

# CULTIVATING SCHOOL BELONGING FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS IN FRENCH IMMERSION



Sara Thurlbeck Tham  
Learning Support Teacher (Winnipeg School Division)  
& Master's Student (Université de Saint-Boniface)

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[s.r.thurlbeck@gmail.com](mailto:s.r.thurlbeck@gmail.com)

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# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## **Banff**

Treaty 6, 7, 8 territories,  
Blackfoot Confederacy,  
Chiniki, Goodspaw, Goodstoney First  
Nations, Tsuut'ina First Nation,  
Métis Nation

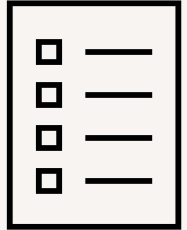
## **Winnipeg**

Treaty 1 territory,  
Anishinaabeg, Anishininewuk, Denesuline,  
Dakota Oyate, Nehethowuk,  
Métis Nation



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# TODAY



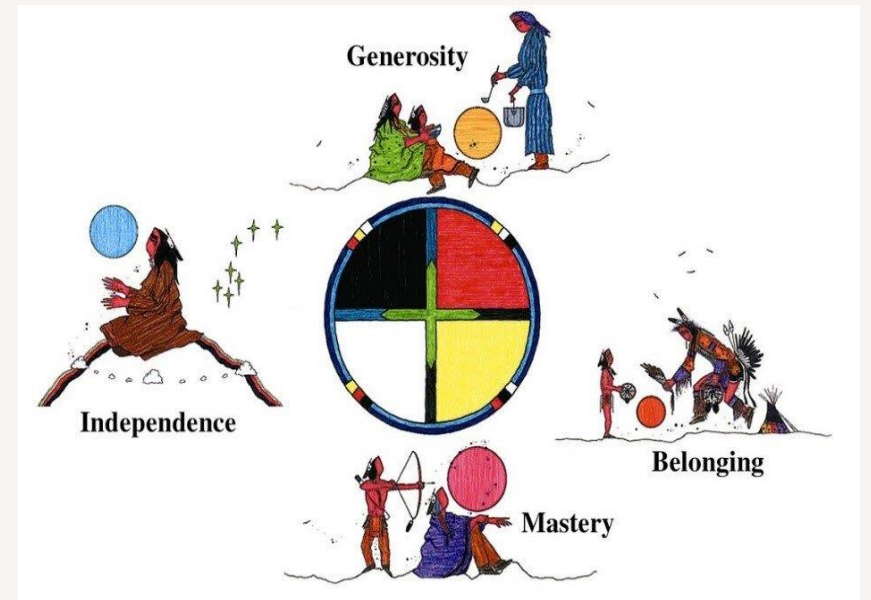
- Define and understand:
  - School belonging
  - Neurodiversity
  - French Immersion context
  - Ecological Systems Model
- Choose a neurodivergent student and follow their path:
  - Share success stories
  - Identify and understand factors that impact belonging
  - Reflect and discuss your student in your context
  - Dream of next steps for our student at the centre

*Confidentiality – Please  
do not use student names  
or identifying descriptors*

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# What is school belonging?

- Human need (Baumeister & Leary, Maslow)
- "The extent to which they feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others – especially by teachers and other adults in the school social environment" (Goodenow et Grady, 1993)
- "Trusted relationships where students can say 'I am loved'" (Dr. Martin Brokenleg, 2003)
- Comfort, cozy & nostalgia, perception of being seen-heard-understood, being part of the community (research participants, 2024)



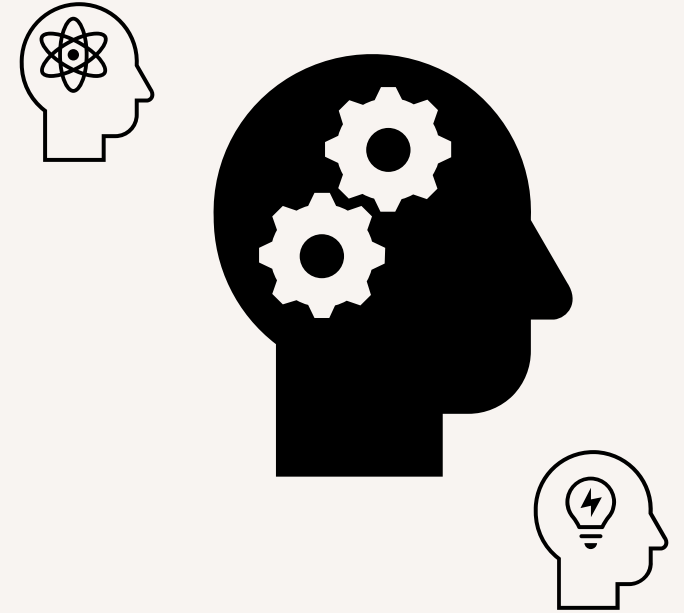
Dr. Martin Brokenleg's  
Circle of Courage

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# NEURODIVERSITY

- Unique diverse brain development of each human
- **Variability** can present in the social, academic, emotional, communication, sensory and perceptive domains, leading to specific **gifts, strengths** and challenges
- *Autism spectrum disorder, Attention-hyperactivity disorder, Downs' syndrome, learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia), intellectual disabilities, mental health disorders (bipolar, obsessive-compulsive disorder), anxiety and social anxiety, Tourette's syndrome*

(Grandin, 2022; Singer, 2016)

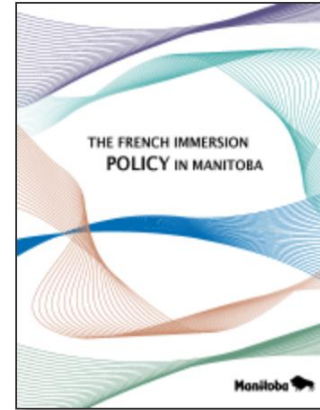


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# THE FRENCH IMMERSION (FI) CONTEXT

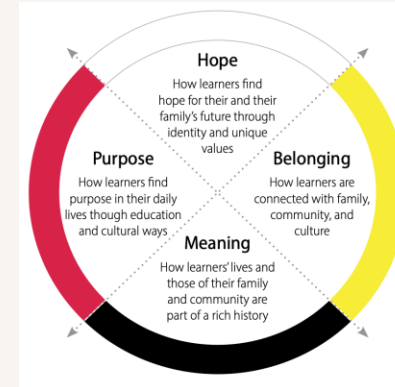
## French Immersion Policy in Manitoba (2023):

- "an inclusive program intended for ALL students with various abilities and needs"
- "The goal is to develop proud, confident, engaged, plurilingual global citizens."



## Framework for Learning in Manitoba (2024):

- "Learner success means learners are prepared to reach their full potential and to live *Mino-Pimatisiwin* (The Good Life), in which they: have hope, **belonging**, meaning, and purpose





# STORY OF FI CONTEXT

## First FI program 1972

- "no attempt was made to preselect or screen children for the Experimental Classes on the basis of IQ or other variables... children with a wide range of IQ, and a few of the children even had recognized perceptual-motor deficits" (Lambert et Tucker, 1972).

## Ideal language learner myth and suitability

- "the successful and good language learner, with predetermined overall characteristics, does not exist. There are many ways of learning a language successfully" (Naiman, 1996)

## Elitism and counselling out

Perception of a program with stronger students; misunderstanding that transfer English program will fix issues; how the brain processes information; student words: "demoted" (Selvachandran et al., 2022)

## Increase in diversity and inclusion

"Early French Immersion is a program that is and should be an inclusive program that allows all children in early years to access bilingualism or multilingualism; it is possible when students receive proper guidance (Arnett et Bourgoin, 2017) and when ideologies are not working against them" (Roy, 2020).

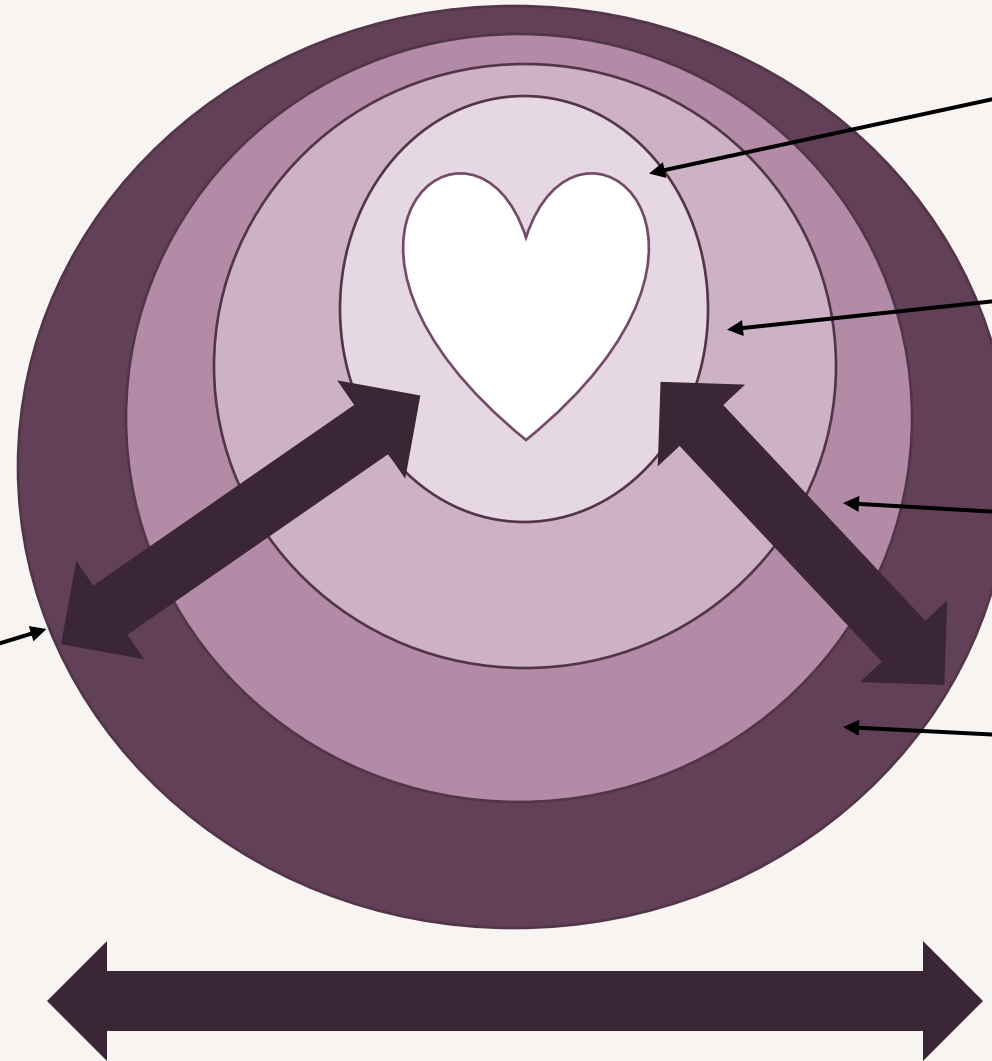
## School belonging for all.

- School belonging may replace the idea of inclusion in politics and practices in the future (Kovac et Vaala, 2019); **Little research on belonging in FI** (Mbikayi et St.-Amand, 2017)

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# Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner)

Interaction of the  
individuals and  
groups, their values  
and beliefs, between  
the levels, context-  
specific



## **Ontosystem:**

Student, their profile,  
their perceptions

**Microsystem:** teacher,  
family, close friends

**Mesosystem :** Peers,  
other teachers & staff  
at school

**Macrosystem:** School  
division and program

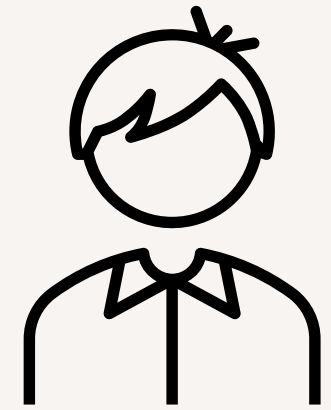
(Bronfenbrenner et  
Morris, 2007; Kay-  
Raining-Bird et al., 2016)

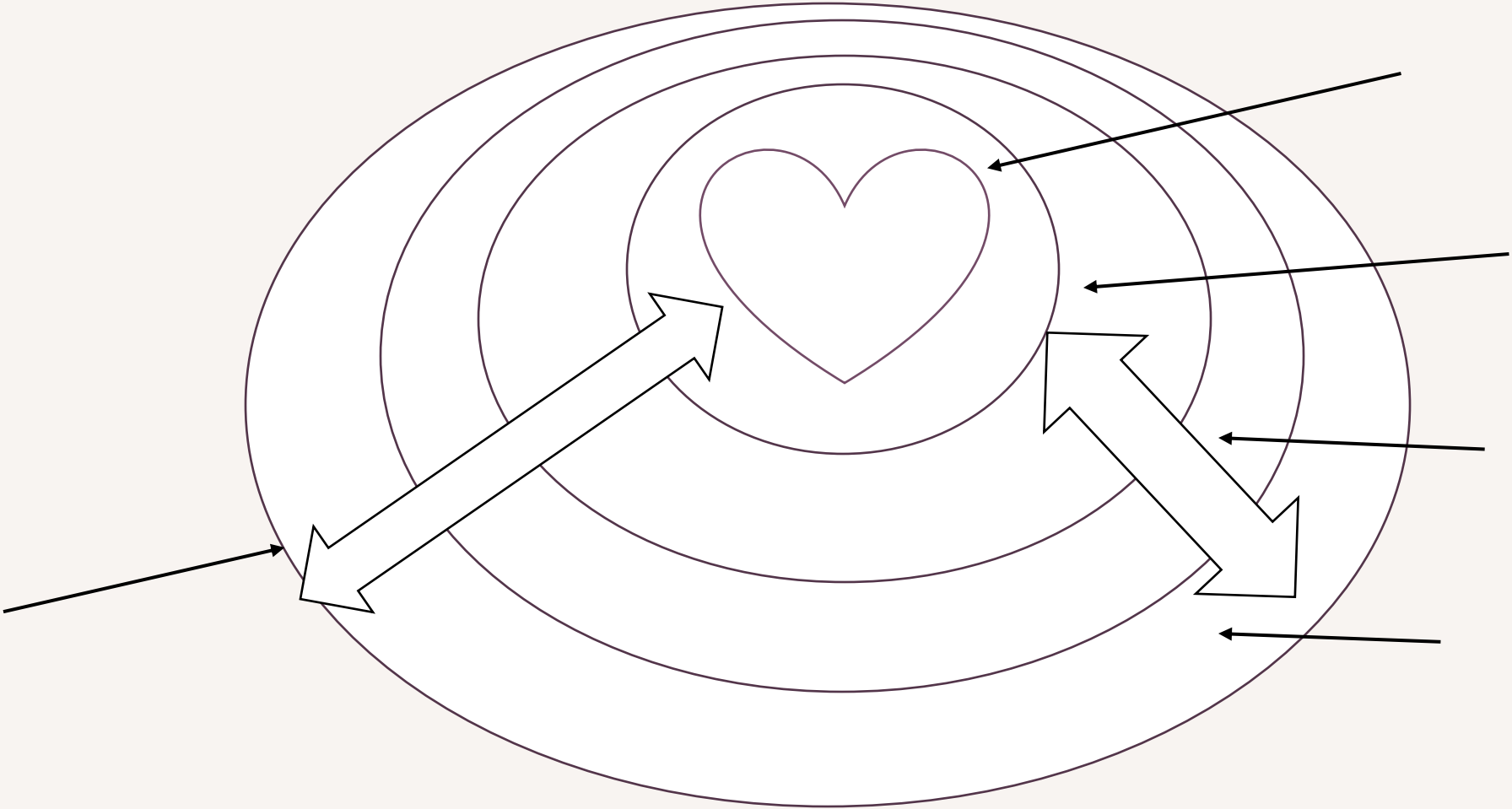
FI Program of the past  
and today

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THINK OF A  
NEURODIVERGENT  
STUDENT...  
WHO WOULD BENEFIT FROM  
CULTIVATING SCHOOL BELONGING



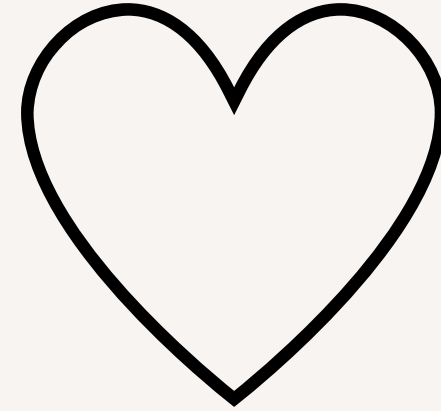


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# STUDENT-CENTERED PROFILE

**Write or draw:**

- **Strengths** that show their potential
- **Interests** that captivate them
- **Talents** that make them unique
- **Stories** that surround them
- **Supports** that they benefit from
- **Identity** as a French Immersion student
- **Contributions and gifts** to their community




**Positive personal characteristics** is a main contributor to a student's sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2018)



# STUDENT-CENTERED PROFILE



Growth Year: 2023	
<b>Name: Shelley Moore</b>	<b>Age: 44</b>
	<b>I am...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Danish, learning to speak Danish</li><li>• Queer, She/Her pronouns</li><li>• Bowen Islander, Albertan, Settler</li><li>• Teacher, Researcher</li><li>• Mom, Wife, Sister, Daughter, Friend</li></ul>
<b>I really like and/or what to learn more about:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gardening, BBQ-ing, travelling, camping, carpentry</li><li>• Universal Design for Learning, disability justice, Inclusive practices, curriculum design</li><li>• How to parent a 2 year old, potty training</li><li>• Watching movies, naps, eating anything my wife cooks</li><li>• The Edmonton Oilers, going to MLB baseball games, playoff spots, the Olympics</li></ul>	
<b>I am really good at and/or could teach others:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Storytelling, making complex ideas accessible</li><li>• The pros and cons to owning an Irish Terrier</li><li>• Renovations and design</li><li>• Deep cleaning and organising</li><li>• Travel itineraries</li><li>• Being impulsive and adventurous</li><li>• Understanding the rules to boardgames and sports</li><li>• Social media &amp; technology</li></ul>	
<b>I want to grow in these areas:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Increase my physical activity</li><li>2. Balance my work and family life</li><li>3. BBQ the perfect steak</li></ol>	
<b>I need support in these areas to grow:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anxiety &amp; depression</li><li>• Managing frustration and anger</li><li>• Memory</li><li>• Communicating through writing</li></ul>	
<b>I need this in my garden to grow:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purpose, time to be creative, rest, medication, routine</li><li>• Positive encouragement</li><li>• Collaborative problem solving</li><li>• Representation</li><li>• Connection, relationship, community</li><li>• Windows of time, name tags, technology</li></ul>	
<b>This is what makes it hard for me to grow:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pace of change</li><li>• Attitudes towards Queer and Disabled identities</li><li>• Misunderstandings about inclusion</li><li>• Political tensions, white supremacy &amp; the patriarchy</li><li>• Assessment models</li><li>• Standardized curriculum</li></ul>	
<b>Thank You For helping me GROW</b>	



# STUDENT-CENTERED PROFILE



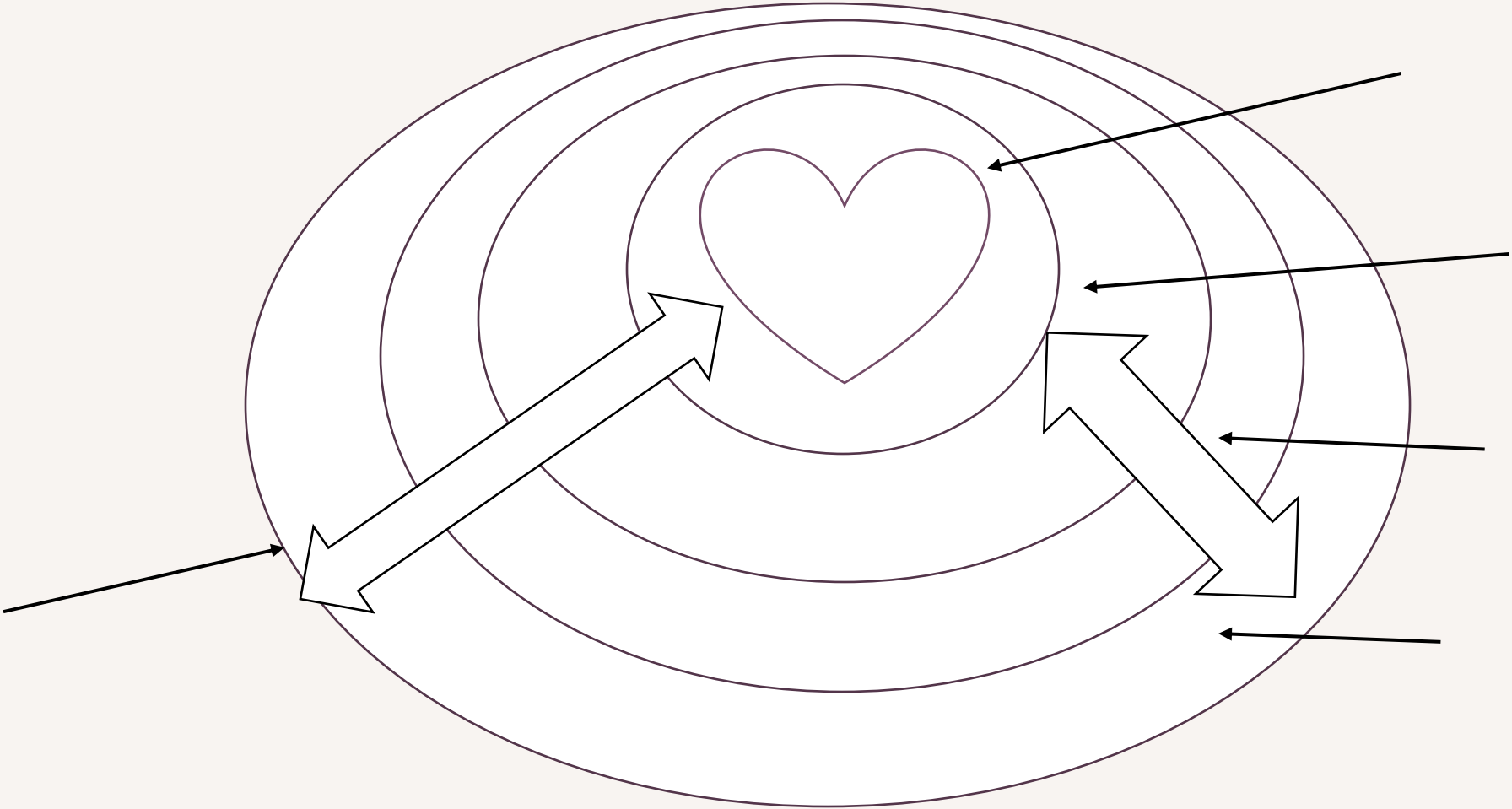
My Growth Plan			
Name:		Grade:	Growth Term/Year:
My Strengths		My Goal 1:	My Goal 2:
(Photo here)	Who am I?  What do I love?	I am able to...  How do I want to grow?	I am able to...  How do I want to grow?
What am I good at?  I do well when...		What helps me grow?	What helps me grow?
How do I help others/am I a member of our school community?		What makes it hard for me to grow?	What makes it hard for me to grow?



# STUDENT-CENTERED PROFILE



My Growth Plan (Student w ADHD)			
Name: A		Grade: 3	Growth Term/Year: Nov 2025
My Strengths		My Goal 1: Following directions	My Goal 2: Resolving conflicts
(Photo here)	<b>Who am I?</b> Creative, bright, artistic <b>What do I love?</b> Unicorns, dance	<b>I am able to...</b> -Ask questions for help in French <b>How do I want to grow?</b> -Complete 2-3 step directions for one task with increasing independence	<b>I am able to...</b> -Participate in repair -Express own perspective calmly <b>How do I want to grow?</b> -Listen calmly to others' perspectives
<b>What am I good at?</b> -Helping younger students -Drawing, art, reading <b>I do well when...</b> -Sharing emotions before a task -I have eaten and had water -Time alone to process feelings		<b>What helps me grow?</b> -First... then... next... template -Visual schedule posted and followed -Visual directions (written, picture) -Feedback given calmly and with humour -Self-correction prompts	<b>What helps me grow?</b> -Check-ins before & after recess -Kelso's Wheel for choices -Deep breathing -Clear order of who speaks when -Praise for waiting turn
<b>How do I help others/am I a member of our school community?</b> -Learning buddy <b>-Roots of Empathy greeter</b>		<b>What makes it hard for me to grow?</b> -Too rushed -Sudden changes -Not followed by preferred activity	<b>What makes it hard for me to grow?</b> -Too rushed -Too many people involved





# STUDENT + TEACHER



- Teacher support and relationship with student has the **strongest effect on school belonging**. (Allen et al., 2018).
  - Strong sense of school belonging has the possibility of **accelerating learning** (Visible Learning, 2018).
  - "Students perceive **good teaching as caring behaviour**" (Ostermann, 2010).
-



# STUDENT + TEACHER



Which quotation is most relevant to your student's context? Why?

1 "Several researchers demonstrate that students with special needs are able to learn French if they are **identified early enough** to provide them additional support in their learning journey." (Roy, 2020)

2 "The attitude of Molly's teachers towards students with exceptionalities in immersion cannot be overlooked as a contributing factor to Molly's progress... **this favorable attitude cannot be understated; it translated into concrete actions** to facilitate and support access for students with ASD..." (LeBouthillier, 2020)

3 "...have students reflect and talk about their language learning experiences by having them **share their emotions, their concerns, and their successes**. Students need to be commended and encouraged to go further by taking responsibility for their language learning..." (Manitoba FI Policy, 2023)



# STUDENT + TEACHER

## Inclusive and Approaches in French Immersion for Neurodivergent Learners (Howard, 2023)

**Communication  
and Interaction**

**Cognition and Learning**

**Social, Emotional and Mental  
Health**

**Sensory and Physical Needs**

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# STUDENT + TEACHER

## Inclusive Approaches in French Immersion: Communication & Interaction (Howard, 2023)

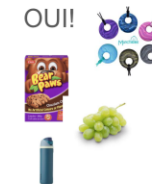
**Universal design, scaffolding, differentiation and adaptations for an immersion setting** (Garret et Mady, 2024; Mady, 2018; Arnett et Bourgoïn, 2017)

- Technology, transcription, recording
- Clear objectives, "the why"
- Visuals
- Many ways to represent and express their knowledge and skills

Entrée	
	1. Souliers dans les pieds
	2. Boîte à dîner et bouteille d'eau sur l'étagère
	3. Pochette dans le panier
	4. Agenda sur la table

### Stuff in my mouth

OUI!



NON!



We only put food, drink and chewlery in our mouth to keep our tummy feeling good. We don't want you to get sick or choke!



# STUDENT + TEACHER

## Inclusive Approaches in French Immersion: Cognition and Learning (Howard, 2023)

**Early Intervention** (Shakory et al., 2022; Wise et al., 2016)

- Literacy (phonological awareness, oral, reading, writing) in French & English
- Immersion, language-rich milieu
- Multimodal, incorporate senses





# STUDENT + TEACHER

## Inclusive Approaches in French Immersion: Social, Emotional and Mental Health (Howard, 2023)

### **Social-emotional** (CASEL, 2024)

- Trusting and safe classroom climate
- Awareness of and regulating emotions
- Developing positive, empathetic relationships

### **Additional language pedagogy** (Garrett et Mady, 2024; MacIntyre, 2011)

- Self-reflection as language learner
- Authentic contexts
- Integrated approach (subject + language)
- Timely, responsive feedback



# STUDENT + TEACHER

## Inclusive Approaches in French Immersion: Social, Emotional and Mental Health (Howard, 2023)

### Learning French is like...

- Running a marathon
- Doing origami
- A black hole
- Digging a bottomless pit
- Learning with a plot twist
- Being trapped
- A story of its' own
- Dancing with two left feet
- Learning English as a baby
- A can of soup

### Nos histoires de français - des élèves

Task: Share with the other students our own stories of how we have learned French (or other languages), how French (and other languages) has influenced our lives in the past, the present, and the future, and/or why education in French (or other languages) is important to us.

Intent:

Fun, work on writing and public speaking. Work on courage and speaking French in a big classroom. So other people can hear your story. To practice speaking out loud. To share interesting stories and interests. So people know that not all people learn French the same way. So people know how you are doing in French. So you can make connections with other people.

Criteria:

- Share during our snack time at 10:40-10:55 am after the break (if y
- Tell the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your learning.
- Include both the successes and struggles in additional-language
- Interesting, funny, silly, inspiring stories and anecdotes are welcom

Apprendre le français, comme une vallée



(Bokhorst-Heng et Marshall, 2021)

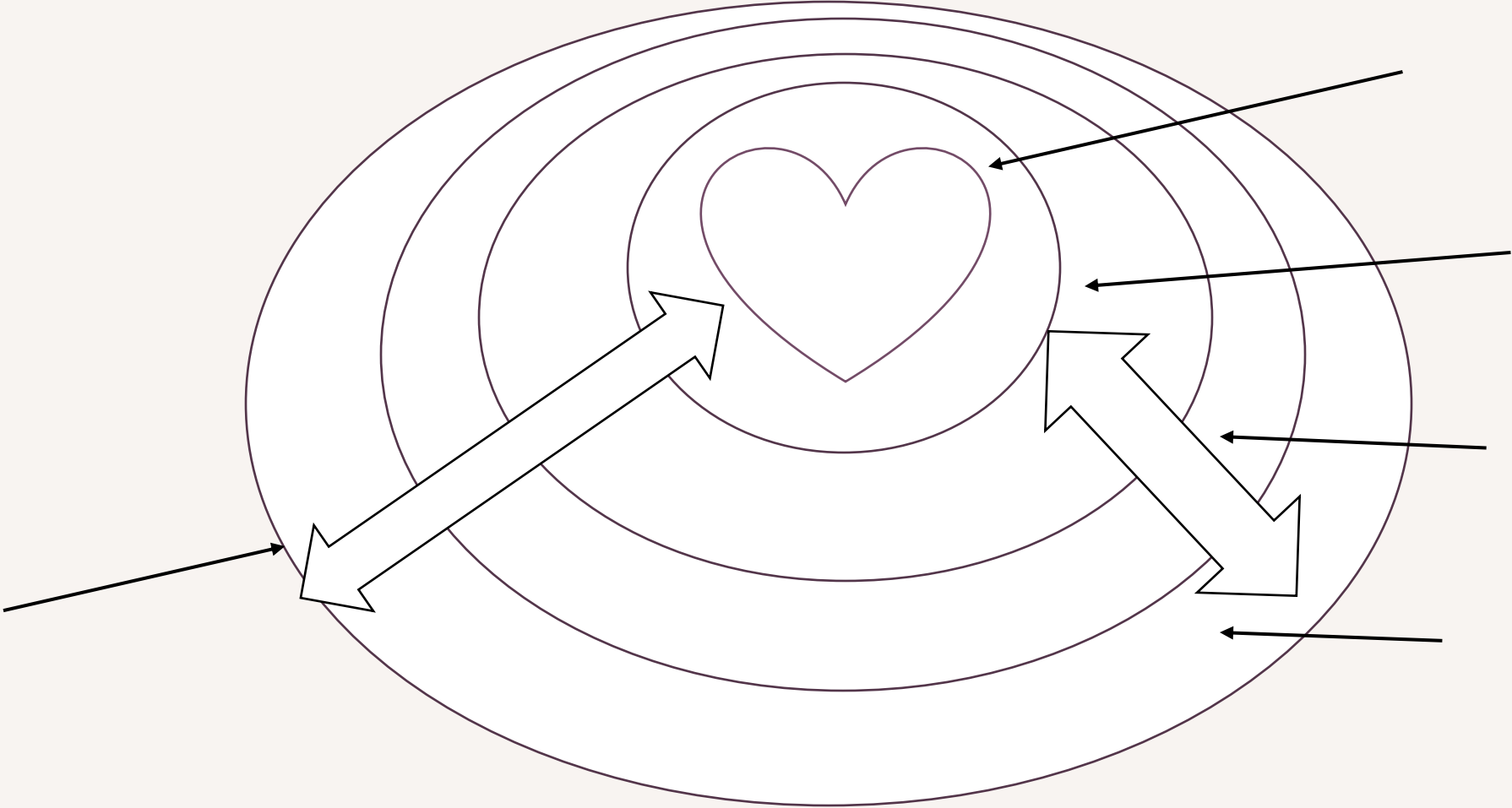
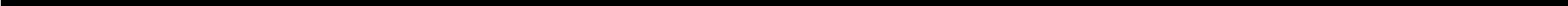


# STUDENT + TEACHER

## Inclusive Approaches in French Immersion: Sensory and Physical Needs (Howard, 2023)

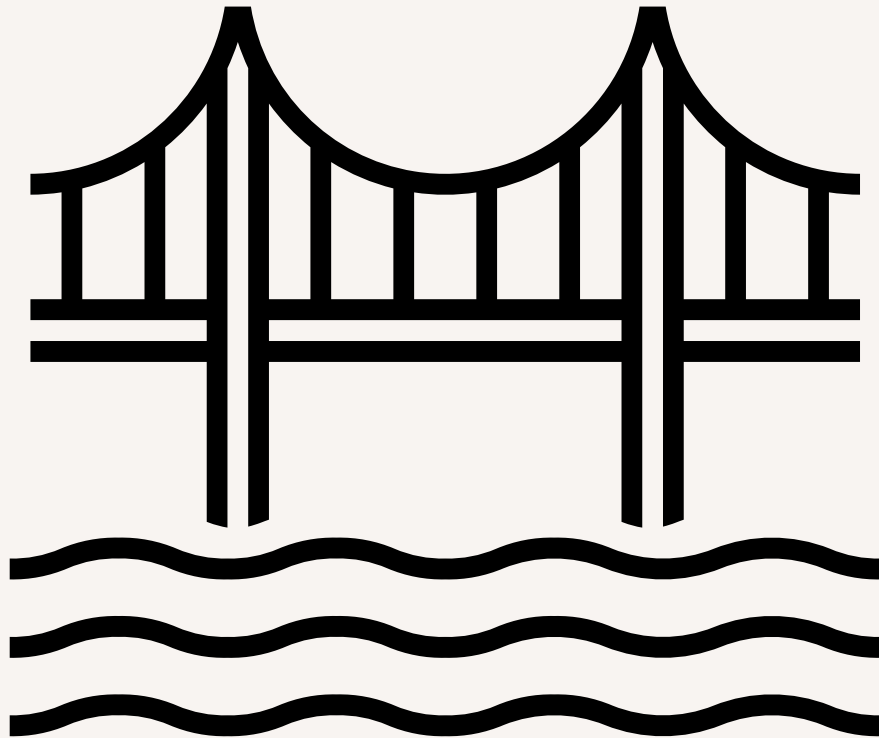
- Expectations for sensory input in class - lights, sound, noise
- Sensory spaces and rooms
- Movement
- Breathing
- Alternative spaces to work or connect

*Co-regulation through sensory  
and physical support:  
Reading student cues  
Connecting with them  
Physical presence  
2x10*



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# STUDENT + TEACHER + FAMILY

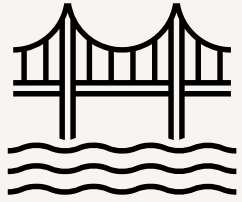


**Create and maintain the "bridge"  
(research participant, 2024):**

- Listen to their stories and ideas
- Expert in this student
- Communicate progress in learning
- Share an understanding of the FI program

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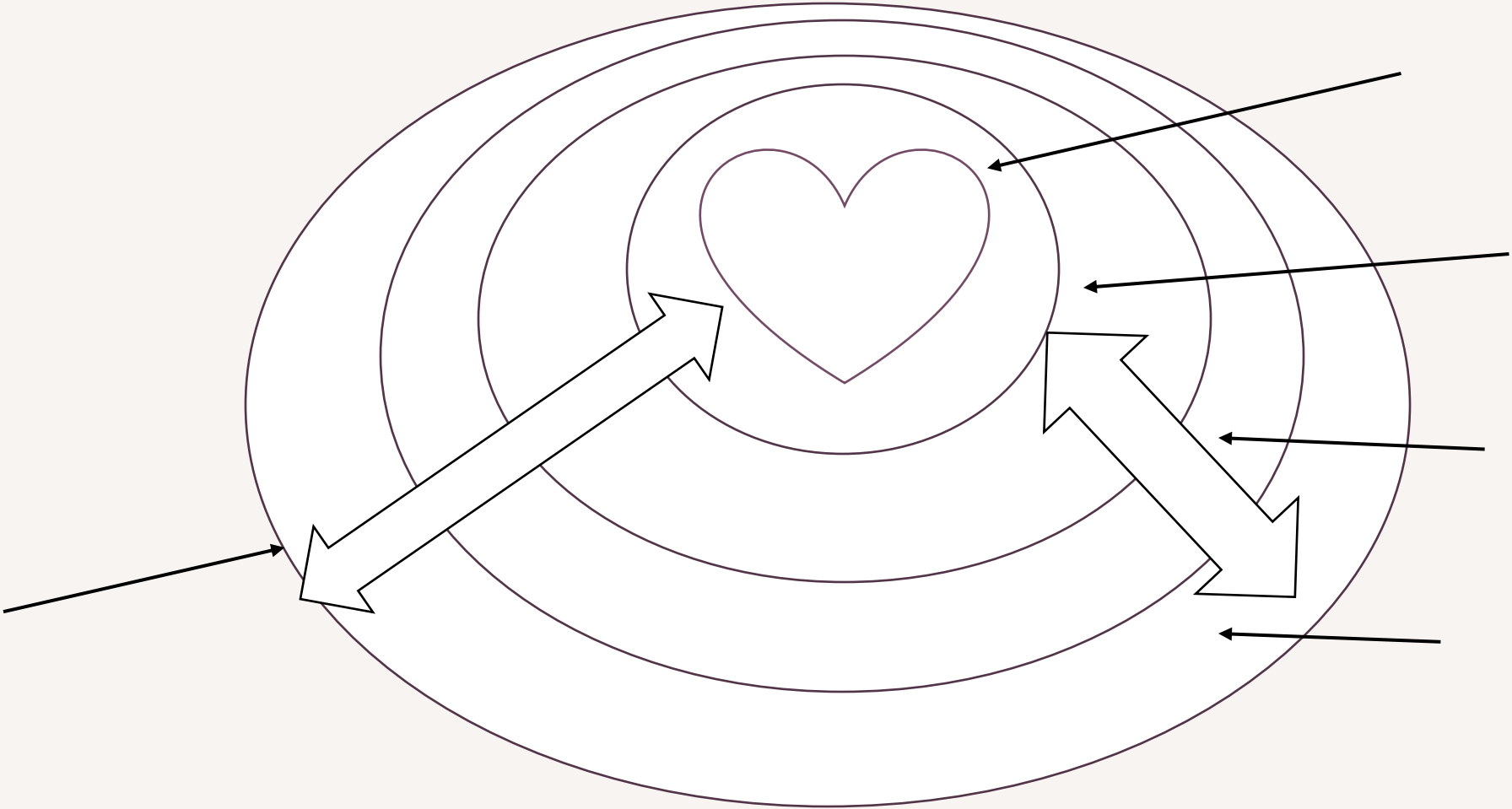
(FI Policy, 2023; Handbook for School Leaders, 2007)



# STUDENT + TEACHER + FAMILY



What are the stories <i><u>presented</u></i> by the family?	What stories are <i><u>unknown</u></i> to you (or the teacher)?	What is your <i><u>own</u></i> story of the family?
Busy Family history of neurodiversity	French-speaking family	Advocates Access to information?



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# STUDENT + FRIENDS + TEACHER



## **Student group identity in FI**

- FI students have a stronger student group identity than many other programs (Walton, 2022)
- Eases transitions and supports belonging between classes, schools (deJong et al., 2020)

## **Role of school staff**

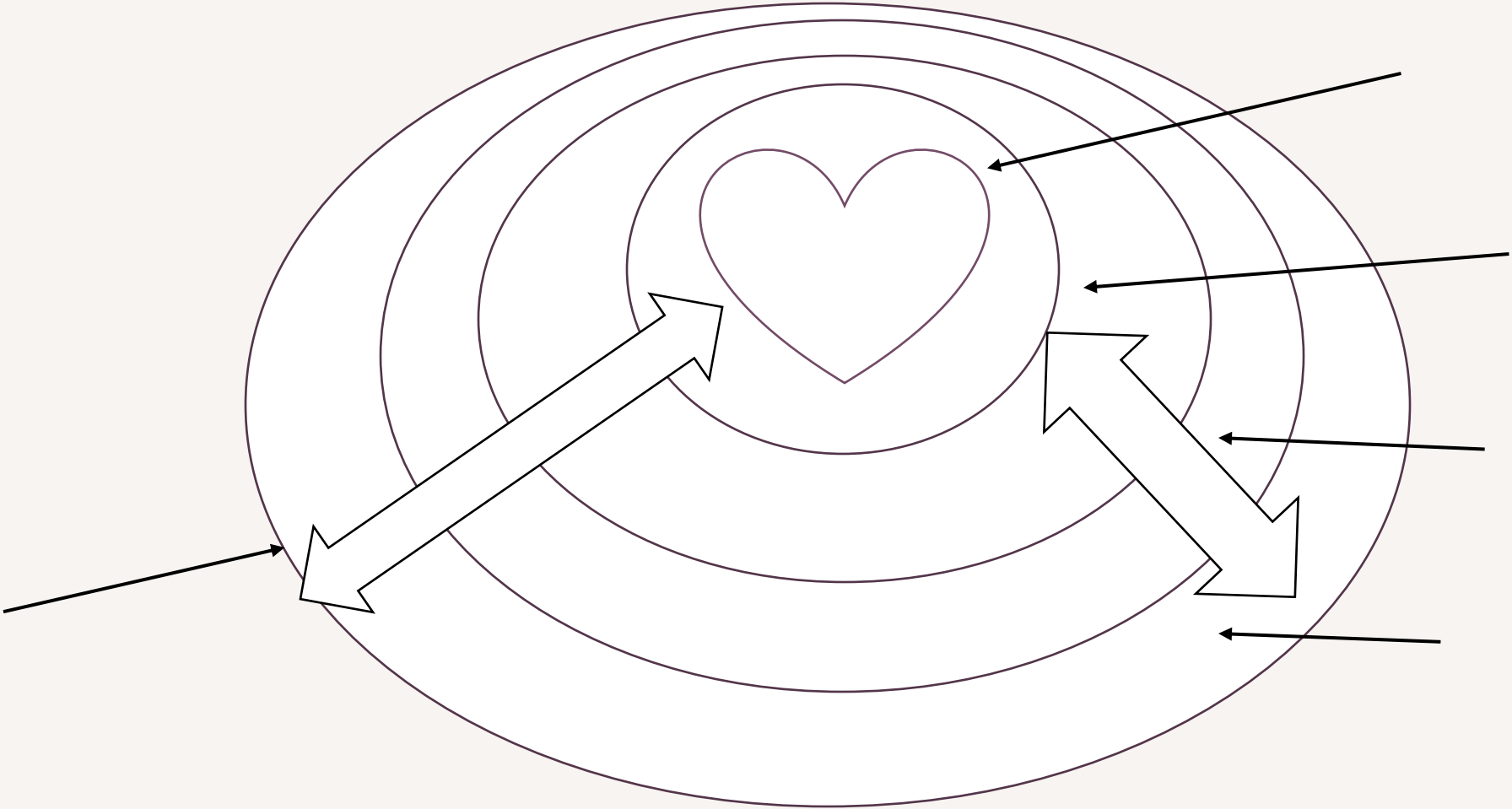
- Bouchard et Berg (2017) - Teachers overestimate the power of the peers in belonging and underestimate their impact on peer relationships & belonging.
    - Students communicate their desire for social-emotional support with peers from teachers.
-



# STUDENT, FRIENDS + PEERS

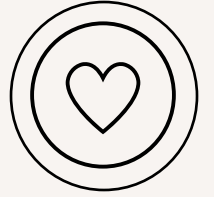


Student relations	Who? Where? When?	Support?
<b>Current</b>	Two students in another class	Facilitate recess, lunch, cross-class
<b>Potential</b>	New student	Intentional partnerships by teacher
<b>Possible surprise connections?</b>	Learning buddies Crochet club	Introductions Maintenance Switch up as needed?



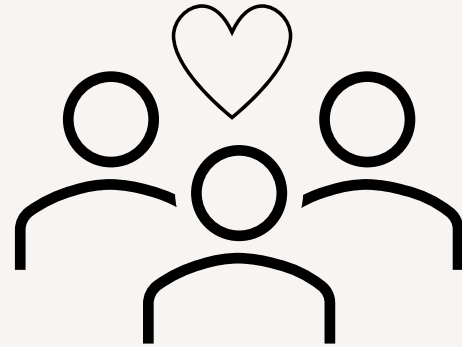
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# STUDENT IN SCHOOL COMMUNITY



## Collaboration around the student:

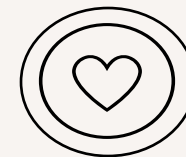
- Classroom teachers
- Educational assistants
- Music, physical educational, library teachers
- Resource, counsellor, learning support, principal
- Clinicians, specialists (internal and external)



Cannot do it alone!  
"Your strengths, my  
strengths... we depend on  
each other" (research  
participant, 2024)



# STUDENT IN SCHOOL COMMUNITY



**How staff organizes their time and collaboration  
impacts student belonging (Walls et al., 2021)**

Low impact ----- High impact

PLCs

Informal,  
spontaneous  
conversations

Middle school  
model

Consult with a  
clinician

Learning Support  
in class

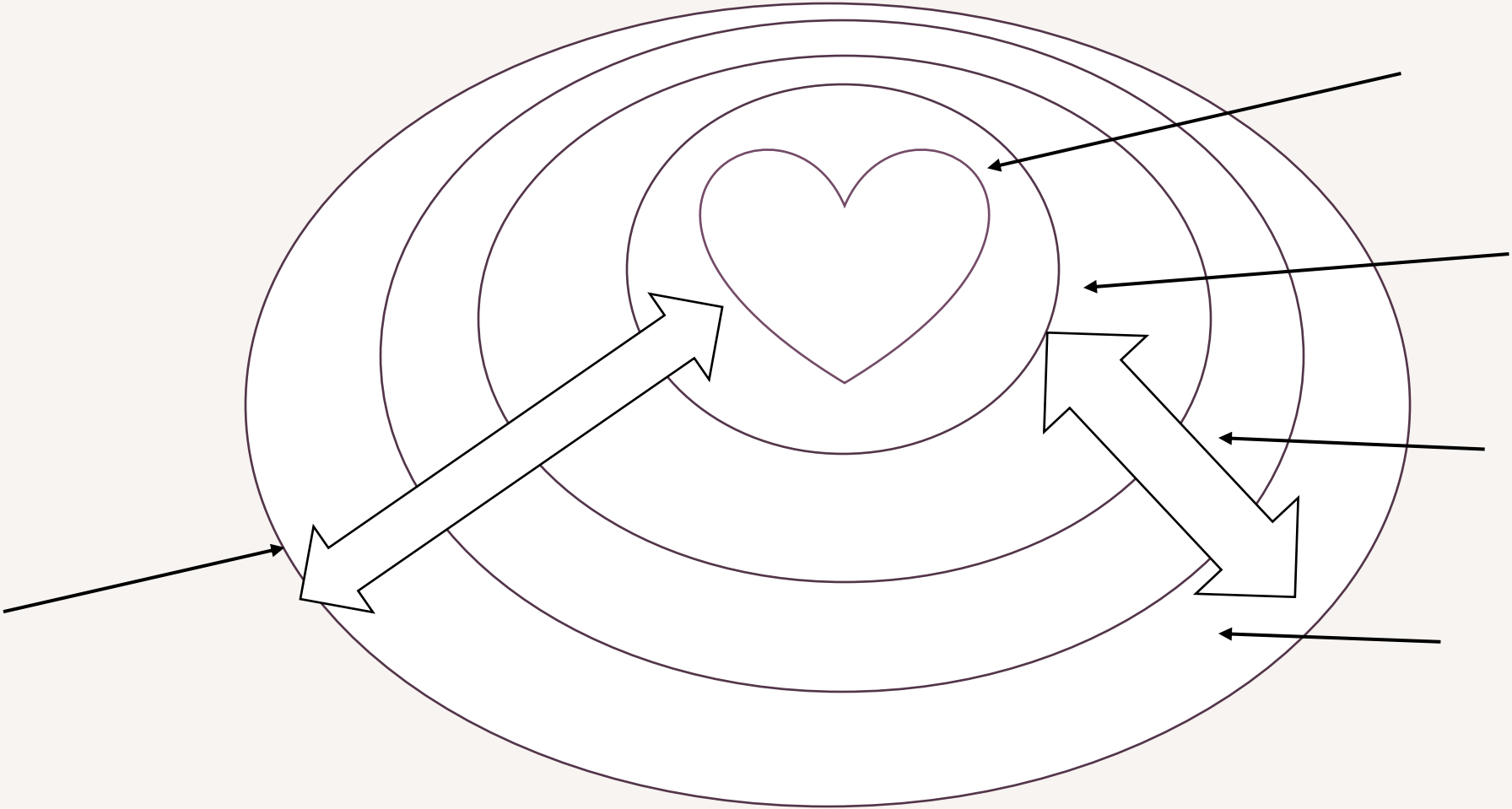
Co teaching

EA support in  
class

Speaking with  
former teachers

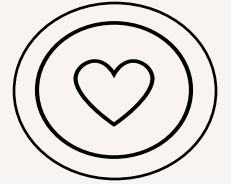
Make a plan as a  
team

Other?





# STUDENT IN FI SCHOOL COMMUNITY



- "French immersion students are also students who **need a connection to what they do and need to feel they are part of a community of French immersion learners.** They need to be **engaged with learning practices that are meaningful and related to their life and experiences**" (Garcia, 2019).
- *Harmonisation*
  - St.-Amand et al. (2020) : How does this school *harmonize* with my identity? (vice versa)
  - Balance : "standing out while fitting in" (Gray, 2017)





# STUDENT IN FI SCHOOL COMMUNITY



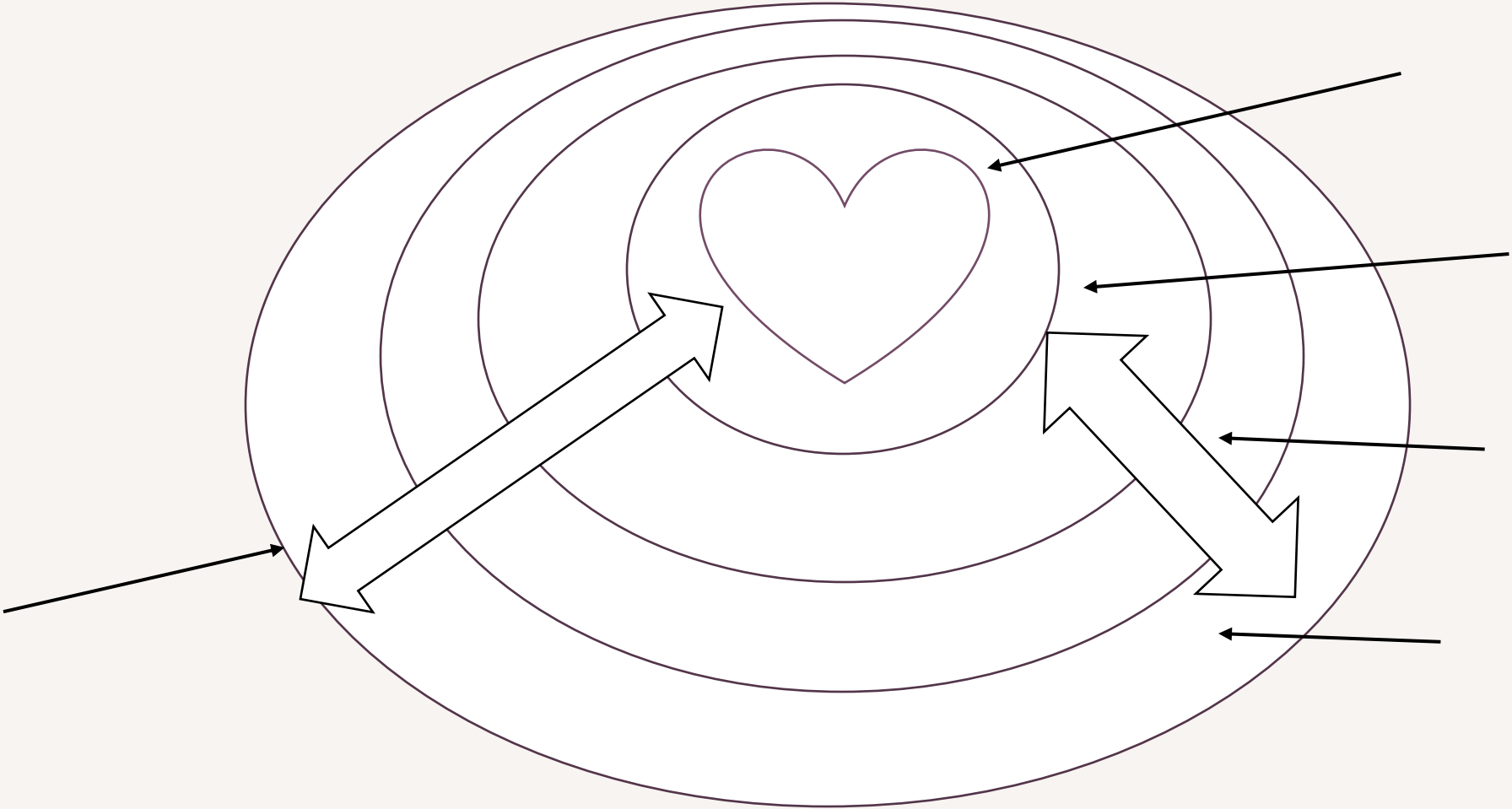
## Manitoba FI Policy (2023):

- learning buddies across grades;
- mentorship programs;
- leadership programs;
- school community events;
- field trips and events out of the school



*\*Common-interest extracurriculars - "so people can find their people" (research participant, 2024)*

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# WHAT IS YOUR ACTION PLAN FOR CULTIVATING THIS STUDENT'S SCHOOL BELONGING ?



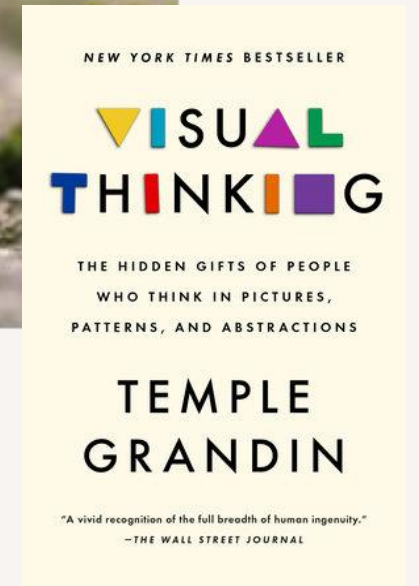
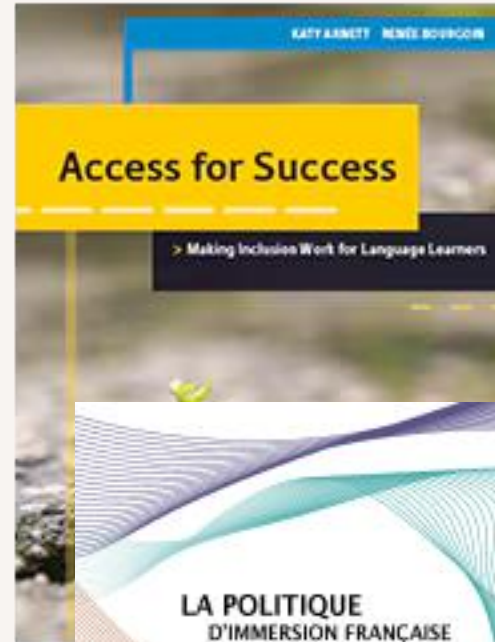
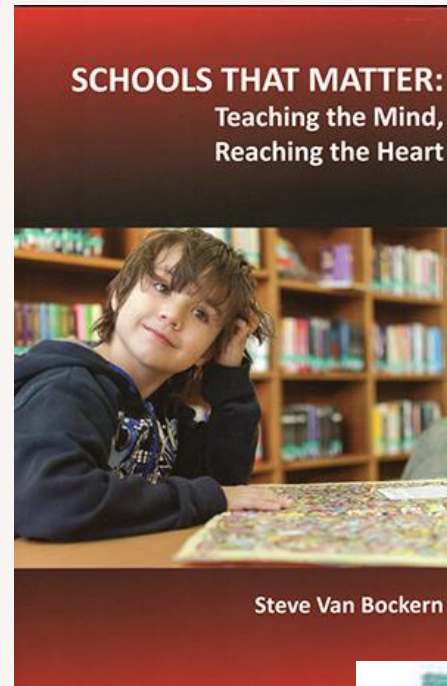
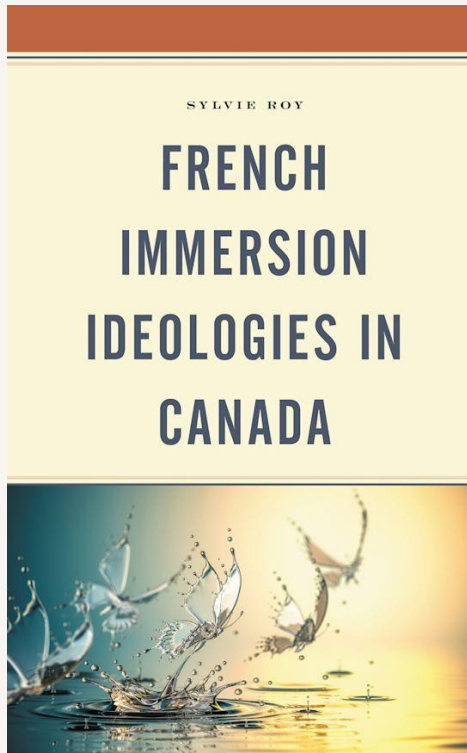
- Which level(s) impact this student's belonging?
- What can you do on **Monday**?
- What can you do **before the end of the school year**?
- How will **you evolve** in this process?

[s.r.thurlbeck@gmail.com](mailto:s.r.thurlbeck@gmail.com)

*ACPI Application – click on blue +*



# RESOURCES



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