



Promoting plurilingualism in French immersion programs

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University of Regina
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A scenic landscape of a turquoise lake reflecting snow-capped mountains and a dense forest of evergreen trees. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

Treaty 7 Land Acknowledgement: Territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut'ina First Nation, the Stoney Nakoda, and home of the Métis Nation of Alberta



Key terms

- ***Multilingual learners*** include all students who speak multiple languages and language varieties in Canada. While terms like *English language learners* highlight the supposed deficiencies of such learners, *multilingual learners* is a strengths-based term that emphasizes students' diverse linguistic repertoires and resources.
- ***Newcomer students*** include all students who migrated to Canada as immigrants or as refugees.
- ***Refugees*** have been forced to flee their home countries because of persecution, war, or violence. Refugees have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group (UNHCR, 2001).
- ***Plurilingual pedagogical approaches*** refer to approaches and activities that seek to recognize and empower the diverse linguistic repertoires of all students in the classroom.



Overview of workshop

1. Multilingual learners in French immersion programs

2. Plurilingualism in French immersion programs

3. Plurilingual pedagogical approaches and activities





1. Multilingual learners in French immersion programs

Policy

Motivation

Language learning

Perspectives



Policy

- **Language education policies ensure access to education one of Canada's official languages, but multilingual learners do not always have access to bilingual programs (Galiev, 2013; Mady, 2007; Mady & Black, 2012).**
- **School divisions rarely have policies to include newcomer students in French immersion programs (Kunnas, 2019, 2024; Sinay, 2010; Sinay et al., 2018).**

French is mandatory

- Ontario
- Quebec
- Prince Edward Island
- New Brunswick
- Nova Scotia
- Newfoundland-and-Labrador

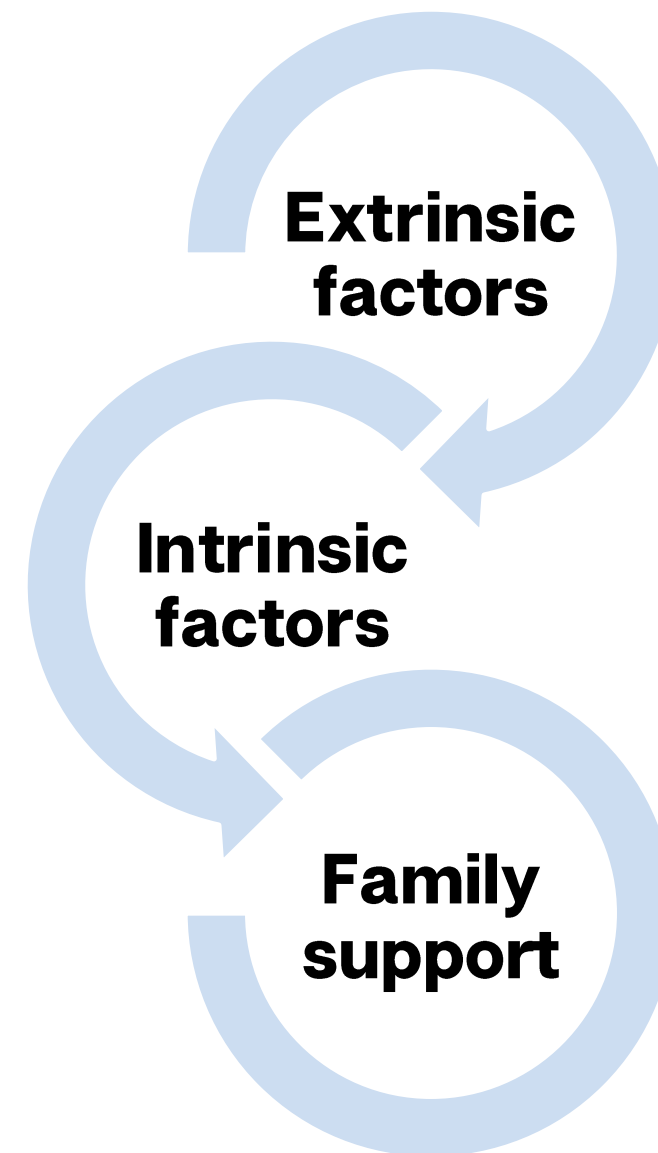
French is optional

- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Saskatchewan
- Manitoba
- Yukon
- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut



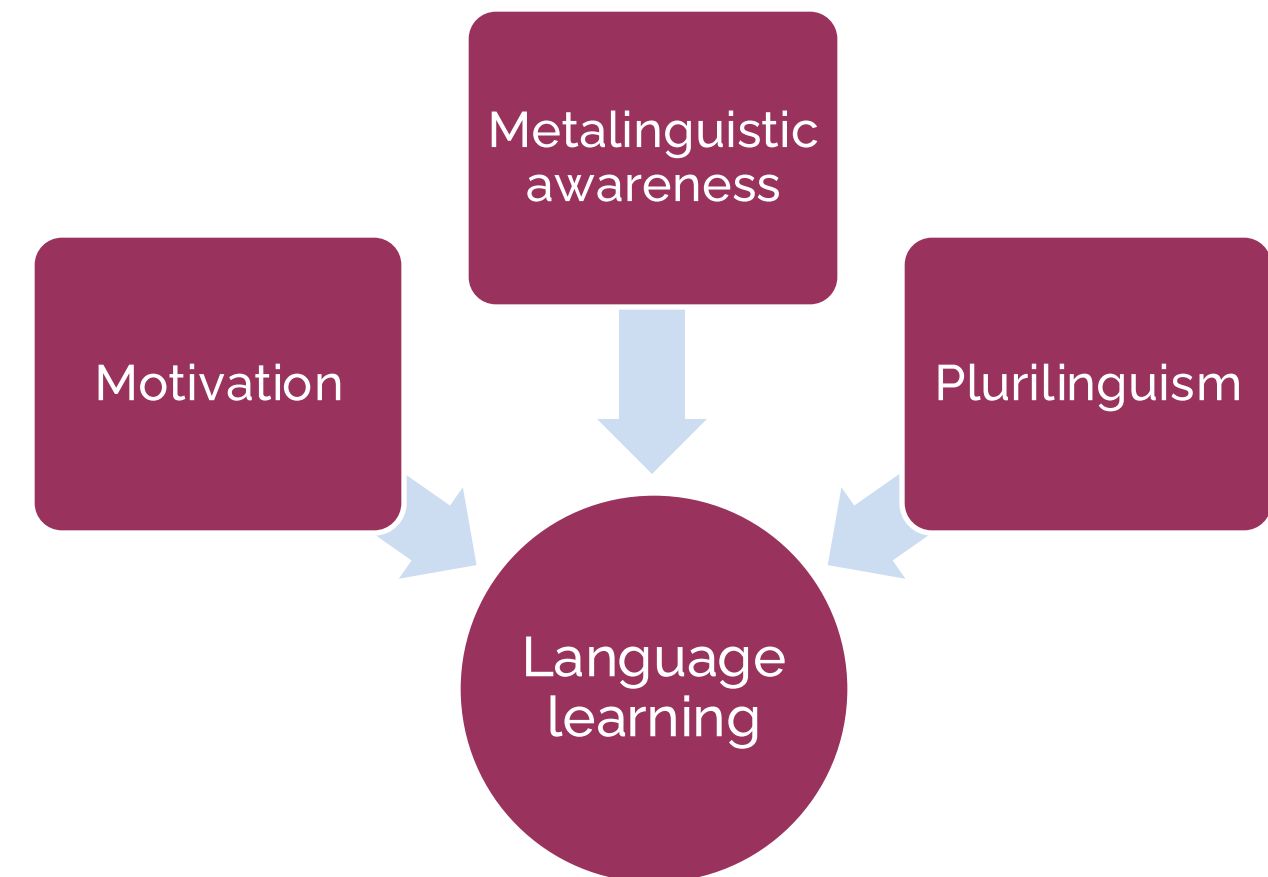
Motivation

- **Newcomer families are often highly motivated to learn both French and English in Canada because they believe that official-language bilingualism will lead to opportunities in the future and because many newcomer families consider French-English bilingualism an essential element of Canadian identity (Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Dagenais & Jacquet, 2000; Davis et al., 2019, 2021).**



Language learning

- **Newcomer, multilingual learners often develop stronger English proficiency in French immersion than their counterparts in regular English programs (Carr, 2007).**
- **Newcomer, multilingual learners in French immersion often develop stronger language skills than Canadian-born, English-speaking students (Bourgoin & Dicks, 2019; Mady, 2015; Knouzi & Mady, 2017).**





Perspectives

- **French immersion educators and teacher candidates consider student diversity one of their greatest challenges (Mady & Arnett, 2016).**
- **Multilingual learners are often excluded from French immersion programs across Canada on the basis of low English language proficiency (Bourgoin, 2019; Davis, 2019; Davis et al., 2019, 2021; Mady & Masson, 2018; Roy, 2015).**





Refugee-background students in French immersion programs: Exploring the experiences, perspectives, and ideologies of educators across the Canadian Prairies (2024)

Stephen Davis, PhD

Supervisor: Dr. Andrea Sterzuk

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**What are the perspectives and ideologies of educators
with respect to refugee-background students in French
immersion programs across the Canadian Prairies?**



Summary of findings (Davis, 2024)



- Most educators would like to include refugee-background students in French immersion programs, but some are concerned about the lack of supports and resources for such students.
- Educators sometimes make assumptions about the challenges and the language learning of refugee-background students, which often leads to the exclusion of refugee-background students from French immersion programs.
- My study advocates for the creation of inclusive policy and equitable resources to support refugee-background students and other newcomer students in French immersion across Canada.



2. Plurilingualism in French immersion programs

**Overview of
French immersion**

**French immersion
programs revisited**

**Orientations
towards
plurilingualism**

**Challenges and
opportunities for
plurilingualism**





Overview of French immersion

- French immersion programs were created in Saint-Lambert, a predominantly English-speaking suburb of Montreal, in 1965 (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Swain, 1971).
- French immersion programs were called “the trial balloon that flew” (Lapkin et al., 1983) and spread across all provinces and territories.
- Today, there are approximately 500,000 students enrolled in French immersion programs across Canada, in addition to nearly three million French immersion graduates (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Pedagogical significance

- French immersion programs were pedagogically significant because they integrated content and language and inspired several other content-driven programs (Genesee, 1984; Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

Political significance

- French immersion programs were politically significant because they served to bridge “the two solitudes” of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians (Haque, 2012; Hayday, 2005).



Features of French immersion programs revisited

1. The L2 is a medium of instruction.
2. The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum.
3. Overt support exists for the L1.
4. The program aims for additive bilingualism.
5. Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom.
6. Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency.
7. The teachers are bilingual.
8. The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community.

Johnson & Swain (1997)

1. The immersion language is the medium of instruction.
2. The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum.
3. Overt support needs to be given to all home languages.
4. The program aims for additive bilingualism.
5. Exposure to the immersion language is largely confined to the classroom.
6. Students enter with similar levels of proficiency in the immersion language.
7. The teachers are bilingual.
8. The classroom culture needs to recognize the cultures of the multiple immigrant communities to which the students belong.

Swain & Lapkin (2005)

Orientations towards plurilingualism in French immersion

Separation of languages

- Historically, French immersion programs and educators have maintained rigid boundaries between languages, including French instructional time and English instructional time (Genesee, 1984; Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

Integration of languages

- Scholars have challenged monolingual ideologies and pedagogies in French immersion programs, arguing that students should be able to use English for scaffolding purposes (Cummins, 2014; Swain & Lapkin, 2013).

Cross-linguistic pedagogies

- Several researchers are critical of pedagogical approaches that ignore the power dynamics between French and English, calling for context-appropriate cross-linguistic pedagogies (Ballinger et al., 2017; Lyster, 2019).

Supporting diverse languages

- French immersion programs provide first-language support for English-speaking students, but not for multilingual learners (Davis, 2023; Kubota & Bale, 2020).



Plurilingualism in French immersion programs

Challenges

- **French is a minority language in most provinces and territories of Canada. Thus, many French immersion educators are concerned that plurilingual pedagogical approaches will detract from French language instruction.**
- **French immersion educators are concerned that enabling students to use their home languages will lead to English dominating the classroom.**
- **French immersion educators sometimes feel unprepared to support the home languages of multilingual learners.**

Opportunities

- **Multilingual learners often develop strong language proficiency in French immersion, especially when their home languages are recognized and valued in the classroom.**
- **Educators do not need to speak the home languages of multilingual learners in order to value these languages in the classroom.**
- **Supporting the home languages of multilingual learners would enable more students to succeed in French immersion and adapt immersion programs for growing cultural and linguistic diversity.**



3. Plurilingual pedagogical approaches and activities

**Plurilingual
pedagogical
research**

**Plurilingual
pedagogical
resources**

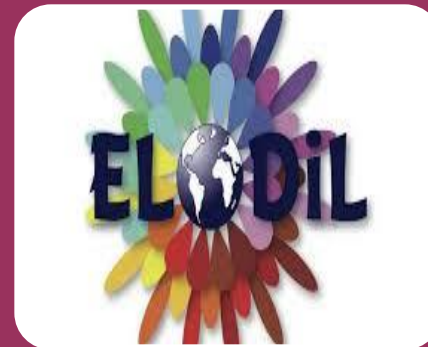
**Plurilingual
pedagogical
activities**

**Plurilingual comic
book project**



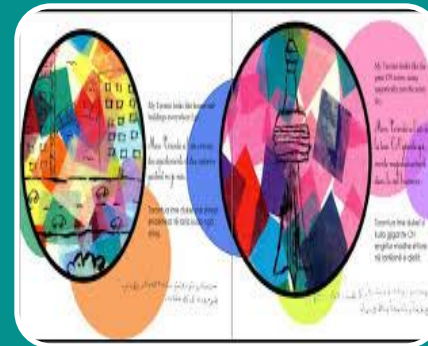
Plurilingual pedagogical approaches

- **Plurilingual pedagogical approaches have emerged as an important area of research pertaining to newcomer students and multilingual learners in language education programs.**
- **The languages of newcomer students and multilingual learners are often ignored in French immersion classrooms. Plurilingual pedagogical approaches present avenues to recognize and empower their diverse linguistic repertoires.**



Éveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique

➤ Université de Montréal



Plurilingual portraits in French immersion schools

➤ Gail Prasad (2015, 2018, 2020)



Storybooks Canada in French immersion schools

➤ Rahat Zaidi, Robin Metcalfe & Bonny Norton (2022)



ÉLODIL: Éveil au langage et ouverture à la diversité linguistique



- The ÉLODIL research team at the Université de Montréal offers several free, plurilingual resources and activities for French language educators.

**Théâtre
plurilingue**

**Albums
plurilingues**

**Littérature
jeunesse**

**Textes
identitaires
plurilingues**

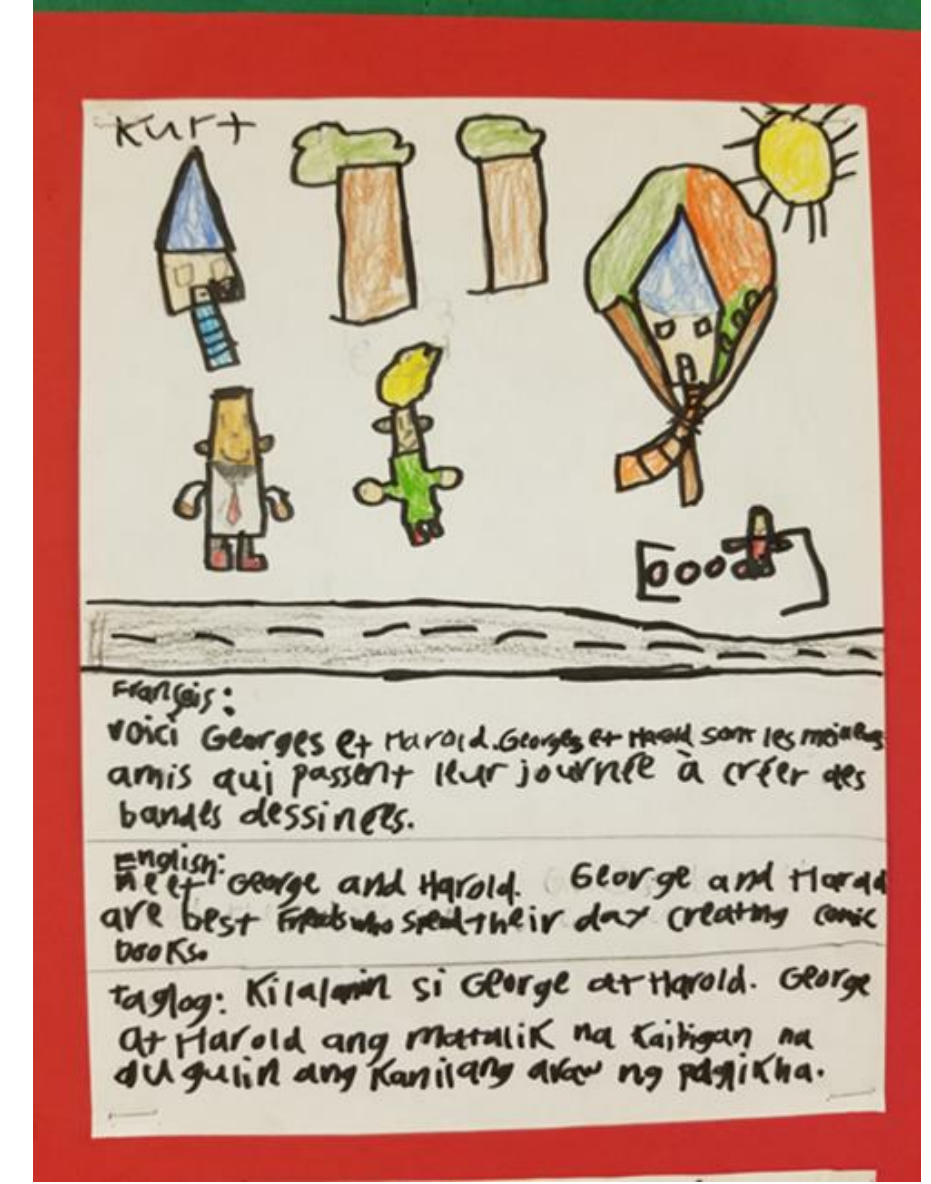
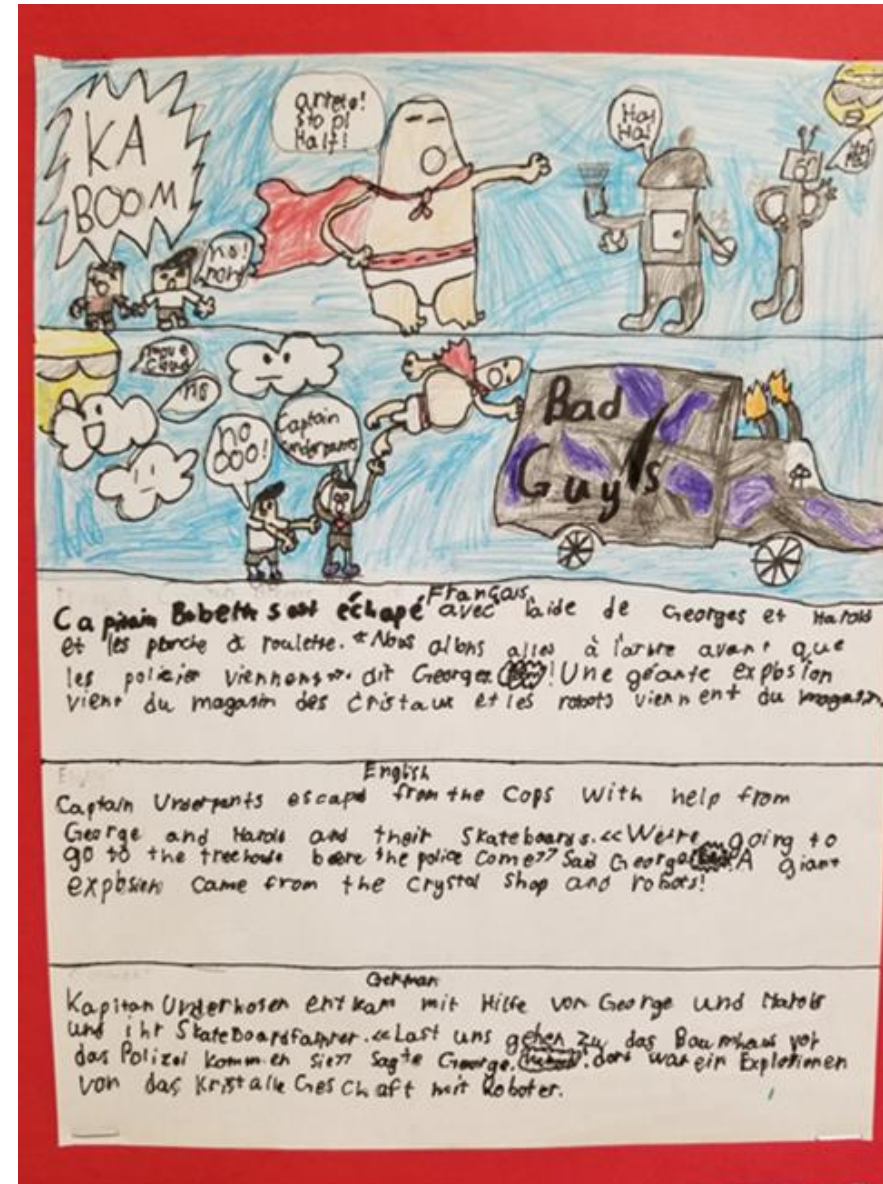
**Guides
pédagogiques**

Vidéos



Les aventures multilingues du Capitaine Bobette







Summary of workshop

1. Multilingual learners in French immersion programs

2. Plurilingualism in French immersion programs

3. Plurilingual pedagogical approaches and activities

- Newcomer families are often highly interested in French immersion and multilingual learners tend to develop strong language proficiency in immersion programs across Canada.
- However, the diverse home languages of multilingual learners are often ignored and overlooked in French immersion classrooms.
- Plurilingual pedagogical approaches present several possible avenues to support diverse languages and to empower multilingual learners.
- There are several possible plurilingual pedagogical approaches, but the central goal is to enable all students to recognize that their diverse linguistic repertoires are important parts of their identities and valuable resources for language learning.



Merci beaucoup! Thank you for your interest and participation! Au plaisir de vous revoir au Congrès ACPI 2025!

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Davis, S. (2023). Multilingual learners in Canadian French immersion programs: Looking back and moving forward. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 79(3), 163-180.



Davis, S. (2024). Refugee-background students in Canadian French immersion programs: Exploring the perspectives and ideologies of educators. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 27(1), 96-124.



Davis, S. (2024). French immersion programs for refugee-background students in Canada: Examining the ideologies shaping policy, inclusion, and support. *Journal of Education, Language, and Ideology*, 2(1), 69-103.



Davis, S. (2025). L'inclusion et l'intégration des élèves réfugiés en immersion française. *Journal de l'immersion*, 47(1), 24-28.