



## Reframing FSL Teacher Learning: Small Stories of (Re)Professionalization and Identity Formation

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**ABSTRACT.** French as a second language (FSL) teacher flight in Canada has become a serious issue, endangering the health of existing FSL programs (Masson, Larson, Desgroseilliers, Carr, & Lapkin, in press). One way to address FSL teacher retention and well-being is to develop a model for professional learning rooted in a sociocultural approach to (re)position teachers as active learners as a means to reclaim their agency. This case study describes the formation of two core French teachers' professional identities over four years in a teacher-led Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) network. Positioning analysis of the teachers' small story narratives reveals the strategies they used to (re)negotiate their professional selves in the CSCL network. The teachers' success developing a strong professional identity was linked to the validation they received for their learning experiences in the network, developing deep ties to their communities and to other teacher-professionals in the CSCL network. This paper discusses how (re)imagining FSL teacher professional learning through a sociocultural lens can have a significant impact on addressing issues of retention and well-being in the profession.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Le taux de renoncement des enseignants de français langue seconde (FLS) met en péril la santé des programmes de FLS actuels (Masson et al., in press). Un moyen d'améliorer la rétention et le bien-être des enseignants de FLS consiste à développer un modèle de développement professionnel basé sur des théories socioculturelles qui (re)positionnent les enseignants en tant qu'apprenants actifs dotés d'agentivité. Cette étude de cas suit le développement identitaire de deux enseignantes de français cadre, qui ont participé dans un réseau d'apprentissage collaboratif en ligne (ACEL) où elles ont géré elles-mêmes leur apprentissage professionnel pendant quatre ans. L'analyse de positionnement des « petites histoires » des enseignantes montre qu'elles ont pu (re)négocier leur statut professionnel dans le réseau d'ACEL. La construction identitaire professionnelle réussie des enseignantes s'attribue à la validation et le soutien qu'elles ont reçu dans le réseau pendant leurs expériences d'apprentissage, ainsi que les liens profonds qu'elles ont su développer dans leurs communautés professionnelles scolaires et avec d'autres enseignantes dans le réseau d'ACEL. Cette recherche suggère que la (ré)invention de l'apprentissage professionnel des enseignants de FLS sous un angle socioculturel peut avoir un impact important pour remédier à leur rétention et à leur bien-être dans cette profession.



**Keywords:** *French as a second language, teacher learning, professional identities, teacher retention and well-being, positioning analysis.*

## INTRODUCTION

The success of French as a second language (FSL) programs in Canada depends upon the success of its FSL teachers. And yet, FSL teachers have expressed feeling de-professionalized and disenfranchised from their practice (Karsenti, Collin, Villeneuve, Dumouchel, & Roy, 2008; Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Mollica, Philips, & Smith, 2005; Richards, 2002). Matters are exacerbated by 'teacher flight,' the fact that many FSL teachers consider leaving the profession or move out of French into the English-language stream (Lapkin & Barkaoui, 2008; Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006). The situation today in many provinces across Canada, has reached a crisis point. Despite market saturation where teachers have difficulty finding work (Ontario College of Teachers, 2016), when it comes to filling French-language teaching positions, school boards lack the numbers they need to ensure thriving successful French-language programming. Amid threats from Ontario school boards in 2017 to cancel some of their FSL programs, due to insufficient numbers of FSL teachers, at a Symposium on FSL hosted by Canadian Parents for French (CPF) the Ontario Ministry of Education pledged to launch an investigation into the matter and push to increase FSL teacher recruitment (Canadian Parents for French, 2017). While this welcomed, and much-awaited effort is necessary at this stage, ensuring we patch the leaky pipeline by retaining FSL teachers and supporting newly recruited teachers to avoid FSL teacher flight are also paramount steps to take in order to ensure the continued success of FSL programs in Canada.

## SITUATING THE STUDY

### Teacher Learning: Welcoming FSL Teachers into a New Paradigm

Professional learning rooted in sociocultural approaches, such as inquiry-based learning and action research (i.e., Banegas, Pavese, Velázquez, & Vélez, 2013; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), (re)places teachers at the centre of their practice. Shifting the paradigm on teacher learning is one approach to promote teacher well-being and (re)professionalization. This approach flourished in the fields of English as a second language (ESL) and General Education (GenEd) but has yet to make its way in the area of sustaining FSL teacher learning. Knowing that collaborative learning promotes professional well-being (Campbell, Lieberman, & Yashkina, 2013; Fullan & Hargreaves,



2016; Lieberman, Miller, & Von Frank, 2013), could this be an approach well-suited to FSL teachers as a form of support to remain in the profession? At the moment, little is known about FSL teachers' professional learning contexts and what FSL teacher learning looks like.

This ethnographic study reports the findings of a longitudinal multiple case study following the evolution of two FSL teachers' professional learning through small story narratives (Bamberg, 2007; Georgakopoulou, 2006). The two FSL teachers were part of a project involving 17 teachers who sought to lead their own professional learning in a Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) network which implemented a sociocultural approach. The paper addresses two issues: first, it provides information about the FSL teachers' professional learning experiences. Second, it demonstrates the potential of having FSL teachers lead their own professional learning in a CSCL network. Specifically, the study explores how this experience affected the FSL teachers' sense of professional identity and well-being.

Despite calls for research on in-service FSL professional learning networks to address issues of teacher well-being and socially equitable practices in teacher training (Heffernan, 2011; Mandin, 2008), such research remains scarce.

Kristmanson led a number of studies on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in French Immersion (FI) contexts (Kristmanson, Dicks, & Le Bouthillier, 2009; Kristmanson, Dicks, Le Bouthillier, & Bourgoin, 2008; Kristmanson, Lafargue, & Culligan, 2011). PLCs are collaborative learning networks with the explicit goal of improving student learning via teacher professional learning (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Kristmanson's studies (2008; 2009) involved action research projects in an elementary and a middle school. The research team created a PLC with FI teachers based on teachers' identified need to develop students' French writing practice. The PLC promoted discussion, active participation of all the PLC members, balanced reflection and action, and experiential learning as a starting point for dialogic inquiries. The teachers reported increased collaborative practice with their colleagues and valued the time they were given by their administration to consult with one another and share pedagogical practices.

Kristmanson's most recent study using PLCs (2011) was a cross-disciplinary action research project involving 10 high school language teachers (5 of them FSL teachers) working together to integrate the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the Electronic Language Portfolio (ELP) into their practice. The PLC met six times, for one-hour meetings, over the school year during full release days. Using a participatory approach, with researchers doing research *with* teachers rather than *on* teachers, the



research team shared the analysis of their discussions with the teachers, prompting a spiralized approach to collaborative reflective practice. Findings show the teachers sought to uncover their philosophical stance before developing an action plan, suggesting PLCs can promote critical thinking skills when teachers are given the time and space to unpack assumptions about learning and the constructs they attempt to integrate into their practice. The researchers mediated the teachers' learning if/when needed (i.e., providing insight, asking questions), but ultimately, the teachers led their own inquiries, identified personal needs and found individualized solutions based on their unique teaching contexts.

The current study extends this form of research demonstrating further potential of PLCs (in the form of a CSCL network) on teacher learning, albeit with an added focus on the long-term effect such work has on teacher professional identities. As such, the guiding questions are: *How do two FSL teachers position themselves in the stories they share in the CSCL network over time? What do these small stories reveal about their professional identities?*

### Teacher Identity: Qui sont les French Teachers?

Developing a strong sense of professional identity is central to the process of becoming an effective teacher (Alsup, 2006; Goodnough, 2010); and yet, there remains a need for deeper understanding of teacher identity development through the knowledge-base of second language teachers (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Identity has been conceptualized as a fixed set of attributes in psychology and behavioural sciences (Ricento, 2005). Studies addressing issues of identity in FSL are mainly rooted in critical and/or sociocultural paradigm(s) (e.g., Byrd Clark, 2008, 2010; Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Wernicke, 2017) which frames identity as a dialectic phenomenon of co-construction realized by the interaction between the individual and their social context, mediated by language.

A shift in FSL teacher identity research begins by acknowledging that a majority of FSL teachers are themselves second language speakers of French (Lapkin et al., 2006) at times in need of language support (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000, 2007). They may even be plurilingual and speak languages other than French and English (Byrd Clark, 2008; Gagné & Thomas, 2011). Identity has already been established as a dynamic composite of intersectional factors, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, linguistic background, geographical location, among others (e.g., Gu & Benson, 2014; Huang & Varghese, 2015; Jenlink, 2014; Motha, 2006; Rodriguez & Reis, 2012; Simon-Maeda, 2004). In the field of FSL, this implies the importance of (re)negotiating who can access FSL teacher status to include all those who would like to teach French and expand the idea of what an FSL teacher is expected to look and sound like.



Byrd Clark leads the charge in questioning the implications of being a multilingual FSL teacher in Canada and working within a professional setting in which “languages are still viewed as autonomous, separate systems” (Byrd Clark, Mady, & Vanthuyne, 2014, p.134) with little or no connection to other facets of the self. Discourses that silo social, cultural and linguistic aspects of teachers’ lives deny the complexity of language learning and the heterogeneity of linguistic identities overlooking the potential that these might have on informing FSL teacher practice (Byrd Clark, 2010, 2011, 2012). Discourse, here, refers to spoken or written interactions between people and the ideologies, beliefs, social practices, and cultural knowledge bound up in their exchanges (Foucault, 1972; Gee, 2014).

For her part, Wernicke (2016, 2017) explored how hegemonic discourses around standardized (usually Parisian) French affect FSL teachers’ sense of identity. Her research followed a group of in-service FSL teachers from British Columbia in a study abroad program in France aiming to improve their French-language proficiency and pedagogical practice. During the research, the teachers negotiated sociocultural and sociolinguistic tensions when they either encountered narratives in France that de-legitimized their status as French speakers, or when they questioned their own sense of belonging in the francophone speaking community. Her research highlights how social discourse around language is tied to status and power and how that affects FSL teachers’ sense of self, their confidence levels, and their feelings towards French language and culture. It also underscores the urgency to create space and legitimacy for Canadian speakers of French who come into the language and culture through the bilingual education system we have created in Canada. Given that feelings of illegitimacy and power struggles for status can negatively affect teacher professional identity construction (Gu, 2013), Wernicke’s research suggests a need for more open discussions about French-language proficiency and non-native speaker status in the Canadian context for FSL teachers to come to terms with their professional identities as qualified, confident teachers.

Knouzi and Mady (2014) examined an additional under-investigated facet of FSL teacher identity that involves understanding how teachers make sense of themselves and their chosen profession in relation to the status that French is afforded in their local context. The case study research, commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education, investigates this issue from three core French teachers’ perspectives using activity theory (Engeström, 2001) to explore the relationship between literacy teaching beliefs and practices. The findings reveal that tensions between the status of French in the Canadian educational context and their professional identities affect their teaching practice.

Studies explicitly on in-service FSL teacher identity remain sparse. Given the importance of identity research in other fields (such as ESL and GenEd) and the current issue with FSL



teacher flight, I argue that the gap in research about core French teacher professional identities warrants further and deeper investigation.

## THE STUDY

### Background

The study originated with a group of teachers working across various disciplines and grade levels in Ontario and Michigan. Some of the teachers had worked with the research team previously (Kooy, 2015; Kooy & Colarusso, 2013; Kooy & van Veen, 2012), and requested the creation of a PLC to continue developing their professional inquiries. Additional teachers joined the study through a sample of convenience. The research provided the teachers with full-release days during the school year. Two cohorts of 17 teachers (total) participated in six online video conferences each year from 2011-2015, to discuss their professional learning inquiries and their practice. The conferences were teacher-led, and participants were free to set their own learning inquiries based on their particular needs within the school context. Additionally, they supplemented these collaborative discussions throughout the year by using a private online forum. They also met face-to-face once a year for three-day Summer Institutes to debrief what they had worked on from the previous year and set learning goals for the coming year. Throughout the study, the teachers also completed open-ended surveys that provided data about their experiences in the project so far, including any changes or desired future directions.

### Methodology

This qualitative research inquiry, rooted in critical sociocultural discourse analysis (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007), explores the development of the two core French teachers' professional learning and identities who were part of our CSCL network. The aim of this study is to examine what these FSL teachers reveal about their professional learning experiences to date, and how this has affected their sense of professional identity and well-being. The study uses positioning analysis to uncover the discursive practices that teachers use in their small stories (Barkhuizen, 2009; Georgakopoulou, 2006) to locate themselves in their professional practice. Small stories are "the ephemeral narratives emerging in everyday, mundane contexts" (Watson, 2007, p. 371), as opposed to big stories which represent idealized projections of our selves.

The small stories teachers tell about themselves, their profession, and their work contexts reveal how they negotiate change. For the purpose of this study, I consider the teachers' stories as narratives, a unit of analysis to explore constructions of their identities. I extend



the definition of narratives of personal experiences to short written, or spoken stories, that help the teller make sense of their experience(s) over time (Ochs & Capps, 2009). Narratives thus serve the function of rationally and reflexively monitoring *self-hood* (Bamberg, 2012), which shapes and is shaped by our life experiences. Narratives, which provide meaning, also help to communicate teachers' understandings of meaning (Bruner, 1986), leaving space to infer the sociocultural influence on the teachers' professional selves.

## Participants

The study's participants are two core French teachers, Sophie and Christina (both pseudonyms), who are working full-time in southern Ontario public schools. The importance of focusing on these teachers' professional narratives is to provide an in-depth, thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the cultural context of learning that these teachers find themselves in.

Sophie is a multilingual Canadian woman of Western European descent in her early 30s who speaks English fluently and learned French at school in Canada. She also has family in France and lived there for three years. Working at a large middle-class high school in an urban center in southern Ontario, she had 5-10 years of teaching experience when the research project began in 2011. At the time of the study, Sophie was Head of Department for FSL and ESL at her school. Sophie also began an MEd degree during the project. For Sophie, joining the CSCL network was an opportunity to learn more about how PLCs function and "to interact more effectively and better support the teachers in my department" (June 2011). Her goals were to "see teachers get more release time during the day to get together and build community and improve student learning" (June 2011).

Christina is a multilingual Canadian woman of South Asian descent in her late 20s who teaches at a newly-opened progressive middle school (grades 6-8) with a large population of multilingual and immigrant students in a middle-class urban centre in southern Ontario. She had 5-10 years of full-time teaching experience when she joined the study in 2012. She described herself in this way:

I have taught core French to grades seven and eight for several years now. I am a product of the core French program. I immigrated to Canada and am a culturally and linguistically diverse individual like all of my students. I have learned French, and two other European languages here in Canada and often pass as a native speaker of any language I speak when speaking to native speakers of that language. I love language and believe that all of my students can and should speak



French well after studying it for six years. I still remember feeling shocked after taking a grade ten additional language class; I realized that I had learned more of that language in that one year than French in nine years of core French (French started in grade one at my grade school). I dropped core French after grade nine and returned to it in University at which point I was completely fluent in the other language after studying it for three years. I don't want my students to drop French forever and I know they will if something isn't done to help them. I also believe that tensions between French and English-speaking Canadians would be alleviated if we didn't superficially pretend to be bilingual. Over the past several years, I have developed a French program my students are excited about; they love French and they can speak it better after one year in my class. I am still developing my French teaching strategy. This study will help me to be a better teacher for my students and will enable me to share this unique French program with you. (November, 2013)

## The Data

The data consist of oral and written excerpts from Sophie and Christina. The oral interactions stem from discussions led by the teachers at the yearly Summer Institute meetings and the monthly online video conferences. The written data comes from online forum posts.

## Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, I applied the principles of narrative analysis (Bamberg, 2012; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) to Bamberg's suggested three levels of positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2007). Positioning Analysis (PA) examines the tension between person-to-world and world-to-person directions of fit that emerge within the discursive practices of storytelling. This makes stories "the empirical ground, where identities come into existence and are interactively displayed" (Bamberg, 2004, p. 2). I use PA to explore the constitutive nature of stories and acknowledge a reciprocal direction of fit. Bamberg distinguishes between two subject-positions: In some cases, the subject is "*being positioned*" (Bamberg, 2004, emphasis in original) (e.g., Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Langenhove, 1991; Linehan & McCarthy, 2000) in already existing (and at times) contradicting and competitive discourses. The discursive choices the subject makes, the discursive repertoires and resources they use, reveal how they position themselves as they ground their identities *in discourses*. In other cases, the subject is "*positioning self*" (Bamberg, 2004, emphasis in original) through identities as performance (e.g., Butler, 1995; Butler, 1997). The performative self involves self-reflection, self-criticism, and agency; it is dynamic and in constant revision. This means that



discursive resources and repertoires are *constructed by* the subject as needed. These two approaches to understanding the relationship of teacher agency in their identity formation opens up a site for investigating “where and how subjects come into existence [...], where positions are actively and inactively taken (and explored) for the purpose of self and world construction” (Bamberg, 2004, p. 3).

The analytic approach amounted to a three-step process in which I asked: (a) Who are the characters in the story and how is the story told?; (b) What discourses are running through the story and what do they reveal about the characters?; and, (c) How are the characters positioned in relation to the discourses they have explicitly or implicitly been previously identified? With each question, I was able to, respectively, conduct a linguistically-oriented analysis that examines the language choices made by the storyteller (i.e., being positioned), perform a sociolinguistically-oriented analysis that examines the discourses that emerge in the story (e.g., positioning self), and ultimately create a content analysis of findings which involves contextualizing all these questions and putting them in conversation. With these three levels of analysis, I shifted my focus on the data from local to global (Watson, 2007), a tactic that was particularly useful when working with the teachers’ small stories. Small stories are an effective means of understanding the details of daily life and how these shape the professional sense of self (Vásquez, 2011). Narrative analysis, then, focuses on the content of the story being told and the way the content has been organized to tell the story. In thinking of identity as narrative (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), the “attention is on human beings in action and on the mechanisms underlying human action” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14). In this sense, exploring teachers’ stories and what meaning they take from them “revolves around. . .the ways in which narrative and discourse shape and are shaped by identity” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 181) and how the narratives themselves become socioculturally situated.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Sophie’s Narrative: Finding Community

During her discussions with colleagues in the CSCL network, Sophie describes her perspective towards the type of professional development (PD) she is experiencing in her board:



1 I think it's just the lack of trust. And it's not about us, it's about them up there. And just making sure  
2 that we're controlled. You know, what's that song by Pink Floyd [laughs]. Look the other way for  
3 the teacher, right? It's all about control and not about us. I remember when I was asked my opinion  
4 for a board-wide second language French PD for French teachers, and teachers were trying to put  
5 in what they wanted, because they spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on these things. And  
6 the coordinator said, "No, it HAS to do with Growing Success. So, you're going to learn Growing  
7 Success." And I can go on the internet and read Growing Success myself, on my own time. It's just  
8 frustrating cause you hit this wall, and you're not treated like other professionals, like lawyers and  
9 doctors who get to pick their conferences and go and... We're just not. There's no trust. It is, it's  
10 disgusting yeah.

Sophie extract – Summer Institute (April 2012)

This passage reveals the crucial role that emotions play in helping Sophie make sense of her professional learning experience thus far. Indeed, emotions as an everyday part of teachers' lives often define their professional identities (Cooper & Edmonton, 2002). Emotions are an important facet of teacher professional identities, which Clarke (2013) advocates discussing in the context of policy, politics and passion rather than being embedded in the techno-rational discourses of teaching. In this case, Sophie's feelings towards the treatment she experiences in her board colour her attitude towards the PD being offered there.

This passage also demonstrates a chasm between "us" and "them up there" (line 1) (van Dijk, 1995). Sophie is at a standoff with her administration where she feels a hierarchy is looking down on teachers and imposing their will on them. Her interpretation suggests this is about the way the administration wants to exert "control" (line 3) over teachers, and her reference to "not about us" (line 3) implies that it has nothing to do with the quality or capabilities of the teachers. The passage suggests French teachers, in her school board, are afforded little autonomy when it comes to their own professional learning. In fact, Sophie argues she is perfectly capable of reading up on new policies, such as "Growing Success" (line 6-7) on her own. She laments this approach to PD she feels wastes money (line 5) and time (line 8). The "disgusting" (line 10) treatment Sophie faces continues to exacerbate her feelings of alienation in the profession. Sophie demonstrates critical awareness (Brookfield, 1995) by recognizing tensions in some of her professional learning



experiences. She states: "It has been the same way for so long that we just endure it and it's hard to imagine it being different" (August 2012, summer institute) which marks a critical point along her professional learning journey.

Her narrative thus far echoes reports of professional marginalization experienced by FSL teachers in previous studies investigating their working conditions (Karsenti et al., 2008; Mollica et al., 2005; Richards, 2002).

Despite reaching this crucial realization, Sophie needs time to take stock of her situation and to attempt to implement change. A wide net is cast in her reflections as she explores how she feels about board-level PD sessions and school-level policies about PD.

1 And there's another issue too with the whole TLC, TLC. In our school TLCs are teacher learning  
2 circles and they're not taken seriously at all and sort of viewed as a punishment because we have  
3 to produce this chart that shows that we're progressing [...]. But it's not a professional learning  
4 community, it's a teacher learning circle so we're supposed to show improvement on paper and it's  
5 not about relationships it's not about connecting with your fellow teachers and the time that we're  
6 given to do it is usually five minutes tacked on at the end of a staff meeting. And it's not enough  
7 time to connect. And I think people in my building also have a need or are searching for, you know,  
8 time to connect meaningfully with each other. And I think you know, it's hard to discuss really like,  
9 really neat things, like the way we talk you know, what we talk about here, when we don't get the  
10 time to get to do it at our schools. I'd love to sit with my French teachers -- and not at lunch time! --  
11 and talk about the books we want to choose or to change, like you know, a lot of our books if we  
12 look at them from a feminist perspective it's kind of scary. And we need time to talk to each other  
13 and decide, and buy books that, you know, matter and that are meaningful for the kids. If we don't  
14 have that time given to us we kind of stick to the same old.

Sophie extract – online meeting (September 2013)

Sophie points out limitations in school policy around "teacher learning circles (TLC)" (line 1-2), which are a type of PLCs her board has implemented. The idea that teachers are considered experts about learning when it comes to their students, and yet are not expert



enough when it comes to their own professional learning creates cognitive dissonance. Her colleagues feel this application of PD is punitive (line 2), and as a result, “they’re not taken seriously” (line 2) by teacher professionals. Again, Sophie identifies “time” (line 7) as missing in this formula for professional learning noting that time is important for building “relationships” (line 5) and “connecting” (line 5). Sophie delves deeper into the implications of the *absent presences* (Derrida & Caputo, 1997) in her professional learning experience: they have serious consequences for her teaching practice. For instance, not having time to discuss books being assigned to students in FSL from a feminist perspective, means teachers “kind of stick to the same old” (line 14). Here, Sophie posits that teachers who want to learn and improve themselves need to be able to move out of their comfort zone and explore new and complex ideas (i.e., feminist theory) or competencies.

Throughout her narratives around professional learning, Sophie resists the idea of teachers being positioned as passive recipients, standard automatons, or pre-determined knowledge processors. Instead, she is intent on creating a narrative which positions her as an intellectual and expert on learning, capable of grappling with new theories and ideas, and determining where to take her professional learning. Sophie also identifies building meaningful relationships and trust as a key aspect of teacher learning that she feels is missing and wants to develop in her practice. She highlights the lack of trust she faces from her administration, which seems to play an important role in the future quality of Sophie’s professional learning.

Emotion is part of the transition process for Sophie who is creating a vision within her work context of what meaningful learning looks like that she can report to her superiors. Over time, Sophie takes a more active role and advocates for the kind of PD she feels is effective:



1 On a positive note, the administration at my school has taken a good hard look at the TLC  
2 process we currently have. Recently we had an entire Department Heads retreat/ PD session at  
3 this brilliant restaurant called [redacted] to discuss the process with brutal honesty. . .which is  
4 something we have never done. We sat in groups with one administrator at each table and  
5 questioned our TLC process and its effectiveness and came up with a plan to improve it.  
6 I brought up our research study [redacted] at the debriefing heads meeting about our retreat as  
7 an example of the ideal professional learning community and our admin seems very interested  
8 in what we've been doing and would like to see how it works. When I suggested technology as  
9 a support tool, they brought up QUAD SI schools, as schools who are involved in doing  
10 something similar to our CSCL network I think. They also mentioned many other issues that  
11 come with teachers being "made" to document their inquiry work online.  
12 Overall, I was very happy that the admin agreed with all the suggestions made about providing  
13 more time to do TLC's, that there needs to be a radical mind shift in how we see and participate  
14 in TLC's and how we can get others to buy in to "self-directed PD or Inquiry" to make it  
15 meaningful and not be seen as an add-on to what they're already doing.  
16 Until now, the TLC process has been a chore but with the support of our Admin there is  
17 possibility for it to become a thorough, rich and meaningful inquiry with a group of people  
18 working together to improve their practice for student success. I feel like we've turned a corner  
19 and that my school is serious about respecting teachers' needs to drive their own PD and I  
20 sincerely believe that once we are given more time, we will accomplish teacher learning that  
21 matters in my school through the new TLC process.

Sophie extract – online forum (May 2014)

At the start of Year 4 in the CSCL network, Sophie signals an institutional change in her board's approach to PD. The administration has taken a critical stance towards their practices by "taking a good hard look at the TLC process we currently have" (line 1-2). Sophie shifts the way she positions herself in her board using "we" (line 13). This indicates that she feels in-groupness with the administration who are now on board with examining



their own PD policies. The lines of communication have opened, and everyone can express their position “with brutal honesty” (line 3), a novel experience for Sophie and her colleagues (line 4). The administration used a critical framework for improvement, encouraging teachers and administrators to collaboratively question the TLC process (line 5) and come up with solutions (line 5-6). In this extract, Sophie finds her voice when she brings up the work she has been doing in the CSCL network as an example of successful professional learning (line 7-8). She positions herself as an experienced teacher who knows what an “ideal professional learning community” (line 7) looks like and an expert who can contribute to the administration’s goals. They respond by becoming “very interested in what [the CSCL network teachers have] been doing and would like to see how it works” (line 7-8). Sophie’s ability to share her CSCL network experience in her work context is an opportunity to validate the approach to professional learning she has been working on over the last four years.

Sophie expresses pride and happiness (line 12) towards her work and her relationship with the administration: “I feel like we’ve turned a corner” (line 18). She feels listened to and valued by her administration who now seem “serious about respecting teachers’ needs to drive their own PD” (line 19). She writes “Admin” (line 16) with a capital A signaling the increased status she affords them.

Sophie is also aware that the changes the administration is looking to implement will not be easy. It took Sophie four years to reach this point in her learning, and she is concerned about “how we can get others to buy in to “self-directed PD or Inquiry’ to make it meaningful and not be seen as an add-on to what they’re already doing” (line 14-15). Her aim is to avoid repeating past experiences with PD that felt like “a chore” (line 16). Interestingly, Sophie includes herself with the administration in this statement when she uses “we” (line 14); she is now collaborating with the administration to implement “a radical mind shift” (line 13) in the school board’s views and ways of implementing professional learning.

Although Sophie does much of the work on a personal level, one clear factor emerges in determining the success of Sophie’s professional learning: her interpersonal relationships with administrators and how she is positioned in their interactions.

### **Christina’s Narrative: Dealing with Exclusion**

Christina also experiences some challenges with professional learning in her school, particularly in terms of access and being able to establish herself as a professional FSL



educator. Christina describes her opportunities (or lack thereof) for professional learning and collaboration with colleagues at her school:

1 **Christina:** So, I guess maybe at my school it's different cause at my school when you have prep  
2 time no one has to take over your class. You just don't have a class. And the other  
3 thing is - at that particular block. And then the other thing is that they actually have  
4 common prep time. So, people that are teaching partners - we have teaching partners  
5 for math, science, and language arts and social studies - they have the same prep  
6 time. So, then they can go and they can talk if they choose to about the same classes  
7 that they teach and do planning together. And they also try to do common prep time for  
8 people who are team teaching in terms of the same they teach the same subject so  
9 then possibly they have the same prep time so they can meet up and talk about it. So,  
10 I think at my school maybe it's planned a little bit differently and it works well. So, I  
11 think maybe that would be a good idea maybe looking into having common prep time.  
12 Like making sure that two teachers have the same prep time when they teach the  
13 same subject so they could meet and they could converse about it or if they're team  
14 teaching where they have the same classes but they teach in different subjects. That  
15 might be a good idea as well.

16 **Kelly:** Christina, it sounds like—Christina it sounds like you have formalized partners or  
17 relation—like collaborative partners. At my school, there's nothing that's explicitly said  
18 about who you're really supposed to be partnering with.

19 **Christina:** Ok yeah see at my school I don't do it because I teach French. So, French teachers  
20 are kind of left out of that, but most of the teachers, yeah, they have someone that's  
21 like, they team teach. They have a partner. They have someone that they look at  
22 each other's report cards. They do everything together.

Christina extract – online meeting (February 2013)



In her school context, teachers have “common prep time” (line 4) to “talk if they choose” (line 6), and “do planning together” (line 7). However, Christina reveals that she does not “do it” (line 19) *because* she is a French teacher. In her school, “French teachers are kind of left out of that” (line 19-20). Christina's February 2013 extract provides further evidence to previous research suggesting that FSL teachers are often left out of ongoing school initiatives (Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Mollica et al., 2005). Even though her school shows innovation and consideration towards *other* teachers, giving them time to work and plan together, French teachers are left out of this particular professional learning opportunity. Christina does not include herself in the teacher “in-group” referring to them as “they” (line 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 20, 21, 22). She makes one reference using “we” (line 4) when describing her school's initiative, while she affiliates herself as being a member of this particular school, despite not having her own teaching partner as a form of inclusion.

Nevertheless, Christina distances herself from the marginalization she experiences by evaluating the school initiative from an administrative standpoint. She deems the initiative successful for other teachers in her school and Christina gives advice to her CSCL colleagues about what to look into (line 12) should they want to set up a similar initiative. She makes suggestions using “would” and “could” (line 11, 13, 14). In keeping with her projected goal of becoming an administrator, Christina positions herself as a knowledgeable expert on what works in schools (line 10-14).

Christina seeks critical engagement with her practice through other means. Given that she is currently doing an MA, professional learning through higher education is important for developing her practice.

- 1 I'm so like scattered all the time cause, I always am interested in like fifty things and that's why I
- 2 want to get everyone's messages. It's a problem I have. Like right now my Masters is about
- 3 teaching social justice through French and I still have to, like, finish my proposal cause I'm so busy
- 4 doing everything else I'm doing cause I'm excited about it that yeah. I have too many interests. And
- 5 right now, what I'm interested in is because I'm teaching so much like I'm teaching language arts
- 6 and all these topics and you know subjects in English, I'm really interested in a whole bunch of new
- 7 things too. Especially because my kids are so amazing this year.

Christina extract – online meeting (October 2013)



Christina is very “excited” (line 4) about engaging with new people and new learning opportunities. Her students, whom she calls “my kids” (line 7), are a great motivator for her because they are “so amazing” (line 7). However, Christina describes herself as someone who is very “scattered” (line 1), recognizing that her learning interests are dispersed, being interested “in like fifty things” (line 1) and “a whole bunch of new things” (line 6-7), ultimately stating, “I have too many interests” (line 4). For Christina, being “scattered” (line 1) is “a problem” (line 2) because she cannot focus her attention deeply on any one thing and she is “so busy doing everything else” (line 3-4). This extract raises questions about how to channel a teacher’s excitement about professional learning to avoid feeling overwhelmed and burnt out from working on too many things.

Christina identified other ways in which French teachers are excluded from professional learning in her school:

- 1 As a French teacher, we’re kept out of. . . math and language-based professional development. I’ve
- 2 always wondered what happens at those meetings. From what I’m hearing now, it appears that I
- 3 haven’t missed out on much. In fact, being able to choose my own PD (via an MA degree) is exactly
- 4 what everyone is saying they want to do. How funny this system in which we provide our students
- 5 with choice boards and our teachers with mandates! How dare we claim to be professional enough
- 6 to identify areas in which we need or want development!

Christina extract – online forum (April 2014)

Christina includes herself in the marginalized French teacher in-group by using “we” (line 1). Because French teachers are excluded from “math and language-based professional development” (line 1), she wonders “what happens at those meetings” (line 2). Christina shows that teachers want to feel a sense of belonging and validation of their subject matter in their school (Kastelan-Sikora, 2013). But Christina deals with her exclusion by switching her stance, rejecting the opportunity for those professional learning sessions and devaluing them: “From what I’m hearing now, it appears that I haven’t missed out on much” (line 2-3). Moreover, Christina claims that the teachers who do participate in those sessions now want to do what *she* is doing: lead their own professional learning through higher education. Suggesting it “is exactly what everyone is saying they want to do” (line 3-4) adds value to professional learning via higher education, such as “an MA degree” (line 3), which Christina was completing at the time. When Christina represents it as the most sought-after way of moving forward in a teacher’s career, she also positions herself as



*already* part of the in-group of teachers who is accessing this “higher” form of professional learning.

In the end, one way that Christina addresses her marginalization as a French teacher is to make herself indispensable and dependable in other areas, specifically in areas of leadership. For instance, Christina is a union representative for teachers at her school and she leads extra-curricular social justice programs to initiate students and other teachers to equitable practices. Perhaps *because* she is not being heard in the area of FSL, she is not shy about speaking her mind, letting her ideas be known when it comes to community and leadership. She positions herself as a solution finder and a leader.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings suggest that fostering strong positive relationships with their administration, by way of open communication and negotiation, benefits FSL teacher actualization. Being in a CSCL network, the FSL teachers found support among peers. They were able to combat feelings of isolation and/or marginalization and to develop a sense of purpose through validation of their professional learning inquiries. For Sophie, the experience in the CSCL network allowed her to take ownership of her learning and assert her profession status. In the long run, this transformational process benefitted Sophie's professional well-being. She became a leader in her school by advocating for change and spearheading new initiatives in teacher professional learning. For Christina, her experience in the CSCL network allowed her to notice the differences in treatment that FSL teachers receive in her school. It also revealed how Christina negotiates feelings of marginalization by dismissing PD experiences she is excluded from and developing creative projects (such as her MA or by starting an after-school social justice group) to (re)position herself as an essential and knowledgeable peer. Overall, it seems the dialectic reflection Sophie and Christina engaged in with their social and professional surroundings allowed them to explore e issues related to their professional status and practice in depth, and with confidence. The CSCL network provided them with a space and the support to embark on this transformative process.

The study also provides evidence of the important role that emotions play in teachers' changing professional identities. They either work as a conduit for reflection, becoming a catalyst for action, or as a means of actualizing or resisting projected identities reified in the discourses around them/used by them. The findings also suggest extending the notion of FSL teachers as learners beyond that of language learners, as already established (e.g., Bourdages & Vignola, 2009; Christiansen & Laplante, 2004), to include their identities as lifelong learners of their craft.



Through the use of positioning analysis of the teachers' narratives (Bamberg, 2004), the study captures a distinctive professional learning journey during which Sophie and Christina discursively construct their *selfhood* (Linehan & McCarthy, 2000) and navigate social relationships with their administration, their colleagues, and their CSCL network colleagues. Sophie and Christina's professional learning narratives reveal the interwoven, long term, and active negotiation of the self that occurs outside of traditional professional learning formats. Contextual factors, such as time, access to space, emotional support, also played an important in their professional identity formation. They demonstrated multifaceted and highly adaptive identities based on their contexts. This included awareness about their own, their colleagues' and their learners' needs.

The analysis also reveals the complex moves these two FSL teachers make as they renegotiate their professional selves in the CSCL network. Upon entering the study, Sophie feels disempowered and dissatisfied with the way FSL teacher learning unfolds in her school context, while Christina displays professional curiosity, seeking alternative ways to engage with and develop her practice. Both of their narratives pick up on elements that are made evident in the research about FSL teachers (e.g., Karsenti, Collin, Villeneuve, Dumouchel, & Roy, 2008; Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Mollica, Philips, & Smith, 2005; Richards, 2002): for instance, Sophie feels unsupported in her practice; meanwhile, Christina touches on her professional isolation when she explains that she does not have a teacher partner in her school *because* she is an FSL teacher. Both express the feeling that current professional learning approaches are un-adapted to their needs, either because they are based on the one-shot workshop model (Sophie), or because they are not offered to FSL teachers (Christina). Through the professional learning inquiries, they engage in with the CSCL network, both teachers resist the ways policy and discourses shape exchanges in their boards.

It is important to point out as well that although some elements found in the literature about FSL teachers emerge in Sophie and Christina's narrative, the evolution in Sophie's narrative and the entrepreneurial spirit of Christina's approach to her own professional learning calls into question the way FSL educators are portrayed as small players in their learning who are constrained by restrictive policies and practices (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). The analysis suggests there is room for a more textured interpretation of FSL teachers' professional selves and that the discourse in the research community may need to evolve to reflect alternative realities for FSL teachers.

### The Future of FSL Teacher Learning?

Approaching FSL teacher learning from a sociocultural perspective (Johnson, 2009;



Vygotsky, 1978), the teachers involved in the CSCL project were afforded the position of experts of their own knowledge and active agents in their learning. Under this paradigm, teacher knowledge is recast as a process of co-construction (rather than purely acquired from outside sources). Privileging decontextualized outside knowledge through “one-shot workshops” and foregrounding academic research as a source of knowledge runs the risk of placing teachers in a passive position. It remains rooted in a techno-rational discourse about teachers’ skills (Clarke, 2013) that reduces matters of professional learning to meeting standards of technical efficiency and developing competencies. The techno-rational discourses usually found in traditional PD narratives position teachers as deficient in their learning and professional knowledge, affecting decision-making and exacerbating feelings of dissatisfaction. Research and PD that focuses on finding “best practices” and developing a tangible “product” of learning that teachers can then “transfer” to their contexts implies that teacher learning can be “one-size-fits-all”, when in fact, teacher learning should be highly situated to the teachers’ context and needs (Johnson, 2009).

Freeman and Johnson’s (1998) critique about language teacher education programs, which also applies to in-service teacher development programs, remains relevant today in FSL. They warn against emphasizing *how* to teach via research and strategies to develop teacher knowledge, rather than supporting teachers to *learn* to teach. Bypassing steps to support teachers on how to conduct their own professional inquiries robs them of the opportunity to develop a critical stance towards research and their practice. Putting teachers in the driver’s seat is one way for them to reclaim a sense of purpose and agency in their profession. It also privileges teacher knowledge as the source for growth. This entails adopting a view of learning in which the teacher is also a learner and fostering a culture of self-regulated learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2011).

This research suggests a sociocultural approach to professional learning, in the form of a CSCL network, offers considerable potential for FSL teachers to counter and address feelings of isolation and marginalization. Future professional learning structures for FSL teachers need to provide them with opportunities to build their own support networks, either in their schools, their boards, or across boards with colleagues across the country. This aligns with recent reports which suggest more collaboration is needed to improve professional learning experiences among FSL teachers (Arnott et al., 2015; Karsenti et al., 2008).

Current technologies are changing the landscape and realm of possibilities for CSCL networks of FSL teachers. For instance, video conferencing platforms such as Google Hangout, Adobe Connect and Skype make this approach to professional learning a very real and affordable possibility. However, to be at their most effective, teacher-led CSCL



networks need school-sanctioned time and support. Collaborative work applications, such as Slack and What's App, offer the security and privacy needed for collaborative learning and support so that teachers can create their own culture of learning and professionalism within self-directed virtual communities. These apps also offer the added benefit of documenting the teachers' learning should they need to access or review their professional learning trajectories.

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