Research Study

Teacher Candidates of French as a Second Language and the Construction of a Professional Identity

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ABSTRACT. This article focuses on a qualitative case study of linguistic support sessions for French second language teacher candidates in an initial teacher education programme in Eastern Canada. The overall purpose of the study was to explore the impact of these sessions on the participants' linguistic competence and confidence. In particular, this article examines one such impact: the construction of a linguistic and professional identity. Through the analysis of focus group transcriptions, findings related to the concept of identity are shared in order to shed light on the potential of these sessions beyond simply language improvement. The article concludes with a discussion of the possible implications of this study for FSL teacher recruitment and retention.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article porte sur une étude de cas qualitative des séances de soutien linguistique destinées aux candidats à l'enseignement du français langue seconde dans un programme de formation initiale des enseignants dans l'Est du Canada. L'objectif général de l'étude était d'explorer l'impact de ces séances sur les compétences et les aptitudes linguistiques des participants. En particulier, cet article examine l'un de ces impacts: la construction d'une identité linguistique et professionnelle. Grâce à l'analyse des transcriptions des groupes de discussion, les résultats liés au concept d'identité sont partagés afin de mettre en lumière le potentiel de ces sessions au-delà de la simple amélioration linguistique. L'article se termine par une discussion sur les implications possibles de cette étude pour le recrutement et la rétention des enseignants de FLS.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, Teacher Candidates, Professional Identity, French Second Language, Teacher Recruitment, Language Teaching, Teacher Retention.*

INTRODUCTION

The effects of a long-term shortage of French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers are being felt across Canada, bringing the issue of teacher recruitment and retention to the forefront of research related to FSL (Masson et al., 2021a). In teacher education programmes, greater emphasis is being placed on preparing teacher candidates for

FSL teaching. Part of ensuring teacher candidates are well prepared for the field means focusing on ensuring they become aware of how they are beginning to construct a professional identity. Kanno & Stuart (2011) pointed out that teacher identity development may be even more important than pedagogical knowledge in second language (L2) teaching. They suggested that teacher professional identity construction should occupy a central place in the initial training programmes of language teachers. Identity has been conceptualised in many different ways, but, for the purpose of this research, we define teacher professional identity as the mental image that teachers and teacher candidates hold of what it is to be a teacher (Wolff & De Costa, 2017). It is important to understand how language teachers conceptualise their professional identity because the dissonance that occasionally arises between the imagined version of their career and the realities of the working conditions can result in pedagogical and identity struggles (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). These struggles can, in turn, impact retention rates (Wernicke et al., 2022).

Context

In New Brunswick's (NB) English schools, learning French is mandatory for all students. Two FSL programme options are offered: French immersion (FI), in which French is the medium of instruction for academic subjects, and intensive French, in which French is learnt as a school subject by all students not in FI. FI programmes have been steadily increasing in popularity for several years in Canada, and that increase is greatest in New Brunswick (NB). According to Canadian Parents for French (2019), from 2014 to 2018, the average increase in the percentage of students registered in FI programmes for all Canadian provinces and territories was 0.8%, while for NB it was 9.6% (average enrolment in FI increased from 27.2% to 36.8% in NB). Educational policy in NB stipulates a high level of French language proficiency for both FI and intensive French programmes, thus increasing the pressure for teacher education programmes to not only recruit candidates with solid French abilities, but also to support those who are working to improve their language skills in order to meet the needs of the system, which are particularly acute in NB.

Moreover, while FSL teachers may have the pedagogical knowledge necessary to teach L2 in NB, they are often criticised by stakeholders for their lack of linguistic and cultural competence in French (Fraser, 2019). Public criticism pointing to a lack of competence may have an impact on the identity of both FSL teachers currently in the system as well as those considering an FSL teaching career, and exacerbate the challenges faced by teacher education programmes of recruiting qualified candidates to meet market demand (Masson et al., 2019). To attempt to address this problem, several universities have developed initiatives to support the language development of FSL teacher candidates (e.g., Carr, 2010; Mady, 2018; Slavkov, & Séror, 2019).

At our NB-based university, applicants to the FSL stream must have achieved a minimum of intermediate plus on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) or an equivalent level of B1.2 on the Common European Framework of Reference scale to be accepted. To be eligible for the FSL practicum in either the IF (Intensive French) or FI programmes, teacher candidates must have obtained a minimum of an advanced level of proficiency (B2.2). In order to support students in increasing their levels of language competence and confidence, our faculty added linguistic support sessions to complement FSL methods courses and practica. Knowing that identity construction is

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an important part of teacher education (Kanno & Stuart, 2011) and understanding that the unique professional identity of FSL teachers is linguistic and pedagogical in nature (Masson et al., 2021a), these sessions were focused on strengthening the linguistic aspects of their identity.

Objectives

The purpose of this article is to study the impact of language support sessions on teacher identity and to provide insights into recruitment and retention of FSL teachers for decision makers and stakeholders. In particular, this paper will focus on the concept of language teacher professional identity, which will be adopted as the conceptual framework. The following research question guided this study: How are the language support sessions aimed at improving the language proficiency and confidence of teacher candidates in our teacher education programme contributing to the development of a teacher professional identity?

This article will provide an overview of literature related to language proficiency and requirements, as well as the native-speaker standard. We will then summarise the methodology used for the study, synthesise the results, and conclude with a discussion of these results through the lens of identity. We will begin with a description of this concept which serves as the theoretical framework for the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Identity

The concept of identity is central to our study and serves as the theoretical framework for this paper. Three dominant schools of thought, psychological, socio-cultural, and post-modern, each hold a different perspective of identity. We take a post-modern perspective in which identity is influenced by the predominant ideologies driven by society, but view the teacher candidates as agents with the ability to oppose or resist dominant ideologies (Martin, 2019). We understand identity as a construct based on a mental image of oneself that integrates both the characteristics by which the person defines themself or is defined by others, as well as the aspirations of the person in relation to their values (Pennington, 2015). Buendía-Arias et al. explained that "identity is responsive to and reflective of contexts in 'which it is developed" (2020, p. 586). Framed in a postmodern view, identity is in constant construction, through language, and thus it is fluid, dynamic, fragmented, multifaceted, and a site of struggles (Hallman, 2015; Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Norton, 2013; Wolff & De Costa, 2017).

The professional identity of language teachers, like identity more generally, is developed over time (Pennington & Richards, 2016). Even before entering an initial teacher education programme, the professional identity construction of language teacher candidates is already underway (Hallman, 2015; Wolff & De Costa, 2017). Teacher candidates have a mental image of what it is to be a language teacher based on their values, beliefs, and experiences as well as how being a teacher is constructed in their local context and by others (Pennington, 2015). In the process of becoming a teacher, teacher candidates are confronted with different subjectivities and discursive practices related to teaching in general, to language teaching in particular, and to the subject matter (taught in French in the

case of FI) in the university context, in the school system during their practicum, and in their community (Cheung et al., 2015). Examining identity during initial teacher education programmes by making connections between teacher candidates' life stories and education, and by encouraging reflection has the potential for "self-discovery, transformation and evolution" (Buendía-Arias, et al., 2020, p. 585). While recognising that a language teacher's professional identity is governed by norms and conventions, power relations in their community of practice, and the pressure to conform, reflexivity and collaboration in teacher education programmes helps to develop agency and a capacity to act (Wolff & De Costa, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Proficiency and Initial Teacher Education Programmes

Being a language teacher requires a variety of knowledge and skills. Masson et al. (2021b) proposed a four-pillar model of initial teacher education: target language proficiency, intercultural competence, pedagogical knowledge, and collaborative professionalism. According to these researchers, the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to these four pillars are essential to teachers' identity and professional well-being. Increasingly, FSL teacher candidates in Canada have themselves learnt French in the same programmes in which they hope to teach (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007). These candidates are therefore still language learners. Despite the willingness of potential candidates to teach in FSL programmes, there are barriers to their admission into FSL teacher education programmes, even at a time of severe teacher shortages in NB and elsewhere in Canada. For example, many Canadian universities impose certain language requirements for admission to the initial teacher training programme (Smith et al., forthcoming).

In NB, the OPI is used by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (NB-EECD) to measure the language proficiency of its FSL teachers. The OPI assessment scale (NB-EECD, 2019) is derived from American language testing frameworks such as the Interagency Language Roundtable Scale, the Proficiency Guidelines developed by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, and the Educational Testing Services (Interagency Language Roundtable, 2011). The OPI scale has six main levels: unrateable, novice, basic, intermediate, advanced, and superior. For candidates who clearly meet the requirements of a given level, but cannot maintain the next proficiency level for the duration of the interview, a plus is added to the given level (NB-EECD, 2003). According to NB's policy 309 (NB-EECD, 2018) which establishes the standards for the provision of FSL programmes, FSL teachers require a language proficiency level of Advanced Plus on the OPI assessment scale (NB-EECD, 2019) to teach in IF and Superior in FI. To be eligible for a FSL practicum experience, teacher candidates must have achieved at least the Advanced level of proficiency.

In September 2017, the FI programme entry-point for elementary students returned to Grade 1 after nine years of being at Grade 3 (White, 2016). With the return of this early FI programme, enrollment increased by 9.6%. The total percentage of students whose dominant language is English participating in an FI programme in NB is 36.8%

(Canadian Parents for French, 2019). The gap between supply and demand for FSL teachers has correspondingly grown and the long-standing FSL teacher shortage has worsened. Without enough teachers with the language level required by Policy 309 to fill available positions, school districts have had to be more flexible about the language requirements when hiring. In February 2019, it was reported that 41% of its Grade 1 and 2 teachers were not meeting the Policy 309 language proficiency standards (CBC News, 2019). In response to the lack of what were deemed linguistically qualified teachers, the NB-EECD and school districts incorporated ways for teachers to enhance their language skills. The shift towards greater flexibility with respect to language requirements also allowed teacher education programmes to reduce language requirements for admission to an intermediate plus level of proficiency. The decision to reduce language requirements meant an even more pronounced need to support language development of teacher candidates.

The Native-Speaker Standard

In NB, it is not uncommon to see criticism of the quality of the French language spoken by FI students and teachers in the media (Fraser, 2019). The dominant, yet contested, ideology regarding the teaching and learning of FSL in Canada is that of the French native-speaker standard, and the ideal variety is defined by a small group of native speakers (Mison & Jang, 2011). In a related study, Roy (2020) interviewed FI students as well as FSL teachers and teacher candidates and demonstrated that the majority adhered to this idealised standard of French. Wernicke (2017) found similar results in her study of 87 FSL teachers and explained that FSL teachers often feel language insecurity when confronted with these "normative assumptions," since they are both language teachers and language learners. This native-speaker standard is also an ongoing factor in the identity construction of FSL teachers (Wernicke, 2020). Similarly, in an international context, efficacy and self-reported proficiency levels of teacher candidates of English in Türkiye, showed a positive correlation between the concept of one's professional identity, and perceptions of efficacy and language proficiency (Alagözlü, 2016). The external perceived pressures for native-speaker-like proficiency coupled with the insecurities many FSL teachers have with regards to their own abilities are both strong arguments for supporting teacher candidates' French linguistic proficiency (Masson et al., 2021), and providing opportunities for FSL educators to develop alternative ideas about what it means to be a competent teacher (Wernicke, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

As described in the review of the literature, identity is a complex and multi-dimensional construct. Therefore, we adopted a qualitative case study design in order to explore this particular phenomenon because it allowed us to deeply examine different perspectives and experiences (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). Moreover, the language support sessions were a bounded system in which a limited number of teacher candidates from a certain environment participated. Finally, several sources of information were used to construct detailed descriptions of the development of participants' professional identity as an FSL teacher as it related to French proficiency and confidence: pre- and post-session questionnaires, OPI and evaluator reports, and focus groups. In this paper, we

report on the analyses of the focus group data, since it is from the analysis of these data where the theme of identity emerged.

Participants and Data Collection

The participants in our study were thirteen students enrolled in an intensive 10-month teacher education programme with an FSL specialisation who participated in language support sessions. Our recruitment strategy followed typical purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). In addition to the support sessions, participants completed three required courses for the FSL specialisation taught in French. Participants with advanced or higher levels of proficiency completed a minimum of 50% of their practicum in French (minimum of 8 of 16 weeks). Two of our participants were students with intermediate plus proficiency. They received special permission from one of the NB school districts to be placed in an FSL practicum because the university was providing language support to these students.

Three session groups of three to five participants were formed based on proficiency levels and met for approximately one hour on Zoom every week (three blocks of 8 weeks, for a total of 24 hours of sessions, separated by two 8-week practica). Each session was guided by a facilitator who set language objectives based on the OPI scale and provided a weekly session guide and support materials (e.g., vocabulary cards, grammar lessons on video) on a learning management system. During the sessions, the facilitator offered corrective feedback orally or by using the chat feature in Zoom.

At the end of January 2021, participants' oral proficiency was assessed through the NB OPI. Following this assessment, the evaluator wrote a report outlining strengths and areas for improvement for each participant. The evaluator also held one-on-one meetings with the participants to discuss the results at the OPI. The participants' oral proficiency was reassessed in June 2021, at the end of the teacher education programme.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of each block, a separate focus group was conducted with each of the three session groups (T1 - October 2020; T2 - February 2021 and T3 - June 2021). The focus groups were guided by an interview protocol that included open-ended questions related to experiences with the sessions and the OPI assessment as well as questions related to perceptions of their linguistic proficiency and their confidence using French in various contexts including the practicum classroom. Not all participants were present at all three times. The following table summarises the participants by pseudonym and their focus group participation.

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Participants	T1 (October 2020)	T2 (February 2021)	T3 (June 2021)
1. Henry	√	√	√
2. Nora	√	√	√
3. Sophie	√	√	√
4. Christy	√		√
5. Sasha	√		√
6. Lynn	√	√	√
7. Kayla	√	√	√
8. Josie	√		√
9. Emma	√	√	
10. Madelyn		√	√
11. Lisanne		√	
12. Mary		√	√
13. Ellen		√	√

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

The analyses were based on transcriptions of nine focus group recordings (1 hour x 3 focus groups at 3 points of time- T1, T2 & T3). These data were analysed using qualitative data analysis procedures (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Preliminary analysis involved breaking transcripts into meaning units and highlighting relevant quotations for general meaning. These data were subsequently coded according to recurring and common themes. Because identity emerged as a major and recurring theme in the data, we identified recent relevant literature and used it to guide an additional layer of analysis of the data. This final analysis, conducted through the lens of identity, re-employed qualitative analysis procedures in order to specifically address the research question for this study.

RESULTS

Language Learning Experiences and Attitudes

The participants in this study had a variety of language learning experiences. Most of the participants (Henry, Nora, Sophie, Christy, Lynn, Josie, Emma, Madelyn, Lisanne and Mary) were enrolled in FI programmes at school. However, their backgrounds differed. For instance, in Grade 10, Christy participated in a 3-month exchange trip to France with her school. Josie's family moved to a foreign country in Grade 6 where FI was not offered. When she returned to Canada, she participated in the Core French (CF) programme in high school. Sophie and Nora left the FI programme in high school. The other two participants took the CF programme at school.

After completing their FI (Sophie, Christy, Lynn, Emma, Mary, and Nora) and CF (Sasha) programmes, these participants pursued undergraduate studies in French, often with a French minor. Others, such as Henry, Josie, Kayla and Madelyn, put their French studies on hold while they completed degree programmes in English. In addition, Nora, Christy, Sasha, and Kayla participated in *Explore*, a language immersion programme sponsored by

the federal government. After her experience in this programme, Kayla decided to do a Master's degree in French. Josie and Lynn worked in Quebec for a while, Lisanne worked in France, and Emma had summer jobs where she could speak French. Nora did volunteer work for a French organisation in Alberta. Only Henry and Madelyn reported taking a complete break from French.

At the time of entering the teacher education programme, all participants reported a positive attitude towards French. Most expressed positive learning experiences with French that led to a desire to integrate it into their personal and professional lives. Again, their experiences were varied. For example, Nora stated that she loved French and that she always made an effort to include it in her daily life. Lynn described speaking French as "a gift." Henry was a first-generation immigrant. His parents enrolled him in an FI programme even though they did not speak either of Canada's official languages. Henry did not have fond memories of his elementary school experience. However, in high school, where he felt he had more autonomy in learning French, he developed a positive attitude towards French and language learning. Despite the fact that her grandmother was Francophone from Quebec, Kayla said she never liked the French she learned in school and that, rather than participating in *Explore* because she wanted to improve her French, she enrolled in the summer programme because "it was the thing to do." In contrast, Lynn dreamed of speaking French and, during her short experience of living and working in Quebec, she carried an English-French dictionary around with her. She said that her co-workers teased her a lot, but it was all in good fun. After getting married and raising her family, Lynn still felt the desire to pursue French studies at university. At age 47, she enrolled in a French studies programme, even though one of her academic advisors did not recommend it for her because of her low proficiency.

All participants showed agency in improving their language proficiency before entering the programme. They used new technology such as iTalkie, WhatsApp; they also held discussion groups with friends and listened to radio, TV, and YouTube in French.

Teacher Candidates' Practicum Experiences and Beliefs about Teaching (in) French

The participants' beliefs and conceptions of both teaching (in) French emerged even before they went to the schools for their practicum. Most participants held a belief that more implicit approaches to teaching French were more effective than the explicit approaches used by their language teachers in school or university. There was some evidence in the data that the pedagogies conveyed in their teacher education programme in the fall semester contributed to the development of their own language teaching beliefs. For example, ideas such as the language learner as a social actor and a user of their L2 in a multilingual and multicultural world were conveyed to teacher candidates in their FSL methodology courses. However, from the data we collected, we cannot definitively say that these beliefs were adopted by teacher candidates. According to the participants in focus group T1, up until high school, French was taught in a traditional way with an emphasis on grammar. Lynn referred to grammar lessons as "torture" lessons. Participants also stated that emphasis was placed on reading and writing at the expense of oral communication. Henry reflected, "And, I noticed that when the teachers eh, when I was in school, they spoke… most of the time. We didn't have much opportunity to use our French too. So, it was just listening."

Two participants, Henry and Sophie, also suggested that the approaches used before high school did not promote choice and autonomy, but that in high school FI teachers used more varied and empowering approaches. Even so, all participants shared that, regardless of the level of instruction and FSL programmes (FI or Intensive French), opportunities to express themselves in French were too limited. However, they portrayed a vision of teaching French that was both learner-centred and focused on meaningful activities that included multiple opportunities for extensive oral expression. Emma explained, "I did immersion in Nova Scotia and, yes, for the most part it was a positive experience, but unfortunately, we didn't have much opportunity to speak conversational French, it was more like learning the rules, that's what I found…". Moreover, some participants discussed the importance of integrating the culture and history of the Francophonie in FSL programmes. Having opportunities to interact with people from Francophone communities mattered to them.

Participants also expressed the belief that French taught in the classroom must meet a certain standard. In turn, they stated that as teachers, they should speak high-quality French. Henry used a business metaphor: "We have to sell quality service, excellence…" However, most participants referred to the linguistic requirements for language teachers when working in a professional context as demonstrated by Josie's comment:

> No, it doesn't bother me, only in a context of at school or in a class in this context where I make mistakes. . . but in a context at work [not as a language teacher] or in a conversation with friends or people not at all.

Participants emphasised that students in FSL classes need to speak French and, according to Sacha, at least, forcing students to speak French is not always pleasant, but still necessary.

> it was really rigid and strict [in the *Explore* programme], but I liked it, but it was really strict too. . . And it's funny because I worked [in a programme] which is kind of the same thing, but in English. . .and there I needed to force the students to speak in English the whole time and to be as rigid as they were during *Explore* so I had the experience on the other side and it was necessary.

Participants felt that FSL teachers should also always speak French in school. Nora, for example, declared, "In my opinion, I'm going to speak a lot of French, either to the students, but in the hallways as well. . . But, of course, I'm going to be in an immersion classroom, so you have to speak French" (translation). In addition, the teacher candidates saw the school as a place of work where they taught (in) French, but also as a place of learning to improve their French language skills.

Native-Speaker Standard and Linguistic Insecurity

The myth of the ideal native speaker emerged in several ways in the data. Lynn's practicum teacher, for example, felt embarrassed to speak in front of her because she was afraid Lynn would judge the quality of her French. The teacher explained to Lynn that she did not have the opportunity to maintain and improve her French. Christie and Lynn mentioned the fact that a French speaker in their programme spoke only English with them because her

French was "too Acadian". Christie also expressed that she preferred to speak French in NB rather than in Quebec or France because everyone here was "a little bit English". She went on to say that Francophones in NB did not have as high a standard for spoken French as other places. From their comments, Henry and Lynn implied that "good French" was that spoken in France. Henry often specified that the resources he chose for the students and for his own language development came from France, and as a result, his French accent was quite Parisian. Lynn repeatedly mentioned that French (from France) was a sophisticated language. Lynn's association of Parisian French with sophistication became personified during her practicum: "She's [The French teacher] is really Francophone. Like, she's beautiful; she's chic. Like, it's the same with the Principal. . .Their behaviours are something that I admire".

Conversely, Sophie and Nora, set the language spoken in the community as the standard to achieve. They lamented not being able to speak like their French-speaking friends who knew *Chiac,* a regional variation of French spoken in NB, as demonstrated in the following quotation:

> yeah, I think I'll be more- um, a little bit more comfortable with a francophone from maybe France, um, and Quebec. . . On the other hand, I think I'll be like more ashamed to talk to people who speak *Chiac* because. . .it's a completely different French. So, maybe they would think- they would think that their French is better than mine.

Coming from a multilingual and multicultural Canadian city, Josie did not believe in an ideal spoken French. In her opinion, users with English and French as L2s were the norm. The data in this study highlighted the fragmented and even contradictory nature of linguistic identity. The notion of power in the construction of a teacher's professional identity and how positioning can influence identity was also evident. Sophie expressed a belief about standard French by positioning herself as a person who speaks "the right French" as opposed to her friends who speak *Chiac* and who code-switch:

> they speak *Chiac*, so it's a French like very different than mine. So, um, I know that I speak . . ."the right French," but like, they don't want to change their habits, um, to talk to me and I find that it's a little bit difficult because they change the words like always so, um, I like to talk to the people who are in the same programme- programme as me because they can talk like without using an English word.

In the February 2021 focus group, Sophie expressed another belief about the ideal speaker. In talking about how proud she was of the way she interacted with the OPI examiner, she explained that she still did not have French from France. Beliefs about French norms varied among the different participants and even within individual participants.

The issue of legitimacy as a user of French was another factor contributing language insecurity. Sophie and Nora felt disempowered when they spoke French to native speakers who responded to them in English. The most common factor that emerged from the data in relation to language insecurity was a lack of practice resulting in

decreased competence and fluency. This lack of confidence could extend to communicating in general, but for some, like Mary, it related to the register needed for a professional context:

> I can say that my confidence changes in relation to [the] situation because I know that in certain situations, I have to use um- different um- language registers. . .for example, in the interview. . .in my classes. . . I have to try to use standard French as much as possible.

The participants' anxiety levels also increased when faced with native speakers. Most participants described feelings of fear about being judged for their lack of proficiency. For example, Christie mentioned that she was afraid that her interlocutors would associate her level of language proficiency with her intelligence. Participants expressed concern about the failure to make themselves understood with native speakers and offending them by "butchering" their language due to lack of proficiency. Their language insecurity was mostly related to oral communication. Entry requirements and those required by the NB-EECD for FSL teachers in NB were also sources of anxiety. Taking the OPI before entering the programme, for many, had been a stressful experience. The opportunities provided in the language support sessions to practice with each other with corrective feedback from the facilitator and to practice the OPI with an evaluator who then provided detailed feedback contributed to perceptions of improved language skills and augmented confidence for the participants. In the final focus group, Kayla spoke to this:

> also, I feel confident speaking in an immersion class and I feel confident teaching an immersion class. And that's a really big, like, step for me; a big leap in my confidence. Because at the beginning of the year…I didn't feel, like, confident at all, speaking in an immersion class. . . And now I feel confident. Yes! (Translation, June 2021)

Negotiating Linguistic and Professional Identity

Over the course of the academic year, during which time participants took courses and participated in two practica, the support sessions also seemed to create a space for negotiating the professional and linguistic identities of teacher candidates. Lynn's perspective of associating Parisian French with sophistication and a superiority of French culture was challenged by her peers. Sasha, for example, countered that people seemed more sophisticated in the cities in general, but that in the French suburbs and countryside, the level of sophistication was likely to be comparable to that of Canadians. Josie mentioned that one of her colleagues from France was embarrassed by her English accent. Christie had a colleague from Paris who never corrected other employees who spoke French as an L2. When Christie asked her why, the Parisian colleague replied that they were all able to make themselves understood and that she did not feel the need to correct them because they spoke well. Nora mentioned that she felt anxious speaking in French because she sometimes hesitated to find her words but realised that she was doing exactly the same thing in English. She had set unrealistic expectations for herself in her L2, expectations that she did not have when she spoke in English. Emma explained that even though her expectation to understand every single French word in a programme or movie was unrealistic, it was still how she felt. Emma went on to note that, through interactions with her fellow FSL teacher candidates, she was developing a growing understanding that these were often personal perceptions and not reality. Through the discussions, participants developed an

awareness of how their beliefs, values, expectations of themselves, and experiences affected their linguistic identities. They engaged in reflection and questioning that helped them manage their feelings and expectations. Participants also supported and encouraged each other.

Participants negotiated their professional identities by discussing issues that emerged from their university courses and practicum placements. The three main topics were the place of English in the classroom, oral corrective feedback, and literacy in academic subject courses. The participants who did their practicum in the FI context were confronted with these realities. Nora experienced it as a shock. She had struggled with the use of English in the French classroom and realised that her attitude fluctuated depending on her mood. She saw the need to be consistent so that students would know where she stood on the issue. The Grade 1 FI students did not understand her when she spoke only in French, so she had to adapt her way of expressing herself to make the input comprehensible and, also, sometimes use English. She found it very tiring to always be reminding students to speak French. Nora had to talk to herself and tell herself to stop focusing only on language. She described herself as someone who loved the little boxes she could check off and thanked Lynn for reminding her that creativity and fun also had a role to play in the language classroom. Mary and Henry addressed the issue of connecting with students and the need to use English wisely. They felt the need to use English sometimes to get to know the students. Mary stated that she spoke English even though her cooperating teacher never used English in class. During his first practicum in late fall, time was set aside for Henry and his host teacher to interact with the students in English. During his final practicum in the spring, English time was eliminated from the schedule and Henry missed out on this time to chat with students in English. Josie and Lynn, teaching Post-Intensive French (PIF), faced opposing standards. The use of English was customary in their teaching contexts. Josie expressed that:

> It really upset me, uh- during my practicum that the teacher told me that I need to speak more in English. Because I, I remember as a student or as a high school student we spoke in French uh- in French class. It was a PIF class. But, (sigh) my personal tolerance is that they are in the French class, so they have to speak French.

Lynn, despite the norms and constraints of the school environment, decided to express herself primarily in French by establishing routines and by modeling, as she had learnt at university. At her practicum school, she had noticed that her students perceived French as a language for smart FI students. It was therefore very important for her to show the students that they could speak French. Lynn spoke about the first time a student in her practicum class answered spontaneously in French:

> It was like a cat jumped out of its, out of its mouth; it was like, "Wah!!! What the heck what happened there?" Like that! It was a good day that, that. . . I saw something, something click for a student. So, for me, when I'm going to go into my own classroom, first day we speak in French.

Several participants, including Nora, Mary, and Henry, struggled with the issue of corrective oral feedback. They would have liked to correct errors but were afraid of interrupting the students' flow of ideas. Henry explained that

his teacher had suggested that he choose a few items (no more than three) and focus on them so as not to overwhelm the students. Sophie, Sasha, Ellen, Christie, and Kayla spoke at length about literacy in school subjects, explaining that, despite the emphasis on literacy in one of their university teaching courses, they often neglected to incorporate literacy except for vocabulary. They recognised the importance of literacy but found it easier to emphasise the subject matter because integrating literacy was still complex for them.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study reveals the need for safe and productive spaces in which teacher candidates can reflect on and discuss native speaker ideology as well as their linguistic insecurities. As Wolff & De Costa (2017) point out, reflexivity and collaboration are key components of identity construction. Additionally, these sessions also were sites of identity exploration and self-discovery (Buendi-Arias et al., 2020). Keeping in mind the four-pillar model of initial teacher education (Masson et al., 2021b), these sessions specifically addressed the need for target language practice and improvement while also providing a space for cultural exchange, professional collaboration, and pedagogical development. While using and improving their French language, teacher candidates in these sessions also negotiated their language teacher identities, a key component of teacher education programmes (e.g., Kanno & Stewart, 2011). This space for oral interaction allowed teachers to express and challenge native speaker norms (e.g., Wernicke, 2020) and begin to shape their own beliefs and conceptions about what it means to both use and teach FSL.

This study also demonstrates that language support sessions can be integrated into an initial FSL teacher education programme, and that it may also be a space in which FSL teacher candidates can explore linguistic and professional identities. Additionally, this study echoed findings of Wolff & De Costa (2017) in terms of the value of collaboration and reflection in the development of agency. Stemming from this qualitative research are the following implications related to FSL teacher education:

- FSL teacher candidates benefit from oral interactions in the target language that also provide opportunities for reflection about language and about teaching.

- Creating safe and collaborative spaces can provide an opportunity to explore their own perceptions about language and what it means to be a language teacher.

- Professional language using/learning communities can support agency and the construction of a professional identity.

- Engaging in opportunities for linguistic risk-taking can support FSL teacher candidates in the development of their own pedagogical beliefs.

For FSL teacher candidates, the potential positive effects of language support sessions not only on confidence and language skills, but also on professional identity could have a favourable impact on recruitment and help foster

retention. Creating communities of practice that foster a sense of belonging and mutual support while also focusing on language goals may play a role in ensuring the well-being and the success of beginning FSL teachers. Although this study was conducted in the specific context of a teacher education programme in NB, it could contribute to professional and academic conversations related to the recruitment and retention of teachers in other FSL contexts in Canada and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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