

Student Engagement in an Ottawa French Immersion High School Program

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This article makes a contribution to the field of French immersion studies by examining the engagement realities of two groups of students in an Ottawa French immersion high school program: those with and without a parent who makes them eligible for minority French language instruction as outlined by Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Findings indicate that students from both official language groups, who came from varying class backgrounds, similarly demonstrated the ability and willingness to follow the secondary French immersion program offered at the university level. Although students with Anglophone parents were found to benefit from cultural capital such as family support and “voluntary minority” belief systems, students with a parent eligible for minority French language instruction benefited from French language capital acquired with family, in social contexts and sometimes in French school. At times, students also had overlapping and cross-cutting realities depending whether they came from EFI or LFI programs. To conclude, this article suggests that French immersion programming and related policies should take into consideration the multifaceted engagement realities of secondary student populations from the two official language communities.

Key words: French immersion studies, student engagement, official-language communities, immigration

Les résultats de la recherche démontrent que les étudiants issus des deux groupes linguistiques officielles et ayant divers profils sociaux font état d'un intérêt similaire dans leurs habiletés et leurs désirs de poursuivre leurs études au sein du programme d'immersion française offert au niveau universitaire. Bien que les élèves ayant des parents anglophones semblent bénéficier du capital culturel (tel que le support de la famille, les systèmes de croyances associés aux «minorités volontaires»), ceux qui sont issus de familles dont l'un des parents est admissible à l'instruction dans la langue de

la minorité française ont également pu bénéficier du capital associé à la langue française par le biais de la famille, dans les contextes sociaux et parfois dans les écoles françaises. Les élèves provenant des programmes d'immersion tardifs et précoces peuvent parfois vivre des réalités transversales ou qui se chevauchent. En conclusion cet article suggère que la programmation de l'immersion française ainsi que les politiques y afférant doivent tenir compte des multiples facettes des réalités que vivent les élèves du secondaire issus des deux communautés de langue officielle.

Mots-clés : Études des programmes d'immersion, engagement des élèves, communautés de langues officielles, immigration

If Canada hopes to have an optimal number of bilingual high school graduates, the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Honourable Graham Fraser, believes that French-Second-Language (FSL) programs need to be strengthened to “produce positive results and support student retention” until students join the workforce:

The Commissioner invites the provinces and territories to step up their efforts to ensure greater continuity in second-language instruction, from kindergarten until the students enter the labor market. Programs must be strengthened so that they produce positive results and support student retention. Of course, the quality of second-language courses and programs and strengthening of these programs through opportunities for social interaction, cultural activities and exchanges are key factors for attracting and retaining young students. (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages [OCOL], 2008, p. 74)

Student retention in French immersion programs is also a contributing factor in achieving the Canadian Government's goal of doubling the number of bilingual graduates by 2013 (Government of Canada, 2003). French immersion education, which was introduced in Quebec during the 1960s for Anglophone students who had little or no access to French at home, saw rapid growth across Canada during the 1970s and 1980s. Since then, different types of French immersion programs have become more widely available to parents across Canada. Early French Immersion (EFI) programs, which begin at the onset of elementary school (grade 3 in New Brunswick), provide equal instruction time in both official languages after mainly exposing students to French when they initially start

school. Middle French Immersion (MFI) programs, typically offered from the onset of grades 4 and 5 to students from regular English programs, usually provide equal instruction time in English and French. Late French Immersion (LFI) programs are offered at the intermediate level (grades 7 and 8) for students from regular English programs, and provide up to 75 per cent of the instruction time in French. Students from EFI, MFI, and LFI programs can enroll in secondary French immersion programs that are typically offered from grades 9 to 12 (ages 14 to 17).

Although some Francophone families were sending their children to French immersion programs because of the unavailability of minority French schools in the 1970s and early 1980s (Heffernan, 1979; Wagner & Grenier, 1990), this situation significantly improved after the Federal Government introduced Section 23 in the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This constitutional provision guarantees Canadian citizens the right to offer their children official minority language instruction (English in Quebec and French in the rest of Canada) if they received this type of instruction in an elementary school in Canada, or have another child who already received official minority language instruction in a Canadian elementary or secondary school. Parents who still speak French as their native language are also recognized as eligible Right-Holders even if they did not attend a French elementary school. In spite of greater accessibility to French language schools in Canada, a growing body of literature indicates that some parents eligible for official minority French instruction have been opting for French immersion programs that were designed for Anglophone students because they view the latter as being more accessible, of better quality, or more inclusive than French schools (Dolbec, 1994; Dallaire & Denis, 2000; Makropoulos, 2007; OCOL, 2008).

Over the past four decades, evaluation studies have portrayed French immersion programs in a relatively positive light (Churchill, 2002; Heller, 1990; OCOL, 2008). At first, studies helped dispel parental fears of bilingual education by showing that French immersion instruction did not pose a long-term risk to the maintenance of English as a first language, and that it allowed students to reach high levels of proficiency in French that varied depending on the age of first instruction and on the extent of French exposure (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Genesee, 1987;

Swain & Lapkin, 1982). Research has also indicated that French immersion students performed as well, and in some cases better, in academic subjects than students enrolled in regular English programs (Turnbull, Lapkin, & Hart, 2001). Although the issue of social class bias in EFI programs stirred considerable debate in the 1980s (Canadian Parents for French [CPF], 1982; Guttman, 1983; Olson & Burns, 1981, 1983), more recent research suggests that social class bias is less pronounced in LFI programs (Hart & Lapkin, 1998) and in parts of Canada where the program is relatively accessible (Lamarre, 1997). Moreover, research shows that immigrant families from various class backgrounds send their children to French immersion programs (Dagenais & Jacquet, 2000; Ottawa-Carleton District School Board [OCDSB], 2007).

Although French immersion education has been successful in fostering bilingualism rates among young Canadian students, research indicates that student participation rates in the program significantly drop at the secondary level (Beck, 2004; Canadian Council on Learning [CCL], 2007; Halsall, 1997; Makropoulos, 1998, 2007; Mannavaryan, 2002). Attrition rates are particularly high among secondary students who are college-bound and among those with learning disabilities. The lack of qualified teachers capable of offering senior-level courses in French is another contributing factor to this problem. Research indicates that secondary French immersion students from Anglophone families tend to be academically oriented, are motivated to get a bilingual education, and have support networks (Blais, 2003; Foster, 1998; Mannavaryan, 2002). This research also indicates that high school French immersion graduates tend to highlight their investment in a French immersion program by identifying themselves as “bilinguals” that are more than just “Anglophone” but not yet “Francophone.” In comparison, however, little research has examined the realities of secondary French immersion students, or graduates, from Francophone backgrounds.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the field of French immersion studies by examining the engagement realities of a group of secondary French immersion students with and without an eligible parent for minority French language instruction who came from LFI and EFI programs. By drawing on the results of a study in an Ottawa English Catholic high school, I will argue that students from the two official lan-

guage communities had distinct engagement realities that were informed by social selection factors and their respective cultural capitals which, at times, were cross-cutting and overlapping. To conclude, I consider why addressing the engagement realities of students from the two official language communities is important for the future development of French immersion programs and of official bilingualism in Canada.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

I largely draw on the role of social selection and cultural capital for my analysis of student engagement in a French immersion context. The correspondence principle developed by Bowles and Gintis (1976) sheds light on my study; it explains that students in capitalist societies are socialized to occupy roughly the same positions in the class structure as their parents through educational tracking processes. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), schools, which mask the process of social reproduction by maintaining a semblance of meritocracy, reward the cultural capital of the dominant classes, and devalue that of lower classes. They suggest that professionals and managerial classes rely on the transmission of their cultural capital to ensure that their children will become members of the dominant class. This transmission broadly refers to a wide range of cultural resources and language forms that are institutionalized and understood as prestigious in society. By virtue of the cultural capital acquired through family upbringing, students from middle and upper class backgrounds are well positioned to acquire good grades and adopt school sanctioned behavior. However, students from lower classes are systematically disadvantaged through their limited access to “cultural capital” that can favor their success in school.

Ogbu and Simons' (1998) cultural-ecological theory on school performance provided insight into the engagement realities of minority students. According to the authors, voluntary minority students from immigrant families acquire a dual frame of reference, which leads them to believe that the situation “back home” is less promising than in the host country where they choose to live. Because immigrants trust the folk belief that hard work and education will enable them to “make it” in a meritocratic society, students from these families generally do well in school because they follow rules and adopt accommodating behavior. In con-

trast, involuntary minority students, whose families and ancestors became permanent members of a society against their will, such as Canada's First Nations peoples, have learnt from the experiences of community members that education does not lead to significant economic rewards because the job ceiling systematically discriminates against them. As a result, involuntary minorities often develop ambivalent attitudes and exhibit "oppositional identities" that conflict with school-sanctioned values, and subsequently lead them to get poor results.

In the Canadian French immersion context, educators still know very little about how engagement realities of high school students from various linguistic, cultural, and class backgrounds are informed by their cultural capital and social selection factors. Motivationally-oriented research conducted by Hart and Lapkin (1994) suggests that French immersion engagement most likely occurs when students exhibit integrative motivations, such as to learn the language for enjoyment's sake and to better understand the culture, in addition to being oriented towards the instrumental interest of wanting to improve future job prospects. However, little work has compared the engagement realities of students with those who have a parent eligible to send them to minority French language schools in Canada even though both groups study in French immersion programs in Canada.

THE STUDY

My analysis of student engagement in secondary French immersion programs draws upon the results of a larger study that I conducted in Ottawa for my doctoral dissertation (Makropoulos, 2007). Located on the Ontario side of the Quebec border, about 200 km west of Montreal and 400 km northeast of Toronto (Bennett, 1973), the city of Ottawa is the national capital of Canada. When French and English were recognized as the two official languages in 1969, the French immersion programs developed in the 1960s in Montreal were being simultaneously implemented in the capital city, and eventually grew to become a popular bilingual option for families residing in the area. According to Khouzam (2003), valorization of bilingualism for career opportunities in the Canadian Public Service fueled local interest in French immersion programs. Moreover, many Ottawa institutions and businesses offering services in

areas such as education, administration, healthcare, and tourism, value the knowledge of the two official languages.

I conducted my study in an English Catholic high school located in an Ottawa east-end suburb that catered to a diverse student population in terms of their racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. The school mostly catered to students in regular English programs. Nevertheless, the small French department offered a four-year secondary French immersion program (grades 9 to 12) that abided by the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1999) guidelines that state the purpose of the program is to prepare students (a) to pursue post-secondary studies in French, (b) to communicate in French, and (c) to accept employment in places where French is used. As a result of the small size of the secondary French immersion program, the school offered a limited choice of classes in this program and upheld the local policy of obliging secondary students to take a total of 13 French immersion credits as a condition to stay enrolled in the program.

For the purpose of this article, I will focus on the results of the fieldwork that I conducted with the students who were enrolled in the grade-11 secondary French immersion program at the school site.

I surveyed all of the Grade 11 students ($n = 29$) who were enrolled in the secondary French immersion program between October 2001 and June 2002. Almost 80 per cent ($n = 23$) of the surveyed French immersion students came from families that did not include an eligible parent to make the eligible for minority French language instruction compared to about 20 per cent who did ($n = 6$). Another trend was that about one third ($n = 8$) of the students in the secondary grade-11 French immersion class came from EFI programs compared to about two-thirds ($n = 16$) came from LFI programs. I invited all the surveyed grade-11 French immersion students to be interviewed – of whom nine students accepted. Because students were under the age of 18, I requested the consent of their parents or legal guardians to participate in the study. The French immersion teachers served as my main contacts over the course of my fieldwork, and gave me the permission to conduct face-to-face interviews with students in the guidance office and school library during regular class hours.

The student interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 2 hours in duration. They covered a range of topics, including student experiences in French immersion programs, their perceptions of the value of a French immersion education, and their identity discourses. I transcribed the interviews using transcription conventions¹ and used the survey data to write standard one-page background summaries to complement and verify the accuracy of interview data. As shown in Table 1, the engaged French immersion student interviewees included slightly more students without a parent eligible for minority French language instruction (n = 5) than with an eligible parent (n = 4), and more students from LFI programs (n = 7) than EFI programs (n = 2). Although a relatively equal proportion of respondents came from middle (n = 5) and working (n = 4) class backgrounds, almost all the students indicated that they were taking their secondary classes for university entrance (one student was also taking college-level classes). All the students from middle-class backgrounds indicated wanting to attend university, whereas about half of the students from working-class backgrounds hoped to attend a college program.

I employed a grounded approach to knowledge production to generate theoretical ideas from the close examination of everyday life (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this tradition, researchers identify patterns of ac-

¹ Transcriptions Conventions

- All names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms
- Respect rules of orthography (with the exception of cases where morphological and diagnostic variations in French speech, example: le p'tit gars)
- Accentuation in the discourse is signaled by capital letters. Example: I REALLY liked that dress
- ? Rising intonation
- ! high-fall intonation
- , pause
- Inaudible discourse
 - (X) short sequence
 - (XX) sequence of two or three words
 - (XXX) sequence of four or more words
- (...) Omission
- /(laughing)/Metadiscursive comments or references
- ___ overlapping talk between two or more participants
- Italics Translation of French into English

tion and interaction among different types of actors in social structures (Charmaz, 2000). Ogbu (2003) described the process as creating a kind of “mental construct” of what is going on, which involves moving back and forth between the research data and background information provided by theory and studies, and analyzing themes that emerge over the course of the data analysis. For my work, I formulated general explanations from the observations of initial cases, looked at additional cases and negative examples, and reformulated a final explanation using a top-down approach (Heller, 1999). Nevertheless, my analysis is limited to the scope of the study as well as my own ever-present features as a White Francophone woman, potentially influencing which students wanted to grant me an interview, and what they wanted to reveal about their experiences and views on French immersion engagement.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The interviewed French immersion students indicated that they had the ability and interest to stay engaged in the secondary French immersion program at the school site. Students from the two official language communities revealed that they had distinct engagement realities that reflected their respective experiences of having a parent that did or did not make them eligible for minority French language instruction. Although social selection factors and cultural capital had different implications in the realities of students from the two linguistic groups, students from Anglophone and Francophone family backgrounds sometimes had overlapping and cross-cutting realities that were informed by class and whether they came from EFI or LFI programs.

Engaged French Immersion Students without a Parent Making Them Eligible for Minority French Instruction

A large group of engaged French immersion students did not have an eligible parent to send them to a minority French language school (survey $n = 24$), which included twice as many students from LFI programs than EFI programs. The interviewed students from this group ($n = 5$) came from immigrant families from low-income and middle-class families who had adopted English as their primary language of integration,

Table 1: The Engaged French Immersion Student Interviewees

Name	Eligible Parent to Minority French School	French Immersion Entry Point	Mother Occupation	Father Occupation	Secondary Program Level	Educational Aspirations
Mary	No	EFI	Public Servant	Public Servant	University	University
Manuel	No	LFI	Nurse	Private Sector	University	University
Paola	No	LFI	Own Business	Own Business	University	University
Rosalie	No	LFI	Retail	Retail	University	University
Romeo	No	LFI	Retail	Cleaning	University	University
Sebastian	Yes	EFI	Own Business	Private Sector	University	University
Patricia	Yes	LFI	Nurse	Professor	University	University
Lianne	Yes	LFI	Receptionist	Bus Driver	University	College
Christian	Yes	LFI	Admin. Assist.	Mechanic	Univ./Coll.	College

or had middle-class, Anglophone, Canadian-born parents who did not speak much or any French at home. In spite of coming from varied class backgrounds, students shared the common trait of being oriented towards university studies leading to middle and upper class careers in areas such as education, law, business, and diplomacy. Because these students spoke little or no French with family and relatives, and predominantly relied on the school system to learn French, they tended to view their French immersion engagement as necessary because they believed that acquiring French language capital would provide access to future career and communication opportunities in Canada, and internationally.

Some engaged students had started EFI programs that their parents had chosen for them at the onset of elementary school where French immersion was not streamlined by levels. In high school, French immersion program becomes more demanding and is only offered at the academic (grades 9 and 10) and university (grades 11 and 12) levels as opposed to also being available at the applied and college levels. Subsequently, students from EFI streams were often confronted with the challenge of staying engaged in spite of the perception that it would be more difficult to get high marks and maintain English language skills. Mary, whose father held a middle-management position for the Government of Canada, explained that she integrated the family belief that it was in her best interest to stay engaged in the secondary French immersion program to reap long-term benefits:

Mary: *Well, in a way, like I was stuck, like I went to immersion because my parents told me X*

Josée: *Why did they want you to start the program?*

Mary: *Because they thought it would be a good opportunity for me to find a job and communicate with people/(uhum)/and then, I was in it all the way, and if I stayed in it, then, like they won't expect me, find, like work X England [sic], and my marks would go down*

Josée: *So you find that immersion was a disadvantage for your English?*

Mary: *In a way, like I really, X, I can always, like improve my English later, like I'll have both of the languages in the end/(uhum)/so in the long haul, yeah, it's all good*

To guarantee her overall educational success, Mary decided to invest herself to a greater extent in the secondary French immersion program than in other academically-demanding subjects like chemistry, which she explained was also difficult to follow in English after studying it in French:

Mary: *I dropped Chemistry because, when you reach Grade 11, Chemistry is in English, and they didn't offer it in French, and I couldn't do it, because I learnt it from whenever we started science in French, so it's, it's a switch/(uhum)/and that's the only one, and I didn't take Biology because I don't like Biology, and I didn't have a choice, my parents said that you have to take Physics, because I need it, so, and then Math from, well, I take that because, now, like you didn't really, like, like it couldn't also, they know my timetable, but it'd be really, really hard to get all my homework done on time, you know?*

Like the Anglophone secondary French immersion graduates studied by Blais (2003), Mary maintained distance from Francophone life to safeguard her primary investment in the English language which she mastered to a greater extent than French (see Blais, 2003). As illustrated in the conversation quotation below, Mary suggested that she was more of an English-speaking bilingual than her English-speaking Franco-Ontarian boyfriend who knew “a lot of French”:

Josée: *How do you feel with French people, like your boyfriend?*

Mary: *In a way French, and sometimes, like I don't know as much as him, so, I know French but I know more English than him, so more bilingual in order....*

Josée: *So you feel bilingual?*

Mary: *Yeah, like he knows French, like a lot of French*

Several engaged French immersions students came from LFI programs that they had been recommended by their teachers at the end of grade 6 on the basis of perceived merit and potential. Several of these students were first generation Canadians from English-speaking immigrant families who spoke a heritage language at home. Although these immigrant families came from varied class backgrounds, they shared what Obgu and Simons (1998) have described as “voluntary minority” values and belief systems that incited them to view educational success

as a way for their children to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. In many cases, the voluntary minority outlook had informed why immigrant parents wanted their children to access FFI programs. The explanation provided by Romeo, a Canadian-born student with Filipino parents, was fairly typical:

Romeo: *It's a better chance in life/(uhum)/and like, it's for my future*

Josée: *What kind of chances? At what levels?*

Romeo: *In, in jobs, and like, in the quality of teaching in immersion, they think it's better__*

Josée: *__ Than?*

Romeo: *Than, that student in the class/(hah)/like the English will slow down their teaching, X [translated from French to English]*

Although students of immigrant origin recommended to the LFI program tended to display strong academic abilities, they still found it challenging to acquire good marks in the secondary French immersion program. Part of the reason was that LFI students had only begun taking immersion French classes for a few years whereas EFI students had typically began their study of French at the onset of elementary school. In addition, many LFI students of immigrant origin were learning French as a third language. In alignment with Ogbu and Simon's (1998) voluntary minority framework, many of these students nevertheless believed that they could overcome challenges and achieve success by displaying a strong work ethic. The explanation provided by Rosalie, a student from a Filipino-Canadian family, was typical:

Rosalie: *Yeah, a lot of people drop out, they say, it's too much French for them, I believe it's not, if you study hard, and, and you know what you need, and if you comprehend/(uhum)/you will do well, but people who drop out, they find it is too much French for them/(yeah)/but I don't mind French.*

Like many of the EFI immigrant parents interviewed by Dagenais and Jacquet (2000) in Vancouver during the late 1990s, engaged secondary French immersion students from immigrant families who had been recommended to LFI discussed socio-economic benefits associated with

the acquisition of French language capital in relation to Canadian and international contexts:

Rosalie: I'd like to go into international law/(uhum)/like that's why I picked up French

Paola: I want to ah, have a good job where I can communicate, you know, use the official languages of, of this country

Manuel: Because many of the jobs in Ottawa require bilingualism/(uhum)/and a lot of people, ah, like to speak in their native language/(uhum)/or even if they do know English, it is better if they can speak to you in French

Secondary French immersion students of immigrant descent who came from LFI programs also maintained some distance from Francophone life by identifying with French from "bilingual" and, sometimes, "multilingual" zones. Students who were learning French as a third language often emphasized that they were less efficient in French than English with considerable humility, as Romeo revealed:

Romeo: Well, I'm trying to be Francophone, trying to be fluent in French with perfect grammar, and X

Josée: Uhum, do you identify as Francophone right now?

Romeo: No

Josée: Why not?

Romeo: Because I, I wouldn't feel like talking to them, like another Francophone French, like I make many mistakes

Josée: But you'd like to consider yourself Francophone?

Romeo: Uhum, well no, like French is like, totally speak French? Maybe bilingual

Hence, the interviewed engaged French immersion students who did not have a parent making them eligible for minority language instruction came from English-speaking family backgrounds, were oriented towards middle and upper class careers, and identified with "bilingual" identity zones that did not involve being Francophone. One student reality was of having accessed the secondary French immersion via the EFI program, and of staying engaged with the support and encouragement of middle-class, English, Canadian-born parents. A more common student reality, however, was of having accessed the secondary

French immersion program via LFI programs, and of benefiting from “voluntary minority” belief systems acquired in immigrant families that helped students display a strong work ethic to succeed in the secondary French immersion program.

Engaged French Immersion Students with a Parent Making Them Eligible for Minority French Language Instruction

A small group of engaged French immersion students had a parent who made them eligible to enroll a minority French schools² (survey n = 6), which included slightly more students from LFI programs than EFI programs. The interviewed students from this group (n = 4) were Canadian-born, and came from both middle-class and working-class families. With the exception of one student with Anglophone parents eligible to minority French language instruction, these students came from linguistically-mixed families composed of one eligible Francophone parent and one non-eligible parent who predominantly spoke English. Students in this group benefited from having acquired French language capital in contexts such as the family, social networks, and in some cases French language schools – which facilitated their ability to follow the secondary French immersion program as it was taught in French. Because students still came from predominantly English-speaking environments, they believed that a secondary French immersion education would help them access the labor market and develop their French language skills. Students’ outlooks were also informed by their post-secondary educational and occupational aspirations.

Some of the students who were still engaged in the secondary French immersion program had started an EFI program from the onset of English elementary school. This was the case with Sebastian, who came from a middle-class family composed of a Franco-Ontarian mother and Venezuelan father. His educational trajectory was, however, atypical because

² Parental eligibility to minority French language instruction is outlined in Section 23 in the 1982 *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* which guarantees Canadian citizens the right to offer their children official minority language instruction if they received this type of instruction in an elementary school in Canada, or have another child who already received official minority language instruction in a Canadian elementary or secondary school. Parents who still speak French as their native language are also recognized as eligible Right-Holders even if they did not attend a French elementary school.

his parents decided to take him out of EFI to enroll him an elementary French school which he did not particularly like:

Sebastian: It's really, like it isn't the teaching or anything, it was just the atmosphere there, it was just pure French/(yeah)/like I don't really like that, I like both languages to speak, to practice both, not just one (...) just that I like a, a blend of both, I didn't really want to speak French the whole way through the day, XX, it's just that I really like the atmosphere of, a bilingual school, I find them better

Sebastian explained that he did not feel comfortable in an environment that “was just pure French” and did not offer him the freedom to speak English or French as he pleased. In this respect, Heller (1999) found that minority French schools in Ontario tended to favor a territorial approach to language planning that involves promoting French as the sole language of communication on school zones to counteract the assimilatory pressures of the English language. The underlying ideology of this position is the saying “l'anglais, ça s'attrape”, which means that it is easy to “catch” the English language the way that you would catch a cold. As was the case with Sebastian, Wagner and Grenier (1990) have pointed out that some minority Francophones actually prefer bilingual schools over French language schools because they appear to offer a middle ground that is neither too French nor too English.

Because Sebastian had learnt French in school at a young age, and regularly spoke French at home and with extended family, he found that “the French part [of the secondary French immersion was] not hard.” In addition, Sebastian was strong academically, and hoped to undertake university studies leading to a career in international law. Like Fordham and Obgu's (1986) high achieving African-American boys, who gained acceptance and downplayed their success by helping lower-achieving peers, Sebastian adopted a “helper strategy” with Anglophone secondary French immersion students that enabled him to connect his “Franco-Ontarian” origins with his French immersion engagement:

Sebastian: I feel that, like, I am just Franco-Ontarian

Josée: You feel Franco-Ontarian?

Sebastian: *Yeah, because everyone, when they have a problem in French, they come to me, so*

Josée: *So you are the French expert?*

Sebastian: *Yeah, there is a couple of us that they always come to*

Josée: *Do they also come from French families?*

Sebastian: *Yeah, yeah*

The students from LFI programs formed a relatively diverse group in terms of their class origins and aspirations. For instance, Patricia came from a middle class interracial family and aspired to become a doctor and/or a professional ballet dancer. Although her parents spoke little to no French, they had become right-holders to minority French language instruction because they had previously sent Patricia to a French language school in Quebec prior to sending her to French immersion in Ontario. Like some “mixed” women studied by Mahtani (2002) in Toronto, Patricia, however, refused to become heavily invested in normative definitions of what it means to be Canadian and, instead, adopted a “mixed” label to validate her multiple identities:

Patricia: *Hum, I don't know if I really identify myself with something, ahm, I am rather ahm, Anglophone I believe, (hum), I do not identify myself with, like a lot of people are like Proud to be Canadian, but me I don't feel that, like I am not like that, like my parents are from two different cultures, and I have never really felt, like feeling XX (...) I am mixed, and I am all right with that (French translated into English)*

A more common reality among engaged secondary French immersion students from LFI programs was to come from working-class linguistically-mixed families composed of one eligible Francophone parent and one non-eligible English-speaking parent who spoke little or no French. Although these students had been recommended to LFI on the basis of perceived merit by their elementary teachers, and had the ability to pass secondary French immersion classes offered at the university level, they were predominantly oriented towards college and vocational programs. One possible explanation was that students and their parents were not aligned with what Bourdieu and Passeron (1997) have described as middle class cultural capital – which essentially consists of

beliefs and values that are oriented towards educational success and class mobility. Lianne, who was performing well in her university-oriented secondary classes, suggested that her parents transmitted ambivalent messages by encouraging her to enroll in LFI as long as it did not involve having to “study too hard”:

Lianne: I wanted to [take immersion], and my parents encouraged me, they told me if XX, if you study TOO hard, DON'T do it, you know?

Students from working-class, linguistically-mixed families also tended to believe that it was important to stay engaged in the secondary French immersion program for economic and symbolic reasons that were not directly linked to social mobility. For instance, Lianne suggested that knowing French was “a necessity in job searching” in Canada and “to communicate better with people [on her] mother’s side”:

Lianne: I wanted to do it to learn more about French, and also, you know, just because, to continue with it, so, and it is really important now adays/(uhum)/to know French, so, and they are also the two official languages of Canada/(okay)/and it is also, because, it is also, like a necessity in job searching, you need it

Josée: In Ottawa, or __

Lianne: __ everywhere in Canada, you know

Josée: Okay, so your motivation was more economic then?

Lianne: Yeah, and also personal because, you know, you can communicate better with the people, like on my mother’s side, because they are French, like my grandmother, her brothers and sisters

There was, however, variation in how students from working-class, linguistically-mixed families identified with Francophone life. For instance, Christian adopted what Heller and Budach (1999) have described as a traditional definition of Francophone which can be traced back through generations because both of her parents were of French lineage:

Christian: Heuh, I feel, more Francophone because my father is, is Francophone, and his parents are Francophones, XX

Josée: And you mother is Francophone?

Christian: Yes, but she does not understand, she does not understand French [translated from French to English]

In contrast, Lianne found it difficult to find the freedom to “feel French” because she feared never being able to “really express [herself] well in French” – as is often expected of bilingual Francophone women from upwardly mobile, working-class backgrounds in Canada (see Heller, 2006):

Lianne: but I, I don't FEEL French, just because I can't, can't communicate well in French, in life, I mean I don't feel that I could really express myself well in French

Although the engaged French immersion students with a parent making them eligible for minority language instruction had acquired French language capital outside the French immersion context, they adopted a wide range of identity discourses in relation to Francophone life that were informed by their respective linguistic and cultural origins and class backgrounds and aspirations. One student reality was to come from a middle-class, linguistically-mixed family that had chosen the EFI entry point, and to subsequently define oneself as Francophone within the parameters of French immersion engagement and academic achievement. However, it was more common for engaged secondary French immersion students to have come from LFI programs. This group included a middle-class student who defined herself in relation with her interracial Anglophone background, and students from working-class, linguistically-mixed families whose engagement involved economic and symbolic motivations that did not implicate class mobility.

CONCLUSION

With federal leaders who are at the forefront of official language issues, Canada is well placed to foster dialogue and cooperation to promote official bilingualism from local to national levels of governance. In this sense, the Honourable Graham Fraser has been right to draw attention towards the need to ensure greater student retention in FSL programs to build a sizeable bilingual workforce in years to come. Although the orientation of this study does not allow me to comment on how to improve the overall development of FSL programs in Canada, the results do indicate that social selection and cultural capital are key factors in

secondary student French immersion engagement realities, and point to the importance of addressing the realities of French immersion students from the two official language communities.

In accordance with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) social reproduction theory, the present study suggests that the secondary French immersion program studied promoted social selectivity by catering to students who had the ability and willingness to take French immersion classes at the university/academic levels (as opposed to college/applied levels). Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that student success in secondary French immersion programs was largely informed by the type of cultural capital that they brought to school, and later interiorized. Students with parents from the Anglophone majority who were not eligible for minority French instruction often described their secondary French immersion engagement in relation with capital they had acquired at home – such as the EFI student who benefited from support and insight her middle-class Canadian-born parents and the LFI students who had acquired “voluntary minority” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) belief systems and values passed down by their immigrant parents. Students with a parent who made them eligible for minority French language instruction, from both EFI and LFI programs, had acquired French language capital outside the immersion context that helped fuel their interest and ability to follow the secondary French immersion program. In addition, both groups of engaged secondary French immersion students indicated that they had developed values and beliefs that were aligned with the objectives of the secondary French immersion program – such as the desire to gain entry into the employment market and to better communicate with people.

The present study offers nuanced conclusions regarding the applicability of Bowles and Gintis's (1976) “correspondence principle” in the class orientations of students who stayed engaged in secondary French immersion programs. My findings partly confirm the theory that educational tracking systems can favor class reproduction, because the engaged students from middle-class families wanted to attend university and often hoped to become professionals where they would use their language skills. However, the determinants of class backgrounds on the aspirations of engaged secondary French immersion students from

working-class families were less clear – particularly because students from Canadian-born, linguistically-mixed, working class families were less likely to be oriented towards university studies and middle-class aspirations than their peers from immigrant, working-class families.

The French immersion students in the present study expressed a common interest in learning French for employment opportunities and for communication purposes – which is consistent with findings obtained by Hart and Lapkin (1994) among engaged French immersion students at the intermediate level. As noted by previous research (Blais, 2003; Foster, 1998), French immersion students from English-speaking families who were not eligible for minority French language instruction also identified with “bilingual” identity zones that did not involve being Francophone. In contrast, engaged secondary French immersion students who had a parent who made them eligible for minority French language instruction adopted a range of identity positions in relation to Francophone life that were informed by their respective linguistic and cultural origins and class realities. Another finding was that none of the interviewed students indicated that their engagement in the secondary French immersion program had provided them with a sense of cultural identification with Francophone life.

The present study raises questions that have implications for the future development of French immersion programs and official bilingualism in Canada. By drawing attention to the realities of French immersion students with and without a parent who makes them eligible for minority French language instruction, this study suggests that French immersion programming should take into consideration the language and cultural realities of student populations from both official language communities to favor optimal outcomes for everyone. This could entail broadening the definition of French immersion education to recognize the participation of students with parents who are eligible for minority French language instruction, and exploring ways to promote positive identification and belonging with Francophone life within French immersion learning contexts. Besides the need to build a larger body of cross-context research on the realities of French immersion students, we still know very little about their post-secondary educational experiences and their overall integration in the Canadian class structure and global

economy. From a policy and program-development perspective, it would be useful to learn how the realities of engaged French immersion students from different entry points compare with those of students who leave the program at the elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels. A more thorough identification and understanding of “good practices” surrounding student engagement in French immersion could also help answer the delicate question of what types of public policy and program adaptations could be made to promote high levels of student retention in French immersion programs across the country.

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