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Training Non-native Second Language Teachers: The Case of Anglophone FSL Teacher Candidates

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Abstract: This study documents the experiences of anglophone French as a second language (FSL) teacher candidates during their pre-service program. The authors describe how this group of non-native FSL teacher candidates felt about the adequacy of their FSL skills, their need for some level of second language (L2) support, and the maintenance of their L2 skills during their teaching careers. Participants represented three teaching divisions (elementary through secondary school), interviewed separately in focus groups. Most students felt that their L2 skills were adequate. In all cases, students expressed a need for some form of FSL support; although they felt responsible for maintaining their L2 themselves, they recognized the need for some level of organizational support. Results are similar to those of studies of non-native ESL teachers and raise many issues that should be addressed in a wider forum to ensure the continuation and improvement of quality FSL education.

Résumé : Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche portant sur l'expérience vécue par des étudiants anglophones inscrits à un programme universitaire de formation initiale visant à la certification pour l'enseignement du français langue seconde (FLS). Les auteures décrivent le niveau de satisfaction des étudiants quant à leur compétence en FLS, leurs besoins en matière de soutien dans la langue seconde (L2) ainsi que leurs attentes en ce qui concerne le maintien de leur compétence en FLS pendant leur carrière d'enseignants. Les participants, qui représentaient trois paliers d'enseignement (de l'élémentaire au secondaire), ont été interviewés dans des groupes de discussion correspondant au palier d'enseignement auquel ils étaient inscrits. La plupart d'entre eux ont trouvé leur compétence en FLS adéquate. Tous ont exprimé le besoin d'avoir du soutien dans leur L2. Bien qu'ils se soient considérés comme responsables du maintien de leur L2, ils ont reconnu la nécessité d'un certain soutien organisationnel. Des résultats semblables ont été obtenus dans des études portant sur les enseignants d'anglais langue seconde qui ne sont pas des locuteurs natifs de l'anglais et soulèvent des questions servant d'amorce à une discussion plus large dans le but d'assurer le maintien et l'amélioration d'une formation des enseignants de FLS de qualité.

Introduction

As a result of the success of the various types of French as a second language (FSL) programs in Canada, students emerging from these programs are choosing to return to the classroom as FSL teachers themselves. Although concerns have been raised about the level of French proficiency these neophyte teachers need to possess (Flewelling, 1995; Lapkin, Swain, & Shapson, 1990), virtually nothing has been done to investigate what impact they may have in the second language (L2) classroom and how they themselves feel about being FSL-speaker teachers.

In order to gain some insight into the phenomenon of L2 speakers as L2 teachers, it is necessary to turn to the literature in the field of English as a second language (ESL) teaching, where a great deal of work has already been done. The literature can be divided roughly into the following areas: issues related to the level of language proficiency required, including the debate about what constitutes "native-like" proficiency (Butler, 2004; Cook, 1999; Davies, 1995; Lam, 1994; Medgyes, 1994); the level of confidence of non-native speakers as teachers (Medgyes, 1994; Reves & Medgyes, 1994; Samimy & Brutt-Griffler, 1999); differences in teaching styles between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS), which spring partly from limited linguistic proficiency (Arva & Medgyes, 2000; Lundy, 2004; Medgyes, 1994); differences in marking styles between NS and NNS teachers, especially their ratings of ESL students' speaking (Nakamura, 1992) and writing skills (Brown, 1991; Cumming, 1990; Hamp-Lyons, 1989; Hinkel, 1994; Sheorey, 1986; Shi, 2001); the need to address the issue of language proficiency concerns in pre-service programs (Kamhi-Stein & Galvan, 1997; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Liu, 1999; Murdoch, 1994); the NNS teacher training program in L2 environments abroad (Braine, 1999; Milambiling, 2000); and the strategies available to L2 teachers to continue to improve their language proficiency once they are in the classroom (Medgyes, 1994, 1999).

The research areas, from the list above, that have informed the present study are those related to the level of language proficiency required, NNS feelings of confidence, and how these two factors can be bolstered during the pre-service program and after. It is also, to some extent, a continuation of our previous work (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000). In that earlier study, we examined the background factors that might be associated with FSL acquisition in an effort to identify those that correlated with the results obtained on the French Admission Test, an

important part of the admission requirements for the FSL teaching option. In this study, we are interested in whether the level of French proficiency demanded for admission is appropriate, both during the pre-service program classes and when teacher candidates are practicing teaching, and how students see themselves in this new role as NNS FLS teachers. Thus, the purpose of this study is to uncover and document the experiences of anglophone students enrolled in the French as a second language (FSL) teaching option, in order to

- 1 Better understand how NNS students feel about their French proficiency level; their feelings of confidence, both as students and as teacher trainees, in the L2; and whether they perceive any need for language support during their pre-service program.
- 2 Verify their perspectives on their language ability and, with reference to their experience with the test, the performance standards presently required (too high, not high enough, appropriate).
- 3 Understand their long-term French language needs, as perceived by them, in the maintenance and improvement of their second language during their teaching careers.
- 4 Be able to offer recommendations, based on student feedback, for addressing the issue of language proficiency and feelings of adequacy, both in the pre-service program and afterward.

Although the authors acknowledge that the program in which these students are enrolled is unique in Canada, we are confident that the students themselves are fairly representative of the population at large. Thus, their concerns can be interpreted in the wider context of other pre-service programs, regardless of delivery model (see program description below).

In order to be able to interpret the data meaningfully, we must first briefly describe FSL teacher education programs in Canada, the FSL program in which our study participants were enrolled, and the various components of this particular program, which figure in the analysis of the experiences reported by the students.

Pre-service FSL teacher education programs in Canada

Teacher education programs in Canada differ widely, according to Ullman and Hainsworth (1991), but can be divided into two general types: concurrent and consecutive. Regardless of the type of program, the course content usually consists of two main components: one theo-

retical (i.e., university courses) and one practical (i.e., a practicum in the school milieu).

In the *concurrent* model, students are simultaneously enrolled in both an undergraduate program (BA or BSc) and an education program (BEd). At the conclusion of the program, they receive a BA or BSc degree as well as a BEd degree. Because of the length of this type of program (four or five years), it is possible to include language courses to upgrade the FSL skills of the NNS participants; therefore, the entry linguistic requirements can be less stringent. In contrast, the *consecutive* model, as its name suggests, is one in which students have completed their undergraduate program (BA or BSc) before applying to a BEd program, which is usually one year in length and which in reality often conforms to the eight-month academic year. Because of the intensive nature of the program, there is very little room to include courses designed to improve language proficiency.

Usually FSL teacher education programs try to ensure that some of the pedagogy courses taken in the BEd program deal specifically with the teaching and evaluation of FSL by focusing on topics such as the history of L2 teaching in general, FSL teaching in Canada and in the province in which the teacher candidate will be accredited, the analysis of Ministry of Education documents for FSL teaching, the development of lesson plans and tests in various FSL contexts, and the study of French cultures. In Ontario, this increases the course load of those wanting to teach in the elementary school system, because these students must also qualify to teach the curriculum in English.

As for the language of instruction used in pre-service programs designed primarily to serve an L2 speaker clientele, Erben (2004) describes the three alternatives: L2 immersion, L2 immersion combined with L1, or L1 alone. All three delivery modes can be found in the Canadian context.

According to Ullman and Hainsworth (1991), in a comparison of the time students spend in schools for their practicums, it is possible to find "wide discrepancies in the amount of practicum time allotted by various faculties of education" (p. 487), but it seems that the average length is about eight weeks during a one-year program. In the case of FSL teacher education programs, students can do their practicums in a combination of settings – French immersion, extended French, or core French – and a portion of the practicum may be done in a regular English class. Ullman and Hainsworth also note that practicum evaluation procedures vary from one program to another. For example, in some cases the practicum is evaluated solely by the classroom teacher, while in other

cases evaluation is carried out by the classroom teacher in conjunction with Faculty of Education personnel.

The FSL teacher education program at the University of Ottawa

Because of its bilingual mandate, the University of Ottawa has two teacher education programs: Teacher Education (attracting mostly anglophones), for students wanting to teach in English first language schools, and Formation à l'enseignement (attracting mostly francophones) for those wanting to teach in French first language schools. They are both full-time one-year consecutive programs leading to a BEd in Teacher Education or a B.Éd in Formation à l'enseignement. Since the participants in this study were all enrolled in the Teacher Education program, its francophone counterpart will not be described here.

The FSL teaching option is offered in all three divisions: Primary–Junior (Kindergarten to Grade 6), Junior–Intermediate (Grade 4 to Grade 10), and Intermediate–Senior (Grade 7 to Grade 12). To gain admission to the FSL teaching option, students must pass a French proficiency test. If a student's level of written French is below the overall pass mark set for the written test, that student must take a remedial course in French (*cours d'appoint*).

At the time of the project, the breakdown of the number of courses taught in French in each division (excluding the *cours d'appoint*) was as follows: Intermediate–Senior students took four courses (two in FSL teaching, one in curriculum design and evaluation, and one in preparation for the practicum) out of 10 in French; Junior–Intermediate students took four courses (two in FSL teaching, one in curriculum design and evaluation, and one in preparation for the practicum) out of 11 in French; and Primary–Junior students took three courses (two in FSL teaching and one in preparation for the practicum) out of 12 in French. The most interesting difference to note is the number of compulsory courses required in Primary–Junior and Junior–Intermediate compared to the number required in the Intermediate–Senior division. Otherwise, both of the more senior divisions received the same number of courses in French, while Primary–Junior received one course less. One other difference to note is that students in the Intermediate–Senior division took the courses delivered in French with their francophone counterparts.

The program outlined above is similar in content and practicum length to many of the other one-year programs across Canada and is delivered in both L2 immersion and L1.

The French Admission Test

Research (Annandale, 1985; Calvé, 1983; Hébert, 1987; Ullman & Hainsworth, 1991) has shown the importance of fluency in French for successful teaching in an FSL context. In order to ensure that candidates applying to the University of Ottawa FSL option have excellent French language skills, the university requires them to pass a French proficiency test before their academic file can be evaluated for admissions purposes. At the time of the project, the test had been in place for five years and had been administered to approximately 600 students. It consists of a two-hour written test covering reading comprehension, grammar knowledge, and expository writing ability and an oral interview lasting about 15 minutes. During the first three years of its administration, approximately three-quarters of candidates failed one or both parts of the test. More recently, the failure rate has been approximately 50%. Feedback received in past years from supervising practicum teachers has corroborated the fact that the required standards are appropriate. For those readers interested in additional detail, the test and its development are described in detail in a previous article (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000).

The cours d'appoint

The *cours d'appoint* is given to those students who, although they have passed the oral part of the French Admission Test (FAT), have "redeemably failed" the written exam.¹ Usually this means that they have written poor compositions or have lost too many of the marks awarded for grammar knowledge, but are still within 10 points of the accepted pass score. In the year when this study was carried out, the *cours d'appoint* was given in a four-hour weekly block during the first semester of the program; the course content focuses on grammar knowledge (the details of the content being determined principally by the weaknesses of the students) and on writing. Students must pass this course in order to obtain their FSL qualification. It is our belief that the *cours d'appoint* is helpful in addressing students' linguistic weaknesses, but no formal studies have been done to ascertain any precise effects.

Practicum arrangements and associate teachers

Students do their two five-week practicums within the program year. In the year of our study, the first practicum took place during the months of November and December and the second during the months of March and April. At least one practicum, usually the first, takes place in

an FSL program (immersion, extended French, or core French). A portion of both practicums can be done in a regular English class, although this was not the case for the students in our study. Generally, students do both practicums in the Ottawa area. It should be noted that the majority of associate teachers who work in the Ottawa area are francophones, either from the Ottawa region or from the region of Québec adjoining the Ottawa River. Both practicums are evaluated by the associate teacher.

Methodology

A group interview technique (focus group) was used to collect the data. This represents a departure from the ESL studies mentioned earlier, in which information related to levels of confidence, attitudes, and so on was gathered using questionnaires. One of the prime advantages of the focus group, according to Morgan (1988, p. 12), is that it uses "group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group." Thus, given that the participants have all completed the same program, this technique should allow them to share and enlarge on their experience in a way that would not be possible using individual interviews or questionnaires. The method also permits the group moderator to explore unexpected issues raised by the group and to try to reach consensus where appropriate.

A preliminary study was undertaken in the spring of 1999 with a single focus group. After examining the results, the investigators decided that although some of the data collected were useful (these data will be referred to in our discussion of the results of the present study), they were not fully representative of the student population: because of an unexpected change in schedule, only 12 of the 20 students enrolled in the program could be invited to participate; unusually, there were no students enrolled in the Intermediate–Senior option of the program that year, and, because of low enrolment, students in the Primary–Junior and Junior–Intermediate divisions were treated as one group and took their French courses together, which may have affected the discussion and biased some of the opinions reported. The preliminary study did, however, allow us to modify some of the questions used in this study in order to address concerns raised obliquely while discussing other points, as well as confirming that the technique was the most appropriate way to elicit information in this context.

Thus, in the current study, all anglophone students enrolled in the FSL option in September 1999 were invited to participate. They were

told that the purpose of the focus group was to discuss issues pertaining to their experiences as NNSs of French during their year in the teacher training program at the University of Ottawa and, further, that they would be encouraged to express both negative and positive opinions of the FSL program and to offer suggestions for improvement of the program in the future. The research took place near the end of the pre-service program, after students had completed all their course work and at least one practicum. The Intermediate–Senior students had completed both teaching practicums for certification as teachers of FSL. They are the same students who participated in the FAT study reported previously (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000).

Students participated in the group interviews with members of their own division; separate focus groups were scheduled for Primary–Junior, Junior–Intermediate, and Intermediate–Senior students. In all, there were 26 students who volunteered to participate: 12 in the Intermediate–Senior group (Focus Group I), six in the Junior–Intermediate group (Focus Group II), and eight in the Primary–Junior group (Focus Group III). The majority of those interviewed were female; on average, participants were 22 years of age. Two research assistants were recruited to conduct the focus groups, to ensure that students would feel free to participate and to answer the questions candidly. Because the focus groups were to be conducted in English, the assistant responsible for leading the interviews was an anglophone. Her duties also included introducing the study to the students and recruiting student participants several weeks before the interviews were to take place. At that time, students also signed a consent form acknowledging their willingness to take part, knowing that the data collected would be kept confidential. This same research assistant also directed the group interview, posing the questions that had been prepared ahead of time, while a second research assistant recorded on paper, for each question raised, the number of students who expressed similar ideas, the number who agreed and differed with the points raised, and any comments regarding the unfolding of the interview that might not be clear from the tape, as when several people spoke simultaneously. She also organized the taping of all three sessions.

Each focus group consisted of a directed group interview in which participants were invited to respond to a total of 25 questions (see Appendix A for the complete list). For the most part, questions centred on issues related to support for students' L2 during all phases of their year's experience, both in class and during their teaching practice; their own sense of competence in their L2; and their feelings concerning how they were going to be able to maintain or improve their L2 during their

teaching careers. In addition, there were two questions that attempted to define more exactly the students' exposure to French culture over the years in which they were learning the language. These questions were added as a result of these same candidates' answers to questions about their cultural knowledge on a questionnaire investigating the background factors of L2 students that might relate to success on the FAT. This study (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000) concluded that candidates appear to have only a superficial knowledge of cultural matters and yet are confident of being able to teach this material to their students. The investigators therefore took this opportunity to try to examine this issue more closely.

The data collected were transcribed by the person who conducted the interview within a week of the event; where the transcript was not clear because of interruptions, multiple voices, or abrupt changes in direction, the two research assistants added comments to clarify the unfolding events based on their personal recollections of the events and on the notes made by the observer. The transcripts were then analyzed by the researchers, who identified the various themes and points of consensus or difference emerging from each interview. These points of consensus or difference were then linked to the data collected by the observer research assistant, yielding definitive comments on the number of participants responding to a theme or agreeing or disagreeing with the resulting consensus.

Results

Although all questions were posed to all three groups, certain themes recurred, sometimes within the context of a group of related questions and sometimes in response to an unrelated question, underlining the fact that students had a few serious preoccupations with respect to their experiences. Thus, rather than treating each question individually, we will report the results under the following headings: L2 support during the pre-service program, L2 practicum experience, adequacy of students' L2 competence as related both to classroom performance and their feelings of confidence, future maintenance of L2, and cultural issues. All the concerns reported are those that either took up a great deal of the interview time for specific questions or represented the view of a majority of the students.

L2 support during the pre-service program

The experiences reported below appear to reflect the different conditions prevailing in the three teaching options described above: the required

course load and the students' experiences related to courses delivered in French. The course load, as mentioned previously, is heaviest for the Primary–Junior and Junior–Intermediate groups, because they will be expected to be able to teach in French in any of the areas covered by the curriculum (e.g., social studies, arts, mathematics, science and technology), while Intermediate–Senior students will be expected to teach only, or primarily, in their two areas of specialization.

Focus Group I, Intermediate–Senior students taking their French courses with students in the French-language program, reported that there were enough opportunities for feedback from their professors. In general, this group ($N = 12$) was pleased to have the opportunity for feedback on their written and oral language skills, but students were divided on whether this feedback should be used as part of their course marks, especially when they were in a class with francophone students. In this case they were referring to the practice of including a mark for language use as part of the total mark awarded for written work. Professors' practices varied in this regard; some made this 20% of the mark at the beginning of the year in order to draw students' attention to the need for accuracy, decreasing the proportion as the year progressed and students' language use improved, while others maintained the same percentage for the entire year.

In contrast, Focus Groups II ($N = 6$) and III ($N = 8$) both expressed the unanimous opinion that they should have had more of their courses delivered in French, although, as mentioned above, Focus Group II had as many courses in French as Group I did. It seems that Group II's concerns were related not to language feedback but to the necessity of acquiring the appropriate French teaching vocabulary. Evidence for this viewpoint is provided by the fact that they said they would have liked to have their mathematics and science methodology courses in French because this would be more useful in their future teaching careers. Group II was happy with the feedback they did receive on their language skills and with other L2 support such as resource lists provided by their professors and resources available in the library, but they would still have liked to receive more personal feedback on their language skills. Focus Group III, however, was not happy at all. They appreciated the efforts of the professor teaching their three French courses, but they felt that they needed much more than she could provide in her limited time with them, both in terms of feedback on their L2 and in terms of access to available French teaching resources (i.e., specialized vocabulary in French and French pedagogical material).

Focus Group I was very positive about the fact that their French professors helped them to locate resources in French, but, unanimously,

they complained about the fact that there were no resource people available to provide a proofreading service, which they felt was essential for them. This idea was expressed several times in response to different questions and was often prefaced or followed by comments such as "I know my grammar needs work" or "I know my writing is not what it should be." In general, however, Focus Group I felt they had enough opportunities to use their L2 and, except for the need for proofreading services, adequate feedback regarding their L2 skills. There was also agreement from this group on the idea that the barriers (i.e., lack of opportunities to work and study together because of conflicting schedules) between the Teacher Education program and Formation à l'enseignement should be lowered even more, so that they could get to know their francophone peers better and share what they felt would be similar learning experiences.

Focus Groups II and III both agreed that they did not have enough opportunities to use their L2. Group II specifically mentioned the possibility of both having an organized conversation group to allow more practice and having more contact with their francophone peers in the Formation à l'enseignement program. Group III students were the least satisfied with their lack of opportunities for practice, with the fact that very few of their English-speaking professors would allow them to do their assignments in French (because they did not feel comfortable marking them), and, further, that only about 10% provided them with French teaching resources.

Focus Group II and III students also initiated a discussion on the usefulness of the *cours d'appoint* as a source of support, even though this part of the discussion did not directly deal with this question.

In essence, the opinions expressed by all three groups can to some extent be linked to whether they would go on to specialize in certain subject areas (Group I) or would be responsible for teaching the whole curriculum (Groups II and III). The latter groups clearly felt the need to acquire more French terminology to aid in their teaching activities, and their wish to have more opportunities to use their L2 may also reflect their anxiety about having to teach across the entire curriculum. The fact that the students in Group III were also dissatisfied with the feedback they received on their language skills may possibly be related to the fact that the same teacher was responsible for all three courses, which may have given her little time to provide feedback or allowed little variety in the type of feedback she could provide. This, too, probably reflects students' anxiety regarding their responsibility for teaching the full curriculum.

L2 practicum experience

Responses to the questions concerning students' practicum experiences were not uniform for members of Focus Group I and reflected the differences in when they did their FSL practicum (first or second semester) and whether they were placed with a core French teacher or with a French immersion teacher. In general, students from Focus Group I had more to say about their teaching experiences than students from the other two groups. It was clear that Focus Group I students who had done their FSL practicum at the end of the first semester reported more difficulties than those doing it at the end of the second semester, because in the latter case more material had been covered that could be used in a FSL context. Those students who were placed with a French immersion teacher, which in all cases meant a NS teacher, were a little more mixed in their responses. Most of these students had received feedback regarding their L2 skills, which sometimes made them a little more unsure of themselves, although they acknowledged that if it was done in the right spirit it could be a useful exercise. Those who had had to prepare a grammar lesson felt that this was another instance where they needed additional resources. Some referred to the usefulness of the *cours d'appoint* in this respect, a point that will be discussed in the section on the adequacy of students' L2 competence. One student felt that a resource book in teaching grammar would be useful, both as a source of ideas in planning lessons and as a reference in checking particular grammar points; this idea was endorsed by others in the group. On the whole, however, in spite of having experienced some unease at times, everyone in the group felt that their L2 skills were good enough for them to succeed in the classroom.

Focus Group II was similar to Focus Group I in experiencing a level of difficulty in the classroom that they felt was not insurmountable, while Focus Group III, on the whole, reported no real difficulties. Only one student in the latter group ($N = 8$) felt that she was not as comfortable orally as she would have liked. Students in both Group II and Group III appeared to find teaching grammar less of a problem than those in Group I did, although, like their Group I peers, they would have liked a refresher course in grammar; again, in this connection, students mentioned the possible value of the *cours d'appoint*. These two groups also had mixed feelings about L2 feedback from their associate teachers, echoing the idea expressed by Group I that if it was done in the right spirit it could be valuable, but that unrelenting criticism succeeded only in undermining students' confidence.

Students were also asked how they felt as language role models during their practicums. All three groups talked about how much they themselves had accomplished and, therefore, how much encouragement they could provide to L2 learners by modelling what it is possible to achieve as L2 learners.

Adequacy of L2 competence

As stated above, all these students felt that their skills were good enough for the career they had chosen. This idea was expressed in different ways by all three groups in response to a series of questions about the FAT, which they had all taken in the spring of the previous year in order to gain admission to the program. In fact, when they were asked whether the level of difficulty of the exam was appropriate, the responses revealed a pride in their language abilities that, in spite of some misgivings about particular sub-tests on the written test, appeared to spring partly from the fact that they had passed this exam. One student stated that she felt University of Ottawa enjoyed an advantage over students at other universities, because the standards of the test were high and they had succeeded. Many felt that a test at the same level of difficulty should be mandatory throughout the province for all students wanting to teach FSL.

In Focus Group I, the three students who had taken the *cours d'appoint* were asked about their experiences. Two felt it was beneficial because they knew that they needed the grammar review and the writing practice. The third student felt that she had been misplaced; she said she already knew these things and had found the course a waste of time. When participants were asked whether the course could have been changed so as to be a more useful preparation for the practicum, one student said it would have been useful to have help in refining reading skills. This particular point is interesting because it ties back to an observation made by the researchers in a previous paper (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000) regarding the profile of scores obtained on the test by some students with low pass scores who appeared to have problems with reading comprehension. All three said the course had not helped them with their L2 teaching problems, but one student remarked that she was sorry that their teacher had not been available for consultation during the second semester, because she was very knowledgeable and would have been a good resource. All three would have preferred that the course be given over two semesters, partly because it would have permitted more time to work on assignments and would have allowed

for more equitable scheduling of the course. The three students in Focus Group II who had taken the course were generally in agreement that it had been useful as a refresher. In contrast, most of the students in Focus Group III felt the course had not been beneficial. The fact that this group was the only one of the three to be almost unanimously negative about the *cours d'appoint* may perhaps be partially explained by the fact that this group had the heaviest course load, which might tend to colour their attitudes toward additional course work, no matter how laudable its goals. When the whole group was asked whether some sort of L2 course should be given to all students, the majority of students in all groups said "yes," although some felt that it should not count as part of their evaluation. The fear was that there would be an increase in the workload, which many students already found to be excessive; at the same time, however, students recognized that a course designed to help them in teaching FSL, rather than to act as a remedial course, would be useful. People also felt that a schedule of two hours per week for the entire year would be much better than one four-hour block per week for one semester.

Future maintenance of L2

Students from all three groups recognized that they themselves should take responsibility for maintaining their L2. As one student put it, keeping up the language should be viewed in the same light as keeping up any other teachable subject. For the role of the Faculty of Education, students in Focus Groups I and III recognized that the promised future availability of their professors for consultation was already a valuable contribution. In addition, students mentioned the availability of French teaching resources, additional qualifications courses in FSL teaching, and courses to improve French writing as other contributions that could be made by the faculty. Many students were also interested in having the faculty organize conferences and speakers dealing with FSL teaching issues or, on a more casual note, a week of informal get-togethers to allow teachers to exchange ideas while practising their oral communication skills with a group of their peers. Focus Group II students appear to have misconstrued this question, thinking instead of other organizations outside the faculty that could provide support. Thus, there was no mention of expected support from their former teachers, although they did talk about similar organized activities (FSL courses, workshops, etc.). Members of all three groups felt that attending these types of sponsored activities counted as *reasonable efforts* (exact phrasing from Question 23) to keep their L2 polished. In addition, in this context,

students in Focus Group I thought that opportunities to talk with native speakers would also count as an appropriate activity, and students in Focus Group III liked the idea of some form of French immersion experience as a way of keeping up their language skills.

Students also saw a role for the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) in helping them keep up their L2. Most agreed that there should be recognition of any French courses taken and of any courses that would enhance their ability to teach their L2. The possibility of being reimbursed by their board of education for courses successfully completed was mentioned and enthusiastically endorsed by the members of all three groups. They felt this would provide an incentive to teachers to continue their education, especially given that, as one student pointed out, many of them already carried a considerable debt load from their university education. One interesting difference with respect to the types of professional activities that students felt should be recognized by the OCT is that Focus Group I only talked about language-related activities, while the other two groups spoke more about cultural activities – both activities for themselves and any activities or exchanges they might organize for their students.

Cultural issues

As mentioned earlier, based on responses to the questionnaire in the pilot study, the researchers had some misgivings about the depth of cultural knowledge of these future teachers. Unfortunately, the questions added on this topic did not elicit a great deal of new information. When asked about their exposure to French culture while they were acquiring their L2, students from all groups talked about going abroad or living in a French-speaking community as the main ways in which they had learned about culture (according to Bayliss & Vignola, 2000, 11 of 18 candidates replying to this question reported three months or more abroad, representing about 60% of the sample).

On the specific question of what kind of French cultural preparation they had had for their practicums and their teaching careers, responses varied. In Focus Group I, about 50% of students agreed that there had been a lot of anecdotes from their francophone professors; one professor had dealt with this issue formally in the classroom, and one student said it was all over campus. Focus Group II felt it would have been helpful to have more courses in French, while Focus Group III said only they had received little or no preparation. When asked whether the nature of their language and cultural preparation was appropriate for their practicums, all three groups spoke only of L2 concerns.

On the question of being cultural ambassadors during their practicum, there were some differences. Focus Group I expressed no misgivings. Students from Focus Group II who responded fell back on the idea that living in a French environment would make this easy to do, while one student said that although she felt comfortable, she did not see herself as a representative of French culture. Instead she felt that her role was to incorporate elements of culture, such as poetry and music, into her lessons. The consensus of Focus Group III was that they saw themselves more as ambassadors of language for the French immersion program than as cultural ambassadors.

Discussion

It is evident from the interview results that, although all the participants in the focus groups felt confident that their L2 skills were adequate for their chosen profession, they all expressed some misgivings about certain aspects of their L2 skills. As we reported earlier, the fact that they had been successful in passing an advanced French admission test seems to have provided them with corroborative evidence of their L2 abilities and enhanced their feelings of confidence. The fact that they recognized that their L2 skills were not perfect, and yet could be pleased with what they had accomplished, fits with the results of similar studies reported in the ESL literature (Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992, 1994). Although much was made on the part of the participants about a certain percentage of courses being delivered in French, these courses did not seem to be serving their L2 proficiency needs as much as their future teaching needs. Since they will be responsible for teaching either the entire curriculum or their particular specializations through the medium of their L2, their most pressing needs seemed to be the acquisition of the specific vocabulary required to teach the subject matter and the opportunity for greater access to French language teaching resources. This conclusion is corroborated indirectly by the opinions expressed by students in Focus Groups II and III who would be teaching the entire curriculum and specifically asked for the mathematics and science methodology courses to be taught in French. It is interesting to note, with respect to Focus Group I's complaint about having marks deducted for language use when there were francophones in their class, which they felt put them at a disadvantage, that the professor involved stated that, in fact, the deduction of marks was not one-sided; overall, francophone students in the group were just as likely as anglophones to lose marks for inappropriate language use. The fact that both language groups had problems with writing is the reason that the cut-score on the

writing component of the test is not set too high; test developers felt that anglophone students should not be expected to demonstrate a level of competence that many francophone student teachers could not attain.

In addition to having access to vocabulary and teaching resources in French through the medium of courses taught in French, students would have liked a French course the content of which would provide a grammar review touching on their most commonly perceived weak points and some methodology that would help in the preparation of grammar lessons while also providing a language resource person to consult during the year. This finding is in agreement with the views expressed in the ESL literature (Liu, 1999; Murdoch, 1994; Kamhi-Stein, 2000) regarding the necessity to offer specific L2 language support during the pre-service ESL teaching program. In the case of ESL students, these authors are making this recommendation in spite of the fact that the future ESL teachers under discussion are already enrolled in programs where 100% of the curriculum is delivered in English. In a survey done by Murdoch (1994), 89% of respondents agreed that "a teacher's confidence is most dependent on his or her own degree of language competency" (p. 258), a position that the participants in our study would surely endorse. From everything that they said, these students appear to follow such a gruelling schedule of classes and obligations that even a course which is desirable may seem too much, which does raise the question of whether the program as it is presently constituted provides enough time to adequately prepare L2 teachers.

It seems that even good NNSs placed in a French-speaking environment need a certain level of L2 support and interaction in order to nurture their confidence in making the transition from learning French to teaching French. This idea of transition is reinforced by students' comments on their practicum experiences. Although they are willing to accept criticism of their language skills from their associate teachers when it is delivered in a positive way, they are not entirely comfortable with it. Given that their confidence in their language skills is somewhat precarious, badly phrased criticism can be quite devastating and could easily spill over to affect their feelings about their ability to teach in the classroom. Reves and Medgyes (1994), in a study of NNS ESL teachers, point out that "a constant realization of their limitations in the use of English may lead to a poorer self-image, which may further deteriorate language performance, and in turn may lead to a cumulatively stronger feeling of inferiority" (p. 364). This sense of inadequacy may also underlie a reluctance to embrace new, more communicative teaching strategies, as discussed by Lundy (2004), Medgyes (1994), and others. There is also a notable difference in the amount of language difficulty

reported by the three groups, which most likely reflects a difference in attitude as a result of their experience in the classroom practicum. It is clear that the group reporting the most difficulty, Intermediate–Senior (Focus Group I), is also the group that can expect to have the most complex teaching demands. Thus, it would seem to be very important that the associate teachers, when they are NSs, be selected with care in order to ensure that students' language proficiency does not become an issue at a time when students are feeling most vulnerable.

As stated above, all these students, with one exception, felt confident of their L2 abilities in the classroom. Even though they recognized that they made mistakes, and specifically referred to their weaknesses in grammar and written production, they felt that they had come a long way in mastering the language. They expressed pride in their accomplishments and in their ability to inspire others to achieve what they had and to be able to offer encouragement to students, having struggled with the language themselves. Their opinions about their L2 ability echo the ideas of Medgyes (1994), who states that there are several advantages to being a NNS teacher and mentions specifically the same opinions expressed by these students: the ability to be a positive role model and to have more empathy with students because of a shared learning experience. He goes on to mention other corollary benefits, such as the ability to teach language learning strategies more effectively, to supply learners with more information about the L2, to anticipate and prevent language difficulties better, and to make use of the learners' mother tongue if needed. This last benefit has become the subject of debate as researchers (Cook, 2001; Turnbull, 2000; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002; van Lier, 1995) try to establish how much, and in what contexts, L1 use in the classroom is beneficial and when it begins to interfere with the acquisition of the target language.

The need to maintain and improve L2 is also confirmed by the results of a questionnaire distributed to 2000 French immersion teachers, asking them about their perceived needs (Day & Shapson, 1996). According to Day and Shapson, 'approximately two-thirds of teachers said they had "great need" or "some need" in the areas of French language and culture (65.3% and 68.2%, respectively)' (p. 264). The students in this study, as well as expressing a willingness to be responsible for maintaining their FSL skills, recognized that the task could be made easier with the support of both the Faculty of Education and the OCT. From the former, they already acknowledge the usefulness of having continued access to their professors and to the French resources available in the faculty's resource centre. In addition, they also looked to the faculty

as a central organizing facility for such activities as seminars centred on FSL teaching or even informal meetings held to allow L2 oral interaction with peers and an exchange of L2 teaching experiences and strategies, a program that is not presently mandated by the province.

The answers to the questions centred on culture were somewhat disappointing. Thinking of culture as the experience gained during a limited sojourn abroad, or as the introduction into the classroom of songs, poems, or stories, or as being embodied strictly by the teaching of the language itself, demonstrates a very limited understanding of culture as it is currently conceived.

The literature on the nature of culture and the importance of its inclusion in the study of language is well established (Brooks, 1968; Brislin, 1990; Heusinkveld, 1997; Kramsch, 1995; Nostrand, 1989). Kramsch (1995, p. 84) provides an excellent description of the two approaches to defining culture. The first, with its origin in the humanities, she writes, "focuses on the way a social group represents itself and others through its material productions, be they works of art, literature, social institutions, or artifacts of every day life, and the mechanisms for their reproduction and preservation through history." The second, originating in the social sciences, concerns "the attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of that community" (Nostrand, 1989, p. 51). According to many writers, this second definition of culture is the more important of the two in bringing about a deeper understanding of those who speak the target language (Kramsch, 1995; Pesola, 1991; and, in the Canadian context, Calvé, 1991; Bibeau, 1991; Rebuffot, 1993).

In Canada, the focus on integrating culture into the language classroom, especially in the immersion context, has continued to be important. A resource guide for French language arts published by the Ministry of Education of Ontario in 1993 reiterates the importance of "culture in the social sense" (p. 17), as do two newer guides, one published by the Centre didactique des langues secondes (Edwards, Kristmanson, & Rehorick, 2000) and the other published by the Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion/Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (Bajard, 2004).

The fact that these students, in their responses, seem unaware of the extensive writings about culture and its importance in the context of the L2 classroom means that until this knowledge gap and their own limited experience are addressed, they will not be able to effectively incorporate the teaching of culture in their classrooms.

Recommendations

It is clear from the results that students considered their level of linguistic proficiency appropriate. Given the context of working with francophone teachers, this group of future teachers was fully aware of how their French compared with that of their associate teachers and yet felt that they were skilled enough to be in the classroom. As far as they were concerned, the knowledge that they were able to cope with the linguistic demands of the classroom, which they might not have been able to do if their French skills had been weaker, led them to endorse the present testing standards. Thus, both the associate teachers and the student teachers feel that the standards required by the test are both necessary and appropriate. In the context of a one-year program (which, in effect, may provide only eight months of contact hours), it would appear prudent to try to ensure that students have the necessary advanced L2 skills before the program begins, since, given the heavy workload required by such a short program, there is not enough time to concentrate on improving language skills in any significant way.

In terms of helping students to develop confidence in their L2 abilities and, concomitantly, in their ability to teach in the L2 classroom, it might be a helpful strategy to direct NNS FSL teacher candidates, as well as professors involved in FSL teacher training, to some of the more pertinent discussions in the ESL literature. We particularly recommend the work of Medgyes (1994) for its full treatment of the NNS teacher in the L2 classroom. Another useful addition suggested by Johnson (1990) might be to offer a unit designed to help teachers use their classroom management language more effectively, something he feels would be of particular importance to the NNS teacher. A new publication written by Bajard (2004) for the Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion, which deals with both classroom management and teaching strategies in the immersion classroom, would also be a valuable resource, both in the pre-service program and for in-service NNS teachers.

Although their FSL skills were at the right level, students still felt that they needed a certain amount of support during their pre-service year in order to adjust to the linguistic demands of their chosen profession. Based on the responses of all three groups, it appears that the program needs to make some adjustments in the number of courses offered in French to the Primary–Junior and Junior–Intermediate divisions to more closely match their responsibilities for teaching the entire curriculum. Although such an initiative is much more feasible in a program such as the one described in this study, this is not so easily resolved where the

program is delivered exclusively in L1, although ideally all faculties of education should be encouraged to add more courses delivered in L2. From the opinions expressed by the students, the most important aspects of the courses delivered in French, or which they would like to have delivered in French, seem to be the acquisition of the appropriate vocabulary and access to French teaching resources. This being the case, it would seem to be worthwhile to provide a French glossary of commonly used vocabulary and to make some effort to encourage the various educational faculties across the province to share their teaching resources in situations where the appropriate courses cannot be delivered in French.

There remains the problem of how to address their perceived need for more study of the French language during the pre-service program, a point of view raised by Hedgcock (2002) and by McCarthy and Carter (1994). Hedgcock (2002) sees such study of the target language not as a return to a transmission-based model of teacher preparation but as something much more dynamic. In his view, formal study of linguistic structure, language use, and development processes should lead to a wider understanding of the classroom teacher's potential in relation to other practitioners and researchers in the field of L2 teaching and acquisition. He also points out that 'recent research unfortunately suggests that, due to insufficient linguistic and metalinguistic awareness, language teachers are often under-prepared to provide the descriptive and explanatory information that so many language learners expect to gain from classroom instruction' (p. 306). In the context of a one-year degree program, it might be worthwhile to extend what is in essence an eight-month course by adding a five- or six-week immersion module to provide this sort of study and to give students additional practice in the target language. In the short term, another useful initiative to be undertaken at the provincial level might be the development of a grammar resource book to provide both a systematic review of grammar points particularly troublesome to L2 speakers and a guide to the preparation of grammar lessons. Such a handbook would also underline the importance of teaching grammar, even in the context of a communicative language learning approach.

This leaves some wider issues to be addressed. Underlying the concerns for L2 support expressed by the students in our study is an implicit acknowledgement that, in order to make a successful transition to the classroom, NNS teachers need real practice in the language, not only during their practicums but also throughout the pre-service program. This is in spite of the fact that these students have acceptable L2 skills, at least from the point of view of passing a test with fairly high

performance standards. If this is the case, should some of these initiatives be discussed in a broader context of interested parties? How can teaching resources be shared as suggested above? What kinds of support should be provided to encourage both new graduate FSL teachers and those already teaching to upgrade and maintain their skills? Although all the participants in our study expressed a willingness to be responsible for the maintenance of their L2 skills, it is clear that this is not something that can be done easily if there is inadequate support in the form of appropriate activities and courses, although Medgyes (1994) does make a positive case for the benefits of autonomous learning, which permits the L2-speaker teacher to “adapt her activity to her individual needs, whims and time schedule” (p. 84). The fact that participants expected to be able to draw on the resources available through the faculty presupposes that they will remain in close enough proximity to do so. Day and Shapson (1996) found that ‘over one-half of respondents to the survey indicated that they did not have access to bilingual or francophone administration or a bilingual or francophone librarian in their school’ (p. 264). And when something more is required, who should be responsible for implementing the necessary programs, and who should provide the funding? All of these questions need to be brought forward, and solutions found, so that we can be sure that future teachers will be able, in the short term, to maintain and, in the longer term, to continue to improve their L2 abilities, thus ensuring that only the benefits of being a NNS teacher are brought into the FSL classroom. Although the venue for this study is in some ways unique, the students who took part are not, except that they all have an advanced level of proficiency as measured through a set of tasks designed for that purpose. Thus, their doubts and self-knowledge when comparing themselves to their NS colleagues are legitimately shared with their peers at other institutions, as are their needs for linguistic support both in the pre-service program and afterward and their ongoing need for adequate teaching resources. Because of the number and variety of FSL teacher education programs across Canada, it is important that similar studies be undertaken elsewhere in order to enlarge our understanding of the interplay among the various factors discussed here and in the ESL literature that play an important role in how well NNS teachers perform in the L2 classroom.

Drawing on our own experience, we recommend that future studies incorporate some modifications to the format used here. It would be useful to provide the questions ahead of time to focus group participants, to allow time for reflection, and perhaps to elicit some written responses as well as those recorded during the interview. This group of

students had been documented previously (Bayliss & Vignola, 2000), but when this is not the case, circulating a questionnaire to obtain information on linguistic background and previous exposure to the L2 could provide useful additional data. Researchers might also consider interviewing students and professors at important points during the year (e.g., at the conclusion of practicums) as an additional point of cross-reference.

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Note

- 1 The phrase “redeemable failure,” usually designating the test performance of a student who has passed the oral test and obtained close to the minimum pass mark on the written test, implies that the observed shortfall in marks can easily be made up within the parameters of a three-credit FLS course.

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Appendix A*Questions for all FSL students*

During the program...

1. Do you feel the language support (language feedback from FSL professor, second language resources at the Faculty of Education or at the Second Language Institute, practice of oral skills, etc.) was appropriate during your Teacher Education program?
2. Do you feel you had enough feedback on your French language skills during the program?
3. Was it necessary to have French language support during your program?
4. Did you have the opportunity to practice your French during the program?
5. What kind of exposure to the French culture did you have while acquiring your second language?
6. What kind of French cultural preparation have you had for your practicum and your teaching career?
7. Do you feel you had the appropriate French language and cultural preparation for your practicum?

Questions for students who took the French remedial course

1. What is your general impression of the remedial course in French?
2. Did the course address the specific language needs you had?
3. Is there anything you would have liked to have included in the course to better prepare you for your practicum?
4. Was the length of the course (one semester) sufficient to cover the language material needed?
5. Any suggestions to improve the French remedial course?

Questions for FSL students who did not take the French remedial course

1. Would you have liked to have some form of French language course during your Teacher Education program?
2. Did you have any French language difficulties during your practicum?
3. Did you feel that your level of French was sufficient during the practicum?
4. Do you feel that the French language standards required to be admitted in the program are appropriate? Too high? Too low? Any comments?

5. How comfortable did you feel about teaching grammar during your practicum?
6. How did you feel about your role as a 'cultural ambassador' during your practicum?
7. How did you feel about your role as a 'French language role model' during your practicum?
8. Did you feel you needed feedback on your language skills from your associate teacher?

After the program ...

1. What do you plan to do in terms of acquiring more French cultural knowledge once you leave the Faculty?
2. What kind of French language support would you like to have once you leave the Faculty?
3. What kinds of efforts are reasonable in order to keep your second language polished?
4. How much do you think you are responsible for your language proficiency and your knowledge of French culture?
5. Should there be some policy developed by the Ontario College of Teachers recognizing some of your professional activities related to acquiring French language and French culture?