

**THE INFLUENCE OF CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE ON TEACHER BELIEF SYSTEMS: NEW FRENCH SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS' BELIEFS ABOUT PROGRAM OPTIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

**L'INFLUENCE DE L'EXPÉRIENCE SUR LE SYSTÈME DE CROYANCES D'UN ENSEIGNANT : CROYANCES DES NOUVEAUX ENSEIGNANTS EN FRANÇAIS LANGUE SECONDE CONCERNANT LES CHOIX DE PROGRAMMES OFFERTS AUX APPRENANTS DE LA LANGUE ANGLAISE ET ÉLÈVES AYANT DES DIFFICULTÉS D'APPRE**

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Article abstract

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**ABSTRACT.** This longitudinal case study examines four new FSL teachers' beliefs regarding the best and worst FSL program for English language learners and students with learning difficulties; the data are drawn from qualitative semi-structured interviews that occurred at the end of the participants' Bachelor of Education program and near the end of each school year of their first three years of teaching. The case study considers how the teachers did or did not change their views as they gained experience in the classroom.

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**RÉSUMÉ.** Cette étude de cas longitudinale explore les croyances de quatre nouveaux enseignants de français langue seconde (FLS) en ce qui a trait aux meilleurs et pires programmes de FLS offerts aux apprenants de la langue anglaise et aux élèves ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage. Les données sont tirées d'entrevues semi-structurées qualitatives menées à la fin du programme de baccalauréat en éducation des participants ainsi que vers la fin de chacune de leurs trois premières années de pratique. L'étude de cas examine de quelle manière le point de vue des enseignants a ou n'a pas changé à mesure qu'ils ont acquis de l'expérience en classe.

When considering the context of second language education, studies of preservice candidate beliefs have considered myriad issues, including: teacher educators who are not native speakers of the language (e.g., Kang, 2015); how they have been evaluated while in practicum (Merç, 2015; Baecher & McCormack, 2015); the discrete elements of the languages they are teaching (e.g., Fenwick, Humphrey, Quinn & Endicott, 2014); the methods of instruc-

tion to which they are exposed in the program (e.g., Kissau, Algozzine, & Yon, 2012); and most germane to this study, their beliefs about the students in their courses (e.g., Mady & Arnett, 2017; Arnett & Mady, 2010; Mady, Arnett, & Muilenburg, 2016; McGowan & Kern, 2014).

In this study, beliefs are defined as “a set of conceptual representations which signify to its holder a reality or given state of affairs of sufficient validity, truth or trustworthiness to warrant reliance upon it as a guide to personal thought and action” (Harvey, 1986, p. 660). Such beliefs can be influenced by many factors. Research has shown beliefs to have the potential to be influenced by teacher education (e.g., Mansfield & Volet 2010), reflective practices (e.g., Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008), and personal experiences (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Richardson, 2003), for example. More specifically within the field of second language education, Johnson’s (2009) work recognized the potential for everyday (i.e., lived experiences) and scientific (i.e., direct learning) conceptions to influence teachers’ beliefs and actions. Johnson (2009), grounded in the work of Vygotsky (1978), Wertsch (1991), and Lantolf (2000), highlighted the need to consider the socialization of teacher candidates as they move from their own experiences as learners to being instructed as teacher candidates to becoming part of the teaching profession. As it pertains to this study in particular, studies have demonstrated that a teaching discipline can have an impact on teacher beliefs (Fang, 1996), which in turn can influence decision making. This study therefore explored the journey of French as a second language (FSL) teacher candidates as they transitioned from teacher candidate to teacher. Specifically, this research sought to examine their beliefs about inclusion of English language learners (ELLs) and students with learning difficulties (LDs) within a variety of FSL programs.

Teacher candidates in this study enter their Bachelor of Education (BED) program with their own lived experiences as learners of a second language, either French, English, or even other languages. During their BED year, they may add scientific concepts as gained through their methodology courses and additional concepts gained in practice teaching. Given the history of inclusion within the realm of FSL education in Canada, teacher candidates may have been exposed to a distinction according to FSL program. For decades, research has underscored the view that French immersion (FI)<sup>1</sup> is not a program for all (e.g., Bruck, 1978; Mannavarayan, 2002; Trites & Price, 1977). In a previous study, Mady and Arnett (2017) found that teacher candidates pursuing qualifications for teaching FSL across Canada made judgements according to program and their experience therein. FSL teacher candidates who gained experience in FI programs, more so than in core French (CF) programs,<sup>2</sup> were generally more favourable of the inclusion of ELLs in both CF and FI programs while preferring CF for students with learning difficulties (LDs). Teacher candidates who had worked primarily in the more prevalent CF program indicated, to a higher degree than candidates in FI that they believed that all students – no

matter their needs — should be provided the opportunity to be a part of the FI program. Examining the quantitative data from that study more closely, which were gathered through questionnaires at the beginning and end of teacher candidates' year in teacher education, Mady and Arnett (2017) found that as the participants gained experience teaching in a particular program, that practical time in the program exerted an influence on their perceptions<sup>3</sup> of the best and worst program options for these two student populations. Finally, using different data points from the same study, Mady and Arnett (2015) found that FSL teacher candidates reported a disconnect between what they experienced in their practicum and the content of their FSL methodology classes, specifically as it pertained to the presence and needs of ELLs and students with LDs. In this study, nearly all of the participants reported gaining practical experience with these student populations, but only a couple of them indicated that these students were mentioned in their FSL methodology courses. Thus, there was a clear line of influence of “everyday” experiences on the candidates' beliefs these two learner populations and a marked absence of “scientific” knowledge that could possibly inform those beliefs and/or interpretations of the classroom experiences.

In addition to the potential for the FSL program to influence FSL teacher beliefs on inclusion, as seen above, the student groups themselves can also have an impact on teacher beliefs. Mady (2012a) used mixed methods to explore FSL teacher beliefs about the inclusion of ELLs in FSL. The questionnaire ( $n = 69$ ) and interview ( $n = 20$ ) findings revealed FSL teachers to be in favour of including ELLs in FSL study. In fact, the teachers had techniques to support ELLs' success in FSL. Research with other teacher populations has shown that diverse groups of educators view ELLs differently than other students when reflecting upon their inclusion in FSL. Through questionnaires, kindergarten teachers in Mady's (2016) study revealed that FI may be disadvantageous for ELLs. Principals (Mady & Masson, 2018), however, were in favour of including ELLs in FI as revealed through questionnaires and interviews.

Teacher beliefs as grounded in the discipline of second language education, FSL in particular, may then influence teacher decision making as it pertains to the inclusion of ELLs and students with LDs. As it pertains to these two groups, research has revealed that beliefs have led to mixed practices. Mady's (2012c) interviews with adult ELLs revealed experiences where teachers discouraged ELLs from studying FSL leading to their placement in mainstream English classes. Similarly, interviews with young adults ELLs (Mady, 2012b) confirmed that educational stakeholders denied the majority of interviewees access to intensive FSL learning opportunities. Taaffe, Maguire, and Pringle (1996), however, found that teacher beliefs led to a variety of practices that led from the inclusion to the exclusion of ELLs in FSL. Similarly, educational stakeholders (i.e., teachers and administration) have, at times, denied enrolment in FI to students with LDs. Arnett and Mady (2010), for example, shared a

narrative of a parent whose son was identified with an LD and thereby denied support in the FI program, thus necessitating his transfer to the English stream. Through interviews with FSL teachers, Arnett (2013) revealed the practice of exempting students with LDs from FSL study where its study was compulsory because of individual teacher, administrator, and/or parental beliefs about the possibility of success within this context for certain students.

While teacher beliefs have been a regular consideration in educational research, such examinations have largely focused on the particular situation or moment under consideration (e.g., Garmon, 2004, 2005; Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997; Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1993), the present study appears to be the first to query teacher perceptions in second language education in Canada over an extended period, and it appears that, with the exception of perhaps one another study in Ireland (Ni Chr  n  n & O’Sullivan, 2014), it is novel in its methodological design with its consideration of teacher beliefs over a sustained period of time. The Ni Chr  n  n and O’Sullivan (2014) study was largely concerned with how the pedagogical practices deployed within the teacher education program shaped the beliefs and perceptions of the teacher candidates, where the current study is more interested in seeing how beliefs about the best and worst FSL programming options for ELLs and students with LDs may or may not evolve as they gain experience in the classroom, given that teacher education has been identified as a weaker influence on belief systems than practical experiences (Borg, 2001). In other words, as candidates move from access to scientific conceptions of teaching and learner populations and gain more everyday conceptions of learners through their experiences, to what extent do their belief systems change accordingly?

This interest in the evolution or stasis of the teacher belief systems will be explored in relation to one specific dimension: the beliefs about the best and worst program options for ELLs and students with learning difficulties. As some of the aforementioned research about inclusion within FSL has revealed (e.g., Arnett, 2013; Mady, 2016; Mannavaryan, 2002), the actual program of study is often invoked as part of discussions of “student suitability” for inclusion. Thus, looking for any changes in viewpoints as experience is gained in the classroom could be a way to help shape larger conversations about how inclusion is and is not facilitated within FSL contexts.

Precisely, this paper will consider the following research questions:

1. What are new FSL teachers’ beliefs about best / worst program options for ELLs and students with LDs in the time period between their BED year and the first three years of their career?
2. How do those beliefs change, if at all?
3. To what extent does their increased access to everyday conceptions of learners, of programs, and of teaching, possibly shape those beliefs?

## METHODOLOGY

This study falls under the umbrella of qualitative research, case study research in particular. Rather than a single typical case (e.g., Johnson & Christensen, 2014), this research adopts a more inclusive view of case study in which the case is not only the FSL teacher candidates' beliefs on inclusion but also the evolution of such beliefs (e.g., Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009). Adoption of an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 1995), specifically, affords researchers the opportunity to examine a case to understand its inner workings as well as explore a more general comprehension (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Although an intrinsic case study does not provide for generalizations, it does allow for evaluation of the case.

The data from the current study are drawn from a series of semi-structured 20- to 45-minute phone interviews that were informed by the similar protocol over a four-year period within a five-year study. A trained research assistant interviewed the participants during May or June for each year of the study, and the interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis. The interview questions which specifically asked about the best and worst program options for ELLs and students with LDs are the focus of the present paper, but the data about their teaching assignments were also culled to give context here.

Because of the narrow focus of the present study, data analysis consisted of manually isolating participants' responses to the targeted interview questions,<sup>4</sup> organizing them in tables which documented the year-over-year response (per participant), and then, within each year, listing the responses across the participants. The responses were then "condensed" to a single word or short statement to capture their classifications only from the response.

### *Participants*

Over the course the five-year study, a subgroup of fifteen respondents from the initial questionnaire study agreed to participate in the interviews, and of that group, four of them participated in the first four years of the study. Those four participants were used for the present analysis. Table 1 presents an overview of the participants.

**TABLE 1.** *Participant description: First language, BEd program, and experience*

Participant (identified by pseudonym)	First language	Province of BEd program	BEd program experience
Marie	English	Prince Edward Island (PEI)	Immersion
Delphine	English	British Columbia (BC)	Immersion
Chantal	English	Ontario	Core
Agnès	French	PEI	Immersion

The four participants represented three provinces: BC, Ontario, and PEI. With the exception of Agnès, all of the participants were English-first language, but Marie also reported Francophone heritage during the third-year interview. Three of the four (Marie, Delphine, Agnès) had their entire FSL practicum in FI, one (Chantal) worked exclusively in CF.

Table 2 summarizes the teaching assignments according to program of the participants during the study's four years. All four entered the teaching profession in the same province where they completed their teacher education. Of the four, Marie had the most stable teaching assignment in that she was at the same school, and mostly the same grade level, for FI in the first three years of her teaching career in PEI; she was also in FI for her BEd year. The other participant from PEI, Agnès, also maintained her involvement in FI for the four years of the study, and while data about her grade level assignments are incomplete, she did appear to have a bit more variation in her assignments than Marie. Delphine also remained within the FI program in the move from the BEd program to the classroom, but unlike Marie and Agnès, Delphine's teaching experience in BC spanned varying grades each year and mostly was built through long-term occasional (LTO) contracts, which means that she was the supply / substitute teacher for an extended period during the year. Chantal, who worked in core exclusively while in her BEd program in Ontario, moved in to the Grade 1 FI program in Ontario for her first two years, which had her teaching in French for half of the day and English for the other half. For her third year in the classroom, Chantal became an itinerant CF teacher in a school, working with all students in Grades 1-6 as they learned French.

**TABLE 2.** *Year-by-year breakdown of participants' teaching context*

Participant	Year 1 (B.Ed. year)	Year 2 (1 <sup>st</sup> yr of teaching)	Year 3 (2 <sup>nd</sup> yr of teaching)	Year 4 (3 <sup>rd</sup> yr of teaching)
Marie (PEI)	FI	Grade 5 FI	Grade 5 FI	Grade 5/6 FI
Delphine (BC)	FI	FI, Grade 3, then FI Grade 7, LTO contracts	FI across various grades 3-7, LTO contract	Grade 3/4 early FI
Chantal (ON)	CF	Grade 1 FI	Grade 1 FI	CF, 1-6
Agnès (PEI)	FI	Grade 3 FI	FI (grade unknown)	Grade 1 FI

## FINDINGS

The participants' beliefs will be shared from the four-year period of the case study in tables that briefly convey their responses to four specific interview questions. These results are presented in the same order that the participants were presented in Tables 1 and 2. Several of the justifications the participants offered for their responses have been inserted as direct quotes in the narration of the information presented in this group of summary tables.

### Marie

Marie is the first of two participants in this case study who completed her BED in PEI and she went on to work exclusively in FI for the first three years of her career; she also completed her BED practicum in FI. Table 3 presents an overview of her responses to the interview questions targeted for this analysis.

**TABLE 3. Summary of Marie's beliefs about best / worst FSL contexts for ELLs and students with LDs**

Year of interview	FSL context best for ELLs	FSL context worst for ELLs	FSL context best for students with LDs	FSL context worst for students with LDs
Year 1	It depends on where they live	FI	CF and FI	Not answered
Year 2	It depends on their age	It depends on when they start school and progress in English	It depends on the work ethic	FI
Year 3	FI	Any one where parent support is not there	FI	CF
Year 4	It depends on age and supports at home	It depends on 'their situation' and personal motivation	It depends on the disability	It depends on the disability and personal motivation

As Table 3 reveals, Marie's responses to the interview questions over the four years of the study varied. Looking specifically at her responses to the question about the best program option for ELLs, in three of the four years, Marie offered that other factors would influence the decision for "best option," not the program itself: where they live (Year 1) and their age (Years 2 and 4). In the Year 2 interview, she invoked her experience with a particular student to explain her interest in student age:

It depends on their age, really. Like I have a little guy in my music class in kindergarten, and so English is his second language and he's in French immersion learning French, but so far there is no adaptation required. He doesn't go out for ESL lessons or anything like that. I would imagine that if they're starting French immersion at the same time as they are learning English that young, I don't see it being a problem.

Looking at her responses to the question targeting her beliefs about the worst context for ELLs, Marie presents a different view each year; in Years 2-4, offering criteria to be considered. For example, in Year 2, she invoked a student currently doing well in CF to explain why age of entry and progress in English would inform a decision about the worst program option. Within the response, she seems to convey that she believes ability / disability exert an influence on a student's potential for success in FSL:



Again, if they are just starting EAL [English as an additional language] in the fourth grade and then adding core French on top of that, that may be a bit much because they have to do all their core courses in English. And then trying to add French at that time, you may want to use that half an hour a day to really focus on English first. But, I don't see a reason why they should be excluded if they are making good progress [in English]. If they don't have a disability or what not, that they need to master English first, that they're enrolled in. I think, here's a girl who is an ELL student who's great on the English side, who is doing fine in her core, and loves it. Again, she is very smart and is very hard working.

When considering the best and worst FSL context for students with LDs, Marie invokes fewer situational responses than for ELLs. In Years 1 and 3, Marie identified FI as the best context for these students, but also indicated in Year 1 that CF was the best, too. In Years 2 and 4, Marie indicated that the choice for the best FSL program was situational to the student, focusing on work ethic in Year 2 and the disability and motivation in Year 4. In Year 2, she felt FI was the worst program for students with LDs, changed the view to CF in Year 3, and then in Year 4, offered a situational reason. In looking at the rationales for the views she offered to these 2 questions, in Years 1 through 3, Marie offered an abstract / theoretical justification for her view; there was no reference to a student or a personal experience. This is the response offered in Year 2, to the question about the best FSL context for students with LDs:

I mean if you start off in French immersion, I know we're at this school to have primary intervention program, resource, reading recovery; we have all the interventions in place to keep the kids in the French immersion program...I feel like there is no reason why you can go into French immersion. As long as you have a good work ethic, which is a lot more important than your LD anyway and core French as well is mandatory until the end of Grade 9. So, like it or not, you are stuck with it.

Though she offered the above situational response in Year 2, it took until Year 4 for Marie to use evidence from her teaching experience to justify her response. In the previous quote, Marie gave the indication that she believed that a student's motivation for FSL study was more important than an LD in making the decision about the program. In Year 4, Marie very clearly held the view that the nature of the child's disability and personal motivation should exert the influence on program choice. Early in the interview in Year 4, Marie had recounted her experiences in working with a student in her class who had challenges with graphonemic awareness, and who was succeeding in her Grade 5/6 FI classroom, attributing the success to the student's hard work in addressing her challenges. The quote here is truncated to eliminate the probes from the interviewer:

Again, it all depends on the nature of their disability. Because I have one little girl in my class who is yet undiagnosed, but she has some serious comprehension issues in both languages and right now she is being very

overwhelmed.... And there's some serious discussions to take her out of the program so that she can get some good solid comprehension skills under her belt in one language...but, like, my graphophoneme student, she has wonderful comprehension and she's really motivated to work, so she doesn't want to leave the program and we don't want her to leave the program...so it all depends on the nature of the disability and the motivation of the child.

In summary, Marie is largely consistent in her belief that decisions about the best and worst FSL program options for ELLs and students with LDs are situational to factors within individual students. Though there are times over the course of the four years where she did select a specific program, her regular invocation of situational factors seem to point to an overall belief system informed by everyday conceptions that programming decisions should not be informed by the features and goals of a particular program (Johnson, 1999). Rather, her experiences seemingly convey a focus on how the student's needs and personal factors align with the program's goals and pedagogy.

### *Delphine*

Delphine is the only participant who completed her BEd in BC, and she went on to work exclusively in FI for the first three years of her career, first on a variety of LTO contracts and then in her own classroom. She also completed her BEd practicum in FI. Table 4 presents an overview of her responses to the interview questions targeted for this analysis.

**TABLE 4.** *Summary of Delphine's beliefs about best / worst FSL contexts for ELLs and students with LDs*

Year of interview	FSL context best for ELLs	FSL context worst for ELLs	FSL context best for students with LDs	FSL context worst for students with LDs
Year 1	Intensive or FI	CF	Early FI or intensive, but "it depends on the disability"	"can't really say"
Year 2	Intensive, early or late FI	CF	Intensive	FI
Year 3	Intensive or early FI	CF	Probably CF, but it depends on the disability	It depends on the difficulty
Year 4	CF (but if they start at the same time) or intensive	One where they come in part way	Where they start early	Come in part way

In terms of the best context for ELLs, Delphine was consistent in her assertion that intensive French<sup>5</sup> – which is a popular model in BC (Carr, 2013) – was one of the best contexts. For the first three years of the study, she also included FI in that assertion, but as Table 4 shows, she sometimes would precise the

entry point of the program. Year 4, she made a departure in her response, in that for the first time, she mentioned CF. In Year 1, Delphine acknowledged in her rationale to the question about the best context for ELLs that her response was theoretical:

Probably intensive or immersion, and I'm saying this theoretical, we learned this in class, but we never actually tried. Just because everyone would kind of be at the same playing level in terms of learning a new language, so they would all have to use the basic skills that they know.

As the quote evidences, Delphine's rationale was grounded in her understanding of the pedagogy and pacing within those programs, but no explanation was offered or probed. Over the next two years, Delphine generally offered the same response to the question. In Year 2, she again acknowledged the theoretical nature of her response and led the rationale with the statement, "everyone would be starting at the same place." As for Year 4, when Delphine changed course and included CF in her decision – to the exclusion of immersion – her rationale still remained focused on the pedagogy of the program, rather than the needs of the students, and she was still basing her decision on the assumption that the students were all starting the program together:

And I guess because, like at the beginning, a lot of the instruction would be given in a similar way that one would give an English language learner, like a lot of visual cues and like...starting from the beginning and building up the vocabulary.

As it pertains to the worst FSL context for ELLs, for the first three years of the study, Delphine was very clear in her belief that CF was the worst context for this student population. In Years 1 and 3, she did offer a rationale for her view, and in both cases, she alluded to the role of English in the classroom, either as a language of instruction, or as the starting point for helping students figure out French. In Year 1, she offered,

Worst, I think currently probably a core French option.... Just because oftentimes our teachers right now may not have a vast view of the French language, so they're teaching French by using English, so you're using a language that they don't understand to teach them another language that they don't understand.

And in Year 3, the rationale she offered for choosing CF as the worst context for ELLs can be interpreted as a partial complement to the reason she offered in Year 4 for identifying it as the best context for ELLs – the fact that the program could be using basic strategies for building vocabulary:

Depending on how the core French is taught, because there are a lot of teachers who, even though they have to teach core French, did not receive any core French training, so their French lessons are more geared to people who know English so that they can translate the words, so that's probably the worst situation for ELLs.

Finally, in Year 4, she offered that the timing of the student's entry into the FSL program would be the way to identify the worst program for the student. However, no rationale for the classification was offered, but given some comments, it is reasonable to infer that Delphine was concerned about students having uneven proficiencies in the classroom.

As it pertains to her beliefs about the best and worst FSL contexts for students with LDs, Delphine's responses often focused on reasons that were situational to students and their needs, similar to Marie. It appears that Delphine's views about best program options for students with LDs in Years 1-3 were anchored to a student with whom she was currently working. This rationale from Year 3, when she was in favour of CF, is a representative example of the way she would consider the student's needs:

It really depends on the learning difficulty, so if it's a student with, where language is really impeding them from learning anything else, I would say not a French immersion or intensive kind of situation, probably core French where French is just a block within everything else, that would probably be the best situation. It all depends on what their learning difficulty is, so if it was learning difficulties with math or something that doesn't really have to do with language, than any French context would be fine. If it comes to the difficulties of hearing loss...I mean right now, the kid I have with hearing loss, it's mild – she's got mild hearing loss – so it's fine, she's got hearing aids. I've got FM signals going on, so she's able to hear, she's able to understand, so it really depends on what the difficulty is and how severe it is.

When considering the worst context for students with LDs, Delphine's response changed from year to year. In Years 1 and 2, though she offered different choices, both justifications invoked a theoretical stance that tied to what she learned in her FSL methodology class and how intensive French was presented as being a program that helped students with LDs. The Year 2 quote is included here:

The worst context, I would say French immersion. I feel that intensive French is still enough [as] everybody is on the same page and there is enough use of body language or visual cues too...and my understanding of intensive French is that it is very communicative, so it's not necessarily writing or reading French but rather using French, like orally as a communication language.

In summary, Delphine's beliefs about the best and worst FSL context for ELLs and students with LDs reveals some consistency and some dynamism, particularly as she moved from Year 3 to 4 in the study, which also happened to coincide with when she got her own classroom, which clearly demonstrated the influence of everyday conceptions (Johnson, 1999). When considering the options for ELLs, her decisions were typically justified with theoretical, scientific rationales. While she reported only working with one ELL for the entirety of the study (Year 2), Delphine never invoked any sort of experiential rationale for her views. Conversely, when examining her rationales for the best and worst FSL program options for students with LDs, Delphine often invoked a situational rationale, in that she offered that decisions would depend

on the nature of the disability. Finally, the noted concern in Year 4 for the starting point for FSL programming for both ELLs and students with LDs was not sufficiently probed in the interview to uncover her reasons for this switch. Drawing on the work of Johnson (1999), it would be reasonable to argue that the shift to her own classroom and increased access to everyday conceptions of learner needs and teaching demands could have caused the shift in belief systems.

**Chantal**

Chantal completed her BEd in Ontario, where she went on to work in both FI and CF for the first three years of her career. She completed her BEd practicum in CF. Table 5 presents an overview of her responses to the interview questions targeted for this analysis.

**TABLE 5. Summary of Chantal’s beliefs about best / worst FSL contexts for ELLs and students with LDs**

Year of interview	FSL context best for ELLs	FSL context worst for ELLs	FSL context best for students with LDs	FSL context worst for students with LDs
Year 1	It depends on the student, but is likely FI	Extended	CF	FI
Year 2	Any program is fine, but “immersion is good”	No program identified	CF	FI
Year 3	Any program is good	Any program is good	It depends on the student	It depends on the student
Year 4	It depends on the student	It depends on the student, but most likely FI	It depends on the student	It depends on the student

Chantal’s views about the best FSL context for ELLs changed slightly each year. Initially, she felt that FI was the best option, but also acknowledged that it depended on the student’s needs. In both Year 1 and Year 2, when FI was the identified program, Chantal’s justification was focused on the way in which language is presented in an immersion setting; this is justification offered in Year 1, when she also reported no experience working with ELLs: “they [the ELLs] have more time with it [French] and they see it in more contexts, and it’s not just a, you know, a forty minute, or whatever the period may be, of instruction, and it’s more in context based [sic].” Though she did have an ELL in her class during Year 2, she again focused on the context for learning:

I think that any is fine...I guess immersion, I think that it is more constant with the language, and they are learning English alongside. Hmmm I don’t know really, I just see that it is working fine for my kids, that they’re doing fine in the immersion program.

In Year 3, the belief that “any program is good” was again offered as her view, but this time, she invoked concern for developing English proficiency as a factor in the decision. Yet, in Year 4, the student’s proficiency was the sole focus of her response (in both Year 3 and Year 4, Chantal taught more ELLs than she had in Years 1 and 2 of the study):

Okay, I don’t, I wouldn’t pick one in particular because it, I think it depends on the students themselves...and how they’re progressing in whatever language. If they’re having trouble in English, and they’re in an English environment, then I might recommend core because they would need more help with their English skills, but if their English is coming along fine and they’re feeling like being challenged, then immersion might be okay, but...I would, it would depend on the student.

There is variation in Chantal’s beliefs about the worst context for ELLs over the course of the study. Admittedly, her election of extended French as the worst option in Year 1 was framed as an “educated guess” in the interview. In Year 2, Chantal offered no true choice of the worst program, stating:

Umm, I don’t think that any would be bad for them. I think that core would be equally as good. I just feel like since I am teaching them immersion, I’m seeing that it is okay, but I also think that they would do just as well in the core program.

Her rationale in Year 2 was somewhat anchored to her experience, and unlike Year 1, she did not allow her lack of knowledge of the other programs to inform her choice. Moving into Year 3, her view aligned with that expressed in Year 2, but actually did not exclude extended and intensive in her assertion that there was no one bad choice for ELLs. By Year 4 of the study, when she was now teaching French to all of the students in her school, Chantal gained the most experience working with ELLs. In this year of the study, her position that program choice was dependent on the student became a prominent theme in the entire interview:

Again, it would depend on the student. I couldn’t say in general, but yeah, if it was someone who was struggling in English, then I think immersion would be more difficult since their primary language that they would need to be speaking and working on would be English, so I would recommend, if I was allowed to give a recommendation, that they would stay in an English program with core French.

Chantal’s views about the best and worst FSL contexts for students with LD were the same for Years 1 and 2, as shown in Table 5 (CF as the best and FI as the worst, respectively). A change occurred in Year 3, which held through Year 4 – that for both questions, the response was relative to the student and his or her needs / skills. While Chantal reported working with students with LDs each year of the study, it is unclear as to why this shift suddenly occurred in Year 3. In Year 2, Chantal invoked concerns about the student’s limitations when asked to pick the best program, but in Year 3, she shifted her focus to

a student's love of the language to help shape the decision. The two quotes from those years are presented sequentially:

I feel like core because a lot of them they have more difficulties with conversing, and in immersion since the math and social studies, other subjects are in French I feel like its holding them back because they are having so much trouble with it. (Year 2)

I think it really depends on the student, the same as with ELLs, I think it's a really individual thing. If a student has any kind of LD but they love the language then they'll make it work, so I think that they should have an equal opportunity for all of them and make further decisions based on their progress in that program. (Year 3)

In Year 4, Chantal's rationale for the best program choice being dependent on the student was actually more about when the student would be entering the program, rather than any intrinsic factors for the student. Yet, for Years 3 and 4, when conveying her rationale for the worst FSL program option for students with LDs, she remained firm in her stance that factors linked to the student should be considered. The rationale from Year 4 is offered as an example:

Again, it depends on the student. In one case I know that core French is difficult for some of these identified students because of the change in routine and structure in the day. So maybe if they were just being spoken French the whole day, but if it was the same teacher.

While the statement at the end is a little unclear, Chantal seems to be weighing how the program structure and the student's needs align. In Year 4, Chantal was an itinerant CF teacher at her school, and it is possible that rationale is aligned with her experiences that year.

In summary, Chantal's beliefs about the best and worst FSL program options convey a mix in their stability and in rationale. Her views on the best program options for ELLs slightly changed from one year to the next, and while her responses to the question in Year 1 and Year 4 address the same theme, there is some difference in the justifications. For the responses to the worst program option, Chantal did offer more varying views than what she had offered for the best program option, but had some consistency in her stance that the timing of the student's entry point into any of the FSL programs could and should be considered. As for best and worst FSL program options for students with LDs, Chantal experienced a noted shift between Year 2 and Year 3 in her responses to both questions, moving from specific program choices to situational decisions linked to the students at the centre of those decisions, thereby demonstrating influence of the everyday conceptions (Johnson, 1999) for individual belief systems.

## Agnès

Agnès is the second of two candidates in this case study who completed her BEd in PEI and is the only native francophone in this study. She did her BEd practicum in FI in PEI and taught in FI for the first three years of her career. Table 6 presents an overview of her responses to the interview questions targeted for this analysis.

**TABLE 6.** *Summary of Agnès's beliefs about best/worst FSL contexts for ELLs and students with LDs*

Year of interview	FSL context best for ELLs	FSL context worst for ELLs	FSL context best for students with LDs	FSL context worst for students with LDs
Year 1	FI	CF	FI	CF
Year 2	FI	CF	FI—but it depends on the student need	Maybe intensive, but it depends on the student need
Year 3	FI, but Intensive if they need to learn English	CF	FI	CF
Year 4	FI	CF	FI	CF

Agnès presented the most stable belief system about the best and worst FSL program options for both student groups during the study. Her choices really did not vary as the study progressed, and while her rationales occasionally introduced slightly different details over time, the core of the offered rationales was unchanged. In her case, it is hard to see any influence of her everyday conceptions of program options and students needs on her belief systems.

For both questions about the best context, Agnès consistently selected FI. Though in Year 2 for students with LDs and Year 3 for ELLs, Agnès did briefly acknowledge that another program could work or that a student's need should be considered (a theme which was also in her responses to worst contexts for students with LDs that year), FI still was included in the stated choice. Some of the rationales she offered include:

French immersion, because when you're surrounded by French it is so much easier to get the language quickly. (Year 1 response to best program for ELLs)

I just believe that the best way to learn a language is to be in immersion, so when the problem is not the language itself but more of the higher level, it doesn't matter if it's in French or if it's in English, it can be easier in English, but if the point is to learn French, the best way will be to immerse in the language. (Year 3 response to best program for students with LDs)

Because I've got results with what I do in French immersion, well I believe more in that. (Year 4 response to best program for ELLs).



As these selected quotes demonstrate, Agnès's rationales are framed through her experience (and sense of self-efficacy) and her understanding of FI as typically leading to the best outcomes in students' French language proficiency.

Just as Agnès was resolute in her stance over the years that FI offered the best programming options for ELLs and students with LDs, she was also fairly resolute in her belief that CF was the worst program option for ELLs and students with LDs. Her rationales largely offered counterpoints to the rationales justifying the decision to select FI as the best program option, offering ideas such as:

Core French because it's just 30 minutes every day and that's not enough.  
(Year 1 response to worst program for ELLs)

Core French. It's a waste of a time, for them [students with LDs] especially, but I think for everybody. (Year 3 response to worst program for students with LDs)

Well, core French won't help them at all because if they have difficulties, to learn French a little bit every day won't do anything for them. (Year 3 response to best program for students with LDs)

Mostly for Agnès, the limited time the students would work with French in a core program influenced her disdain for the program.

The only deviation from this pattern occurred in Year 2. Just as she did that same year, when asked about the best option for students with LDs, Agnès also invoked the student's needs as a consideration, which is the only time we saw evidence of the potential influence of an everyday conception:

I don't know if intensive can mix them up, or by the time they get used or comfortable in French, if they've got difficulty with the concept by the time they are used to all the vocabulary that the effort they made to learn it, then they switch to English then they need to relearn the concept or different concept. Well, I don't know if that is going to help them or not. But again, it depends what the difficulty. They have it so big in French.

In this quote, Agnès is expressing some doubt / ignorance of the results of intensive French, and does so in a way that seemingly implies the program is not a match for the students' needs. Her concern here appears to parallel the theme she invoked in responses to questions about CF – that French access was not total and absolute – meant that the program was inferior. However, later in Year 3, she acknowledged in the interview that she did not know how intensive French worked and indicated that she would not select that option.

In summary, unlike the other participants, Agnès offered little variation in her choices and in her rationales for those choices over the four-year period of the study; her everyday conceptions and experiences seemed to offer no influence on her belief systems, even from the standpoint of confirming what she already believed. She was firm in her conviction that FI offered the best choice, and she nearly always cited CF as the worst choice option. Her rationales mostly

did not focus on student need, but rather the structure of the programs. To that end, it appears that Agnès may have believed that the program's features, rather than the student's needs or other intrinsic factors, would either enhance or inhibit the student's success in the program. In Year 4, she makes statements that allude to her confidence in teaching FI, and it could be that this teacher self-efficacy, which has certainly been shown to be a predictor of teacher effectiveness (See Klassen & Tze, 2014 for a review of many of these studies), has likely added to her convictions as well.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Given the reality of case study design, generalizations from the findings presented above are not possible. Within the small group of four, there was variation in the beliefs of the best and worst program options for ELLs and students with LDs, as well as the rationales offered in support of those decisions. Further, there is some evidence of how everyday conceptions and experiences further refined belief systems as most of them progressed in their career, but these influences could mostly be seen in the rationales offered for their decisions about program choice, not the decisions themselves.

There seemed to be more variation in the belief systems about the best and worst program options for students with LDs than ELLs, and this variation could be attributed to the fact that the participants all reported more (everyday) experience with students with LDs each passing year, and less experience, as a collective, in working with ELLs. This lived experience appears to have had a greater impact on their beliefs than the scientific conceptions they would have gained in their BEd courses, if they even gained them at all. Further, the belief systems also appeared to change a few times when the teaching context experienced a shift, such as when Delphine got her own classroom after two years as a supply teacher, and when Chantal moved from teaching French to a single immersion class to being the itinerant French teacher for Grades 1-6 in her school, again pointing to the role of everyday conceptions. Belief systems have been known to be altered through experiences (Pajares, 1993), and it could be the case that increased experience in teaching both student populations would continue to shape the belief systems further.

For the most part, the participants preferred the FI program as means of gaining French proficiency. Agnès, in particular, grounded her consistent beliefs in both her scientific conceptualization of FI pedagogy as well as in her lived experiences. This congruence of experiences provides a basis for the consistency in Agnès' responses over time (Borg, 2001). The remaining participants revealed, however, that there may be mitigating factors for these two student populations that may favour selection of another program. In terms of the ELL population, English proficiency, age, and parental support were factors in the participants' program recommendations; whereas the identified disability,

work ethic, and motivation were influential factors for students with LDs. Such factors suggest that the participants believe the program choice is tied to particular student attributes, which could somewhat propel the notion of “suitability” of one student or another for a particular FSL program. Yet, it also propels the role of everyday experiences and conceptions in informing pedagogical decisions, even if there may be research evidence (e.g., scientific knowledge) to the contrary. The fact that the participants have aligned certain contextual factors or factors beyond the control of the child with their beliefs about which programs are the best and worst options for these students could also perpetuate the idea that it is not possible, reasonable, or otherwise feasible to respond to these students’ needs in the classroom.

Where participants grounded their beliefs in scientific concepts of the pedagogy (see Agnès above and Danielle’s belief in the intensive French program), this study revealed that these beliefs were less likely to change over time where they were not accompanied by lived experiences (i.e., experiences with ELLs in particular). As the study progressed, the responses grounded in lived experiences shared by most of the participants did become more student-centered, rather than program-focused. In several situations, the proffered example confirmed that a student with a particular learning profile was successful, corroborating the stated belief. It should be noted that the participants’ belief about ELLs were inconsistent with research, specifically as it pertained to the role of entry point into FSL programming and also the belief that the students could not manage developing proficiencies in multiple languages simultaneously (e.g. Mady, 2014, 2017).

As it pertained to students with LDs, the fact that the participants focused on the nature of the disability as a factor in the decision-making in several of the responses reveals some areas of concern for ensuring that students with LDs are included in the FSL classroom. First, Jordan, Lindsay, and Stanovich (1997) found that when teachers held a belief that a disability was “fixed” or otherwise a defined, unchanging trait about a student, the teacher was less likely to interact with the student in a way that was cognitively engaging or otherwise conveyed that the student was “capable” of learning in that situation; thus, such perceptions of LDs in relation to FSL programming could mean that the teacher is not engaging with the student in the way that is needed to develop proficiency in the language. Second, as Arnett (2003, 2010) found, many of the recommended strategies for responding to the needs of students with LDs have been found to be regularly implemented in CF settings, in particular, as a part of the general classroom pedagogy. Thus, the fact that the participants were unaware of the match between the students’ needs and the general classroom practices could make it a challenge for students with LDs to be included.

All of these research points should be considered as components of both initial and in-service learning opportunities. Yet, as has been found in other considerations of influences on a candidate's belief systems (e.g., Graber, 1995; Mady & Arnett, 2015), formal knowledge only trumps experience so much, and if inclusive teaching is truly a goal, it could be worthwhile to provide ongoing dialogue and monitoring of how teachers' experiences influence their belief systems as they advance into their careers.

## NOTES

1. In Canada, French immersion programs provide students opportunities to learn the target language by being taught grade-level content in French for at least 50% of their instructional time.
2. CF programs in Canada are the most common type of French Second Language programs, and offer French as a "subject" of instruction from 20-90 minutes at a time, some days or every day of the week.
3. Within the context of this article, "perceptions" and "beliefs" will be used interchangeably to denote the value systems and thoughts of the participants.
4. Which FSL context (immersion, core, extended, intensive): 1. Is best for English Learner Students? Why? 2. Is worst for ELLs? Why? 3. Is best for students with LD? Why? 4. Is worst for students with LD? Why?
5. Intensive French is a newer program model for FSL study in Canada and is replacing CF as an option in many districts. The program features a 5-month "intensive" literacy-based teaching block exclusively in French in Grades 5 or 6 to "launch" the students' language study, followed by annual classes that are timetabled similarly to CF.

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