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## **Chapter 13: Early immersion in minority language contexts (Canada and Finland)**

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### **Abstract**

This chapter discusses early immersion in a minority language in two bilingual countries, Canada and Finland. In Canada, immersion in the minority language, French, has been implemented since the mid-1960s and Finland introduced immersion in Swedish in the mid-1980s. As the core features of immersion education evolve in tandem with second language education theorizing (particularly as it relates to the interdependence and hybridity between and within languages), so too does the need to revisit the relevance of these core features across different contexts. In this vein, this chapter compares how changing socio-political realities in the two contexts have influenced program development in relation to three emergent areas: learner diversity, learning exceptionalities, and teacher training. It further highlights critical points of convergence and divergence in program development in the two contexts, showing that Finland and Canada have contributed to the field of early language education with complementary research findings related to a common guiding principle in both contexts - immersion for all. The two contexts, thus, have much to learn from one another in order to reach collective gains. The chapter ends with a call for ethnographic research to decipher how relevant policy statements are put into practice in early years classrooms, as well as continued empirical attention to the evolving reconceptualization of the prototypical immersion learner and teacher. Such consideration will work to optimize the universal access to immersion that is desired in Canada, Finland and other minority language immersion contexts.

**Keywords:** early immersion education, core program features, linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, learning exceptionalities, immersion teacher training

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### Abstract

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## **1 Introduction**

Immersion education is a form of bilingual education that aims for learners to achieve additive bilingualism and biliteracy, i.e., learning a second language while maintaining the first language (Lambert, 1975; Fortune & Tedick, 2008). Fortune and Tedick (2008) divide immersion education programs into three branches or program types: one-way immersion, two-way (dual) immersion and indigenous immersion. One-way immersion typically targets children who are dominant in a majority language and who want to learn a foreign or a second language through immersion. Conversely, two-way (dual) language immersion is for majority and minority language children who want to learn each other's languages.

Indigenous immersion programs enroll children with Indigenous heritage with the goal of

revitalizing their endangered languages and cultures. This chapter compares two programs of one-way second language immersion - early French immersion (FI) in Canada and early Swedish immersion (SI) in Finland. We begin with a brief description of the history of immersion programming in each context. Then, we move to outlining the main theoretical concepts associated with each early immersion program, leading to a discussion of the similar and different ways in which early immersion has evolved amidst changing socio-political realities in both contexts. Finally, the chapter addresses some critical issues and topics where the two contexts could learn from each other.

### ***1.1 Early immersion in Canada***

French immersion programming began in the province of Quebec (Canada) more than 50 years ago. Canada is a country with two official languages (English and French), both allocated equal status throughout the federal administration and Canadian society (see Government of Canada, 2005). French is often considered a minority language in terms of numbers of speakers throughout the country (i.e., 10.4 million Canadians speak French compared to 30 million who speak English – see Statistics Canada, 2018a). In Canada, the majority Francophone community is associated with the province of Quebec, while minority Francophone communities are found in other provinces and territories throughout Canada. FI is a type of French as a Second Language (FSL) program where half or more of the subjects (mathematics, social sciences, visual arts, etc.) are taught in French to learners for whom French is not a first language (L1). Throughout the chapter, we distinguish between research focusing exclusively on FI and findings from studies of FSL programs that included FI stakeholders . In the 1960s, the province of Quebec was undergoing significant changes, one of which was the increasingly important place occupied by French in sectors once dominated by English. This created a socio-political environment conducive to the

development of more intense FSL programming. English-speaking parents concerned about these changes and their children's disappointing results in the regular French language program (i.e., Core French [CF] - daily 20 to 40 minute classes) decided to take action by asking their school board to have their children taught French differently. FI was created in response to the disappointment of many English-speaking parents living in an environment where French was a majority language. According to these parents, the performance of their children enrolled in CF programs was not sufficient enough to integrate effectively into Quebec society in general and eventually into the labour market. And so, in 1965, the first early years FI class in Canada was created in a kindergarten class (children of ages 4-5) - an experimental project conducted under the supervision of university researchers (Lambert & Tucker, 1972).

Since then, FI has rapidly spread to other areas of Canada where French is a minority language (unlike in Quebec, where French is the majority language). At present, FI programs are offered in all Canadian provinces and territories (except Nunavut) in a context where English is the majority language. Enrolment in FI is on the rise - at present, over 11% of all eligible Canadian children are registered in the program (CPF, 2018). As well, FI is no longer aimed only at children whose L1 is English; in principle, it is open to all students regardless of their L1.

FI formats vary across Canada – it can be one-way total immersion (if all subjects are offered in French - which was the case when FI first started in Quebec) or one-way partial immersion (if some subjects are taught in French). The age when children begin immersion also varies - “early immersion” begins in kindergarten (ages 4–5 years old), with learners accumulating up to 7,000 hours of French by the end of high school. “Middle immersion” designates a Grade 4 start (ages 9–10 years old), with students accumulating up to 5,000

hours of French by the end of high school. Finally, “late immersion” denotes a Grade 6 or 7 start (ages 11–13 years old) and an accumulation of approximately 3,500 hours by the end of high school.

FI in Canada has been the subject of much research since its inception in 1965 and several studies have demonstrated the linguistic, academic and cognitive benefits (Bournot-Trites & Reeder, 2001; Lazaruk, 2007; Turnbull, Lapkin, & Hart, 2001). It has been characterized as a "quiet language revolution" (Stern, 1984, p. 506) and an innovative and successful way of learning FSL. While the studies above link to FI programming more broadly, it is still relevant to discussions of early immersion programming specifically. In line with the focus of this book on early years education, we have purposefully included research on the early FI program. Remaining references across different FI formats are integral to our overall analysis of early immersion programming in both contexts.

In summary, more and more Canadian school boards are offering FI as an option for children to learn French in contexts where it holds both official- and minority-language status. This immersion language education program format has been evolving in Canada, while also being adopted in other language contexts, such as Finland, which we describe in more detail below.

### ***1.2 Early immersion in Finland***

In 1987, immersion education was introduced in Finland. Like in Canada, sociolinguistic reasons were fundamental to its introduction. Finland is a country with two official languages (Finnish and Swedish), both with equal status (Constitution of Finland, 731/1999); however, Swedish is often considered a minority language in terms of numbers of speakers only being 5.2 % of the total population in the country (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019). The use of the two languages in the Finnish society includes linguistically different geographical areas

where the balance between the majority and minority language varies regionally. The Finnish-Swedish bilingual municipalities are situated in the western and southern coastal areas of Finland and many of these municipalities offer Swedish immersion (SI) programs for Finnish-speakers. A recent survey on immersion education shows that SI has remained an educational program offered only in these bilingual municipalities (Sjöberg, Mård-Miettinen, Skinnari, & Peltoniemi, 2018). It is worth noting that while SI is the focus of this chapter as it is the main immersion program in Finland, some Swedish-dominant municipalities also offer Finnish immersion for Swedish-speakers. Immersion in the three Sami languages spoken in Finland (most often labelled “language nests”) are also offered in the northern part of Finland for language revitalization purposes (Sjöberg et al., 2018; Äärelä, 2016).

In an effort to optimize the bilingualism of Finland in educational contexts in the late 1980s, Professor Christer Laurén (Professor of Swedish at the University of Vaasa) initiated the importing of Canadian immersion to Finland. Prior to that time, Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking children were educated monolingually in separate schools. Laurén pushed for the implementation of immersion in his own bilingual municipality and his initiative was supported by local politicians and parents. Later on, SI programs spread to other bilingual municipalities in Finland at the particular urging of parent advocates looking to maximize early Swedish learning opportunities beyond what regular language arts teaching was providing. These parents felt that the children needed to know both languages well, particularly for their future studies and the job market (Björklund, Mård-Miettinen, & Savijärvi, 2014). Today, SI is offered in 7% of all municipalities, most of which are bigger cities that populate about 60% of inhabitants in Finland and which all are bilingual municipalities. SI has approximately 4,500 students, representing about 0.5% of the total eligible student population; in some specific municipalities, immersion students make up 10–50% of the student population (Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011; Sjöberg et al., 2018). In

many municipalities, the demand for immersion is greater than the supply. Research has shown that SI is a program that renders good results, both in terms of multilingual skills, content learning, and multilingual awareness as will be shown in this chapter (Björklund, Mård-Miettinen, & Turpeinen, 2007, Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011).

The immersion model implemented in Finland is one-way early total immersion that starts with 100 % of instruction time in Swedish, beginning in pre-primary education (ages 3–6 years old). In primary school (Grades 1–6; ages 7–12 years old), Finnish is gradually introduced from Grade 1 onward, reaching a proportion of 50% of instructional time by the end of Grade 9 (14–15 years old). Starting in Grade 2 (ages 7–8 years old), children are exposed to at least one additional foreign language (e.g. Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011).

Notably, in Finland, the pre-primary years of immersion have received considerable attention among researchers (especially in the early 2000s) to describe and develop pre-primary pedagogy in SI. This research focus has resulted in several studies highlighting linguistic and pedagogical issues important in pre-primary SI (e.g., the quality of strategies implemented to elicit consistent student use of the target language). Also, connections between research and in-service teacher training have led to several action-research projects completed by pre-primary immersion staff (e.g. Björklund, Kaskela-Nortamo, Kvist, Lindfors, & Tallgård, 2005; Ikäheimo, Hiitola, & Mård-Miettinen, 2010). Findings from both sources have contributed considerably to the improved quality of pre-primary SI, resulting in Finnish immersion students entering primary school SI with strong language skills (Björklund et al., 2014).

In summary, research results pointing toward enhanced multilingual awareness and good multilingual skills from an early age have made SI programs popular in the bilingual parts of Finland where early Swedish learning opportunities are important for children

belonging to the Finnish-speaking majority. The extent to which this compares with FI in Canada will be discussed below, after identifying the main theoretical concepts guiding our analysis of early immersion programming in both contexts.

## **2 Main theoretical concepts**

Over 20 years ago, Swain and Johnson (1997) articulated a list of eight core features distinguishing immersion programs from all other bilingual education models. These characteristics were meant to denote the uniqueness of an immersion program's overall objective (i.e., additive bilingualism), context (i.e., L2 exposure confined to the classroom; classroom culture is that of the local L1 community), anticipated pedagogy (i.e., L2 as the medium of instruction; overt support for students' L1), curriculum design (i.e., immersion curriculum parallels local L1 curriculum) and profiles of typical teachers (i.e., proficient in students' L1 and the L2) and students (i.e., similar/limited levels of L2 proficiency upon entrance to the program). While several features have recognizable links to existing theory on second language acquisition, including maximized use of the target language (e.g., Krashen, 1981; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975), others are more explicitly linked to the socio-political context in which immersion programs are implemented, including the status of the target language being acquired in the immediate community and the prototypical teachers and students implicated in its implementation.

In 2005, Swain and Lapkin revisited the overall integrity of these core features in light of the changing Canadian FI student population in particular, concluding that while some remain true, "others need to change to reflect the changing demographic of large cities in North America and in multilingual, multiethnic nature of many immersion programs" (p. 181). In response, they advocated for the reconsideration of the original, uniform portrait of the FI learner as being a monolingual anglophone. Instead, they argued that the core features

of any immersion program must acknowledge that the immersion language might not be students' L2 (but rather their third or fourth language), and consequently, that the classroom culture and pedagogy must recognize immersion students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and more overtly support the development of their home languages (and not just the language of schooling).

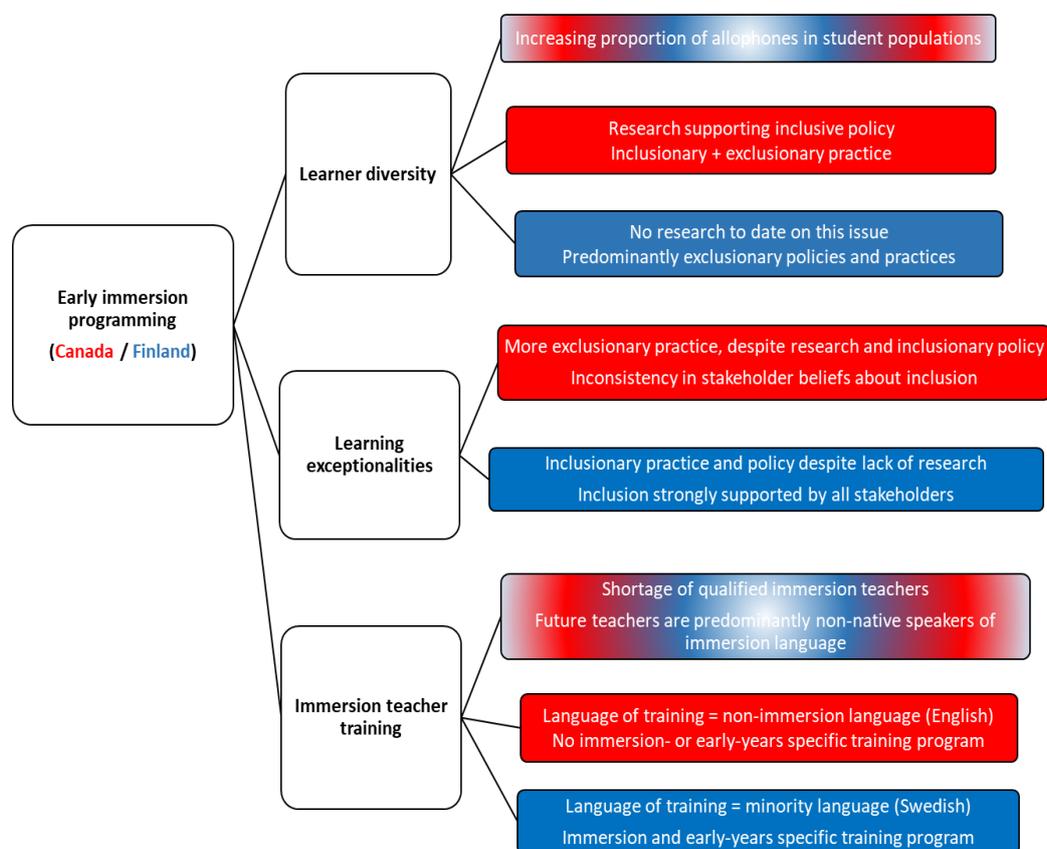
Certainly, these changes are supported by recent developments in second language education theorizing that advocate for more interdependence and hybridity between and within languages (e.g., Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia, 2009). Still, while these types of changes to the core features of FI remain relevant in the Canadian context, consideration of their applicability to the Finnish SI context is what motivated the following discussion of other areas where the two countries converge and diverge around immersion program delivery and overall pedagogy, particularly in the early immersion context. In the sections that follow, we outline three central areas where early immersion education has changed - or needs to change - in order to respond to changing sociolinguistic and socio-political realities in both contexts.

### **3 Major contributions**

The following sections elaborate on the realities across three specific areas of FI and SI (i.e., diversity in the immersion learner population; supporting immersion learners with learning exceptionalities; and immersion teacher training) to offer a snapshot of how socio-political realities in Canada and Finland present themselves in similar and different ways across both minority language early immersion education systems. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the main similarities and differences that will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

[Figure 1 near here]

**Figure 1:** Comparative Thematic Map on main similarities and differences across French immersion in Canada and Swedish immersion in Finland concerning learner diversity, learning exceptionalities and immersion teacher training



### *3.1 Diversity in the early immersion learner population*

Differing rates of growth in learner diversity in Canada and Finland has led to divergent pedagogies related to the integration of children’s linguistic and cultural repertoires in immersion education. In Canada, updated statistics show that the 2005 recommendations put forth by Swain and Lapkin are still relevant to this context, with 21.9% of the Canadian

population being comprised of immigrants and over 70% of immigrants reported having a mother tongue other than the two official languages (referred to henceforth in both Canadian and Finnish contexts as “allophones”) (Statistics Canada, 2018b). The proportion of immigrant children is also on the rise across Canadian school boards, which has implications for FI education. Canadian research has shown that allophone children and their families are motivated to learn French and that children can achieve high levels of French proficiency in FSL programs, including FI (e.g., Dagenais & Jacquet, 2000; Hart, Lapkin, & Swain, 1988; Mady, 2013, 2014, 2015). In terms of early FI in particular, Reyes and Vignola (2015) synthesized existing research in order to shed light on the diverse dimensions of the allophone learner experience in FI. For example, studies conducted with elementary school allophones enrolled in FI programs have shown that their L1 (defined here as the family language[s] commonly used before entering the school system) has a very significant influence on their acquisition of additional languages. Specifically, the presence of L1 literacy skills in reading and writing would appear to facilitate the acquisition of L2 and L3 (Swain & Lapkin, 1991; Bild & Swain, 1989). On the other hand, the absence or gradual loss of L1 proficiency would appear to result in the loss of knowledge and strategies that are useful for additional language learning and may limit the chances of crosslinguistic transfer that could fill gaps in individuals’ language systems (Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Cenoz, Hufeisen, & Jessner, 2001). Allophone FI children also face a complex, yet unique, learning situation - they are integrated into a language education system in a kind of double immersion when they have to learn Canada's two official languages almost simultaneously (Taylor, 1992). This can pose a challenge for those in early language education contexts in particular - for example, allophone children in early FI have to wait three or four years, in some programs, before they can take English classes in school. Essentially, allophone learners in early FI seek to achieve an appropriate level of French proficiency (commonly their L3) for

professional and educational purposes within a bilingual program that does not necessarily seek to support additive trilingualism in any official way (Reyes & Vignola, 2015).

In Canada, allophone students do not always benefit from the same level of access to FSL programs as their Canadian-born peers, particularly when it comes to FI. Research has uncovered a tendency for allophone children of all ages to be excluded from FI programs, primarily because of their lack of English language proficiency (Mady & Turnbull, 2012; Taaffe, Maguire, & Pringle, 1996; Roy, 2015). Reyes and Vignola (2015) speculate that their exclusion could be due to FI teachers perceiving allophone students' L1 as an obstacle to learning French (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 1981). Such a non-encouraging attitude towards the L1 risks immersion teachers contributing to allophone learners' "subtractive trilingualism", that is, a progressive loss of the L1 (Olshtain & Nissim-Amitai, 2004). This attitude is contrary to findings from Dagenais, Day, and Toohey (2006) showing the benefits over the long-term (from age 7 onward) of FI teachers openly promoting allophone reliance on L1 linguistic and cultural resources to optimize additional language learning.

With regards to Finland, the socio-political landscape looks somewhat different when it comes to the diversity of children in early immersion program. While the proportion of allophones in Finland (i.e., citizens with mother tongues other than Finnish, Swedish or the three indigenous Sami languages spoken in Finland) has increased from 0.2 % in 1980 to 7.1 % in 2019 (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018; Official Statistics of Finland, 2019), survey findings show that the SI learner population closely resembles what it was when immersion was introduced in the 1980s (Björklund et al., 2014). SI education still typically addresses monolingual Finnish-speaking children with no previous knowledge of Swedish prior to entering immersion at the age of 3–6 years old.

In summary, the two countries with minority language immersion programs have a slightly different policy and practice regarding immersion programming in relation to the growing linguistic and cultural diversity in the country. Despite Canadian research documenting the potential for positive results when integrating allophone children in FI, exclusionary practices are still prevalent. In Finland, the practice of limiting allophone children's access to SI is widespread. In the following we will discuss the inclusion of children with learning exceptionalities to SI and FI.

### ***3.2 Supporting early immersion learners with learning exceptionalities***

As to children with learning exceptionalities, inclusionary policies are similar in the two contexts, but analysis of practices in immersion education in Canada and Finland reveal a noteworthy divergence. In Finland, inclusion is strongly supported and there is an obligation for all education providers to meet every child's right to receive support (FNBE, 2011). SI is often characterized as a program for all types of learners, meaning that support for learners with learning exceptionalities is integrated directly into the program (e.g. Bergroth, 2016). Consequently, the drop-out rate in SI has always been very low. Despite this explicit commitment to inclusion in early immersion, research on learners with learning exceptionalities in SI is lacking.

Existing immersion researchers in Finland, like Bergström (2002), emphasize that teaching methods used in immersion may be favourable for children with learning exceptionalities. For example, an immersion teacher ought to ensure learners' understanding rather than taking it for granted when planning and delivering instruction, which may sometimes happen in L1 instruction. Bergström believes that "it is above all the selection of teaching methods – independently of program – that can help pupils with different qualifications to cope" (2002, p. 304). For example, her research findings showed that

learners with reading and writing difficulties benefit from early oral communication-based introduction to Swedish rather than a focus on writing and overall accuracy as is the tendency in regular language-arts teaching starting in school.

Also, the method of working with multidisciplinary thematic modules in immersion, which integrate development of content and language knowledge may help children with learning exceptionalities to grasp the content. Another factor often highlighted in SI literature is that the early introduction of Finnish literacy helps to identify whether or not the source of the possible problem is Swedish-based or not (Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011). Despite the message that children with learning exceptionalities are welcome in SI, Bergström (2002) encourages enrolment decisions to be made on a case-by-case basis.

In Finland, both SI researchers and practitioners highlight the importance of treating SI learners as bilinguals when identifying and supporting children with possible learning exceptionalities (Bergström, 2002). Drawing on her experience as a special education teacher in SI, Eklund (2007) found that early intervention and testing in both languages (Swedish and Finnish) helps to identify the source of learners' challenges and to provide subsequent individualized support. Biliteracy is systematically promoted in early SI, where kindergarten teachers support children's emergent reading and writing with various language awareness activities in Swedish, and parents are encouraged to facilitate similar activities at home in Finnish.

In Canada, inclusion in FI is widely supported in principle. On a national level, the advocacy group Canadian Parents for French (CPF) (CPF, 2018) has long promoted universal access for students to learn French via the specific FSL program that meets their individual goals and needs. Provinces have also identified inclusion as a central principle guiding FSL curricular reform and professional development (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015;

Alberta Education, 2009). Provincial efforts in this regard have tended to focus on ensuring that children with learning exceptionalities can access FSL programs and identifying the specific supports they need to succeed once enrolled. Although research to date on inclusion in Canadian FSL programs (including FI) is not necessarily lacking, the extent to which research findings are informing everyday practice in early FI programs still has yet to be determined.

In terms of access, studies have documented the trend of children with learning exceptionalities being systematically counselled out of FI out of “fear of compounding their problems” (CPF, 2012). In fact, despite policies advocating for inclusion across the curriculum, excluding children from French class (including immersion) is permitted in practice, making it the only school subject with such status (Arnett, 2013). In this regard, Arnett (2013) documents the potential influence of educational leaders and parents on ending and/or perpetuating exemption and transfer policies in FI specifically, and FSL generally. For example, she claims there is great diversity in the beliefs and practices of educational leaders in the absence of official policy promoting inclusion in FI - “some insist upon its practice, others may go against it, even if the teacher is in favour of it, and others may leave the decision up to the parents” (p. 112). Such variance was also reported by parents - some were shown to seek enrollment in FI as a way to separate their children from others with special needs who are often moved to the English stream. The FI context is also seen by parents as an environment where the teacher is less challenged by a wider range of needs, meaning their child may receive more attention. In Mady and Arnett (2009), after beginning the early FI program at age 6, a parent unwillingly ended up transferring their child with special needs out of FI to protect them from teachers who held unfavourable attitudes toward their inclusion.

The majority of research on inclusionary practices in FI has focused broadly on teachers at all levels and documents how children of all ages with learning exceptionalities can succeed and thrive in FSL when provided with appropriate teacher support (e.g., Arnett, 2010; LeBouthillier, 2015). In the case of early FI in particular, Wise (2011) described what she characterizes as a typical occurrence in early FI programs - inclusionary practices that are deemed to be sufficient to support an early FI student (between the ages of 4-6 years old) with learning difficulties are only made available in English but not in French. In fact, FSL teachers have identified the provision of such support in the French language as being a major challenge given their lack of professional learning opportunities related to inclusionary practices in FI (Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006).

Essentially – the aforementioned research provides evidence that learning strategies used in inclusive classrooms are useful for all FI students, and not just those with special needs. However, teachers' beliefs and their ability to implement such strategies determines their ability to effectively include learners with special needs in FSL. For example, Arnett (2013) observed a reluctance on the part of FI teachers in early FI to provide cross-linguistic support to learners with learning exceptionalities.

In summary, Finland and Canada have approached the inclusion of children with learning exceptionalities in early immersion in different ways. Finland has explicit inclusion policies that have led to supporting inclusionary practices and positive attitudes among SI teachers, despite the lack of research in this area. Canada, on the other hand, has research supporting the inclusion of learners with exceptionalities in FI but this is not reflected in practice. Inclusion policy tends to focus on access to immersion, and there is also inconsistency across stakeholder groups in terms of beliefs about inclusion in FI. In the

following section, the two early immersion contexts are contrasted as to early immersion teacher training.

### ***3.3 Early immersion teacher training***

Teacher training offered in Canada and in Finland has not been able to meet the need for qualified teachers for early immersion programs in the two contexts. In Canada, teacher training programs fall under provincial jurisdiction and are grouped into two categories: concurrent and consecutive (Ullman & Hainsworth, 1991). Program content typically has two components: a theoretical part (university courses) and a practical part (practicum). In the concurrent model, students are enrolled in both an undergraduate program (B.A. or B.Sc.) and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program. This type of program can last four or five years. At the end of the program, they receive two diplomas. In the consecutive model, students enroll in a B.Ed. after completing their undergraduate program. In this case, the B.Ed. program usually lasts one to two years. When applying to Faculties of Education, they must decide whether they want to become an elementary (which includes kindergarten) or high school teacher, which dictates the teacher training program they select.

In Canada, future FI teachers are enrolled in FSL teacher training programs preparing them to teach not only in FI, but also in other FSL programs like CF and Extended French (i.e., where French serves as the language of instruction in at least one other subject). The programs address native speakers of French as well as non-native speakers with high level of proficiency in French. FSL teacher training programs commonly offer courses that address a wide range of topics, including theories of L2 instruction, FSL instruction in Canada and in the province where the candidate will be certified (including analysis and familiarity with Ministry of Education policies and curriculum documents), L2 methodology and evaluation, among others. Generally, the language of instruction in FSL teacher training programs is

English, since candidates are being prepared to teach in English school boards; however, French is ideally used for the component that deals with FSL instruction itself. According to Ullman and Hainsworth (1991), there are significant differences in the length of practica placements across Faculties of Education, but the average length is approximately eight weeks per academic year. Since future FI teachers are trained for all FSL programs, they can do their practicum placement in different combinations of FSL programs as well as in the regular English classroom.

Since the turn of the century, Ontario school boards have faced significant challenges recruiting and retaining FSL teachers (Karsenti, Collin, Villeneuve, Dumouchel, & Roy, 2008). According to Lapkin, MacFarlane, and Vandergrift (2006), there is a chronic shortage of qualified FSL teachers in Canada, coupled with a worrisome trend of attrition of FSL teachers within five years of entering the profession. The shortage of FI teachers in particular results in significant pressure on boards to hire enough teachers to reach the necessary targets to sustain their optional FI programs (Veilleux & Bournot-Trites, 2005). Several reasons have been offered to account for the shortage of FI teachers in particular. FI programs in Canada require many more teachers than other FSL programs, with at least 50% of class time spent in French. In terms of supply and demand, there has been a steady increase in demand for FI programming (CPF, 2017). In Ontario, the majority of school boards offer FI programs – since 2012, FI enrolment has increased by almost 15% in several suburban school districts (Ontario Public School Boards' Association [OPSBA], 2018). There is also a gap between the supply of teacher candidates trained to teach in FI and the demand. One of the reasons for this gap is the difficulty in attracting candidates who have the level of French proficiency necessary to teach in FI (CPF, 2018).

The shortage of qualified immersion teachers is also apparent in Finland, affecting the spread of SI in the country. The shortage was highlighted in the Governmental National Language Strategy in 2012 (Valtioneuvoston kanslia, 2012) as well as in the stakeholder interviews for national immersion surveys conducted in 2011 and 2017 (Kangasvieri, Miettinen, Palviainen, Saarinen, & Ala-Vähälä, 2012; Sjöberg et al., 2018) and in other reports and articles dealing with immersion teacher training (Peltoniemi, 2015). Several reasons have been offered to explain this shortage – intermittent availability of teacher training programs for immersion, universities not having offered training for teachers of all levels of immersion education, and graduates of immersion teacher training starting to work as teachers in mainstream rather than in SI (Peltoniemi, 2015; Sjöberg et al., 2018).

In terms of the availability of teacher training, the development of a permanent pre-service teacher training program for SI has proven to be challenging. Since 1998, five programs were launched in succession; only two remain active (i.e., Åbo Akademi University - see Sjöberg et al., 2018). Finland has separate teacher training programs for kindergarten teachers (a three-year Bachelor's degree program), primary school (classroom) teachers (Grades 1–6) and secondary school (subject) teachers (Grades 7–9) (a five-year Master's degree program). One of the two existing immersion teacher training programs is for kindergarten teachers and the other one is for primary school teachers. The kindergarten teacher training program includes general courses on kindergarten pedagogy as well as specific courses preparing them for immersion (i.e., courses on individual multilingual development, multilingual pedagogy and immersion pedagogy) and several periods of practicum in immersion kindergarten classrooms. However, it remains difficult to meet the demand for qualified immersion kindergarten teachers with only one training program in the country.

Since their inception – and in order to recruit a broad range of candidates – pre-service immersion teacher training programs in Finland have mainly addressed the majority-speaking population and recruited non-native speakers of Swedish with good Swedish skills, while also accepting L1 speakers of Swedish (Björklund et al., 2007). This has presented challenges both in terms of admission policy as well as programming. Prior to 2018, candidates' language skills were tested before they entered the program. Now, language skills are no longer tested before admission due to the changed national admission policy to Finnish universities to avoid admission examination. Instead, universities are encouraged to base admission on the Finnish national matriculation examination certificate earned at the end of upper-secondary school. Presently, the level of competence needed to enter immersion teacher training is therefore based on the results of the language exams of the Finnish and Swedish exams of this matriculation examination. Minimum admission in this respect is equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level B1 (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018a). Efforts are made to further develop candidates' language skills both inside (i.e., the language of teaching in the program is Swedish and Swedish language courses are offered within the program) and outside the classroom (i.e., students are encouraged to actively participate in Swedish activities organized in the highly bilingual city of Vaasa during their studies). Furthermore, in the existing programs, all the studies are completed in Swedish.

In summary, teacher training for early immersion in the two contexts follows the national system. Canada recruits both native and non-native speakers of French to French immersion teacher training and trains them mainly in English in a general teacher training program for teachers in all levels and for all programs with French. In contrast, Finland explicitly recruits non-native speakers of Swedish, trains them mainly in Swedish, and provides a separate training program for kindergarten teachers in immersion with a number of

immersion-specific courses. Both contexts share a challenge of educating enough teachers for immersion education to respond to the increasing demands of program expansion and to maintain the quality of the programs as will be shown in the following sections.

## **4 New projects**

The following sections highlight recent developments within Finland (SI) and Canada (FI) connected to each of the three areas described above (i.e., diversity in the learner population; supporting learners with learning exceptionalities; and immersion teacher training).

### ***4.1 Finland***

Diversity and inclusion as well as availability and training of teachers are addressed in some of recent Finnish research and policy documents in SI. In 2014, the national core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education was renewed and implemented in kindergartens and schools from August 2016. The notion that there is diversity among learners as to their abilities and linguistic and cultural backgrounds in Finland is supported in the national curriculum guidelines by obliging education providers to define the target SI population and describe selection criteria for immersion (FNBE, 2014). In her research on the writing of the bilingual education section (including SI) of the new national core curriculum, Bergroth (2016) reported that curriculum designers addressed issues of a prototypical immersion child

from at least two different angles: learners with learning exceptionalities and multilingual backgrounds.

As to learners with learning exceptionalities, Bergroth (2016) reinforces the discourse of SI being a program for all. The national policy document also emphasized the need to consider the bilingualism of the SI learner when deciding upon support: “the working group added a short paragraph [to the national curriculum] stating that the right to receive support for growth and learning extends to those in bilingual education and that bilingual language acquisition needs to be taken into account when determining the need for support and the implementation of supportive measures.” (Bergroth, 2016, p. 98). This indicates that inclusion and the model of three-tiered support for learning (general support, intensified support, special support) (Thuneberg, Vainikainen, Ahtiainen, Lintuvuori, Salo, & Hautamäki, 2013) used in Finnish kindergartens and schools is also supported in the policy-level documents dealing with SI. Notably, curricular guidance about the suitability of SI to all types of learners is implied, but not explicit: “Leaving the issue of testing with regard to immersion unexpressed was our [=the group that designed the curriculum for bilingual education in Finland] strongest way of communicating that in early total immersion, testing for language skills, language aptitude, intelligence, social skills, or other characteristics in an attempt to close doors to possibly struggling students is not recommended” (Bergroth, 2016, p. 99). This might be due to the lack of research on this issue in Finland. Implicit guidelines, together with the lack of research on this issue, might be some of the reasons why municipal immersion stakeholders (teachers, principals, administrators) expressed conflicting views about the suitability of immersion to all types of learners in the 2017 national immersion survey (Sjöberg et al., 2018). Some municipalities communicated that they welcome all learners to SI whereas others don’t accept children with learning exceptionalities (Sjöberg et al., 2018).

Bergroth (2016) further demonstrates how the changing population structure in Finland was addressed when designing the new national curriculum guidelines: "Diversity in the immersion student population was discussed briefly, but at the moment the immersion population in Finland is not yet so diverse that immersion-specific adjustments are needed in the curriculum." (p. 98). A recent survey shows that the immersion population in Finland is not exceptionally diverse: language skills in Finnish and lack of them in Swedish are used as an overall selection criteria to the majority of the SI programs in Finland (Sjöberg et al., 2018). This means that a child with immigrant background needs to know Finnish prior entering most of the SI programs in Finland. However, stakeholder interviews indicated that in most municipalities, enrolment decisions for SI are made on an individual basis, meaning that even children with other language backgrounds may be accepted to SI (Sjöberg et al., 2018). Furthermore, in some municipalities the interviewed stakeholders expressed a possible need to revisit this particular enrolment criterion due to the changing linguistic reality in the municipality (Sjöberg et al., 2018). One reason why allophones are becoming more prevalent in the context of SI might be that they tend to live in bigger cities and, thus, live in those municipalities with SI.

Despite the current absence of children with multiple language backgrounds in SI, the program as a whole is characterized as having a multilingual orientation (Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011; Nissilä & Björklund, 2014). In Finland, children are obliged to study at least two additional languages during their schooling (e.g., English, German, French, etc.), which commonly results in multiple languages being present even in the SI context. In this way, a multilingual orientation in SI refers to the introduction of multiple languages within the program and research on multilingualism in SI, thus, deals with majority-language children learning and using multiple languages that they have learned during early immersion. Even though SI learners have been shown good results in all the languages they study within the

program and to use their languages even outside immersion (Björklund & Mård-Miettinen, 2011; Mård-Miettinen & Björklund, 2019), Nissilä and Björklund (2014) found that each language within the program tends to be “evaluated separately and language-specifically with a monolingual native speaker as the norm” (p. 298), leading them to call for more cross-linguistic perspectives for early immersion programs in Finland.

As indicated in the previous section, the challenges in offering consistent teacher training programs for SI has led to a significant shortage of qualified immersion teachers in Finland. In the recent immersion survey from 2017 (Sjöberg et al., 2018), stakeholders explained that the teacher shortage is not only preventing them from expanding their immersion programs, but it is also jeopardizing the quality of the program. The stakeholders reported, for example, that most of the unqualified teachers were neither able to deliver or develop high-quality immersion teaching due primarily to a lack of language skills and/or knowledge of appropriate immersion pedagogy for SI identified in research (e.g. Björklund, Mård-Miettinen, & Savijärvi, 2014). This had burdensome implications for qualified teachers who were then responsible for mentoring their unqualified peers while developing the program on their own. Furthermore, even though there is an obvious need for in-service SI training in Finland, not all teachers reported being able to participate due to tough economic situations in the kindergartens and schools and the restricted availability of substitute immersion teachers.

#### ***4.2 Canada***

A recent research synthesis found that since 2000, the vast majority of research conducted in K-12 FSL contexts has focused specifically on the FI program (Arnott, Masson, Knouzi, & Lapkin, 2017; Masson, Arnott, & Lapkin, 2018). New projects in this regard have yielded

noteworthy findings related to each of the three areas of FI focused on in this chapter, with specific mention of implications for early FI where applicable.

Although trends show a promising increase in the physical inclusion of allophones and students with learning exceptionalities in FI (e.g., Toronto District School Board, 2015; Mady, 2017), ongoing research documenting stakeholder beliefs continues to highlight the evolving nuances of this apparent shift toward inclusion. For example, Mady (2016) found that while Canadian kindergarten teachers did not promote the exclusion of allophones from FI, they still felt it was a “less desirable program” for this child population (p. 261). Administrators have also been shown to consider “home language maintenance as the responsibility of the home” (Mady & Masson, 2018, p. 82).

Interestingly, Canadian FSL teachers, among them FI teachers, seem to be more supportive than their English mainstream counterparts of including allophones and students with learning exceptionalities in their classes (Bourgoin, 2016; Mady, 2016). Still, teacher candidates report their initial teacher training programs as still lacking in this regard (Mady & Arnett, 2015). This is despite the realities they are presented with during their practicum placements.

New projects are expanding our understanding of how allophones and children with learning exceptionalities are performing when included in FI programming. In the case of allophones, research continues to show their ability to outperform Canadian-born students, not only in French, but also in English (Mady, 2013, 2017). This trend has been noted at Grade 6 (Mady, 2015), but it has yet to have been examined at the kindergarten level. Possible explanations for this trend include motivation linked to the desire to develop their Canadian identity via French learning as well as a strong belief in the Canadian education system (Mady, 2018).

In regard to inclusion in FI, research has highlighted the potential for cross-linguistic transfer to be a central feature of inclusionary practices for children with learning exceptionalities in early FI. Some encouraging work in this regard can still be found, namely that of Wise and Chen (2015) who presented evidence for cross-linguistic transfer of phonological awareness, and subsequent findings showing that the gains experience by these same early FI students were maintained for two years thereafter (Wise, D'Angelo, & Chen, 2016).

Another theme of interest to researchers has been that of FI teacher training. Recently, the *Association canadienne des professionnels de l'immersion* (ACPI) conducted a pan-Canadian consultation with 887 professionals working in FI (teachers, administrators, university professors, etc.) to identify the reality, strengths, challenges, needs and perceptions of professionals working in FI (ACPI, 2018). Findings highlighted two issues specific to FI teacher training across both elementary and secondary levels, namely the generalized scarcity of qualified teachers and the variability in the teachers' level of French proficiency. In this regard, ACPI recommended that a targeted national promotion campaign be conducted with high school and university students to bolster consideration of FI teaching as a career choice, while also suggesting a teacher recruitment campaign across Canada and in French-speaking countries. With the increasing number of Canadian school boards offering early immersion in particular, empirical attention has yet to be paid to the distinct nature of L2 teaching at this level when considering teacher recruitment (Schwartz, 2018).

In response to the variability in French proficiency - which has been identified by other researchers as an area requiring empirical attention (Arnott & Vignola, 2018; Bayliss & Vignola, 2007; Day & Shapson, 1996; Flewelling, 1995) - ACPI proposed 15 suggestions for consideration. Suggestions implicating teacher training take the form of proposed certificates

(one in the L2 and the other in immersive teaching) to validate student teachers' efforts to develop their language skills in tandem with their FSL specialization. Another suggestion was to facilitate language skill development during initial training, which could take different forms (e.g., more courses delivered in French or a remedial course during which student teachers improve certain proficiency skills [i.e. writing], as documented in Bayliss & Vignola, 2007).

Along these lines, Arnott and Vignola (2018) highlighted the importance of "continued development of FI teacher candidates' language proficiency" (p. 322). They proposed the use of a professional language portfolio adapted from the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2018b) – a tool inspired by the CEFR. Findings showed that FI student teachers who completed a portfolio reflected on their own language skills and developing pedagogy, while also proposing ways to develop their autonomy and metacognition and establishing a plan of action for their continued language proficiency development (Arnott & Vignola, 2018). Such continued attention to language proficiency development is relevant considering updated data showing that the majority of FI teachers self-identify as non-native speakers of French (ACPI, 2018). Also, since statistics are showing that FI graduates are becoming FSL teachers, then the diversity of FSL teachers should also evolve to resemble the reality of the school population. As a consequence, the increase of non-native speakers of French among the student teachers' population seems obvious.

In summary, recent developments within Finland (SI) and Canada (FI) connected to diversity in the learner population in immersion education show a gradual move toward more inclusive policy and practices. In Finland, children with learning exceptionalities have long been welcomed into SI; but current research shows that the immersion population in Finland

is still not linguistically and culturally diverse. Still, linguistic and cultural diversity among SI learners is supported – albeit implicitly – in the new national curriculum guidelines for SI education. In Canada, promising new research results have resulted in a shift towards inclusion of both allophones and students with learning exceptionalities in FI. In both contexts, however, stakeholder views remain conflicted in regard to the suitability of immersion for all types of learners, meaning that even more research is needed on these issues. As for teacher education, recent research in both contexts continues to foreground the challenge of educating enough teachers for immersion education in order to maintain the quality of the programs. In Canada, research has called attention to the variability in FI teachers' level of French proficiency underlining a need to include continued language proficiency development as part of their immersion teacher training programs.

## **5 Critical issues and topics**

Points of convergence and divergence that emerge from the research presented above highlight critical topics where Finland and Canada could learn from one another's experiences and research findings, as well as noteworthy theoretical and empirical developments in other contexts. First, as shown in the previous sections, FI and SI programs were originally initiated as programs providing access to national minority languages (French in Canada and Swedish in Finland) when such access was not available to them in their homes. Traditionally, this referred to majority language speakers of English or Finnish in designated areas of each country. Immersion programming in both contexts started as local initiatives, growing quickly to national-level programs. Such expansion has resulted in debate around the suitability of immersion for all types of learners, and consequently, challenges to the original linguistic and cultural profile of a prototypical child in immersion education.

Despite similar starting points, FI and SI programs have encountered distinct socio-political realities, resulting in different realizations of the concept “immersion for all” across Canada and Finland. In Canada, significant immigration and general education policy promoting inclusion across all educational programs (including early years programming) has led to an emphasis on ensuring universal access to FI programs. In Finland, inclusion in SI has referred primarily to children with learning exceptionalities, as linguistic and cultural diversity has only recently become evident in the municipalities offering SI. This emphasis in the SI context in Finland has yielded noteworthy findings on biliteracy and cross-linguistic transfer as being central to inclusive pedagogy in immersion. Similar findings have only recently emerged in the Canadian context related to children with exceptionalities, but have been at the forefront of research on linguistic and cultural diversity in FI.

Valuing the entire linguistic repertoire of FI students has emerged as an important inclusionary practice in Canada, while the practice of identifying majority language knowledge (Finnish) as a criteria for inclusion in SI in Finland is only now being questioned in light of the diversifying population in urban centres offering SI. In Finland, existing research on multilingualism within SI focuses on majority-language SI children learning and using multiple languages within the immersion context; whereas corresponding research in Canada deals more with the emergent variety of linguistic backgrounds of immersion learners (both majority- and minority-language children). Certainly, research conducted in Canada showcasing that immigrant learners without majority language knowledge (English) can succeed in FI warrants the need for reconsideration of this criterion in the Finnish context. This could work to avoid the random nature of inclusionary practices that has been documented for years in Canada.

Overall, the areas of convergence and divergence around inclusionary practices in immersion show that Finland and Canada have much to learn from one another - particularly for SI on how to optimally integrate allophones in immersion, and for FI on how to introduce multiple languages within immersion to best support children with learning exceptionalities. Research in both contexts converges around the benefits of cross-linguistic transfer and overtly encouraging children to draw from linguistic and cultural knowledge in their repertoires while learning the target language. Such promotion aligns with recent theoretical and empirical work in the field of language education more broadly in regard to translanguaging (e.g., Garcia, 2009) and plurilingualism (e.g., Council of Europe, 2001, 2018a).

However, this area of convergence in our analysis brings about the critical topic of language status in early immersion, given recent warnings against the promotion of increased majority language use at the expense of minority languages in immersion programs (Ballinger, Lyster, Sterzuk, & Genesee, 2017). This is particularly relevant to our analysis, where cross-linguistic transfer seems to be promoted differently with allophones (often drawing from a minority language to learn another minority language); whereas language status does not matter as much when advocating for such transfer with learners with exceptionalities.

Much of the research summarized earlier highlights the potential for cross-linguistic transfer to be facilitated by linking as much to minority as majority language knowledge (i.e., English in the case of FI; and Finnish in the case of SI). If the ultimate objective of both SI and FI is to enhance the development of proficiency in the minority language (Swedish and French, respectively), then such socio-political issues need to be taken into account when realizing the principles of “immersion for all”. At the very least, the analysis presented here

aligns with Ballinger et al.'s (2017) call for immersion programs to simultaneously contextualize and weigh the risks and benefits of cross-linguistic transfer when both language status and the needs of the learner are taken into account.

As has been addressed above, another, common critical feature between the two contexts is the shortage of qualified immersion teachers, including those destined to teach in early language education programs. In Finland, this shortage has resulted in municipalities not initiating new immersion programs and a considerable number of families wanting immersion for their children not getting access to it (Sjöberg et al., 2018). In Canada, more and more school boards are offering - and sometimes mandating FI during the early years, despite the shortage of FSL teachers (e.g., Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2019) —. These developments in both contexts highlight how ensuring universal access for all students to immersion education comes with challenges. Generally, when immersion programs are made inclusive to all children, the content of teacher training programs should reflect this mandate. Canadian research has shown that at the moment, such information is lacking from existing education programs. Also, maintaining high-quality immersion programs requires there to be enough qualified teachers specialized in immersion education.

Debate around what constitutes a “qualified” immersion teacher is ongoing in the Canadian context, particularly in terms of the required level of French language proficiency. In this respect, there is an apparent convergence across Finland and Canada - teacher training in both contexts addresses mainly non-native speakers of the immersion language. However, Canada could learn from the Finnish teacher training context, particularly in terms of a specific focus on early FI and by offering more if not all courses in French to future FI teachers. It is something that had been highlighted by FI student teachers who participated in a study in which they stated that the increase of courses in French during their training

program would “more closely match their responsibilities for teaching the entire curriculum.” (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007, p. 390).

## **6 Future research directions**

The above section highlights a number of critical issues regarding the development of minority language immersion education in Canada and Finland. One potential area of future collaboration identified in this chapter links to the field of inclusion. As shown in the above sections, Finland and Canada have contributed to the field with research on slightly different aspects of inclusion (i.e., inclusion of allophones vs. inclusion of learners with exceptionalities), meaning that comparative research projects could be built around gaps in each individual context for the purposes of collective gains across both.

Furthermore, areas remain within the field of inclusion where new research to both contexts could be initiated. For example, there is a need for ethnographic research focusing on both allophones and children with learning exceptionalities to find out how relevant policy statements are put into practice in classrooms across both contexts, and to identify best practices to support immersion teachers, teacher educators, and immersion program decision-makers. This type of research could optimize equal access to minority language immersion education within as well as across both contexts.

Finally, research attention should be paid in both contexts to the extent to which the changing socio-political situation in immersion education has affected the prototypical immersion learner and teacher profiles. Discussion of the implications of reconceptualizing the prototypical immersion language learner (e.g., not always Canadian-born or speaker of English - see Waterhouse & Arnott, 2016; not always children with Finnish as mother tongue

or home language - see Sjöberg et al., 2018) and the prototypical immersion language teacher (e.g., no longer native-speakers of target language - Salvatori, 2007) is ongoing, and certainly warrants continued empirical attention across both contexts.

## **7 Conclusions**

This chapter has presented comparative points highlighting how changing socio-political realities in Canada and Finland have influenced early immersion programming in a minority language (French and Swedish, respectively) in both contexts. The comparison has been made across three specific areas that emerge from the research in the two contexts: diversity in the immersion population; supporting children with learning exceptionalities; and immersion teacher training. Critical points of convergence and divergence highlight areas for potential collaboration, particularly centred on what emerged as a common guiding principle in both contexts - immersion for all. This principle has presented significant challenges and insights that are crucial to ongoing immersion program development in Canada, Finland and other minority language immersion contexts.

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- Preparing teachers for early language education: Language teacher education and professional development by Gunhild Tomter Alstad

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