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# Qui suis-je: Discontinuity as part of teacher identity in Canadian French immersion

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*The scarcity of research on French immersion teachers' professional identity contrasts with the increasing popularity of French immersion programs in Canada and the concomitant need for French immersion teachers. This study explores the professional identity negotiation of four French immersion teachers in Alberta, Canada, with a focus on discontinuity. Semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face with the participants were analysed using dialogic narrative analysis. The findings highlight how discontinuity is occasioned by a change in knowledge about the French immersion teaching as a profession, encountering classroom realities, shifting one's values concerning second language learning and the emotions one experiences in moments of discontinuity. A negative change in emotion may encourage discontinuity in immersion teacher identity and teachers' understanding of themselves as second language learners. On the other hand, positive emotions underline the harboured passion for French and second language learning and may help re-align French immersion teacher identity to the sense of purpose teachers identified in their professional lives. The study concludes with a discussion of certain considerations arising from the data.*

**Keywords:** Canada, French immersion, professional identity, discontinuity, emotion, narrative analysis

## 1 Introduction

The inability to be functionally bilingual, perceived as a clear disadvantage to Anglophone children, inspired French immersion programs in Quebec, the success of which quickly spread to other provinces in Canada (Swain & Johnson, 1997) and internationally, with Spanish immersion in the United States, Swedish immersion in Finland and English immersion programs in Germany (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). Canadian French immersion has long been regarded as a crucial precursor for the development of content-based language education (CBI) as well as content and language integrated learning (CLIL). As an educational approach that deliberately promotes the development of a new language as well as the learning of content, immersion readily fits under the CLIL umbrella (Cenoz, Genesee, & Gorter, 2014). Immersion education, however, also brings

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questions of language identity development and cultural heritage to the fore in ways not necessarily addressed in the curriculum-based approaches of CBI and CLIL. As ambassadors for minority languages, immersion teachers often play an important role in sociocultural initiatives to maintain and even extend the presence of minority languages within a community (Anderson, 2019).

The increasing popularity of French immersion programs in Canada reflects the widespread belief of bilingualism as a social advantage for Canadians (Alberta Government, 2014; Horner & Weber, 2017; Roy, 2010). The goal of immersion education in Canada is additive bilingualism, meaning that the students learn their second language at no cost to their first language through content (Vanderveen, 2015). Fortune and Tedick (2008) argue that additive bilingualism reflects “the belief that all students are capable of fully acquiring two, or more, languages” (p. 29). French immersion aims to create an encouraging language learning environment conducive to functional fluency by the end of grade 12, and to encourage post-matriculation bilingual studies and use of both languages in personal and professional settings (Alberta Government, 2014). As the majority of French immersion students speak another language at home, French can easily become a “school” language confined to and promoted within the school environment, with few opportunities to engage with French outside of school. Moreover, there are no statistics on the number of graduates of the French immersion program and their level of French proficiency at the time of graduation.

Alberta has two types of immersion programs, individually regulated by Canada’s ten provincial and three territorial governments who must adhere to a certain standard. The majority of students begin in either Kindergarten or Grade 1. However, some schools offer late immersion programs where students can start French immersion in Grade 6 or 7. ‘Late immersion’ students join their counterparts in grade 9, where both immersion programs continue their studies together until Grade 12. According to Alberta Education (2010), French immersion programs “use French as the language of instruction for most of the school day” (usually 75-100% in grades 1 to 6 and 25-70% in grades 7 to 12), “and use English for the remainder” (p. 208). All core subjects and many complementary subjects are taught in French. Students attending a school with an alternative French language program are required to take English language arts, starting in Grade 3. The English and French immersion curriculum in Alberta are identical, although French Language Arts is an additional subject to be taught in the French immersion curriculum.

In policy, the French immersion teacher is considered in terms of impersonal requirements while the programs themselves are presented in an idealized way that does not encompass the challenges, difficulties and demands such educational programs entail for teachers (Alberta Government, 2014, p. 15). The matter is compounded by the overwhelming variety of immersion program types, the ways content and language instruction is conceptualized in each, and teachers’ persistent struggle with explicit instruction of language through content (Domke, 2015). In addition, there is a paucity of research on how the micro dynamics of languages and various socio-historical and political discourses at play affect the macro realities of bilingualism and the linguistic identities of both teachers and students (Domke, 2015; Roy, 2010).

With this study, we illustrate how immersion teacher identity (ITI) develops through personal narratives authored by the personal experiences of teachers as

well as the complex relationship with their environment and the language of immersion. The theoretical section explains in more detail how teacher identity development has been conceptualized as cognitive and social, related to teacher beliefs and emotions, ideologically and historically formed through negotiations constructed across time in particular settings, tested and contested (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020). Our particular interest, however, is the way in which immersion teachers manage the disjunctures and unanticipated discontinuities that are present in their identity narratives.

## 2 Theoretical framework

The popularity, complexity and varying degrees of success of bilingual education programs (e.g. Canadian French immersion, content-based instruction, Content and Language Integrated Learning) have turned attention to pedagogical practices and student and learning outcomes (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2018). The complexity of language teacher identity has been connected with teacher development, peer and collegial interactions, pedagogical choices and practices, issues of power and ownership of language (Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Martel & Wang, 2015). Norton (2013 cited in Norton, 2016, p. 476) describes identity as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future”. In teachers’ work, identity has been understood as a profoundly individual and psychological phenomenon, tied to the self-image and other-image of individual teachers (Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005) as well as commitment, motivation, task perception and job satisfaction (Hannaa, Oostdam, Severiens, & Zijlstra, 2019). Indeed, research on language teacher identity has increasingly highlighted teacher identity as a relational, reflexive and emotional meaning-making process helping teachers change, self-organise and adapt multiple selves (i.e. private, public, professional, ought-to and ideal selves) to environmentally available, imagined or desired resources (Barkhuizen, 2017).

Educational researchers often underline the dynamic fluidity of teacher identity constructed across social-individual, multiple-unitary and discontinuous-continuous dimensions (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The social-individual dimension is shaped through relationships with significant others, including teachers, peers, mentors, in pre- and in-service contexts, as well as in response to discourses on belonging and ownership. The multiple-unitary dimension is illustrated by the acknowledgement of different types of identity as well as subidentities (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). In language teacher identity research includes language and sociocultural identities, ethnic, racial and gendered identities as well as narrated, enacted and designated identities (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). Identity understood as ‘multiple, changing, and a site of struggle’ should not imply multiplicity as an impediment, but rather as a resource if productively harnessed (Norton, 2016). Through pedagogical practice and wider life experience, the resources of teacher identity expand to provide alternative perspectives, which can be used to navigate the development of self and the wider environment (Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009). The flux between continuity and discontinuity can be heightened when personal thoughts, emotional states and behaviour shift with great frequency (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). The significant decisions teachers make in response to change, however, are often intuitive

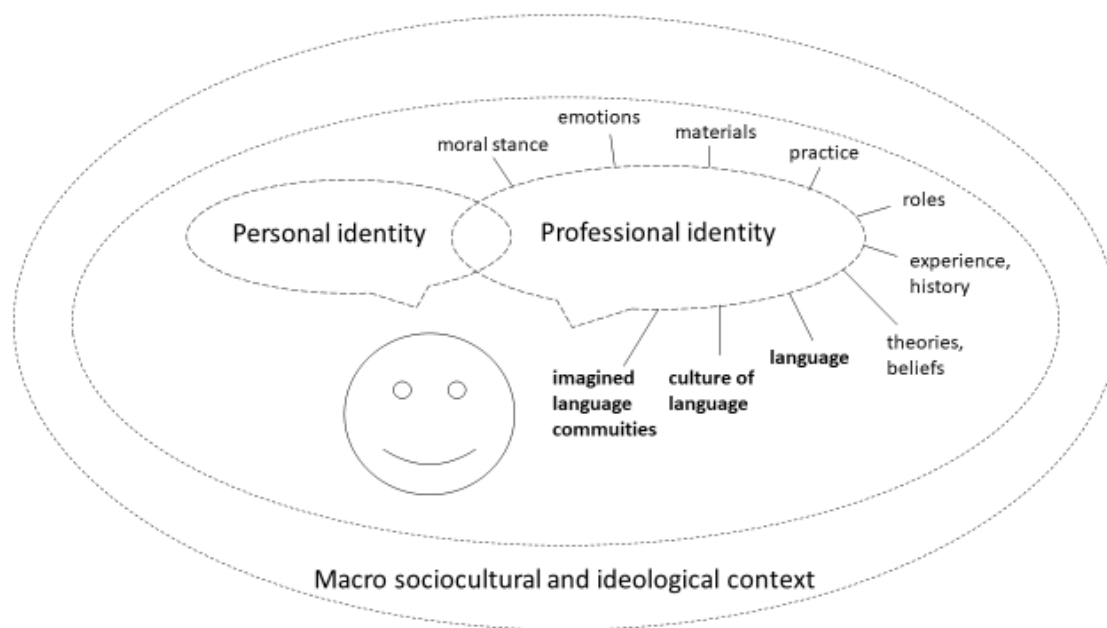
(Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Further research on moments of change in knowledge can help highlight how discontinuity informs teacher identity negotiation and what might be needed to create a positive environment for development.

Moments of discontinuity in teachers' careers can provide useful insights into the negotiations of teacher identity (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Whereas disjunctures point to a gap in teacher identity, for example between their ideal and enacted practice, discontinuity often points to change in knowledge or structure (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013; Vähäsantanen & Eteläpelto, 2009). Both disjunctures and discontinuities can alter teachers' perception of their profession and their professional self (Alsup, 2006; Lanas & Kelchtermans, 2015), and prompt teachers to make decisions with regard to their own ongoing development, their relationship with their environment and hopes for the future. Moreover, emotional changes can also be catalysts for teacher identity negotiation. Emotions are embodied experiences triggered by subjective interpretations of real or imagined contexts and events, and influence how teachers behave in response to their professional circumstances (e.g. Ashkanasy, 2015; Watkins, 2011). The interpretations teachers make become part of 'narratives of subjectivity' and are constantly shifting, due to 'narratives of culture' and fluctuating contextual resources and tensions (Zembylas, 2003). Thus, teacher identity is – usually unconsciously – 'constantly becoming' in a dynamic manner, involving individual confirmation or problematizing of who one is at the moment of discontinuity and who one is becoming (Zembylas, 2003). This discontinuity is emotionally-accented and can bring to the fore aspects of one's identity that one does not habitually relate to. Prompted by emotion, discontinuity can bring preconceived notions of teacherhood or desired ways of shaping one's teacher identity into the light as they are renegotiated in relation to present exigencies that negate them (Janzen, 2014).

Research indicates that the language of education can create significant discontinuities in teacher identity development as teachers "navigate complex identities in classrooms, schools, and communities" (De Costa & Norton, 2017, p. 11). The struggles, for example, of 'non-native' teachers in response to the 'superior native' metanarrative requires the re-imagining of professional identities (Reeves, 2018). Research with CLIL teachers highlights how the pedagogical language deeply intertwines with teachers' sense of self-expression, pedagogical expertise and capacity to form relationships (Pappa, Moate, Ruohotie-Lyhty, & Eteläpelto, 2017). Moreover, research with language teachers illustrates how teachers' relationships with language has significant implications for school environments affecting methodological and structural choices in bilingual programs, teacher-student interactions and students' identities in the short and long term (Morgan, 2004). For language educators, it might well be that the relationship with the target language pre-dates the decision to become a teacher (Kalaja, 2017), highlighting the critical connection between the personal, as well as professional, identity of a language teacher and the language they teach, a fundamental aspect of language teacher identity that requires more attention (Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2019).

The significant amount of research on language teacher identity to date highlights the importance of language teacher identity and the complex negotiations involved in identity development (Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020). Much of this research, however, focuses on English as a foreign language (EFL) and non-native English teachers, connecting identity negotiation to social

engagement, conflicts and struggle, and teacher attrition (Yuan, 2019). Whilst it is useful that different types of language education can be brought together under, for example, the CLIL umbrella (Cenoz et al., 2014), this can detract from the particular conditions under which teachers work. Unlike EFL, immersion education is often implemented in small-scale programs that conform to existing (monolingual) education structures whilst also requiring immersion teachers to be familiar with bilingual issues and to prepare tailored material for their specific environment (Björklund & Mard-Miettinen, 2015).



**Figure 1.** A modified overview of the “Facets of language teacher identity” (based on Barkhuizen & Mendieta, 2020, p. 5) with additions in bold.

Although research on language teacher identity can readily assume the importance of teachers’ relationship to the word in terms of implicit and explicit knowledge, their professional context and their investment in their job and what comprises it (Bonnet & Breidbach, 2017), the relationship with the target language is not always acknowledged as a particular concern of language educators (see FIGURE 1). In this study, we focus on the discontinuities in immersion teacher narratives to explore how teachers negotiate their identities and the way in which language is interwoven with their identity development.

### 3 Research questions

In this study, we use a dialogic conceptualisation of immersion teacher identity (ITI) with a particular focus on discontinuities as presented in the teachers’ narratives and a critical interest in the presence of language as part of ITI development. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How is discontinuity present in the participating teachers’ identity narratives?
- 2) How is the French language present in relation to the instances of discontinuity?

## 4 Methods

### 4.1 Data collection and analysis

In the invitation to the semi-structured interviews, the theme of the study was shared with the voluntary participants providing them with three months to reflect on their experiences. Although the interviews were reasonably short, between 30 and 45 minutes, the participants readily shared their experiences and reflections. The open-ended questions invited reflections on the participants' past, present and future experiences and aimed to encourage dialogue between the participants' sub-identities creating thought-provoking answers (see Appendix 1), which were organized and re-negotiated through discourse into more holistic narratives (Aylett, 2006; Hermans, 2001). This post-structuralist approach recognises that teacher identity can be presented in "flexible 'clusters', which construct and are constructed by the relevant subject positions the teachers relate to in the interviews" (Søreide, 2006, p. 536), and that identity is invested with a sense of social being and embedded in the stories we author to frame our understanding of the world and ourselves (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Søreide, 2006; Tracy, 2013). Such understandings inform the epistemological decision of dialogic narrative analysis, which posits that 'stories as artful representations of lives; stories reshape the past and imaginatively project the future' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2015, p. 2).

**Table 1.** Outline of data analysis process.

Outline of data analysis process	
Stage	Actions taken
1	Taking notes during the interviews
2	Listening to the interviews
3	Transcribing the interviews
4	Listening to audio data while reading the transcripts
5	Highlighting interesting elements (interpretative analysis)
6	Constructing identity narratives for each participant using their words
7	Identifying instances of individual-social, continuity-discontinuity and unitary-multiple.

The audio-recorded data were transcribed and analysed to construct identity narratives for each participant (see TABLE 1; Creswell, 2014), resulting in a 62 page dataset, font 12, single-line spacing. The analysis explored how the participants constructed their identities with their stories, metaphors and the emotional intonation (Zembylas, 2007). Isabelle, for example, explained that "as a teacher it's almost like being a gymnast and being so flexible that you can tweak your content so that everyone can access it almost equally, I say almost to the best of your ability and feel like they are able to succeed in it". The constructed identity narrative, therefore, refers to one of Isabelle's sub-identities as a 'gymnast', prepared to be flexible in order to meet the needs of students. The constructed narratives were shared with the participants to ensure that the narratives resonated with their sense of self (Muylaert, Sarubbi Jr., Gallo, Neto, & Reis, 2014). The following section provides a concise version of the final narratives.

## 4.2 Participants

The four participants were residents of Alberta, Canada. Having completed their teacher education at the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary, they worked as French immersion teachers in Alberta, with the exception of one teacher who had also taught in British Columbia. Evelyn, Sophie and Isabelle attended a Francophone campus, where French was the language of instruction throughout their studies and encouraged as the social language on campus. Margaret first studied French and Spanish as a major and then completed her education degree in an immersive education program geared towards French immersion teachers. Their teaching experience varied from 4-24 years and all participants were women, which is not unusual, as women comprise 84% of early and elementary education teachers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2014). As few studies exist on ITI, this study seeks to provide space for voices that have rarely been heard in immersion education research. It was hoped that the familiarity of the second author with the participants would provide a “logistically feasible and comfortable interaction” in which the participants would be willing to share their vulnerability as they honestly reflected on their understanding of “the world, delimiting opportunities and constraints for action” (Tracy, 2013, pp. 132,159). The co-authors of the study supported a more critical examination of the individual narratives. Each participant is briefly described below based on the information provided in the interview. All names are pseudonyms.

### 4.2.1 Evelyn

Evelyn was considering retiring from her 24-year teaching career in the French immersion program of a dual-track school with French immersion and English stream students and teachers. She has lived and studied around Alberta and abroad. French had some presence in her home, because her father’s first language was French and his mother was Belgian. Evelyn describes “falling for” French upon hearing it and how there was a mystery surrounding it, idealizing knowing French. Having taught in Alberta and British Columbia, Evelyn hopes to inspire students through her sharing of French culture.

### 4.2.2 Margaret

Margaret had been an elementary teacher for eight years teaching at a single-track French immersion school where all the teachers and staff are fluent in both French and English. Margaret was born in Alberta to Anglophone parents who valued education. Her mother, in particular, valued second language learning and, although not a French speaker herself, enrolled Margaret to the only French immersion class of her otherwise all-English school, supporting her learning with books and other resources. Perhaps because the school was in a small town, speaking French was stigmatised and an imposition as she got older. At the end of her schooling, however, Margaret decided to study French at university. She retains a passion for French immersion teaching and takes pride in her ability to create strong teacher-pupil relationships based on mutual respect. Her own experiences in French immersion as a student make it easier to relate to her pupils’ challenges.



### 4.2.3 Sophie

Sophie had been teaching for four years, mostly kindergarten, and is an elementary teacher in Alberta. She has always taught at a single-track immersion school, with the administration, teachers and students all part of the French immersion program and French ideally spoken by all stakeholders. Sophie was born in Montreal and her bilingual parents were very influential in her language learning. They started her formal education in French in kindergarten and enrolled her in the French immersion program when they moved to Alberta. Sophie's parents encouraged and supported her learning, and helped her navigate cultural differences, accents and vocabulary choices present in their bilingual city. Yet, learning French was a parental decision and mostly situational. As a French immersion kindergarten teacher, she believes teaching pupils something unavailable at home is "pretty cool". She has a student-centred orientation to her teaching, describing herself as her pupils' model and guide in their learning of French, and stating that her French teaching has made her capable of identifying her pupils' language strengths.

### 4.2.4 Isabelle

Isabelle is an elementary teacher with four years teaching at a dual-track school with English and French immersion streams. Isabelle was raised in a bilingual household to parents who are French immersion teachers. Her French-speaking mother has French roots in Canada, while her father is half-French. Sophie started learning French at five, continuing with French immersion and ending secondary education with a bilingual diploma. There was no "defining moment" that compelled her towards French immersion teaching. Nonetheless, she is very enthusiastic about her work, being inspired by the language itself and what a second language can achieve in the classroom, as well as wanting to inspire her students and serve as their "shining bright light".<sup>1</sup>

## 5 Findings

The identity narratives of the four participants included significant moments of change and discontinuity accompanied by a range of emotions. Although some changes supported positive renegotiations of the teachers' identity, other changes prompted negative transformations and disjunctures within their immersion teacher identities. Negative emotional changes were present in the identity narratives of Evelyn, Margaret and Isabelle, altering how they saw themselves and understood their identity. These changes encouraged discontinuity in their profession and themselves as second language learners and prompted negative emotions, however positive emotions present in their identity negotiations often served as a counterweight to discontinuity. The positive emotions implicit in their stories underline the harboured passion for French and second language learning and help re-align their teacher identity as French immersion teachers to the sense of purpose they identify in their professional lives. Evelyn's excitement stems from her pupils' own excitement in making connections in French and watching them construct their own learner identities in French. Love is another emotion Evelyn mentions; love of teaching

becomes an extension of her love of French and is mirrored in pupils' developing love for it. Isabelle expresses amazement at the fast pace of her pupils' learning and joy at their independent use of it. Similar to Isabelle, Sophie expresses joy and wonder at the pupils' taking initiative and drawing connections in French as well as love for teaching the youngest of age groups, which makes pupils' exponential learning throughout the year rewarding.

### 5.1 Evelyn

Evelyn experiences discontinuity when seeing an employment opportunity and actively seeking a tertiary education program that would prepare her for the transition to teacherhood. This discontinuity marks a departure from an existing identity as a learner of French, about which she was already passionate and which she used to foreground her developing teacher identity as an immersion teacher. Evelyn's course of action was sudden, yet resolute, and founded on an estimated future shortage of immersion teachers, information about the benefits of bilingualism in Canada and her need for a job.

at this point the French immersion program was taking off and there were not enough qualified teachers to fill the positions that were coming up so then I just sort of decided right then and there that I was going to go back to school and that I was going to um become a teacher.

Evelyn was willing to complete the specialization literature at the college she enrolled in and continue with the transfer program at a university, as she "began [...] to work towards mastering of the French language and to work within it" at university. The expressions Evelyn used to describe her journey toward becoming a French immersion teacher indicate a shift in her life that she remained faithful to and persisted in acquiring the skills necessary to support it.

Evelyn further experienced discontinuity in her work as she tried to maintain her teacher identity amidst parental expectations and student resistance to the ways she enacted her own desired identity. This is highlighted by a difference in her university training and challenges encountered in teaching. The university created the space for raised awareness regarding immersion teaching and French, but failed to address the additional pressures and expectations teachers would encounter once in service, such as "differentiation" of instruction or "put[ting herself] in the shoes of [her] students". This lack in her knowledge persisted, lending her teacher identity a sense of insufficiency, but also room for development:

They have an ability with language perhaps. And even when I left teaching, I still felt like I could get much better at that. After 24 years I felt like there's still a lot of work to do still to be able to be really good at that.

Evelyn's sense of insufficiency or incompleteness was compounded by knowledge of parental dissatisfaction at the slow progress of her pupils' language learning. While she was trying to follow her teacher training and "build on what the kids already know and give them a new language to express [it]", parental demands implied a certain mould she resisted using to shape her teacher identity. Because of this resistance, Evelyn gradually became more aware of her teacher identity, as she realised that pupils' identities as French

language learners may significantly differ from her own and her enthusiasm for and commitment to French.

I wasn't prepared for the level of frustration on the part of the kids and on the part of the parents that they weren't learning it faster [...] And so, it just gave me a bit of insight, because I was in French because I wanted to be there, and I worked really hard at it, but the students may or may not had a hand in the decision to go into French immersion.

She further recognized that parental demands were founded on values different from her own as a teacher and from her family's, who "encouraged [her] to read", yet parents' values affected how the quality of her work was perceived and how competent a teacher she perceived herself to be.

Evelyn's discontinuity in her teacher identity was also affected by her emotional ties to French, which were renegotiated when there was a place for her in the workplace. As a student, her views on French shifted due to school policy having an obligatory typing class for its French-learning students. Evelyn used 'choose' to stress how learning French was her independent choice, but then used expressions like "going downhill", "feeling forced" and "hating" to express her profound disappointment at the conditions being set on her French studies. Not being proficient at typing made that hatred more acute. Although this emotion was directed at school regulations and was never allowed to overshadow her desire to learn French, Evelyn imposed a discontinuity on her learner identity by abandoning her French class near the end of her last year in high school. This discontinuity and concomitant feelings of frustration toward school-imposed pressures negatively affected her disposition towards classroom settings. Another instance of discontinuity occurred at university aiming at her reconnection with her French learner identity. This helped to develop an empathetic stance in her teacher identity in relation to pupils who did not choose to learn French, like she did not choose typing.

Evelyn's narrative suggests that discontinuity was initiated by her in response to perceived pressures in language learning at school as well as perceived differences in values with parents and students. These discontinuities were used as resistance to either protect or bring forth her learner identity and as support for reassessing the value she sees in her teacher identity. Hence, in addition to Evelyn's claim of remaining passionate about French throughout her life, these discontinuities might suggest an attempt at continuity as an emotional and reflexive process.

## 5.2 *Margaret*

Similar to Evelyn, Margaret entered the teaching profession suddenly after an initial indecision about what to do after graduating with a language degree in French and Spanish. The moment of selecting immersion teaching is not presented as a discontinuity, although it is a departure from uncertainty in the light of new information. Margaret claimed, "so I'll go and be a French immersion teacher and that's totally just how it happened, like, by chance". Margaret stated that her love for learning languages and the profound value she saw in language learning were something she "would love to transmit" to children. Yet, it was a trusted friend who presented her with the viable possibility of being an immersion teacher that made her consider this professional path, which she then invested with the importance she attributed to second language learning.

Another discontinuity is suggested by Margaret's presentation of herself as a learner of French before and during her university studies. Margaret differentiates herself from "monolingual people" as French becomes something of "real value" for her at university and the embarrassment she had associated with her identity as a French speaker became a valuable tool. She remarks, "[i]t wasn't until university that I wanted to speak French and I wanted to improve and took it more seriously in the end and saw the real value in it and it wasn't like an embarrassing thing". Margaret's regained interest in French demarcates the time when she took ownership of her language learning, making proficiency in French a personal choice in her teacher identity negotiation.

A third discontinuity can be noted when Margaret negotiates between her identities as a learner of French at school and a French immersion teacher in her adult life. Her own notions of what second language learning should be like contrasts with the stagnation of French immersion in Canada, which she criticizes commenting:

I had this recent realization about how there should be more focus on, like, the oral communication or whatever. I just didn't think about that, like, earlier as a teacher and that's just from experience and just, like, over the years of observation, like, oh my god, I'm still having all these same problems. We've talked a lot recently at my school about having more focus on, like, oral language; not so much on, like, reading and writing.

Margaret's observations partly echo Cammarata and Haley's (2018) on French immersion students' consistent, thus problematic, lower achievement on the French Language Arts exam, which may have a negative ripple effect on these students' ability to perform well in other French-administered classes. The experience and expertise Margaret had gained from when she started teaching made her more attuned to the rigidity of the French immersion program. The mismatch between the unaltered state of French immersion instruction and her ideas of how it should be created a disjuncture between what she is expected to do as a teacher by the government and the teacher identity she wishes to express through her teaching. Margaret wishes her pupils become the "functional bilinguals" she herself never felt able to become through the same French immersion program. However, she feels the government does not allow teachers room for development and freedom, prompting her to question the progress pupils can achieve through it when remembering her own learning of French.

The most emotional instance of discontinuity for Margaret was feeling socially stigmatised as a French immersion student, causing her to cease expressing her identity as a French language speaker to most peers. Being mocked for being a French immersion student in her otherwise English school, speaking French "definitely got like a stigma" and she was viewed as one of "the dorks, kind of, because we were doing an extra academic thing". French in school became something imposed on her, but she maintained her contact with French through friends who, while not wanting to speak French per se, used French to achieve their high academic goals. This, however, impeded Margaret's advancement in French, as she was not a functional bilingual by grade 12. To an extent, this was remedied when Margaret decided to pursue French in university, which indicates another moment of discontinuity as Margaret regains the confidence to express her identity as a French language speaker. Because of these discontinuities, Margaret imbued her developing French immersion teacher identity with a lifelong attitude to learning and self-awareness concerning her proficiency in French.

Margaret's discontinuities highlight the biographical and relational nature of teacher identity. Margaret responded to the disjuncture felt because of peer attitudes to French immersion by limiting and carefully selecting social areas for the expression of her identity as a French speaker. The discontinuities that followed with choosing French as her major and French immersion teaching as her profession suggest actions that reconcile a fractured sense of identity with a personally valued one by providing it with favourable conditions to flourish. Margaret uses her past experiences and values in both as an immersion student and a student of languages to inform her teacher identity and resist government-prescribed teacher action that does not align with her values and goals in immersion education.

### 5.3 *Sophie*

Contrary to Evelyn and Margaret, Sophie was the least critical of teaching and her reality as a teacher matched her idea of an immersion teacher. However, she shares Margaret's discontinuity in her transition from an experience of speaking French at school as unpopular to enjoying teaching French as an adult. Whereas at school she felt pressure from her peers to not succumb to the imposition of speaking and learning French, in her adult life she authors herself as a user of French by choosing immersion teaching as a career and presenting French in her class in a way that reflects her love of teaching, whether through subject or language. In her interview, Sophie shares how she enjoyed teaching something unavailable in her students' homes. However, there is discontinuity in her professional environment, as Sophie is divested of a sense of power in interactions beyond the classroom where she chooses not to speak French. She tries to counterbalance this by making the classroom the space in which she may enact her teacher identity in ways that correspond to her own ideals.

Discontinuity in Sophie's teacher identity can further be seen in the description of herself as language-inclined. Access to instruction on the grammar rules of French and the enjoyment experienced as a learner provided a foundation on which she could differentiate herself from classmates with other talents (e.g. mathematics, sciences) and motivated her study of other languages. Discontinuity can be seen in Sophie's preference of English when addressing some teachers, deeming French "pretty uncool" at school, yet not making this attitude part of her teacher identity, already developing when she "really liked teaching French to [her] neighbours". As a teacher, Sophie acknowledged the linguistic advantages of French immersion programs and her own identity as a French learner enabled her to pinpoint similar attitudes in pupils, which remain lamentably unaddressed by said programs after all these years.

### 5.4 *Isabelle*

Isabelle presented herself as a typical learner of French in grade 3 who subsequently disconnected herself from French, only to reconnect in grade 10. It is noteworthy that, despite the cultural and linguistic presence of French at home, Isabelle had not developed a bilingual identity. Rather, she identified as an Anglophone whose competence in French, regarded as her second language, cannot match that of her native-speaking parents'. Hence, she was "[her] most comfortable self" in English, feeling rather inauthentic, even inadequate at times, when speaking French. This discontinuity of distancing and reconnecting with

French in Isabelle's narrative is accompanied by Isabelle's reinvestment of value in French as a useful future skill and in herself as a French speaker. This was supported by a following instance of discontinuity when Isabelle learned about the added dimensions a second language brings to teaching as a student-teacher in university. The new focus equipped Isabelle's developing teacher identity with expert knowledge that supported her already valued identity as a French speaker and her reasons for choosing immersion teaching as her career:

When I got to [university], it became more about the second language, whereas at first it was sort of an obvious choice. Well obviously, I will pursue this in French. [...] I think that anybody can learn a second language.

Despite her non-bilingual identity, becoming a French immersion teacher was a natural choice for Isabelle. Yet it proved to be "this beautiful wonderful thing that you're doing and in reality it's really, really hard". Isabelle elaborates by expressing feeling burned out due to the increased workload and sometimes feeling too sensitive or "soft" to be a teacher. Moreover, she describes French as different, but not necessarily less authentic, making her work harder in French and affecting her students' perception about her in both languages. She believes it would be easier to develop teacher-pupil relationships in English as opposed to French. This is compounded by students' unwillingness to learn or speak French, lack of age- and level-appropriate French immersion resources, and colleagues' lack of interest in creating a French community at school. Isabelle's discontinuity can be seen in the disjuncture between her own motivations and persistence in her work, and professional circumstances that are unsupportive of her efforts. This disjuncture extends to her relationship with French; Isabelle tries to retain a meaningful connection to French as an individual and cultivate teacher-student relationships through it despite perceived limitations.

Isabelle's negative emotions stem from the main challenge of French immersion teachers in "starting a fire in these students" who study French. Her perceived inability to do so instigates discontinuity in her teacher identity, as it clashes with her sense of mission in teaching, which is to inspire students. The discouragement in fulfilling her purpose as a teacher is described as "very challenging when you have a classroom full of kids who don't want to speak French and they almost dumb down their knowledge and they will say things that they know are incorrect". This lends her teacher identity a sense of failure or incompetence, as she knows that pupils' recalcitrance in using the language implies lack of improvement. The discontinuity of her teacher identity is protracted and irreconcilable, as joint collegial strategies to counter pupils' resistance only yield short-term results. To counter her frustration of the experienced discontinuity, she draws on her own passion for French and her pedagogical convictions of the French immersion teacher as a source of inspiration and motivation for the pupils.

## 6 Discussion and conclusions

This study addressed the under-examined research field of French immersion teachers focusing on four participants from Alberta, Canada. Premised on the understanding of discontinuity as a key feature of identity development with changes in knowledge, institutional circumstances and emotional experiences

providing catalysts for identity (re)negotiation and (trans)formation. The participants' narratives in this study illustrate instances of discontinuity based on changes in knowledge and emotions. Pupils' learning of French was a source of positive emotion, while circumstances negatively affecting pupils' attitudes, teachers' unmet expectations and feelings of being unheard were sources of negative emotion. The findings support teacher identity as a socially negotiated, fluctuating understanding teachers have of themselves (Barkhuizen, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2019; Martel & Wang, 2015; Varghese et al., 2005). Discontinuity enables a closer look at identity as it changes (Beijaard et al., 2004), although the analytical focus on discontinuity should not over-emphasize discontinuity as a state of identity over-writing the constant flux that these teachers experienced. Given the small scale of this study, the portrayed narratives are not intended to be generalizable, but to highlight certain considerations elaborated in this chapter.

Knowledge about viable career prospects in immersion teaching and the value of speaking French as adults as well as emotions experienced by speaking French as students elicited discontinuity that shaped teacher identity before employment. On one hand, this highlights early experiences as a second language user as important to ITI. While fairly absent from second and foreign language learning literature, strategic self-presentation in the classroom is prominent among students, who express identities according to the particular social capacity and expectations inherent in interactive situations (Taylor, Busse, Gagova, Marsden, & Roosken, 2013). Making peer interactions inclusive of students in bilingual or immersion programs are important to foregrounding a language teacher identity divested of shame or stigma associated with studying in a second language, especially in the light of discourse about elitism and bilingual education (Pérez Cañado, 2020). On the other hand, knowledge about immersion teaching and its value for self-expression or career advancement highlights how language teacher identity negotiation is experiential and agentic, but also relational and socially regulated (Tsui, 2011). The participants acted upon suggestions and opportunities in their immediate social circles, which occasioned discontinuity and re-directed their development as French speakers and immersion teachers. In doing so, they reassessed the values present in their individual backgrounds and the French speaker identities they enacted or selectively silenced. This interpretation echoes the finding that teachers in other language teaching contexts draw on complex and diverse linguistic and cultural identities, and manage conflicting attitudes and values across the worlds shaping these identities (Gallardo, 2019).

The ways participants reacted to changes in knowledge and emotion with discontinuity in their teacher identity further suggest an underlying orientation toward continuity in their relationship to French. Discontinuity can be connected to the multi-dimensionality of teacher identity, which has engendered a debate about whether teacher identity entails a continuing site of struggle in striving for harmony and coherence, especially for non-native language teachers (Beijaard et al., 2004; Tsui, 2011; Varghese et al., 2005). For instance, English language teachers decide on their career based on language and teaching interests, hoping to secure membership in formerly imagined communities of successful English users or English teachers (Werbińska, 2015). In this study, the participants purposefully directed their identity negotiation to French learning and immersion teaching in a manner reflective of their values. In part, this was

instigated by knowledge about immersion education as an avenue for a reassessed French speaker identity. However, it was not only the participants' initial love of the language that informed their career choice (e.g. Kalaja, 2017), but also the participants' more complex relationship with the language due to wrestling with negative perceptions from others and a sense of inauthenticity in their past. Participants' purposeful identity negotiation was further instigated by knowledge about immersion teaching in practice and beliefs about its aims. This interpretation is supported by broader language teacher identity research arguing for a complex interplay among professional and personal selves, transactions within professional environments, and language teachers' own conceptualisations and beliefs about language education (Schutz, Hong, & Francis, 2018). It is, thus, important for immersion teacher education to facilitate coherence by supporting teachers' affiliation to different aspects of immersion education and a sense of continuity with other immersion practitioners and speakers of the language. This might help foster positive emotions through discontinuity and promote stability and quality in language teaching (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2018).

Despite a growing number of studies in how emotions affect teacher identity development (e.g. Barkhuizen, 2017; Martínez Agudo, 2018), it is difficult to determine the extent to which teachers' emotions shape their professional identity. Emotions are typically regarded as part of a teachers' inner world and may be regulated by implicit or explicit rules at the workplace (Benesch, 2018), therefore remaining unseen and difficult to examine. The findings indicate that discontinuity is often accompanied by emotions (see also Rokita-Jaśkow, 2018), seen in participants' emotionally accented way of weaving their stories and their explicit reference to emotions, like hatred, love and excitement. The participants further acknowledged the negativity harboured against the profession as well as the way French immersion teaching continues to be unrealistically portrayed by the government and teacher education programs. Despite their popularity in Canada, French immersion programs "are complex to implement and not as successful as we would hope them to be when it comes to the development of students' language skills" (Cammarata & Haley, 2018, p. 334). When emotions are important to good language teaching (Gallardo, 2019), research on language teachers' emotions should be more comprehensive and go beyond an exploration of emotions in relation to language learners (e.g. stress, satisfaction) (Martínez Agudo, 2018; Rokita-Jaśkow, 2018).

The findings highlight the ways disjunctures and discontinuity prompt and resource teacher identity negotiation, here through change in knowledge and emotional response to events that stimulate teacher identity negotiation. While the study focused on Canadian immersion teachers, the findings may be relevant to the field of bilingual instruction more generally. Bilingual instruction, like immersion, requires teachers to express their professional identity through more than one language and to draw on pedagogical knowledge and skill repertoires that are discipline-specific and linguistic; bilingual instruction is a more complex endeavour than teaching in monolingual settings (Cammarata & Haley, 2018). However, French immersion teachers' perspective remains not only unaddressed, but also largely underused as a resource for illuminating, identifying and elaborating "issues, problems, and outcomes related to immersion language education" (Walker & Tedick, 2000, p. 6). Without a holistic picture of French immersion education, governmental policies in support of



recruitment and retention of teachers are potentially undermined. Such policies should be implemented with an understanding of the way in which teacher identities are formed and influenced, as well as the relationship between teacher identity, practice and well-being. Given the limited scope of this study, however, future research can examine the experiences of in-service teachers across the province or country to address the disjunctures and discontinuity in teacher identity, but also open the line of communication between the areas of English-speaking education and its French immersion counterpart. It can further address the need to include other levels in in-service teachers' identity research (De Costa & Norton, 2017), as the relationships among the participants, government, pupils, colleagues and family were quite often present in the narratives. Finally, while discontinuity can allow for exploring identity at specific moments in time, longitudinal studies on French immersion teachers would contribute to research on the effects of discontinuity over time, while taking into account the emotional changes participants identify as meaningful as well as the changing circumstances that they encounter and negotiate.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Isabelle continued to teach for another year after the study, after which she pursued a career outside of education, due to the demands and lack of support she received from parents and the leadership at school and district levels.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1. Interview guide.*

#### Part 1: Introduction to the language

1. When did you start to learn French?
2. Why did you learn French?
3. Who were played key roles in teaching you French?
4. What was your relationship to French as a student?
5. What are some memories from your experiences as a second language learner?

#### Part 2: Relationship to the language as a teacher

6. How long have you been a French Immersion Teacher?
7. Why did you want to become a French Immersion teacher?
8. How did your teacher training prepare you to be an immersion teacher?
9. What are your experiences as a language teacher?
10. Have those experiences affected your relationship to the language at all?
11. What is your role in the classroom?
12. What do you expect from your students as second language learners?

#### Part 3: French immersion program (Walker & Tedick, 2000)

13. What problems and challenges do immersion teacher face?
14. Are issues common across programs?
15. What is unique about immersion language teaching?
16. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being an immersion teacher?

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