Inclusion in a French classroom

Background and Purpose

Within the field of second language (L2) education in Canada, largely since the inception of French immersion programs in the 1960s, there has been an ongoing debate about whether students with special education needs should pursue FSL study. However, in the current era of education, there is interest in supporting a wide range of learner needs, with inclusion as a key goal for the Canadian classroom (Hutchinson, 2006), and the FSL classroom has largely been omitted from previous research on how to support students with disabilities in the classroom.

This study was pursued to continue the line of inquiry first started by the researcher through an earlier study in 2003. The previous study had also considered how a core French teacher supported students with disabilities in her classroom, but as it was implemented at the Grade 9 level, there was interest in seeing how adaptations might change at a lower grade level—and before the point in time some students were being exempted from the core French requirement because of their special education needs. Initially, this was to have been a larger study, but because two participants dropped out prior to the start of the study and no other participants could be found, it became a case study. What is presented in the current article is only a partial view of the data collected for the study. For information about the other component of the study, please see (Removed for Review).

This current study sought to determine:
1. How does a grade 8 Core French teacher support a wide range of learner needs in her classroom? What practices comprise her pedagogy?
2. How does the teacher’s beliefs support or contradict her practices?

Methods

Participant

This was a case study of one Grade 8 classroom teacher and one of her core French classes. At the time of the study, Julie (a pseudonym) had been teaching for 15 years, in a variety of FSL contexts. Initially, the study hoped to be larger, but two participants withdrew prior to the start of the study and additional participants were not able to be located.

There were 29 students in the class, and nearly 2/3 of them spoke English as a second language and French represented a third language. 7 of the 29 students had some sort of special need, some of which had a direct impact on their experience learning French.

Data Collection Instruments

This study employed a 3-page, 112-item observation scheme, developed for this study by the researcher. The Teacher Adaptations in the Language Classroom (TALC) Revised Observation scheme was a revision of the scheme previously created by the researcher for an earlier study (Removed for Review). The TALC Revised was constructed from components of established observation schemes for research in second language classrooms, including the Communicative Orientation.

To ensure the reliability of the TALC Revised, it was piloted in another core French classroom prior to the start of this study. The piloting also included was tested for inter-rater reliability with the use of another coder, who I had trained in the use of the observation tool. Following the piloting period, it was determined that the two coders agreed 86.1% of the time, and that the Kappa coefficient of 0.421. Given the fact that there were over 100 points on the scheme, these values were considered acceptable for the reliability of the scoring tool/procedures.

This study also used three teacher interviews: one prior to the start of the observation period to
learn more about the teaching context, one at the end of the observation period to talk about the events that had transpired during the observation period, and the Pathognomonic-Interventionist (P-I) interview developed by Jordan and colleagues (Jordan-Wilson & Silverman, 1991; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar, & Diamond, 1993) and used with her permission (for information about the reliability and validity of the instrument, please refer to those studies). The P-I Interview is a way to learn about teacher beliefs towards students with disabilities, by assigning scores ranging from 1-3 to statements teachers make about the actions they have taken to support students with special needs in their classes.

Data Analysis Methods
Given the limited body of research on inclusive teaching practices in FSL classrooms, there is still a need for basic descriptive data, in other words, information about what is actually happening in the classroom. The data from the observation scheme were analysed for simple frequencies—to determine the behaviours most prevalent in Julie’s classroom. To an extent, these behaviours were checked against what she had described in the interviews about her pedagogy and the ways in which she supported students with disabilities to see what congruence existed.

The context and post-observation interview were analyzed to determine common themes and to locate additional details to support phenomena observed through the observation scheme. The P-I interview was scored in greater detail, by a rater (other than the researcher) highly trained in the P-I scoring tool. Julie’s score on the P-I interview was 2.98, which was the highest score ever recorded for a teacher. Scores closest to 3 indicate teachers who have highly positive views of students with special education needs in the classroom and who have taken active, appropriate steps to support those students. The design of the interview precludes for “halo” effects, which means that the answers are not potentially clouded by a participant’s desire to “look good” to the researcher.

Findings
Overall, Julie was found to be a teacher who definitely supported her beliefs about inclusion in FSL classrooms through meaningful practice. In general, many of the strategies that were used in Julie’s classroom for the purpose of supporting the students with diverse learning needs were consistent with good FSL instruction. This finding challenged previously held assumptions that good FSL instruction was incompatible with inclusive teaching. Some of the strategies were proactive, in that she designed them into lessons to minimize challenges before they could appear. These included how she organized the students within the class and the ways in which she wanted to have them use their language skills. Other strategies focused on the language she used to communicate with students, the ways in which she presented information to the students, and also, the types of questions she asked in the classroom. The chart that follows reveals the frequency of the most common features of her pedagogy that supported all of the students in her classrooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed descriptor &amp; its prevalence (in minutes &amp; % of total time)</th>
<th>Most prevalent</th>
<th>Second most prevalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Organization</td>
<td>Teacher leads student or class in instruction 84 min., 36.5%</td>
<td>Students work in groups on the same task 60 min., 26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Modality</td>
<td>Equal focus on Reading, Writing &amp; Speaking 58 min., 25.2%</td>
<td>Exclusive focus on Listening 34 min., 14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Language Use</td>
<td>Exclusive French 215 min., 93.5%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Language Use</td>
<td>Balanced French/English mix 151 min., 65.7%</td>
<td>Exclusive French 53 min., 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation Emphasis</td>
<td>Exclusive Visual emphasis 84 min., 36.5%</td>
<td>TIE: Exclusive Auditory emphasis and Equal Auditory &amp; Visual emphasis 73 min., 31.7% (each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Interaction</td>
<td>Exclusive Monitoring Student Comprehension of Material 44 min., 19.1%</td>
<td>TIE: Partial Cognitive Extension, Assessment/evaluation of student knowledge,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**TALC Revised Context Category**
Implications for policy or practice

• As it is a case study, it is inappropriate to make generalizations about the findings to the broader issue of how to support students with disabilities and other special needs in FSL classrooms. However, the findings of the case study can be used to inspire further questions and considerations about this issue.

• Because this case did show a FSL teacher having a positive experience with inclusion of a diverse range of learner needs, there was a basic demonstration that inclusion in FSL is possible. Additional research in more classrooms is needed to learn more about how teachers can include students in FSL classrooms, as there is not necessarily one way by which to do it.

• Some school boards do exempt students with special needs from core French requirements, and it may be that this policy should be discussed, especially if teachers of FSL are easily integrating adaption strategies into their teaching because they align with good FSL instruction.

References

