School principals’ views on FSL programs in Canada

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Goal of study: Guiding question

- To provide insights into beliefs, attitudes and practices (related to FSL programming and FSL teachers) of a group of stakeholders - PRINCIPALS - who make decisions in Canadian public schools
Background

• MANY anecdotes and perceptions, maybe misperceptions

• Previous research..... Few studies and many are American – some are very old
Previous research: Working conditions

- Lapkin, MacFarlane & Vandergrift (2006)
  - principals considered very supportive by 53% of participants
  - 62% reported NOT having bilingual administrators
Methods

- Focus group and individual interviews to gather ideas and seek advice from key stakeholders
- Literature review
- Web-based survey
- Recruitment: key newsletters, email networks, direct mailing to schools, CPF email to schools
- Individual interviews
Response

- Not great!
- 403 participants
Profile of participants

• All provinces, 2 territories (NWT, Yukon)

• 91% Anglophones, 40% bilingual

• 33% had taught FSL in the past
Participants by province & territory

- BC = 12.5%
- NWT = 1.1%
- Yukon = 0.4%
- Nunavut = 0%
- AB = 10.6%
- MB = 6.5%
- SK = 4.9%
- ON = 25%
- QC = 2.3%
- NB = 11.4%
- PE = 3.8%
- NS = 14%
- NF = 7.6%
Beliefs and experiences

- 58% agree that FSL should be mandatory in all grades

BUT...

- 45% agree that FSL should be required for high school graduation
Beliefs and experiences

• 85% agree that students should learn at least one language other than English at school
• 62% believe that this language should be French
• 56% agree that other second languages are as beneficial as French in Canada
Beliefs and experiences

• 57% agree that core French is less prestigious than FI
• 15% agree that FI is the only way to really learn French
• 82% believe that learning FSL contributes to L1 literacy skills
Beliefs and experiences

• 46% disagree that newly arrived immigrants should be exempt from FSL, 24.5% agree and about 29% on the fence

• 46% disagree that students with learning difficulties should be exempt from FSL, 31% agree and about 23% on the fence

• 95% disagree that it is more important for girls to study French than for boys!! 😊
French in the school (district)

- 75% agree that senior administration in the school district support all FSL programs
- 67% agree that parents in the school district support all FSL programs
- 82% agree that the school principal should be a key player in promoting FSL programs
French in the school (district)

- 72% and 76% agree that they have had troubles hiring qualified core French and immersion teachers (respectively)

- Over 80% agree that they have had troubles hiring qualified substitute teachers for all FSL programs
French in the school (district)

• 24% agree that there are tensions between FSL teachers and non-FSL teachers in their schools

• 65% agree that it is ok for FSL teachers to speak French amongst themselves in the staffroom (35% disagree)
French in the school (district)

- 70% reported NO extra-curricular activities in French in their school

- 52% rated their library collection in French as poor or very poor

- 81% had a unilingual anglophone librarian
French in the curriculum

• Ranking of importance of school subjects: English language arts, math, sciences, French and social studies

• Drop-out from French competition from other subjects, limited number of courses, graduation requirements, post-secondary requirements exclude French, low status of French
FSL teachers

- A large majority of participants believe that teachers’ French should be tested before hiring (85% in core, 90% in FI)

- Most important criteria for hiring FSL teachers: skills in French, classroom management, motivating skills and enthusiasm
Participants’ professional development

- 45% had done FSL-specific PD
- 73% interested in FSL-specific PD
- 62% willing to devote 1-2 days per year to FSL-specific PD
Differences across types of respondents (correlations and ANOVA)

• Teaching FSL in the past made a difference on many belief statements

• Principals with past FSL teaching experiences value FSL significantly more than those who have not taught FSL
Reflections

• Importance of having administrators with FSL teaching experiences

• However – FSL teacher shortage??

• Action needed related to PD for administrators – a role for CASLT