

# French Immersion for English Language Learners?: Kindergarten Teachers' Perspectives

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*Given the increasingly diverse, multilingual student body in Canada, the call for increased inclusion in education, and in light of research highlighting the potential for inclusion in French immersion (FI) to be limited by gatekeepers, this study examines the beliefs of kindergarten teachers regarding the inclusion of English language learners in French immersion where entry begins in Grade 1. The theory of planned behavior as discussed by Ajzen (2005) served as a theoretical lens through which the data were examined. In particular, through their responses to a mixed format questionnaire, including a 12-item Likert scale of agreement and open-ended questions, kindergarten teachers revealed that a) French immersion is not for everyone, and b) may be disadvantageous to English language learners in particular. The teachers grounded their beliefs in the importance and influence of English on students' future endeavours. Beliefs that FI is not for all students were supported by the board's provision of information to parents as revealed by a document analysis. Such findings highlight the need for information sharing on multilingual language acquisition to extend beyond administrators to include parents and additional educators who have the potential to influence parents' choices for their children.*

*Compte tenu du corps étudiant canadien de plus en plus diversifié et plurilingue, de la demande pour une intégration accrue en éducation et de la recherche soulignant la possibilité que des gardiens limitent l'inclusion en immersion française, cette étude examine les croyances des enseignants de maternelle face à l'inclusion en immersion française d'élèves apprenant l'anglais (où l'apprentissage du français commencerait en 1re année). La théorie du comportement planifié telle que proposée par Ajzen (2005) a servi d'optique théorique pour l'analyse des données. Les résultats d'un questionnaire à 12 items (réponses sur une échelle de Likert et questions ouvertes) ont indiqué que, entre autres, les enseignants de maternelle croient: a) que l'immersion française n'est pas pour tout le monde et b) que les apprenants de l'anglais pourraient y être particulièrement défavorisés. Les croyances des enseignants reposaient sur l'importance et l'influence de l'anglais dans l'avenir des élèves. Une analyse documentaire a révélé que les croyances selon lesquelles l'immersion française n'était pas pour tous les élèves étaient appuyées par des informations remises aux parents de la part du conseil. Ces résultats soulignent la nécessité d'un partage d'informations sur le plurilinguisme et l'acquisition des langues au-delà des administrateurs de sorte à inclure les parents et d'autres enseignants susceptibles d'influencer les choix que font les parents à l'égard de leurs enfants.*

Among G8 countries, Canada has the highest proportion of immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011). Prior to the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, waves of immigration to Canada brought people who spoke primarily English or French or whose home language shared a script with English and French. Over the last few decades, Canada has seen a shift in immigration demographics with the majority of newcomers coming from Asia and speaking languages from Indo-Aryan or Sino-Tibetan language families (Statistics Canada, 2016). This newer wave of immigrant parents has shown an interest in having their children add both of Canada's official languages to their linguistic repertoires (Parkin & Turcotte, 2003).

Research with immigrant parents has revealed not only a parental community interested in having their children add English and French to their language repertoires, but also a preference for the more intensive option of French immersion (FI) programs to do so within English-dominant regions of Canada. For the vast majority of such regions, FI is an optional program in which a minimum of 50 per cent of the content is delivered in French with the remaining class time, if any, delivered in English. For the most part, in Canada, the early FI program begins in kindergarten or Grade 1 depending on the board of education.

The above demographics accompanied by the parental desire to enroll their multilingual children in FI provide, in part, the rationale for this study. An identified limiting of access to FI by educational gatekeepers (e.g., Arnett, 2013; Genesee & Jared, 2008) offers additional motivation to examine educators' beliefs on inclusion of English language learners' (ELLs) in FI. More specifically, this study explores kindergarten teachers' beliefs on the inclusion of ELLs in FI where entry begins in Grade 1. More specifically, I sought to examine the following questions: a) to what extent are ELLs present in FI schools, b) if and how kindergarten English teacher beliefs (i.e., personal) correspond to information the board provides to parents regarding FI registration (i.e., social), and c) what beliefs would teachers communicate to ELL parents (i.e., behavior) if provided the opportunity to do so.

### **Literature Review**

Studies in British Columbia and Ontario have shown an interest on the part of immigrant parents to register their ELL children in FI. Numerous studies (e.g., Dagenais, 2003; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Dagenais & Moore, 2008) with immigrant families in British Columbia showed immigrant parents to be motivated to register their children in the FI program as they judged the program to be the best way for their children to learn French within an English dominant region; a judgment supported by research (Genesee, 2007). These parents chose FI so as to allow their children to be able to adopt a national Canadian identity, a transnational identity for ease of mobilization and to reap the rewards that are associated with these identities. It is important to note however, that while grounded in a flattering image of English/French bilingualism (Duff, 2007), ELLs and other FI graduates may be challenged to reap economic benefits associated with official language bilingualism (Pendakur & Pendakur, 1997). Yet despite a change in view from an imagined view of official language bilingualism and its rewards to one more moderated by time in English-dominant Ontario, through interviews, immigrant parents shared their desire for their children to add English and French to their language repertoires with a preference for the FI program (Mady, 2012a). These immigrants, however, as supported by voices of their adult children (Mady, 2012b) were often discouraged from enrolling their children in intensive French learning programs. French as a second language teachers,

administrators, and other educators (i.e., teachers, resource teachers, consultants) questioned parents' desire to register their children in FI and at times actively discouraged parents from seeking such options for their children grounding their perspective in the difficulty of the program.

To date, there is seemingly only one study that has examined teachers' perceptions of access to FI for ELLs (Mady, 2011). It was in this study where FI teachers revealed through questionnaires and interviews that they limited access to FI for ELLs. Some of the FI teachers described the challenges of the FI program as overwhelming and too demanding for ELLs (Mady 2011). Mady and Arnett (2015), in their interviews with teacher candidates, found that student teachers struggled with their inclusive beliefs when faced with associate teachers who would discourage ELLs from studying French as a second language. This present study sought to gather additional data from one different group of influential educators: kindergarten teachers. In this study's context, FI begins in Grade 1. Parents may then seek the advice of mainstream kindergarten teachers when contemplating enrolling their child in FI. In fact, the board, through its website, encourages parents to consult with their child's kindergarten teacher. This study gathered kindergarten teachers' beliefs regarding the inclusion of immigrant ELLs in FI by means of a questionnaire including closed and open-ended questions.

Although there is a dearth of research examining gatekeepers' perspectives on inclusion of ELLs in FI, the practice of gatekeeping in FI is not reserved for this student group. In fact, educational stakeholders may have applied the gatekeeping measures that they had previously used with students with learning difficulties (e.g., Genesee, 1992; Genesee & Jared, 2008) to the ELL population. In his review of the literature on students with learning difficulties in FI, Genesee (2007) confirmed that students with learning difficulties are at times refused access to FI. Studies examining the reasons behind such practices revealed application of "common sense" principles (e.g., FI is too demanding for students with learning difficulties) that varied from region to region and school to school (Arnett & Turnbull, 2007; Arnett, Mady, & Muilenberg, 2014, Taaffe, Maguire, & Pringle, 1996). Similar to this present study, Bourgoin (2016) explored English teachers' perspectives on inclusion. More specifically, she investigated the Grade 2 English teachers' perceptions of inclusion of students with learning difficulties in FI where FI entry began in Grade 3. The teachers revealed through interviews that they believed that FI was best suited for academically strong students. The Grade 2 teachers also revealed certain characteristics that would allow average students to be successful in FI. The identified characteristics (e.g., tolerance of ambiguity), however, correspond to research from the 1970s that posited that certain traits could bolster their success.

Basing decisions to discourage FI enrolment for some students on such dated research and/or "common sense" principles is contrary to research that has found that both students with learning difficulties (e.g., Genesee, 2008) and ELLs can be successful in FI. Taylor (1992) compared one Cantonese-speaking child's math and French results to that of the class to find he was at least on par and at times performed above his classmates. Similarly, although at the junior level, in her comparison of Canadian English speaking, Canadian multilingual, and immigrant multilingual students' French acquisition in Grade 6 FI, Mady (2015a, 2015b) found that the immigrant multilingual group often outperformed, and never underperformed, the other two groups in tests of French or English achievement. Although through a different delivery model at a different grade than the students in this study, similar results were found by Carr (2009) at the onset of the Intensive French program in British Columbia, where the ELLs' performed on par with their English-speaking peers in English and outperformed them in tests

of oral French proficiency. In addition to these comparative studies, in Moore's (2010) qualitative examination of 14 Chinese Grade 1 students' multilingualism and literacy development through discussions of the children's drawings, she judged the students to have high levels of competencies, awareness of writing systems, and reading in their three languages.

### Theoretical Framework

Ajzen's (2005) theory of planned behavior has been identified as a means by which to clearly examine teachers' beliefs (Arnett & Turnbull, 2007). According to the theory of planned behavior, behavior is predicated by one's intention to act which evolves out of three types of beliefs: a) behavioral beliefs about the outcomes of acting (i.e., personal), b) normative beliefs that pertain to one's interpretation of expectations and willingness to comply (i.e., social), and c) control beliefs concerning factors facilitating/inhibiting ones' behavior. In addition, as per the theory of planned behavior, the three belief systems are individually accompanied by the coinciding attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control (see Figure 1). Taken together and supported by numerous studies, Ajzen (2005) theorizes that these six factors lead to intention, and a favourable intention will lead to action provided the opportunity. At the beginning of this study, I sought to investigate kindergarten teachers' personal beliefs about the inclusion of ELLs in FI in one large, urban board of education to explore if and how those beliefs corresponded to information the board provides to parents regarding FI registration (i.e., social), and to examine what beliefs the teachers would communicate to ELL parents (i.e., behavior) if provided the opportunity to do so. This objective was in light of the above research and can be organized/divided into two groups/groupings. First, the research showed French as a

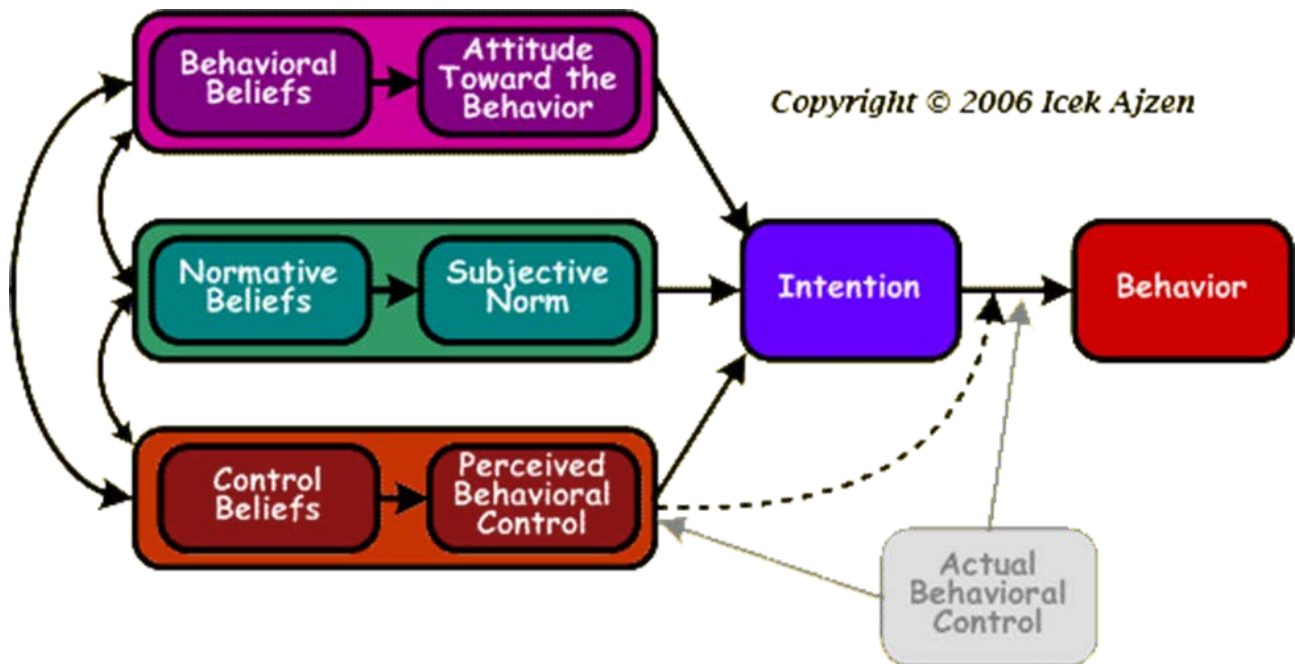


Figure 1. The theory of planned behavior with the addition of beliefs. Retrieved from "Attitudes, Personality and Behavior" by I. Ajzen, 2005, New York, NY: Open University Press. Copyright 2005 by I. Ajzen. Reprinted with permission.

second language teachers judge FI differently than core French,<sup>2</sup> and assess ELLs differently from other students. Second research indicates that parents had been discouraged from registering their children in FI, and the research used to form teacher opinions on excluding certain student groups from FI are sometimes grounded in questionable information. Upon initial analysis of the data from this current study, it became evident that there were determinants that led to the potential for teachers to share their beliefs with parents. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2005) allowed me to trace the kindergarten teachers' intentions to share their beliefs with parents (i.e., behavior) by examining the steps that led to intention, their accompanying beliefs and associated reasons. More specifically, under the personal realm, I examined teachers' behavioral beliefs as leading to attitudes under the social realm—normative beliefs as influenced by the board's subjective norm, and considered issues of control—and control beliefs leading to perceived behavioral control. As it applies to this study, I examine the teachers' and their employers' beliefs, as implicitly revealed through the board's website, as factors leading to the teachers' intentions to share their views with parents considering applying to the FI program.

### **Methodology**

I collected data with the intent to explore kindergarten teacher beliefs on the inclusion of ELLs in one large, urban board of education. In the context of this research study, all students in the participating board of education begin their education in English for junior and senior kindergarten (i.e., two years). Part way through the second year of kindergarten, parents have the option to submit an application to the board to take part in a random draw lottery to potentially allow their children to gain entry into the FI program in Grade 1, where there is limited enrolment. This is the only entry point for FI in the board. In hopes of informing this parental decision-making process, the board offers information nights, brochures, information for parents on their website, and encourages parents to speak to their children's kindergarten teachers. In light of research identifying barriers and biases to inclusion in FI (Arnett, 2013) and the potential for the board and kindergarten teachers to influence parents' decision-making, I set out to examine kindergarten teachers' beliefs on the inclusion of ELLs in FI. More specifically, I sought to examine the following questions: a) to what extent are ELLs present in FI schools, b) if and how kindergarten English teacher beliefs (i.e., personal) correspond to information the board provides to parents regarding FI registration (i.e., social), and b) what beliefs would teachers communicate to ELL parents (i.e., behavior) if provided the opportunity to do so.

### **Kindergarten Teacher Participants**

Mainstream kindergarten teacher participants were recruited from an urban Canadian school board whose student population was at least 50 percent immigrant at the time the study was conducted. Kindergarten teachers were specifically targeted, as this board begins FI in Grade 1. Thus, there is great potential for kindergarten teachers to influence parental decision-making with respect to the Grade 1 FI option for their children.

As per the board's research office requirements, an invitation to participate with a link to the questionnaire was posted on the board's intranet site (i.e., available only to board employees). A total of 60 kindergarten teachers responded to the survey. Half of the respondents indicated

their school was English mainstream (without an FI option); 43.3% indicated that their school was dual track, that is, FI and English mainstream options; and the remaining 6.7% indicated being from single track FI schools.

## **Methods**

To examine the above questions, I used a mixed methods approach. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through open-ended and closed questions in the form of a written survey. In particular, kindergarten teachers were asked to fill out three-parts:

1. A demographic section within which respondents described the ELL population within their school and surrounding community.
2. 12 statements where respondents indicated their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and N/A. This section of the questionnaire was modeled primarily after Lapkin, MacFarlane, and Vandergrift's (2006) national survey of French as a second language teachers' perceptions. The section pertaining to perceptions on inclusion of ELLs has also been used in previous studies (e.g., Mady, Arnett, & Muilenburg, 2016).
3. Three open-ended questions aimed at examining the advice they may provide to immigrant parents of ELLs: a) When a parent of an immigrant English language learner is considering French immersion for their child, what do you encourage them to consider? b) What, if any, factors might influence you to discourage a parent from enrolling their child (immigrant English language learner) in the French immersion track? and c) What, if any, factors might influence you to encourage a parent to enrol their child (immigrant English language learner) in the French immersion track?

Additionally, a document analysis was conducted of the school board's website to examine the type of information provided to parents with respect to enrolling their children in the Grade 1 FI program. One way in which the school board offers guidance to parents considering FI for their children is by means of a website. The website provides a description of the board's perceptions of successful FI candidates. The website data shared below is limited to the data that were on the same topic as those of the kindergarten teachers' beliefs as revealed in the questionnaire. Direct references and quotations are not included so as to not allow the board to be identified. Comparative analysis was performed to examine potential differences between teacher responses and board policies.

## **Findings**

I present data from the questionnaire in three sections. First, I introduce the board, school, and community contexts as revealed by the kindergarten teachers. Following this contextual description and according to Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, I communicate the teachers' beliefs and attitudes as revealed by their level of agreement to the Likert scale items. In the third section, I describe the website analysis as informing teachers' subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. In the final portion of this findings section, I share the kindergarten teachers' intentions to act on their beliefs as revealed in their responses to the open-ended questions.

## **Board, Schools, and Community Contexts**

In this urban board, students begin school with junior and senior kindergarten in English. Since there is a cap on FI enrolment, this board of education uses a lottery system to offer parents the potential to enrol their children in FI beginning in Grade 1. The students are randomly selected to enter the FI program, which may then involve a change in schools.

Although board documentation indicates an enrolment of over 50% immigrant population throughout the board, the kindergarten teachers surveyed were asked to estimate the percentage of immigrant ELLs in their school. The majority of teachers from English mainstream schools (57.2%) indicated that their school had 50% or more immigrant ELLs. While 100% of teachers from single track FI schools indicated there were over 50% immigrant ELLs in their school.

Those teachers in a dual track school were asked to estimate the number of immigrant ELLs in each track. When asked to estimate the number of immigrant ELLs in the English track, approximately 45.5% of teachers reported that immigrant ELLs formed over 50% of the English track of their school. When asked to estimate the number of immigrant ELLs in the FI track, 61.9% of the teacher respondents indicated that immigrants ELLs formed over 50% of the FI track in their schools. Regardless of the school context, all teachers reported that ELLs formed over 50% of the school population. It is noteworthy that in the dual track schools, the teachers estimated there to be more immigrant ELLs in FI than in the English stream.

Teachers were also asked to estimate the number of immigrant children of school age ELLs in the community in which their school is located. The majority of teachers (60.4%) estimated the percentage of immigrant ELLs in the community in which their school is located to be over 50%. The kindergarten respondents revealed similar estimates for both the school and surrounding community, thus providing an indication that FI is inclusive of ELLs.

Given the above reflection on their school and local communities, teachers were provided the opportunity to comment on discrepancies between the two populations, if any. Two teacher respondents offered comments to explain the greater number of immigrant ELLs in the school. One indicated that the families of the immigrant ELLs choose FI because “they want to better educate themselves.” Another added the perspective that “all the parents in the area feel that if they don't put their children in French, regardless of their actual ability, they are setting them up for a disadvantage later in life.”

## **Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes: Findings from Likert-scale Questions**

Kindergarten teachers were asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement to 12 statements related to ELLs in FI, with 5 response options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and N/A. Responses from teachers to this section of the questionnaire was quite low resulting in a substantial amount of missing data. The percentages reported here are out of the total number of teachers who responded to each statement as reflected in the second column, N, of Table 1 below.

In general, teachers were more likely to strongly agree/agree to most of the statements presented: a) ELLs should be included in French immersion (77.8%), b) ELLs should be included in core French (88.9%), c) ELLs meet with success in the English mainstream program (75%), d) ELLs meet with success in the French immersion program (57.2%), e) success in French immersion requires a certain level of English competency (57.1%), f) there are occasions when an ELL should be exempt from learning French (57.2%), and g) I believe ELLs' focus

Table 1

*Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions on the Inclusion of ELLs in FI*

Indicate your level of agreement/ disagreement with the following statements:	N*	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	N/A
ELLs should be included in French immersion.	9	77.8	22.2	-
ELLs should be included in core French.	9	88.9	11.1	-
ELLs meet with success in the English mainstream program.	4	75.0	-	25.0
ELLs meet with success in the French immersion program.	7	57.1	42.9	-
Success in French immersion requires a certain level of English competency.	7	57.1	42.9	-
I believe that the learning of French will support the learning of English for ELLs.	8	37.5	50.0	12.5
There are occasions when an ELL should be exempt from learning French.	7	57.1	42.9	-
In French immersion, the presence of ELLs has an unfavourable impact on the learning potential of the other students in the class.	3	-	100.0	-
I believe ELLs are advantaged learning French compared to their unilingual Canadian peers.	8	-	75.0	25.0
I believe the parents of ELLs support their learning of French.	18	38.9	33.3	27.8
I believe learning French is detrimental to ELLs' learning of English.	15	6.7	86.6	6.7
I believe ELLs' focus should be the acquisition of English.	26	57.7	42.3	-

*Note:* Dash (-) indicates no response was provided. Respondents were able to skip questions and thus there was a variety in the number of participants for each question. Also noteworthy was the fact that more respondents responded to open ended questions than the Likert-scale items thereby providing for missing data.

should be the acquisition of English (57.7%).

Teachers were more likely to strongly disagree/disagree with the following statements: a) I believe that the learning of French will support the learning of English for ELLs (50%); b) In French immersion, the presence of ELLs has an unfavourable impact on the learning potential of the other students in the class (100%); c) I believe ELLs are advantaged learning French compared to their unilingual Canadian peers (75.0%); and d) I believe learning French is detrimental to ELLs' learning of English (86.6%). For the statement, *I believe the parents of ELLs support their learning of French*, although the percentage of teachers who strongly agreed/agreed (38.9%) was greater than the number of teachers who strongly disagreed/disagreed (33.3%), these percentages were relatively close.

Linking the data to Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, as it pertains to kindergarten teachers' behavioural beliefs about inclusion of ELLs in FI, the kindergarten teachers who responded to the Likert-scale questionnaire items agreed that ELLs should be included in FI and core French, with a greater percentage agreeing with their inclusion in core French making a



distinction between programs. At the same time, a majority believed there were times when ELLs should be exempt from French learning. As it pertains to inclusion of ELLs in FI in particular, these findings reveal that the kindergarten teachers believe that FI is a less desirable program for ELLs than core French and that there are times when ELLs should be excluded.

In regard to their behavioral beliefs about the inclusion of ELLs as determined by their evaluation of ELLs' abilities to meet with success, the teachers agreed that ELLs could meet with success in English (75%) and FI (57%). Consequently, a lesser percentage, 18 percent less, agreed with their ability to succeed in FI. As it pertains to knowledge, the majority of respondents indicated that success in FI required a certain level of English, that French could not support nor be detrimental to English learning, nor that ELLs are advantaged learning French. Teachers were less certain about parental support. The teachers indicated their preference for ELLs to focus on English.

### **Normative Beliefs and the Subjective Norm: Findings from Document Analysis and Open-ended Question Responses**

As it pertains to this paper, evidence of the subjective norm of the board was examined by exploring the board's website that provides information to parents who are considering entering their child's name in the lottery for potential admission into Grade 1 FI. It is important to note that, in addition to practical registration information for FI, the board's website offers a description of successful FI students that includes seven characteristics. The provision of such a description could be viewed as implicit messaging creating a subjective norm that some students are more suited for FI than others. With this implicit message that FI is better for some students than others, teachers could adopt the normative belief that sharing this information with parents would dissuade them from choosing FI for their children. In turn, this rationale would meet with board approval since the board itself is engaging in such messaging. In addition to the shared beliefs that FI is not for everyone, teachers may also believe they should share such information with parents as the board's site supports parents consulting with their child's kindergarten teacher. Such congruence between teacher and board beliefs encourages the likelihood of teachers sharing their uncertainties about the FI for certain children with parents. In fact, the board in its provision of information and suggestion for parents to seek advice from the kindergarten teachers places the educators in potential powerful positions of influence on parental decision-making.

Evidence of how kindergarten teachers in this context might apply this general information to ELL parents in particular was discovered in their responses to one of the three open-ended questions. When asked to identify factors, if any, that would prompt them to discourage parents from enrolling their children in FI, thirty-two teachers responded offering ten factors: the affective domain ( $n=10$ ), first language proficiency ( $n=9$ ), English language proficiency ( $n=8$ ), early literacy skills ( $n=6$ ), learning skills ( $n=5$ ), progress in kindergarten ( $n=4$ ), parents' level of English ( $n=2$ ), time on vacation ( $n=1$ ), behaviour ( $n=1$ ), and support at home ( $n=1$ ). It is striking that of the ten factors the teachers identified only one, first language proficiency, is congruent with the characteristics on the board site. Further, the above factors suggest that ELL parents be encouraged to consider factors above and beyond that of other parents (e.g., proficiency in two languages, parental level of English, time on vacation).

### **Control Beliefs and Perceived Behavioral Control: Findings from Open-ended Questionnaire Items**

According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2005), one's control of the behaviour influences whether or not one will partake in said action. As it applies to this study, as seen above, the kindergarten teachers have control over the information they share with the parents. Evidence of such perceived control was discovered in the kindergarten teachers' responses to another of the open-ended questions. In responding to the question of what they recommend immigrant parents consider when contemplating FI for their child, 33 teachers chose to respond, providing 14 different recommendations; some of which included more than one suggestion. Ten teachers chose to focus on the affective domain encouraging parents to consider their child's motivation, interest, personality, independence, self-regulation, confidence, and risk-taking. Five teachers encourage parents to consider their child's English and five their first language skills. Four teachers revealed that children's progress in kindergarten is an area parents should consider. Three teachers believe literacy skills are an important consideration for parents. Two teachers mentioned the need for FI students to be strong learners. The remaining items to consider were mentioned by individual teachers: parents' level of English, the option of late immersion, fast pace of the immersion program, other challenges, the board's information pamphlet, the opportunity FI provides, and the reduction in proficiency in other languages with FI. These responses highlight teachers' level of perceived control in particular as they identified fourteen areas that ELL parents should consider prior to FI application, only three of which were present in the board documents: first language skills, confidence, and risk-taking. It is also worth noting that the kindergarten teachers included a minority of the board-recommended characteristics when giving advice to parents and adding additional characteristics they judge worthy of consideration.

The third open-ended question asked the opposite—what factors teachers would consider when and if encouraging a parent to contemplate FI for their child. Thirty-one teachers responded with ten factors. The most frequent answer ( $n=7$ ) was to consider the affective domain: i.e., risk taking, interest, motivation, and confidence. Consideration of literacy skills and English proficiency were factors mentioned by four teachers. Three teachers indicated that exposure to French outside of the classroom and strong communications skills would be factors that would encourage them to prompt parents to consider FI as an option for their children. Two teachers mentioned strong academics, first language literacy, and strong learning skills as factors that indicate appropriateness of a FI recommendation. Single teachers mentioned success in kindergarten, and both English and first language skills as additional factors. Overall, the kindergarten teachers took similar factors into consideration when choosing to encourage a parent to consider FI for their child. Again, the teachers provided additional characteristics to those provided by the board, but this time included four of the seven characteristics from the board's site (i.e., risk taking, communication skills, language proficiency, and confidence).

Although the provision of supplemental criteria indicates that teachers perceive having the ability to choose the information they share with parents (i.e., control beliefs), other factors may influence whether or not this exchange of information occurs (i.e. perceived behavioural control). For example, teacher beliefs regarding the ability of parents to understand the information if they are also ELLs and the parents' desire to receive such information may be among the factors that could dissuade or facilitate information sharing as might frequency of parental contact.

## **Discussion**

This research study's findings showed kindergarten teachers to believe that FI is not for everyone, claiming it is less suitable than core French and agreeing that ELLs should, at times, be exempt from learning French as a second language. Beliefs that FI is not for all students were supported by the board's provision of information to parents that described characteristics of successful FI students thereby implying that other students may not be successful. The board's information provided not only the subjective norm bolstering the board's kindergarten teachers to share a similar message but is also grounded in a societal norm that judges FI to be for some students, not for all (e.g., Bourgoin, 2016). In addition to the kindergarten teachers' beliefs about inclusion of ELLs in FI, the teachers shared what could be viewed as a rationale for such beliefs. For instance, the kindergarten teachers were less certain (18%) about ELLs' potential to succeed in FI than in the English mainstream program. Reasons for such uncertainty may be grounded in the kindergarten teachers' beliefs about the importance and influence of English. The teachers believed that the ELLs should focus on English, that their focus on French could not help their acquisition of English, and that the students required English to be successful in FI. The teachers also denied that ELLs may be advantaged in learning French as a second language. Given the potential role for teacher experience and preparation to impact beliefs, future investigations should gather more demographic data on the respondents' own experience whereas this questionnaire was limited to their beliefs on the inclusion of ELLs in FI. Further, future research is required to explore ELLs' competencies in French and English in later Grades (e.g., Grade 12) so as to provide data to inform parents and teachers of potential future challenges/advantages.

Further to explaining behavior, the theory of planned behavior has been applied to modify behavior by directly addressing one or more of the six factors influencing intentions. Although most often used in health interventions (e.g., Keats, Culos-Reed, Courneya, & McBride, 2007; Symons Downs & Hausenblas, 2005), given the similar decision-making behavior without use of recent data, such an intervention may also prove beneficial to this study's participants and board as well as to the broader community. For example, in order to address behavioral beliefs and thereby ensuing attitudes, given that some of the teachers' beliefs were supported with information, it may prove advantageous to provide them and the board with up-to-date information that pertains specifically to the ELL community. For instance, given the teachers' concerns about English, the kindergarten teachers may benefit from knowing about research that shows ELLs can learn English as well as French as a second language simultaneously to the same extent or better than their Canadian-born peers (e.g., Mady, 2015, Carr, 2009) and that learning of languages can support each other (Peyer, Kaiser, & Berthele, 2010; Tullock & Fernández-Villanueva, 2013). Such knowledge may also help to reduce the application of additional criteria when considering an ELL student (e.g., parents' language proficiency and time on vacation) in particular as such seemingly common sense judgments are without supporting data and serve to marginalize communities of learners (Blackledge, 2003).

With the objective of modifying the subjective norm, it may prove fruitful to directly address the board-provided characteristics as grounded in dated research of the characteristics of a "good language learner" (e.g., Naiman, Frölich, Stern, & Tedesco, 1978; Rubin, 1975) as such research was, even in the 1970s, intended not to exclude learners but to provide strategies to students to improve their language learning. In fact, although in pursuit of the goal to improve second language learning for all, Naiman, Frölich, Stern, and Tedesco (1978) found that the

strategies used by “good language learners” were not more observable in a “good language learner” than in a poor language learner. In addition, these researchers found that the characteristics (i.e., risk taking) were not sufficient to predict success. It is also noteworthy that Naiman, Frölich, Stern, and Tedesco found that characteristics change according to context so a student who is willing to take risks at home may not be willing to do so in class and vice versa. Further to providing more detailed information on the board’s characteristics as grounded in the faulty image of the “good language learner” above, it may also prove beneficial to provide the board and teachers with more recent research that has found such characteristics to be fluid, subject to teacher influence, and future identifications (i.e., Canadian and transnational identities) (e.g., Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton & Toohey, 2011). Motivation to consider such different perspectives may be encouraged by sharing of research data that shows ELLs and other minority groups to be successful in FI (e.g., Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004; Mady, 2013; Paradis, Crago, Genesee, & Rice).

As it pertains to the dimensions of control in the theory of planned behavior, I in no way want to suggest that the board diminish teachers’ ability and willingness to talk to parents. Instead, I propose that the teachers be provided with the above information, and other evidence-based data, in professional development sessions. In addition, the board may want to consider providing talking points to guide teachers’ discussions with parents not only of ELLs but for all students as well. The board may also consider updating the information it provides to parents through its website. To reach ELL parents in particular, the board might consider providing information in a variety of languages. Canadian Parents for French (2010), for example, provides information to parents about FI in a variety of languages. Additional information for parents may also include evidence, as presently available and to be made available through future work in this area, on the potential/challenges for their children to reap their intended rewards. Such information sharing would allow parents to make informed decisions.

Despite the dated information on the website and potential discouragement, through the description of the school contexts and limited comments, the above findings revealed ELL parents who were motivated to enroll their children in FI. Despite the kindergarten teachers’ intentions to inform ELL parents that FI is not suitable for all students as revealed by the antecedents to intention in the Planned Theory of Behavior, ELLs still gained admission into the FI program as indicated by the school populations having the same amount or more ELLs in FI than in the surrounding communities as revealed by the kindergarten teachers. This suggests that ELLs are getting greater access to FI than revealed in past research. Although given the cap on enrolment in this board, this access is limited. The reasons for greater access were not examined in this study. For future research, it would be beneficial to interview the parents regarding the factors that encouraged registration of their child in FI, both philosophical and practical. It is possible that the lottery system may have contributed to an increase in ELL enrolment. Although likely not done with that end in mind, the board may have increased parents’ desire to gain entry to FI for their children by limiting their ability to do so. Such an increase in desirability is similar to consumers who have greater desire to buy a product as they view it has greater value in part due to its scarcity (Aggarwal, Jun, & Huh, 2011). Future research with parents could also examine their planned behavior to explore if and when they consulted teachers and if and how that information was used. Previous research with ELL parents suggests that parents may enroll their children in FI without consultation and also despite of advice to do the contrary. It would be interesting to learn of the frequency with which the parents are given

advice and whether or not they follow it. Sharing the same information as suggested above for teachers and the board with all parents could be means by which to bolster parents' behavioral and control beliefs so as to empower parents to make informed decisions for their children.

This research study revealed potential challenges to access to FI programming for ELLs. Possible discouragement from the positive results of FI, the “best” way to become bilingual (Genesee, 2007), then, could be interpreted as disadvantageous, dated, and in need of change and/or expansion. In this paper, I suggested a multifaceted approach to informing educators and administrators who could then inform themselves and parents. Such a strategic multifaceted approach has the potential to empower parents to make informed educational choices for their children.

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### Notes

1 In the context of this study, English language learners are children who have immigrated to Canada and whose home language is neither English nor French.

2 In French immersion, students study French and subjects in French for a minimum of 50% of the day whereas core French is the study of the language for approximately 40 minutes a day.

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