

**Context-appropriate crosslinguistic pedagogy:  
Considering the role of language status in immersion education**

**Abstract**

In the field of second language education, researchers increasingly call for crosslinguistic pedagogical practices meant to encourage bilingual learners to draw on all of their linguistic resources regardless of the focus of instruction or the status of the target language. These recommendations include a relaxation of the strict language separation common in many bilingual education programs. Specifically, some Canadian French immersion researchers suggest that it may be beneficial to allow immersion students to use English for peer interaction during instructional time allotted to French. In this position paper, we argue that researchers should proceed with caution in calling for increased majority language use in the minority language classroom. We use Canadian French immersion as a case in point to contend that until empirical evidence supports increased use of English in immersion, crosslinguistic approaches that maintain a separate space for the majority language may represent ideal pedagogical practices in these contexts.

**1. Introduction**

**1.1. Language use in Canadian immersion contexts**

The advent of French immersion programs in Canada coincided with calls for increasing the power of the French language in the province of Quebec and in Canadian society in general. It also occurred at a time when federal legislation made both French and English official languages in Canada. With respect to educational issues, anglophone parents in the province of Quebec in particular “were disillusioned with traditional methods of language-teaching such as

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4 drills and repetitions and were eager for their children to have a bilingual advantage in Québec”  
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6 (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Roy, 2010: 398). Meanwhile, federal and provincial governments  
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8 embraced immersion as a means to unite Anglophones and Francophones, two distinct  
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10 populations within Canada. As French immersion spread to schools in other provinces, it offered  
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12 opportunities for bilingualism to English-speaking families and was seen to increase social  
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14 cohesion throughout Canada.  
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19 In Canadian French immersion programs, at least 50% of the curriculum is taught using  
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21 French. During time allotted to French, teachers and students alike are meant to use only French  
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23 -- once students have acquired sufficient proficiency in the language to express themselves,  
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25 usually at the end of kindergarten or in Grade 1. In recent years, the program has become  
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27 increasingly diverse linguistically so that French-speaking students as well as students who speak  
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29 first languages other than French or English are also enrolled in the programs (Lyster, Collins, &  
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31 Ballinger, 2009; Mady, 2015). Nevertheless, the majority of French immersion students come  
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33 from English-speaking households, and many of them are not exposed to French outside of  
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35 school. As a result, the class time allotted to French is often the only exposure to French the  
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37 students receive. All French immersion programs also provide students instruction in and  
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39 through English, and students across Canada (with some exceptions in the province of Quebec)  
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41 are exposed primarily to English, the societal majority language, outside school. This pattern of  
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43 the immersion language being limited to the classroom while the students’ L1 permeates the  
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45 social environment outside the immersion classroom is not limited to Canadian French  
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47 immersion programs. It can be found in other immersion programs in North America, such as  
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49 Spanish immersion in the U.S., and in programs around the world, such as English immersion in  
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51 Japan (Bostwick, 2001) and English immersion in Brazil (French, 2007).  
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4 While teachers in French immersion programs largely maintain the use of French during  
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6 French instruction time and despite informal rules that encourage the use of French only during  
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8 those times, immersion students often prefer to use English, particularly when interacting with  
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10 peers (Tarone & Swain, 1995). In early total immersion programs, students' preference to speak  
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12 English during French instructional time markedly increases at around Grade 4, soon after the  
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14 introduction of English instruction (Harley, 1992). Similar findings for an English preference  
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16 have been found in U.S. one-way immersion programs (e.g., Fortune, 2001), U.S. two-way  
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18 immersion, and even in Irish immersion contexts in Ireland (Hickey, 2007). Among students who  
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20 speak English at home, the timing of this increased preference for English has been found to co-  
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22 occur with a plateau effect for oral proficiency development in the minority language (Fortune &  
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24 Tedick, 2015; Lapkin, Hart & Swain, 1991). A preference to use English has also been found in  
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26 programs where students from minority-language and majority-language households learn  
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28 together and is evident regardless of students' language background, probably reflecting the high  
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30 status and generally broad usage of English outside school (Potowski, 2007) The bias to use  
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32 English is of particular concern in two-way immersion programs that include speakers of both  
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34 the majority and the minority language because these programs aim to offer equitable linguistic  
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36 support for both majority and minority language speakers (de Jong & Howard, 2009).  
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45 Immersion teachers are urged to discourage their students from using the majority  
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47 language during minority language class time in order to enhance the status, use, and acquisition  
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49 of the minority language as much as possible (Calvé, 1993; Germain, 1991; Rebuffot, 1993).  
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51 Some recent publications have called this practice into question (Cummins, 2014; Swain &  
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53 Lapkin, 2013; Turnbull, Cormier, & Bourque, 2011), arguing that changes in our thinking of  
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55 how bilinguals learn and use language to mediate communication, cognition, and identity  
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4 indicate that the benefits of immersion students using English outweighs any disadvantages that  
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6 result from reduced use of the minority language. In this paper, we address those arguments by  
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8 examining crosslinguistic theory and practices, including translanguaging. Throughout this  
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10 exploration, we consider both the advantages and disadvantages of pedagogical practices that  
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12 require or encourage use of majority languages during minority language class time in  
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14 immersion programs. The aim of this paper is to begin a critical conversation about issues related  
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16 to crosslinguistic pedagogical methods in immersion education. In so doing, we do not aim to  
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18 criticize these practices or the thinking behind them. Rather, we aim to sharpen thinking about  
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20 how best to enhance the effectiveness of what we agree is a ‘transformative pedagogy’ for all  
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22 learners and in all learning contexts.  
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29 We focus on the use of French and English in immersion programs in Canada as a case in  
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31 point. Specifically, we argue that when both a majority and a minority language are taught within  
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33 the same program, crosslinguistic techniques that favour increased use of the minority language  
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35 are more beneficial than those that favour increased use of the majority language. In regards to  
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37 French immersion specifically, we argue that claims for the benefits of English use in the  
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39 program may be premature and even potentially damaging to the progress and effectiveness of  
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41 the program. Moreover, in hastily seeking to incorporate practices into immersion programs that  
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43 specifically increase use of the majority language (English), educators could simultaneously be  
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45 (a) eradicating longstanding and proven immersion methodologies; (b) overlooking the historic  
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47 and modern role of English as a dominant language in Canadian and, indeed, international  
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49 contexts; and (c) ignoring the fact that immersion-based studies have demonstrated the efficacy  
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51 of alternative means to supporting students’ access to their full linguistic repertoire in the target  
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53 language classroom without direct use of the majority language.  
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## 1.2. New perspectives on bilingualism

In the past two decades, understanding how bilinguals acquire, process, and communicate in their languages has undergone a fundamental shift. Throughout this paper, we use the term ‘bilingual’ broadly to refer to individuals who know two or more languages. Previously, there was a tendency among scientists and educators to view bilinguals’ knowledge of each language as cognitively compartmentalized—that is, as totally separate systems of representation and processing. This view has been reflected in some educational thinking and practices; for example, in the past, many educational programs for immigrant students discouraged and, in some cases, even prohibited minority language speakers from using their home languages in school on the assumption that this would interfere with and slow down their acquisition of the majority language. This approach was also evident in immersion programs for majority language students in Canada. Cummins (2007), notably, has commented on the isolation of English and French instruction in Canadian French immersion, referring to this as the ‘two solitudes’ approach to language instruction.

However, evidence from the fields of neurolinguistics (e.g., Hoshino & Thierry, 2011), sociolinguistics (e.g., Jorgensen, 2008), cognitive psychology (Kroll, Bobb & Hoshino, 2014), multilingual education (García, 2009; García & Li Wei, 2014), critical applied linguistics (Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; May, 2013) and second language (L2) education (e.g., Council of Europe, 2000) indicate that there are multiple dynamic interrelationships between the languages of bilinguals. For example, in the field of cognitive psychology, researchers have found that child and adult bilinguals and, in particular, simultaneous bilinguals are able to code-mix without violating the grammatical constraints of

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4 either language most of the time (e.g., Genesee, 2006). This ability indicates that bilinguals have  
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6 access to the grammars of both languages simultaneously and automatically. There is also a great  
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8 deal of evidence for significant and positive correlations between reading skills in one language  
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10 and reading skills in another in bilinguals; the nature and extent of the interaction depends to  
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12 some extent on the typological similarity of the languages and their orthographic systems (e.g.,  
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14 August & Shanahan, 2006). Research on the acquisition, comprehension, and production of two  
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16 languages and during proficient bilingual performance among sequential Spanish-English  
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18 bilinguals has revealed further that both linguistic systems are differentially accessible and  
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20 activated at virtually all times (e.g., Gullifer, Kroll, & Dussias, 2013). The two languages of  
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22 bilinguals share a common cognitive/conceptual foundation that can facilitate use of more than  
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24 one language during communication, thinking, and problem solving. Research also suggests that  
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26 competence in two or more languages engenders the development of sophisticated cognitive  
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28 skills for negotiating and minimizing cross-language competition (Kroll, 2008). Findings from  
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30 these lines of research reveal highly sophisticated, interacting systems of language  
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32 representations, access, and use.  
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41 An important consequence of this shift in our conceptualization of bilingualism is that,  
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43 while in the past many educators<sup>1</sup> viewed crosslinguistic interactions as a source of interference  
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45 that might impede learners' ability to learn and use an additional language, these relationships  
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47 are increasingly viewed as potentially advantageous to bilinguals' overall linguistic  
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49 development, processing, and communication (Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010;  
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51 Cummins, 2014; García, 2009; Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). As a result,  
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58 <sup>1</sup> Notable exceptions are and Faltis (1989) and Wong Fillmore & Valadez (1986), who advocated  
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60 the concurrent translation approach in bilingual classes for Spanish home language students  
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62 learning English in U.S. schools.  
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4 researchers increasingly promote and seek practices that support learners' ability to make  
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6 crosslinguistic connections. While researchers who are grounded in translanguaging theory are  
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8 not the only ones to seek this pedagogical change, they have made important and extensive  
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10 contributions to it. Thus, the following section offers an overview of translanguaging theory and  
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12 pedagogy.  
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## 15 16 17 18 19 **2. Translanguaging**

### 20 21 **2.1. Definitions**

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23 Cen Williams first used the term translanguaging to refer to a specific bilingual pedagogical  
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25 practice that he developed for Welsh-English bilingual programs in Wales (Williams, 1996).  
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29 Williams encouraged switching the language used for input and output within the same  
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31 classroom. For example, students might read or listen to a text in English and then write or speak  
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33 about that text in Welsh. The goal was to push students to process information more deeply and  
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35 fully, the reasoning being that, in order to use the information in one language, students had first  
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37 to be able to fully understand it through another language (Baker, 2011; Williams, 1996). Due to  
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39 the endangered position of Welsh as a societal language and the tendency for it to be students'  
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41 weaker language, this approach was also meant to support the status and use of Welsh in schools  
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43 and to push students to develop more cognitively complex ideas in their weaker language.  
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49 Within the fields of multilingual education and critical applied linguistics (Baker, 2011;  
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51 Canagarajah, 2011; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009; Li Wei, 2011; May, 2013),  
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53 translanguaging has been defined according to both the internal mental and external social  
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55 practices of bilinguals themselves. Notably, García (2009: 45) defines translanguagings as the  
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57 “multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their  
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4 bilingual worlds.” More recently, the definition of translanguaging has been extended to include  
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6 “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to  
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8 the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages” (Otheguy, García, & Reid,  
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10 2015: 283). In other words, there is a growing emphasis on the argument that the notion of  
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12 distinct languages is a social construction that reflects sociopolitical boundaries but has no basis  
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14 in distinct linguistic features or in the way languages are represented and processed cognitively.  
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16 In this sense, rather than conceptualizing second language learning as acquisition of a separate,  
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18 distinct language, translanguaging theorists argue that it is more beneficial for educators to frame  
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20 this process as adding to a bilingual’s single linguistic repertoire (García & Li Wei, 2014;  
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22 Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015).

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29 According to translanguaging theory, translingual discursive practices are the norm rather  
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31 than the exception among bilinguals in society; although we would argue that it depends on the  
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33 societal context. As a result, it is argued that, in the classroom, it is inappropriate and  
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35 counterproductive for educators to try to put a halt to this type of language use. It follows that  
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37 translanguaging pedagogical methods are methods with the intention of tapping into or  
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39 supporting bilinguals’ multiple discursive practices or that “use the entire linguistic repertoire of  
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41 bilingual students’ flexibly” (García, 2013: 2). Translanguaging researchers often underline the  
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43 importance of supporting and celebrating students’ natural tendency “to travel” between their  
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45 languages to communicate effectively (Palmer, Martinez, Mateus, & Henderson, 2014). They  
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47 argue that school environments should support learners’ development of a specifically bilingual  
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49 competence that allows them to strategically draw on their full linguistic repertoire and to use  
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51 both languages in socially appropriate ways. In this view, mastery of this type of communication  
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is necessary for social success in bilingual communities where this type of communication occurs naturally (Garcia, 2009; Gort & Sembiante, 2015; Palmer et al., 2014).

## 2.2. Translanguaging and crosslinguistic pedagogical practices

The term ‘translanguaging’ can refer to many things. As described above, it can refer to a theory of cognitive language processing or it can refer to the societal use of more than one language during communication among bilinguals. It can further be used to describe classroom language use behaviors among emerging bilingual students, and it can be used to refer to teaching practices that support and encourage students’ accessing their full linguistic repertoire, regardless of the language of instruction. Even in this final category of pedagogical practice, the term translanguaging has been used to refer to practices that directly support use of other languages (often home languages) in a target language classroom and practices that indirectly push learners to draw on resources from their other languages while continuing to communicate through the target language (see, e.g., Cummins, 2014). It is our belief that these multiple uses of the term render it vague for many in the field of second language education, which can lead to misunderstandings. We therefore propose that a distinct umbrella term be used for pedagogical practices that support and encourage learners’ drawing on their full linguistic repertoire in the classroom. Here, we use the term ‘crosslinguistic pedagogy’ to refer to practices that may, or may not be, grounded in translanguaging theory. Additionally, these practices may, or may not, allow for direct use of non-target languages in the target language classroom.

What are some activities that qualify as crosslinguistic pedagogy? Besides the original practice of translanguaging developed by Williams (1996), described earlier, research in a variety of contexts has described teachers using translation and strategic codeswitching to

1 support students' understanding of the material. They may also allow or encourage their students  
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4 to use other languages during peer collaboration or while brainstorming or writing a first draft of  
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7 an assignment in the classroom language, for example (Behan, Turnbull, & Spek, 1997; García,  
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10 2009; Manyak, 2004; Luk & Lin, 2015). In majority language educational classrooms with  
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13 students from minoritized language backgrounds, teachers may use multicultural or multilingual  
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16 texts to validate and draw attention to the variety of languages spoken by students, use examples  
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19 drawn from other cultures or countries to illustrate a point, or may introduce multilingual  
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22 elements into the classroom such as greetings, songs, or labels. Students may create language  
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25 portfolios to record their learning in both/all languages of instruction, or teachers may use  
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28 'identity texts' in which minority language students first write a text in the majority language and  
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31 then work with family and community members to translate it into their L1 (Celic & Seltzer,  
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34 2012; Chow & Cummins, 2003; Hesson, Seltzer & Woodley, 2014; Schecter & Cummins, 2003).  
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37 In immersion contexts, teachers may begin readings and tasks in a language arts class conducted  
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40 in one language of instruction and finish them in the language arts class in the other language of  
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43 instruction (Ballinger, 2013, 2015; Lyster, Collins, & Ballinger, 2009; Lyster, Quiroga, &  
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46 Ballinger, 2013). These are a few examples; but, other possibilities for crosslinguistic activities  
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49 have been and are still being explored (e.g., Beeman & Urow, 2012; Cenoz & Gorter, 2011;  
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52 Soltero-González, Escamilla, & Hopewell, 2012). In short, there is a broad spectrum of activities  
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55 that could be included under the rubric "crosslinguistic pedagogy", and while most of these  
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58 techniques are probably effective, it is also possible that some of these techniques are not equally  
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61 useful or relevant for all learners in all contexts. In other words, crosslinguistic pedagogy may be  
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64 implemented in different ways depending on the language-learning context and on students'  
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67 needs and background.

### 2.3. Crosslinguistic pedagogy in French immersion.

In the past decade, researchers grounded in translanguaging theory (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009; Wei, 2011) have focused on students from minoritized language backgrounds such as Spanish-speaking students in U.S. schools where English tends to predominate. As a result, the specific pedagogical implications and applications of their work tend to focus on a particular type of learner – a non-native speaker of English or a learner who is still in the process of learning English for purposes of schooling and who has some exposure to English in and outside of school, but few opportunities to access or develop their other languages at school. Building in opportunities for these students to officially access their other languages within a majority language framework does not pose a threat to their continued exposure to or use of the majority language, while supporting their overall linguistic development, full expression of their linguistic identity and histories, and their academic achievement (García & Wei, 2014; Norton, 2013).

French immersion programs in Canada also increasingly include minority language students whose L1 is not English (Kristmanson & Dicks, 2014; Mady, 2015), although the primary language of communication at school and the surrounding community is likely to be English. While crosslinguistic practices that incorporate minority language students' L1s in French immersion classrooms could be beneficial for the reasons given above (Cummins, 2014; Swain & Lapkin, 2005), it is not widespread practice in French immersion. Some French-immersion-based studies (Lizee, 2014; Mady, Arnett & Muilenburg, 2016) have found that teachers' use of students' home language(s) was limited to English with little consideration given to languages other than English or French. Immersion programs have far to go in supporting the

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4 incorporation of minority languages other than English or French into the classroom; efforts to  
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6 do so must be added to the program's goals to allow it to respond to the evolving needs of  
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8 immersion students.  
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11           Nevertheless, some research on crosslinguistic practices in French immersion has focused  
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13 on the potential benefits of *English* use among L1 *English* speakers. In addition to claims that  
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15 appropriate codeswitching and bilingual language use practices should be modeled and taught to  
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17 Anglophone students to aid their successful integration into bilingual society (Turnbull, Cormier,  
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19 & Bourque, 2011), these researchers also note that immersion students must learn and respond to  
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21 increasingly complex content as they move into the upper grades of the program. Thus, some  
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23 immersion researchers have proposed that crosslinguistic practices that entail the use of English  
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25 in immersion classrooms may help Anglophone students mediate complex subject material while  
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27 supporting their L2 development (Behan, Turnbull, & Spek, 1997; Cummins, 2014; Swain &  
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29 Lapkin, 2000; 2013; Turnbull, Cormier, & Bourque, 2011).  
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36           Swain and Lapkin (2000), for example, examined English use among (English L1)  
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38 French immersion students as they collaborated in pairs to complete jigsaw and dictogloss tasks  
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40 during instructional time allocated to French. The researchers investigated the frequency with  
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42 which students used their L1 during these task interactions, what they used it for, and the  
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44 relationship between L1 use and the written product that emerged from their collaboration. They  
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46 found that these learners used their L1 to move the task along, to focus their attention on the task,  
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48 and for 'interpersonal interaction' (when off-task and during disagreements). The researchers  
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50 found that students who spoke more English were rated more poorly on their written product in  
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52 French than those who spoke less English. The researchers concluded that lower achieving  
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54 students have a greater need to use the L1, and they argued that without recourse to the L1,  
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4 students may not be able to complete certain tasks. Although they stated that teachers should not  
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7 ‘actively’ encourage students to use English, the researchers somewhat contradictorily conclude  
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9 that ‘judicious’ L1 use can support L2 learning. This at least implies that immersion teachers  
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11 should not intervene in relation to their students’ choice of language, and many teachers may  
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13 wonder whether they should take measures to support students’ French use during collaborative  
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16 tasks.  
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19 Two other studies have examined the possible benefits of English use during instructional  
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21 time allocated to French in Grade 7 late French immersion in Canada. In examining their claims  
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23 and findings, it is important to note that late immersion begins in Grade 7 and that, prior to Grade  
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25 7, most late immersion students take only core French classes, which usually entail about 30  
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27 minutes to an hour of French instruction per day. Thus, even after a year in the immersion  
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29 program, late immersion students’ French proficiency is much lower than it would be if, like the  
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31 majority of immersion students, they had begun immersion in Kindergarten or Grade 1 in an  
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33 early total immersion program. Because the content to be learned is more complex in Grade 7  
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35 than it is in Grade 1, late immersion students must begin learning complex content material in  
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37 French despite having rather low proficiency in that language. They therefore need substantial  
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39 scaffolding, and recourse to English is most likely unavoidable during complex L2 interactions,  
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41 for these students, given that academic objectives in these programs are the same as in English  
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43 classes at the same grade level.  
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51 In Behan, Turnbull, and Spek (1997), four groups of Anglophone participants from one  
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53 Grade 7 immersion class were asked to prepare a written draft of an oral presentation. Students  
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55 were recorded during this collaboration. Their interactions were analyzed to determine what  
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57 language they spoke to each other and whether, in the final oral presentation, there was any  
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evidence of learning stemming from their English interactions. The researchers found that learners used English while searching for French vocabulary words and later used these French vocabulary words during their oral presentation. The researchers also found that topics discussed in English appeared in the final French product, and they inferred that English use assisted L2 learning. Because students used a mixture of their L1 and L2 for task completion, the authors concluded that English was beneficial to task completion.

In another study examining English use in French immersion, Turnbull, Cormier, and Bourque (2011) investigated late immersion Anglophone students' use of English and French during an oral interview on a science topic. Students' English language use during the interview was linked to the complexity of their oral turns as well as to their French written performance in answering questions on the same topic. The researchers found that exclusively English turns and turns in which students codeswitched were more complex in nature than exclusively French turns. Moreover, students who used more English during their interviews produced fewer French errors in their written production. Swain and Lapkin (2013) interpret the Turnbull et al. (2011) findings to mean that students may need their L1 to mediate their thinking when dealing with complex content, an idea that Cummins (2014) restates, based on findings from this same study.

In the following sections, we address the above claims and suggest crosslinguistic methods for French immersion and other bilingual education contexts in which the majority of students and/or one of the target languages is the high status or majority language in the broader community of the learners. We first explain the rationale behind certain tenets of immersion programs, including the separation of languages of instruction. We then propose our vision of context-appropriate crosslinguistic pedagogy for the Canadian French immersion classroom and,

by extension, for other contexts in which students are learning through both a majority and a minority language.

### 3. Rationale for immersion program policies

Immersion programs for majority language students are based on a number of assumptions or theories. Below, we examine these assumptions with reference to the use of crosslinguistic pedagogies:

1. To achieve additive bilingualism, overt support is given to both languages of instruction.
2. To achieve high levels of functional proficiency in the L2, students require extended exposure to and use of the language.
3. To effectively learn content through their L2, immersion students need instruction that is adapted for L2 learners.
4. Learning through two languages and learning about the target-language culture will help resolve societal power imbalances and bridge divides between language speakers.

#### 3.1. Assumption 1: To achieve additive bilingualism, overt support is given to both languages of instruction.

Lambert (1975) introduced the concept of additive bilingualism as a form of bilingualism in which learners may learn an additional language with no threat of loss to their home language(s). In order for this to happen, they need to continue receiving support for their home languages and to see that these languages are valued and supported by the school (Cummins, 1998). As Johnson and Swain (1997) note, a key feature of immersion programs is the fact that they offer ‘overt’ support for learners’ L1 by making it an ‘essential element’ of the curriculum. It is important to

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4 note that this is only true when students' home language is one of the languages of instruction  
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6 since Canadian immersion programs do not yet offer support for home languages other than  
7  
8 English or French. Even in early French immersion, English language arts classes are typically  
9  
10 introduced by Grade 3, and instruction through the medium of English is gradually increased  
11  
12 until it represents 50% of instruction time. The goals of this configuration of instruction are: (1)  
13  
14 to provide explicit and visible support for English, the majority language of the community and  
15  
16 the home language of most students, thereby creating an additive bilingual environment in the  
17  
18 school, and (2) to help immersion learners reach the same level of English proficiency as they  
19  
20 would if they were taught through English only. Thus, because majority-language English-  
21  
22 speaking students in French immersion participate in an additive bilingual program and receive  
23  
24 extensive English support in and outside school, the potential benefits of encouraging the use of  
25  
26 English during French instruction time are questionable in this context for these learners. The  
27  
28 same is true in other immersion or dual language education contexts in which students' L1 is the  
29  
30 societally dominant language; for example, English immersion for Japanese-speaking students in  
31  
32 Japan (Bostwick, 2001), English immersion for Portuguese-speaking students in Brazil (Blos  
33  
34 Bolzan, 2016), or one-way Spanish immersion for English-speaking students in the U.S  
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44 (Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013).

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48 **3.2. Assumption 2: Learners need extensive exposure to and practice using the**  
49  
50 **minority language.**  
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53 Achieving high levels of functional proficiency in a minority language is not something  
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55 that can be achieved with only 30 or 60 minutes a day of classroom exposure. The purpose of  
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57 French immersion programs in Canada has been to create classroom settings that maximize  
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4 exposure to French in meaningful ways by creating opportunities to use it in schools located in  
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6 communities that are otherwise predominantly English-speaking. Immersion programs have  
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8 similarly been devised in other parts of the world to create learning environments in which  
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10 students can be exposed to and use an additional language which is otherwise not widely used or  
11  
12 supported outside school. Consequently, French immersion programs have striven to discourage  
13  
14 and avoid the use of English during the French part of the school day because it takes away time  
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18  
19 to use and practice the L2.

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21         The rationale for avoiding English during class time allocated to French stems from two  
22  
23 basic psycholinguistic principles that underpin conceptualizations of L2 learning in classroom  
24  
25 settings. The first principle is that L2 learning is driven by meaningful input and that, in the case  
26  
27 of French immersion, classroom exposure to French is students' primary source of meaningful  
28  
29 input (Krashen, 1985). The second principle is that L2 learning is enhanced when students use  
30  
31 the target language for purposeful communication (Swain, 1985); greater use of the target  
32  
33 language for such communication, it is argued, enhances L2 learning commensurately. The goal  
34  
35 of developing students' L2 fluency in the service of academic development is based on the  
36  
37 psycholinguistic premise that retrieval of target language representations and their subsequent  
38  
39 production in meaningful contexts increases depth of processing and strengthens associations in  
40  
41 memory in a way that makes them easier to access during spontaneous production later (de Bot,  
42  
43 1996; DeKeyser, 2007; Lyster, 2007). While reference to English for contrastive purposes during  
44  
45 French class time may contribute to a restructuring of interlanguage representations, it is only  
46  
47 through use of French in cognitively challenging ways that newly analyzed representations can  
48  
49 become proceduralized and thus available for fluent spontaneous use (Lyster & Sato, 2013).  
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4 In the case of French immersion, Swain and Lapkin (2013) proposed that “students  
5 should be permitted to use their L1 [...] to mediate their understanding and generation of  
6  
7 complex ideas (linguaging) as they prepare to produce an end product (oral or written) in the  
8  
9 target (L2) language” (pp. 122-123). Similarly, Cummins (2014) has claimed that French  
10  
11 immersion students “who use English for planning are able to develop strategies to carry out  
12  
13 tasks in French and to work through complex problems more efficiently than they might be able  
14  
15 to do when confined to using their weaker language” (pp. 16-17). However, these suggestions do  
16  
17 not appear strongly supported by empirical evidence. For example, although Turnbull et al.  
18  
19 (2011) found a link between oral English use and fewer French writing errors, Swain and Lapkin  
20  
21 (2000) found that the dyads in their study who used less English received overall higher ratings  
22  
23 on the content and language of the French written tasks than did students using more English.  
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26  
27 Swain and Lapkin (2000; 2013) have suggested that the L1 is necessary for task  
28  
29 mediation, arguing that “students should be permitted to use their L1 for the purpose of working  
30  
31 through complex ideas as occurred in the Behan et al. study” (p. 113). The study by Behan et al.  
32  
33 (1997), however, was exploratory and very small-scale: Students in one late immersion  
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35 classroom were given one hour to prepare a rough written draft of an oral presentation. The peer  
36  
37 interaction occurring during the preparation phase as well as the oral presentations were  
38  
39 recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the researchers. The findings revealed that, during the  
40  
41 oral presentations, students used vocabulary words in the target language that they had searched  
42  
43 for through the medium of the L1. This led to the tentative conclusion that L2 development had  
44  
45 occurred, although the authors were quick to emphasize the exploratory nature of their study.  
46  
47 Swain and Lapkin’s claims that the use of English enhanced task completion and L2  
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49 development in this study are thus speculative and not directly supported by the findings,  
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4 especially because no language testing took place. That learners use their L1 to complete a task  
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6 does not necessarily mean they cannot complete the task without their L1. Nor does it follow that  
7  
8 the use of English benefits French development because it allows for task completion.  
9

10  
11         Despite the growing interest in examining English as a mediating tool for L2 and subject-  
12  
13 matter learning in immersion, there is both anecdotal and empirical evidence showing that  
14  
15 French immersion students already use English for this purpose and do so increasingly as they  
16  
17 progress through the program (e.g., Tarone & Swain, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Moreover,  
18  
19 as mentioned earlier, immersion students appear to reach a plateau in their oral development in  
20  
21 the minority language around the same time that more English is introduced into the curriculum  
22  
23 (Fortune & Tedick, 2015), indicating that there may be a link between increased English use and  
24  
25 slowed rates of minority-language development. Some studies have found that French immersion  
26  
27 students feel dissatisfied with their proficiency in French and hesitant to use it, and do not see  
28  
29 themselves as legitimate speakers of the language (Auger, 2002; Macintyre, Burns, & Jessome,  
30  
31 2011; Roy, 2010). Taken together, these findings do not support the claim that more use of  
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33 English in French immersion would lead to greater fluency in French and more confidence using  
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35 it.  
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43         In many foreign language contexts outside Canada and other English-speaking countries  
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45 in which the minority language is English (e.g., Saudi Arabia or Vietnam where English is the  
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47 L2), students are often highly motivated, even in peer interaction, to use English and to limit  
48  
49 their use of the majority language (Blos Bolzan, 2016; Storch & Aldosari, 2012). This suggests  
50  
51 that the use of English by North American immersion students is not necessarily a result of their  
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53 lack of proficiency in French or a need for cognitive support through English, but rather the high  
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55 value and prestige that is attached to competence in English, even among adolescent learners.  
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This could also account for the low level of motivation to use French in the English-dominant setting in Canada (see Segalowitz, 2010, concerning the role of motivation in fluency development).

In a similar vein, Storch and Aldosari's (2013) investigated pair work in an EFL college class in Saudi Arabia. The audio-recorded pair talk of 30 learners revealed that they used English predominantly during these activities and their L1 only to a very limited extent regardless of their level of proficiency in English or the pattern of interaction: 94% of all turns and 96% of all words were in English L2. Similarly, Blos Bolzan's (2016) study of peer collaboration during writing tasks in English in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class at a bilingual school in Brazil found that students were comfortable speaking English during peer activities and that some students suggested that speaking about English texts in their L1 (Portuguese) might render the task more difficult. In these studies, students were both willing and able to use English to complete tasks without the use of the L1 for cognitive support, again speaking to students' motivation to learn and use English even when it is not used in the community. Collectively, these studies argue that French immersion students' preference to use English may be more related to its status as the majority global language than to its value as a cognitive tool, an issue we return to later.

**3.2.1. *The role of translation in French immersion.*** Examining the value of English use in French immersion raises the perennial question of translation, which, in turn, needs to be qualified in terms of who is translating—the teacher or the students? French immersion teachers are advised to not rely extensively on concurrent translation to facilitate comprehension because immediate provision of translation equivalents reduces students' motivation to learn the target language and their depth of processing, thus diminishing the extent to which the target word is

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4 used and internalized in memory. Students are more likely to remember a word in the L2 if they  
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6 have been pushed to think about its meaning through the L2 than if they are simply told the L1  
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8 equivalent in English (Cameron, 2001). Moreover, the use of translation equivalents in  
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10 immersion tends to reorient the instructional focus away from contextualized academic content  
11  
12 learning and towards the learning of decontextualized vocabulary items (Pessoa, Hendry,  
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14 Donato, Tucker, & Lee, 2007). In a study of CLIL (content and language integrated learning)  
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16 teachers at the secondary level in Austria, Gierlinger (2015) found that teachers used German L1  
17  
18 as a means to help students understand academic content and to scaffold learning, but did so  
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20 because they were not sufficiently fluent in English and they (the teachers) did not possess the  
21  
22 pedagogical knowledge required to help students understand concepts through English. The  
23  
24 disadvantages of over-using students' home language in the early grades can become  
25  
26 increasingly problematic in the higher grades when content objectives become more complex  
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28 and abstract and, thus, dependent on language. Students who lack advanced levels of proficiency  
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30 in the L2 become increasingly dependent on support from the L1, further reducing their  
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32 opportunities to advance their L2 proficiency.

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41 This is not to say that translation is to be avoided at all times, but that it may be more  
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43 effective for students to engage in translation themselves than for teachers to give them  
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45 translations. The use of translation by students to help them understand and process content has  
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47 the potential to increase depth of processing and, thus, to foster consolidation of content  
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49 knowledge. Moreover, it may be cognitively unavoidable insofar as bilinguals tend to access  
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51 meaning through both languages, as noted earlier. In a somewhat dated but nevertheless  
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53 informative study, Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1996) found support for student use of  
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55 translation in a study that compared the reading strategies used in English by three successful  
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English-Spanish bilingual readers, three successful monolingual Anglophone readers, and three less successful English-Spanish bilingual readers, all native speakers of Spanish. They identified three strategies that were uniquely used by the successful bilingual readers: actively transferring across languages, translating from one language to another, and accessing cognate vocabulary while they read, particularly when they read in their less dominant language.

In a recent study by Berger (2015) of German-speaking CLIL students individually solving math problems in English-L2, it was shown that, relative to monolingual speakers of German solving the same problems in German, CLIL students took longer to comprehend text because they often resorted to German to test provisional interpretations of the problems. According to Berger, drawing on two languages rather than only one extended their engagement with mathematical content in a way that provided additional opportunities for switching their attention recursively between language and content. As a result, switching between languages contributed to a more profound use of the text for deducing a mathematical model to solve the problems. These are good examples of students using their L1 as a cognitive tool not just for ascertaining translation equivalents but for processing the content by means of two languages in a way that enhances engagement with the content.

### **3.3. Assumption 3: Immersion students need instruction that is adapted for L2 learners.**

An additional assumption underlying immersion is that, even though the L2 will be used to teach subjects that form part of the school curriculum, it needs to be adapted to reflect the fact that students are L2 learners and, thus, need lots of scaffolding to acquire the language. Bruner (1978: 19) defined scaffolding as “the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some tasks so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of

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4 acquiring. Scaffolding is especially important in bilingual programs in light of the fact that  
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6 students are learning content through a language they have not yet mastered. In other words,  
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8 immersion teachers often need to modify the way they use language of instruction as they are  
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10 teaching math and science to make sure the content is comprehensible and language learning is  
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12 promoted among students for whom the target language is an L2. In this regard, proponents of  
13  
14 translanguaging have argued that use of home languages (that are not a language of instruction)  
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16 is an effective practice to support students' engagement with new knowledge (see e.g., Celic &  
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18 Seltzer, 2012).  
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24 However, in the case of French immersion, a more pressing research initiative than  
25  
26 exploring the potential scaffolding benefits of the use of English would be to investigate ways of  
27  
28 improving instruction and increasing use of the L2 so that students attain the high levels of  
29  
30 French L2 proficiency necessary to manage increasingly complex subject matter without  
31  
32 recourse to English. Over-reliance on English to avoid the challenge of processing complex  
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34 subject matter in French may arguably be detrimental to improving French proficiency.  
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39 This begs the question of what scaffolding techniques in French immersion are available  
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41 and possibly more effective than using English for promoting acquisition of both French (L2)  
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43 proficiency and content knowledge. Immersion teachers have at their disposal a wide range of  
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45 scaffolding strategies that can facilitate the learning of curricular content through the immersion  
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47 language. Some scaffolding techniques involve linguistic redundancy whereby teachers say more  
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49 or less the same thing but in different ways by using self-repetition, paraphrases, synonyms, and  
50  
51 multiple examples. Other scaffolding techniques entail non-linguistic support such as gestures  
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53 and facial expressions, graphic organizers, visual and multimedia resources, and predictability in  
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55 classroom routines. These scaffolding techniques are at the core of immersion pedagogy.  
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4 Effective use of these scaffolding strategies means that immersion teachers do not have to resort  
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6 to English to facilitate comprehension. Instead, they can build linguistic and non-linguistic  
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8 redundancy into their use of French—what is called “teacher talk,” which serves a didactic  
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10 function to highlight both language and content.  
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14 In addition to such scaffolding techniques, there is a growing consensus in the research  
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16 literature that, for immersion to reach its full potential for developing high levels of French  
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18 proficiency, teachers need to plan systematic integration of language and content, rather than  
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20 focusing only on content and relying on the expectation that students will simply ‘pick up’ the  
21  
22 language along the way (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Lightbown, 2014; Lyster, 2007, 2016).  
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24 Many questions concerning effective immersion pedagogy remain to be explored with respect to  
25  
26 content and language integration and the best ways to scaffold learners as they process content  
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28 through their L2. As noted earlier, whether more use of English during French classes in  
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30 immersion will contribute to increased French proficiency while supporting the processing of  
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32 increasingly complex content requires more research.  
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#### 41 **3.4. Assumption 4: Immersion should bridge societal divides between language** 42 43 **speakers.** 44

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46 Immersion programs for majority language students are also based on the assumption that  
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48 they will help close the “two solitudes” that often characterize relationships between language  
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50 groups in communities around the world and, more specifically, between French- and English-  
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52 speakers in Canada (Haque, 2012); the same could be said of Castilian and Catalan speakers in  
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54 Spain or Flemish and French speakers in Belgium. More specifically, a goal of many immersion  
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56 programs is that, by acquiring proficiency in another language and becoming familiar with the  
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4 culture of that language, immersion students will develop more positive attitudes toward that  
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6 group and be more prone to engage with speakers of that language when the occasion arises.  
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9         Crosslinguistic pedagogy is also meant to bridge between languages (Cummins, 2014)  
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11 and, when implemented appropriately, it certainly has the power to do that in French immersion.  
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13 Nevertheless, the practice of actively encouraging students to draw on linguistic features from  
14  
15 their overall linguistic repertoire can have very different implications depending on the  
16  
17 immersion students' language backgrounds and, specifically, whether they are encouraged to  
18  
19 draw on features from a minority or a majority language. As stated earlier, there are strong  
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21 arguments for encouraging immersion students whose home language is a minority language to  
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23 draw on the resources of their home language during class time. However, when learners are  
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25 encouraged to draw on features from the majority language during class time allocated to the  
26  
27 minority language, this practice can replicate, rather than resolve, an existing societal language  
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29 imbalance. In effect, it can create a subtractive learning environment for learners from  
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31 minoritized language backgrounds because it reinforces the dominance of the majority language.  
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33 Because the societal status of a language influences students' willingness to speak that language  
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35 (Ballinger & Lyster, 2011; Christian et al., 1997; Tarone & Swain, 1995), the question of what  
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37 role the majority language should play in immersion classrooms must be considered carefully as  
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39 part of a broader discussion of how to manage differences in the societal status of languages in  
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41 bilingual programs. Again, we use the Canadian French immersion example to illustrate our  
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43 point.  
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53         Although Canada has been a bilingual country since the passing of the Official  
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55 Languages Act in 1969, prior to the passing of that act, and in some cases after it, French  
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57 language instruction was banned in several Canadian provinces (Mackey, 2010). Even today, the  
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majority of the population outside the province of Quebec is vastly English-speaking; in the 2011 census, only 17.5% of Canadians reported being able to hold a conversation in both French and English (Statistics Canada, 2013). In terms of societal power, English has the historic and current upper hand in Canada (not to mention in North America) despite ongoing attempts by the Canadian government to equalize the status of the two languages through its support of a wide range of programs, including French immersion. For most French immersion students, it is only within the French immersion classroom that a language other than English has power. We would argue that, in light of these broader societal issues, encouraging French immersion students to write or speak English during French instructional time is tantamount to telling them that English use is necessary even when using another language and, thus, reinforces the idea that English is the only language that holds authentic importance for them. We would argue that educators consider a bias in favor of the majority language, without undermining the minority language, when planning immersion programs in order to offset the dominating influences of English and to establish a greater equilibrium between the two languages.

Our suggestion that the majority language play only a minor role, if any, during instructional time allocated to the minority immersion language, should not be construed as adherence to “monolingual instructional assumptions” (Cummins, 2014, p. 11). Instead, providing minority-language instruction without recourse to the majority language, avoiding concurrent translation, and maintaining a separation between languages should be deployed in ways that serve to avoid the very societal language imbalance that immersion programs are often designed to redress. The following section outlines some ways of implementing crosslinguistic pedagogy in French immersion without exacerbating the existing language imbalance between French and English.

#### 4. Immersion-appropriate crosslinguistic pedagogy

##### 4.1. Bilingual instruction.

Making explicit connections between the languages of instruction in bilingual education is increasingly considered useful for supporting biliteracy development, especially in light of significant and positive correlations between reading skills in two languages, discussed earlier. In a planned and systematic way, teachers can guide students in detecting similarities and differences between the two target languages. They can do so through cross-linguistic awareness activities that may involve cognate instruction or the study of word families and patterns in derivational morphology (e.g., adding affixes to root words). These types of crosslinguistic connections are not translations to facilitate comprehension; instead, they serve to promote students' metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness by enhancing their ability to detect similarities and differences in patterns across languages. The purpose here is to foster bidirectional transfer across languages in ways that contribute to reading and writing skills in both languages while supporting students' overall language proficiency (Cummins, 2007; Lyster et al., 2013). So how can French immersion teachers encourage their students, on the one hand, to draw on their knowledge of both French and English to develop crosslinguistic awareness and biliteracy skills and, on the other hand, to use French as their primary means of communication? Immersion teachers need answers to this question because competition between French and English for time and status in Canadian schools usually ends up favouring the more dominant language—English. The notion of French having its own space is thus crucial, but also creates a dilemma for teachers keen on developing strong connections between French and English and committed to encouraging students to draw on all their available resources to maximize learning.

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4 This issue has been addressed in classroom studies by Ballinger (2013, 2015), Lyster et  
5 al. (2009), and Lyster et al. (2013), all of which focused on French and English teachers' use of  
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7 each language to teach literacy skills to the same group of immersion students. In all three  
8  
9 studies, either the researchers or pairs of partner teachers co-designed and implemented  
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11 biliteracy tasks that used a reading series that was available in both languages. The unique  
12  
13 feature of this intervention was that instruction began in one language during its allotted class  
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15 time and language (e.g., French) and continued in the other language (e.g., English) during its  
16  
17 class time. In this way, each language remained the language of communication in its respective  
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19 classroom, even though boundaries between the languages and classrooms were crossed as  
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21 students engaged with the themes of the books in both languages and participated in related  
22  
23 tasks. The stories engaged students with related content in both French and English, enabling  
24  
25 them to learn new concepts with different linguistic representations. In one of the studies that  
26  
27 examined this approach, post-test measures of derivational morphology in French revealed that  
28  
29 the experimental group who had received biliteracy instruction significantly outperformed the  
30  
31 comparison group who had not had this type of instruction (Lyster et al., 2013). An especially  
32  
33 positive result of this project was the enthusiasm exhibited by the students and their engagement  
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35 during the instructional interventions, which may have been given more importance than usual  
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37 because two different teachers were involved rather than only one.  
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#### 50 **4.2. Language awareness instruction.**

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53 In terms of teaching for transfer across languages while still maintaining separation,  
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55 another possible pedagogical strategy is the language awareness approach (Hawkins, 1999;  
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57 Dagenais, Walsh, Armand, & Maraillet, 2008). Language awareness can be understood as  
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4 explicit knowledge about language in language learning, language teaching, and language use.  
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7 As an ability, language awareness “develops through paying motivated attention to language in  
8  
9 use” (Bolitho, Carter, Hughes, Ivanič, Masuhara, & Tomlinson, 2003, p. 251). A language  
10  
11 awareness curriculum was developed in the 1980s by Eric Hawkins for schools in the United  
12  
13 Kingdom. Activities associated with this curriculum were not developed to directly teach an L2  
14  
15 but to offer students a better overall understanding of languages and how they work, both  
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17 linguistically and in society. For example, a language awareness activity may consist of having  
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19 students first compare examples of negative sentence structures in a known and an unknown  
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21 language and then try to infer the rules for negation in the unknown language. Or, students can  
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23 compare proverbs from different cultures that carry the same message or compare written scripts  
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25 between languages for similarities and differences. Critical language awareness (Fairclough,  
26  
27 1992) activities further push students to consider power relationships among languages and the  
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29 way those languages and language speakers are positioned in society. For example, students may  
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31 examine non-standard linguistic variation, the rules governing language varieties, and how these  
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33 varieties and their speakers are viewed in society. Students are encouraged to draw on and  
34  
35 compare linguistic knowledge stemming from all of the languages that they speak or have partial  
36  
37 knowledge of. This does not imply that students need to use a particular language to  
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39 communicate their ideas about the languages being studied. Rather, during these activities, they  
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41 may compare aspects of the languages that they know while maintaining use of the target  
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43 language. The language awareness approach has the additional benefit that it can include all  
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45 languages represented in the classroom. At a time when French immersion educators seek  
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47 methods to incorporate the array of different home languages represented in increasingly diverse  
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classrooms (Mady, 2015), this aspect of the language awareness approach should not be overlooked.

A number of French immersion-based studies have used a language awareness approach developed in French-speaking contexts, known as “*éveil aux langues*” (Armand & Dagenais, 2012; Perregaux et al., 2003; Candelier, 2003, Dagenais et al., 2008). For instance, Dagenais et al. (2008) implemented language awareness activities with French immersion students in Vancouver and students from Francophone schools in Montreal. The language awareness activities were designed to encourage students in multilingual groups to draw on the class’s collective language resources to think about languages unknown to the majority of students. The researchers argued that sharing knowledge of all languages spoken by group of students led to new knowledge about relationships between languages and helped the students to form critical positions towards language status. It also offered minority language speakers in the classroom the opportunity to share their linguistic expertise and enhanced all students’ appreciation of the languages spoken by those students. These are only examples of how crosslinguistic pedagogy can be adapted for immersion contexts in ways that achieve its stated goals while maintaining a separate space for more complex and sustained use of the minority language (see Beeman & Urow, 2012, for more examples).

## 5. Concluding remarks

This is an exciting time in the field of L2 education. Shifting ideas on how bilinguals learn and use their languages have opened up new possibilities for teaching that incorporate new approaches. The goal of this article was to serve as a note of caution and a reminder that our developing notion of crosslinguistic pedagogy should not be seen as a one-size-fits-all affair;

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4 rather, it should be adapted to fit the context in which students are learning. There is a growing  
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6 consensus that there are dynamic and complex interactions between/among the languages of  
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8 bi/multilinguals with respect to both their underlying representations of those languages and how  
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10 bilinguals use language in social interaction. Our goal was to initiate a critical discussion of the  
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12 implications of these findings and theories for educators. Such a discussion is essential to enable  
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14 educators to choose from the array of crosslinguistic pedagogical approaches, strategies, and  
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16 activities based on their students' language learning needs and abilities, their program's goals,  
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18 and, importantly, the status of the languages of instruction. It is our belief that these criteria  
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20 should be taken into account before tossing aside existing pedagogical approaches. Clearly, more  
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22 research is needed in all bilingual contexts to examine the effectiveness of specific  
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24 crosslinguistic pedagogical practices—with special attention to the status of the languages  
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26 involved. In the meantime, if we do not know “if any use of the L1 by the students is essential,  
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28 whether it expedites the learning process or is simply the easier route to take” (Swain & Lapkin,  
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30 2013, p. 110), it is important to carefully consider both the pros *and* the cons of encouraging  
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32 increased use of the majority language in immersion programs.  
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