

Teacher Perspectives on the Affective Dimensions of Immigrant Language Classes: Pedagogical and Social Implications

Interim Report

Background

Every year thousands of adult immigrants and refugees enroll in Canada's federal Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program and Quebec's Programme d'intégration pour les immigrants (PILI) to acquire the basic language skills they need to settle into their new home.

Compelling new research shows that the complexity of the integration experience can transform immigrant language classrooms from neutral sites of ESL or FSL learning to affectively- and emotionally-charged spaces. Within these spaces, **teachers** play a key role in the language development and integration of newcomers. Yet we know very little about how teachers experience the emotional and affective dimensions of classroom life. In order to meet the objectives of adult education, experts point out that more attention must be given to teachers and the emotional labour they do in language classrooms.

Objectives

This three-year study, supported by the Fonds de recherche du Québec sur la société et la culture (FRQ-SC), aims to better understand how the affective and emotional dimensions of classroom life impact teachers' pedagogical choices and explore how arts-based teaching materials can be used to address issues of newcomer integration. The study was approved by Research Ethics Boards at Université Laval and TESL Ontario.

Methods

This study has two phases. Phase one was completed in June, 2018, and yielded promising results. Phase two is currently underway.

Phase 1 – Online Questionnaire (completed)

The goal of phase one was to explore how teachers respond to affectively-charged classroom situations and to determine how often these types of events occur in their own classrooms. During this phase, 75 teachers from Ontario and 10 teachers from Quebec responded to an online questionnaire which solicited their reactions to affectively-charged classroom situations presented as four short vignettes. To summarize, the vignettes described:

- (1) a student's angry outburst in response to a song sung in class;
- (2) a student's expression of joy at gaining Canadian citizenship;

- (3) students' feelings of homesickness, regret, and loneliness in response to reading a poem about the challenges associated with immigration; and
- (4) students' feelings of sadness in response to hearing a classmate's story about her child being killed as a result of civil war.

The questionnaire also invited teachers to share their own stories of affective or emotional events that may have previously occurred in their classrooms.

Phase 2 – Classroom Research (ongoing)

The goal of phase two is to deepen the understanding of data collected in phase one and to explore the possibilities that arts-based pedagogy offers immigrant language classrooms. In phase two, teachers are collaborating with a researcher to pilot arts-based teaching materials with their classes. These teaching materials feature artwork from Shaun Tan's graphic novel, *The Arrival*, as well as classic Canadian and Quebec folk songs, *This Land is My Land* by Woody Guthrie and *Gens du Pays* by Gilles Vigneault. Throughout this phase teachers are keeping a research journal to document affective events in their classrooms as well as their pedagogical responses to them. They are also participating in two individual interviews to share their insights into how the arts-based lessons impacted their classrooms.

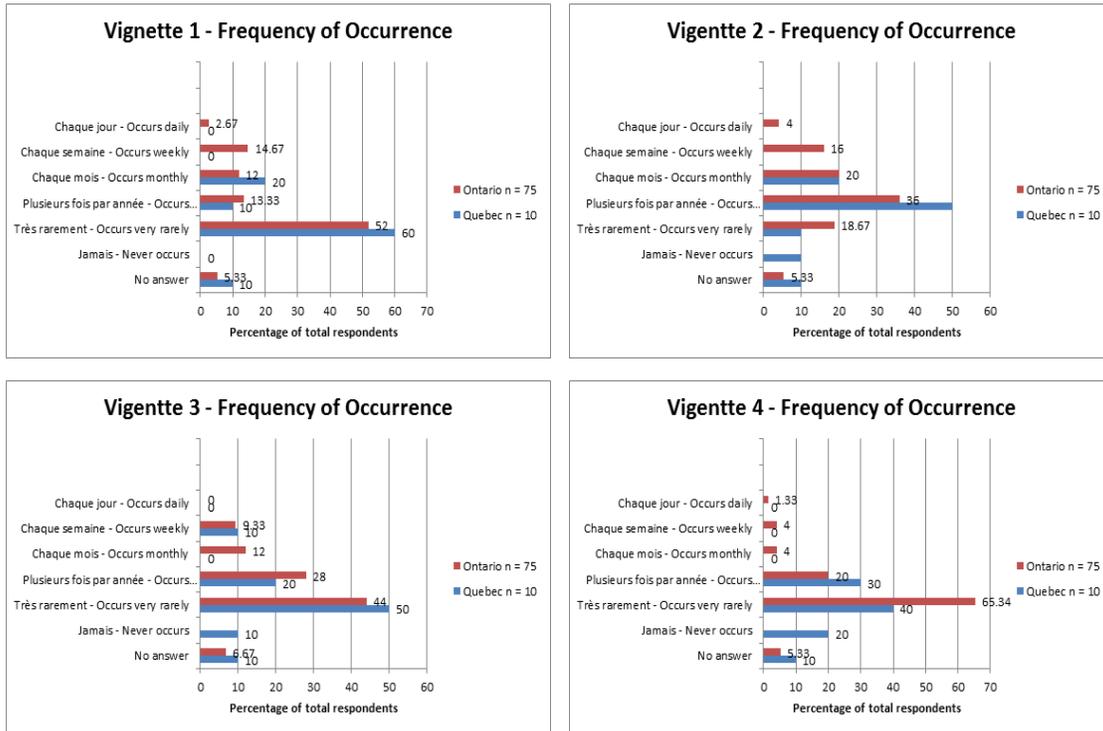
Results of Phase One

Teachers' responses to the online questionnaire revealed the following key findings:

- Affectively-charged classroom events are rare yet significant. Questionnaire data showed that while affective/emotional events don't occur often, when they do occur, they leave a lasting impression on teachers and students.
- Affective/emotional situations in the classroom have the potential to influence teachers' pedagogical choices moving forward.
- Teachers' opinions about the place of emotion in the classroom vary. While some teachers welcome emotion as a natural element of immigrant language classrooms, others believe that strong emotions should be prevented from encroaching in on classroom life, or should be limited to emotions that can be easily managed.

Finally, over half of the teacher participants shared stories about their own affective/emotional teaching experiences. The textual expression of these teachers' responses attested to the visceral affective forces at work in some ESL and FSL classrooms today.

Frequency of Affectively-charged Classroom Situations



Conclusions and Implications

Phase one provided a picture of the frequency of affectively- and emotionally-charged events in adult language classrooms in Ontario and Quebec, how teachers respond to these events, and the varying ways that teachers view the role of emotions in the classroom. It also portrayed the types of affective/emotional events that teachers experience in their own classrooms; their accounts not only highlight the intense and often unpredictable nature of these events but also the fact that they are left to deal with them largely on their own.

Data collected in this study so far points to the need for greater support for ESL and FSL teachers of newcomers. This may include targeted pedagogical resources, opportunities for deeper reflection individually or with support professionals, and more involvement from program direction. Additionally, teacher training programs which acknowledge the emotional aspects of newcomer language classrooms may help to better prepare teachers to respond to affectively- and emotionally-charged events when they happen.

Questions?

For additional information about the project please contact the principle investigator, Monica Waterhouse, at monica.waterhouse@lli.ulaval.ca.