English notes

1. Opening: Rethinking inclusion (1 min)

George Sefa Dei (2015, p. 19)

As leaders in French education, this quote should challenge us. Because too often, when we talk about inclusion in FSL, we think: how can we get more students into our programs as they already exist?

But Dei pushes us further: What new space are we creating? A space that doesn't ask students to fit into an existing mold, but one that transforms itself to truly welcome them.

2. Intersectionality slide (7 min)

So, create a new space for whom, exactly? Because FSL classes are not a homogeneous group.
- **Racialized students:** People who belong to a group considered "other" than the norm, particularly because of their appearance, origin, or culture.
- **Allophone students:** Learn French as an additional language.
- **Immigrant students:** navigate complex migration paths.
- **Queer students:** negotiate gender and sexual identities in a language that often renders them invisible.

These students do not all experience the same things. Our policies must recognize this complexity.

What recent research tells us?
"What does research tell us about these students 'on the periphery' of our FSL programs?"

Racialised students (Kunnas' work)
- **Significant underrepresentation:** South Asian students make up 23% of the TDSB school population, but only 6% of immersion students (Kunnas, 2023).
- **Eurocentric curriculum:** Despite curriculum requirements, racialized students report learning virtually nothing about non-white Francophone cultures (Kunnas, 2025).
- **Experienced racism:** Racialized students experience racism from their peers, teachers, and administrators (Kunnas, 2025).
- **Unchallenged racism:** This racism is rarely challenged by anyone in the school—teachers, administrators, or peers (Kunnas, 2025).
- **Normalized racism:** Students come to perceive racism as inevitable, focusing their energy on their French language skills rather than on the injustices they experience (Kunnas, 2025).
- **Intersectionality:** Race intersects with social class, mother tongue, and newcomer status to determine who gains access to the program and who succeeds in it (Kunnas, 2023; 2025).

Allophone (and often immigrant) students (work by Mady and Davis)
- **Systemic exclusion:** Administrators and teachers actively exclude non-English-speaking students from immersion programs, often citing a "lack of English"—an empirically unfounded myth (Davis, 2019).
- **Performance paradox:** Yet these same students who are excluded or discouraged outperform their English-speaking Canadian peers in French skills when they have access to the program (Mady, 2017).
- **High motivation, unequal access:** Allophone students are more motivated to learn French than their English-speaking peers, but face more structural barriers (Mady, 2007; Davis et al., 2021).
- **Voices missing from research:** Allophone families excluded from the program cannot participate in studies, making the true extent of discrimination difficult to measure (Davis et al., 2021).
- **Persistent deficit ideologies:** Teachers' beliefs—viewing non-English-speaking students as a burden or as unfit—shape concrete access decisions, regardless of official policies (Davis, 2024).
- **The impact in schools:** Students who never see themselves reflected in what is taught

Queer students (Grant and Hakeem's work)
- **Curricular silence:** Despite seemingly inclusive discourse, the FSL curriculum reinforces binary gender constructs and excludes marginalized sexualities (Grant, Masson & Carroll, 2024).
- **Unchallenged heteronormativity:** Immersion students tend to normalize sexual diversity and minimize homophobia and transphobia as forms of systemic discrimination (Hakeem, 2021).
- **French as an identity barrier:** The binary grammatical structure of French imposes gendered subject positions on non-binary students, limiting their ability to express themselves in accordance with their identity (Spiegelman, 2022).
- **Linguistic disengagement:** Faced with the denial of their identity by teachers, non-binary students become disengaged from learning French (Spiegelman, 2022; Grant, 2025).
- **Tolerance is not enough:** Inclusive pedagogy reproduces inequalities by promoting tolerance without questioning underlying power relations (Hakeem, 2021).
- **Absence of queer language:** Queer language is generally absent from FSL spaces, depriving 2SLGBTQI+ students of an environment that reflects their identity (Grant & Smith, 2025).

Summary for decision-makers:
What all this research tells us is that the current structure of our FSL programs is not working for these students. We cannot simply "include" them in what already exists. As Dei says, we need to create a new space.

These changes are not just for marginalized students. **They are also essential for students from majority groups.** *How can we create programs that reflect the multicultural reality of*

Canada and the Francophonie, and prepare our students to interact in a culturally rich and diverse world?

3. The role of teachers—and your crucial role (2 min)

To create this new space, we need teachers. But they are not prepared (Arnott et al., 2023; Masson et al., 2021; Masson et al., 2022).

Most have never had training on:
- The power dynamics in French language teaching (Davis, 2024, Hakeem, 2021)
- How to create truly inclusive spaces for these students
- How to navigate these complex issues

And above all: they cannot do it alone.

The research is unanimous: when teachers have the support of their administration, they transform their practices. Without this support, even the most motivated give up (Arnott et al. 2023, Blazar & Kraft, 2017, Culligan et al., 2024, Grant & Smith, 2025, Leithwood et al., 2008, Masson, 2018).

Your role:
- Give them time to learn
- Value their initiatives
- Defend them when things get tough
- Provide resources that reflect Francophone diversity

Transition: But in practical terms, what does creating this new space mean? Let's look at three examples that are essential to the Canadian context.

4. Three essential changes to create this new space (7 min)

A) Rethinking language standards: Which French are we talking about?

The current situation in our schools:
- Assessments often favor standardized accents (often from France or Quebec).
- Textbooks present French from France or Quebec as the only ideal model
- "Canadianisms" are corrected as errors
- Teachers themselves may be judged on their accent (Tang, 2020)

The concrete impact on our students:
- Students do not associate French with communication or belonging, but with surveillance, correction, and shame.
- Students disengage—not because of a lack of ability, but because the space does not belong to them.

The impact on our programs:
- Lower retention rates in our immersion and FSL programs.
- Fewer students continuing French in high school.
- A Francophone community that is shrinking rather than expanding.

The new space to be created:
- **Objective:** Communicate effectively with French speakers around the world, not imitate Paris.
- **Assessments:** Criteria that value clarity and effective communication, not a particular accent.
- **Role models:** Teachers, guests, resources that represent the diversity of French speakers.
- **Message:** "Your French is legitimate, no matter where you come from."

Your role as a leader:
- Review your evaluation criteria and grading rubrics.
- Recruit teachers from diverse French-speaking backgrounds.
- Invest in audio/video resources that showcase the diversity of French accents.

B) Valuing linguistic repertoires: Background as an asset

The current situation in our schools:
- "French only" policies in FSL classrooms
- Students are asked to "leave their other languages at the door"
- Multilingualism is treated as an obstacle rather than a resource
- No recognition of the strategies that students have already developed

The concrete impact on our students:
- A student who speaks Mandarin and English must "forget" these resources in French class.
- A student who speaks Spanish cannot make connections with lexical and grammatical similarities.
- A Haitian Creole-speaking student cannot use her knowledge of Creole to understand French.
- Result: We slow down their learning. We waste valuable resources.

The impact on our programs:
- Less effective learning—we ignore the science of language acquisition.
- Students who feel torn in two: "Part of me is not welcome here."
- Implicit message: to belong to the French-speaking world, you have to give up who you are.

The new space to be created:

- **Translingual approaches:** Students can use all their languages as learning tools.
- **Explicit recognition:** "What you already know in your other languages will help you learn French."
- **Linguistic bridges:** Activities that exploit the similarities between languages.
- **Message:** "All your languages are strengths, not obstacles."

Your role as a leader:
- Review your language policies—are they based on research or ideology?
- Train your teachers in translanguaging and multilingual approaches
- Publicly celebrate multilingualism in your schools (assemblies, communications)

C) Recognizing our colonial history: Teaching for emancipation

The current situation in our schools:
- French (like other subjects) is taught as neutral and apolitical.
- Silence on the imposition of French on Indigenous peoples.
- Silence on the role of French in French colonization in Canada.
- No discussion of why certain varieties of French are valued and others are not

The concrete impact on our students:
- An Indigenous student takes a French class without anyone acknowledging that this language has historically been used as a tool of assimilation and erasure of their own language—the curriculum normalizes this silence (Kunnas, 2023)
- A racialized student whose ancestors suffered French colonization learns to celebrate Francophonie without being given the tools to understand the power relations involved — they reproduce hierarchies that they cannot name (Kunnas, 2025; Spiegelman, 2022)
- A newly arrived allophone student internalizes that their multilingualism is an obstacle to be overcome rather than a resource, because the FSL curriculum does not recognize complex linguistic trajectories as legitimate (Davis et al., 2021).
- A queer or non-binary student learns that French is a binary, fixed, and normative language—without ever knowing that queer Francophone communities around the world are actively transforming this language in order to exist within it (Spiegelman, 2022; Grant, Masson & Carroll, 2024).
- A white, English-speaking, middle-class student—the one for whom the program was designed—learns an impoverished and false version of the French-speaking world. They leave the program without having developed real intercultural competence, without having been exposed to complexity, without having learned to navigate difference. They have also been done a disservice (Hakeem, 2021; Kunnas, 2023).

The impact on our programs:
- French remains associated with assimilation and cultural loss for many communities.
- We are missing an opportunity to educate critical citizens who understand power and language.

The new space to be created:
- **Honest curriculum:** We talk about the history of French in Canada, including its colonial dimensions.
- **Critical reflection:** Students understand why some forms of French are valued and others stigmatized.
- **French as a tool for empowerment:** French can be used to connect, resist, and create.
- **Message:** "This language has a difficult history. Let's learn to do better."

Your role as a leader:
- Support teachers who want to address these topics (in the face of questioning parents)
- Integrate these perspectives into your curriculum revisions
- Create partnerships with Indigenous communities and diverse Francophone communities
- Train your teams in critical pedagogy and decoloniality

5. FSLdisrupt: Example of this new space in action (2 min)

You may be wondering: is this really possible? What does it look like in practice?

FSLdisrupt is an example of what happens when teachers are given the support to create this new space.

What teachers are doing in this project:
- They are challenging language standards—using resources that show the diversity of French.
- They are valuing linguistic repertoires—integrating translanguaging into their lessons.
- They are addressing colonial history—having honest conversations with their students.

And you know what? They are passionate about it.

They see their students:
- Becoming more engaged
- Feeling proud of their French
- Developing critical thinking skills
- Seeing themselves as true Francophones

But they cannot do it alone. This work requires:
- Your support from parents and communities
- Investment in new resources
- Time for training and reflection
- Recognition of this work in their evaluations

We can come to your schools to train your teams. But above all, you must create the conditions for this work to be done.

6. Closing: Dei's invitation (1 min)

Let's return to George Sefa Dei:
"Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone."

Inclusion in FSL is not a question of quotas or numbers. It is a question of transformation.
- What kind of French are we teaching?
- Whose voices are we valuing?
- Who has the right to feel Francophone in our schools?

Teachers are ready to create this new space. They are waiting for your leadership.

The future of French in Canada is being built today, in the decisions you make—your budgets, your policies, your support for your teams.

What kind of Francophonie do we want to build?

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