

Differentiated Instruction, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and The Modern Quebec Second
Language Classroom

Mikailagh Gifford

A Thesis

In the Department

of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Applied Linguistics) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 2026

© Mikailagh Gifford, 2026

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

This is to certify that the thesis

Prepared By: Mikailagh Gifford

Entitled: Differentiated Instruction, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and The Modern
 Quebec Second Language Classroom

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts (Applied Linguistics)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to
originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Walcir Cardoso

_____ Examiner
Dr. Teresa Hernandez Gonzales

_____ Thesis supervisor
Dr. Kim McDonough

Approved by _____
Graduate Program Director

_____ 2026 _____
Dean of Faculty

Abstract

Differentiated Instruction, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and the Modern Quebec

Second Language Classroom

Mikailagh Gifford

Quebec is home to a large population of bilingual and trilingual children entering the public education system. The current educative framework and historically restrictive language legislation make navigating teaching English as a second language a challenging mandate for educators in metropolitan areas of the province. This qualitative study uses a three-phase model to explore how English second language teachers navigate the challenges of teaching literacy to a highly varied student body. The study also collaboratively considers the combination of differentiated instruction and culturally sustaining pedagogy for generating reading comprehension materials for ESL elementary classes in Quebec. Findings revealed that educators in Quebec are interested in exploring differentiated reading materials. ESL teachers in Quebec currently describe their classes as highly diverse and identify teaching literacy as a complex issue. Furthermore, findings indicate that teachers believe their students would benefit from a more inclusive curriculum, which reflects the diversity found in metropolitan areas of the province.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Kim McDonough, who has supported me and my exploration of this topic since the beginning of my master's degree. Her guidance helped me focus on concrete outcomes for the questions that interest me and kept me grounded when writing a thesis became intimidating. Thank you, Teresa Hernandez Gonzalez for your valuable contributions as a knowledgeable advisor to this project and for your feedback on ESL pedagogy.

I would also like to thank the educators who graciously provided their time without compensation to make this research possible. I thank all of my elementary school ESL students who had a tremendous impact on me early in my career. Seeing your academic needs unfold without fully being met led to this research. Finally, thank you to my partner, family, and friends for your unconditional support. You guys are the best.

Table of Contents

Table of figures	ix
List of Tables	x
Chapter 1: Introduction to English Second Language Classrooms in Quebec	1
Evolution of Immigration Policy	1
Ministry of Education Policies.....	4
Summary	6
Chapter 2: Qualitative Inquiry into Teaching Elementary School ESL Literacy Through Differentiated Instruction and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	7
What is literacy?	8
Differentiated Instruction and Literacy.....	9
Culturally Responsive (Sustaining) Pedagogy and Literacy	12
Using DI and CSP in Quebec Elementary School ESL Education.....	15
Purpose of the Study	16
Project Overview	17
Phase One: Understanding DI in Quebec ESL Classrooms.....	19
Participants.....	19
Data Collection and Materials	21
Data Analysis	21

Findings	22
Phase Two: Materials Design and Implementation	27
Teaching Materials Design	27
Teaching Materials Implementation	30
Data Collection	30
Data Analysis	31
Findings	32
Phase Three: Revised Materials and Teacher Feedback.....	36
Revised Materials.....	36
Participants.....	39
Materials, Data Collection, and Analysis.....	40
Findings	40
General Discussion	42
Implications.....	45
Limitations and Future Research	46
Conclusion	48
Chapter 3: Concluding Remarks.....	48
References.....	51
Appendix A Initial Interview questions.....	58
Appendix B The First Learning Materials	60

Pre-lesson Teacher Instructions	60
Worksheet #1 (Painted Skies).....	62
Worksheet #1 (The Name Jar)	64
Worksheet #2 (Painted Skies).....	66
Worksheet #2 (The Name Jar)	67
Painted Skies Cover Art.....	68
Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - A1).....	69
Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - A2).....	72
Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - B1)	74
Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - B2).....	77
The Name Jar Cover Art.....	79
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified A1).....	80
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified A2).....	82
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified B1)	84
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified B2).....	86
Appendix C Post-Lesson Checklist	91
Appendix D Focus Group Outline	92
Appendix E The Final Learning Materials	94
Pre-lesson Teacher Instructions	94
Easy Differentiated Text.....	106

Moderate Differentiated Text	107
Difficult Differentiated Text	108
Appendix F Google Form Question.....	109

Table of figures

Figure 1. Painted Skies Cover Art	68
Figure 2. The Name Jar Cover Art.....	79
Figure 3. Easy Differentiated Text.....	106
Figure 4. Moderate Differentiated Text	107
Figure 5. Difficult Differentiated Text.....	108

List of Tables

Table 1. Teacher Responses to Post-Lesson Checklist Questions	33
Table 2. Lexutor Vocabulary Rating by Text Difficulty Level	38

Chapter 1: Introduction to English Second Language Classrooms in Quebec

To effectively understand the requirements of today's classrooms, it is essential to consider the varied student body in many urban schools in Quebec. The province is a prime example of a region with evolving immigration policies that have led to significant growth in diversity over the past two decades (Ministry of Immigration, 2014). In 2023, Quebec saw a net migration increase of 217,600 people (Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2024). However, despite the growing number of newcomers across the province and the recent desire to create a "Quebec for all" (Ministry of Immigration, 2016), the province's unique linguistic and cultural history has left many elementary school English second language (L2) teachers in the difficult position of accommodating highly diverse classes, both academically and culturally. Two crucial events that continue to significantly affect education today are the establishment of the Ministry of Immigration, Francization, and Integration in 1968, following the Canada-Quebec Accord (Ghosh, 2004), and the initial passage of the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) in 1977 (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2024).

Evolution of Immigration Policy

Quebec is the only province in Canada to have a direct say over the number of immigrants entering the province, the immigration programs administered, and the selection process of immigrants (Ghosh, 2004; Talbani, 1993). The Ministry of Immigration, Francization, and Integration developed during a period when officials began to understand the economic potential that immigration could have for business development (Ghosh, 2004). Francization was established to help ensure that immigrants in Quebec had access to the education needed to

succeed in a predominantly French-speaking society. Between 1970 and the early 2000s, assimilation was considered the ultimate integrative goal. In 2014, the document “Together We Are Quebec” was published, marking the emergence of a new narrative. Quebec officials claimed that the province’s cultural diversity was a strength and they started using the word “pluralistic” in their mission statements. A recent modification of this document included an action plan for the years 2016 to 2021. In this document the nuanced and distinct experience of second-generation immigrants is acknowledged. In 2016, the province began to mandate support for these individuals in fostering their complex and intersecting cultural identities as both citizens of Quebec and members of minority groups (Ministry of Immigration, 2016). Despite this shift in discourse and the fact 30% of people in Quebec are not francophone (Statistics Canada, 2016), the concept of assimilation remains very strong among the Quebecois culture, especially in terms of language.

Also reflecting the emphasis on assimilation in Quebec’s linguistic culture is The Charter of the French Language (Bill 101). This legislation not only reflects the prevailing linguistic culture in Quebec but also represents a landmark moment in its codification. In 1977, The Charter of the French Language was established to govern the use of language in business and education with the hopes of upholding the status of French as the official and dominant language in Quebec (Bourhis, 2008). The major implication of Bill 101 on public education includes prohibiting newcomer children and children without a historically anglophone Canadian family from enrolling in the English school boards. This implication results in high levels of classroom diversity.

One of the reasons Bill 101 causes variation in ESL classrooms is that it places students who have not received English second language instruction for at least one academic year

together with students who have followed the traditional English second language curriculum since they began school. In conjunction with immigration and Francization policies, specialized programs were developed for children who were required to attend French-language schools but lacked the linguistic skills to participate in regular classes. In public schools, this program is known as “*classe d’accueil*” and provides intensive French language instruction to prepare children for the regular curriculum. The duration of the intensive French program depends on the students’ ability to learn the French language and is gauged by educators within each school (Centre de Services Scolaire de Montreal, 2025). While students attend this intensive program, they are exempt from ESL classes. An additional reason that Bill 101 can be associated with different levels of readiness is that, depending on where they came from, children’s previous knowledge of English varies greatly. Some students may come from countries where ESL is not part of the public-school curriculum, while others may come from countries where English is taught early.

These existing policies make it difficult for students in Quebec to enroll in English public education. As a result, many English-speaking students find themselves in ESL classrooms, contributing to disparities in academic readiness. The registration requirements for English-language schools in Quebec, brought on by Bill 101, prevent any Canadian or Quebec-born child from enrolling in a public English school unless they can demonstrate a direct connection to Anglo-Canadian ancestry. This restriction means that a fraction of children attending ESL classes in francophone public schools are born into bilingual and anglophone families. These demographics include students who speak English at home but do not practice reading or writing, those with high English literacy, newcomer children who have limited ESL experience, francophone students who have little to no experience with English outside of the classroom,

bilingual students, and students learning English as a third or fourth language. As the need for an ESL curriculum that meets the academic and cultural needs of all students becomes increasingly urgent, the progression of teaching guidelines and learning frameworks continue to fall short, which will be described in the following section. The lack of explicit instruction for teachers addressing these highly diverse classes places a large burden on teachers trying to meet the academic and cultural needs of their students.

Ministry of Education Policies

The education plan for the province of Quebec dates to 2001. Although it was relevant at the time, it is now twenty years old and outdated, with many ideologies that no longer align with the needs of Quebec's modern population. For ESL teachers looking to work in public elementary schools, two documents from the ministry are essential. The first, *Progression of Learning*, outlines the expected outcomes for students in English as a second language, grades 1–6. Some of the expected learning outcomes include, but are not limited to: Giving opinions, expressing others' needs and wants, inquiring about others' feelings, interests, tastes, preferences, deciding to concentrate on the right things, foretelling based on prior knowledge, topic, task at hand, title, pictures, glancing through a text, and using contextual cues to construct meaning. Next, the *Framework for Evaluation* (2011) is a guide for teachers as they prepare to grade students' success throughout the language-learning program. Although both mention culture, they tend to focus on superficial aspects of culture without helping teachers to understand the culture of their students.

Similarly, one of the objectives of the learning plan (2001) is to prepare students to be citizens of society, yet there is very little that provides ESL teachers in Quebec with tools to facilitate this learning. The most recent tool that educators can use to align the requirements of

the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Immigration for inclusivity is the Reference Framework for Professional Competencies (2021). This framework outlines the recommended approach for teachers to adopt in their professional journey. The document does not address how teachers should approach academic or cultural diversity; however, it does include these following sections: item 2.3 building relationships with students and item 3.1 acting to further student learning (Ministry of Education, 2021). Another document worth referencing is “Differentiated Instruction: Helping all students achieve educational success” published in 2021. The existence of this document outlining differentiated instruction (DI) as a means for “success in education for all” indicates that pre-service teachers since 2021 will likely have exposure to this educational framework. However, it does not guarantee that the document has made its way to in-service ESL teachers’ desks. Furthermore, existing ESL evaluation frameworks have not been updated to reflect values of DI including differentiated learning processes and products. Beyond this document outlining differentiated instruction as a possible pedagogical approach for classrooms, the Ministry of Education’s current body of ESL-focused resources do not include instructions for dealing with the significant readiness gaps that are common in today’s ESL classes.

The Ministry of Education says that language is key to a student’s cultural identity and social development (2001), yet it provides no guidance for ESL teachers fostering the cultural identity of anglophone and immigrant students. The Ministry of Immigration recognizes the complex identities of second-generation immigrants. However, the current ESL curriculum in public schools (2009, 2011) does not go beyond surface-level discussions of culture and prioritizes French as the sole mandatory language (2001). The Ministry of Education (2021) tells educators that their professional competencies include acting to further student learning and

building relationships with their students, yet it does not provide them with tools for differentiating on an individual level to meet each student where they are academically. The existing policies are void of details and in some cases, contradict each other.

Summary

In Quebec, French is the predominant language in both law and education. Despite this, immigration is on the rise and the government aspires to foster a harmonious society, asserting that Quebec's diversity is a source of strength (2014). ESL education is witnessing a transition between maintaining Quebec's unique linguistic identity and becoming an intercultural province, as echoed through recent evolving government policies. To achieve this within classrooms, teachers will require strategies that can meet all students where they are academically and provide them with a safe space to sustain their unique cultural identities. As shown in this chapter, a large burden is placed on ESL primary school teachers to connect with their students, create a welcoming environment for all students, generate learning materials that allow "success for all" (Ministry of Education, 2001), and respect the progressions of learning (2011). ESL teachers face the challenge of navigating this path alone since policies vary. The current study therefore focuses on collaboratively developing teaching resources that address both the academic and cultural needs of ESL learners in Quebec's primary schools. Chapter two will describe a transformative action research project that creates and implements materials that can address the academic and cultural needs of students in Quebec ESL primary school classrooms. Chapter three will reflect upon the experiences of teachers involved and the potential influence of this study in the Quebec ESL context.

Chapter 2: Qualitative Inquiry into Teaching Elementary School ESL Literacy Through Differentiated Instruction and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers in Quebec face the unique burden of teaching an undervalued language in highly diversified classrooms. Current policies, such as The Charter of the French language (Bill 101) and “Together We are Quebec” (Ministry of Immigration, 2014) emphasize the importance of the French language as dominant in both business and education. These two policies have contributed to large readiness gaps in ESL classrooms by placing all children who do not have historically Anglo-Canadian heritage in French public schools, regardless of their language aptitudes. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Immigration both have other guidelines underlining the importance of academic success for all children (Ministry of Education, 2001), acknowledging cultural diversity (Ministry of Immigration, 2016), and a teaching approach that centres students (Ministry of Education, 2021). Public ESL teachers in Quebec face a dilemma. They must balance their work with the expectations of a province that asserts its linguistic identity while also embracing interculturalism.

The balance of trying to accommodate students from differing cultural backgrounds with a wide range of academic needs is a burden placed on ESL teachers in public schools throughout the province, especially in metropolitan areas. The present study explores a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy skills in diverse Montreal second language classrooms. Specifically, an interest is placed on understanding how to navigate teaching literacy in a way that meets the diverse cultural and academic needs found in multifaceted classrooms. Successful integration into society is one of the primary goals of the province of Quebec’s (2001) learning plan. The concept of developing involved citizens is also foundational to culturally sustaining

pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2014). One way we can make sure that our literacy instruction reaches all students in our classroom, from those who may be falling behind to advanced readers, is to use a differentiated instruction approach to learning (Puzio, 2020; Dack & Tomlinson, 2024).

What is literacy?

Prior to delving into approaches for tackling literacy instruction in Quebec ESL classrooms, first literacy in this context should be understood. Literacy in primary school education often refers to the ability to understand and convey meaning through text; usually literacy is learned and demonstrated through decoding and creating texts. This project works with the UNESCO definition of literacy: “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society” (UNESCO, 2025). It is also important to recognize that this definition is limited when considering the vastness of literacies globally, which can include health literacies, financial literacies, and digital literacies. This research chooses to focus on literacy because, despite living in an information era, children seem to be encountering more difficulties with reading and writing. Current literature suggests that as our reading media becomes more digital, online chatting has been correlated with a decrease in understanding of reading strategies and lower literacy rates (Luyten, 2022). This correlation likely does not come as a surprise to many educators who were teaching pre-pandemic. It does not come as a surprise to scholars who have studied reading comprehension in digital media versus print and found that the former yields stronger comprehension outcomes (Delgado et al., 2018).

In light of the decline in literacy, there continues to be a huge need to build children's literacy skills because, as stated in the UNESCO definition, literacy allows members of society to access valuable information and fulfill their potential roles. One study found that 63% of grade four students are reading at the most basic level, demonstrating only a surface ability to read and lacking the required skills to make deeper connections (Yurick et al., 2024). The case in Quebec risks being similar, especially in ESL classes, where students do not begin learning literacy skills until grade three. Students' literacy skills may be negatively impacted by the digital era, especially in Quebec, where most students do not receive much explicit second-language literacy instruction in primary school. Some possible approaches for tackling both literacy instruction and the cultural and academic needs of students include differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2014) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Differentiated Instruction and Literacy

Differentiated Instruction (DI; Tomlinson, 2014) is an approach that aims to leverage the diverse needs of learners in the classroom to promote their academic success. To successfully implement DI, teachers must first understand their students' academic needs, interests, and readiness levels. High levels of interest in students allow teachers to accommodate student strengths through teaching content, processes, and products (Chenowith, 2014; David, 2017). Teachers have made use of a variety of creative strategies for implementing DI into language classrooms, by dividing assignments into smaller "chunks", creating class time for homework completion, regular needs and interest assessments, and the use of small group instruction to name a few (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; Ortega & Benalcázar, 2018). DI challenges the status quo, or often "one size fits all" approach to education that has historically dominated much of Western education through a philosophy of deep care. Learning to read and write is a very

personal experience. As students develop their skills, they also develop a style. For this reason, DI is a powerful tool for helping young learners build their skills because it is intentionally malleable to accommodate a variety of needs.

Some notable approaches to differentiation in literacy lessons include the use of small reading groups (Dack & Tomlinson, 2024; Hall & Burns, 2018) and reading material differentiation (Puzio et al., 2020; Domke et al., 2024). Differentiated reading groups are formed through assessment data with specific goals in mind. Some criteria for forming these groups include grouping students based on their reading level, the strategies they need to improve, and their personal interests (Domke et al., 2024). Through generating differentiated small reading groups, students receive more targeted language instruction and have the opportunity to receive purposeful feedback (Kelly & Djonko-Moore, 2021). Differentiating reading materials refers to cultivating a reading selection which caters to the specific learning needs and interests of students. Using this approach to variation has historically implied that students within any given class will be reading different texts to achieve their literacy outcomes; however, the present study considers using technology to adapt one text to meet a variety of language levels. An example of variation can include stories that focus on specific phonemes, stories that emphasize targeted sentence structure, and texts focused on developing an interest in reading through special topics. One study by Campbell, Lawson, and Angelis (2015) focused on understanding what systemic changes influenced the literary success of students in disadvantaged communities. These authors found one of the key commonalities within the best performing schools to be administration, direction, and classroom teachers who focused on differentiation and individual support. The study found that in these New York public schools teachers' ability to differentiate, accommodate different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and cater to a variety of needs

through intentional reading and writing blocks made the primary difference between students' success.

As highlighted throughout the literature (Gaitas & Martin, 2016; Wilcox et al., 2015), educators' abilities to implement and accurately use differentiation techniques have a significant impact on the effectiveness of their instruction and, ultimately, on the learning outcomes of students. In Quebec ESL teachers have limited support for implementing differentiation into their classrooms, especially after their pre-service education. The perceived time-consuming nature of implementing DI and the lack of resources are consistently cited as barriers between educators and using this tool in their classrooms; (Gaitas & Martin, 2016) however, empirical data suggests that their primary concern comes from the lack of support (Pozas et al., 2020). One recommended solution is to generate teacher development groups and to provide a space where collaboration is welcomed (Sullivan & Weeks, 2018). Using teacher support groups in the present study could support the Ministry of Education's professional competencies (2021) by allowing teachers the opportunity to fulfill item 2.5 professionals who work collaboratively.

The existing research provides a strong argument for the effectiveness of DI in addressing different academic needs within a class as well as teaching diverse socioeconomic groups fairly (Valiandes, 2015). Some aspects, such as supporting learners' interests, require a deep understanding of the student. Tomlinson claims that DI is a means for educators and students from different backgrounds to accomplish learning outcomes together (as cited in Cornwell et al., 2015). A lot of work has been done to demonstrate that planning for the different interests of students helps build teacher-student relationships (Coffey, 2014), cultivates motivation (Qorib, 2024), and meets learning outcomes (Puzio et al., 2020). However, it does not necessarily allow for how these interests and experiences may vary from one student to another.

It could be improved to meet the needs of evolving student populations by using these differences to promote learning between students and to encourage the growth of empathy and collaboration. The use of differentiated reading groups, for example, could be enhanced by not only grouping students according to their learning needs, but also by having them share their cultural knowledge with each other to form a community. This is why culturally responsive pedagogies complement DI. Both seek to create a sense of personal involvement and value in the education process by empowering the student.

Culturally Responsive (Sustaining) Pedagogy and Literacy

Culturally responsive pedagogy similarly serves as a potential framework for closing a gap that impacts learning. CRP emphasizes bridging the ideological space between a students' home learning environment and their institutional learning environment (specifically in Western culture). Paris (2012) and Ladson-Billings (2014) renamed the popular and established Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP; Ladson-Billings, 1995) to Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), because they believe that our goal as educators cannot simply be to respond to the culture of our students, but also to help them gain tools for sustaining it (Paris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Something that the current Quebec ESL progressions of learning and evaluation frameworks tend to do is treat culture as something static that can be kept tucked away on a shelf. Some examples of culture in the current curriculum include introducing students to anglophone movies, talking about celebrities, and understanding traditional foods (Ministry of Education, 2009). Although these are all interesting topics to discuss with elementary school students, incorporating more CSP and DI into the lesson plans intentionally creates space for students to talk about family recipes, community issues, and their own unique and intersecting identities.

In terms of literacy, CSP scholars perceive that the literacy habits and values children learn at home and before coming to school tend to influence and sometimes even clash with the literacy habits and values they learn at schools (Lew & Nelson, 2016). Cats and Kahmi (2025) advocate for an approach that focuses on culturally and knowledge-rich texts, teaching children how to interpret them, which is an essential skill for understanding texts. DI provides teachers with a framework for appropriately addressing the academic needs of students, while understanding that these are usually tied to socio-cultural needs. CSP contributes a way of honouring these sociocultural needs by teaching students to see themselves in the literature, as well as seeing their own life experiences as learning opportunities for others. Literacy instruction in CSP supports the notion of individual interest as often found in DI literature because the selection of reading materials in CSP literacy instruction intentionally provides students with both the opportunity to see themselves in the story and to learn about those different from themselves through an empathetic lens. A study focused specifically on demonstrating the power of CSP learning materials (Hass, 2025) mentions a few ideas for selecting CSP reading materials. First, using literary materials that help our students gain awareness about issues in the community. Second, using literature to build empathy in our students and third, using classroom texts to help students take action. CSP literacy instruction could be effective in teaching students how to interpret texts, allowing them to access foundational knowledge crucial to successful reading comprehension (Cats & Kahmi, 2025).

Further, a more recent study by CSP scholar Ladson-Billings (2014) highlights the benefit of CSP for empowering students as active members of their communities. CSP does this by helping students learn how to identify, analyze, and solve real world problems within their communities through developing their foundation of knowledge and problem-solving skills. In

the classroom this looks like preparing students with background knowledge about a topic and its importance prior to diving into the reading and encouraging comprehension processes (predictions, identifying the main idea, making connections to other literature, inferring characters) over comprehension questions (Domke et al., 2024). It also includes educators making a conscious effort to frame cultural diversity as valuable learning resources and creating the space for students to develop socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Masunungure, 2025). It can be challenging to select reading materials that fulfill all the intended benefits of CSP and for this reason, usually having multiple series throughout an academic year may be the best approach to incorporating this pedagogy into classrooms. Continuously evaluating the needs and interests of students is a vital part of DI that would benefit CSP. It allows educators to have a better understanding of their students' interests and cultural backgrounds before implementing them in the classroom.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, the combination of CSP (Paris, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014) and DI (Tomlinson, 2014) are complementary educative frameworks geared towards addressing the same challenge in public education: diversity, inclusion, and academic success. In areas that DI may be lacking, such as student-to-student interaction, building community, and teaching students about their involvement in socio-political conversations, CSP is ready to fill the gaps. Likewise, where CSP does not lay a lot of foundational work for addressing the specific academic needs of individual students, DI provides educators with a solid framework for accommodating learning through scaffolding, individual planning, and diversified opportunities to demonstrate their understanding.

Using DI and CSP in Quebec Elementary School ESL Education

Beyond being two complementary teaching frameworks, implementing DI and CSP can also fill a gap in the ESL curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2011) and the Professional Competencies of Teachers in Quebec (Ministry of Education, 2021). For example, current frameworks for learning English as a second language include a section on culture, but they offer only a superficial view. The competencies associated with culture are limited to exploring anglophone films and magazines, famous people, origins of names, landmarks, idiomatic expressions and traditional celebrations (Ministry of Education, 2009). CSP teaches us that engaging cultural reflection should extend beyond typical food and tradition discourse and into the community lives of our students. Second generation immigrants have very different, intersecting cultural identities from their parents, or from people who still live in their home countries. Likewise, children born and raised in Quebec since 2010 have different cultural identities from their Quebecois parents. Current ESL discussions about culture have lost a lot of credibility due to their lack of relevancy. Through providing literacy instruction that focuses on CSP, two things can be true at once. The Ministry of Immigration, Francization, and Integration's desire to evolve into a more intercultural Quebec (Ministry of Immigration, 2016) becomes a reality in classrooms. The important French-Canadian identity of Quebecois students is equally honoured as something that others can learn from. Not only would students benefit from this kind of instruction, but teachers could also improve their relationships with their students and, in turn, further their professional competencies. Although there is no mention for how to address readiness differences in the teacher competencies document administered by the Ministry of Education, there are a few important skills directly supported by implementing both CSP and DI. Similarly, although the evaluation frameworks do not ask teachers to consider the cultural

identities of students while teaching and creating class communities, there are still markers that would be fulfilled using these combined approaches.

Purpose of the Study

DI (Tomlinson, 2014) provides students with scaffolded learning materials and opportunities to demonstrate their understanding through various projects (Cornwell & al., 2015). CSP (Paris & Ladson-Billings, 2014) focuses on connecting students' learning experiences outside of the classroom to institutional learning values, with a goal of establishing collaborative learning spaces (Hilaski, 2020). The present study aims to highlight the potential of combining these two approaches to facilitate student-centred learning. Student-centred learning is gaining importance in the context of ESL classes in primary schools. Several intersecting factors have created learning groups with high levels of variability in terms of both academic readiness and cultural backgrounds.

Restrictive immigration policy has resulted in abundant second and third language learners in elementary public schools. Partially, Quebec is ready to embrace its identity as an intercultural province. However, it also has a deep-rooted cultural identity tied to its historical linguistic identity. When implemented effectively, culturally sustaining teaching can affirm the cultural identities of every student in the classroom. Incorporating such a pedagogy into Quebec ESL classrooms would serve to fulfill the expectations laid out by the Ministry of Education (2001, 2009, 2011) and by the Ministry of Immigration (2014, 2016) for success and inclusion for all students. DI in Quebec ESL classrooms would allow teachers to assess the needs of their students at the beginning of the year and then adapt the curriculum as required throughout the year. All students in ESL classrooms benefit from learning opportunities that meet them where they are academically, whether advanced or behind. A program that combines DI and CSP

strategies does not exclusively benefit students, it also helps educators to reach the professional competencies established by the Ministry of Education (2021). Ultimately, their combined strength has the potential to positively influence ESL teachers and students in primary schools across Quebec towards a deeper understanding of each other, our communities, and the intercultural provincial reality. In hopes of seeing this understanding deepen, the current transformative action research study seeks to explore teacher perceptions when using DI and CSP materials for literacy instruction in their ESL primary school classrooms. Specifically, this study aims to answer three research questions:

1. How do elementary ESL teachers in Quebec describe and perceive the readiness levels of their students?
2. What techniques and approaches do elementary ESL teachers in Quebec use to accommodate teaching literacy?
3. How do ESL teachers in Quebec perceive the use of differentiated texts for reading comprehension activities in their classrooms?

Project Overview

The research questions were explored using a transformative action research design (Lewin, 1946; Toomey, 1997) with the goal of providing possible solutions to an ongoing community issue for primary school ESL teachers in Quebec. Using action research allowed community members (i.e., ESL teachers in QC) to provide direct input throughout the project as the learning materials evolved with the shared goal of building a relationship between theory and practice. The project was carried out into three phases and followed a variation of a typical cycle seen in action research: plan, act, observe, and reflect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; McIntyre, 2014). The first phase focused on understanding the classroom experiences of ESL teachers in a

metropolitan area of Quebec in terms of classroom variation and how they typically navigate teaching literacy and addressed the first two research questions. The second phase focused on developing and implementing classroom reading comprehension materials, which differ from something the teachers have previously tried. After using the materials, the teachers' comments were used to address the third research question. In the third phase, the materials were revised based on the teachers' feedback and the revised materials were reviewed by additional primary school ESL teachers to address the third research question again. Valuable teacher insight was used while developing these materials, first by testing them in the classroom and then through collaboratively modifying the materials. The approaches to inquiry for this research were primarily pragmatic. The pragmatic goal was to provide teachers with practical materials they can incorporate into their classrooms as they navigate the ongoing challenges of teaching ESL in elementary schools in Quebec.

In terms of researcher positionality, I have taught ESL in various settings over the past six years, including Quebec's primary schools, international institutions, and online platforms. My experience in Quebec mostly takes place in an underprivileged community within a borough of a metropolitan area. My brother's struggles with dysgraphia have had an impact on the way I understand and write about literacy difficulties. Witnessing the way he navigates the world and the way the world tends to treat him, has instilled in me a sense that literacy is a social justice topic. Among my colleagues and I, one of the challenges we often faced as an obstacle to precise instruction is the multifaceted nature of the classroom and how this tends to clash with the existing teaching traditions we have. As the primary researcher, in addition to my six years of experience teaching English as a second language, I am also currently pursuing a master's of Applied Linguistics at a large Canadian university. My experience working in a highly

multicultural school with first language English speakers in ESL classrooms from grades one to six is what lead to the proposed research. Prior knowledge and experience within the teaching context of the research will influence the way data is analyzed and contribute to subjectivity.

Researcher reflexivity was recursive throughout the phases of this research. To assure that reflexivity was interwoven throughout all aspects of this project, I used a group of questions to refer to at the beginning and end of each phase throughout the project. The questions were designed to bring into question personal reflexivity, interpersonal reflexivity, and methodological reflexivity (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Personal reflexivity questions helped me to introspectively think about the impact my own experience has on my research and the way that this research could change my perspectives as a result. Interpersonal reflexivity questions allowed me to continuously consider the way that relationship dynamics between myself and participants might have influenced the data. These questions were particularly helpful when analyzing focus group data where multiple personalities were at play. Methodological reflexivity encouraged me to think about what a focus on pragmatism means for the results of this research and the different advantages and disadvantages of participatory research.

Phase One: Understanding DI in Quebec ESL Classrooms

Participants

Two ESL elementary school teachers participated in the first phase of this study, which is an appropriate sample size within the scope of qualitative research using in-depth interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Further, using this sample size supported the feasibility of the research as a one-year thesis. Both teachers participating in this action research described their classroom populations as multicultural. Each educator also confirmed that they have students with varying language proficiencies. Their previous experience with teaching diverse groups contributed

positively to the feedback they were able to provide about the lessons as they were developed over the course of this research. Their unique perspectives contributed to further understanding the context that ESL teachers in Quebec face. The participants were homogeneous in terms of career, as they are both ESL elementary school teachers; however, they varied in years of service, cultural backgrounds, and age.

The first participant, who will go by the pseudonym Marianne, has twenty years of teaching experience and she currently teaches in an enriched immersion program for students in grades five and six. In the enriched program, Marianne's students spend one week on and one week off in her classroom, meaning their subject instruction is 50% in English and 50% in French throughout the school year. She has taught this program for over five years and prior to teaching this enriched program, she taught in the regular second language stream in Quebec. She was born in another Canadian province and completed her teacher's education in the West Coast, moving to the province about fifteen years ago. The second participant, going by the pseudonym Pasha, has fifteen years of experience teaching ESL and has always taught in the typical second language classroom, where she sees her students between sixty to ninety minutes per week. She teaches a 100% contract in one school and has also previously taught ESL in a variety of boroughs within the metropolitan area of Quebec. This teacher also has experience teaching in smaller towns of Quebec considered to be more French dominant areas. She comes from an ethnically mixed background and has lived in Quebec most of her life.

Both participants had previous professional experience with the researcher from working in the same school. They were recruited using convenience sampling and participated on a volunteer basis without any monetary remuneration. It was crucial that the participants had direct experience with the teaching context and content these developed materials were intended to

address. Further, as a thesis project, the feasibility of recruiting teachers with no partisan ties was limited because no compensation was provided for participation.

Data Collection and Materials

In Phase 1, the goal was to meet the teachers and gain as much insight as possible into their classroom needs, knowledge about DI and CSP, and teaching beliefs. Both teachers participated in hour-long interviews where they discussed their experience teaching ESL in Quebec, their students' readiness levels, and the role that culture plays in their classrooms. The interviews employed fifteen open-ended questions, with five to seven follow-up probing questions targeting their experiences teaching ESL literacy in their classes within a metropolitan area of Quebec. The researcher met with participants individually towards the beginning of the school year through a Microsoft Teams video meeting. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes and allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the educators' beliefs, classroom demographics, and practices. Appendix A provides the initial interview questions. The interviews were audio-recorded.

Data Analysis

Audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed using the Teams record and transcribe function. The researcher manually checked the transcripts by listening to the audio-recordings while reading the transcripts to correct any errors. The transcripts were then shared with teachers through a password protected, Google drive folder, allowing them the opportunity to add or clarify anything. The individual interview transcripts were then imported into CAQDAS program Dedoose and coded based on the following categories: how teachers express their classroom proficiency levels, teacher experience with differentiated instruction, and teacher

perceptions of culture in the classroom. These categories then had smaller codes affiliated with the larger ideas; for example, reading strategies, scaffolding, and reading groups were in “teacher experience with differentiated instruction.” Both deductive codes, reflecting issues raised in previous research, and inductive codes arising from the data were included. After codes were applied once, the researcher took time away from the transcripts and revisited them for other details after completing the reflection questions on a weekly basis. Then, by looking at the codes in each category, answers to the first two research questions were extracted.

Findings

In response to the first research question about teachers’ perceptions of their students’ readiness levels, the interviews revealed that both participants experience a lot of variation in their classrooms. The teachers witness large readiness gaps when it comes to students’ oral expression and their reading comprehension. They believed that the primary reason for these gaps was related to different levels of exposure and experience with the English language outside of the classroom. Pasha reported that “at least half” of her students speak English at home and that “maybe 90% speak English quite fluently.” Marianne, similarly, mentioned that it is not uncommon for students in her class to be perfectly bilingual. In both classroom cases, the teachers cited great variation in reading and writing readiness levels. They agreed that students with an advantage in literacy skills tended to be students who had a lot of English exposure outside of the classroom, even often times being anglophone students.

In addition to students speaking English at home or with friends outside of the classroom, another factor that separates second language and first language English speakers is their reading and writing skills. The ESL curriculum in Quebec currently begins to teach second language English literacy skills (reading and writing) in grade three, yet children who grow up in

multilingual houses may interact with English texts such as stories and games much earlier. Pasha underlined this late introduction to literacy in the curriculum as a logistical teaching challenge. She explained that by the time students begin to read in class, it is difficult to find age appropriate and level appropriate reading material because stories feel as if they are geared towards a less mature audience when the literacy level is accurate. She says, “With the older groups, I find whatever is level appropriate is not maturity appropriate.” The challenge of finding reading material that is both literacy level appropriate and about a topic that interests her students is a primary reason Pasha was interested in further exploring the possibility of differentiated reading materials. In Pasha’s classrooms, she reported the largest literacy gaps, specifically saying that, “there's like a couple of kids at the bottom where the ESL text is maybe even too hard for them. And then there's some right at the top where it's like too easy. So I find that a challenge all the time, yeah.” In Marianne’s case, she described that, since she teaches an enriched course, students often come to her classroom with more advanced language skills, but that she still has to navigate between the students who are “perfectly bilingual” and those who are advanced English second-language learners. In summary of the findings for the first research question, both teachers described their classrooms as experiencing large readiness gaps between the students who struggle with course content and those who have advanced abilities compared to the current curriculum. The primary reason they stated for this was that many students gain English experience outside of the classroom at a rate faster than it is introduced in the class.

The second research question sought to understand strategies ESL teachers used to teach literacy in groups with large readiness differences. Through the interviews, Marianne and Pasha both expressed experience using some form of differentiated instruction within their classrooms, but they had never differentiated the same text across literacy levels. The most common way

both teachers accommodated differentiated learning in their classrooms was through scaffolding assignments to make sure that students were provided with a model and asked to submit preliminary works such as rough drafts, mind maps, and planning sheets. Pasha uses two other DI strategies to accommodate her students. First, she uses differentiated groups by grouping those who need more support together and offering them guidance when she can. Second, she also does some differentiating with the products of her students; for example, because the writing capacities of her students varies so much, she usually has a basic assignment and then additional things the students can do to challenge themselves and possibly earn extra points. The following quote illustrates the difficulty faced in her ESL classrooms when it comes to written work:

“I’ll say, you know, you can write about anything you want. I will, you know, for some people I want at least three sentences and then others, if you can do 2 pages, like go for it. But just let’s write for this amount of time... And then some kids, you know, finish with maybe two sentences that are like, um, pretty rough around the edges. And then others are like writing 2 pages full.”

One implication of using differentiated products in these circumstances, as revealed by Pasha through the interview, relates to students and their grades. Since she needs to maintain the engagement of her students, she aims to have those who can, go above and beyond. However, when it comes to grading, this means that a majority of her students way over-perform on the ESL evaluation framework. Pasha shared that “most of” her students have 90% in the class and for the select few who do not, she often tells the parents not to look at the class average for their child, noting, “It’s not fair to compare your, you know, your daughter that just started learning English two years ago with somebody who speaks it at home.” Continuing to describe that some students feel like maybe they don’t belong in her class, when actually, “they totally do. And the

program is made for them. The program is made for them, actually.” This implication indicates a fundamental functionality issue with the current ESL evaluation framework. Beyond typical differentiated instruction techniques, both teachers use additional measures to help their students succeed, encouraging confidence and connecting culturally. Marianne approaches teaching literacy skills to her advanced students through “focus[ing] on building confidence” within students based on their capacity to learn, saying,

“ I really just try to make them feel confident in the things that they don't know, like to ask questions and realize that, yeah, buddy beside me is perfectly bilingual and they do know, but it's OK that I don't and that's how I'm going to learn. So they need to try and I encourage them to sort of.”

Marianne and Pasha both also expressed that they believe culture plays an important role in connection with their students professionally and to gain academic interest. In Marianne’s class, for example, she explains that each year she has the opportunity to explore topics of interest with her students and doesn’t typically follow a textbook for her enriched course. When asked about how culture intersects with her teaching materials, she answered:

“I don't use any manuals. It depends on what the students are interested in and what their backgrounds are and what they bring to the table culturally as well. So anything that they're interested in or that they bring up, we can explore. I've got the time to do that, since I have them every day.”

Pasha had similar sentiments when it came to showing interest in her student’s culture. She encourages her students to talk about their culture when they feel like it and she makes an effort to remember special holidays and celebrations of her students, She has a personal interest in understanding culture, even having taken a sabbatical to travel with her family for a year. Both

teachers develop cultural connection through understanding their students, but do not have activities that specifically emphasize cultural sharing or learning.

Finally, while both teachers naturally use some form of differentiated instruction or personal touch to gain the interest of students, neither of them have received specific instruction for the use of DI. In the focus group, when asked about the Ministry of Education 2021 document, “Differentiated Instruction: Helping all students achieve educational success” neither of them had specific memories of the document or its contents being emphasized or shared through professional development. Pasha expressed a lot of interest in receiving the document and potentially having the opportunity to receive professional development related to it.

To summarize the Phase 1 findings, the initial interview findings, as they related to the first two research questions, revealed that both teachers experience significant student variation in all of their classes when it comes to both literacy skills (reading and writing readiness levels) and cultural backgrounds. One of the common concerns with this relates to student confidence and perceived ability of second-language learners versus those with a lot of English exposure. Another recurring problem within their classroom relates to lesson planning and evaluation of students. They demonstrated experience with some aspects of differentiated instruction; however not all. They also showed interest in exploring the possibility of using differentiated teaching materials and considering differentiated evaluation measures; however, they were not familiar with best practices or where to start. Following these initial interviews in phase one, both teachers believe their students would benefit from trying differentiated texts and are interested in exploring topics related to shared culture with their students. Phase two will explore how educators perceived a reading comprehension exercise that sought to use both differentiated instruction and culturally sustaining pedagogy to address these intersecting classroom needs.

Phase Two: Materials Design and Implementation

The second phase of this research involved developing experimental learning materials based on the identified varying needs of the teachers in phase one. The data collection and materials for phase two are outlined below. This phase represents the improvement and reflection phases of the transformative action research model.

Teaching Materials Design

Reading comprehension materials were developed that focused on providing students with differentiated versions of one story (Puzio et al., 2020; Domke et al., 2024) and with worksheets that could encourage them to discuss topics surrounding culture as they experience it (Cats & Kahmi, 2025; Hass, 2025). I took two stories that already existed: “The Name Jar” by Yansook Choi which tells the story of Unhei, a Korean girl who recently moves to North America and grapples with navigating her identity with a name she finds “hard” for her new classmates to pronounce. Throughout the story, her classmates offer to help her choose a new name, by writing names down and putting them in a jar on her desk. At the end of the story, Unhei decides to keep her name because of what it means to her and helps her classmates learn to pronounce it properly. The second story, “Painted Skies” by Carolyn Mallory introduces Inuit knowledge through a story of friendship. It is about a girl whose parents move to the Canadian arctic for work and her experience seeing the northern lights for the first time with her Inuit friend. In this story, there are themes about cultural familial knowledge that is passed down to us, learning through new experiences, and some ideas about spirituality. Both books are children’s picture books, sold in Canada, that were purchased for the purpose of this project. The stories were chosen because they feature a lot of themes that the students in Marianne and Pasha’s

classes could relate to: friendship, immigration, desire to fit in, adapting to new situations, similarities through differences, etc.

Once the stories were chosen, two different teaching resources were used to help transform the texts into differentiated versions of the same text. The two online resources are: DiffIt and MagicSchool. To transform these texts, first the entire story was transcribed into a word document as a simple text. Then, the simple text was copied and pasted into DiffIt and MagicSchool prompts. From here, differentiated versions of the text were generated that reflected A1, A2, B1, B2 levels in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Each levelled text was then analyzed using the Lextutor Vocabulary profiler to cross reference the accuracy of each text's level. Each version of the story was read through for fluidity and double-checked for any errors. In using differentiated texts and grouping students into groups with similar readiness levels, the lesson utilized key DI techniques (Chenowith, 2014; David, 2017). Each teacher received the original story and all four differentiated texts.

Next, the lesson comprised of two different worksheets for students to complete after reading. The first worksheet focused on overall reading comprehension and on encouraging students to think about the cultural context of the story. Students were asked to search for new words in the dictionary and to identify different characteristics and themes from the story. The worksheet was completed in groups and designed to facilitate conversations about what students' own cultural experiences looked like. Maybe their grandmother passed down valuable knowledge to them too? Maybe they also find their name difficult for people to pronounce sometimes? The second worksheet asked students to come up with a poster idea in their group. The poster was intended to share what they believed was something important others could learn from the story. It asked students to discuss with their classmates what their favourite parts of the

story were and how they could share that with others. Having students reflect on their own surroundings and find ways to participate in micro change within their communities is a foundational value of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Masunungure, 2025).

The lesson was designed as a stand-alone reading comprehension activity that teachers could use at any point during the year. It could be taught over one period or extended into multiple periods by offering the students the opportunity to present their posters and by facilitating longer group discussions about their takeaways. For reading competencies these two worksheets support the Ministry of Education's C2 "reinvest understanding of texts" by asking the students to discuss their learning beyond a simple gap fill activity. Specifically, for grades five and six students (cycle three), the ministry progression of learning says they should be working towards mastery of inferring, explaining a storyline, and sequencing. Also in the ESL progression of learning, by cycle three, students should be able to identify cultural traditions and discuss them in English (Ministry of Education, 2009). Finally, the group centred nature of this assignment, having students work with other students who have similar literacy levels and encouraging them to interact through learning about each other and themselves, aligns well with the Ministry's educational plan, chapter three "broad areas of learning," which includes an emphasis on citizenship and community life (Ministry of Education, 2001).

The entire learning material package (Appendix B) included: Two different books, with four differentiations each, two worksheets for each story (a total of four), and teacher procedures. These were shared with the teachers through a Google Drive folder and a Facebook group was created at this point in the project for any additional questions to be addressed while planning implementation.

Teaching Materials Implementation

The two teachers who participated in Phase 1, Marianne and Pasha, implemented the materials in their primary ESL classes as the action phase of this research project and embarked on the journey of feedback and modifications. Here the goal was to collaborate on how the materials could be improved, based on their implementation within each classroom. The teachers' primary responsibilities for this phase included: implementing the materials to the best of their ability, using the post-lesson checklist, and providing feedback. Each teacher taught the materials to multiple classes of between 20 and 25 students, each time over the span of one period (60 - 90 minutes). Marianne read the "painted skies" differentiated texts with her grade five group. They completed the story and the first worksheet over one period of 90 minutes. Next, Marianne read the "The Name Jar" differentiated texts with her grade six group. They also completed the first worksheet within the same work period. In Pasha's class, she used the same text, "The Name Jar" with all three of her grade six classes. They also each read the story and completed worksheet #1. Unfortunately, because the teachers had a hard time getting their students to connect with the stories, neither of them implemented the second worksheet focused on creative reinvestment.

Data Collection

The data were collected through post-lesson checklists (Appendix C) and a semi-structured focus group (appendix D). The post lesson checklist was a researcher generated tool that acted to guide teacher feedback following the implementation of the materials. The checklist asked teachers to reflect using smiley face options to respond to statements, similar to a Likert scale. These checklists served as a reminder and guide for teachers when they shared in the focus group. The primary purpose of this checklist was to make sure that teachers were collectively

thinking about the same criteria when they reflected upon their perceived success of the lesson. This acted as a key control factor for the researcher as the educators prepared to bring their perspectives to the focus group.

After each teacher individually implemented the materials and completed the post-lesson checklist, they both met with the researcher for a semi-structured focus group. The meeting took place over Microsoft teams and was audio recorded. The focus group allowed the researcher to ask questions about how their students interacted with the materials, which things they would change about the lesson, and the effectiveness of the differentiated materials while also allowing teachers to bring their own meaningful contributions to the conversation. The researcher asked thirteen core questions during the focus group, which lasted about one hour during lunch with both participants. The focus group protocol favoured inclusivity, equal contributions, and opposing dialogues through a set of basic ground rules (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The audio-recording of the focus group was transcribed through the record and transcribe function of Microsoft Teams. Immediately following the meeting, the researcher read through the transcripts and corrected any voice to text errors. The transcript was shared with teachers through a Google drive folder to allow them the opportunity for elaboration and clarification. To identify areas for improvement for the teaching materials, the transcript was analyzed using the same Dedoose protocol used in Phase 1. The checklist data were recorded in an excel spreadsheet (Figure 1). The faces were converted to a five-point scale, where one = strongly disagree, two = disagree, three= neutral, four = agree, and five = strongly agree. The numerical response to each question was recorded in a table so the answers from each teacher could be compared side by side. In cases where teachers agreed (score of 4 or 5), it was coded with green

to represent positive feedback. Similarly, in cases where teachers disagreed (score of 1 or 2), they were flagged as negative and coloured red. Neutral answers (score of 3) were left blank. During this phase, all feedback on what teachers found worked well and what did not in their classrooms was coded. The researcher used the following broad codes to answer the third research question and determine which elements to change: reading material feedback, worksheet feedback, and teacher procedure feedback.

Findings

The third research question focused on understanding the perceptions of teachers using differentiated reading materials to teach reading skills in their ESL classrooms. The findings reveal their perceptions about student-to-student interaction, student interest, the use of DI texts for group work, the readability of the teacher procedures, and finally overall sentiments towards the lesson.

In terms of the post lesson checklist, there were both positive and negative reactions to the materials, as shown in Table 1. On student interactions, positive responses were gathered from the post lesson checklist, which indicated that teachers found that their students connected well with each other (Q1) and were comfortable talking about culture among themselves (Q6). Both teachers in the focus group reported that they felt grouping students by proficiency level allowed them to truly collaborate. They emphasized the benefit of placing learners in heterogeneous groups for comprehension exercises, as it encourages students who typically remain quiet to actively participate with their peers.

Table 1. Teacher Responses to Post-Lesson Checklist Questions

Question	Pasha	Marianne
Q1: I felt that my students had opportunities to connect with each other during this lesson.	3	4
Q2: I noticed my students connecting with the reading material during this lesson.	2	4
Q3: This lesson allowed me the opportunity to learn more about my students.	3	4
Q4: I did not have to change, pivot, or redirect this lesson while teaching it.	1	3
Q5: My students responded well to the prompts.	2	3
Q6: My students seemed comfortable responding to questions about their culture.	4	3
Q7: This activity naturally led to conversations about actions we could take in our own communities.	2	2
Q8: My students understood the story similarly, although they had differentiated versions of the text.	4	2
Q9: Using differentiated texts allowed my students to read independently for an appropriate amount of time.	3	3
Q10: The use of differentiated texts did not impact student collaboration.	4	3

Note: Any response with a three was considered neutral, neither agree nor disagree.

Regarding student interest, the post lesson checklist answers (Q2 and Q5) partially contradict the experience reported in the focus group. In the focus groups, both teachers identified that they did not perceive the students as relating well to the stories. Pasha suggested that perhaps the story was too long, so students lost interest about halfway through and that the topic was overall not interesting. She noted that some of her students got very caught up on the Korean name of the shop owner, in two different groups and made inappropriate jokes. In her case, she had a lot of behavioural pushback with this story that took away from the lesson that it was trying to teach. Pasha's feedback about the lesson further demonstrates the challenge she

mentioned in the initial interview phase, which was that it is a challenge to find reading material that is appropriate for the students. It is possible, in the case of the two picture-book stories selected, they were deemed “baby-la-la” by the students in grade six who may have more mature interests. In Marianne’s case, she believed that the students did not connect well with the topics and that because the variations were in part computer generated, some of the human feel of reading a story was removed for students taking away from the experience. Finally, both teachers agreed that the difference in the size of each text might have had negative impacts on their students. For example, in Marianne’s case, she wondered how the student with a one-page long story felt seeing the students with stories three pages long. In Pasha’s class she noticed that some of the strongest behavioural reactions came from students with the smaller texts. Some of the suggestions made by both educators to modify this error in future work were to use a non-fiction text as the base and to include pictures across all versions that would guide reading and intrigue students.

Next, teacher perceptions about using differentiated texts as a tool for teaching reading with group work. Data in this phase found that the students understood the story similarly, despite all having different copies of the reading, and that the use of differentiated texts did not hinder the student’s ability to work in groups (Q10). This positively reflects the usefulness of varied texts when the goal afterwards includes group work. Alternatively, Marianne found that the most simplified version of the text did not tell the same story as the most complex one and that this did hinder the students’ ability to understand the story similarly across different proficiency levels. A suggestion to overcome this discrepancy was to take a very simple text to start and then add complexity, rather than taking a complex text and trying to shorten or simplify

it, which, in this case, seemed to have removed some of the meaning between the A1 and B2 texts for one of the teachers.

A third aspect was the usefulness of the teacher procedures, such as modifications or pivots the teachers needed to make for the lesson to work properly. Both teachers disagreed that the first lesson did not need to be changed or pivoted to be taught to their class (Q4). During the focus group, the teachers agreed that there were not enough specific instructions on the teacher documents to help them navigate the best way to teach the lesson. While some instructions were included, Marianne said that she believed it would have been better if I came to the class and taught it personally, because the idea “lived in [my] head,” but was not explicit through the instructions. Similarly, Pasha explained that she tried the lesson with three different classes and by the third time the lesson really had potential, but that, in regard to the first two attempts, “I don't think this lesson worked in order to get the conversations out that we were hoping to obviously get out.” Some of the things that Pasha workshopped and found worked included: structuring the group functionality (which student answers which question, who should read which part), not reading the entire story first prior to giving them their differentiated version, and clarifying questions that students misinterpreted in previous groups from the beginning for the next groups. Examples of misinterpreted questions include asking students to think about a “gift” from a family member, rather than something that holds personal significance to them. Rephrasing this question to include sentimentality, encouraging students to go beyond superficial material possessions. Students also experienced confusion over a question which asked, “do you know someone like the main character of this story?” the students defaulted to looking for students in the class with similar physical characteristics, rather than personality traits or positive parts of their character. One final area where student comprehension could be improved was for

the dictionary search activity of the worksheet. The first worksheet said, “write down three words you do not know and find them in the dictionary to define them.” Here students responded with “I already know all the words” so the recommendation is to include a list of vocabulary for students to choose from and say, “using the below list, choose three words to look up in the dictionary.” Following the guidance of this feedback, the teachers made it clear that the next lessons should include more structured instructions for teachers so that both the goal and the process is clear.

Finally, both teachers agreed that the lesson aims to address a question that is conceptually very important and interesting; however, they found that this first lesson did not do what they hoped it would, or what it was initially intended to do. The focus group interview reiterated some of the common challenges with implementing DI and CSP in classrooms: the difficulty of texts accurately depicting a story across levels, the challenge of grouping students without feelings of inadequacy, and writing teacher instructions that leave room for flexibility from class to class while also providing enough structure that they’re easy to use. Therefore, the goal of Phase 3 was to revise the materials based on gathered feedback and to collect additional ESL teacher perspectives. Phase three represents a continuation of the reflection phase in the action research model.

Phase Three: Revised Materials and Teacher Feedback

Revised Materials

The revised learning materials were developed with the same goal in mind, to allow students of multiple readiness levels to read one text in their classroom. The differentiated texts should lead students to have similar experiences reflecting on their reading and then completing a project as a relates to a culturally significant topic. As a result of the teachers’ feedback in

Phase 2, the materials were revised by differentiating a non-fiction text that evolved from simple to complex, making the text the same length (one page) for all levels, and including the same picture for all, adjusting the wording of questions that were misunderstood (i.e., dictionary search task and “similarities”), and including more detailed explanations in the teacher instructions. The text is about axolotls because in my experience, elementary school students are often interested in odd and unique animals. It started from a very simple text I wrote based on short research about the animals and gradually grew in complexity. The fact-based nature of these texts made it easier to facilitate conveying the same meaning across multiple literacy levels. It has a similar feel to a Ripley’s Believe it or not short “did you know” text, which Pasha mentioned that her students quite enjoy. Rather than specifying levels A1, A2, B1, & B2, the reading materials are graded from easy, to moderate, and advanced. In decreasing the division from four to three categories, teachers will have more flexibility when making groups. Teachers may still choose to test and place their students on the CEFR scale because a conversion scale is provided for them in the teaching procedures. Similarly to the initial reading materials, all three variations of the text were analyzed using Lextutor to confirm the complexity of the vocabulary (see Table 2).

Table 2. Lexutor Vocabulary Rating by Text Difficulty Level

	Token	Types	K1/K2 (types)	K3/K4 (types)	K5 + (types)
Easy	93	65	55 (84.62%) / 5 (7.69%)	1 (1.54%)	2 (3.08%)
Moderate	89	66	47 (71.21%) / 9 (13.64%)	1 (1.52%) / 3 (4.55%)	4 (6.08%)
Difficult	106	75	49 (65.33%) / 10 (13.33%)	4 (5.33%) / 3 (4%)	7 (9.33%)

The text has the same picture and is only one page for every student, which will hopefully help to mitigate some of the previously mentioned concerns with longer and shorter texts. Next, rather than having two different worksheets, with one focused on comprehension and another focused on creativity, there is only one worksheet which seeks to address both. In the first set of learning materials all students received the same worksheet but completed it with students at the same literacy level. In the revised materials, there is an easier worksheet along with a more challenging worksheet that teachers can give their stronger students. Each worksheet includes comprehension and creative reinvestment activities. The revised worksheets focus on discussing changing environments and the impacts it can have on animal habitat. Rather than focusing on explicit cultural differences (like having a non-western name or believing in different faith) the worksheet focuses on something more globally shared, which is the threat to our natural environments. The conversation focuses more on the collective cultural issue of climate change and asks students to think about actions they can take to help locally. One part of the worksheet asks each group to choose one endangered animal to focus on and the worksheet asks them about their decision-making process to choose which animal the group would focus

on. The final package of learning materials (Appendix E) includes more detailed teacher procedures, three differentiated non-fiction texts about axolotls, and two different levelled worksheets. The revised materials focus on new vocabulary, mindful group work, endangered animals, and environmental change.

Participants

Pasha and Marianne from the first two phases were provided with the revised materials and both teachers confirmed that they believed the issues identified in phase two were addressed in the revisions. Pasha expressed interest in trying the new materials and shared that she found them awesome: “Wow, yay this is awesome.” To further answer the third research question for the revised materials, two additional ESL teachers were also asked to review them. One of the ESL teachers, who will go by the pseudonym Chloe, is an in-service ESL teacher with less than five years of experience pursuing a master’s in applied linguistics. The final additional participant, who will go by the pseudonym Alejandra, is also pursuing a master’s in applied linguistics. Alejandra immigrated to Quebec as an adult as a second language French and English speaker herself. She teaches in a southern borough of the metropolitan area where Marianne and Pasha teach. Both Chloe and Alejandra reported that their ESL classrooms have large differences when it comes to student proficiency levels. They also agreed that part of their challenge included specifically meeting the needs of both anglophone and francophone students in one class. Chloe also named the fact that a lot of her students merge from classes d’accueil as one of the reasons for these large readiness gaps. Although both teachers also commonly used scaffolding as a technique with their students, neither of them had experience using differentiated texts.

Materials, Data Collection, and Analysis

The revised learning materials, including texts, teacher procedures, and worksheets, were shared through a Google drive folder with all participants. A Google form was developed, which employed 14 short or long answer questions (Appendix F) focused on how the ESL teachers perceive the learning materials. The teachers were asked to look at the differentiated texts, teacher procedures, and worksheets as references while completing the Google form. To get the teachers to evaluate these revised materials, questions focused on their understanding of the teaching procedures, the quality of the differentiation, whether they believed the worksheets are clear, and if they believed their students would connect with the lesson. After receiving every answer, the entire Google form answers were imported into Dedoose and coded with codes related to the ESL teacher's perceptions: usability of procedures, student engagement, questions and uncertainties, expressed interest in using the materials.

Findings

To answer the third research question, the teacher's perceptions will be discussed through the following topics: the perceived usability of the teacher procedures, their perceived student engagement, and their interest in using the reading comprehension activity. For perceived usability of the teacher procedures, both teachers stated that the procedures were clear. They clearly understood how to make their groups within their classes, and they both believed it would be possible to facilitate a group discussion with their students collectively after having worked on different versions of the worksheets.

In terms of their perceived student engagement with the lesson, both teachers believed the topic axolotls would pique the interest of their students and that the texts each conveyed the same meaning across all three levels. Chloe believed that while her students could be very interested in

this activity, one question on the worksheet, as it pertains to explaining how they came to a group decision would be too challenging for her weakest students:

“I find the post-reading Qs could be difficult for my weakest students to respond to in writing without lots of help. For example, describing in writing how they all came to an agreed upon answer. Many of my weakest students (some from classe d'accueil) are not even capable of reading in English just yet and/or have little to no understanding of texts.”

In this response, Chloe touches on something that Pasha discussed as a challenge too, which is that for some students, even the A1 level will be too difficult because they are essentially working at an A0 level in grades five and six. Similarly, Alejandra wondered about her weaker students being able to complete the collaboration question, stating that “the question “How did your group decide which animal to choose?” might be very confusing and difficult to answer for A1 A2 level students.” The final version of the learning materials found in Appendix E reflects changes based on these teachers’ comments and makes use of a blank comparative table where students can simply list their “pros” for each animal showing the agreement they came to rather than articulating it. Regarding student engagement, Alejandra also worried that by grouping students by proficiency level she would experience pushback in the class because her students typically prefer to group themselves with classmates they work well with. This was an interesting finding, because Alejandra’s concern here seemed to be the opposite of the opinion that Pasha, Marianne, and Chloe had about creating groups based on proficiency levels. They all tended to believe it could yield better group collaboration and input. Chloe wrote, “My students happen to enjoy collaborative work and are used to doing so in my class. I also find they appreciate being placed into groups with peers of similar proficiency levels in reading/writing/speaking.”

Finally, Pasha, Marianne, Chloe, and Alejandra all expressed interest in using the new learning materials in their classrooms. Taking into account the Google form completed by Alejandra and Chloe, it found that both would be interested in trying it with their grade five/six students but remain aware of the adaptation that might be required for their groups. In Chloe's case, adaptations include classroom management strategies for successful group work. In Alejandra's case, she would prefer to prolong the lesson over two or three work periods to allow for more concept checking with her students between each section of the worksheet. She also mentioned that she would provide them with an entire work period to conceptualize and realize the creative reinvestment activity. She concluded her feedback with, "On the whole, I love the project. Bravo!"

General Discussion

The present study supports the notion that English second language classes in metropolitan Quebec face challenges as a result of language legislation and immigration policy. The findings of the first two research questions demonstrated that teachers of ESL in French language schools face continuous difficulties accommodating the large variation in literacy readiness, a sentiment also expressed by educators who participated in DI and CSP studies outside of Quebec (Achmad et al., 2024; Pozas et al., 2020). It is one of very few recent studies that focused on ESL teachers' perspectives about teaching literacy in the current evolving language climate in metropolitan areas of Quebec. The reported lived experiences of educators represented in the present study underline the critical need to find a solution for teaching large proportions of anglophone students within the limited ESL framework.

In response to the first research question, the participating ESL teachers reported having disproportionate amounts of English first-language speakers, or high-performing English

speakers in their class. This was particularly problematic for teachers who only see their students for 60 - 90 minutes a week. The students' large variation in language level differs from other studies focusing on teaching ESL literacy, where students are typically grouped by their proficiency level. These large disparities, however, do align with studies focused on teaching literacy in other globalized metropolises through DI (Puzio et al., 2020; Ginja & Chen, 2020). Building literacy skills with such a small window of time has proven to be difficult. In addition to the limited time teachers have with students, the competency distribution of the Ministry of Education (which favours oral communication greatly across all cycles) makes it challenging to prioritize literacy. All four participants reported that meeting the learning needs of their anglophone and francophone students within the same class was a challenge. The three participants teaching in the traditional ESL program also worried about their weakest students being able to handle the A1 activity, indicating that they perceive some of their grade five and six students as being below the expected literacy level. These findings are similar to another study, which found that 63% of grade four students observed, read at the most basic level and lacked the skills to make deeper connections through reading (Yurick et al., 2024). In summary, all four teachers reported large disparities between their weakest and their strongest students as a recurring challenge in their classes.

Next, the second research question focused on understanding how ESL elementary school teachers in Quebec accommodate teaching literacy to their varied classes. All participating teachers expressed having heard of DI before; however, they used limited tools within the framework. All four teachers used scaffolding and only one teacher made use of reading groups and differentiated student products. Prior to this study, none of them had experience using differentiated texts. These findings are similar to those in a 2020 meta-analysis that examined the

DI habits of 1164 teachers. The study found scaffolding and tiered assignments to be the most commonly used techniques and seemingly the most accessible to teachers (Pozas et al., 2020). Previous studies (Gaitas & Alves Martins, 2016; Ginja & Chen, 2020) suggest that one of the reasons teachers do not employ the full realm of DI techniques could be due to a lack of professional development in this area. When Marianne and Pasha were asked about their knowledge of DI and the 2021 ministry publication, they both did not report any specific memory of receiving training or explicit instruction when the document was released. Overall, all four teachers showed interest in using DI and CSP within their classrooms. Similar to other studies, these teachers in metropolitan Quebec felt that they required more professional development and preparation time to accurately carry out differentiated instruction programs (Gaitas & Martins, 2016). In summary, answers to the second research question found that the DI technique teachers primarily used was scaffolding, but they were interested in further developing their understanding of other DI techniques, including reading groups and differentiated materials (such as texts and worksheets).

Finally, on teachers' perceptions about the use of differentiated texts, they perceived the use of differentiated texts as valuable. They were interested in using differentiated texts to help reach the varied levels of readiness found in their classes. The present study had some of the same challenges to functionality that were pointed out in other research for CSP and DI: implementing specialized learning materials for a class is a deeply personal and time-consuming task (Ginja & Chen, 2020; Gaitas & Martin, 2016). When presented with the final revised materials, each teacher was interested in using them, but cognizant of the modifications they would make for it to work with their teaching style and different groups.

The teachers perceived differentiated reading materials as useful for engaging a wide range of students in their classroom but felt that we must be careful with which kinds of texts we adapt and through what tools. For instance, if the more challenging text becomes too long, then the students will require different amounts of time to read, and if the text is modified using AI, something like a story may end up lacking emotion and become mechanical. Additionally, while the teachers in phase two were interested in engaging in conversations about culture with their students, they found that some of their students lacked the skills required to infer and convey a deeper meaning from a text. This is a skill that Cats and Kahmi (2025) argued needs to be explicitly taught alongside other literacy skills if we wish for students to engage in critical community involvement. The fact that a lot of the students struggled to answer questions beyond the surface demonstrates the continued necessity of using CSP in language classrooms to help students develop their inference and elaboration skills in a second language. This challenge also underlines that it may be difficult to use DI materials with students who are not very experienced in critical reading. In summary, since it is a new teaching method, for most professionals it would require establishing different routines with their groups to accommodate this kind of activity. These four ESL teachers perceived the differentiated texts and worksheets as being interesting for meeting the diverse learning needs of their classes.

Implications

The pursuit of answering these three research questions also brought awareness to some implications of using DI and CSP within the outdated educational frameworks for ESL in Quebec. First, because the existing evaluation framework was designed to meet the needs of francophone second language learners across the province, it does not suit the advanced language capacities of many multilingual students. As we saw in one of the interviews in phase one, some

teachers feel limited by the low expectations of the current evaluation framework. They have many students who by far exceed the expectations, resulting in a lot of classes averaging 90%. Unfortunately, some students who could really benefit from the program end up feeling behind and those who don't try to overachieve receive "easy A's." Another implication when attempting to teach ESL literacy skills concerns the ESL progression of learning framework. The current progression of learning begins building literacy skills in grade three, usually around eight years old. For this reason, finding authentic reading material is challenging. When something is level appropriate, some students find it to be aimed at "babies" and reject the text. Other times, the authentic texts that appeal to them in topics are too challenging in terms of vocabulary. The final implication revealed in this study related to the professional support of ESL teachers. If the province of Quebec hopes for educators to facilitate "learning for all" they should provide more support for the training and liberation of teachers. In this study, none of the participating teachers had received any explicit training with DI, despite the Ministry of Educations' 2021 document about DI as an accessibility tool. ESL teachers are not liberated for additional preparation time which would allow them to better support differentiating and personalizing lessons. Further, when ESL teachers recognize difficulty with literacy, there are limited institutional supports such as pedagogical counsellors or resource teachers. In summary, the findings revealed a need to modify the existing evaluation and progression of learning frameworks and to provide additional professional support to ESL teachers faced with large classroom diversity.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study was limited by the proximity of the researcher with the students, by time restraints, and by teacher availability. The nature of DI and CSP really call for a deep understanding of students to tap into both approaches full potential. Since I was removed from

the students, never met them, and did not fully understand the classroom dynamics at play, it was challenging to fully implement something that could meet everyone's needs. The development of differentiated texts and materials was found to be the most challenging aspect of DI to implement in a study that surveyed 273 primary school teachers in Portugal (Gaitas & Alves Martin, 2016) . Next, time constraints and availability impacted the sharing of information and the number of times lessons could be tested. Since I am the one who completed the background learning required prior to creating DI and CSP reading comprehension lessons, the teachers did not have the same depth of knowledge when it came to using them in their classrooms. It was not feasible for me to try to teach them about DI and CSP in the time we had available. Due to limited time and teacher availability, only the first version of the DI and CSP materials were tested in the classroom. Although I got a lot of teacher feedback on the second revised materials, there were also numerous changes that we did not get to see unfold within a classroom. Teacher availability also made it challenging to recruit teachers who had the space in their yearly planning to try experimental reading activities. As a result, the initial materials were only tested by two teachers and in five classes.

Future studies could implement the second revised materials into a variety of grades five and six second language classrooms across the province. It would also be useful to further understand why the general literacy level of elementary students is so low. It would be interesting to consider this question through two different lenses. Once in comparison to their French literacy, to understand if literacy in general is low or if it is really an ESL-specific problem. Then, also to consider if students with low ESL literacy have strong first language literacy. This type of study would look at the anglophone students in French public schools to see if acquiring literacy skills later (Grade three) impacts their ability to read and write in French.

It would also examine the first languages of each student to see if there were any patterns related to first and second language literacy progression.

Conclusion

The present study sought to understand how ESL teachers in metropolitan Quebec situated themselves and their students within an evolving and linguistically diverse province. It specifically asked: how do ESL teachers in Quebec describe variety within their classes? How do they address this variety? How do they perceive the use of DI and CSP reading materials in their classrooms? The findings revealed that ESL teachers in Quebec are faced with highly diverse classes. The language laws in the province emphasize these disparities by placing students from English-speaking backgrounds into the same ESL classes as francophone second language learners. The ESL educators in this study primarily used the DI technique of scaffolding. Although they reported working towards lessons that were accessible to all students, they also acknowledged these readiness differences as a big challenge. ESL teachers and students in Quebec are limited by an outdated educational framework. One that asks teachers to grade their students unfairly and one that greatly underestimates a large proportion of the provinces' students. Second language teachers in this study remained optimistic about the potential that using differentiated texts could have for teaching literacy to their students. The study found that ESL teachers preferred differentiated texts when they were non-fiction, had visuals, and were on an interesting topic. Teachers believed that grouping their students by proficiency level and encouraging them to discuss culturally relevant topics fostered good teamwork.

Chapter 3: Concluding Remarks

This study demonstrated the tangible consequences of immigration policy and education policy that do not evolve simultaneously. Current immigration policy acknowledges an

intercultural identity for the province of Quebec and welcomes newcomers as significant members of the province's economic strength. Despite this welcoming policy, the experience of newcomers is still largely impacted by language policy. It primarily impacts education by policing which children can or cannot attend school in the language of their families' choice. Existing education frameworks continue to valorize the learning experience of francophone Quebecois students as the standard ESL student in the province, without recognizing the shifting percentage of multilingual students attending public school as a direct result of Bill 101.

The evaluation framework and progressions of learning are both over a decade old. Quebec's educative plan dates back two decades. The results of this study indicate where this lack of evolution directly impacts ESL teachers and students in Quebec's ESL classrooms. The evaluation framework currently uses a one-size-fits-all approach to grading highly diverse students. This unfair approach to grading often disproportionately advantages students from anglophone backgrounds. Anglophone students coast through ESL classes with minimal effort and good grades; meanwhile, some students exiting classe d'accueil find themselves far below ESL literacy expectations. In most ESL classes from this study, the francophone Quebecois students made up a small minority of the group. The progressions of learning currently introduce literacy skills to students in Grade three. This makes sourcing materials that both meet students' interest and are level appropriate difficult. It also means that some anglophone students in French language schools may not begin formally acquiring English literacy skills until grade three.

Next, when it comes to teaching culture in current ESL elementary school classes, the recommended topics do not do justice to sustaining culture. It is crucial that young students learn how to analyze texts for feelings and meaning to develop the ability to infer and interpret their own deep understanding of a text. To accomplish this style of teaching, students require

numerous opportunities to practise discussing culture both globally and locally, as it relates to them. The current curriculum suggestions for culture do not emphasize this type of learning. Finally, similar to other studies looking at DI in elementary schools, the participating teachers in this study were all interested in using differentiated materials, products, and processes with their students. Something that held them all back was the lack of professional development for implementing DI and concerns about limited preparation time.

The study underlined a critical issue as it relates to public education in Quebec. Not all students attending French public schools in Quebec have access to ESL instruction that appropriately meets their learning needs. In metropolitan areas of Quebec, multilingual students' second language literacy skills slip through the cracks. The province should support teachers through offering further professional development opportunities and additional time for planning for highly diverse groups. Hiring resource teachers who can help students falling behind in English second language classes should become a priority. Quebec's current education plan prioritizes access to education "for all". To fulfill this mandate, the ESL frameworks must be re-evaluated to ensure they meet this requirement.

References

- Beyea, C., Giroux, I., Durand, C., & LeBlanc, D. (2018). *Tag! student workbook: English as a Second language, grade 3*. Chenelière Éducation.
- Bourhis, R. Y. (2008). *The English-speaking communities of Quebec: Vitality, multiple identities and linguisticism*. The vitality of the English-speaking communities of Quebec: From community decline to revival, 127–164
- Catts, H. W., & Kamhi, A. G. (2025). Rethinking Reading: Differentiating Comprehension from the Components of Reading. *American Educator*, 48(4), 38–41.
- Centre de Services Scolaire de Montreal (CSSDM). (2025). Documentation prescriptive (MEQ) – La classe d'accueil au préscolaire et au primaire.
<https://cybersavoir.cssdm.gouv.qc.ca/saf-pp/documentation/>
- Chenowith, N. H. (2014). Culturally responsive pedagogy and cultural scaffolding in literacy education. *Ohio Reading Teacher*, 44(1), 35–40.
- Coffey, Debra. (2014). Transforming Lives with Differentiated Literacy Instruction. *Journal of Education and Human Development*. 3. 85–103.
- Cornwell, K., Seltz, J., & Tomlinson, C. A. (2015). Differentiated classroom. 1, responding to the needs of elementary learners (Vol. 2). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Dack, H., & Ann Tomlinson, C. (2024). Preparing Novice Teachers to Differentiate Instruction: Implications of a Longitudinal Study. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 76(1), 12—28.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871241232419>

- David, C. (2017). Repenser la différenciation pédagogique au sein d'une classe de langue étrangère (FLE) multilingue, multiculturelle et multi-niveaux. *Bulletin VALS-ASLA*, n° spécial (2), 101-113.
- Delgado, P., Vargas, C., Ackerman, R., & Salmerón, L. (2018). Don't Throw away your printed books: A meta-analysis on the effects of reading media on reading comprehension. *Educational Research Review*, 25, 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.09.003>
- Domke, L. M., Kaplan, M., & Bingham, G. E. (2024). Differentiated reading groups: Bridging literacy instruction and culturally sustaining pedagogy. *The Reading Teacher*, 77(6), 800–809. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2317>
- Gaitas, S., & Alves Martins, M. (2016). Teacher perceived difficulty in implementing differentiated instructional strategies in primary school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(5), 544–556. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1223180>
- Ghosh, R. (2004). Public Education and Multicultural Policy in Canada: The Special Case of Quebec. *Int Rev Educ* 50, 543–566 (2004). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-004-4685-9>
- Ginja, T. G., & Chen, X. (2020). Teacher Educators' Perspectives and Experiences towards Differentiated Instruction International <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.13448a>
- Gouvernement du Canada. (2020, January 2). Profile of Quebec's anglophone Immigrants with English Mother Tongue. Canada.ca. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/research/profile-quebec-anglophone-immigrants-english-mother-tongue.html>

Hall MS, Burns MK. Meta-analysis of targeted small-group reading interventions. *J Sch Psychol*. 2018 Feb;66:54-66. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2017.11.002. Epub 2017 Nov 15. PMID:

29429496.

Hass, C. (2025). Using Literacy Instruction to Develop Student Activists. *Reading Teacher*, 78(4), 220–229.

Hilaski, D. (2020). Addressing the mismatch through culturally responsive literacy instruction. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 20(2), 356–384.

Institut de la statistique du Québec. (2024.). Quebec had a record-high net migration gain of 217,600 people in 2023. <https://statistique.quebec.ca/en/communiquer/quebec-record-high-net-migration-gain-217600-people-2023>

Kelly, L. B., & Djonko-Moore, C. (2021). What does culturally informed literacy instruction look like? *The Reading Teacher*, 75(5), 567–574. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2068>

Ladson-Billings G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 465–491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 74–84.

Legislation. (2024). Ministère de l'Éducation. Retrieved October 22, 2024, from <https://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/contenus-communs/parents-and-guardians/instruction-inenglishlegislation#:~:text=In%201977%2C%20Qu%C3%A9bec's%20National%20Assembly,or%20a%20subsidized%20private%20school.>

- Lew, M. M., & Nelson, R. F. (2016). New Teachers 'Challenges: How Culturally Responsive Teaching, Classroom Management, & Assessment Literacy Are Intertwined. *Multicultural Education*, 23, 7–13.
- Luyten, H. (2022). The global rise of online chatting and its adverse effect on reading literacy. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 72, 101101.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101101>
- Masunungure, A., & Maguvhe, M. O. (2025). Barriers to teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms in mainstream secondary schools. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 19(1), 1–13.
- McIntyre, A. (2008). What constitutes “research” in participatory action research?. In What constitutes “research” in participatory action research? (pp. 49-60). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483385679.n4>
- Ministry of Education (2001). Quebec Education Plan. Retrieved 2025, from https://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/PFEQ/educprg2001-010.pdf
- Ministry of Education (2009). Progression of learning English as a Second Language. Retrieved 2024, from www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/progression.
- Ministry of Education (2008). Éthique et culture religieuse. Retrieved 2025, from https://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/site_web/documents/dpse/formation_jeunes/EthiqueCultRel_Primaire.pdf
- Ministry of Education (2011). Framework for the Evaluation of Learning English as a Second Language. Retrieved 2024, from www7.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dc/evaluation/index_en.php

Ministry of Education (2021) Reference framework for professional competencies for teachers.

Retrieved 2025, from https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/devenir-enseignant/reference_framework_professional_competencies_teacher.pdf

Ministry of Immigration, Diversity, and Inclusion (2014). Quebec Education Towards a New

Quebec: Policy on Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion. Retrieved 2025, from

<https://assnat.qc.ca/Media/Process.aspx?MediaId=ANQ.Vigie.Bll.DocumentGenerique91655en&process=Default&token=ZyMoxNwUn8ikQ+TRKYwPCjWrKwg+vIv9rjij7p3xLGTZDmLVSmJLoqe/vG7/YWzz>

Ministry of Immigration, Diversity, and Inclusion (2016). Together, We are Quebec: Quebec

policy on immigration, participation, and inclusion. Retrieved 2025, from

<https://numerique.banq.qc.ca/patrimoine/details/52327/2680411>

Olmos-Vega, F. M., Stalmeijer, R. E., Varpio, L., & Kahlke, R. (2022). A practical guide to

reflexivity in qualitative research: AMEE Guide No. 149. *Medical Teacher*, 45(3), 241–

251. <https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>

Ortega, D. P., Cabrera, J. M., & Benalcázar, J. V. (2018). Differentiating instruction in the

language learning classroom: Theoretical considerations and practical

applications. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 9(6), 1220–1228.

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and

practice. *Educational Researcher*. 41(3), 93–97 Pozas, M., Letzel, V. and Schneider, C.

(2020), Teachers and differentiated instruction: exploring differentiation practices to

address student diversity. *J Res Spec Educ Needs*, 20:217-230.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12481>

Puzio, K., Colby, G. T., & Algeo-Nichols, D. (2020). Differentiated Literacy

Instruction: Boondoggle or Best Practice? *Review of Educational Research*, 90(4), 459–498. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320933536>

Qorib, M. (2024). Analysis the Impact of Differentiated Instruction on Critical Diversity Literacy in Inclusive Education. *Aksaqila International Humanities and Social Sciences [AIHSS] Journal*, 3(1), 1–19

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing : the art of hearing data* (Third edition). SAGE.

Smale-Jacobse, A. E., Meijer, A., Helms-Lorenz, M., & Maulana, R. (2019). Differentiated instruction in secondary education: A systematic review of research evidence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02366> Statistics Canada. (2016). *Census Profile, 2021 The evolution of language populations in Canada, by mother tongue from 1901 to 2016*: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2018001-eng.htm> Statistics Canada. (2021). *Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population: Ville de Quebec*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0&DGUIDlist=2021A00052423027&SearchText=quebec>

Stavroula Valiandes, (2015). Evaluating the impact of differentiated instruction on literacy and reading in mixed ability classrooms: Quality and equity dimensions of education effectiveness, *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, Volume 45, 2015, Pages 17–26, ISSN 0191–491X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2015.02.005>.

- Sullivan, A. L., & Weeks, M. R. (2018). "Differentiated Instruction for Young English Learners". In *The Routledge handbook of teaching English to young learners* (pp. 125–137). essay, Taylor & Francis
- Talbani, A. (1993). INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND MINORITIES: POLICY INITIATIVES IN QUEBEC. *McGill Journal of Education/Revue Des Sciences De l'éducation De McGill*, 28(003). Retrieved from <https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/8123>
- Thomas, M. B., & Carvajal-Regidor, M. (2020). Culturally responsive pedagogy in TESOL. In *Contemporary foundations for teaching English as an additional language* (pp. 91–117). Routledge.
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The Differentiated Classroom: Responding to the Needs of All Learners*. United States: ASCD.
- UNESCO.org. (2025). *What you need to know about literacy*.
<https://www.unesco.org/en/literacy/need-know>
- Wilcox, K. C., Lawson, H. A., & Angelis, J. (2015). Classroom, School, and District Impacts on Diverse Student Literacy Achievement. *Teachers College Record*, 117(9), 1–38.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811511700902>
- Yurick, A. L., Council, M., Telesman, A. O., Musti, S., Gardner, R., & Cartledge, G. (2024). On the science of reading: How social justice, behavior analysis, and literacy instruction converge. *Behavior and Social Issues*, 33(1), 563–580.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42822-023-00154-1>

Appendix A

Initial Interview questions

Consent: Remind the interviewee that this conversation will be recorded and used as data. Ask again for their consent to analyze our conversation and report on it.

Questions about demographics, DI, and CSP (30 minutes)

1. Please tell us about the demographics of the students you teach.
 1. What community do you teach in?
 2. What are the common backgrounds of students?
 3. How old are your students?
2. As an educator, what do you consider to be the important milestones for second language literacy in elementary school?
3. Do you believe that your students achieve these literacy milestones at the same time?
4. How do you approach variation of learning needs within your classroom?

Probe: Do all of the students in your classes submit and complete the same assignments?

5. What does “culturally sustaining pedagogy” mean to you, if anything?
6. What do you believe are some of the common experiences in teaching literacy skills (reading and writing) ESL teachers in Quebec encounter?
7. Tell me about the variation you’ve witnessed in student proficiency throughout your teaching career.
8. What are some strategies you use to address student variation?

9. How often do your students work in groups? What does group work in your class usually resemble?

Questions about classroom materials (15 - 20 minutes)

1. What are some reading and writing projects that you have enjoyed with your students in the past?

Probe: What about the reading and writing projects do you think students enjoyed in particular?

2. Do you scaffold literacy learning? As in, do you approach learning in “chunks” and provide different opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding?
3. If you were to have materials developed for your classroom, what materials would you be interested in making more use of?
4. How often do you and your colleagues collaborate about learning materials, classroom practices, and other professional development topics?
5. For the purpose of this project, which story are you interested in exploring with your class?

Appendix B

The First Learning Materials

Pre-lesson Teacher Instructions

1. English level assessment: Teachers may choose to divide their students into groups based on proficiency levels using their own professional knowledge, or teachers may opt to have all students in their class complete the Cambridge ESL test for schools, which would place their students on the CEFR: <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/for-schools/>

Note: The CEFR levels of students are only for their teacher's knowledge if they choose and will not be a part of the data collected for this research.

2. Assigning the reading material: the goal when assigning the reading material is to provide the students with reading material most appropriate for their literacy level. **Divide your students into groups of 3-4 students as you see fit.**

PDF versions of each book are available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/12I2sqfiFecnBahcVkv5OOFm2GPxRzXy?usp=sharing>

Book choice #1: Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory

Book choice #2: The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi

3. Post-reading worksheets: an opportunity for students to critically engage with the story and reinvest their learning. Once each group has the opportunity to read the story through their group, begin with the first worksheet. They are intentionally sequenced.

Worksheet #1 is designed to have the students interact with each other and reflect upon the story and how it relates to their own communities. Although the students will complete this worksheet in groups, they should each have their own copy with their answers written down. Depending on your group size, their readiness levels, and overall ability to work independently, please feel free to intervene when required and to modify the task as you see fit.

Worksheet #2 serves as the final brainstorm and collaboration opportunity for the group. During the same class that students complete this worksheet, they should also have access to 11 x 14 paper and colouring pencils, scrap paper, and other creative tools for making a poster. The worksheet will act as a draft for the poster they create. This is an opportunity for them to re-invest their knowledge into their own community. If you're interested, they can place these posters around the class and/or school.

Worksheet #1 (Painted Skies)

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Find three words in the story you don't know. Using a dictionary, copy the definition of the word. Write the three words here:

Word	Definition

2. Who do you think this story is about? Write the main character's name here:

3. Write three words to describe the two main characters.

4. Do you know anyone who is similar to a character in this story? Who?

5. Why are they similar to the main character?

6. Leslie is new to Northern Canada, it is her first time in the Arctic. Have you ever moved somewhere new? OR have you ever welcomed a new friend like Oolipika does in this story?

7. Leslie's mom taught her to whistle when she is scared and Oolipika's mom taught her to make a clicking noise with her nails. Does anyone in your group have a little trick for keeping calm that someone has passed down to them?

8. What could other's learn from this story?

Worksheet #1 (The Name Jar)

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Find three words in the story you don't know. Using a dictionary, copy the definition of the word. Write the three words here:

Word	Definition

2. Who do you think this story is about? Write the main character's name here:

3. Write three words to describe the two main characters.

4. Do you know anyone who is similar to a character in this story? Who?

5. Why are they similar to the main character?

6. Unhei finds the buildings in her new home strange, they do not look like the buildings she is used to back home. Have you ever moved somewhere new? OR have you ever welcomed a new friend like Joey does in this story?

7. Unhei's grandma gave her a wooden block with her name carved into it and it became very special to her. Can you think of anything special a family member gave to you?

8. What could other's learn from this story?

Worksheet #2 (Painted Skies)

In the story **Painted Skies** you read with your group, Oolipika shared stories passed down from her family with Leslie.

Why is this important? Use this box to brainstorm your ideas. You may use key words, write sentences, or draw a picture.

Worksheet #2 (The Name Jar)

In the story **The Name Jar** you read with your group, the main character explored different names and then discovered she liked her own best.

Why is this important to know about? Use this box to brainstorm your ideas. You may use key words, write sentences, or draw a picture.

Painted Skies Cover Art



Figure 1. Painted Skies Cover Art

Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - A1)

Leslie jumped off the steps, moving her arms and legs like a young deer trying to keep up with its family.

Whump!

The snow was hard, with only a little soft snow on top. Oolipika was next to her, laughing. The girls lay on their backs, their breath made small clouds. They moved their arms and legs up and down as if they were birds trying to fly.

“I did not think there would be so much snow here in October,” Leslie said. “I’m happy my mom bought me new winter clothes before we moved.”

A dark darkness, darker than a black bird, wrapped around them.

“Look,” Leslie said. “The sky is green!”

She closed her eyes and opened them again. Then she looked at Oolipika. Her friend’s eyes were big. Holding hands, the girls stood up. Pink swirls flashed with green. Leslie moved closer to Oolipika. Big ribbons waved in the wind. Leslie shivered. The colours filled more of the sky and floated closer.

When Leslie was scared, her mother taught her to whistle. Holding Oolipika’s hand, Leslie took a deep breath and started to blow.

“Stop whistling,” Oolipika said. “They’ll hear you.”

She took off her gloves and quickly moved the fingernails of one hand back and forth across the fingernails of her other hand, making a clicking sound.

“What will hear me?” Leslie asked.

Oolipika kept moving her fingernails back and forth. Leslie slowly moved back to the house with Oolipika behind her. *If we move slowly,* she thought, *whatever is in the sky won't see us.*

The stars twinkled through the green and pink sheet that moved in the sky. Leslie felt her heart beat a little faster. Could the sky-colours hear her? Would they get close enough to touch her? "Spirits?" Leslie whispered to her friend.

Oolipika nodded her head. "Anirniit - spirits," she said.

Leslie saw the colours change, fill more of the sky, and get closer.

"Should we run back to the house?" Leslie asked Oolipika.

"We don't have to be afraid, if you don't whistle again," Oolipika said.

"What kind of spirits are they?"

"We call them Aqsarniit, northern lights."

"Lights?" Leslie asked. "Not spirits?"

"Look closely," said Oolipika. "Do you see how the lines of light follow each other? Those are people running. That's what my grandma says."

"Oh," Leslie said, squinting her eyes. "Wow," she whispered. "I can see them."

"These lights are our anirniit, the spirits of our great-grandparents or friends. They are playing with a ball, kind of like soccer," Oolipika said. "My grandmother told me that if you whistle, the lights will come closer and the ball might hit you on the head. Because these spirits are very strong, they use a big, old walrus head for a ball. Nobody wants to get hit by that ball! If you make clicking sounds with your fingernails, the spirits know to stay away."

Leslie looked up at the sky and smiled as she took off her gloves and clicked her fingernails.

“They’re beautiful,” she said.

Sometimes green, sometimes red, the night sky dances. Stars peek through pink with a wink. A bit of yellow. Splashes of purple and silver, a sail, a sheet, a streak - with one big puff of wind, gone.

Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - A2)

Leslie jumped off the steps, moving her arms and legs like a caribou, trying to run with the group. Bang! The snow was packed hard, with just a little bit of soft snow on top. Oolipika landed next to her, laughing. The girls lay on their backs, and their breath made small, white clouds.

They moved their arms and legs up and down, like birds trying to fly away. “I didn’t think there would be so much snow here in October,” Leslie said. “I’m happy my mom bought me new winter clothes before we moved.”

A dark shadow, darker than a black bird, covered them. “Look,” Leslie said, pointing. “The sky is green!” She closed her eyes tight and opened them again. Then she looked at Oolipika. Her friend’s dark brown eyes were wide open. Holding hands, the girls stood up. Pink colours now flashed with light green. Leslie moved closer to Oolipika. Big lines of colour waved in the wind. Leslie shivered. The colours took up more of the sky and moved closer like a quiet, white owl. When Leslie was scared, her mother told her to whistle. Holding Oolipika’s hand, Leslie took a deep breath, and started to blow. “Stop whistling,” Oolipika said. “They’ll hear you.” She took off her gloves and quickly moved the nails of one hand back and forth across the nails of her other hand, making a clicking sound.

“What will hear me?” Leslie asked. Oolipika kept moving her fingernails back and forth. Leslie slowly moved back to the house with Oolipika behind her. If we move slowly, she thought, the things in the sky won’t see us. The stars shined through the green and pink colours that moved in the sky. Leslie felt her heart beat faster. Could the sky-colours hear her? Would they come close enough to touch her?

“Spirits?” Leslie whispered to her friend. Oolipika nodded her head. “Anirniit - spirits,” she said. Leslie held her breath and watched as the colours changed, covered more of the sky, and floated closer. “Should we run back to the house?” Leslie whispered to Oolipika.

“We don’t have to be afraid, as long as you don’t whistle again,” Oolipika said. “What kind of spirits are they?” “We call them Aqsarniit, northern lights.” “Lights?” Leslie asked. “Not spirits?” “Look closely,” said Oolipika. “Do you see how the long lines of light follow each other? Those are people running. That’s what my grandma says.”

“Oh,” Leslie said, looking closely. “Wow,” she whispered. “I can see them.” “These lights are our anirniit, the spirits of our great-grandparents or friends who have died. They are playing with a ball, like soccer,” Oolipika said. “My grandmother told me that if you whistle, the lights will come closer and the ball might hit you on the head. Because these spirits are very strong, they use a big, old walrus head for a ball. Nobody wants to get hit by that ball! If you make clicking sounds with your fingernails, the spirits know to stay away.”

Leslie looked up at the sky and smiled as she took off her gloves and clicked her fingernails.

“They’re beautiful,” she said. Sometimes green, sometimes red, the night sky dances. Stars peek through pink colours with a blink. A bit of yellow light as the sky breathes. Colours of purple and silver, like a sail, a sheet, a streak - and then it’s gone.

Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - B1)

Leslie jumped off the steps, moving her arms and legs like a young caribou trying to keep up with the herd. *Whump!* The snow was packed hard, with only a thin layer of soft snow on top. Oolipika landed next to her, laughing. The girls lay on their backs, their breath making small, white clouds. They moved their arms and legs up and down as if they were birds trying to take off and fly away.

“I didn’t think there would be so much snow here in October,” Leslie said. “I’m glad my mom bought me new winter clothes before we moved.”

A soft darkness, darker than the darkest raven, surrounded them.

“Look,” Leslie said, pointing. “The sky is green!”

She closed her eyes tightly and opened them again. Then she looked at Oolipika. Her friend’s dark brown eyes were wide open. Holding hands, the girls stood up. Pink swirls now flashed with bright green. Leslie moved closer to Oolipika. Huge ribbons of light waved in the wind. Leslie shivered. The colours took up more of the sky and floated closer like a quiet snowy owl. When Leslie was scared, her mother had taught her to whistle. Squeezing Oolipika’s hand, Leslie took a deep breath, closed her lips, and started to blow.

“Stop whistling,” Oolipika said. “They’ll hear you.” She took off her gloves and quickly moved the fingernails of one hand back and forth across the fingernails of her other hand, making a clicking noise.

“What will hear me?” Leslie asked.

Oolipika kept moving one set of fingernails over the other in a steady way. Leslie slowly moved back to the house with Oolipika behind her. *If we move slowly,* she thought, *whatever's in the sky won't notice us.*

The stars twinkled through the green and pink silky sheet that moved in the sky. Leslie felt her heart beat a little faster. *Could the sky-colours hear her? Would they get close enough to touch her?*

"Spirits?" Leslie whispered to her friend.

Oolipika nodded her head. "*Anirniit* - spirits," she said.

Leslie held her breath and stared as the streaks of colour changed, painted more of the sky, and floated closer.

"Should we run back to the house?" Leslie whispered to Oolipika.

"We don't have to be afraid, as long as you don't whistle again," Oolipika said.

"What kind of spirits are they?"

"*Aqsarniit* are what we call them, northern lights."

"Lights?" Leslie asked. "Not spirits?"

"Look closely," said Oolipika. "Do you see how all the long lines of light follow one after the other? Those are people running. That's what my grandma says."

"Oh," Leslie said, squinting her eyes. "Wow," she whispered. "I can see them."

"These lights are our *anirniit*, the spirits of our great-grandparents or friends that have died.

They are playing with a ball, kind of like soccer," Oolipika said. "My grandmother told me that if you whistle, the lights will come closer and the ball might hit you on the head. Because these

spirits are very strong, they use a big, old walrus skull for a ball. Nobody wants to get hit by that ball! If you make clicking sounds with your fingernails, the spirits know to stay away.”

Leslie looked up at the sky and smiled as she took off her gloves and clicked her fingernails.

“They’re beautiful,” she said.

Sometimes green, sometimes red, the night sky dances. Stars peek through soft pink with a wink and a flicker. A thin piece of yellow cloth as the sky breathes with light. Splashes of purple and silver-grey, like a sail, a sheet, a streak - with one big gust of wind, gone.

Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory (modified - B2)

Leslie jumped off the steps, all arms and legs, like a young caribou trying to keep up with the herd. Whump! The snow was hard, with just a thin layer of fluff. Oolipika landed beside her, laughing. The girls lay on their backs, their breath forming small, frosty clouds. They moved their arms and legs up and down as if they were birds trying to fly away.

"I didn't think there would be so much snow here in October," Leslie said. "I'm glad my mom bought me new winter clothes before we moved." A deep darkness, blacker than the darkest raven, surrounded them. "Look," Leslie said, pointing. "The sky is green!" She closed her eyes tight and opened them again. Then she looked at Oolipika. Her friend's dark brown eyes were wide open. Holding hands, the girls stood up. Pink swirls now mixed with the lime green. Leslie moved closer to Oolipika. Huge ribbons waved in the sky. Leslie shivered. The colours filled more of the sky and moved closer like a silent snowy owl.

When Leslie was scared, her mother taught her to whistle. Squeezing Oolipika's hand, Leslie took a deep breath, pursed her lips, and started to blow. "Stop whistling," Oolipika said. "They'll hear you." She took off her mitts and quickly moved the fingernails of one hand across the fingernails of her other hand, making a clicking noise.

"What will hear me?" Leslie asked. Oolipika kept rhythmically moving her fingernails. Leslie slowly backed toward the house with Oolipika behind her. If we move slowly, she thought, whatever's in the sky won't notice us. The stars twinkled through the green and pink silky sheet that rippled overhead. Leslie felt her heart beat a little faster. Could the sky-colours hear her? Would they get close enough to touch her?

"Spirits?" Leslie whispered to her friend. Oolipika nodded. "Anirniit - spirits," she said. Leslie held her breath and watched as the streaks of colour painted more of the sky and drifted closer.

"Should we run back to the house?" Leslie whispered to Oolipika.

"We don't have to be afraid, as long as you don't whistle again," Oolipika said. "What kind of spirits are they?"

"Aqsarniit is what we call them, northern lights."

"Lights?" Leslie asked. "Not spirits?"

"Look closely," said Oolipika. "Do you see how all the long threads of light follow one after the other? Those are people running. That's what my grandma says."

"Oh," Leslie said, squinting her eyes. "Wow," she whispered. "I can see them."

"These lights are our anirniit, the spirits of our great-grandparents or friends who have died.

They are playing with a ball, kind of like soccer," Oolipika said. "My grandmother told me that if you whistle, the lights will come closer and the ball might hit you on the head. Because these spirits are very strong, they use a big, old walrus skull for a ball. Nobody wants to get hit by that ball! If you make clicking sounds with your fingernails, the spirits know to stay away."

Leslie looked up at the sky and smiled as she took off her mittens and clicked her fingernails.

"They're beautiful," she said.

Sometimes green, sometimes red, the night sky dances. Stars peek through satin pink with a wink and a flicker. A wisp of yellow gauze as the sky breathes with light. Splashes of purple and silver-grey, a sail, a sheet, a streak—with one great gust, gone.

The Name Jar Cover Art

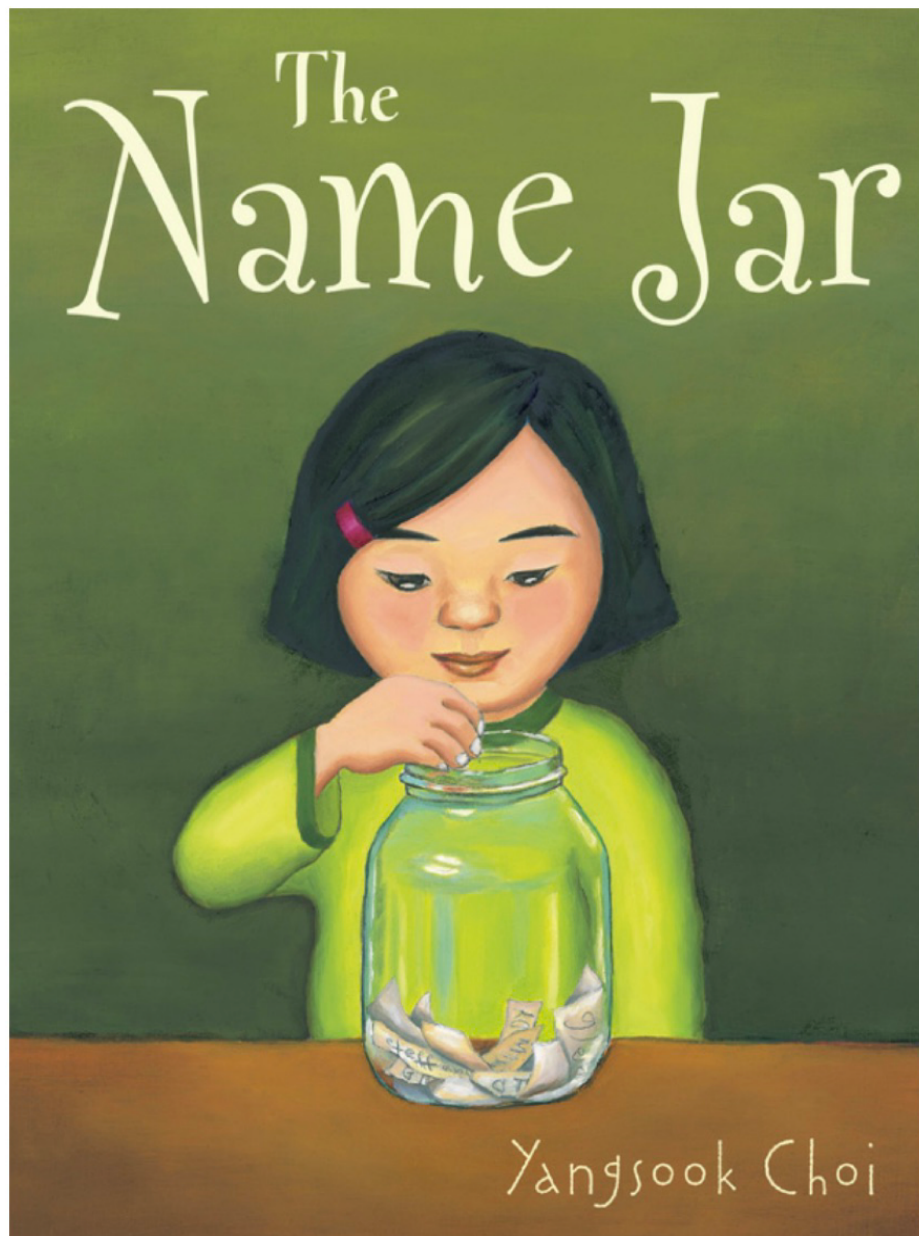


Figure 2. The Name Jar Cover Art

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified A1)

Unhei looked out the school bus window at new buildings and houses. It was her first day at a new school, and she felt nervous and excited. She touched a small wooden block in her pocket and remembered saying goodbye to her grandma at the airport in Korea. Her grandma gave her an ink pad and a small red pouch. "Your name is inside," she had said. Unhei wondered what her grandma meant.

A boy saw the pouch. "Is that for show and tell?" he asked. "No, it's mine," Unhei said, putting it back in her pocket. "Are you new here? What's your name?" asked a girl. "Unhei," she replied. The girl tried to say it but got it wrong, making some kids giggle.

When Unhei got to her new classroom, a boy with curly hair introduced her loudly. The teacher, Mr. Comoros, welcomed her. "What's your name?" someone asked. Unhei thought of the kids on the bus and said, "I haven't picked one yet."

On the way home, Unhei thought about her name. Her mom asked, "How was school?" Unhei nodded but said she wanted an American name. Her mom was surprised. "Unhei is a beautiful name," she said. "But it's hard to say," Unhei complained. "You're different, and that's good," said her mom.

Later, they went shopping in their new neighbourhood. They went to Kim's Market, which felt familiar. Mr. Kim, the shop owner, asked for her name. "Unhei," she said. "What a beautiful name, it means grace" he replied. Unhei felt happy.

At school, Unhei found a jar on her desk with names inside. Her classmates suggested names like Daisy and Tamela. They were trying to help her choose a new name. Unhei was touched by their kindness.

Unhei got a letter from her grandma, reminding her that she is always loved. She thought about her name a lot.

On Saturday, Unhei went to Mr. Kim's store and met Joey, a boy from her class. "Your name is Unhei?" he asked. "Yes, it means grace," she said. Joey learned to say it correctly, making Unhei smile.

On Monday, the name jar was gone, but Unhei was ready to tell her class her decision. She wrote her name in English and Korean on the board. "I like my name best," she told them. "Unhei means grace." The class clapped, and everyone tried to say her name right.

After school, Unhei found Joey with the name jar. He took it to help her keep her own name. Unhei was grateful. Joey suggested adding Korean nicknames to the jar. "I have a Korean nickname from Mr. Kim" Joey said, showing a stamp with the word "Chinku," meaning friend. Unhei smiled at her new friend, Chinku.

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified A2)

Unhei looked out the school bus window at the new buildings. It was her first day at a new school. She was nervous and excited. She touched a small wooden block in her pocket and thought about her grandmother in Korea. Her grandmother had given her an ink pad and a red satin pouch. “Your name is inside,” she had said.

Unhei took out the pouch and looked at the wooden block with her name in Korean. It reminded her of her grandmother’s smile. A boy asked, “Is that for show and tell?” Unhei quickly put it back in her pocket. “No, it’s mine,” she said. “Are you new? What’s your name?” a girl asked. “Unhei,” she replied. “Oooh-ney?” the girl asked. The other children laughed. “No, it’s pronounced Yoon-hye,” Unhei explained.

When the bus stopped at school, Unhei was glad to get off. Inside her new classroom, she felt shy. A boy with curly hair said, “You’re the new girl, right?” He took her hand and led her inside. “Here’s the new girl!” he shouted. The teacher, Mr. Comoros, welcomed her. “Please welcome our new student from Korea,” he said.

“What’s your name?” someone asked. Unhei thought about the kids on the bus. “I haven’t picked one yet,” she said.

At home, her mother asked about school. “It was okay,” Unhei said. She wanted an American name. “Why?” her mother asked. “Unhei is a beautiful name.” But Unhei wanted to fit in with the other kids.

Later, they went shopping in their new neighbourhood. They went to Kim's Market, which felt familiar. Mr. Kim, the shop owner, asked for her name. “Unhei,” she said. “What a beautiful name” he said. “and it means grace” he added. Unhei felt happy.

The next day at school, Unhei found a jar on her desk with name suggestions. “Daisy,” “Tamela,” and “Wednesday” were some of them. Ralph said, “You can pick one or all of them!” Unhei thought about her name. Her grandmother had sent a letter saying, “You’ll always be my Unhei.” This made her think.

On Monday, Unhei came early to see the jar, but it was gone. There was only a piece of paper with one name on it. “Where’s the jar?” Ralph asked. “I’m ready to introduce myself,” Unhei said. She wrote her name in English and Korean on the board. “I liked the names you thought of,” she told the class, “but I like my name best. Unhei means grace.”

After class, at home, Unhei’s mother called, “Your friend is here!” It was Joey with the name jar. “I took it so you’d keep your name,” Joey said. “Do you want to keep these names?” “Yes, as a souvenir,” Unhei smiled.

Then Joey showed her a wooden stamp. “Mr. Kim helped me choose a Korean nickname,” he said. Unhei read it. “Chinku. That means friend!” she said, and they both smiled.

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified B1)

Unhei looked out the school bus window at the different buildings on her way to her new school. It was her first day, and she felt nervous but excited. She touched a small wooden block in her pocket and remembered leaving her grandmother at the airport in Korea. Her grandmother had given her an ink pad and a red satin pouch. “Your name is inside,” she had said. Unhei took out the pouch to see the wooden block with her name carved on it. She imagined her grandmother’s smile.

“Is that for show and tell?” a boy asked, surprising Unhei. She quickly put the pouch back and replied, “No... it’s mine.” “Are you new? What’s your name?” a girl asked. “Unhei,” she replied. “Oooh-ney?” the girl said, confused. “No, it’s pronounced Yoon-hye,” Unhei corrected. As the bus stopped, kids teased her, saying, “You-hey, bye bye!” Unhei felt embarrassed.

In her new classroom, a curly-haired boy said, “You’re the new girl, right?” He took her hand and led her inside. “Here’s the new girl!” he announced loudly. The teacher, Mr. Comoros, welcomed Unhei. “Please welcome our newest student from Korea,” he said. Unhei smiled, trying to hide her nervousness. “What’s your name?” someone asked. Unhei thought of the kids on the bus and said, “I haven’t picked one yet, but I’ll let you know next week.”

On the bus home, Unhei thought about her name. “How was school?” her mother asked. “Did you understand the teacher?” Unhei nodded. “I think I want an American name,” she said quickly. Her mother looked surprised. “Why? Unhei is a beautiful name.” “But it’s hard to pronounce,” Unhei said. “I don’t want to be different.” “You are different, Unhei,” her mother replied. “That’s a good thing!” Unhei just wrinkled her nose.

Later, Unhei and her mother went shopping in their new neighbourhood. They passed different stores until they saw Kim’s Market, with signs in English and Korean. Her mother bought

ingredients for Korean food, which made Unhei smile. “Just because we’re in America doesn’t mean we stop eating Korean food,” her mother said.

At the counter, Mr. Kim asked, “What is your name?” “Unhei,” she answered. “Ah, what a beautiful name. It means grace, right?” Unhei nodded. Mr. Kim said, “A graceful name for a graceful girl. Welcome to the neighbourhood.” That evening, Unhei tried out American names in front of the mirror, but none felt right.

The next morning, Unhei found a jar with paper pieces on her desk. Each piece had a name suggestion from her classmates. “Daisy,” “Tamela,” and “Wednesday” were a few. Unhei smiled and thanked them. Ralph suggested she could pick from the jar, or choose all and have the longest name ever.

At home, Unhei received a letter from her grandmother. It reminded her of her name’s significance. On Saturday, Unhei visited Mr. Kim’s store and met Joey. “Your name is Un-hee?” Joey asked. Unhei nodded, “It’s pronounced Yoon-hye.” Joey repeated it perfectly, making Unhei smile.

On Monday, Unhei was ready to introduce herself. The jar was gone, but she had decided. She wrote her name in English and Korean on the chalkboard. “I liked all your suggestions, but I like my name best. Unhei means grace.” The class tried saying her name, and they applauded her choice.

After school, Unhei found Joey at her house with the name jar. “I took it because I wanted you to keep your name,” he admitted. They decided to keep the names as souvenirs. Joey showed her his Korean nickname from Mr. Kim, “Chinku,” which means friend. Unhei smiled at her new friend, knowing she could be herself.

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi (Modified B2)

Through the window of the school bus, Unhei observed the unfamiliar buildings and houses on her way to her new school. It was her first day, and she felt both nervous and excited. She touched the small wooden block in her pocket and remembered saying goodbye to her grandmother at the airport in Korea. Her grandmother had wiped away Unhei's tears and given her an ink pad and a small red satin pouch. "Your name is inside," she had said. Unhei wondered, My name? She took out the red pouch again to look at the wooden block with her name carved into it. As she traced the Korean characters, she imagined her grandmother's smile. "Is that for show and tell?" a boy asked, surprising Unhei. She looked up as more kids leaned over. "No... it's mine," she replied, quickly putting the pouch back in her pocket. "Are you new here? What's your name?" a girl asked. "Unhei," she said. "Oooh-ney?" the girl repeated with a puzzled expression. "Oooh, oooh, ohh-ney!" some kids chanted. "No, no," Unhei corrected, "It's spelled U-N-H-E-I. It's pronounced Yoon-hye." "Oh, it's Yoo-hey," the boy said. "Like, You, hey! What about 'Hey-you!'" Just then, the bus stopped at the school and the doors opened. Unhei hurried off. "You-hey, bye bye!" the kids yelled as she left. Unhei felt herself blush. Standing in the doorway of her new, noisy classroom, she was relieved that the kids from the bus had gone to different rooms, but her face was still red. "Aren't you going in?" asked a curly-haired boy with freckles. "You're the new girl, right?" he asked cheerfully. Unhei nodded, and before she could respond, the boy took her hand and led her inside. "Here's the new girl!" he announced loudly, almost making the teacher, Mr. Comoros, drop his glasses. Mr. Comoros thanked him and greeted Unhei. "Please welcome our newest student," he said to the class. "She and her family just arrived from Korea last week." Unhei smiled broadly, trying not to show her nervousness. "What's your name?" someone shouted. Unhei thought of the kids on the bus.

“Um, I haven’t picked one yet,” she told the class. “But I’ll let you know by next week.” As Mr. Comoros showed her to her desk, she felt many curious eyes on her. “Why doesn’t she have a name?” she heard someone whisper. “Maybe she robbed a bank in Korea and needs a new identity,” a boy replied.

On the bus ride home, nobody teased her, but Unhei kept thinking about her name. “How was school, Unhei?” her mother asked when she walked in. “Did you understand the teacher?” Unhei simply nodded. She unpacked her schoolbag and placed the red pouch by a photograph of her grandmother. “I’m glad you are learning English well,” her mother said. “You must study hard, behave nicely, and get good grades to show that you’re a good Korean.” “I will,” replied Unhei. “But... but I think I would like my own American name,” she said quickly. Her mother looked surprised. “Why? Unhei is a beautiful name. Your grandma and I went to a name master for it.” “But it’s so hard to pronounce,” Unhei complained. “I don’t want to be different from all the American kids.” “You are different, Unhei,” her mother said. “That’s a good thing!” Unhei just wrinkled her nose.

Later that day, Unhei and her mother went grocery shopping in their new neighbourhood. They passed Fadil’s Falafel, Tony’s Pizza, and Dot’s Deli. A garbage truck painted with graffiti roared down the street like a lion. Nothing seemed familiar until they reached Kim’s Market. The sign was in both English and Korean. Her mother picked up cabbage to make kimchi—Korean-style spicy pickled cabbage—and other vegetables and meat. She also found some seaweed, Unhei’s favourite, for soup. It made Unhei smile. “Just because we’ve moved to America,” her mother said, “doesn’t mean we stop eating Korean food.”

At the counter, a friendly man smiled at Unhei. “Helping your mother with the shopping?” he asked. Unhei nodded. “I’m Mr. Kim,” he said. “And what’s your name?” “Unhei,” she answered.

“Ah, what a beautiful name,” he said. “Doesn’t it mean grace?” Unhei nodded again. “My mother and grandmother went to a name master for it,” she told him. “A graceful name for a graceful girl,” Mr. Kim said as he packed their groceries. “Welcome to the neighborhood, Unhei.”

That evening, Unhei stood in front of the bathroom mirror. “Hi! My name is Amanda,” she said cheerfully. Then she wrinkled her nose. “Hi! My name is Laura. Hmm... maybe not.” Her smile faded. Nothing felt right. “I don’t think American kids will like me,” she worried as she began to brush her teeth.

The next morning, when Unhei arrived at school, she found a glass jar on her desk with some pieces of paper in it. Unhei took one out and read it aloud. “Daisy.” “That’s my baby sister’s nickname, but she said you can use it if you want,” said Cindy, who sat next to her. Unhei took out the rest of the papers. “Tamela,” she read. “I got it from a storybook,” said Nate. “She was smart and brave.” Unhei nodded and unfolded another piece. “Wensdy?” “Yeah. You came here on a Wednesday,” said Ralph. “Thank you... for your help.” A smile spread over Unhei’s face. Ralph quickly said, “We’ll put more names in. You can pick whatever you like—or pick them all, and you’ll have the longest name in history!”

Every day, the jar got fuller with more names, and Unhei read them all. She found a few she liked—Miranda, Stella, Avery. They sounded interesting. “I hope you choose the name I put in,” Marco told her at snack time. “I’ve put in three more,” said Ralph. “Madison, Park, and Lex. They’re my favorite street names.” “Maybe you should close your eyes and draw a name,” Rosie suggested. Ralph frowned. “That’s silly. What if she doesn’t like the name she draws?” “Well, we didn’t get to choose our names when we were born, did we?” Rosie argued. Everyone thought about this.

When Unhei got home from school that day, her little brother ran to give her a letter. It was from her grandma. She opened it quickly. It said, “To my Unhei, I hope you are enjoying your new friends. Be sure to help your mother and your little brother. Here the moon is up, but there the sun is up. No matter how far apart we are and no matter how different America is from Korea, you’ll always be my Unhei. Your grandma forever.” Unhei took out her wooden stamp and filled a paper with it. She thought for a long time in front of the bathroom mirror.

On Saturday, Unhei walked to Mr. Kim’s store. Mr. Kim was helping a customer, but he looked up and greeted her. “Hi, Unhei!” “Hello, Mr. Kim,” Unhei replied. She felt as if she was back in her old neighborhood in Korea. “Hey!” said the customer, turning around. It was Joey. “Your name is Un-hee?” he asked with wide eyes. Unhei looked at Mr. Kim, then turned to Joey. She nodded slowly. “Yes, it’s pronounced Yoon-Hye.” “And it means grace,” Mr. Kim added.

“Yoon-hye,” Joey said slowly and this time perfectly. It made Unhei smile.

“I’ll have it ready for you tomorrow,” said Mr. Kim to Joey. “Thank you, Mr. Kim. See you Monday, Unhei,” Joey said to her. He left before she could ask why he was at the store.

On Monday, Unhei came to class early to look at the names one last time. But the jar wasn’t on her desk. “Where’s your name jar?” Ralph asked when he saw it was gone. “I don’t know,” Unhei said. It wasn’t on Mr. Comoros’ desk or any other desk. And it wasn’t on the counters or shelves. As other kids arrived, they helped look. Soon, Mr. Comoros came in, and Ralph shouted, “The name jar is gone! The jar with all the names in it!” “Gone?” Mr. Comoros replied. With a look of concern, he asked Unhei, “Did you get a chance to read all the names?” Unhei nodded.

She took a breath. “I’m ready to introduce myself,” she said. Unhei wrote her name in both English and Korean on the chalkboard. “I liked the beautiful names and funny names you

thought of for me,” she told the class. “But I realized that I liked my name best, so I chose it again. Korean names mean something. Unhei means grace.” “Grace! Grace Yoon-hye!” shouted Ralph. Everyone tried to say it. “Yn-ha-e. Unh-yee. Unhae.” Unhei said her name again slowly and clearly. Soon, the kids began to say it better. Even Mr. Comoros. They applauded Unhei’s choice. “I was named after a flower,” Rosie whispered to Unhei. “Lots of American names have meanings, too,” Mr. Comoros reminded everyone.

When the class was dismissed, Unhei heard her new friends say goodbye. “Bye, Unhei. See you tomorrow.” “G’Bye, Unhei.” Unhei said goodbye and then looked around for Joey. But he was already gone.

“Unhei! Unhei! Come downstairs!” her mother called. “Your friend is here!” Unhei rushed down to see who it was. There stood Joey. And in his arms was the name jar. “Where did you find it?” Unhei asked. Joey looked embarrassed. “Um, well, I took it. But only because I wanted you to keep your own name. And you did!” He reached in and pulled out the names. “Do you want to keep them?” he asked. “Thank you, I’ll keep them as a souvenir,” Unhei said happily. Then she pulled out the piece of paper from her pocket. “Do you want this back?” Joey grinned. “You can keep it. I’ll return the name jar to the class. Maybe you could put some Korean nicknames in it for us. Names with good meanings.” “I could do that,” agreed Unhei. “I’ve already got a Korean nickname,” Joey said. “Mr. Kim helped me choose it.” Carefully, he pulled a small silver pouch from his pocket. Then he took out a dark wooden stamp with beautiful Korean characters carved into it. He pressed it on the ink pad and then on the piece of paper next to her name. “Chinku,” read Unhei. “That means friend!” And Chinku smiled back.

Appendix C

Post-Lesson Checklist

1. I felt that my students had opportunities to connect with each other during this lesson.

• :D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

2. I noticed my students connecting with the reading material during this lesson.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

3. This lesson allowed me the opportunity to learn more about my students.

• :D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

4. I did not have to change, pivot, or redirect this lesson while teaching it to my class.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

5. My students responded well to the prompts.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

6. My students seemed comfortable responding to the questions about their culture.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

7. This activity naturally led to conversations about actions we could take in our own communities.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

8. My students understood the story similarly, although they had differentiated versions of the text.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

9. Using differentiated texts allowed my students to read independently for an appropriate amount of time.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

10. The use of differentiated texts did not impact student collaboration.

:D / :) / :| / :(/ :C

Appendix D

Focus Group Outline

Focus group structure

- Made up of two participants (all ESL teachers, homogeneous in profession)
- Taking place online through Microsoft Teams (outside of school hours: during lunch or immediately after school)
- Takes place over one fifty minute session

Ground rules

1. Allow for each participant to complete their thought prior to adding yours.
2. Our purpose is to collect as much information about your teaching practices as we can, to do this we should all welcome both sharing and comparing while elaborating and disagreeing.

Probing questions (as needed)

1. I am curious to know if anyone experiences that differently?
2. What else could we say about that?
3. Any ideas as to why that might be?
4. In what ways?
5. How does that differ from (other similar/previously mentioned idea)?

Focus Group Questions

1. Overall, how did you feel teaching this lesson?
2. What advice would you give someone else before teaching it?
3. Looking at your post-lesson checklist, what was your lowest scored question in the post-lesson checklist? Why?

4. Let's think about the positive take-aways from these lessons. What was your highest score on the post-test? Why?
5. What commonalities do you think you both shared with implementing these lessons?
6. If you could change only one thing about these current lessons, what would it be?
7. Was this your first time working with a differentiated text (like the ones we used)?
How did that go? What were your main take-aways?
8. Is this the first time that you had a reading activity that emphasized discussion around culture?
9. How many students did you have at each level? What was the variety like in your classes? How many students do you think speak EN outside of your classroom/outside of school?
10. There's a document that exists, published by the Ministry of Education in 2021 called "Differentiated Instruction: Helping all students achieve educational success". Have you guys heard of it before? How does the ministry usually update ESL teachers when new documents are published in your experience? When I am writing my summary of our discussion, what is something you think will be important to mention?
11. Did you learn anything new about your students through this lesson?
12. How did you perceive your own teaching skills when giving this lesson?
13. Finally, when I summarize our conversation, what do you think is one thing I shouldn't miss or that you'd like to see underlined as a takeaway?

Appendix E

The Final Learning Materials

Teachers Procedures

Differentiated texts are used in this lesson to help students relate with the reading material at a level that is appropriate for their proficiency level. The intention and hope is that students' literacy level does not negatively impact their ability to interact with the lesson and learn similar take-aways as their peers who may have stronger literacy skills. Similarly, those who can read at a more advanced level, will not feel that the text is too simple, this will hopefully help maintain engagement of all students. The topic of the worksheets and text is related to a topic like endangered animals and the environment to help probe conversations about positive action people can take - this is a foundational belief of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which believes that by having students engage with cultural topics we can help create empowered citizens.

Pre-lesson Teacher Instructions

1. English level assessment: Teachers should divide their students into groups based on proficiency level using their own professional knowledge, or teachers may opt to have all students in their class complete the Cambridge ESL test for schools which would place their students on the CEFR: <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/test-your-english/for-schools/>

Note: The CEFR levels of students are only for their teacher's knowledge and do not need to be shared with students.

2. Once you have determined the CEFR level of all of your students, you can begin to assign groups. The groups should be comprised of three to four students and based on their proficiency level.

- Students will receive either the easy, moderate, or advanced reading.
- If your students are between A1 - A2 they should receive the easy text.
- If your students are between A2 - B1 they should have the moderate text.
- If your students are from B2 + they should have the advanced text.

The purpose of dividing your students into proficiency groups is to provide them with a reading text that has the appropriate ratio of new words and known words for them to learn from the text. If you do not have any students who score one of these three categories, not all versions of the text need to be used.

Students should be provided with fifteen minutes to read the text on their own.

Following independent reading, students should work with students at the same proficiency level to answer the questions.

Post-reading worksheets

This is an opportunity for students to critically engage with the story and reinvest their learning. Once each group has the opportunity to read the story themselves, they should begin working with their same proficiency level group.

- Students should take turns reading the questions aloud to each other
- Once one student reads the question, all students should discuss their answers for a minute or two before completing their own worksheets with the agreed upon answer.
- While they are working on these sheets we are hoping to target: their sense of responsibility, to foster their understanding of each other, and to eventually see them in problem solving mode.
- Students will require shared internet access to view this page about endangered animals:
<https://www.twinkl.ca/homework-help/science-homework-help/animals-facts-for-kids/what-are-endangered-animals#:~:text=Endangered%20Species%20List:,Golden%20Lion%20Tamarins>

After students complete the worksheets (whole class discussion)

- Put out a general feeler for how students enjoyed the text and the activity.
- Ask each group to share one or two sentences from Q1 on the worksheet.
- Ask students about their collaboration process. How did they come to a group decision about which animal to focus on? Was it easy or challenging to make this choice? (*Asking them to think about collaboration might bring about other conversations about the importance of compromise, voting, etc.*)
- What did each group find was threatening their animal?
 - What actions can we take? (tangible things, ideas about lifestyle changes, discussions about big corporations)
 - Why do you think people do not want to make these changes?

- Let's brainstorm small things we can do as a class this year to help small animal life around us? (not leave garbage on the playground, be careful when disposing of gum, leaving spider webs untouched, not picking flowers that provide for pollinators, putting healthy birdseed out, building small insect hotels with recycled materials, etc.)

Students will present their posters if they had the time to finish them.

Name: _____ Date: _____

- Using a dictionary, copy the definition of the word. Working with your group, write down two new sentences you could use these words in.

Word	Definition
Endangered	
Two sentences	
Pollution	
Two sentences	
Gills	
Two sentences	
Amphibians	
Two sentences	

2. What else do you know about pollution?

3. Write three adjectives to describe the axolotl.

Use this website to discover some other endangered animals (<https://www.twinkl.ca/homework-help/science-homework-help/animals-facts-for-kids/what-are-endangered-animals#:~:text=Endangered%20Species%20List:,Golden%20Lion%20Tamarins>) .

Choose one animal with your group to focus on.

4. Use this table to list the “pros” of three different animals. Circle the animal that your group decided to choose.

5. What makes it hard for your animal to live?

6. What are some things people can do to help your animal live?

7. Name four cool facts about your animal.

If you have time, use the back (blank) side of this paper to design your own poster raising awareness about your endangered animal.

Think about:

- Adding bright colours
- Using different texts
- Drawing a great picture
- Offering things people can do to save them

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Using a dictionary, copy the definition of the word. Working with your group, write down two new sentences you could use these words in.

Word	Definition
Endangered	
Two sentences	
Poaching	
Two sentences	
Gills	
Two sentences	
Amphibians	
Two sentences	

2. What else do you know about environmental threats?

3. Write two sentences to describe the axolotl using like/as to add a metaphor. For example: The axolotls skin is soft like butter or the axolotl eyes are as small as blueberries.

Use this website to discover some other endangered animals (<https://www.twinkl.ca/homework-help/science-homework-help/animals-facts-for-kids/what-are-endangered-animals#:~:text=Endangered%20Species%20List:,Golden%20Lion%20Tamarins>)

Choose one animal with your group to focus on.

4. Which animal did your group choose? Describe it's habitat (where it lives)

5. How did your group decide which animal to choose? Did everyone want the same animal? If not, how did your group reach a consensus?

6. What is threatening your animals survival?

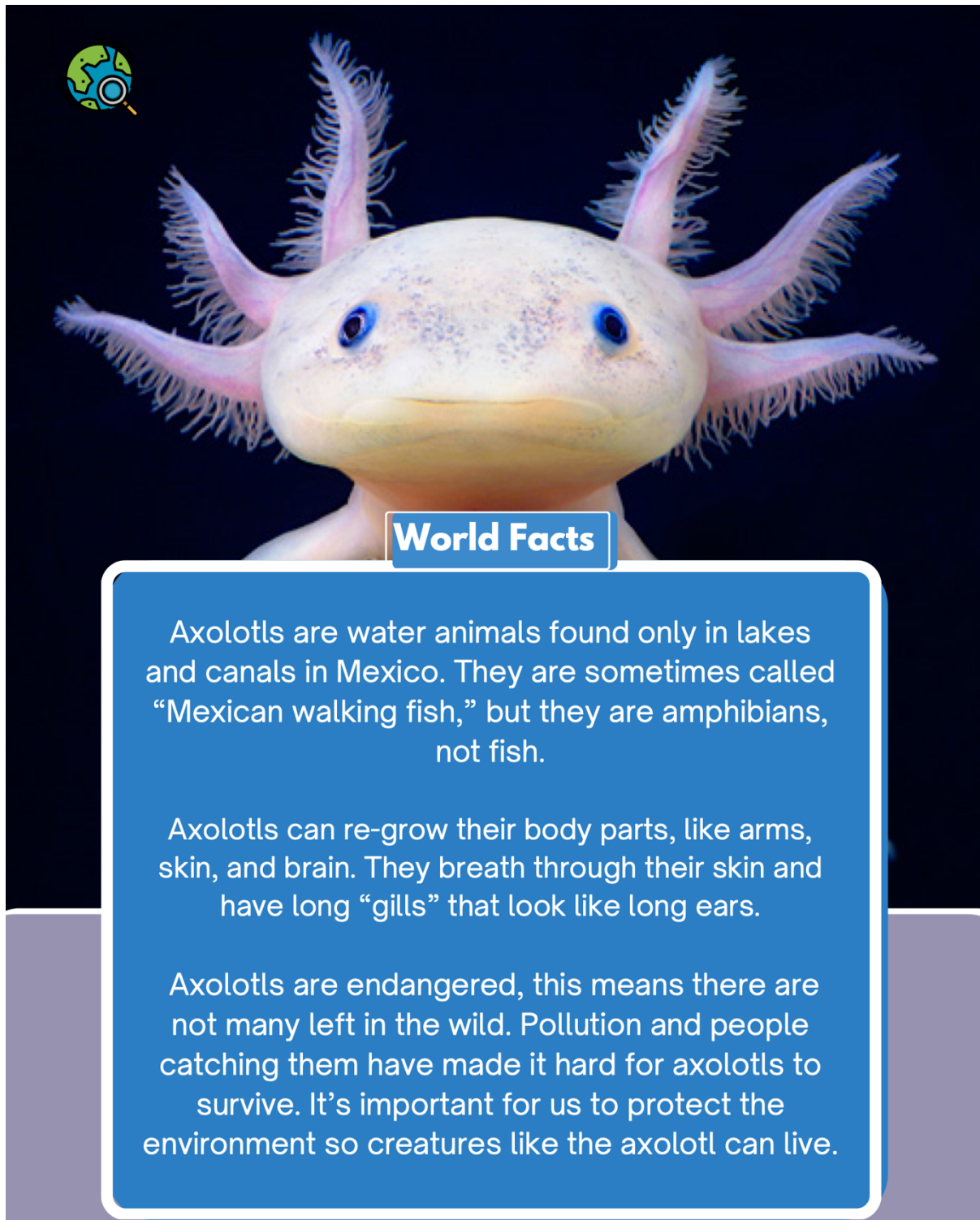
7. What are some things people can do to improve your animal's chance at survival?

8. What are some cool or strange facts about your animal?

If you have time, use the back (blank) side of this paper to design your own poster raising awareness about your endangered animal.

Think about:

- Adding bright colours
- Using different texts
- Drawing a great picture
- Offering things people can do to save them

Easy Differentiated TextA close-up photograph of an axolotl, a pinkish-white aquatic creature with prominent, feathery pink gills. The axolotl has blue eyes and a yellowish mouth. In the top left corner of the image, there is a small icon of a globe with a magnifying glass over it. Below the axolotl's head, there is a blue rectangular box with a white border containing the text "World Facts". Below this box, there are three paragraphs of text in a white font on a blue background.

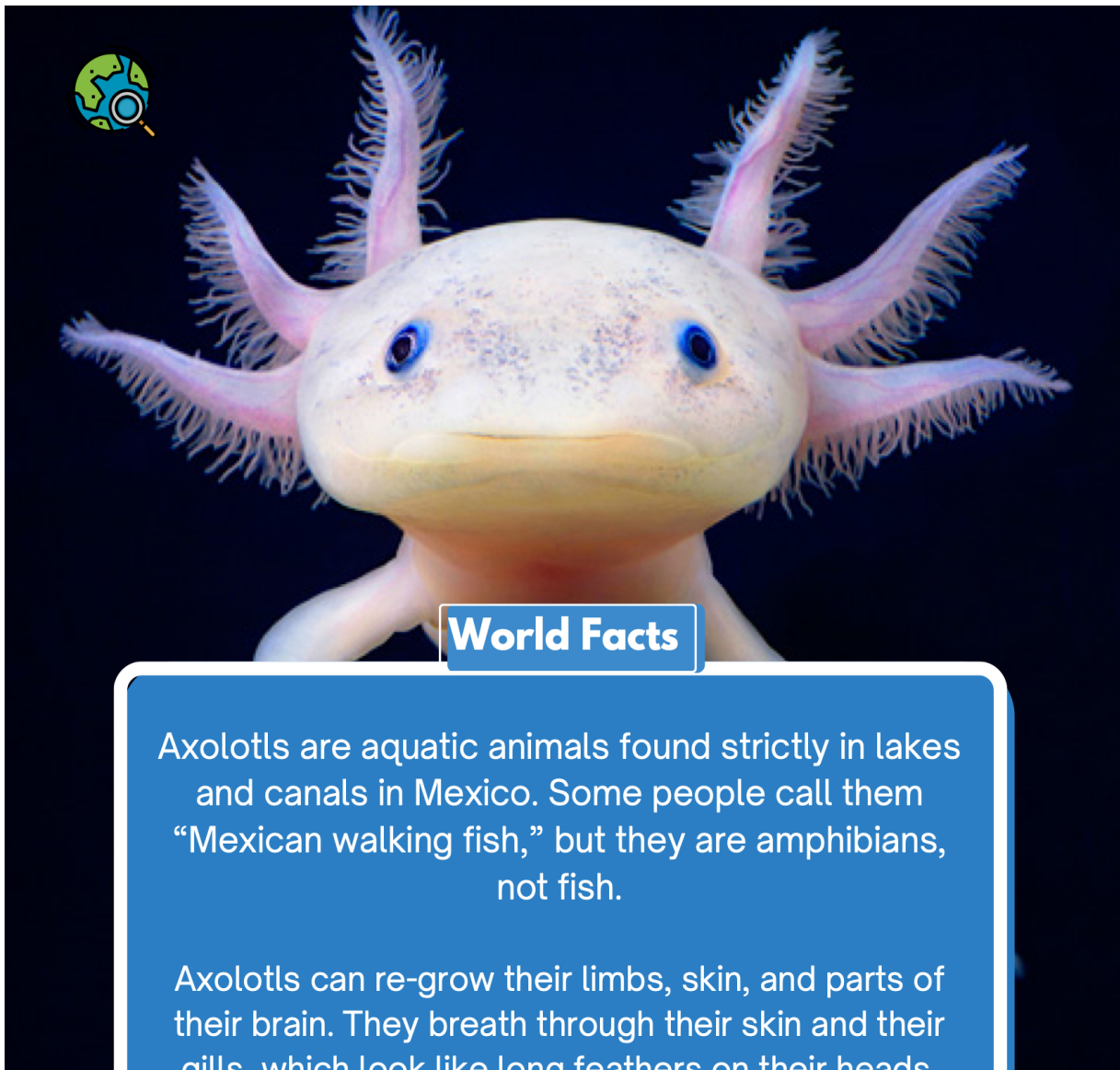
World Facts

Axolotls are water animals found only in lakes and canals in Mexico. They are sometimes called “Mexican walking fish,” but they are amphibians, not fish.

Axolotls can re-grow their body parts, like arms, skin, and brain. They breath through their skin and have long “gills” that look like long ears.

Axolotls are endangered, this means there are not many left in the wild. Pollution and people catching them have made it hard for axolotls to survive. It’s important for us to protect the environment so creatures like the axolotl can live.

Figure 3. Easy Differentiated Text

Moderate Differentiated Text

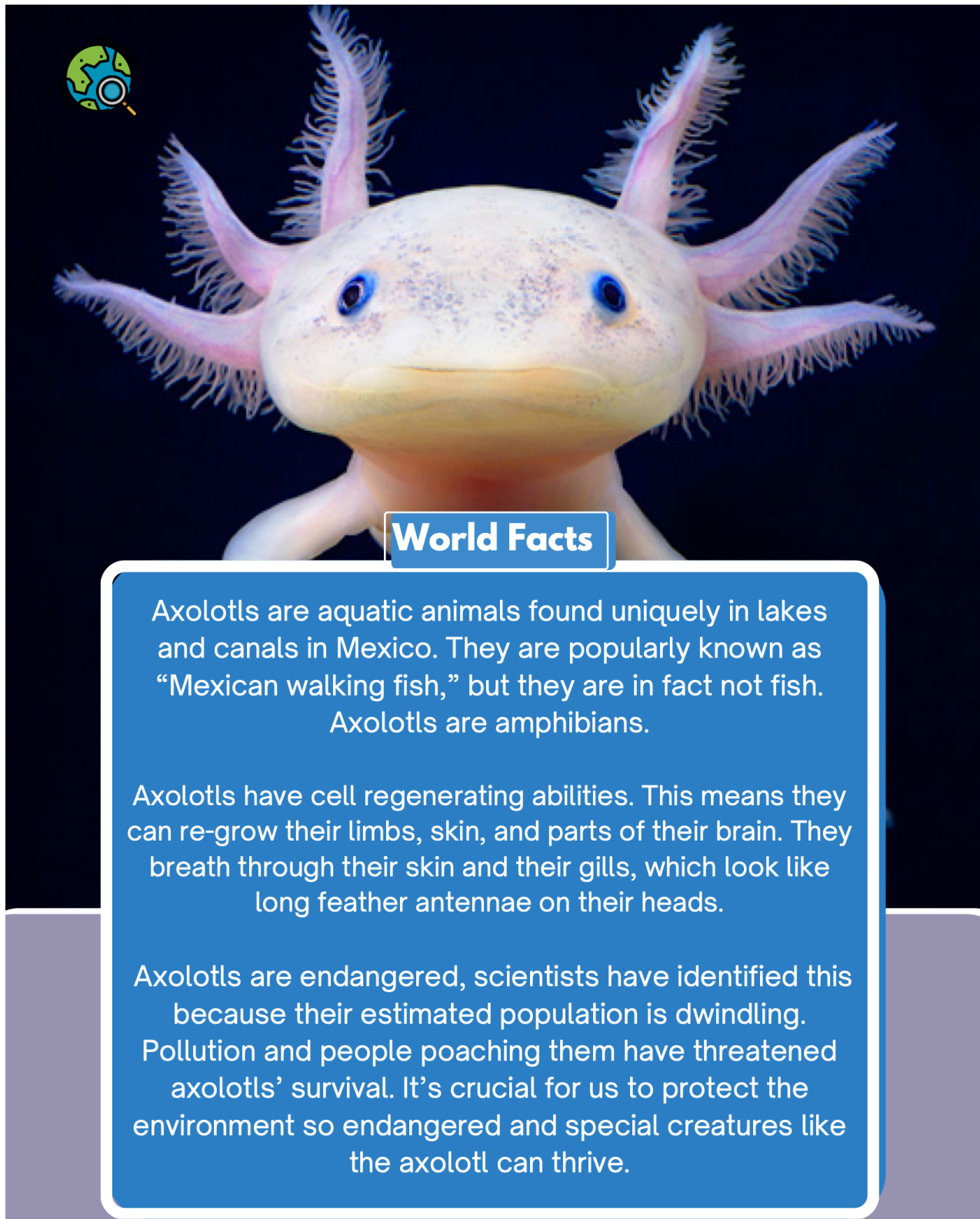
World Facts

Axolotls are aquatic animals found strictly in lakes and canals in Mexico. Some people call them “Mexican walking fish,” but they are amphibians, not fish.

Axolotls can re-grow their limbs, skin, and parts of their brain. They breathe through their skin and their gills, which look like long feathers on their heads.

Axolotls are endangered, we know this because their population is lowering. Pollution and people poaching them have threatened axolotls’ survival. It’s important for us to protect the environment so creatures like the axolotl can thrive.

Figure 4. Moderate Differentiated Text

Difficult Differentiated Text

World Facts

Axolotls are aquatic animals found uniquely in lakes and canals in Mexico. They are popularly known as “Mexican walking fish,” but they are in fact not fish. Axolotls are amphibians.

Axolotls have cell regenerating abilities. This means they can re-grow their limbs, skin, and parts of their brain. They breath through their skin and their gills, which look like long feather antennae on their heads.

Axolotls are endangered, scientists have identified this because their estimated population is dwindling. Pollution and people poaching them have threatened axolotls’ survival. It’s crucial for us to protect the environment so endangered and special creatures like the axolotl can thrive.

Figure 5. Difficult Differentiated Text

Appendix F

Google Form Question

Each question is an open answer, teachers can choose to write a short or long answer to every question.

1. Some of our preliminary findings found that ESL teachers struggle with meeting the learning needs of both anglophone students and francophone students in their classrooms. Is this something that resonates with your experience?
2. Phase one of this research revealed that teachers are interested in using differentiated instruction in their classrooms, but do not have a lot of professional support (time for planning or additional training) to implement it. Is this something you can relate to?
3. In the initial phase one of this study, teachers commonly used scaffolding assignments as a way to support students across different proficiency levels. In your classroom, do you scaffold assignments?
4. Have you ever used differentiated texts (same content, different proficiency levels) in your ESL classroom?
5. Do you think the reading topic (axolotls) would be interesting to your students?
6. After reading the procedures, what questions do you have?
7. Do you envision this lesson as being easy to implement into your class? Why? Or why not?
8. After reading through the three different text variations, do you think they convey the same meaning (from easiest to hardest)?

9. Are the instructions for creating groups clear? What have you taken away from the procedure for group making?
10. After reading through the two different worksheets (A1/A2 focus + B1/B2 focus) do you think you could facilitate a discussion for your entire class?
11. Are you interested in using something like a CEFR test to identify the literacy level of your students?
12. Are differentiated texts and learning materials something that you would be interested in using in your class?
13. What might hold you back from using this lesson with your students?
14. Please provide any additional feedback you have after reviewing both the differentiated texts and the worksheets.