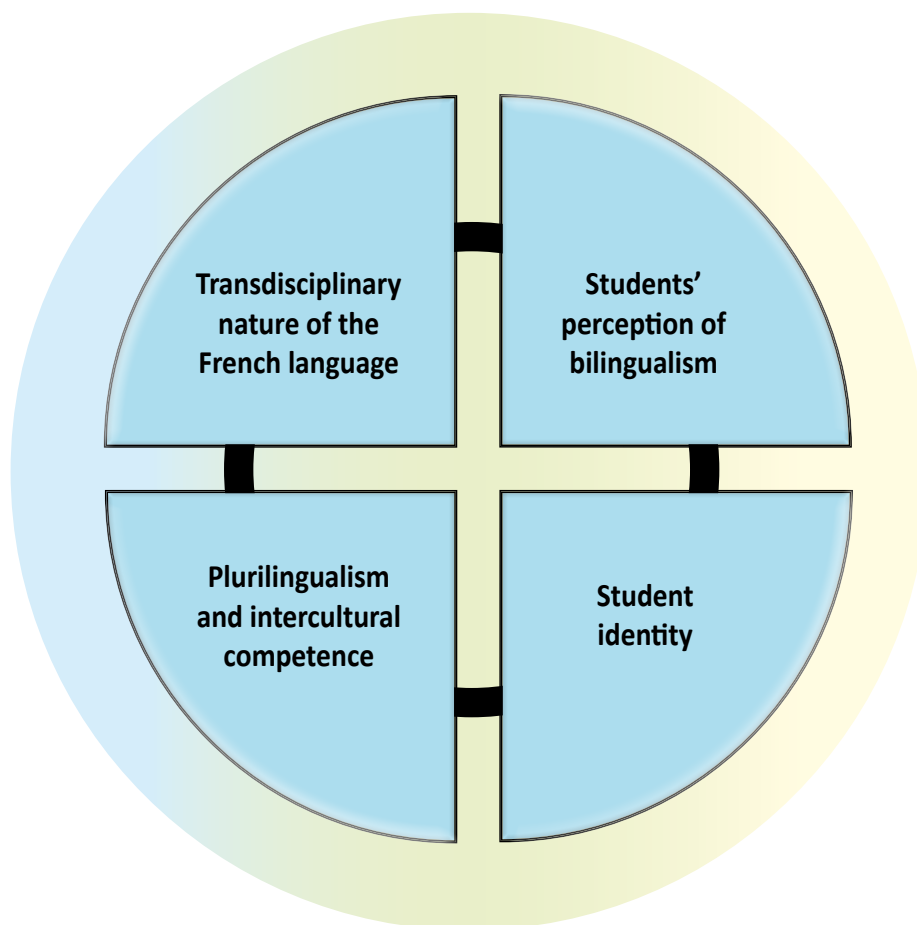


INTRODUCTION

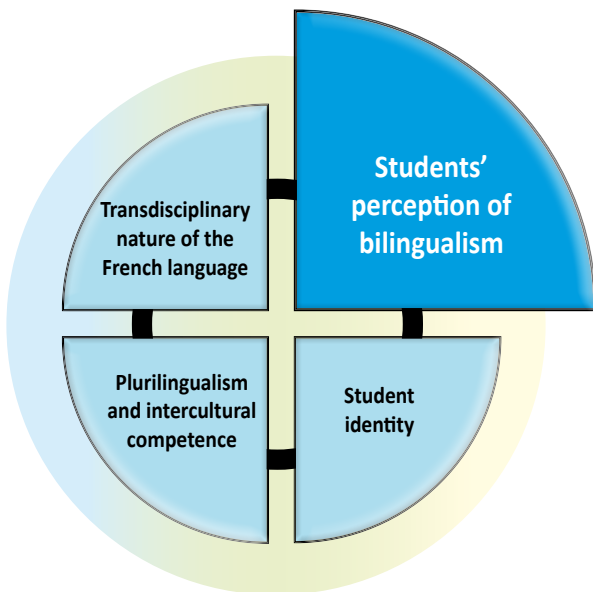
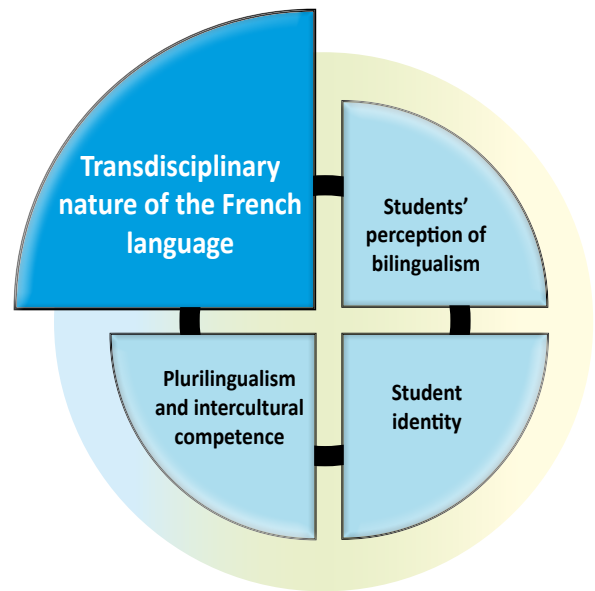
Since 1973, the French Immersion Program in Manitoba has had a successful history. Building on its rich and solid heritage, the Program is turning to the future. It continues to evolve in response to current realities, observations in the field and reflection informed by recent research in French language education.

Current realities, such as the role of the transdisciplinary nature of the French language, students' perception of their bilingualism, concept of plurilingualism and the importance of intercultural skills as well as the concept of the students' identity as learners in immersion, call for a renewal of the French Immersion Program in Manitoba.

Current realities



The French Immersion Program is first and foremost a program of language and communication. The French language is both the object of and the vehicle for learning in all academic disciplines. Because of this transdisciplinary nature, all teachers working in the program at all levels and in all disciplines share the responsibility for ensuring quality teaching not only with respect to the content of the discipline, but also with respect to the French language itself. It is important to recognize that a greater emphasis on developing French language supports a deeper comprehension of content (Lyster, 2016). The time invested in integrating language learning with subject matter content contributes to the development of language accuracy and confidence in students, resulting in a more holistic approach.

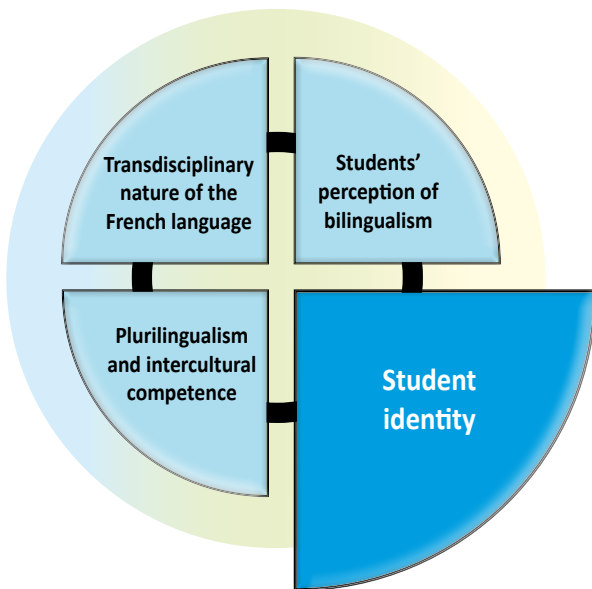
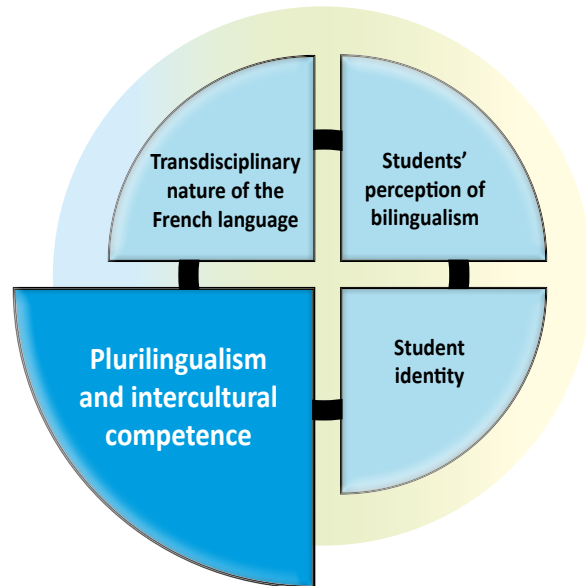


Initially, the goal of the French Immersion Program was to enable students to become “functionally bilingual”. Today, the goal of the program is to promote a bilingualism that goes beyond the purely “functional” use of French and English. The program now seeks to develop global citizens, capable in French and in English, “to participate and contribute to society in ways that build identity, social responsibility, citizenship, [and] independence” (PONC, 2011, p. 15). Students’ perception of their own bilingualism impacts the development of their identity as bilingual citizens who speak both of Canada’s official languages, as well as their level of confidence and commitment to learning French.

In order for learners to perceive themselves as bilingual, students must come to understand that being proficient in French does not necessarily mean mastering the language to the same degree as a native speaker (Lyster). For most immersion students, this level of proficiency represents an unattainable goal. Mastering a language occurs gradually, continuing throughout the students’ schooling and throughout their entire life. It is important to recognize and understand that the path of language acquisition is an ongoing process. Such an awareness allows learners to develop a positive and realistic attitude toward their learning and, in turn, develop confidence and French-language skills.

INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

An added benefit of bilingualism is its potential to promote students' understanding of plurilingualism as well as an openness to other languages and cultures. Plurilingualism allows a language to be learned in relation to another, where one language draws on the other. This new plurilingual reality is increasingly present in the immersion classroom and the dynamics of this diversity of languages and cultures, far from posing obstacles, add considerable resources to enrich the students' learning.



The concept of students' identity as learners in French immersion has been gaining ground for some years. "Blais (2003) points out that graduates of immersion schools are neither [solely] francophone nor [solely] anglophone, but have another identity" (Mandin, 2007, p. 6). John Ralston Saul adds that immersion students are part of a new Canadian collective, a growing minority. It is therefore important to promote this "other identity" and to guide and support learners in developing an awareness of the impact of the French language on their learning and on the person they are, and in this way help them value their constantly evolving identity. Students will then be able to take their legitimate place in the Canadian bilingual community.