Let me begin by saying what a pleasure it is to be here among such an esteemed group of colleagues - to share my thoughts, perspectives and research on the topic at hand - multilingual learners in Canadian teacher education. Thank you to the organizers of this panel for inviting me.

I would like to first acknowledge that McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. McGill honours, recognizes and respects these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and waters on which we meet.

I’ll start by briefly introducing myself. I am an associate professor and teacher education program director at McGill. I’m involved in all of our teacher education programs, including our TESL and Pédagogie de l’Immersion Française (PIF) programs, but also our elementary and secondary education programs, and as I will go on to say – in Quebec everything and all programs relate to language.

While each province in our officially bilingual country is unique, I would like to present the uniqueness of Quebec particularly with respect to second language education and school contexts.

I’ve lived in Quebec for most of my life, through the October crisis - when Halloween was also cancelled, and when I experienced my first curfew - to the present day, where we have the highest rates of Covid-19 in the country, perhaps the most stringent measures and we are the only province that has imposed a curfew.

I say this, not only to at least make some mention of our current very dire situation we find ourselves in, but also to segue into discussing the uniqueness of Quebec.

Quebec is always about language. And although I need to acknowledge that this includes indigenous languages, and the languages of other groups, the tension between English and French in particular and how this plays out is ever present.

My research has to do with L2 teacher professional identity and in Quebec, and this can often be complicated - because of language laws, school contexts and because of the teacher candidates own language backgrounds and experiences.
For teacher candidates, navigating these complex realities can be a challenge. So I am going to briefly address this question by presenting some of the complexities of ESL and FSL education in Quebec and the school contexts that we are preparing our teacher candidates for.

In Quebec, schools and school boards are divided along language lines. ESL is taught in French schools. French Immersion is reserved for English schools.

La charte de la langue française, or Bill 101, determines who has access to English schools and who goes to French schools. Only children whose parents themselves had the majority of their elementary education in English, in Canada, are eligible to attend English schools.

All others, francophones and allophones, including recent immigrants attend French schools – but there are some exceptions.

English schools and ESL:

The myth is that English schools serve only English speaking students, but this is not necessarily the case. There are francophone students who have eligibility through their parents, but do not speak English at home. There are families who are in Quebec temporarily and are permitted to send their children to English schools. And finally English school boards recruit international students to attend English schools in Quebec providing a context to learn English.

But officially, English schools are for English-speaking students, and ESL is not an official subject. ESL teachers are generally not hired, and teachers are not prepared to address the needs of ESL students.

So our challenge, then is to prepare elementary and secondary, subject-area teachers, for this reality.

English schools and FSL:

In terms of FSL programing, most English elementary schools, particularly in the Montreal area, are French Immersion schools. But even though we are situated in a French-speaking province, the need for French Immersion teachers is ever present.

There is a belief among some of our own students, and among HR and school admin, that if you have a teaching degree and speaks French you can be a French Immersion teacher. In fact, teacher education grads from regular, not L2 programs at French universities are often preferred over our French Immersion Pedagogy program.

Our ongoing challenge is to communicate the importance of teachers having a specialized FI degree in order to achieve effective French Immersion programs. This challenge and need to provide quality French Immersion programming also relates to the need to counteract the practice of parents sending their English-school eligible children to French schools, for a ‘super’ - French immersion experience.
In addition to this challenge, secondary schools are increasing FI programs, are more and more requiring French-speaking subject-area teacher candidates. So it is also our responsibility to provide those TC with a background in FI pedagogy.

French Schools and ESL:

Moving onto ESL in French schools. We might assume that proficiency in English and ESL qualifications are the most important aspects of being an effective ESL teacher.

In Quebec, however, the reality is that for ESL teachers, there is also an expectation of at least functional proficiency in French, in order to be accepted into the whole school community. In fact, ESL teachers need to pass a French test to be employed.

For some of our students, this is a barrier to employment, and sometimes to successful student teaching placement outcomes.

Our challenge is to support and prepare our teacher candidates for these language expectations.

French Schools and FSL:

With the immigrant population directed to French schools, the expectation might be that these students are integrated into the mainstream with FSL support. However that reality is that new immigrant students are placed in one-year intensive FSL programs – called ‘accueil’ or ‘welcome’ classes - where they learn French as well as follow subject-area coursework, in multi-grade and multi-level classrooms, before entering the mainstream.

While we do not have specific programs to prepare teacher candidates for ‘accueil’ classes - it is important for our teacher candidates to have an understanding of how to approach such teaching situations.

So in getting back to the question:

Our teacher candidates need to develop understandings of the multilingual contexts/programs in Quebec schools, in order to be effective teachers of multilingual learners – whether that be in ESL, FSL or regular programs.

How to developing these understandings and ways of teaching multilingual learners is part of what our teacher education programs need to look like.

I look forward to discussing these issues further with the other member of this panel in this forum.

Thank you again for inviting me to be part of this conversation.