

Teaching materials for use in French classes for immigrants enrolled in Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults in Quebec: overview and issues

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Le personnel enseignant travaillant avec les personnes adultes immigrantes en apprentissage de la langue et de la littératie (PAIALeL) est confronté à plusieurs défis concernant la disponibilité et l'utilisation de matériels didactiques. Pour dresser le portrait du matériel utilisé dans les classes de français pour PAIALeL au Québec (Canada) et mieux comprendre les différents enjeux liés à l'utilisation de ce matériel, nous avons interrogé des enseignants en utilisant un questionnaire en ligne (n=53) et des entrevues individuelles (n=7). Nos données, analysées à l'aide de la théorie de l'activité (TA), révèlent un manque de matériel adéquat ainsi que des enjeux liés à l'adaptation et à la création de matériel ainsi qu'à l'hétérogénéité des profils des PAIALeL. Des implications pédagogiques sont aussi présentées.

Mots-clés: matériel didactique, développement du français langue cible, développement de la littératie, personnes immigrantes adultes

Teachers working in the field of literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) face several challenges related to the availability and use of appropriate teaching materials. To provide an overview of the materials used in Quebec's French L2 classes and to better understand the challenges related to these materials, we collected data from teachers both through an online questionnaire (n=53) and individual interviews (n=7). Analysed through the lens of Activity Theory (AT), our data highlight a lack of suitable materials and issues related to the heterogeneity of students' background. Pedagogical implications are also presented.

Keywords: teaching material, French as a second language education, literacy education, adult immigrants

1 Introduction

Quebec, Canada's only French-speaking province, takes in thousands of immigrants each year from various countries (Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Immigration [MIFI], 2022). Of these, a high proportion have no command of French; for instance, between 2016 and 2020, 40.2% of all landed immigrants in Quebec stated that they knew no French (*ibid.*). While many people immigrating to Quebec are in the economic immigrant category and have had academic or vocational training before their arrival, many others – some 11.8% between 2016–2020 – reported that they had attended school for 11 years or less, and half of them had completed between 0 and 6 years of schooling (*ibid.*). Although some of these individuals might have developed literacy skills either during their brief school attendance or outside of school, it is possible that some others only have partial knowledge, if any, of any written language (Council of Europe, 2022). Hence, the challenge faced by these newcomers is twofold: to learn the language of the majority, French, and to achieve literacy, that is, to acquire sufficient reading and writing skills to maximize their potential and participate fully in their community and life in society (Ahmed, 2011).

Quebec offers various French courses for persons with little formal schooling in their countries of origin. Those courses are offered by two different ministries (Immigration and Education), but, to date, in neither case is the teaching based on a standard (a core program or frame of reference) or on shared teaching materials, which are unavailable. Since Quebec's variety of French differs from other varieties, especially in its oral form (Chalier, 2018), the local government wishes to develop its own curriculum and materials so that learners will become familiar with the local variety. However, due to the current lack of guidance, the province has great difficulty harmonizing the courses it offers; moreover, it is impossible to monitor the teaching approaches or the teaching materials used in school settings (Auditor General of Quebec, 2017), even though such material is essential to target language (L2) classes (Chartier & Renard, 2000). Indeed, instructional material affords important insights into what is done in the classroom, as it lays out the greater part of the knowledge to be taught and learned as well as L2 values and ideologies (Matsuda, 2012).

The purpose of the present study, accordingly, has been to explore the reality of literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) classes – in terms of the use of teaching materials – from the standpoint of the people who deal with that reality on a day-to-day basis: teachers. To achieve this aim we have employed Activity Theory (AT) to make sense of the human practices and challenges underlying the use of teaching materials in LESLLA classes. By *teaching materials* we mean all those tools that a teacher uses in his or her practice (Piccardo & Yaiche, 2005), regardless of whether they were originally designed for learning (e.g., textbooks, audio and video recordings, photocopied handouts, source and reference documents, and games).

2 Earlier research

In order to explore the use of teaching materials in L2 classes for LESLLA learners, we first need to gain a better understanding of the nature of these learners. Thus, in what follows, we shall provide insights into the characteristics of this learner population, then review studies that have explored the uses of teaching materials in the LESLLA context.

2.1 What characterizes LESLLA learners?

It is not easy to characterize immigrant LESLLA learners, as they do not form a homogeneous group of learners (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011): some may have attended school for a few years but stopped for any of a number of reasons (war, migration, work,

etc.); others have never had the opportunity to go to school, although living in a literate environment; a third group may have lived in remote areas where written language was virtually absent (Council of Europe, 2022). For the third group, acquisition of literacy means not only familiarizing themselves with written words, but also changing the way they deal with language in society (Bautier, 2009). Those learners, when entering into a Western educational system to learn the language of the host community, may struggle to find their bearings because of the cultural dissonance they experience between the ways they used to learn skills and languages before immigrating (i.e., namely through experiential learning) and what Western school culture expects from them (i.e., abstract thinking, performance) (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

In the first place, because much of the material is in print form – both text and photos, pictures or pictograms (Salvaggio, 2018) – and highly culturally loaded, LESLLA learners may experience difficulties interpreting multimodal texts (Altherr Flores, 2017). For example, Altherr Flores (2017) notes that it may be difficult for participants to explain why certain parts of a document, such as an instruction sheet, are in bold. Two-dimensional images in black and white may also pose difficulties of identification and interpretation (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Huettig & Mishra, 2014), potentially leading to misunderstanding, for example, of illustrations accompanying instruction sheets for medication (Dowse et al., 2011).

Again, some studies (e.g., Huettig & Mishra, 2014) indicate that LESLLA learners may find it easier to understand and interpret information that is closer to their personal experience than abstract or hypothetical situations (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Huettig & Mishra, 2014; Keller, 2017). Thus, materials that present situations far removed from their day-to-day reality (e.g., in which they are asked to plan a travel itinerary) or which ask them to pretend (e.g., perform a role-playing exercise) or to deal with language in an abstract and decontextualized way (e.g., by learning the letters of the alphabet individually; see Vinogradov, 2008) may be unsuitable for some LESLLA learners.

Lastly, LESLLA learners are apt to favour collaborative modes of learning rather than those based on individualism and competition that hold sway in the Western academic world (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015), for in many collectivist cultures such as those certain LESLLA learners come from, achievement of group objectives takes precedence over the accrual of benefits to the individual, and cooperation is undertaken to achieve such common objectives (*ibid.*). So, teaching approaches and teaching materials that focus on the individual's work and success can place learners in a novel and uncomfortable situation.

These characteristics of LESLLA learners must of course be considered during the choice, adaptation and creation of teaching materials, so as to narrow the cultural gap between their ways of learning and the academic approach adopted in Western cultures, which is neither universal nor necessary for learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). In what follows we shall see how research studies have grappled with that issue.

2.2 A review of studies of teaching materials for LESLLA learners

To our knowledge, few studies have looked at teaching materials in the context of immigrant LESLLA learners. There does not seem to be any published overview of the teaching materials used in classes for literacy development in the target language (Bédard, 2021). However, a few studies have looked more generally at the reality of teachers working with LESLLA learners and have addressed the issue of teaching materials.

In the studies we have been able to review, one main tendency emerges clearly: there is very little such material produced expressly for that learner cohort. Indeed, teachers generally find that access to teaching materials suited to these learners is problematic, as little or nothing is available in the way of resources explicitly designed for them. As early as 1992, Papazian and Van Isschot highlighted the difficulty of finding teaching materi-

als suitable for adult learners in the area of language and literacy, as the materials available to teachers were actually designed either for second language teaching for learners already having some schooling, or for the acquisition of literacy in their first language. That situation has been frequently decried in subsequent studies (e.g., Bédard, 2021; Farrelly, 2014; Ollerhead, 2010; Perry, 2013; Strube et al., 2013). Starting from this central issue, the studies take different tacks: they describe some of the material that is actually used, or they focus on issues teachers encounter as a result of the lack of materials, or they make recommendations on their use.

In particular, the dearth of formal materials created specifically for LESLLA learners leads teachers to employ audio and/or video materials to supplement a core textbook or to make use of a variety of teaching materials, such as photocopies, colour cards, or real-life objects (Strube et al., 2013). Some studies have recommended that teaching materials should better relate to LESLLA learners' day-to-day lives outside the classroom, to further contextualize learning in this particular teaching situation (see, e.g., Vinogradov, 2008). For example, consideration could be given to the use of authentic materials (i.e., printed matter not designed for educational purposes, such as supermarket flyers or utility bills (Condelli, 2004)); the author showed that the use of such real-world materials had a positive effect on LESLLA learners' reading skills, insofar as these non-purpose-built resources contain information that learners want to know and which is directly related to their life experiences.

Some studies also note that the lack of materials for these learners can be a source of dissatisfaction and tension. For example, Ollerhead's (2010) case study, which sought to examine the ways in which two teachers working in the LESLLA context were navigating *Australia's Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program* (LLNP), highlights the possible frustrations resulting from this lack of materials, as none of the available materials allowed the participants to meet the needs of their multi-level classrooms. In addition, the teachers expressed feelings of helplessness in their work due to the fact that their teaching institution gave them no help in the selection and use of teaching materials for LESLLA learners. Farrelly (2014) too indicates that this lack of materials is likely to generate tension in the way teachers approach the use of materials; thus, a more experienced teacher might have an easier time juggling and adapting different materials, while another might instead use a single source of material for want of anything better.

To compensate for the lack of adequate materials for their LESLLA learners, teachers sometimes create *homemade* materials or adapt existing materials. Where existing materials are adapted, they may be designed for elementary school pupils, L1 literacy, or foreign language instruction for persons having some schooling, and then be repurposed for use with LESLLA learners (Vinogradov, 2013). Changes may be made to the form of the document, such as by simplifying its layout (Farrelly, 2014), or to its content, such as by changing the childlike content of an exercise designed for children so that it is more appropriate for adults (Farrelly, 2013; Vinogradov, 2013). Such creation and adaptation is another issue, since it is a time-consuming task for teachers (Farrelly, 2014; Ollerhead, 2012; Perry & Hart, 2013).

Finally, the scarcity of materials may not be unrelated to the heterogeneity of the learners' socio-demographic profiles (age, mother tongue, etc.) and academic profiles (educational background, level of schooling, etc.), which is another issue in terms of the materials used with LESLLA learners in the classroom (e.g., Benseman, 2014; Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Fortier et al., 2021). In response to this challenge, some researchers have developed initiatives to provide teachers with teaching materials that are better adapted to heterogeneous groups. For example, digital tools have been created to encourage independent work among LESLLA learners, allowing them to progress at their own pace, regardless of the profile of other learners in the class. Such is the case, for example, of the *Digital Literacy Instructor*, a software program developed to support LESLLA learners in independent learning of grapheme-phoneme correspondence in German,

English, Finnish and Dutch (Craats & Young-Scholten, 2015; Cucchiarini et al., 2015). Speech recognition enables LESLLA learners to practise on their own at a time of their choosing, as the technology provides automatic feedback on the learners' pronunciation, so that they are no longer dependent on the teacher for correction. Despite the apparent relevance of this resource, there is no information available on the extent to which it has been tested or how it is being used in educational settings, since the studies cited provide only a bare-bones description.

3 Theoretical Orientation: Activity Theory

To make sense of questions surrounding the use of teaching materials in LESLLA classes of Quebec, we have made use of Engeström's (1987; 1999; 2001) Activity Theory (AT). Adopting a sociocultural perspective based on Vygotsky (1978), this theory employs the concept of mediation, according to which human actions in pursuit of an objective are governed by the use of physical or symbolic tools (Lantolf, 2011). In other words, any activity is understood as a series of actions carried out by a subject (e.g., a teacher) through the use of tools (e.g., teaching materials) that aim at the development of an object (e.g., teaching an L2). In order to better take into account the collective nature of this mediation, Engeström (1987; 1999; 2001) added three other elements: 1) the rules that regulate activities (e.g. a Ministry textbook to be used), 2) the community that is part of the social environment (e.g., other teachers working at a given teaching centre), and 3) the division of labour among the individuals in the community (e.g. the choice and purchase of teaching materials).

These six components (subjects, tools, objects, rules, community and division of labour), represented by Cole and Engeström (1993) with triangles (see Figure 1) are far from static. They are linked to each other and they constantly interact to shape or modify the actions that individuals take in order to achieve their objective. One of the key elements of the theory is that these interactions engender tensions between the components of AT that have the potential to transform the activity. These tensions, which are inherent to any human activity, are not conceptualized as failure but rather as potential for improvement within the activity system (Engeström, 2001). Identifying tensions could thus provide a better understanding of the key dynamics and issues involved in the use of teaching materials by LESLLA teachers.

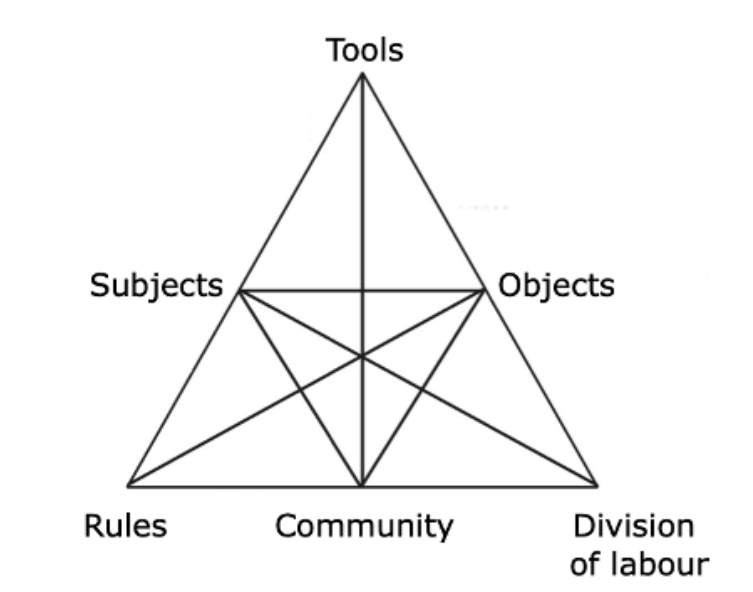


Figure 1 Engeström's triangles (from Cole & Engeström, 1993, p. 8)

For example, Farrelly (2013) employed AT to “[highlight] the relationships and tensions between the teachers and the tools¹ available to them within their teaching activity systems” (p. 25). Her results give an idea of the use of teaching materials in a LESLLA context as well as the tensions that emerge from it. For instance, teachers (subject) mentioned the lack of appropriate texts for LESLLA learners (tools) to teach English as a second language, forcing them to create new materials or adapt existing ones even though they lacked the time and resources to do so. This tension identified between *subject* and *tools* led to a feeling of frustration among participants as the teachers expressed a desire for better collaboration and sharing of teaching resources. The author concludes that a collaborative approach to professional development, such as peer observation or teacher study circles, where concrete problems encountered in the classroom can be shared and solved, would be an accessible way of mitigating this conflicting dynamic within the activity system.

Thus, we believe that the use of AT and its six components affords us a relevant framework to make sense of intricate human activity, especially when scientific literature is lacking (Brink & Nel, 2019), as it is the case with the LESLLA context in general (Plonsky, 2017). The value of this theory for our research is therefore twofold. Firstly, AT serves as an organizing principle to identify the teaching material and its uses in the LESLLA context, as the six components afford clear categories for what comes into play in the use of teaching materials (for example, the *division of labour* component gives information about an important aspect of the material: whether it is homemade, adapted, used as is, etc.). Secondly, AT can also help us understand the complex dynamics and tensions that underlie this activity.

In sum, because the supply of learning materials for LESLLA learners appears anemic, a number of issues may arise, including a significant workload for teachers who must create or adapt materials for classes where learners have various different profiles. As very few recent studies address that reality, we feel it is essential, above all, to find out more about how teachers use teaching materials, especially in the context of Quebec, where there are neither any guidelines nor any information on what really happens in educational settings. Thus, in the light of the foregoing, this article focuses on the following two research questions:

- 1) What kind of teaching materials are used in French classes for LESLLA learners in Quebec?
- 2) What are the issues associated with the use of these materials?

To answer these research questions, AT will be applied to reveal and describe the teaching materials (Q1) and the issues associated with their uses, which are conceptualized as tensions between the components of the system (Q2). We also believe it is essential to give the floor to teachers working in this field; the next section will therefore look at the methodological approach we have chosen in order to highlight the teachers’ points of view on their use of teaching materials.

4 Methodological approach

This article employs a mixed method whereby quantitative and qualitative data are drawn from two data sources. As a first step, and in the context of a broader research project on the realities of teaching LESLLA learners, we used an online questionnaire to gather data from teachers on several aspects of French courses for those learners (e.g., teaching practices, assessment, teaching materials, etc.). Note, however, that this article will focus only on their responses regarding teaching materials. In a second phase, to

1. In Farrelly’s (2014) study, the tools component is broader than in ours, as it included any physical (i.e. teaching materials) or cognitive (i.e. teacher’s knowledge and beliefs) resources a teacher can access in their practice.

flesh out our research, interviews were conducted with individual teachers, dealing specifically with the use of teaching materials in French classes for LESLLA learners, in order to obtain a more in-depth account of their use from the teachers' perspective.

4.1 Participants

The participants in our work were teachers working in various educational centres offering French courses for LESLLA learners. In all, 53 people completed the questionnaire. Just over a third of the participants specifically indicated that they held a bachelor's degree in teaching French as a Second Language (n=20), while many others (n=16) held a bachelor's degree in teaching in another field (e.g., French as a First Language or Preschool and Elementary Education) while the rest (n=15) had no teaching background and came from other fields (e.g., literature, philosophy and industrial relations). Participants' experience working with LESLLA learners also varied widely: nearly a third reported having more than 6 years of experience (n=17); most reported 2-5 years of experience with LESLLA learners (n=21), and close to a quarter stated that they had worked with such learners for 6-23 months (n=13).

Subsequently, seven teachers participated in a one-on-one interview (however, since the administration of the online questionnaire was anonymous and confidential, we are unable to indicate how many of the general interview participants had previously completed the online questionnaire). Of these participants, the majority (n=5) had a teaching background: four had completed a bachelor's degree in teaching French as a Second Language and one held a bachelor's degree in Preschool and Elementary Education, while the other two had studied in the field of languages and literature. In addition, there was a wide disparity in their teaching experience with LESLLA learners, which ranged from 3 to 23 years. Finally, because of our small sample size, pseudonyms were used to preserve participants' anonymity.

4.2 Survey instruments

As mentioned earlier, two instruments were used to collect the data: 1) an online questionnaire on various aspects of teaching LESLLA learners, including teaching materials, which allowed us to gather quantitative data from a larger number of people, and 2) a one-on-one interview focusing solely on teaching materials, which allowed us to gather more in-depth qualitative data.

Online questionnaire

Originally created as part of a larger research project, the online questionnaire comprises six sections and some one hundred questions, designed in Lime Survey software. Its main purpose was to report on the practices of teachers working with LESLLA learners (e.g., their assessment practices) and the factors influencing these practices (e.g., their beliefs about their students). Because the scope of the project for which we created the questionnaire is much bigger than that of this article, we are particularly interested here in the 14 questions that dealt more precisely with teaching materials. These are specifically related to 1) the type of material used (e.g., see statement 1 in figure 1), 2) its use in the classroom (e.g., see statement 2 in figure 1), and 3) its creation or adaptation (e.g., see statement 3 in figure 1). Participants were asked to respond to the questions by indicating, on a 4-point Likert scale, how often they implemented the practices presented.

	Always	Most of the time	Seldom	Never	Don't know/ Does not apply
1. I use authentic materials (e.g., songs, flyers, Weather Network website) not created specifically for language learning					
2. I allow students to use digital devices (e.g., their cell phones) in class to translate, take pictures, etc.)					
3. I create original material					

Figure 2 Excerpt from the questionnaire on teaching practices

The data collected using this instrument helped us to answer our two research questions, but the interviews were necessary to get a broader and richer picture of the issues.

Interview

The interviews consisted of 20 questions divided into four sections: 1) general information about the participants (teaching experience, academic background, current teaching context); 2) a description of the teaching materials used in the classroom and their characteristics (e.g., *During the session that ended a few weeks ago, did you use the following types of materials: textbooks, videos, authentic documents, etc.?*); 3) the choice of materials (e.g., *Does a program, curriculum or framework guide your choice of teaching materials?*); and, 4) classroom use of materials for linguistic and cultural competency development (e.g., *Can you show me a concrete example of teaching materials to develop oral proficiency? What challenges do you face with this material and why?*). The interviews were conducted remotely by telephone or via an online communication application such as FaceTime, Skype or Zoom, and were digitally recorded for analysis.

4.3 Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative data, collected in the form of Likert scales, were processed to report the frequency of each response. The interviews were first transcribed verbatim and then analyzed through the lens of Activity Theory (AT) using NVivo software. We first read the transcript and identified units of analysis corresponding to the six components of AT (subjects, tools, objects, rules, community and division of labour); these which represented our main themes and our first level of analysis. Then, at a second level of analysis, we divided the units of analysis under each theme into emerging subthemes in order to describe more precisely what constitutes each component of AT. For example, when a participant said they shared teaching material with other teachers in their teaching centre, their response was first coded under the theme *community*, and then, at our second level of analysis, we created the subtheme *other teachers*. This process gave us an overall view of the components of the activity under investigation, enabling us to answer our two research questions.

For our first research question (What kind of teaching materials are used in French classes for LESLLA learners in Quebec?), we isolated the *tools* theme and looked at the different subthemes that had been spun off (i.e., *textbooks* or *videos*, when someone had mentioned using these types of materials), thus providing a description of the materials used by participants.

For our second research question (What are the issues associated with the use of these materials?), the analysis was conducted by looking at how the six components of AT we had previously defined interacted with each other and the tensions (here represented as issues with the use of teaching materials) that emerge from these dynamics. It was only by taking this overall view of the components of the activity under investigation that we were able to reveal the issues associated with the use of teaching materials in the LESL-

LA context. For example, the theme *time-consuming nature of creating* was highlighted by looking at the interaction between the *subject* (the teacher) and the *division of labour* (i.e. teachers told us that creating material takes a lot of time that they do not have).

It should be noted, too, that for each theme and subtheme the data analysis gave us the number of participants whose comments related thereto. This number is reported in our results as *n* (e.g., *n*=5 means that five people mentioned one or more items related to a theme or subtheme). Thus, even where a teacher reported using multiple textbooks, the *textbooks* subtheme would be counted only once for that person. Finally, the extracts presented in the following chapter were chosen for their relevance in exemplifying our results.

5 Results

This section presents the principal results guided by AT and related to our two research questions: 1) What kind of teaching materials are used in French classes for LESLLA learners in Quebec? and 2) What are the issues associated with the use of these materials? For the outline, we chose to focus on the materials actually used by the teachers and their opinion of these materials (4.1). We then set out the broader issues related to the use of these materials in the classroom (4.2).

5.1 Overview of the teaching materials used

To obtain a more accurate picture of the kind of materials used by participants in the classroom, we made use of AT, isolating the *tools* component of the activity, thus giving us an in-depth description of the teaching materials used. The interview was our primary source of information as it afforded us a clearer picture of the materials used by participants in the classroom. Indeed, one question explicitly asked them to identify the materials used in the classroom. The responses to this question are summarized in Table 1. Since teachers almost always specified whether the material was used as is (i.e. without any modification), adapted, or created from scratch, we incorporated this information into the outline to make it as representative as possible of actual usage.

Table 1 Teaching materials used by teachers

Teaching materials	Used as is	Adapted	Created	Not specified
AUDIO (n=7)				
Audio from a textbook (n=5)	X	X		
Other audio (n=3)			X	X
AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS (n=7)				
Video or audio files (n=7)	X			
Printed documents (n=7)	X			
Online documents (n=4)	X			
Objects (n=3)	X			
PHOTOCOPIED HANDOUTS (n=6)				
Photocopies of books and textbooks (n=5)	X	X		
Worksheets (grammar, vocabulary, oral, reading and other) (n=4)			X	
Other photocopied handouts (n=3)				X
GAMES (n=7)				
Games (n=7)	X	X	X	X
TEXTBOOKS (n=6)				
Textbooks (n=6)	X	X		X

DIGITAL TOOLS (n=6)				
Computer and software (n=6)	X		X	
Website (n=5)	X			
Phone, tablet and apps (n=4)	X			
Email (n=1)	X			
REFERENCE WORKS (n=7)				
Digital works (n=3)	X			
Paper books (n=7)	X		X	
VIDEOS (n=2)				
Textbook videos (n=1)	X			
YouTube (n=2)	X			
Other (n=1)	X			

The first insight we glean from Table 1 is the wide variety of materials that were classified under the *tools* component of the activity. Indeed, teachers report using audio and video materials (e.g., audio provided with a textbook), real-world materials (e.g., newspaper classified ads), photocopied handouts (e.g., a photocopy of a page from a textbook that is not necessarily intended for LESLLA learners, such as *Par ici*), games (e.g., bingo), digital tools (e.g., smartphone applications, such as a translation app) as well as reference books (e.g., the *Bescherelle*). The use of a specific textbook was mentioned by six participants; the one provided by the Ministry in charge of LESLLA classes, *Digne d'attention*, heads the list (it was mentioned by four participants). Finally, we note that, in addition to materials that, by definition, are used as is (e.g., authentic paper or digital materials), creative or adaptive work was often done by the teachers.

In the online questionnaire, teachers were not asked to name the materials they used, but rather to indicate whether they used adapted materials or created them from scratch. The responses are consistent with the interview responses in that a large number of teachers indicated that they always or most of the time adapted materials designed for other student populations (n=34). Indeed, the adapted teaching materials came mainly from resources intended for elementary school pupils (n=32), literate adults or those with some schooling (n=30), and adults never schooled in their L1 (n=28). To a lesser extent, questionnaire respondents also reported adapting materials originally intended for adolescents (n=9) or learners of English or other languages (n=4).

The interviews also provided more qualitative assessments of the materials teachers use, which they sometimes use as is even though they may be dissatisfied with them (see excerpt A) or which they use with their own adaptations. Many mentioned that the materials available were sometimes outdated (n=6) or ill-suited to teaching LESLLA learners (n=4, see excerpt B); contained inappropriate vocabulary from a European variety of French rather than taking into account the specificities of the local Quebec variety (n=2); were too print-based (n=2); infantilizing (n=2), incomplete or unavailable (n=2); were too focused on Montreal reality² (n=1); decontextualized (n=1); or contained cultural references that were opaque to these learners (n=1) (see excerpt C).

Excerpt A:³ Often it doesn't work. Often it's too difficult [...]. Often I'll choose homemade materials, but in practice we don't always have time to create them. As a result, I've no choice sometimes but to use material that isn't quite right. (Heidi)

Excerpt B: I use very few ready-made things, because it's often too much, it's already too complicated for the students' level. (Ève)

2. Most immigrants to Quebec settle in Montreal (MIFI, 2020).

3. All excerpts were translated from French to English by the authors.

Excerpt C: Sometimes they're not even ... um ... the thing is, their cultural references are so different that they won't even recognize what they're seeing ... you know, a drawing of a little boy in overalls, it's supposed to make you think of childhood ..." [Q. And for them that's not childhood.] Exactly. (Camille)

Then, too, many participants found the Ministry's textbook for LESLLA learners, *Digne d'attention*, to be unsuitable (see excerpt D):

Excerpt D: To be honest ... a lot of what they want us to use actually, like the main text we use, it's out of date, it's not updated ... no, really, it's not at all suited to our classes. (François)

While most of the comments made about the materials used were rather negative, some interviewees did find some positive things in them, such as the use of illustrations (n=4, see excerpt E) and the fact that they gave learners more of a hands-on experience (n=3, see excerpt F).

Excerpt E: Yes, I love these materials because there are a lot of illustrations to help with the grammar. Here, I'll give you an example, look, it's all pictures, it's fantastic for grammar. Lots of pictures. For people that haven't been to school, that's what it takes. (Alice)

Excerpt F: The people we're dealing with, for the most part, have low literacy, the classroom environment is new to them or they haven't been in a classroom for a very long time. So they can't really keep, you can't keep their attention on the blackboard that long. So it's very, very important for them to handle things. For me, it's often cards and pictures. (Camille)

In short, our results show the great variety of teaching materials used by teachers, although they did not always find them suitable for their students; it explains why materials were sometimes modified or created from scratch rather than used as is. This rundown of the materials used gives us a clearer and unprecedented picture of what teachers use in the classroom, and what they think of what is available to them. However, by taking a closer look at the issues surrounding teachers' use of these materials, we may better grasp the reality of using teaching materials with LESLLA learners.

5.2 Issues with the use of the materials

The interviews and questionnaire raised some issues teachers had with the use of classroom materials with LESLLA learners. These issues, through the lens of AT, are conceptualized as tensions between the components of the system. Before delving into these questions in greater detail, it is crucial to first get an overview of the components that make up the activity by defining each one of them from our data. This first step, represented by Figure 2, will enable us to better see and understand what is included in each component (subject, community, object, rules, division of labour and tools) and the various tensions between them.

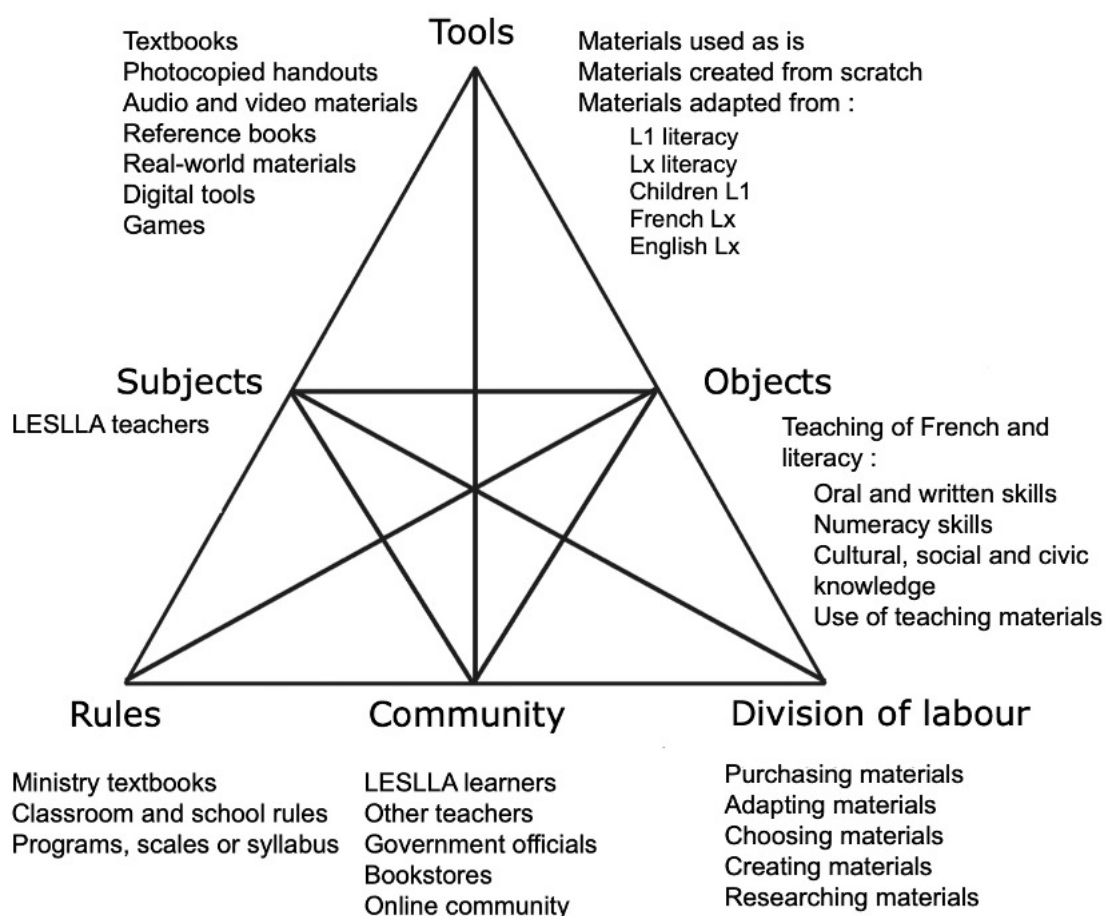


Figure 3 Activity system for the use of teaching materials in Quebec LESLLA classes

All teachers who answered the online questionnaire or participated in the interviews constitute the *subject* component, that is, the point of view from which the activity system is analyzed and understood. The object (the objectives of the activity) is multiple as subjects told us they use teaching materials to develop various skills and knowledge: French language teaching, literacy, numeracy and cultural, social and civic knowledge. Explicit instructions on how to use the teaching materials are also an objective of the activity, since our results indicate that students can have difficulties understanding the instructions of materials. The *community*, namely other actors that share the same *object* as the subject, includes students, other teachers (at their teaching centre or in the online community) with whom they share materials, government officials who provide textbooks, and bookstores where subjects buy teaching materials. A set of *rules* also mediate the use of teaching materials: Ministry textbooks to be used, class and school rules and the various programs, scales or syllabi teachers have to follow. The *division of labour* component encompasses purchasing, adapting, selecting, creating and researching materials. Finally, the *tools* component is made up of a great variety of teaching materials, which were presented in great detail in the previous section.

Now that we have a better understanding of the activity system in the use of teaching materials in the LESLLA context in Quebec (see Figure 2), a qualitative analysis of the data gathered during the interviews and guided by AT reveals three main tensions between the components of the activity: the perceived lack of materials (between *subjects* and *tools*) (5.2.1), the challenges of adaptation and creation (between *subjects* and *division of labour*) (5.2.2) and student heterogeneity in class groups (between *subjects* and *community*) (5.2.3).

5.2.1 Tension 1: Lack of materials

A major tension was identified between the *subject* and *tools* components as teachers mentioned the unavailability of materials for teaching LESLLA learners. Almost all interviewees reported a lack of available teaching materials for teaching LESLLA learners (n=6, see Excerpt G). Only one person felt that there were lots of materials available (n=1, see excerpt H).

Excerpt G: We really haven't any materials ... There's nothing. We fall between the cracks, as we're always saying. (Ève)

Excerpt H: Actually I'd say we do have lots and lots of materials ... Notebooks and all that, you can really sort through and find things. And we can adapt the materials, too, we don't have to use the whole page, we can ... I'd say we do we have enough. (Florence)

However, while this participant did not perceive a lack of materials, she did indicate that the materials available sometimes need to be adapted, which raises a new issue: the time and energy teachers must spend adapting and creating materials.

5.2.2 Tension 2: Adaptation and creation of materials

The majority of teachers responding to the online survey (n=29) as well as the interview (n=6, see excerpt I) said that creating and adapting pre-existing materials was something they did, highlighting the tension between the *subject* and *division of labour* components, as they do not always have time for this additional task. Respondents to the online questionnaire indicated that they adapted materials primarily from materials intended for elementary school pupils (n=32), adults learning French (n=30), or Francophone adults needing to develop their literacy skills (n=28). Similar responses were given in the interview, although some participants specified that they adapted material originally designed for the LESLLA context (n=3).

Excerpt I: Say I want to work on accents, for instance: acute accents, grave accents. Then, looking at an exercise in a school workbook, there are words that are, like, way too complex. As it stands it might be a good exercise, but I'll adapt it, with words we've already studied, for example. (Ève)

A large majority of respondents to the online questionnaire (n=44), and all interviewees (n=7), said that in addition to adapting existing materials, they would create new materials. These two practices raise certain issues for teachers, whether it be the length of time it takes to create (n=3) or adapt (n=2), the workload involved (n=3), or the lack of consistency between the documents modified (n=2, see excerpt J) or created (n=3) by teachers.

Excerpt J: Sometimes we adapt things, we modify them, but to me that's not great, because we lose consistency: maybe I change such and such a page, but someone else is using it as is. That's a bit tiresome. (Alice)

It should be noted that other participants saw creating materials as actually saving time, as simpler and faster than searching for or adapting existing materials (n=3, see excerpt K). Indeed, the interviewees mentioned a great variety of places where they look for teaching materials: inside the centre (n=6) (e.g., by accessing different resources such as the library) as well as outside the centre (n=6) (notably on the internet or in bookstores).

Excerpt K: In the end I realized I'd spent so much time looking for something suitable that I would have been better off doing it myself. It would have been faster and it would have been really perfect for what I wanted to do. (Heidi)

It was also mentioned that the creation of materials was a good thing because the learning materials created were more relevant to the reality of teaching LESLLA learners (n=2), and in particular the heterogeneity of students within a given class group.

5.2.3 *Tension 3: Student heterogeneity*

Another tension was raised between the *subject* and their students, who belong to AT's *community* component. Indeed, student heterogeneity, both in terms of learner demographics (age, L1, and culture) and educational attainment, represents the third main tension. It seems teachers have a hard time accessing materials that meet the needs of the whole class (n=5, see excerpt L). In line with this, another issue raised by teachers is the perceived difficulty some LESLLA learners have in understanding the content or the instructions of the material (n=6, see excerpt M), which forces teachers to explicitly teach how to use teaching materials or what to do with them (n=6).

Excerpt L: They decided to put illiterate and less literate learners in the same class. If you do that, or keep on with that, please give us something basic for everyone, and then some enriched material for the less literate ones. (Camille)

Excerpt M: You really have to repeat and be extremely structured, precisely because the instructions are so difficult. It's so difficult to get them to understand the instructions. (Florence)

Again, some participants also said that the in-house materials always needed to be readapted to their learners' changing needs from one session to the next, even where the participants were teaching the same level (n=2, see excerpt N).

Excerpt N: Yes, well, what I find hard is that there's a lot of material to create and it's very time-consuming. Then, you know, we'll often have to change it, because even if I have another class of Alpha 1, well, if ... suppose their needs are different because they've been living in Canada for a longer or a shorter time, or because their mother tongue is not the same: they won't have the same difficulty with phonetics, with vocabulary or whatever. So I find that there are a lot of things that need to be done over. (Hélène)

To summarize, our findings highlighted the wide variety of teaching materials (the *tools* component of AT) used by teachers, as well as important tensions between different components of the activity, such as a lack of materials, issues associated with adaptation and creation, and issues associated with student heterogeneity.

6 Discussion

Materials take centre stage in L2 education classrooms (Matsuda, 2012), and it appears that the same is true of classrooms for students struggling with the dual challenges of learning the majority language and attaining literacy. The purpose of this study, whose results will be discussed below, was to explore the reality of LESLLA classes – in terms of the use of teaching materials – from the standpoint of the teachers, and more specifically to present an outline of the materials used in LESLLA classes in Quebec (5.1) and to highlight the issues associated with them (5.2) from the perspective of AT.

6.1 An overview of the materials used

To our knowledge, this is the first study to provide a clear overview with concrete examples of teaching materials used in the LESLLA context, allowing us to better understand what is being done in the classroom. By isolating the *tools* component of the

activity, our findings show what a wide variety of materials are used: textbooks, audio and video content, real-life material, etc. The study by Strube et al. (2013), conducted in six LESLLA classrooms in the Netherlands, also found significant teacher use of materials considered “extra” (real objects, handouts, practice clocks, etc.) in addition to a textbook, which is considered core material in half of the classes. In this regard, although LESLLA teachers in Quebec have a textbook provided by the Ministry (*Digne d'attention*) and almost all interviewees (6/7) reported using it, none would give it a central role, as they had many criticisms of it (e.g., unsuitable, out of date, etc.).

Another observation from our overview is how much work is done by teachers to adapt and create materials. Participants overwhelmingly reported that the materials designed for these learners are ill-adapted to their realities and needs and that, accordingly, they need to do significant adaptation and creation work. That was also reported by Farrelly (2014), who saw it as a way to better respond to these learners' individual needs. Other studies we consulted also noted that teaching materials are sometimes adapted from resources designed for teaching children in L1, for L1 literacy and L2 for adults (e.g. Vinogradov, 2013). However, our results (see Figure 2) show that teachers also adapt materials made for teenagers and for the teaching of languages other than the one being learned (in our case, French) in addition to existing materials for teaching and learning literacy in L2. In other words, it seems that LESLLA teachers in Quebec are drawing on a wider variety of teaching materials than previously reported, and that even materials that have been explicitly designed for the LESLLA context are being adapted and modified.

Teachers were also keen to use materials that have some application to real life, as evidenced by their use of authentic documents and digital tools. This desire to use meaningful material attested in our results echoes the work of some authors (e.g., Asfaha, 2015; Condelli, 2004; Vinogradov, 2008; Williams & Murray, 2010), who state that materials to be used with LESLLA learners must contain information that learners want to know and can directly relate to their life experiences (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

Some positive comments were also made by participants, in particular on the abundance of illustrations. They felt that images were more suitable than text for their students who, according to their own experience teaching LESLLA students, are often taking their first steps in learning to read and write. This use of visual aids in the material, recommended in particular by Feldmeiner (2015), does however come with some specific recommendations (see Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Huettig & Mishra, 2014). Indeed, two-dimensional black and white images and those lacking context can be unsuitable for LESLLA learners (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011) and, consequently, may hinder rather than help their understanding. Icons or drawings may also be considered not very effective with some LESLLA learners due to their abstractness and cultural load (Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Altherr Flores, 2017). Thus, while our participants seem to set great store by the amount of imagery present in the teaching materials used, some studies point out instead how important it is that the visual aid be of good quality. That point was made by only one of our participants, who spoke of the importance of using authentic photos.

6.2 The issues

Looking at the teaching materials used in language classes for LESLLA learners from the Activity Theory (AT) point of view allowed us to identify a certain number of challenges, here conceptualized as tensions between components of the activity. Among these are the lack of available and appropriate materials for teaching such learners, which is mentioned in several studies (e.g., Farrelly, 2014; Perry, 2013; Ollerhead, 2010; Papazian & Van Isschot, 1992; Strube et al., 2013) as well as in our own results as it represents an important tension between the *subject* and *tools* components. We note, too, that this

problem, raised in the early 1990s in Quebec (Papazian & Van Isschot, 1992), remains unresolved more than thirty years later. The same can be said of the heterogeneity of learners, which is a predominant characteristic of this teaching context in our results as well as in certain studies (e.g., Bigelow & Vinogradov, 2011; Craats & Young-Scholten, 2015; Cucchiarini et al., 2015; Williams & Murray, 2010). That heterogeneity, which is understood as a tension between the *subject* and the *community*, poses an important challenge to the use of teaching materials, as it is difficult to adapt them to learners' diverse realities: the constant need to create and re-create teaching materials in line with learners' changing needs is perceived as problematic by our participants. This also has an impact on the *object* of the activity system, as our results show that according to teachers, it can be difficult for some of their LESLLA learners to understand the teaching material. Indeed, the responses we obtained allowed us to see that teaching the learners how to use the teaching materials is in itself an objective for LESLLA classes, an important result that draws attention to the uniqueness of the LESLLA context.

In both the literature and our interview responses, this heterogeneity and lack of materials for LESLLA learners has led many teachers to modify and adapt existing materials or develop their own in-house materials (Farrelly, 2013, 2014; Gunn, 2003; Ollerhead, 2010), which represents a tension between the *subject* and *division of labour* components. No wonder, then, that our results show that the content and format of some materials are adapted by teachers from resources made, for example, for children or for teaching French as a second language. Such an adaptation is not without its challenges, as it takes up a lot of teacher time. That result is consistent with Farrelly's (2014) findings, which noted that teachers did not have time to develop or adapt relevant teaching materials for LESLLA learners. Moreover, materials development was shown in Ollerhead's (2010) study to be sometimes a source of frustration, as teachers' creative work often seemed insufficient or unsatisfactory. That dissatisfaction is also seen in our participants' responses: they reported that the materials created are sometimes poorly designed because the teachers run out of time, and that developing teaching materials saddles them with a sizeable workload. That being said, our results show that the *division of labour* within the activity is broader than what has been noted previously by other authors: in addition to choosing, creating and adapting materials, teachers are also responsible for researching and purchasing them, which adds even more to their workload.

7 Conclusion and pedagogical implications

In focusing on the French-language teaching materials used in classes for LESLLA learners in Quebec through the lens of Activity Theory (AT), we gained a better understanding of this teaching/learning context by highlighting a number of issues concerned with the availability and choice of these materials, which are not without pedagogical implications. Even though we note that a wide range of materials are used, including some specifically for LESLLA learners, our main finding is the scarcity of available materials. This apparent contradiction is undoubtedly linked to the strong heterogeneity of learner profiles within the same classes, which leads us to believe that a single type of material, even one that is designed for this specific context, cannot meet teachers' needs, nor, consequently, their students'. Since teachers are already creating and adapting materials, it would be advantageous for them to be better supported in that endeavour, through training or the implementation of exchange and observation workshops within teaching teams in order to promote the sharing of existing materials that do meet teachers' needs, as proposed by Farrelly (2014). In addition, it would be wise to provide teachers with materials with differentiated content at multiple skill levels to help them manage class heterogeneity. For example, the expected answers to exercises in the same material could be different depending on learners' level. Although our research was carried out in the limited context of Canada's French-speaking province of

Quebec, we believe that these pedagogical implications may be useful in other contexts where LESLLA learners are learning an additional language in formal settings. Indeed, our results seem to align with what has been observed in other parts of the world; that leads us to believe that the challenges faced by Quebec educators are not unique to this specific context.

That being said, it should be noted that our study has some limitations. COVID-19 forced educational centres to close their doors a few weeks before our data collection, and thus our interviews, began. As our participants had not been in the classroom for quite some time when they were interviewed, their perception of their use of learning materials may have been affected. And meeting with participants virtually rather than in person deprived us of physical access to the material: teachers sometimes spoke about material that had been left at their teaching centre and that was therefore inaccessible during the interviews. Also, since the questionnaire used covered a wide variety of topics other than the use of teaching materials, few questions were devoted to this specific topic and the data collected thus remain rather limited.

Despite these limitations, this study does afford us a broader picture of the use of teaching materials in French classes for immigrant LESLLA learners, allowing us to delve deeper into ways of lending better support to those working in that environment. In addition, we believe that this initial outline will enable us to better support LESLLA learners in learning French, so as to promote their linguistic, cultural and professional integration and enable them to participate more fully in Quebec society. Accordingly, there would be great value in getting learners' perspective on their classroom use of teaching materials for LESLLA learners, to better understand their needs and concerns and not limit ourselves to the teachers' perspective.

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