

## **ABSTRACT**

ALLEN, JEFFREY LANDON. Towards the Eye of the Storm: Overcoming Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety by Achieving 'Flow' with Can-Do Statements (Under the direction of Dr. Chad Hoggan and Dr. Valerie Lambert).

This qualitative case study explored the evolution of the student can-do statement (CDS) experience in an introductory French course at the post-secondary level. The study unveiled the multifaceted roles CDSs play in fostering not only language proficiency but also in mitigating Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), a pervasive challenge confronting language learners. Incorporating rich data from surveys and focus groups, the research lays bare the nuanced interactions between the structural framework of the CDSs, the classroom environment, students' cognitive and emotional landscapes, and the pivotal role of instructors.

Central to this exploration is the evolution of students' experiences as they journey through the semester. Each CDS performance serves as a harbinger of both challenge and opportunity, a dual role epitomized by the cyclical and dynamic nature of anxiety and confidence, struggle, and triumph. This study encapsulates these dynamics through the metaphor of navigating a storm, with the CDS experience acting as the storm, and the optimal conditions surrounding the CDS performance as the eye—a serene yet challenging nexus where assessment and affirmation of burgeoning language abilities converge. It is within this judgment-free, supportive environment where effort is welcomed and risk-taking encouraged, that students reached a state of 'flow'. In such an ambiance, the formal structure of an oral exam dissolves into the fluidity of a conversation, swept up by the authentic exchange of dialogue rather than the pressures of the testing atmosphere.

The findings reveal that while test anxiety and FLCA remain formidable hurdles, CDSs, when effectively tailored to context and executed, can transform these challenges into

steppingstones for profound learning and self-discovery. Each student's journey, as evidenced by the data, is markedly individual yet intertwined with the collective experience of the classroom. The study illuminates the pivotal role of adaptability, both in the design and execution of CDSs and in the students' approaches to navigating them.

A critical revelation of this research is the emergence of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) inverted, providing a protective shield against the FLCA stressors encapsulating the CDS experience. This inversion exemplifies the role of the collective—instructors, peers, and the structural environment—in facilitating individual journeys through the tumultuous yet enriching storm of language learning and assessment.

Furthermore, the study amplifies the pronounced influence of speaking on test anxiety. The intricate ties between pronunciation and emotional and cognitive responses emphasize the need for pedagogical approaches that are as attentive to the emotional as they are to the cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning.

In conclusion, this qualitative case study offers a holistic, nuanced, and insightful exploration of CDSs in the context of a French language classroom. It features the multidimensional aspects between structure and fluidity, challenge and support, individual and collective. The findings advocate for a dynamic, adaptable, and empathetic approach to implementing CDSs, one that is as attuned to the silent echoes of anxiety and struggle as it is celebratory of every whisper of triumph and self-discovery. The insights gleaned hold profound implications for educators, policymakers, and language learners, offering a compass to navigate the tempestuous yet exhilarating odyssey of language learning in a classroom setting.

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Towards the Eye of The Storm: Overcoming Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety by  
Achieving 'Flow' with Can-Do Statements

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To the language learner: Be kind to yourself; perfection is an elusive goal. Embrace and grow from your missteps and remember to find joy in the journey and the connections you make along the way.

To the community college student: May your challenges embolden you. Strive for consistency, perhaps even stubbornness. Stay curious.

To anyone who struggles in silence: What you feel matters. How you feel matters. You matter. May your voice be heard.

## BIOGRAPHY

Jeff's initiation into language learning began whimsically at Butler Memorial Library, where his repeated check-outs of "Speaking Pig-Latin & Ung" elicited the librarian's playful suggestion, "How about you just hold on to that copy..." This early interest in code languages, spurred by a children's book, belied the profound impact that language would have on his life's trajectory.

As Jeff transitioned from the simplicity of Ung to the profound nuance of French, he found that with each syllable learned, he unlocked more than just a means to communicate; he discovered a portal to lives in parallel. The librarian's idea had been unwittingly prescient, marking the beginning of a lifelong relationship with languages as gateways to worlds beyond English.

His exploration of various forms of expression has shown that communication extends far beyond utterance. Non-Romanized scripts artfully reflect the vibrancy of their people and cultures. And, while hand-signed conversations may happen in silence, they suffer no loss in meaning. Music, the language that replaces word with sound, can transcend the score to touch emotions in ways that words sometimes cannot.

Appreciation for the vast, interconnected web of shared experiences has shown Jeff the power of human connection. And whether the words are those you speak, or write, or sign, or sing, may you always have a song.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Looking behind at the runway below, this project somehow managed to get airborne shortly after lurching on to the tarmac. I would still be sputtering towards the Bermuda Triangle without a parachute were it not for the indefatigable support and guiding light from my esteemed mentors, colleagues, and family.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the canon of second language (L2) education and policy literature, the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) undoubtedly stands out as a monolithic figure in the 21st century (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; Council of Europe, 2001; Erkan & İsmail, 2019; Figueras, 2012; Knoch et al., 2021; Little, 2007). Its scale of six language proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) has transcended European borders, becoming a universal benchmark in the realm of language learning, assessment, and policy. With the 2001 publication of the CEFR came 'can-do statements' (CDSs), marking a paradigm shift in language assessment from demonstrating knowledge of the language to actively demonstrating ability in the language (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), 2017; Council of Europe (CoE), 2001; VanPatten et al., 2015). This evolution resonates with a broader narrative in language learning and assessment, captured by the ubiquitous adoption of or adaptation to the CEFR.

Shortly after 2002, the appeal of the CEFR gained traction in the United States. The National Council of State Supervisors of Languages and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages were pioneers in adapting the CEFR into their proficiency guidelines and have maintained an ongoing collaboration to ensure alignment with the evolving proficiency standards in L2 education. Their implementation has been deemed "effective" (Moeller & Yu, 2015; Shleykina, 2020), and "powerful" (Faez et al., 2011), while also contributing to learner autonomy as students document progress, set goals, guide their own learning, and see success in academic achievement (Kristmanson et al., 2013). Beyond the field of L2 education, the influence of CDSs has permeated other disciplines such as physical education (Herrmann & Seelig, 2017; Scheuer et al., 2019), institution-wide graduate studies (Ipperciel & Elatia, 2014),

academic advising (Aoki, 2012), and even engineering (Yamazaki et al., 2017) and aviation (Emery, 2016), evidencing their versatility in assessing and measuring outcomes.

CDSs equip L2 learners with tangible metrics, enabling them to track their language proficiency incrementally from class to class and unit to unit (Goodier & Szabo, 2018). For educators, they represent a blueprint, facilitating lesson planning and curricular design, all attuned to learners' needs and potential. The encompassing nature of CDSs allows stakeholders a panoramic view of language ability across modalities and proficiency levels, which are categorized in American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages into three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational (ACTFL, 2015). CDSs span the ACTFL Proficiency Scale across five levels from novice to superior, the first three levels further stratified into low, mid, and high ranges. For example, a novice-mid CDS reads, "I can express my likes and dislikes on very familiar and everyday topics of interest, using a mixture of practiced or memorized words, phrases and simple sentences" (ACTFL, 2017).

Amidst the widespread recognition and adoption of CEFR standards, challenges and criticism emerge. Knoch et al. (2021) assert the necessity of enriching and, in some cases, counterbalancing the CEFR's general scales with concrete, real-world performance data, calling into question its construct validity and score generalizability. Such critiques foreground an important observation: While policy readily endorses the CEFR, its transfer into curricula and classrooms remains a matter of debate. Despite contemporary curricula pivoting towards outcomes-based assessment emphasizing real-world linguistic applications such as CDSs, the CEFR acknowledgment of such curricula often seems elusive. This could be attributed to the extensive adaptations of the level descriptors, many of which having morphed, sometimes

beyond recognition, with scant documentation or literature about any modification thereof (Figueras, 2012).

This study departs from the policy implications of those overarching standards to zero in on how L2 students experience CDSs. A mounting awareness of student mental health, accentuated by campaigns highlighting educational stressors such as test anxiety and academic burnout calls for a closer look inside the classroom walls (Buizza et al., 2022; Charbonnier et al., 2022). This exploration of the student angle is not merely academic; it echoes larger concerns about student mental health and the potential necessity of reshaping curricula. Given the CEFR's influence on language programs worldwide, understanding the student experience with CDSs becomes paramount. This understanding could not only inspire student-centered curricula that considers students' perceptions and experience, but it could also catalyze institutional strategies to address mental health from the classroom to the broader university ecosystem.

### **The Ubiquity of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages**

“Nobody engaged in language education in Europe can ignore the existence of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (Alderson, 2007, p. 660). Frequently described in terms of its ubiquity (Jones & Saville, 2009; Savski, 2022), or its status as a “common currency” (Alih et al., 2020; Figueras, 2012, p. 478; Van Huy & Hamid, 2015) the CEFR's monumental impact over the past three decades is indisputable (CoE, 2006; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007; Van Huy & Hamid, 2015). The renown of the CEFR is articulated through its translation into forty languages, echoing the import of its pedagogical innovation across the globe (Byram & Parmenter, 2012; North, 2014; Piccardo, 2020). Its sweeping adoption has left indelible marks in various domains, ranging from national immigration and citizenship policy (Alderson, 2007; McNamara, 2011) to educational policy such as teacher certification and most

notably language proficiency assessment (Alih et al., 2020; Bonnet, 2007; Fulcher, 2008; Little, 2007). Further, its widespread influence has prompted the restructuring and adaptation of proficiency frameworks beyond European borders. Noteworthy examples include the Canadian Language Benchmarks, the CEFR-J in Japan, the China Standards of English, and language official policy in Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia (Jin et al., 2017; Negishi & Yukio, 2014; Piccardo, 2020; Savski, 2020; Van Huy & Hamid, 2020; Wu, 2014).

Language policy spanning 27 countries and one continent falls largely under the purview of two influential bodies: the European Union and the Council of Europe (Jones & Saville, 2009). Although the Council of Europe boasts 20 more members and predates the EU by 44 years, its authority largely rests in the domain of human rights, precluding it from direct economic policy decision-making. Rooted in the European Cultural Convention of 1954, the Council of Europe fosters unity and defends the collective ideals and principles among its members (CoE, 1954).

While the facets of language education policy across Europe are multifarious, encompassing elements like teacher training, information and communication technologies, lifelong learning, and content and language integrated learning, the overarching motif remains one of multilingualism (CoE, 2020; Deygers, 2021). Such multilingualism is seen as a characteristic trait and serves as a linchpin in promoting social inclusion and a culture of democratic citizenship (CoE, 2006, 2020; Jones & Saville, 2009). While ‘multilingualism’ refers to the presence of multiple languages within a society, ‘plurilingualism’ is a term uniquely coined by the Council of Europe that focuses on an individual’s linguistic and cultural repertoire, honing the ability to communicate in several languages and adapt to various cultural contexts. (Çelik, 2013; Erkan & İsmail, 2019; CoE, 2020; Deygers, 2021; Figueras, 2012; Girard & Trim,



1998; Mirici, 2014). The Council of Europe also offers support to its member states in creating language education policy profiles, serving as a roadmap for future policy considerations (Fleming, 2008).

The role of the CEFR in shaping European language policy had humble beginnings as a reference manual (Piccardo, 2020). Envisioned as a tool for guiding curriculum planning and textbook development, the CEFR was soon endorsed and adopted by the EU as an emblematic policy.

Applying a reference for language wholesale onto policy warrants caution, however; the Council of Europe's inexact verbiage was deliberate in order to offer flexibility to the demands of both languages and curricula (Savski, 2022). Moreover, the grounding of the CEFR in statistical methods may instill a false sense of security when considering its use in high-stakes situations such as university admissions or by immigration authorities (Figueras, 2012; North, 2014).

The Council of Europe's Language Policy Division has been instrumental in setting the stage for language diversity by way of its human rights campaigns fostering communication, exchange, and intercultural awareness (Jones & Saville, 2009; North, 2023). The publication of their seminal works in language proficiency, or 'threshold levels' of Waystage (van Ek & Trim, 1991), Threshold (van Ek, 1975; van Ek & Trim 1980; van Ek & Trim, 1998), and Vantage (van Ek & Trim, 2001), set the precedent for the defining current Council of Europe language proficiency levels of A1–C2 (Goodier, 2015; Gouillier, 2007; Sheils, 1996). This initiative culminated in the release of the CEFR in 2001, formally launching 'can-do statements' (CoE, 2001).

## **‘Can-Do Statements’**

‘Can-do statements’ are learning objectives re-envisioned. They lead to real-world outcomes, and each is expressed concisely beginning with “I can...” As a pedagogical construct in language classes, a CDS resembles the following: “I can order food at a restaurant.” These statements can be employed in myriad ways, including but not limited to the planning of curricula, courses, units, individual lessons, and test administration. For example, CDS are listed in syllabi, line the pages of textbooks, formulate the basis of quizzes and tests, or introduce the class topic and learning objective for that particular day. These are but a few illustrative methods of implementation. As the course progresses, this approach ensures that instruction is centered around tangible and practical linguistic outcomes, framing the learning experience within the context of real-world application (ACTFL, 2017).

Students utilize CDS to gauge their abilities in the language they are studying. Measuring their confidence in “I can order food at a restaurant,” on a 3-2-1 scale, students identify strengths and areas for development, where 3 means, “I can perform this function with ease,” and 1, “I can perform this function with great difficulty. They use this self-assessment for selecting relevant activities and tasks that reinforce skills for confidently achieving the stated goal (ACTFL, 2017).

The self-assessment aspect of CDSs caught the attention of the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, who were subsequently sponsored by the Goethe-Institute to travel to Europe and witness it firsthand. The Council of Europe then formally introduced them to the CEFR and the European Language Portfolio.

Since 2003, the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages has been the governing body of LinguaFolio, a U.S. self-assessment tool inspired by the European Language Portfolio. There have since been collaborative updates with ACTFL to include CDSs, with 2010

and 2012 marking the alignment of CDSs with ACTFL's Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2017; Moeller & Yu, 2015; van Houten, 2007).

The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages and ACTFL define CDSs as a guide for

[l]anguage learners to identify and set learning goals and chart their progress towards language and intercultural proficiency; [e]ducators to write communication learning targets for curriculum, unit and lesson plans; [s]takeholders to clarify how well learners at different stages can communicate (ACTFL, 2017).

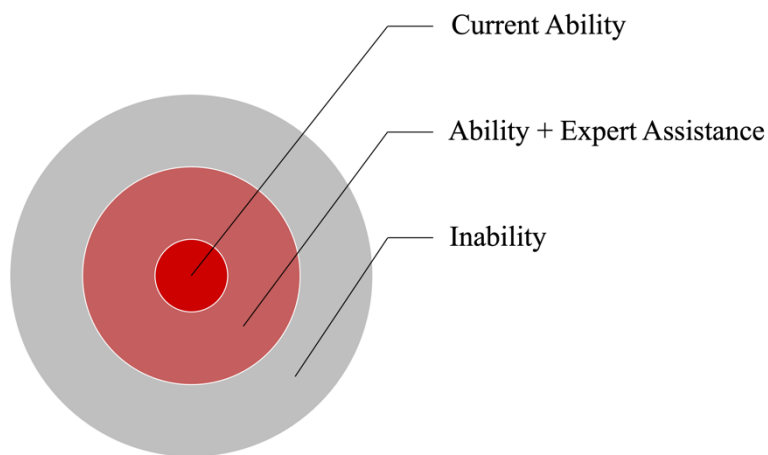
CDSs are organized by “proficiency benchmarks,” “performance indicators,” and “examples” (ACTFL, 2017, p. 1). Proficiency benchmarks evaluate language performance features like context, text type, and function in the three communication modes of interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. These benchmarks set goals and can determine program and course outcomes while tracking student progress on ACTFL's proficiency continuum. Performance indicators outline the steps to achieve the benchmark goal, assisting learners in documenting their progress and informing curriculum design. Examples further contextualize how to tailor CDSs at the instructional or activity level.

The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages CDSs adhere to the principles of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound) goals, which scaffolds learning with contextualized language use and real-world tasks (North, 2023). Learners who conduct self-assessment take control of their own learning, thereby minimizing teacher-fronted instruction. The teacher then becomes more of a facilitator, allowing students to begin practicing L2 skills sooner (Monereo, 1991; Moeller & Yu, 2015). Using the formulaic ‘can’ or ‘cannot do,’ learners become cognizant of

their abilities and limits as well as when to seek assistance. This path of self-assessment, self-regulation, and ultimately self-efficacy aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, which defines what students can achieve under expert guidance but not yet independently (Vygotsky, 1987).

**Figure 1.1**

*Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development*



The emphasis on authentic language use has been demonstrated to bolster student engagement by linking language to emotions and behaviors. Engaging with native speakers or interacting with genuine cultural artifacts augment this effect, leading to heightened student motivation (Fandiño, 2013). Moreover, this skill aligns with the attributes that contemporary employers actively seek in potential candidates, underlining its importance in the 21st century context (Damari et al., 2017; Looney & Lusin, 2014).

Central to the 'can-do' framework is task-based learning, which is defined in L2 education as “a classroom activity, or exercise that has a learning objective attainable only through interaction among participants, a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and a focus on meaning exchange” (Moeller & Yu, 2015, p. 55; Lee, 2000). The CEFR terms

this “an action-based approach” and considers the “cognitive, emotional, and volitional resources and the full range of abilities specific to and applied by the individual as a social agent” (CEFR, 2001, p. 9). CDSs then add the stipulation of performing these tasks in the L2 (Norris & East, 2021). In contrast to achievement tests, CDS tasks are purposeful and align with proficiency tenets that “require the candidate to demonstrate the skills directly under conditions similar to an actual situation” (CoE, 2001; Jones, 1979, p. 50; Lowe, Jr., 1985).

### **CDS: Informing a Novel Pedagogy**

The emergence of the communicative language classroom (CLC) during the late 1970s and early 1980s marked a pivotal juncture in L2 education. Deemphasizing the role of vocabulary and grammar, the CLC shifted the focus to communicative ability, or meaningful, real-world L2 applicability. Learning objectives aimed to purposefully use the L2 from day one by immersing Ss in an environment rich with authentic input, thereby increasing their exposure as much as possible.

An ideal L2 learning environment is conceptualized as the synchronous enhancement of language skills alongside its communicative application, typically rooted in one’s upbringing or formative years of schooling (dos Santos, 2020). In an effort to recreate this very context, the CLC aims to simulate those initial experiences by way of curated tasks and activities. It logically follows, then, that assessment of oral proficiency would mirror these real-world communicative tasks and activities embedded within the CLC. Thus, complementing the conventional pencil-and-paper assessment, CDSs enrich the evaluation process, enabling Ss to demonstrate their L2 proficiency through task-based performances that aligns with ACTFL’s oral proficiency scale (Brown et al., 2014; Summers et al., 2019).

CDSs position students at the heart of the learning experience. Students are empowered to direct their education in alignment with their personal and professional goals, establishing relevant and functional language objectives. This student-centered approach, coupled with real-world tasks, ensures that linguistic skills are both meaningful and applicable beyond educational settings. Through CDSs, students are actively engaged in setting, monitoring, and refining their learning objectives, cultivating metacognition and intrinsic motivation. The inherent flexibility of CDSs allows for tailored learning experiences, accommodating diverse learning styles and objectives. Furthermore, the collaborative essence of CDSs promotes peer interaction, enhancing both language proficiency and interpersonal skills (Faez et al., 2011; Lenkaitis, 2020; Moeller & Yu, 2015; Shleykina, 2020; VanPatten et al., 2015).

The ‘can-do’ initiative, in keeping with trends in L2 pedagogy, has transitioned from traditional in-class assessment to online platforms. Rigorous research has validated the efficacy of this digital migration, ensuring uncompromised quality in assessment (Tigchelaar et al., 2017; VanPatten et al., 2015). This innovative approach optimizes classroom time, allowing for a more pronounced emphasis on CDSs. Consequently, the resulting pedagogy aligns assessment with learning objectives and instructional methodologies. CDSs serve as a pragmatic roadmap, aligning pedagogical approaches with the broader objective of equipping students with the requisite skills to thrive in the 21st century (ACTFL, 2015; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2019; Shadiev & Wang, 2022).

Adopting and implementing CDSs does not imply that no further action is required. National Council of State Supervisors for Languages-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages provides guidance on the appropriate implementation of CDSs: CDSs outline the abilities consistently demonstrated over time, assist in goal setting, and can be tailored to fit

curricula spanning individual learning objectives to schools, districts, and postsecondary policy. They promote self-evaluation, establishing goals, and developing performance-based grading rubrics. CDSs are not to be treated as a one-time checklist or used to limit teaching and learning. They are not a set curriculum, nor are they tools for assigning letter or numerical grades (ACTFL, 2017).

CDSs thus play a pivotal role in modern L2 pedagogy, offering both educators and learners a pragmatic approach to curriculum development, assessment, and self-assessment. In the context of the language course in focus, Elementary French I (FLF 101), CDSs are crafted by scholars in the field of second-language acquisition and incorporate nuanced elements of input processing and scaffolding directly into the textbook (Wong et al., 2016).

Input processing refers to what learners understand (intake) and what they learn (uptake) when exposed to new language such as words, phrases, or sentences. This concept emphasizes the importance of exposure to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982), meaning language that can be understood by the learner, which aids in the natural acquisition of language skills. This design facilitates an immersive learning environment where the target language becomes the primary medium of instruction and interaction.

FLF 101 uses *Liaisons: An Introduction to French* (Wong et al., 2016) and covers five chapters: a preliminary chapter of language fundamentals followed by chapters one through four. Each chapter is divided into six segments focusing on either vocabulary (V) or grammar (G) arranged in a sequential pattern: V1, G1, V2, G2, and V3, G3. Every set of CDS is linked to respective segments as well as throughout the entire chapter, contributing to the overarching chapter theme.

Each class session commences with an introduction to the day's CDS and corresponding learning outcome. Instructors present and model the vocabulary or grammar, guiding students through a structured practice that leads to a culminating communicative activity. All activities align with the learning outcome and CDS, scaffolding students from the first lesson to the CDS performance itself.

Self-assessment is thus embedded within the curriculum: students rate their CDS proficiency on a 3-2-1 scale at the end of each class. This reflective process serves both as an evaluative tool and a mechanism for self-regulation, enabling learners to identify, understand, and create individualized learning plans. Before the day of the oral exam, students sign up for a ten-minute time slot to 'perform' their CDS in groups, utilizing the six CDSs in English to guide the conversation within the chapter theme. Chapter 1 of FLF 101, 'A Balanced Life,' introduces activities, days of the week, description, time, and personal possessions (Wong et al., 2016).

The Chapter 1 CDSs are as follows:

- 1) V1: I can say three things that I typically do and three things that I typically don't do during the school week.
- 2) G1: I can ask someone else if that person does particular activities or not to see if our activities are similar.
- 3) V2: I can say two things that I do often, two things I sometimes do, and two things I rarely or never do.
- 4) G2: I can ask someone else about activities that person performs frequently, sometimes, or rarely/never.
- 5) V3: I can describe my weekly schedule including when I have class, when I study, and so on, and indicate on which days I do what activities.



6) G3: I can ask someone else about his/her weekly schedule (classes, studying, other activities) and also find out on what days that person does what activities (Wong et al., 2016).

A comprehensive list of all FLF 101 CDSs can be found in Appendix A.

## **The Importance of CDSs**

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**

21st-century skills encompass a broad array of competencies designed for success in our current era marked by technological innovation, global interconnectivity, and rapid sociopolitical change. These are further categorized into learning skills (critical thinking and problem-solving), literacy skills (digital, technological, and cultural literacy), and life skills (adaptability, leadership, and social skills) (Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), 2019). The advent of the digital age, the transition from industrial to information economies, and the challenges posed by global problems such as climate change necessitate that individuals today possess a skill set which is radically different from that of previous generations. These skills are not simply luxuries afforded by a revolutionary ideal; rather, they are critical for successfully navigating and sustaining the world we inhabit.

Education systems are in a globally transformative phase, aiming to shift from traditional, rote-learning models to ones that foster these 21st-century skills (Carey, 2016; DeMillo, 2011; Woldeab & Brothen, 2019). This transformation goes beyond curriculum content alone; it encompasses teaching methodologies, assessment techniques, and even the physical classroom setup (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020; Van Houten, 2007). Students today are encouraged to be active learners, collaborators, and problem-solvers. By integrating these skills into the

educational framework, institutions aim to mold students who are both knowledgeable and able to apply this knowledge in diverse, real-world scenarios.

### **P21 and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages**

P21, known formally as the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, originated from a profound need recognized by leading businesses, educators, and policymakers. They saw a mismatch between the outcomes of the traditional education system and the demands of the 21st-century workplace and society. Initiated in the U.S., the collaboration's primary aim was to identify and promote the skills that students need for success in today's world, ensuring a brighter future for all (P21, 2019; Shadiev & Wang, 2022).

P21's framework offers comprehensive guidelines that encompass more than just academic knowledge—it focuses on the holistic development of students (Fandiño, 2013). However, its principles are broad and open-ended, therefore interpretation and implementation can differ greatly. Educational entities take inspiration from P21 and adapt its guidelines to their unique cultural, regional, and institutional needs. It provides direction, but each journey is tailored specifically to educational landscapes (Czerkowski & Berti, 2020).

### **The ‘Foreign Language Crisis’**

In an ironic turn, as our world becomes more interconnected, L2 education has witnessed a decline, especially in the shadow of English hegemony. Economic constraints, shifting educational priorities, and a lack of emphasis on global competency have all contributed to this downturn (Fandiño, 2013). This reduction is concerning, given the crucial role languages play in fostering global understanding and cultural exchange.

Studying an L2 is about more than just communication. It opens a window into understanding different worldviews, cultures, and histories. It effectuates cognitive flexibility,

enhances one's ability to understand and operate in multicultural contexts, and builds empathy (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020; Shadiev & Wang, 2022). Furthermore, as businesses expand globally, language proficiency combined with other 21st-century skills can be a distinctive advantage (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020).

The intertwined relationship between an L2 and 21st-century skills is set to shape our future in unprecedented ways (P21, 2019). As more organizations operate on a global scale and as our world grapples with complex, 'borderless' challenges, those equipped with a diverse skill set, including language proficiency, will find themselves at the forefront. It is they who will forge international collaborations, bridging cultural divides and driving innovation in a multicultural, interconnected world. The confluence of L2 and 21st-century skills will become not just advantageous but indispensable (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020). It is therefore unsurprising that the CEFR has been globally embraced as an implement to instill these skills. However, despite its pervasive adoption as a framework for imparting 21st-century skills, the CEFR continues to engender polarizing debate among various stakeholders.

### **The CEFR: Criticisms and Conflict**

The rise of the CEFR and CDSs mark a shift towards outcomes-based assessment in language learning. These tools prioritize communicative competencies, reflecting the demands of 21st-century skills that emphasize global communication and intercultural understanding. Yet, paradoxically, the original intent of the CEFR has been misconstrued.

Foremost among its criticisms is the use of CEFR as a standardized measure, which contravenes its inherent design as a heuristic foundation for language education (Piccardo, 2020). The dilemma does not lie in CEFR's architecture; it is rather the manner of its implementation that precipitates conflict and even power struggles.

Far removed from its purpose as a reference for language curriculum design, the sociopolitical dimension of CEFR's adoption adds another complex layer. The framework has occasionally been appropriated as an instrument of centralized authority and control, thereby undermining the pedagogical autonomy of educators (Saviski, 2023, p. 2). This centralization generates imbalances at the grassroots level, as teachers find their expertise subordinated to a document that wields much more considerable influence (Jones & Saville, 2009).

Moreover, the framework has faced skepticism concerning its construct validity. Critics cite its ostensibly universal applicability to diverse languages, intuitive design, and a theoretical framework that is not adequately substantiated by empirical performance data. Such critiques put into question the scope of its assessments as well as their quality and adequacy (Fulcher et al., 2010; Knoch et al., 2021).

It is therefore essential to reiterate that CEFR has been transparent about its original objectives (Harsch, 2018; Piccardo, 2020). It neither claims nor aspires to provide an unequivocal standard for language learning. However, much of the critical discourse surrounding CEFR seems to suffer from a collective amnesia about the framework's foundational ethos. Rather than to act as a blanket policy thrust upon educational systems by some detached European bureaucracy, the CEFR was designed to invoke pedagogical initiatives that are sensitive to context-specific needs.

Furthermore, the framework encourages interpretive latitude precisely to allow its customization to the adopter's unique context (Piccardo, 2020). This calls for additional work in post-adoption, reinforcing the notion that the CEFR is not a complete, one-size-fits-all solution. The notion of 'incompleteness' here is not to be construed as a deficit; instead, it underlines the framework's flexibility and openness to adaptation. Harsch (2018) reminds us that there is no

guarantee that the CEFR will be used systematically each and every time. Perhaps the variability stems from user misinterpretation or lacks congruence with the context in question.

In sum, North (2014) aptly characterizes the CEFR as a heuristic for curriculum reform rather than a prescriptive policy. That the framework engenders disparate outcomes across various implementations is not a criticism but rather an affirmation of its flexibility and contextual adaptability. This versatility echoes its foundational ethos, making it not a monolithic standard but a living document that evolves in concert with the pedagogical landscapes it influences.

### **Student Mental Health**

Universities have long been hubs of intellectual growth, cultural development, and personal transformation (Duranczyk et al., 2015; Moore, 2007; Perin, 2011). Students enter these institutions from a multitude of backgrounds, seizing the opportunity to realize personal and professional goals, thereby gaining agency over their futures. However, behind the curtain of academic achievements and developmental milestones lie challenges that deeply impact mental health.

Mental health concerns, although prevalent for a considerable time, have often been met with indifference by healthcare systems. Despite the gravity of the issue, governmental interventions have proved inadequate in addressing the mental challenges faced by their citizens. This negligence extends to the educational sector as well. In fact, a majority of those braving mental health concerns in society are college and university students (Larson et al., 2022; Limone & Toto, 2022). Current observations in academic institutions are particularly alarming as the number of students exhibiting pronounced mental health issues continues to rise (Larson et al., 2022; Lipson et al., 2022).

Despite the presence of campus mental health services, a substantial number of students in need do not access care (Lattie et al., 2022; Limone & Toto, 2022). Disturbingly, about half of the students diagnosed with depression, for instance, remain untreated. In the academic year 2020–2021, over 60% of students displayed signs of at least one mental health problem, an increase of almost 50% from 2013 (Lipson et al., 2022). Suicidal ideation affected 11% of those aged 18–25, making it the second leading cause of death in this demographic (Casey et al., 2022). An extensive meta-analysis of 64 studies encompassing 100,187 students, revealed that 33.6% manifested depressive symptoms and 39% exhibited anxiety symptoms. These figures have been further exacerbated following the COVID-19 outbreak, highlighting the critical need for comprehensive mental health interventions in educational settings (Li et al., 2022).

With an uptick in crises, especially since the years of the pandemic, mental health has taken center stage in recent educational discussions, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to student development (Buizza et al., 2022; Copeland et al., 2021). In addition to direct mental health services, institutions have begun to focus on building supportive campus environments.

Services that fall under this initiative include workshops on stress management, resilience training, and cultural integration. Offering regular check-ins and creating spaces where students can share their experiences can make them feel heard and understood. Moreover, peer support can play a crucial role in mental health support. Student-run groups, helplines, and mentorship programs can bridge the gap when professional services are overwhelmed. Such programs can offer first-hand insights into the stressors of student life and create a supportive community (Broton et al., 2022; Lamis & Lester, 2011; Sontag-Padilla et al., 2018).

Incorporating mental health into the educational discourse is not just about recognizing challenges. It also urges reshaping educational environments to be more supportive, inclusive,

and responsive to the emotional and psychological needs of all students. This holistic approach, epitomized in Georgetown University's philosophy *cura personalis*, takes into consideration "care for the whole person" (Furlong et al., 2020, p. S91), and in turn, every person, and all abilities.

While Vygotsky's ZPD has made important contributions to the wider discussion surrounding CDS, his lesser-known work in defectology, and particularly that in deaf education sheds light on how mental health is interwoven with educational practices (Vygotsky et al., 1993). This synthesis becomes even more profound when considering the lived experiences of those impeded by a language barrier (Scott et al., 2023; Vygotsky, 1987).

Vygotskian pragmatism regarding deaf education can be summarized in a pithy two words: 'deaf positive.' Considering the immediate and future mental health of these students has practical implications for campuses to tailor their services and approaches to meet students' unique needs, including access to language. Accommodations provided in the classroom, as well as in the language one feels most comfortable in are of vital importance—be it sign language or Serbo-Croatian.

Just as Vygotsky criticized exclusionary oralist practices in deaf education (Vygotsky et al., 1993), language barriers can greatly impede access to vital healthcare or mental health services. Fostering a supportive, inclusive environment becomes increasingly difficult, hampering positive relationship formation or establishing a sense of belonging (Williams et al., 2018). This further highlights the voiceless participants of the 'foreign language crisis,' or the decline in language program interest and offerings (Fandiño, 2013; Stein-Smith, 2022).

The slightest mention of American Sign Language polemicizes conversations by threatening linguistic ideologies of those who question its legitimacy in the academic context, or

its place in the field of ‘foreign languages’ (Reagan, 2011; Skyer, 2023). Instead of arguing over where ASL belongs in the grand scheme of languages or whether its usage is appropriate for formal settings such as academia, that energy could be displaced to better serve our student populations and help bridge this critical gap.

When used for the ‘greater good’ rather than for exclusionary purposes, the power of language—signed or spoken—transcends barriers, fostering human connections, evoking emotions, and deepening our understanding of the world (Brown, 2021; Fox, 2006). It is authentic, and it serves a purpose. It is meaningful.

Such connections, colored with the diverse hues of human emotion, resonate deeply within each individual are at the heart of the communicative language classroom. Whether it is the thrill of understanding and using a new concept, the sting of a miscommunication, or the warmth of shared laughter, these experiences are as diverse as they are profound. In this environment, connecting language skills with memories and emotions amounts to more than a pedagogical strategy; it is a means of validating one's identity and experiences, perhaps even seeing both in a different light.

Navigating the multifaceted landscape of language learning is not without its challenges, but it is these very challenges that recount the unique journey for each individual. Promoting this inclusivity and embracing our differences to accomplish goals can cultivate a sense of belonging in that shared experience, validating all voices, all ears, and all hands (Ull & Agost, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The ascent of CDSs signifies a transition to outcomes-based assessment in L2 education. These tools emphasize communicative ability, mirroring 21st-century skills that underpin global dialogue and cultural comprehension. However, in contrast, an alarming trend of dwindling or



discontinuation of world language programs is afflicting education, curbing students' chances to acquire these crucial competencies.

The wide acceptance of the CEFR has not come without criticism. Some suggest its standardized approach might not address diverse student needs, potentially contributing to mental health concerns. The hurdles in effectively incorporating CDSs across different educational settings highlight the urgency for a more adaptable, receptive, and inclusive paradigm. A design that, besides endorsing communicative language skills, also values the student mental health, recognizing the stressors of academic life and eminent entry into the professional world.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study, I integrate two theoretical frameworks: Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) through the lens of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) as delineated by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Social cognitive theory posits that learning is situated within a dynamic environment and is influenced by the ongoing interplay between cognition, environment (social context), and behavior. A distinctive attribute of social cognitive theory is its dual emphasis on the role of social influences and both external and internal forms of social reinforcement. Social cognitive theory provides insight into how individuals adopt, sustain, or modify behaviors, taking into account the global context in which these behaviors manifest (Bandura, 1986).

Social cognitive theory also acknowledges the influence of an individual's prior experiences, or their personal beliefs in their capabilities (Schwarzer, 2015; Zhou et al., 2022). Bandura defines 'self-efficacy' as the experiences that impact subsequent reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, collectively determining whether an individual will exhibit a

particular behavior and the underlying motivations thereof (Bandura, 1997; Mills et al., 2006; Zhou et al., 2022).

Turning to the construct of FLCA, Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three salient dimensions of anxiety specific to the L2 classroom: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. According to Bandura (1997), anxiety is “a state of anticipatory apprehension over possible deleterious happenings” (p. 137). Introducing an L2 augments this combination of anxieties to result in FLCA, which is particularly pronounced in the context of language assessment (Fallah, 2016; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000).

Delving deeper into this construct, anxiety can differ across domains or contexts (Gogol et al., 2017). Specifically, FLCA has been categorized into modality-specific language anxieties such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading anxiety. These skill-specific anxieties are distinct from the broader scope of general language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Russell, 2020; Torres & Turner, 2016). To further define the phenomenon of FLCA, students may experience heightened anxiety within the classroom setting as opposed to that which occurs outside the classroom walls.

The convergence of social cognitive theory, FLCA, and CDSs thus creates the perfect storm: students already attend to a pronounced fear of public speaking. This aligns with the findings of Rajitha and Alamelu (2020), who highlighted that the presence of peers or an audience is the primary external trigger for student anxiety. Mulyani (2018) further corroborated this, noting that students often exhibit nervousness when speaking before their peers.

Nevertheless, these somewhat high-pressure circumstances can elicit positive reactions as well; as the task indicates that students communicate effectively in order to achieve a common goal, some students have found that correcting their own mistakes and using high-frequency

vocabulary with their peers was a strategy for success (Drury & Ma, 2003; Ibrahim et al., 2022). Eliminating these language barriers could thus lead to effective communication whereby peers could achieve their common goal while simultaneously improving their speaking skills.

Grounded in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy pertains to an individual's confidence in their own abilities (Bandura, 1997). Students who possess a strong sense of self-efficacy are more inclined to embrace challenging assignments (Hesline & Klehe, 2006), put forth greater effort (Pajares, 2002), and persist despite hurdles (Mills et al., 2006). These qualities are associated with lower levels of anxiety and high aptitudes of self-regulation in students, who in turn are likely to self-assess more accurately (Moeller & Yu, 2015).

### **Conceptual Framework**

At its core, FLCA is a specific type of situational anxiety tied to language learning contexts. Horwitz et al. (1986) described this as a complex amalgamation of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that emerge uniquely from the language learning process. While general language anxiety pertains to broader aspects, FLCA is exclusively linked to language learning experiences rooted within the context of second-language acquisition.

Horwitz et al. (1986) drew parallels from three generalized manifestations of anxiety in order to conceptualize FLCA: 1) communication apprehension with limited facility in an L2; 2) test anxiety, which stems from fear of failure compounded by ongoing evaluation in FL classes; and 3) fear of negative evaluation, which falls under the umbrella of social evaluation, (e.g., job interviews or speaking in an L2 class).

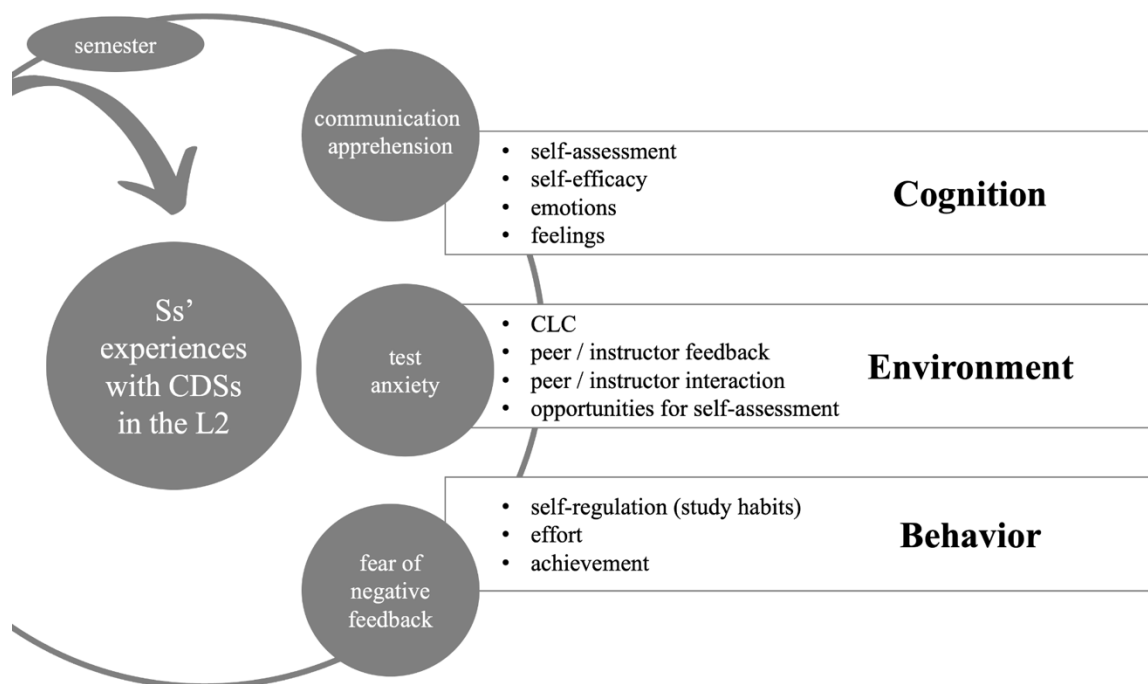
Within the framework of social cognitive theory, behavior is shaped by a combination of environmental and cognitive determinants (Bandura, 1977). In this study, the environmental components encompass the CLC and include feedback from teachers and peers, the role of

teacher as facilitator, and group assessment in the form of CDSs, which emphasize peer modeling and contextual language clues. The cognitive factors include students' motivation to perform, as well as their emotions and feelings about performing CDSs. The behavioral indicators are in-class and pre-CDS self-assessment procedures and any evolution in study approaches, preparatory techniques, or strategic adjustments observed throughout the semester.

This research therefore aims to explore students' experiences with CDSs over a semester FLF 101, with a specific focus on understanding how these experiences evolve.

**Figure 1.2**

*Conceptual Framework of Experiencing CDSs Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory through the Lens of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*



## **Research Question**

How do students' experiences with CDSs evolve throughout a semester in FLF 101?

Adopting a qualitative approach, this study utilized a case study method to delve deep into the lived experiences of FLF 101 students. Data were collected through focus groups in order to gauge students' self-perceptions, beliefs, and feelings about CDSs at two different time points and surveys to document any noticeable shifts in behavior, feelings, apprehensions, and perceived growth or setbacks.

## **Rationale of the Study**

The adoption of the CEFR's CDSs has transformed the pedagogical landscape of language learning (Faez et al., 2011; Kristmanson et al., 2013; Moeller & Yu, 2015; Savski, 2022; Tigchelaar et al., 2017). CDSs provide benchmarks for assessing language proficiency while fostering a student-centered approach where learners can track and measure their progress in tangible terms (ACTFL, 2001).

While CDSs provide a roadmap in terms of outcomes, the journey towards achieving these outcomes remains influenced by social, cognitive, and behavioral factors. One such area, relatively underexplored despite the broad adoption of the CEFR, is the nuanced experience of CDSs in introductory language courses such as FLF 101.

Existing literature acknowledges the substantial role of self-efficacy and FLCA in shaping language learning experiences and outcomes (Bandura, 1986; Barrows et al., 2013; Horwitz et al., 1986; Mills et al., 2006). However, there remains a gap in the understanding of how students contend with, embrace, adapt, or evolve while navigating the CDS experience.

Understanding students' experiences with CDSs throughout the semester will offer invaluable insights into the dynamics of FLCA, as well as enrich academic discourse regarding

overall assessment. The outcomes of this study have the potential to inform instructors about the effectiveness of their pedagogical and assessment techniques, shape departmental language curricula to be more cognizant of students' affective needs, encourage the adoption of 21st-century skills that emphasize mental health and resilience in language learners and students alike. The findings can pave the way for pedagogical interventions that minimize the negative repercussions of academic anxiety and FLCA, thereby creating a more conducive and sympathetic learning environment.

### **Significance of the Study**

The CEFR and CDSs have undeniably cemented their place as cornerstones in the global language education landscape. Their universal adoption and influence extend far beyond Europe, undergirding curriculum designs, pedagogical strategies, and assessment methods across disciplines. Yet, while these 'can-do' descriptors offer precise (or imprecise) tangible benchmarks for language proficiency, they also present an opportunity for deeper analysis—especially from the vantage point of 21st-century students.

The current educational outlook therefore urgently calls for honing 21st-century skills. These skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity, among others, are seen as indispensable in preparing students for global citizenship and the ever-evolving demands of the modern workplace (Guo & Woulfin, 2016). L2 education, especially, as orchestrated by the CEFR and ACTFL, is decisive in this mission (ACTFL, 2017; CoE, 2020). Yet, it is a bitter irony that at such a transformative juncture, we witness a 'foreign language crisis' throughout education (Fandiño, 2013; Stein-Smith, 2022).

This juxtaposition of L2 education's crucial role and its marked reduction underlines the need to consider the students' lived experiences. With rising awareness around mental health and

the stressors that students encounter (Buizza et al., 2022; Rodriguez-Kiino, 2013; Oropeza et al., 1991), an exploration into their experiences with CDSs holds profound implications. This study is not merely an academic exercise; rather, it endeavors to marry policy with practice, ensuring that the sweeping influence of the CEFR passed down through the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages considers the practical experiences of those they impact the most—students.

This study, therefore, occupies a critical space: it seeks to understand the efficacy and implications of the CEFR's strategies from the students' vantage point against the backdrop of the current crises afflicting L2 programs and mental health. The revelations from this study could inform pedagogical strategies across disciplines, ensuring that they are both effective and sensitive to students' needs, as well as energize a broader dialogue about the place and importance of L2 education in the 21st-century curriculum.

### **Study Design and Overview**

The focus of this research is to conduct a case study on the application of CDSs as a method of assessment in the context of Elementary French I (FLF 101). This class, situated in a large, Research I university in the southeastern United States, served as an ideal candidate due to its unique status: a large-scale introductory language class using CDSs as an evaluative tool at the time. The novelty of this approach to assessment and its implementation in that singular class structure makes for an intriguing focal point for this study.

The class that I studied was designated as a 'megasection' class, a format diverging from traditional classroom settings. While conventional class sizes often comprise approximately 25 students, this 'megasection' class can accommodate up to 120 students. This expansive size led

to a diverse student demographic in terms of academic standing, major programs of study, and prior L2 exposure.

Although the class was purposively selected for its unique use of CDSs, the sampling of participants within this class was random due to their enrollment. This study was thus bounded by the academic semester and the CDS course component of FLF 101.

Data were collected through surveys and questionnaires, as well as in focus groups. The surveys were distributed and collected through Qualtrics and aimed to glean qualitative insights from the FLF 101 students about their experiences with CDSs. The focus groups yielded both textual and audio data by way of semi-structured and unstructured interviews to collect in-depth qualitative data. This format allowed students to elaborate on their experiences, providing context and nuances that surveys might miss. As part of the focus group data collection, both written and voice-recorded data were collected. The voice-recorded data were transcribed to ensure accuracy during analysis.

The data were analyzed over several phases. The first phase involved in vivo coding in order to preserve the authenticity of students' experiences by using their own words. I then integrated a priori codes taken from the conceptual framework to discern how in vivo codes aligned with Social Cognitive Theory and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety.

### **Definition of Terms**

*'Can-do statement'*: Phrase that guides L2 learners, and educators to identify and set learning goals, chart progress towards proficiency, inform curriculum, and clarify how well learners at different stages can communicate (ACTFL, 2017).

*Behavioral influences*: Choice of activities, effort, persistence, achievement, environmental regulation (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Schunk & Usher, 2019).



*Communication apprehension:* A type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with others in groups (oral communication anxiety) or in listening to or learning a spoken message (receiver anxiety) (Horwitz et al., 1986).

*Communicative language classroom:* A learning environment in which students acquire the necessary skills to communicate in socially and culturally appropriate ways, and, in the learning process, focus functions, role playing and real situations (Aguilar, 2007; Canale & Swain, 1980).

*Environmental influences:* Social models for comparison, instruction, feedback, standards, rewards, opportunities for self-assessment (Bandura, 1986; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

*Fear of negative evaluation:* "Apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively," (Horowitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

*Foreign language classroom anxiety:* Parallel to performance anxieties of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, FLCA is distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (Horowitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

*Goal:* A mental representation of what one is attempting to attain (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020, p. 2). *Learning goal* means knowledge, skills, and strategies to be acquired (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). *Performance goal* refers to tasks to be completed (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

*Personal influences:* Cognition, beliefs, perceptions, emotions, feelings, goals of self-assessment, self-efficacy, social comparisons, values, outcome expectations, and motivation (Bandura, 1986; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020; Schunk & Usher, 2019).

*Self-efficacy:* Perceived capabilities to learn and perform actions at designated levels, influenced by progress towards goals and/or observations of success in perceived demographic similarities (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

*Self-regulation:* Self-generated thoughts, affects, and behaviors that are systematically oriented toward attainment of one's goals (Bandura, 1997).

*Test anxiety:* A type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986, pp. 127–128).

*Triadic reciprocity:* Reciprocal interactions between behavioral, environmental, and personal influences (Bandura, 1986; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

This introductory chapter provided an overview of CEFR and CDSs, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and the methodological approach for this study. Qualitative methods were chosen in order to dive deep into the intricacies of students' experiences and perceptions surrounding CDSs. Given the complex nature of human behavior and cognition, qualitative methods allow for a more nuanced understanding and in-depth exploration of changes that occur along with trends in behavior and cognition.

The following chapter offers a review of the literature tracing the evolution of the CEFR and CDSs, an overview of the language proficiency movement, the benefits and challenges of CDSs implementation, factors influencing foreign language anxiety, and concludes to discuss strategies for mitigating foreign language anxiety.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

"Proficiency has taken off!" (Heilenman & Kaplan, 1985, p. 75)

### **Towards L2 Proficiency**

In the complex matrix that is second L2 pedagogy and assessment, CDSs dare to ask students to put their pencils down and demonstrate what they can do. This modern approach contrasts with previous standards of gaining and measuring language proficiency, which relied heavily on rote memorization or decontextualized exercises (Alsowat, 2016; Blake & Kramsch, 2007; Sparks & Ganschow, 2001).

The time-honored tradition of measuring FL proficiency through written examinations has held steadfast; however, this method alone has become incongruent with the advancements in second-language acquisition such as input processing, interactive tasks, individual differences, developmental sequences, or implicit linguistic knowledge in today's communicative language classroom (Buczek-Zawiła, 2021; VanPatten et al., 2015). This dissonance between the established conventions and communicative demands compels us to delve deeper into the beginnings of the language proficiency movement and its impact on L2 pedagogy.

### **Proficiency Defined**

In the foundational stages of defining 'proficiency,' Kaulfers (1944) aptly described it as the "readiness to perform in a life-situation" (p. 137). This notion was echoed by James (1985), who characterized proficiency by emphasizing its intrinsic nature, stating that it mirrors "what language is and what language does, nothing less" (p. 7). This basic understanding evolved to perceive proficiency as a superordinate goal, representing more than the sum total of its individual parts (e.g., discrete vocabulary lists and morphological features). Proficiency aims to

strike a balance between content knowledge set in a context where it is authentically employed (Heilenman & Kaplan, 1985). Simply put, in a given language, it is what you can do.

“There is no mystery,” said James (1985, p. 2); “to be proficient you must be able to use the language” (Lowe, Jr., 1985, p. 16). In what Heilenman and Kaplan (1985) call the “functional trisection,” which encompasses function, topic or context, and accuracy (p. 60), proficiency measures are ambiguous in nature but criterion-based, allowing their levels to describe global ability with a non-exhaustive set of scenarios.

Contrasted with ‘achievement,’ which are norm-based measures designed to capture a student’s grasp of the material taught within a particular course or curriculum, proficiency is measured according to set expectations or in comparison with peers. The scope of achievement tests is narrowly tailored to gauge understanding of content-specific learning objectives covered in a classroom (Heilenman & Kaplan, 1985).

As such, it is prudent to contextualize the proficiency movement from its use in the professional setting (e.g., U.S. agencies) and in the academic setting (bilingual teacher certification, L2 major requirements, participation in study abroad programs, etc.) (Barnwell, 1987; Heilemen & Kaplan, 1985).

### **The ‘Big Three’ Scales**

#### **The Interagency Roundtable Language Scale**

In the aftermath of World War II, the demand for communicative language skills became acutely apparent as American military personnel were manifestly unprepared for effective L2 engagement upon their deployment to Europe (Barnwell, 1987). This palpable inadequacy underscored the limitations of then-prevailing L2 pedagogy. The Army had most recently been using the audio-lingual method, which was rooted in behaviorist theories. Faced with real-world

situations, the ‘Army Method’ truly tested the extent of survival language skills, which left many found wanting. In the absence of functional language skills, ranging from quotidian tasks like currency exchange to dire necessities like medical assistance, the insufficiencies of the audio-lingual method and its contemporaries were revealed (Barnwell, 1987).

Acknowledging this lacuna in language preparation, the Foreign Service Institute embarked on an ambitious project in 1956 to construct a specialized interview format, tailored to the idiosyncratic demands of U.S. foreign affairs. The Institute eschewed traditional achievement tests in favor of a more authentic exchange reflective of the language use domain: a natural conversation. This evolved into the eponymous FSI Oral Interview, segmented into four distinct phases: warm-up, level check, probes, and wind-down (Barnwell, 1987; Lowe, Jr., 1985). Far removed from any semblance of a classroom, this interview compelled examinees to showcase their ability and adapt to evolving communicative demands without the safety net of language support, such as a dictionary or prepared notes (Heinleman & Kaplan, 1985).

This domain-specific test was not restricted to diplomatic corridors but found applicability across diverse sectors of the governmental agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Security Agency. Its salient feature—the evaluation of functional L2 capabilities demonstrated through task completion—resonated particularly with adult populations, who conceptualize learning not in terms of scholastic achievement but in functional, practical capabilities (Buck & Forsythe, 1985).

The Interagency Language Roundtable system (n.d.) offered a bespoke solution to meet the State Department's imperative for assessing the functional linguistic competencies of foreign service officers. Contrary to any monolithic or bureaucratic connotations, the term 'system' here refers to a nuanced ensemble of level definitions and rating procedures that are universally

applicable across varied languages and linguistic skills (Lowe, Jr., 1988). This multi-tiered scale ranges from '0' signifying 'no proficiency,' to '5' denoting an 'educated native speaker' (Barnwell, 1987).

In the early 1980s, the FSI Oral Interview underwent refinements to align with vocational communicative needs, thereby attracting the interest of organizations such as the Peace Corps and Mormon missionary programs (Barnwell, 1987; Graham, 1978). At this point, the buzz surrounding the proficiency movement would make its way into the classroom.

### **The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Scale**

*"After this year, will I be able to say everything in French that I can say in English?"*  
(Heilenman & Kaplan, 1985, p. 55).

The proficiency movement heralded a transformative shift in education as well, beginning at the post-secondary level. The student-centered approach along with practical, real-world, SMART language skills resulted in greater L2 retention (James, 1985; Barnwell, 1987). The notional-functional syllabus emphasized functional language use over abstract forms, and all appeared well until students were met with their ILR proficiency scores. (Barnwell, 1987; van Ek 1976). Existing benchmarks rated most college language majors at a 1+ with a range from 0+ to 2+ on the ILR scale, which had a jarring effect (Barnwell, 1987).

The dissonance between expected proficiency and actual attainment levels thus provoked soul-searching within the academic community. This led to the U.S. Department of Education commissioning the development of a more contextually appropriate scale by the Educational Testing Service. In 1981, ACTFL introduced their 'Academic Scale,' celebrated for its more encouraging, positive language and its restructuring of the ILR's levels into more palatable and straightforward categories (Barnwell, 1987).

## **The CEFR**

Since its establishment on May 5, 1949, the Council of Europe has been a steadfast proponent of democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. Language education became a strategic focus as early as the European Cultural Convention in 1954, and this commitment gained further traction in subsequent ministerial conferences. These deliberations led to the formation of the Council for Cultural Co-operation and the eventual institutionalization of the Language Policy Programme in 1965. The subsequent years saw an escalating dedication to L2 education, symbolized by the appointment of "official modern language correspondents" (CoE, 2023) in member states by 1968 and robust advocacy for adult L2 learning and curricular inclusion by 1972 (Goullier, 2007; Jones & Saville, 2009; Papageorgiou, 2014; Sheils, 1996; Trim, 2007).

Amidst the growing traction of oral proficiency, a renewed discourse emerged around the need for proficiency measures that could accurately assess language growth and competence. Initiating these discussions as early as 1977, the Council of Europe's Language Policy Programme engaged in a comprehensive series of conferences and seminars aimed at fostering linguistic diversity and democratic citizenship. Discussions regarding "threshold level specifications" in 1977 culminated in the seminal 1991 symposium, where the groundwork for the ubiquitous Common Reference Levels was laid. The now-renowned alphanumeric rating system (A1–C2) has since become a cornerstone in language proficiency assessment (Goullier, 2007).

## **Alignment of Scales**

‘The Big Three’ serve distinct, yet occasionally overlapping, purposes. While the ILR's scale is primarily designed for professional governmental purposes, it is not wholly suited for

educational contexts. Indeed, the prospect of completing an academic language program only to receive an ILR rating of 0+ could be particularly disheartening for college L2 majors (Barnwell, 1987).

In response, ACTFL's Academic Scale recategorized the ILR levels of 3, 4 and 5 as 'Superior,' level 2 as 'Advanced,' level 1 as 'Intermediate,' and level 0 as 'Novice.' ACTFL provides a more relatable framework for what learners in academic settings are likely to encounter or be expected to accomplish in L2 courses. This reframing aligns more closely with educational objectives while also incorporating a language of expectation that is both accessible and motivational for students (Barnwell, 1987).

The CEFR operates on a six-tiered scale, a design choice that is consonant with its foundational objective of serving as a global reference for language proficiency. While it offers a broad-brush picture useful for international comparison and standardization, the granularity and nuance manifest in the ACTFL Proficiency Scale are somewhat diminished in the CEFR. The CEFR model's emphasis on offering a universally applicable system inherently limits its ability to capture the finer distinctions in skill levels and contexts that are the hallmark of ACTFL's more U.S.-centered approach.

**Table 1.1**

*A Crosswalk Matrix of 'The Big Three' Oral Proficiency Scales*

ILR	ACTFL	CEFR
4–5		—
3–4	Superior	C2
2+	Advanced High	C1
2	Advanced Mid	B2.2
2	Advanced Low	B2.1



**Table 1.1** (Continued).

1+	Intermediate High	B1.2
1	Intermediate Mid	B1.1
1	Intermediate Low	A2
0+	Novice High	A1
–	Novice Mid	–
–	Novice Low	–

*Note.* Adapted from Deygers (2021).

### **Benefits and Challenges of Implementing CDSs**

#### **Motivation, Self-Confidence, and Authentic L2 Use**

CEFR-informed instruction and CDSs positively influence student language proficiency by increasing motivation, building self-confidence, promoting authentic language use, and encouraging learner autonomy. CDSs make language learning transparent and enable learners to track their own progress, recentring the proficiency paradigm with each statement beginning with ‘I can...,’ orienting users towards success (Moeller & Yu, 2015). This empowerment is due to the incorporation of self-assessment into the framework (Faez et al., 2011; Moeller & Yu, 2015; North, 2014; Summers et al., 2019).

#### **Goal Setting and Monitoring**

Using a language portfolio based on CEFR principles, learners have experienced mixed reactions to self-assessment and goal setting (Kristmanson et al., 2013). Although some found it helpful in documenting progress, others viewed it as an imposition. The integration of CDSs and real-world scenarios is endorsed for enhancing teaching, learning, and the development of linguistic, learning, and metacognitive skills, adaptable to various contexts and proficiency levels.

## **Positive Language**

CDSs contribute to the incorporation of positive language, reorienting the proficiency paradigm and empowering students. This shift results from the embedding of self-assessment in the framework, which has been linked to increased motivation and self-confidence among learners (Faez et al., 2011; Moeller & Yu, 2015; Summers et al., 2019).

## **Self-Assessment, Reflection, and Critical Thinking**

Self-assessment methodologies, especially when integrated into CDS frameworks, foster heightened awareness, self-reflection, and engagement in critical thinking. They democratize the assessment responsibility between learners and educators, aligning with contemporary L2 education's focus on nurturing functional, socially engaged, and self-directed learners (Dörnyei, 2009; Summers et al., 2019).

## **Learner Engagement**

CDSs aim to cultivate sociolinguistic competence in learners through real-world tasks, fostering enhanced learner engagement. Self-assessment encourages learners to conceptualize their "possible selves," contributing to a more goal-oriented and enjoyable language learning experience (Dörnyei, 2009; Summers et al., 2019; Winke et al., 2023, p. 434).

## **Vs. Standardized Assessment**

While CDSs and self-assessment methodologies foster a more personalized, engaging, and reflective learning experience, their reliability and subjectivity have been questioned (Moeller & Yu, 2015; Shleykina, 2020). The challenges associated with their implementation require adaptation to specific learning environments and extensive preparation for both instructors and students. They are valid up to ACTFL's 'Advanced-Low' level (Tigchelaar et al., 2017; Winke et al., 2023).

## **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety**

Foreign language classroom anxiety can be mitigated with short-term goals enabled by CDSs. However, challenges exist, with some learners being uncomfortable or incapable of accurately self-assessing due to overestimation or underestimation of abilities, lack of confidence and training, and fear of incorrect self-assessment (Moeller & Yu, 2015; Summers et al., 2019). L2 instructors need and benefit from professional development and exemplars of student performance to integrate CEFR-informed instruction effectively into classrooms and alleviate anxiety (Faez et al., 2011).

### **Factors Influencing Foreign Language Anxiety**

#### **Academic Challenges and Pressures**

Alsowat (2016) illuminated the struggles students face, where the looming fear of failing courses, the ominous possibility of forgetting learned material, and an intrinsic uneasiness during tests cultivate a breeding ground for anxiety. These elements coalesce to form a formidable barrier to effective learning, driving a wedge between students and their academic potential. This was corroborated by Dikmen (2021), who introduced empirical weight to the discussion, showcasing a significant negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and language performance. This statistic stands as a stark quantification of the intangible yet palpable grip that anxiety holds over academic achievement.

#### **Psychological and Emotional Elements**

The labyrinth of the human mind, with its complex psychological constructs, finds itself at the mercy of foreign language anxiety, as asserted by Danilova and Rotko (2023). Self-perceptions and intrinsic beliefs about language learning are deeply entrenched, affecting students' learning. Bensalem and Thompson (2022) provide a lens into this intricate dynamic,

presenting findings that multilingual Saudi students, although experiencing lower English anxiety, are simultaneously plagued by a deficit in self-confidence. This paradox authenticates the complex, multifaceted nature of the psychological and emotional elements inherent in foreign language anxiety.

### **Instructor Influence**

The role of the L2 instructor surfaces in Alsowat's (2016) exploration, revealing an interconnection where the instructor's personality, behavior, teaching methods, and practices affect students' anxiety. This link is further emphasized by Yentürk and Dağdeviren-Kirmizi (2020), who found that students associated higher anxiety levels with native-speaker instructors.

### **Negative Educational Experiences**

Danilova and Rotko (2023) highlight a poignant reality for students from Russia and post-Soviet countries, where anxiety is not a distant specter but a tangible consequence of harsh and traumatic learning experiences with the Russian language. The profound impact of these negative language experiences beyond theory to a lived reality that shapes students' attitudes, beliefs, and performance in L2 learning.

## **Consequences of Anxiety**

### **Impact on Learning and Proficiency**

Dikmen (2021) examined the effects of anxiety on cognitive learning, interaction, and communication skills. The impacts unfold in real-time, spawning difficulties in focusing and precipitating lower performance scores. Alsowat (2016) contributes to this conversation with a constructive proposal, advocating for the introduction of welcoming classroom atmospheres and effective teaching methodologies to attenuate anxiety.

Alsowat (2016) draws a clear line connecting anxiety and language proficiency by quantifying this dynamic. Foreign language classroom anxiety can explain a staggering 37% of the total variance in language performance, a statistic that underscores the urgent imperative to address this pervasive issue.

## **Strategies and Solutions for Mitigating Foreign Language Anxiety**

### **Classroom Environment**

Wijaya (2023) elucidates transformative power of the classroom environment. Learning, interaction, and growth converge and thrive in the welcoming and positive atmosphere as preventative measures for anxiety. Alsowat (2016) extends this narrative, attesting to the indispensable role of well-designed syllabi and reliable, valid assessment as pillars supporting students' academic and psychological well-being.

### **Technology Integration**

Hamzaoglu and Koçoğlu (2016) and Bashori et al. (2021) navigate the intersections between technology and anxiety, unearthing the alleviating impact of technology-enhanced teaching and instructional websites. In the digital age, these tools have become integral in the relentless battle against anxiety.

### **Teacher Training and Methodologies**

Danilova and Rotko (2023) elevate the discourse to the arena of teaching methods and teacher training. The urgency to mitigate anxiety brings the need for refined training and resources to the forefront. Innovative L2 speaking learning activities and 'more enjoyable' experiences proved conducive to alleviating anxiety (Wijaya, 2023).

## **Research and Analysis**

Ekalestari et al. (2023) accentuate the relentless pursuit of knowledge, a journey where continuous research and analysis stand as the bedrock for understanding and addressing foreign language anxiety effectively across diverse contexts and landscapes.

Advancements in technology have been identified as significant in mitigating FLA that highlight the effectiveness of technological integration in language education. These approaches, particularly blended learning have been shown to significantly reduce language learning anxiety.

Nonetheless, educators are cautioned that online platforms do not universally resolve FLA issues. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, platforms like Google Meet, while widely used, did not necessarily address FLA, signaling the need for more nuanced and varied strategies.

Consequently, Ekalestari et al. (2023) advocate for a dynamic approach to research that keeps pace with the complexities of anxiety in language acquisition, bridging academic inquiry with tangible teaching methodologies. This effort is not just scholarly but also critically relevant to modern educational methods and the experiences of learners, who now navigate the ever-accelerating and interconnected world of the 21st-century.

## **Broader Insights**

Zhang (2019) offers a panoramic view of the foreign language anxiety landscape, asserting its consistent impact across decades and illuminating its undiminished relevance in the arena of L2 learning. This enduring legacy of anxiety is echoed by Mahammadi et al. (2013), who found a negative correlation between the utilization of language learning strategies and anxiety levels, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity in the ongoing quest to mitigate the impacts of foreign language anxiety.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored literature related language proficiency, CDSs, and foreign language anxiety. A brief overview of the language proficiency movement led to comparison of the ‘Big Three’ proficiency scales. Next, the benefits of challenges of implementing CDSs were explored, including but not limited to motivation, self-confidence, and goal setting. Finally, it concluded with the looming shadow of foreign language anxiety, dissecting its causative factors and its impact before illuminating various strategies for mitigation.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research sought to explore the experiences of undergraduate students with performing CDSs in FLF 101. With the pervasive integration of CDSs in L2 pedagogy (Faez et al., 2011; Lenkaitis, 2020; Moeller & Yu, 2015), students face a novel challenge, particularly when confronted with an oral exam in a language they are only beginning to grasp. These first steps in communicating in an L2 may conjure varied responses: manifesting hesitancy (May, 2009), heightened anxiety (Zhang, 2019) or, contrastingly, an increase in learner confidence or self-efficacy (Butler, 2018; Kissling & O'Donnell, 2015; Shleykina, 2020).

The inherent nature of test anxiety is daunting; compounded by the requirement of accomplishing goal-oriented tasks by uttering words and phrases in an unfamiliar language can potentially amplify this anxiety. The insights gleaned from this study can provide a more transferable understanding of students' CDS experience throughout an academic term, especially with regard to the evolution of cognitive and behavioral responses to anxiety. Harnessing this knowledge inform decision-making at the policy level, ensuring a more attuned educational experience for learners.

Given the alarming mental health statistics afflicting American campuses (Larson et al., 2022; Limone & Toto, 2022), a deeper inquiry into the nuances of the college academic environment, especially within the structured setting of classrooms, has become vital. The paucity of academic discourse focusing on this area gives further weight the significance of this study.

The increased scrutiny of student mental health in academic journals and in the media highlights ongoing efforts to better comprehend and support student needs, (Li et al., 2022), making the findings of this study relevant and timely. This is especially true at this research site,



which has experienced a high number of student deaths over the past year, the most recent occurring in September 2023. As many academic programs require students to take a certain number of language courses to fulfill their degree requirements (Gass et al., 2019; Papageorgiou, 2014), it is crucial to know more about how students are experiencing the testing environment, especially when oral exams administered via CDSs are involved.

This study specifically aimed to qualitatively address the following question: How do students' experiences with CDSs evolve throughout a semester in FLF 101?

In striving to uncover the intricate layers of students' experiences with performing CDSs in FLF 101, a qualitative approach emerges as the most apt choice. This methodology delves deep into the subjective emotions, interpretations, and perceptions of participants, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their evolving experiences (Kristmanson et al., 2013; Moeller & Yu, 2015).

The remaining sections of this chapter detail the study design and how the research was conducted. Following the justification for employing a qualitative methodology, I explain the rationale behind adopting a case study approach, and more specifically, for this inquiry. The following sections will delineate participant sampling techniques, elaborate on the data collection and analysis procedures, and address measures employed to ascertain the study's trustworthiness. The chapter will culminate with statements concerning researcher subjectivity, thus ensuring the transparency maintained throughout this analysis.

### **Research Design**

This section provides a detailed description of the design and methodology for the study. Beginning with the foundational principles of qualitative and case study research, it proceeds to delineate the rationale behind site selection and participant sampling. Following are explanations

of the methods of data collection and analysis employed. It concludes by addressing the study's trustworthiness and pertinent ethical considerations.

### **Qualitative Approach**

As this study explored the ways in which participants experience a certain phenomenon and their perceptions thereof, a qualitative approach was particularly well-suited (Merriam, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2018). The research question aimed to delve deeper into the participants' experiences, feelings, and perceptions that can be obtained by way of qualitative methods such as surveys and focus groups. Providing participants with an avenue to articulate their internal processes of emotions, thoughts, and introspections allows us to achieve a depth of understanding (Merriam, 2007; Miles et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Case Study Design**

Creswell and Poth (2016) state that obtaining a rich, intricate understanding of a question can only be achieved by way of directly engaging with those who experience the phenomenon. A holistic perspective of multifaceted concepts like perceptions and feelings regarding CDS experiences were gleaned from participant reflections and discussions thereof, painting a broad picture of otherwise intangible perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative inquiry was therefore beneficial to this study as it allowed for the interaction with and documentation of the CDS experience. Furthermore, this approach allowed for a comprehensive perspective as data from four distinct points in the semester were gathered, accounting for the multi-faceted nature of this case.

Qualitative methods bring participant narratives and insights to the forefront (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers employ qualitative data to examine imperceivable phenomena (e.g., experiences with CDSs in language classes) in detail through reflections and discussions that

emanate from participants' lived experiences within a specific context (e.g., FLF 101). This research approach was therefore structured to encapsulate the experiences with CDSs unique to L2 classes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

In their explanation of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) highlight the connection between the researcher and the research question while acknowledging the surrounding constraints. Qualitative data collection endeavors to paint a clear picture of phenomena, drawing from rich participant interviews using thick description to encapsulate the experience (Stake, 1995; Hyett et al., 2014). This investigative method was aptly chosen for this study, which sought to elucidate how students navigated their experiences with CDSs in FLF 101, as well how this type of oral assessment might be improved.

### **Case Study Design as a Method of Qualitative Inquiry**

#### **Qualitative Surveys**

Qualitative surveys emphasize qualitative research values and techniques, collecting intricate, detailed data for deeper comprehension of social phenomena (Braun et al., 2021). Unlike traditional surveys with predetermined responses, qualitative surveys encourage participants to provide responses in their own words, yielding intricate insights into their subjective experiences, narratives, and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). While individual responses might be succinct, collectively, they provide comprehensive depth and richness.

These surveys offer a 'wide-angle lens' (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2008) of the topic, capturing diverse perspectives and experiences, which proves particularly valuable for exploring uncharted or scarcely researched areas (Braun et al., 2021). Qualitative surveys accommodate extensive, varied, or even unspecified populations and ensure that no single respondent becomes

a sole representative of a particular demographic, avoiding the potential pitfalls seen in smaller interview samples (Braun et al., 2021).

Such surveys can prioritize a ‘maximum variation’ approach (Sandelowski, 2000), spotlighting diversity over typicality. Online surveys enable efficient access to vast participant pools, often a boon for projects with constraints on time, funding, or resources (Braun et al., 2021). Moreover, the digital platform ‘gives voice’ to those who might refrain from in-person research due to individual characteristics, expanding the breadth and inclusivity of qualitative research (Davey et al., 2019, p. 12).

### **Qualitative Survey Design**

For online qualitative surveys, the manner in which demographics are solicited is pivotal, especially as many researchers aim to prioritize participants' narratives over standard demographic labels. Often, while using conventional demographic selections, an option for 'other' with a specification field is added (Braun et al., 2021). This detail allows the data to shed light on how diverse groups experience CDSs.

Optimal qualitative survey questions are open-ended, succinct, and articulated with clarity and specificity. Assumptions about participants' perceptions, emotions, or experiences are conscientiously avoided (Braun et al., 2021). This particular facet was reduced as much as possible; however, the phrasing of the questions could potentially influence or prime some responses as they were adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986)'s Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey. Concluding with a broad question, such as 'Is there anything else you'd like to add?', allows participants to impart additional insights, potentially uncovering unanticipated valuable information (Braun et al., 2021). For this study, this broad question was posed in the focus group sessions.

The length of surveys was heavily considered and encompassed both the total survey duration and the number of topic-related questions. Typically, qualitative surveys feature a limited set of topic-related questions, although there are exceptions based on the study's focus. When centering on lived experiences and aiming for detailed answers, fewer questions generally yield better outcomes (Braun et al., 2021).

Piloting the survey (Willis, 2016) is a critical step in qualitative survey practices, with numerous facets to evaluate prior to its implementation. This study's survey was designed from the original Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (Horwitz et al., 1986) questionnaire; three of the 33 original Likert measures were eliminated for the pilot. After the participants indicated that 30 questions were still too many, I further reduced the number to the 21 most germane to the research question. The pre-CDS survey contained four qualitative questions and the post-CDS survey contained five qualitative questions.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus group research involves a small group of individuals discussing a specific set of topics. These groups provide a non-threatening environment, enabling participants to openly share perceptions, opinions, and feelings (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The core objective is to understand the beliefs, meanings, and cultures influencing individual attitudes and behaviors (Rabiee, 2004).

Focus groups stand out for their ability to produce data from group interactions (Green et al., 2003). The dynamics of the group allow members to engage and feel at ease sharing, even though some may require trust and effort for self-disclosure (Rabiee, 2004,). Students in this FLF 101 class had been in class approximately six weeks before the first focus group took place. The

social nature of the setting promotes a sense of belonging and safety, leading to richer interactions and more spontaneous responses (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Participants were purposively sampled, representing a specific, though not necessarily typical, segment of a population. This method captures a range of perspectives and emotions about particular issues, often unveiling differences in viewpoints between different groups (Rabiee, 2004). This particular FLF 101 class reflected populations from prior and following semesters as well as the overall demographic makeup of the university (Fast Facts, n.d.).

Furthermore, employing multiple focus groups helps researchers determine when saturation is achieved, ensuring a thorough exploration of the topic (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Depending on the research objective, focus groups can be used exclusively or alongside other methods (e.g., survey data). The results effectively provide a global picture of thoughts, feelings, or actions concerning a specific topic (Freitas et al., 1998). This study conducted two focus groups alongside the survey data to capitalize on the brief time frame for data collection. Hence, the strength of focus groups lies in its capacity to generate rich, diverse data that individual interviews might miss, owing to the spontaneous interactions among participants (Freitas et al., 1998).

### **Focus Group Design**

Homogeneity in focus groups is often valued, with many researchers suggesting that participants do not know one another to promote honesty and a wider range of responses (Rabiee, 2004). Students were randomized by using alphabetical order to create the focus groups for this reason, using the common denominator of enrollment in FLF 101.

Krueger and Casey (2009) advocate for groups of six to eight members, noting that smaller groups often yield richer insights. Rabiee (2004) suggests an optimal size between six

and 10, which strikes a balance: diverse enough to capture various viewpoints and manageable enough to maintain space for everyone to voice their opinions.

Should group membership surpass twelve participants, it is recommended to split the group if possible. Smaller group settings allow for a more in-depth exploration of each participant's viewpoint, although there's a trade-off in terms of potentially reduced productivity and increased cost. Larger groups present management challenges, often requiring more active moderation, stricter discipline, and proactive efforts to prevent side conversations (Freitas et al., 1998, p. 11).

The participants for this study were divided into groups of eight among five moderators: the instructor of FLF 101, three graduate teaching assistants, and the principal researcher. Two rounds of focus groups lasting 25 minutes each allowed for students to discuss their CDS experience. While the suggested amount of time is typically one to two hours (Freitas et al., 1998), the constraints of both the class time and number of participants necessitated this time allotment.

The caliber of responses hinges heavily on the quality of participants. Additionally, the foundation of a successful focus group lies in its questions. While these questions should appear spontaneous to participants, they need careful crafting and alignment with the research objectives. A standard focus group interview might encompass roughly 12 questions. This study asked 11 questions for both the first and second semi-structured focus group meetings. Unstructured focus groups moderated by the graduate teaching assistants yielded data different from that of the structured interviews, offering a more nuanced picture of the students' experience.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

To effectively capture participants' experiences and perspectives on CDSs in FLF 101, a multifaceted data collection strategy was employed. This strategy elicited qualitative data from both survey and focus groups, ensuring a holistic understanding of students' perceptions, anxieties, and performance outcomes related to CDSs. Data ranged from electronically submitted responses in surveys to handwritten and oral responses captured on paper and digital voice recorders.

## **Research Site**

This particular FLF 101 course was one of 33 first-semester L2 courses across five L2s offered during the spring semester of 2019. The French language section offered 20 other L2 classes that semester taught by 16 different instructors of record; they consisted of four associate professors, two assistant professors, nine lecturers, and one graduate teaching assistant.

In terms of enrollment, the French courses are overshadowed only by Spanish, which has historically been the case. As these two L2s attract the most students, all first-semester French and Spanish students are grouped into one (French) or two (Spanish) 'megasections' as opposed to being spread across sections of approximately 30 students each. The Spanish classes average 150 students per class, and the French classes 100 or 70 in the fall and spring semesters respectively. The distribution of graduate teaching assistants also reflected this disparity with Spanish courses having five graduate teaching assistants for each 'megasection' compared to the three graduate teaching assistants in the French course. The French class chosen for this study had 78 students enrolled.

To provide a broader context, the university recorded an enrollment of 33,724 students that semester. Among these, 4,288 were affiliated with the College of Humanities and Social



Sciences, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Breaking this down further, 3,437 were undergraduates in this college, and of these, 68 were new freshmen (Fast Facts, n.d.).

While FLF 101 might not boast the same enrollment numbers as its Spanish counterpart, its impact within the university's language program can be felt across the three-semester sequence that students complete per their degree requirements. Additionally, only the French language section was conducting oral exams via CDSs at the time.

### **Sampling Procedures**

Unlike quantitative research that may use randomized sampling procedures, qualitative inquiry primarily uses strategic and purposive sampling strategies (Merriam, 2007). In studying the dynamics of CDSs in the L2 classroom, the researcher determined a boundary (e.g., courses using a particular form of assessment) and a conceptual framework (social cognitive theory through the lens of foreign language classroom anxiety) and interviewed participants the CDS phenomena in this context, contributing the findings of research question(s) (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). As the primary goal is to deeply understand the nuanced experience with CDSs in FLF 101, the priority in selecting a sample is ensuring that the participants can provide rich insights into this phenomenon.

### **Purposive Sampling**

While purposive sampling remains a broad strategy, it encompasses several specific types, such as typical, unique, maximum variation (or theory-based sampling), convenience, and snowball sampling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Within the myriad purposive sampling strategies, Patton (2015) suggests that a critical case sampling approach can lead to localized generalizability of findings, enhancing their transferability to similar contexts. Given the widespread teaching of French at universities and the import of understanding CDS

experiences, many other language educators and institutions might find the insights from this study beneficial.

For this particular study on CDSs in the L2 classroom, FLF 101 was chosen for the students' similar characteristics and shared experiences within the university French program (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Some scholars, such as LeCompte and Schensul (2010), term this approach as "criterion-based selection." The idea is to identify and choose participants that meet the essential criteria for the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This strategy, which Patton (2014) calls 'homogeneous sampling,' aims at recruiting participants with shared characteristics or experiences, which may lead to understanding those shared attributes in-depth (p. 268). This approach was chosen to enhance the transferability of the findings and align the theory with the context of this study on CDSs.

In this research, the sample included the students enrolled in the course who performed CDSs as a required course component. A central characteristic of the chosen participants was their direct involvement or experience with CDSs in the French classroom setting, making them uniquely positioned to shed light on this specific area of interest.

## **Participants**

As CDSs already figured into the course administration and were clearly addressed in the course syllabus, an IRB for secondary information was submitted and determined to be exempt from further inquiry. The nature of the 'megasection' classes allowed for a large population, which would facilitate data saturation and meet the suggested requirement of at least 30 participants (Mason, 2010), indicating a potentially richer data set and more comprehensive representation of students' CDS experiences.

Initial contact was made with the FLF 101 instructor of record two months before the course began. The outreach entailed expressing an intent to gather data from the course for this dissertation research. Her support was instrumental: Not only did she permit observation and participation in data collection, but she also accommodated the integration of dedicated research days into the course schedule for focus groups. Her cooperation extended further by granting access to the class's data sets (which were purged of any personally identifiable information), and ensured students were familiarized with my role, thereby eliminating any potential element of surprise or discomfort.

Given the nascency of CDSs' implementation within the university and the singular section offering of elementary French during that spring semester, the potential pool of participants was inherently limited. The students enrolled in the course were thus automatically deemed eligible participants. That they were enrolled fortunately required no need for extended recruitment efforts such as flyers, meetings, or networking. These participants were ideal for the research due to their minimal exposure to CDSs and their relative novel experience with the French, given that FLF 101 is introductory level.

Despite the underlying structure of a class setting, ensuring consistent engagement from all participants proved challenging at times. Digital communication and reminders regarding data collection could not be ubiquitously assured to be read. Further, albeit expected, complications arose from student absences, leading to data gaps during both assessment and dedicated data collection periods. Fortunately, the pre- and post-CDS surveys averaged 70 responses, and the focus groups 35. This disparity of the latter is attributed partly to the unstructured protocol deployed in three of the five focus groups.

In case study research, the primary objective of data collection is to explore the complexities and particularities of a specific case or multiple cases within real-life contexts. Drawing from the insights of Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a consensus emerges regarding the importance of harnessing multiple data sources. Erlandson et al. (1993) spotlight the researcher's pivotal role as the chief instrument for data gathering in such qualitative research, explaining that the mainstays of data in case study research encompass "interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts" (p. 85).

For this study, the preeminent data acquisition method consisted of semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Such an approach aligns with the recommendations of scholars like Stake (1995) and Patton (2014), who have consistently highlighted the indispensable role of interviews as a method of data collection for case study research. The semi-structured interview protocol is pivotal in eliciting targeted responses, allowing participants the freedom to more expansively elucidate their experiences to provide a richer understanding of the case. This methodology grants the researcher the flexibility to collect structured feedback while enabling participants to reflect upon their experiences, thereby offering a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the case in its real-world context.

## **Qualitative Data**

### **Initial Reflection Survey**

At the outset of the course, participants completed an initial reflection survey about their feelings towards CDSs using Qualtrics. This instrument captured demographic data, history with language study, preconceived notions about CDSs, and self-perceived language proficiency after uploading a voice recording speaking French. The ACTFL proficiency pyramid served as a reference point to standardize perceptions of L2 proficiency.

Before completing the survey, the instructor used a PowerPoint presentation to remind students of the submission deadline, explained how to access the survey, and also introduced the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages inverted language proficiency pyramid.

Students could access the surveys in multiple ways, ensuring maximum coverage of data collection (Braun et al., 2021). The links were permanently housed on the university-wide learning management system, Moodle, to which all enrolled students had access. Following the class presentation, students also received a reminder email. All methods of delivery included the same information: the deadline, a QR code pointing directly to the initial reflection survey on Qualtrics, and a URL with the university's own branded link shortener to garner more survey engagement (O'Sullivan et al., 2017; Ramsden, 2010). QR codes were created with 'QR Code Monkey,' a free, online generator at <https://www.qrcode-monkey.com>. Students had the choice of scanning the QR code with a personal device or typing the shortened URL directly into an internet browser's address bar using a computer or any other device at their disposal. The QR code was revealed to be largely unpopular, accounting for 7% of all submissions.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

In an immersive participatory approach, the class was randomly divided into five groups to engage in two rounds of focus group sessions. These sessions occurred one class meeting following the initial and final CDS performances. To ensure consistency in data collection as well as to neutralize potential biases, the focus group leaders—the instructor, graduate teaching assistants, and the principal researcher—were provided with standardized interview protocols. These protocols detailed essentials to ensure the functionality of voice recorders and to establish an environment conducive for open dialogue. A crucial addition was the reminder and

demonstration to participants of how to respond by stating their participant number before speaking.

Given the expertise and familiarity with CDSs and American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages between the instructor and principal researcher, a semi-structured interview approach was employed to minimize the effects of diverse experience during questioning (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Conversely, the graduate teaching assistants were provided with an unstructured protocol, prioritizing spontaneity and organic student input from figures viewed more as peers rather than figures of authority (Chauhan, 2019).

Each focus group was conducted within the familiar confines of their regular classroom during the usual 50-minute class duration. The ambient dynamics of the focus groups varied with some choosing amphitheater seating, some opting for a standing discussion, and others seated informally on the floor. To ensure minimal interruption and maintain respect, voice recorders acted as a ‘talking stick.’ Moreover, participants were free to handwrite their responses, noting their participant number for reference.

### **Final Reflection Survey**

At the end of the semester, students revisited their CDS experience via a final reflection survey completed on Qualtrics. They compared their initial feelings and emotions about CDSs with those from the end-of-semester, introspected on their skill development from January to May, and estimated their progress using the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency pyramid after uploading a voice recording in French. Additionally, they were given the option to offer advice to future cohorts of FLF 101.

## **Data Collection Tools and Ethical Considerations**

The predominant tools in this study were Qualtrics for survey data collection, digital voice recorders and pen and paper for focus groups. No questions probed deeply into participants' personal lives, as the objective was to understand their experience with performing CDSs. Some students opted not to participate and were thus excluded from all activities related to the current study. To account for the graded component, the instructor provided the alternate assignment of reflective journaling that equaled the demand of participating in the study.

Participants were not privy to interim results or feedback, chiefly due to the time constraints faced by the researcher. The data collection phase was given precedence, with a plan for detailed analysis earmarked for a later, more feasible time.

### **Data Consistency**

Maintaining a consistent data collection procedure was paramount with such a large participant pool. All identifying data were initially linked to participant numbers for verification purposes. Upon confirmation of the corresponding participant number, any personal identifiable information was promptly purged to ensure anonymity and privacy. The data were examined to ensure that responses matched participant numbers throughout the semester by using the 'xlookup' function in Google Sheets. I then numbered each question to track them from collection to data analysis.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

### **Thematic Analysis of Written and Audio Data**

The collected survey reflections, written focus group responses, and transcribed focus group discussions underwent rigorous thematic analysis. This process began with a thorough familiarization phase, where all survey data were matched to participants and organized into a

spreadsheet. I began memoing while cleaning the data, noting any initial thoughts, emergent commonalities, and potential implications.

The focus group audio consisted of two recordings per moderator (five) per focus group (two), totaling 20. Each audio file was uploaded and automatically transcribed using the ‘Dictate’ feature in Microsoft Word 365. An initial comparison of the transcription to the audio allowed me to assign speakers for the entire recording and correct spellings or replace incorrectly transcribed words and phrases. I then made a second proofreading pass to account for suprasegmental or regional linguistic features such as natural pauses, false starts, and accents, which proved problematic for the ‘Dictate’ technology. Themes became stronger as each transcription was proofread, which I discerned by typing in all capital letters in my memo document.

After proofreading the transcriptions, the data were pasted from the Word document into the comprehensive spreadsheet. Fully immersed in the data at this point, I began an in vivo coding process in Dedoose to highlight primary patterns and keywords to code using the participants’ own words, forming the basis of the emerging themes. These themes were particularly attentive to students’ perceptions, feelings, anxieties, ability, and any recurrent phenomena throughout the course.

Once the in vivo codes were established, I integrated the following a priori codes, informed by this study’s conceptual framework: cognition (self-assessment, self-efficacy, emotions, feelings), environment (the CLC, feedback, interaction, opportunities for self-assessment), behavior (self-regulation, effort, achievement), and FLCA (communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative feedback). Codes from memoing were incorporated in a third step to this process.



A final set of codes was derived after comparing and reducing the developed codes. This final set served as the backbone of understanding this phenomenon, providing valuable insights into students' experiences with CDSs throughout FLF 101.

### **Qualitative Analysis Software**

Given the sheer volume of the collected data, Dedoose was employed to facilitate a more organized and visually intuitive analysis. The comprehensive spreadsheet was imported into the software, which automatically categorized the data per participant and question number.

Questions were punctuated with a question mark so the software could discern those data from descriptives. To initiate the data analysis, I processed each participant's media using the native coding functionality. The in vivo codes were reduced from 69 to seven before merging the 18 a priori and nine memo codes. Finally, these gave way to five overarching themes, which will be discussed more in depth in the following chapters.

### **Triangulation**

To bolster the credibility and validity of the findings, data triangulation was employed. This method cross-verifies emergent findings from one data source with another. In this case of this study, insights gleaned from both surveys and focus groups were cross-referenced with the conceptual framework, which is informed by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) and foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). This multiplicity of perspectives promotes a robust and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study, minimizing biases and enhancing the trustworthiness of the results.

### **Potential Bias**

As the principal researcher of this study on CDSs, I recognize the importance of acknowledging my personal and professional experiences, biases, and beliefs and how they may

shape this research. I bring to this study several years of teaching French and Italian at the post-secondary level as well as experience teaching at French immersion academies and directing study abroad programs. My interactions with students, witnessing their struggles, successes, and varied responses to different pedagogical methods and approaches, particularly those associated with CDSs, have undoubtedly influenced my perspective on this topic.

Presently, my professional role's chief responsibilities involve close engagement with the ILR Language Proficiency Scale. This proximity to the ILR offers me a unique vantage point when examining CDSs. Rather than perceiving my familiarity with ILR as a point of contention or bias, I view it as an asset. Knowledge of both scales enables me to approach CDSs from a multifaceted perspective, considering nuances and intricacies that might escape a more singular focus.

Through the years, I have witnessed both the empowering potential of CDSs and their limitations. I have also witnessed students who thrive atop its scaffolding, while others contend with its boundaries. Yet, it is essential to clarify that my perception of CDSs is not a simple binary of commendation or critique. It is rather a continuum informed by my understanding of language scales, including those from the ILR, ACTFL, and CEFR.

The depth of my immersion in the ILR and prior teaching experience could understandably raise concerns about their undue influence on my perception of this research. Nevertheless, this dual knowledge is what I believe to be one of the foundational strengths of this study. It has equipped me with an analytical lens that can discern subtle interplays and intricacies inherent to language assessment tools.

While I have ensured that participant responses remain uninfluenced by my stances, I acknowledge that my established rapport with students, peers, and colleagues might lend a

particular hue to their feedback. To counteract this, I have prioritized measures like participant anonymity and have encouraged a climate of candid feedback.

In essence, my commitment is to produce an exploration of CDSs that is both rigorous and enriched by the diverse perspectives from my own background. This research stands as a testament to my efforts to analyze CDSs in all their depth, leveraging both my experience and unique insights to interpret the findings as comprehensively as possible.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In the realm of qualitative research, issues of trustworthiness, reliability, and rigor stand at the forefront (Yin, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Bloomberg, 2022; Patton, 2002, 2015). Ensuring qualities such as transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability elevates the integrity and value of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Meadows & Morse, 2001).

In my research, constraints prevented prolonged engagement and collaboration with multiple investigators (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Yet, I will bolster credibility and confirmability through triangulating theories, survey data, and focus group data.

While generalizability is the gold standard for quantitative studies, qualitative findings are expected to be transferable (Creswell, 2013; Bloomberg, 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Patton, 2015). The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the insights obtained can be aptly applied in diverse settings and scenarios.

I have thus provided in-depth descriptions of the case, protocol, and data collection procedures to enhance transferability. These descriptions, along with the emergent themes, make these findings applicable elsewhere.

## **Conclusion**

For this study exploring students' experiences with CDSs, a qualitative approach was chosen to delve deep into the intricate facets of this recurring oral exam throughout a semester. The multi-pronged data collection began with a survey of initial reflections about performing the first CDS. Two focus group sessions, conducted in the familiar amphitheater of the students' regular classroom, provided a platform for open discussion to capture insights. Qualtrics played a key role in gathering reflection data, with rigorous measures in place to ensure data protection and participant anonymity.

Leveraging Dedoose for qualitative data analysis enriched the research process by offering insights into the emerging themes. The software's visualization capabilities facilitated merging data into intuitive themes, highlighting the students' CDS experience. Furthermore, a combination of methodological practices was instituted to enhance the study's trustworthiness.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

This qualitative study explored how students' experience with CDSs evolved throughout a semester in FLF 101. The research is framed in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) through the lens of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). This conceptual framework served as a springboard for analyzing and interpreting those experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to performing the first CDS, students completed surveys via Qualtrics to gauge their thoughts and feelings about the experience. These preliminary data served as a baseline for assessing how the experience evolved. After the final CDS, a post-engagement survey was distributed, offering insights into the evolution of the CDS experience.

To enrich the qualitative data, two focus group sessions were conducted in class following the initial and final CDS performances. These discussions allowed for an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, providing a nuanced description thereof. The class was divided into ten groups, with five concurrent sessions held twice, each lasting 25 minutes to fit into the regularly scheduled 50-minute class time.

### **Description of population**

The majority (69.2%) of participants ( $n = 78$ ) identified as White in terms of racial and ethnic background, followed by Black or African American (17.9%) and Asian (7.7%) representations. The predominant age group was 18 to 21 (83.3%). In gender distribution, there were more females (59%) than males. Freshmen (38.5%) and sophomores (30.8%) constituted the majority in terms of academic levels, and roughly half of the class (53.8%) had not studied French before. The majority (59%) were full-time students in terms of employment, and a notable portion (39%) worked part-time. Spanish stood out as the most commonly studied

language (37.2%) prior to FLF 101, and almost half (46.2%) had never taken a language in a formal classroom setting. While most individuals did not speak a different language at home, a select few indicated Chinese, English, Yoruba, Spanish, and Marathi.

### **Advantages, Limitations, and Challenges of CDSs: Into the Storm**

The data analysis revealed five overarching themes related to the FLF 101 students' CDS experience. These themes provided a holistic understanding of their lived experiences, capturing aspects such as their emotional responses, adjustments, the communicative nature of the course, insights into skills development, and the perceived utility of CDSs. Alongside each major theme, subthemes were discerned and examined within the findings.

Additionally, the data revealed critical spaces of profound impact, wherein students achieved or fell short of achieving their goals. Manifesting as a powerful inversion of Vygotsky's (1987) Zone of Proximal Development, the place of encounter moved inwards rather than out, effectively shielding students from FLCA.

Students encountered these spaces fraught with swirling emotions, which served as critical junctures that either propelled or hindered their progression along the CDS journey. Using the imagery of a hurricane, I liken the movement in and out of these critical spaces to navigating through the rainbands awash with FLCA towards the eye of the storm.

**Table 2.1**

*Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subthemes
Anxiety and uncertainty <i>The Outer Rainband</i>	General anxiety, unknown expectations FLCA (test anxiety, communication apprehension, fear of negative feedback, French pronunciation)

**Table 2.1** (Continued).

Adaptation and learning <i>The Inner Rainband</i>	Test preparation, challenges & motivation, forced engagement, self-assessment/regulation, in/ability, perceptions of effectiveness
Interaction and environment <i>The Eyewall</i>	The communicative language classroom, resources, the interaction-feedback loop, the ‘playing field’
Proficiency awareness <i>The Eye of the Storm</i>	Achieving ‘flow’, the freedom to make mistakes, self-efficacy
Real-world application	‘Actual’ conversations, genuine interest development, skill transferability

### **Theme 1: Anxiety and Uncertainty**

Anxiety did not so much emerge from the data; rather, its unrelenting, dominant presence imbued most facets of the entire student experience. The lens of the Foreign Classroom Language Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) naturally set certain expectations regarding the data. Incidentally, the unexpected revealed itself to be the other major contributing factor to this anxiety through both survey and focus group data.

This palpable sense of uncertainty begged further investigation. Test anxiety aside, the novelty of the CDS experience fanned the flames. Many students simply had never taken a test like this before. The compounding factor of speaking French did indeed materialize into foreign language classroom anxiety. As will be elaborated in upcoming sections, this juncture in the semester presented the first of two critical divergences, with one path more treacherous than the other. This is the outer rainband of the storm.

### **Theme 2: Adaptation and Learning**

A wave of relief washed over the class upon completing the first CDS, which confirmed the presence of foreign language classroom anxiety. This aspect of the experience was now

crystal clear, and expectations for CDS performances were established. Learning had occurred in real time facilitated by the interaction and feedback from peers and the instructor. Consequently, students began adjusting their individualized learning strategies mid-CDS in anticipation of the next. Doubts lingered, however, regarding grading criteria, specifically baseline expectations and allowance for mistakes. This concern opened the door to a formidable, underlying stressor: French pronunciation.

Gravitating towards familiar routines and patterns, particularly in the face of a high-stakes test, provided students some reassurance. That CDSs comprised 35% of the course grade maintained steady pressure on them to perform. Established expectations functioned effectively as long as testing conditions remained consistent; deviations from the familiar, however, led to student confusion and frustration. An unanticipated component of CDS performances for students was an inherent unpredictability: spontaneity. While this element served as a motivator for some, it had a discouraging effect on others. This is the inner rainband of the storm.

### **Theme 3: Interaction and Environment**

The element of spontaneity introduced the strategy of improvisation and adaptation. This also brought us to our second and final critical juncture of the semester. The approach with which students adapt to their environment became determinative of either overcoming the challenges presented by CDSs or acquiescing to fate. The role of instructors at this critical juncture was of paramount importance. Detailed at a later point, this moment served either as a beacon towards success or a riptide sweeping students out to sea. This is the eyewall of the storm.



#### **Theme 4: Proficiency Awareness**

Those who braved the peak of stress were rewarded with a clear perspective of their abilities. They understood where their limits lie while acknowledging their triumphs, however big or small. Moreover, they celebrated the fruits of their labor with classmates-turned-friends along the way. Groups of ‘regulars’ signed up to perform their CDSs together, capitalizing on the sturdy social support and forming symbiotic relationships. Before realizing it, this ‘test’ slipped into a conversation like any other—only in French. This place of support and comfort was free of judgment. It stood as a wellspring of confidence and pride. This is the eye of the storm.

Unfortunately, not all students found their way to this place of sanctuary. Various factors contributed to negative feelings, which blocked their path. These hurdles included the immersive nature of the CLC, the ‘megasection’ class, the tacit law of assigned seats, the overabundance of resources (or perception thereof), the ratio of content to pace, method of delivery for feedback, and difficulty adapting.

#### **Theme 5: Real-World Application**

As the semester neared its end, the impending tasks of the real-world refocused students’ attention. Interestingly, encounters with the unexpected outside the classroom were embraced. Before taking their final exam, students had already expanded their contact with French into their own worlds. They wanted more: more French speaking, more French music, more French movies. More can-do statements? For two, yes. Students expressed gaining a genuine interest in the language and culture and spoke of plans to incorporate it further into their lives.

Yet, the real world was not all sunshine and rainbows. CDSs still loomed on the horizon for the remainder of their FLF sequence. Furthermore, a three-month summer break stood between FLF 101 and 102. There were apprehensions regarding potential regression and the lack

of a review session upon resuming classes in the fall. Test anxiety continued to accompany them along the way.

Although CDSs essentially represented another test, students noted how their application throughout the course had poised them for success. They contrasted previous language experience with that of FLF 101, highlighting that the CLC appeared to be less common still. Students recalled prior language courses that emphasized rote memorization or lengthy presentations rather than engaging in ‘actual’ conversations. Though a three-month break might lead to some language attrition, students believed that FLF 101 equipped them with the necessary tools to face future challenges such as those.

### **Major Themes and Subthemes**

In examining how students’ experience with CDSs evolved throughout a semester of FLF 101, several themes and subthemes emerged. The themes drawn from the conceptual framework were both enlightening and reflected elements of the foreign language classroom anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) and the triadic reciprocity of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). The rich data set yielded surprising results at times within the subthemes, reinforcing the notion that CDS require some assembly before implementation. The data also provided insight into other manifestations of foreign language classroom anxiety while also shedding light on the strategies students employed to improvise, adapt, and overcome adversity. The themes are arranged chronologically, yet the cyclical pattern of the triadic reciprocity illustrates the multidimensional freedom of movement across themes.

#### **Theme 1: Anxiety and Uncertainty**

Using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986) as a point of departure, students indicated how they felt about performing CDSs at various points throughout

the semester. Prominent within the theme of anxiety and uncertainty are general feelings of unease and unpredictability. When pushed beyond their comfort zone, however, a critical space emerges where positive and negative feelings intertwine.

The way it went down, it was like—when we started, you know, we started ‘bonjour,’ and talking to each other. And then the questions come into play (P4).

### ***General Anxiety***

Data indicated a range of emotions both positive and negative, but students were overwhelmingly ‘nervous’ about performing CDSs; ‘anxious’ trailed not far behind. Related were feelings of fear, and the visceral feeling of ‘butterflies.’ Many recalled physical manifestations of this anxiety, such as shaking, voice tremors, stuttering, redness in the face. Some mentioned brief moments of hesitation during the task, where they paused to gather their thoughts before continuing. Procrastination and self-doubt also played a role in the students’ experiences. Some were initially apprehensive due to the uncertainty of what to expect but felt relief or increased confidence once the task was underway or completed.

### ***Unknown Expectations***

Following general feelings of anxiety was a fear of the unknown. Students expressed initial apprehension and nervousness when first introduced to CDSs, primarily due to unfamiliarity with its format and uncertainty about expectations. Despite available resources to facilitate preparation, students “did not know what to expect, so “the first one was just terrifying because I didn't even know the format” (P8) or “how the flow would be” (P33). Perplexity about the CDS persisted into the live performances as well. P59 recalled “I was talking to people, and I didn't know what was happening.”

Ultimately, no amount of preparation could fully replicate the bona fide testing experience. Many students did not consider the communicative activities in class ‘practice.’ Pointing out stark differences between the two settings, the pressure of performing without the safety net of notes or slides was ‘daunting’ and ‘nerve-wracking.’ Additionally, providing students with the CDSs in English offered little solace. “Even though we had the objectives, I didn't know what—exactly what—what we would be graded on, and what I would have to know or have to say” (P62). For many, the experience was quickly over. “But it felt like—before I did it, it felt like 10 minutes was going to be forever, and then we, like, did it. And I was like, well, this isn't too horrible, so...” (P73).

During the first focus group discussion, students debriefed their experiences. To their surprise, they learned that not all tests were considered equal, or so it seemed. Opinions varied regarding the extent to which the instructor’s intervention had been beneficial or detrimental. Other students wondered about the potential impact, positive or negative, of having instructors intervene at all. The onus was on them to lead the conversations while their professor observed and took notes.

The first CDSs were therefore not universally praised for reducing anxiety; however, students did use the experience to inform their approach moving forward. This seemed especially beneficial for improving pronunciation as students could verify immediately whether they were communicating effectively by “actually pronouncing things right” (P8). Versus the practice in-class activities, P74 says “I'm actually put on the spot and like, she tells me what I'm doing wrong. It's like, effective.”

Similarly, students noticed an immediate impact on their listening comprehension. “So having to really think about it, like hearing and processing that was really interesting, yeah” (P

53). P3 illustrates real-time language processing further, “But like when it’s spoken, I’m like, ‘What is going on?’ So, like, actually speaking, it is like a whole different experience, and it really helps understand, like, spoken French as well.”

### ***Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety***

As time progressed, nervousness about the CDS performance abated yet paradoxically, communication apprehension related to speaking French persisted. This language-specific anxiety can be largely attributed to pronunciation and remained a constant source of apprehension throughout the semester. “I just feel like speaking and pronunciation in any language is just my weakest point (P68). Students expressed being “afraid to mispronounce a word” (P62) or “articulate correctly” (P56).

Regionalisms also factored in, P51 noting that “It still sounds like an American take on the words instead” and P33, “I feel that I sound dumb—like a dumb country person trying to speak French.” Somehow, the corrosive notion of perfectionism had subtly infiltrated the class, prompting the need for “more practice perfecting the sounds fully” (P51). P67 lacked confidence “because what I did say wasn’t flawless.” This brings us the first of two critical junctures.

As awareness grew regarding the CDS performance expectations, it set the stage for a perfect storm of foreign language classroom anxiety and social cognitive factors. This daunting experience inevitably pushed students beyond their comfort zones. The emotions ran the gamut from extremely negative descriptors such as ‘dread,’ ‘horror,’ ‘hellish,’ ‘train wreck,’ to more neutral sentiments including, ‘we got through it,’ ‘not horrible,’ ‘not horrendous,’ ‘not as mediocre,’ and then to positive qualifiers such as ‘not as bad I thought,’ and ‘it was actually pretty easy.’

A number of students described a combination of feelings. Participant 44 succinctly wrote “horror, anxiety, determination.” P41 also highlighted a duality of the experience: “As I have never taken a spoken language before I am nervous to speak since I have had no practice prior. I also am excited for this same reason” (P41).

### ***The First Critical Juncture***

Empowering students was achieved by repositioning this ‘choose your own adventure’ hesitancy towards positive anxiety and away from its negative counterpart. A number of students discovered this potent formula and wielded its power to their advantage. Participant 44 described this feeling succinctly as “horror, anxiety, determination.”

Some students used this mixture of feelings to forecast the CDS experience. “I am honestly dreading it, but I am kind of excited to get the chance to work with my same group. I think myself and my group will start to improve and get more comfortable” (P66). The wavering emotions were audible as P5 recounted the first CDS in the focus group. “Scared and nerv—and like, excited. And yeah, and I was terrified the entire time, but it was—it was pretty fun.”

Acknowledging and leaning into any ‘awkward’ feeling was crucial. “It was pretty—it was weird. I think doing it, it took a while for my brain to think about what I was going to respond with and like, translate it from English to French. So that took a little bit” (P51). Given their limited vocabulary, indeed, the exchange felt “kind of slow and unnatural” (P46).

For many, this proved to be the first time communicating in a language other than English, which presented challenges as well as benefits. “It’s weird to hear yourself anyways and especially speaking a language that is foreign” (P35). “It was difficult since we were all new to French, so the conversations did not flow very well, making it difficult [sic] to start” (P70).

However, just, I was having a hard time—I think this was the first time I'd ever really conversed in a different language other than just maybe a few words, like 'bonjour' or saying something like 'hola.' So, like, it was a little, I mean, it was just hard to process things, but um—trying to be like, fast-paced like you would normally hold a conversation. But it was cool because you were like, actually seeing the words on the pages, like, actually coming to life a little bit more I guess (P53).

P5 recommended “[t]he way they should approach the statements is to know being nervous is okay.” The risk was ultimately worth the reward: “I feel that they are a relatively useful learning tool despite the stress they cause me” (P32).

In this space of excited hesitancy, the critical juncture was found. Critical due its gravity and its ephemeral nature. Fleeting, even. The reaction to the strange mix of feelings determined the trajectory towards subsequent CDSs as well as the approach to the course.

Faced with such nerve-wracking trials risked a complete imbalance of anxiety and excitement, tipping the scale towards the former. Maintaining equilibrium was therefore a precarious act. “I think that in the past I was overly nervous and stressed myself out more than I should have been, which sometimes led to the demise of my grade (P74).” Furthermore, some students faced obstacles soon after crossing the starting line. “At the beginning of the semester it felt like you were hung out to dry” (P43).

Instructors who developed an intuition for these challenges knew when to toss students a life raft when they feel “dead in the water, or [don’t] really know what to say...and that definitely [helps] a little bit” (P7). This support lays the groundwork for students’ adaptation and learning, where they begin to leverage their environment to address gaps stemming from their nascent yet improving language abilities.

## **Theme 2: Adaptation and Learning**

### ***Test Preparation***

In a marked departure from their first CDS experience, students now had clarity about the process and “what to expect walking into it” (P66). “I wasn't really sure what a can-do meant, so I was confused” stated P64. As they progressed, CDSs became “easier to do and prepare for” (59) with the added context of their prior experience. P55 noted “[w]e understand the flow,” and P22 felt they “kind of got down the system.” The modus operandi turned to ‘expect the expected.’

Students emphasized that uncertainties about the grading criteria contributed to the fear of negative feedback factored into their state of worry for the first CDS, but that they had since adapted their study habits to conform with expectations after receiving feedback and their scores. Galvanized with satisfying CDS results, P75 endorsed the textbook structure and vowed to use it to their advantage for FLF 101 and beyond. “The organization of it is really nice and I'm pretty sure they use this—I'm—I don't remember if that's right or not, but I think they use the same textbook for 102. (JLA: They do). Oh well, bless.” Students value consistency, relying on steadfast approaches to predict their success.

“They’re easy as long as you prepared and are exactly what you’re led to expect” was the advice offered by P28. Increasingly, students indicated that inconsistencies in test administration led to confusion and frustration, some students indicating an element of entrapment or deliberate challenges.

### ***Challenges and Motivation***

It had become evident that students observed and experienced variations in the test format across instructors. The extent of instructor intervention still differed. One student



commented, “I felt like I didn't speak enough and the TA did little to direct our conversations. I wish he had asked more questions” (P67). Several other students expressed the desire to “be prompted” (P27) and for the exchange to be “a bit more structured” (P70), or similarly structured across professors. “And then that kind of threw us off because I did prep more for this one more than I did the other ones, yet like, how the TA did it kind of confused the mess out of me” (P35).

The observed variation extended beyond these two groups, with evidence from others pointing to the same discrepancy. Interestingly, several of the students who experienced a more structured CDS experience pondered the potential benefits of having greater autonomy during the 10-minute process.

[W]hen I did my can-do statement it was more of like, the professor asking the questions, and then we answered while y'all had conversations. I was like, oh, we ain't have no conversation. But, so, I guess it would have been cool to see how that conversation would have gone, but like, it still worked out in the end, so (P2).

### ***Forced Engagement***

Within the existing course framework, the focus groups enabled students to reflect on how to better navigate uncomfortable silences during CDS performances. “There were like, a lot of long pauses in the group, especially when somebody would like, phrase a question that wasn't super easy to understand. So, it would like, definitely take a second to process that” (P57). Furthermore, these instances offered students a real-time gauge of their ability and served as an opportunity to self-assess.

### ***Self-Assessment and Self-Regulation***

Being placed under immediate scrutiny truly brought abilities to the surface. P48 recalled their false sense of confidence and its lasting effect throughout the semester. “[T]he TA's were

very encouraging. Even though I realized very suddenly that I did not know as much as I thought I knew, and I still have some of the anxiousness from that first experience...but not as much for sure.”

### ***In/ability***

Students began to understand that oral and aural comprehension was a gradual process, but that CDSs served as a roadmap. “They allow you to see how far you have progressed. They give a good indicator of what you should be understanding from each chapter” (P64).

Additionally, students adjusted their study schedules based on these markers. “They help me make sure that I am working at an accurate pace to succeed in the class. They also help me organize what I need to know at any point in the semester (P42).

### ***Perceptions of Effectiveness***

With limited ability in the beginning stages, students noted that the conversations could become stagnant and repetitive. For some, these situations did not allow them to reach their full potential. “It's not good enough for me. I do not like to consider myself a failure, but I feel like one when it comes to French as a language” (P31).

Students identified a balanced benchmark for instructor intervention during these moments of pronounced silence. The perceptions of effectiveness largely outweighed those of ineffectiveness when this formula was employed. “I was really surprised by how laid back it was. Like, we were just sitting there, and like, [INSTRUCTOR] would give us some prompts, and we would talk and, and it was. It was a lot less intimidating than it sounded. And yeah. So, hopefully it goes well. It was fun. I enjoyed it” (P23).

Rising to the challenge was also deemed an accurate indicator of current proficiency. “It tests what you know off the top of your head” (P77). Under the right conditions, students not

only recognized the value of performing CDSs but also came to appreciate the experience. P66 said,

Initially I was not very confident in my ability to perform Can-Do statements. I had never spoken French and did not know how I would do. But as we did more, I realized that the Can-Do statements, actually speaking French, was the best way for me to learn the language and I came to really look forward to doing them.

### **Theme 3: Environment and Interaction**

#### ***The Communicative Language Classroom***

The FLF 101 used a flipped approach, so class time was well spent practicing the language. P37 remarked on the transformation required in order to succeed:

I think it's effective for like, the self learner [sic]. Like, when I just started this course, I had a hard time like, coming to class and speaking stuff because I didn't learn all the stuff before I came to class. I feel like I learned a lot by myself on iLrn. Then I will be able to recognize those words. Otherwise, I—I can't....

Fortunately, the CLC environment bolstered confidence in the social dimensions of interaction to create safe spaces for risk-taking. “With the new friends that I have gained throughout this course, I feel like I have gotten more confident about my speaking. I know that if I mess up, I will still have friends that are willing to help” (P43). This is the same student who, weeks before, felt as if the CDS experience left them ‘hung out to dry.’

Despite the budding social dynamic, the omnipresent shadow of foreign language classroom anxiety became inescapable at this point. The persistent uncertainties, and the gradual accumulation of pressure to perform in French once again create a recipe for the perfect storm.

## ***Resources***

The digital era allows for the instantaneous effortless exchange of information, which manifested in the challenge of sifting through the plethora of available resources, if students needed. P60 rather appreciated the “clear black and white” simplicity CDSs as a tool for guidance and success. Indeed, the CDSs were “very specific about what I must be able to do” (P60). P11 preferred this direct approach while simultaneously underscoring the scaffolded progression as well of the CLC. “I sort of just went to the learning outcomes and having already seen them and said them in class, you kind of could just recall back to what you've already done.” In fact, P11 “[s]tudied off of learning outcomes exclusively.”

Yet, for others they were not specific enough. P58 mentioned the utility of a study guide for written tests, a resource that lacked for CDS. “Like, we were told the questions you were going to ask, but were we supposed to just, like, look up how to say the answers to those questions? Like, I don't know.” Cue an unexpected guest into the arena of classroom anxiety: the paradox of plenty.

## ***The Paradox of Plenty***

At first glance, advice directing students to “Read the textbook!! It is so helpful!!” (P19) seemed like obvious conclusions. “Each time you come to a ‘Oui, je peux’ section in the book, DO IT! Write down the questions/answers/statements. Then, study these for the can dos” (P62). Using the class slides in tandem provided contextualized examples that students had practiced in class and were “actually extremely helpful” (P61).

Others found the textbook to be woefully inadequate. For instance, the glossary did not include “all the words” (P51). Additionally, the inclusion of pronunciation into the textbook would further enhance its utility. Students often turned to Google Translate for its functionality

in both translation and pronunciation. The intricate labyrinth of materials along with the added pressure of the CDS performance was revealed to be a source of great stress and frustration.

During the second focus group, which took place following the fourth and final CDS, P51 discovered that the textbook did, in fact, include a glossary. They had instead been referring to vocabulary introduction pages, which reflect only the key terms for one particular lesson.

Also embedded within the digital textbook were pronunciation features, activated by mousing over the word in question. While P51 instructed me to disregard their concern about the glossary, this oversight made salient a needless contributor to general anxiety. The confusion over resources diverted many students' attention, putting them at a disadvantage even before they started preparing for the CDSs.

In FLF 101, a large portion of class time is allocated for oral French practice, ostensibly supporting the processes of self-assessment and self-regulation. However, the vast 'megasection' format was not optimal. Some students felt overshadowed in the expansive setting, affectionately known as “the fishbowl.” With instructors spread thin across the expansive classroom, students predominantly relied on their peers for feedback, making it challenging to identify and rectify errors before examinations.

The pace at which both the classes and overall course progressed daunted students as well. P58 observed this particularly for novel concepts. “We go very, very fast and like, for people who haven't seen things before, like, to just like, look at one slide and then we repeat it back to each other a few times, and then we kind of move on. Like, sometimes it's like, a little overwhelming” (P58).

Further, students feel locked into seating arrangements, which do not allow ample time for practice in groups of three versus two. “I know where I sit, like we have an—an uneven

number of people. So, I have a group of three. So, when we start talking like we get cut off a lot by like just how fast we're going through the slides” (P57).

The perceived urgency extended beyond the individual concepts covered in class. In terms of instructional continuity, P63 would have preferred if “the teaching assistants took an entire class rather than just one portion.” The accelerated pace culminated in the CDSs, with students now finding 10 minutes too brief. P13 felt nervous for this reason, which resulted in forgetting “things because [of feeling] so rushed during the can-do statements” (P13).

### *A Question of ‘Where?’*

The immersive aspect of the CLC, while beneficial for language acquisition, can exacerbate feelings of anxiety for some students. In a classic case of ‘forest for the trees,’ the anxiety was glaringly evident as students continually vented their frustrations with ‘questions’ during the last focus group.

This challenge manifests most distinctly when students grapple with their inability to pose questions. Questions are, undeniably, fundamental in sparking and sustaining dialogues. However, the delayed introduction of interrogative adverbs, such as ‘when’ and ‘how,’ until chapter four left many students perplexed, considering these terms could have been instrumental from the outset.

Seven of the 24 CDSs in FLF 101 begin with “I can ask...”; the second CDS of FLF 101 reads, for example, “I can ask someone else if that person does particular activities or not to see if our activities are similar” (Wong et al., 2016). P58 found themselves ‘Google translating how to say questions...which, weren’t always the like, most correct way to ask questions in French.’ This perceived drawback ignited an impassioned discussion in the focus group. P23 said,

It would—it would help—we learned the—what the questions were for this course in the fourth chapter at the end of the class, after we've been using the questions all semester, which seemed a bit ridiculous to me. But I feel like that would have helped, like, with—because I had problems finding the questions too, that I was supposed to ask during the can do, so I feel like you know, like, that would have helped significantly more if that was kind of at the beginning, you know, but otherwise....

P19 agreed “that learning the questions at the beginning would have been way more beneficial than learning them right at the end because [they] would have to basically look up question words [they] hadn’t been taught...yet.” P17 “eventually found the questions” but considered this quest to be “one of the most stressful parts about CDSs.”

Intriguingly, students had inadvertently complicated the paradox of plenty and heightened anxiety during CDSs by extension. The CLC's immersion was so profound that students overlooked the fact that they had been posing these notorious questions from the outset of the course in the very first activity.

Communicative activities typically begin by asking questions. For example, the task of greeting and introducing oneself might begin with, “Hello, how are you? What’s your name?” Furthermore, exemplar dialogues are projected on the screen, mirroring the textbook activities they derive from. Yet, P17 was not “able to find the questions in the book or in the PowerPoint.” They, too, “would resort to going to Google Translate and typing in the word...or the question that [they] wanted to say, and then it—it would be something that [the class] hadn't even learned yet.”

This snowball effect of stress then infiltrated the CDS experience, as the unfamiliar words “would confuse [their] group members” (P17). Expecting to hear a classmate ask, for

example, “Do you like to swim?” versus a translation of “What particular activities do you like to do or not and which of those activities are similar to mine?” naturally engendered a great deal of stress for both parties.

The storm was brewing, and the need for a supportive framework became evident. Thankfully, this aspect is built into the CLC.

### ***The Interaction-Feedback Loop***

There was a subtle, yet extremely powerful difference between “It wasn't terrible. We got through it” (P2), and “we were kind of in the same boat, and we were having the same conversations that we were a few days ago together” (P44).

The pressure of the CDS performances served as extrinsic motivation, and the seeds of confidence had begun to sprout. Evidence of their growth appeared in French expression, which, albeit limited, led to ‘actual conversations.’ Moreover, to their surprise and delight, CDSs were enjoyable. And useful.

Spontaneity challenged students to improvise and draw upon skills honed or realizations from prior experiences. Talk of know-how “to like, kind of work this system” began to crop up. One group of students resorted to the timeless “fake it till you make it” strategy, seemingly unaware that they were fully realizing the intention of the task. P31 said,

So, it's like while we're doing it, even if we're messing up, we're sort of pretending as if we're doing it perfectly. You know what I mean? So, It made it a little more fun during it because we knew we were messing up, but pretending like we weren't.

For some, upcoming CDSs loomed ominously on the horizon, and even into the next semester. “Like, they would pop up, and I'd be like, like I don't want to do that” (P73). The



anticipation colored their outlooks. “So overall, it wasn't horrible, just like waiting up to it was bad” (P41).

A second pass through the gauntlet signified a turning point for students with a negative outlook. CDSs mutated into an encumbrance, and this feeling remained constant: “I just tell myself I have to do it” (P58). “I feel less sad after I do them now” (P55).

While CDSs, viewed as ‘necessary evils,’ served as key assessment tools, it is the students' perception of them—as burdens or as opportunities—that truly marked the second critical juncture in FLF 101.

### ***Leveling the Playing Field***

The complexity of CDSs was escalating, and the students were becoming acutely aware of it. “Since everything had been like, compounding on each other and all the material was getting harder, I was worried.” Interrogatives continued to haunt students, and the conversational aspect remains a source of apprehension. “I thought the questions were harder than the responses because like, I don't know, I practice more of the responses than the questions” (P56).

And yet, students began to see a glimmer. They realized the power of co-constructing meaning in order to overcome their fears. “[T]he questions were getting harder. So, like, I didn't know everything that the professor was saying, so I had to rely on everyone else's answers to kind of put mine together (P60).

P56 employed a similar strategy. “I wouldn't necessarily understand the question, so I'd have to like, let somebody else answer first to see kind of what they said.” There is a tinge of guilt in making this maneuver for not having adequately prepared, but they justify using this strategy directly after. “I mean, I feel like I could have been more prepared and studied more for it, but I didn't realize how broad of like questions and topics we would be talking about (P56).

This feeling of guilt might elucidate why some students identify the need to seek support but stop short of signaling an SOS to their peers. Instead, they “just kind of go into auto pilot when doing them” and struggle in silence and frustration for being unable to “pull the word I’m looking for when trying to get a point across” (P57).

P73 goes further to explain that speaking with strangers still contributes to their communication apprehension. “I think I’m nervous before every single one of them. Like, no matter how much I prepare, I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh.’ Like, I have to talk in front of these people that I don’t always know because it’s a random spreadsheet.”

### ***Face to Face with FLCA Embodied***

Tensions reached an all-time high as the semester pressed on: The pace felt rushed, the material increased in difficulty and in quantity, and students struggled to effectively use their resources. Curiously, some students harnessed the inherent pressure to their benefit.

“[CDSs] give me an opportunity to practice the language and receive feedback from friends. I also like that we get the chance to meet our classmates” (P4). P64 added, “I also have found a group of motivated students to help me study and we have a great time.”

The ‘thriving’ students honed their communicative skills and leveraged the social construct to forge friendships, which in turn helped in tempering anxiety. The ‘surviving’ students narrate a contrasting story at this critical juncture. The manner in which students adapted at this precise point determined their trajectory towards success or downfall.

Instructors wielded significant influence during this phase, especially if students perceived they were a contributing factor to their anxiety. The magnitude of this moment required delicate handling, particularly given its transient nature, reminiscent of the initial emergence of the critical space.

At this critical juncture, however, the storm raged. Students who lagged behind grappled with heightened vulnerability, especially juxtaposed against their thriving counterparts. Anxiety began to crumble into feelings of hopelessness, abandonment, disappointment, and failure, placing these students at arguably their most susceptible state.

### ***Uneven Playing Fields and Moving Goal Posts***

Initially, the perceived variation in peers' language proficiency seemed intriguing. "I thought they were kind of cool, but like, it was weird that people had different levels of, like, how well they could speak French" (P20). This gap in abilities coupled with the inexperience in social interaction strategies did not bode well. "I had no clue what they meant. And then I was saying stuff I'm pretty sure other people had no clue what I meant. So that was kind of like, I don't know, off putting" (P20).

P17 empathized with this experience, noting the difficulty in listening comprehension. "I know at least one girl had taken French before and she was very, very fast, very fluent, and it was hard for me to kind of keep up with [them]." Nor was this an isolated incident. "I'm going to be honest. A lot of the conversation that we had, I didn't know what was going on, but I understood like, some keywords. I think just because so many people were on different levels, it made it harder."

Ultimately, the pernicious disparity across multiple course factors became the most egregious source of anxiety. Different proficiency levels, different group synergy, different CDS experiences.... Different expectations from instructors led to frustrating confusion. For this reason, P18 did not feel prepared for any CDS, not knowing if they were "actually right" when speaking French. Regrettably, the unclear standards for achieving a satisfactory grade had left P21 perplexed once again:

I felt pretty apprehensive about the first can do but got more confidence as the semester progressed. After doing badly on the third one I felt confident that I could prepare adequately for the fourth one. Despite studying quite a bit and feeling like I did well on it I got a 60 so now I'm just confused.

The rushed pace would unfortunately leave some collateral damage in its wake. P31 explained the detriment to initial excitement about performing CDSs:

I thought I'd learn well and they would be fun to grow as a class into being able to communicate. I feel like as the class progressed they became less and less enjoyable whether from my inability or class load. I ended up just wanting them to be done.

The peril of falling "behind at all during the semester" meant that they "were behind for good" (P31). P33 also "fell behind the curve," and although they indicated being "fine," feeling "fed up with French" suggests otherwise.

Conducting a focus group brought me closer to understanding one of the primary causes of this anxiety. P35 expressed a desire for more speaking opportunities in class, recognizing that partner dialogues were taking place. However, they added, "but half the time when we do that, I still don't really know what we're talking about, so..." I checked with the group to verify that no one sought clarity, and the collective response was, "Yeah, just kind of go with it."

These students suffered in the aftermath of a recent brush with foreign language classroom anxiety. Once the fragility of that critical juncture had been compromised, their disengagement from the course and the class was palpable. Ranging from despondency to resentment, a singular traumatic event dampened the entire semester.

P45 “wholeheartedly agreed” with another student regarding the option to perform CDSs with the instructor of their choice. They pointed out that differences in grading rigor “can kind of skew your grade at times.” P45 continued:

At the beginning of the semester, I hated can-do statements. Now that it's the end of the year, I still hate can-do statements. I think that they're important in understanding and communicating the language. They are definitely helpful, but I guess I just don't like the way that they're structured. One professor does them differently than the other and so that adds more stress that isn't needed. I want to be able to focus on studying the material, rather than stressing because I do well for one professor but that might be terrible for another professor.

While the damage had cut deep, recovery was possible. P45's story did not end in doom and gloom. In fact, it now had a silver lining. Tensions eased upon finding solace in the support of a newfound social structure. Given another, final platform with the post-CDS survey, there were evident signs of healing. P45 successfully made it to the eye of the storm:

I think that I still dislike them as much as I did, but it's better and easier now that I have made friends that I feel comfortable messing up around them. Also, I have gotten really comfortable with one professor that I never got to speak with.

#### **Theme 4: Proficiency Awareness**

##### ***Achieving 'Flow'***

Reaching the eye of the storm enabled students to strive for their maximum potential by effectively clearing the haze that foreign language classroom anxiety casted upon perceptions surrounding their ability.

Students often described their CDS experience in terms of ‘flow.’ At times mysterious, at times ‘messed up.’ Or ‘just kind of, like, weird.’ When students came to understand that proficiency might inevitably involve making the occasional or oft error, they began to willingly take more risks. As a result, “French is less scary of a language” (P49). P13 feels “kind of cool being able to say some things.”

Students began to achieve ‘flow’ by tapping into the social aspect of communicative competence inside and outside the classroom. Even Mom was proud. “I’m pretty hype about it because like, it’s a running joke with me and my mom that like I will never pick up any language. So, she’s happy I can say ‘oui’ now, so that’s great” (P3).

These small feats were far from negligible. Recognizing incremental successes heightened awareness and fueled motivation. “I did not know a lick of French starting out besides “Oui.” I am happy about the progress I have made and look forward to making more” (P5).

Students felt accomplished when demonstrating their skills, noting that informal measures of self-assessment could be fun. “I can tell my friends like, oh, this is what a tree is and just random stuff and make little phrases. Like, if I’m bored in my English class, sometimes I try to translate to see if I can, and it just helps. So, it’s fun” (P13).

### ***The Freedom to Make Mistakes***

Outside the classroom included all family members. “I can talk to my cat in French to practice which is silly, but it helps me just think in the language” (P13). Though it might appear trivial initially, a forgiving and supportive platform demonstrated to students the essence of venturing into the unknown. Embracing vulnerability and taking risks paved the way for self-assessment, which fostered confidence and elicited empathy from peers.

Witnessing peers' shared struggles proved to be more beneficial than being intimidated by comparing skill sets. Moreover, extending proficiency awareness to that of others helps students better navigate the uneven terrain to locate steppingstones rather than plummet down slippery slopes. It became "[a] little more comfortable knowing that everyone is around the same level as me" (P51).

Achieving 'flow' effectively reduced foreign language classroom anxiety, and specifically, the fear of negative feedback and communication apprehension. Proficiency awareness therefore extended beyond self-assessment in this case. Recognizing others' limits and strengths facilitated a deeper understanding of the social landscape, enabling collaborative efforts to attain common goals. The sooner students realize this, the more they can capitalize on the comfort of a safe space. The freedom to make mistakes released anxieties tethered to the CDS experience.

I feel like going forward just cause I was really, really nervous before and I like, didn't know what to expect, and I didn't think that I'd be good at it, and like, knowing that I'm like, at the same level as the rest of my classmates is really just comforting because I just like, don't feel behind. I don't know why I felt behind before, but.... I don't know it like, is a level playing ground I guess. And I'm like, excited to be able to keep learning how to keep speaking. So...(P41).

At the start of the semester, students were preoccupied with mistakes and a sense of discomfort, stemming from the unfamiliarity of the situation and uncertainty about what lay ahead, thus inhibiting the 'flow.' "But when it comes to speaking, especially in like, a freeform conversation, I do get like, tripped up just because I don't necessarily know how to structure things in the most like, grammatically correct way to keep a conversation like, flowing" (P57).

### *Glow with the ‘Flow’*

Achieving ‘flow’ with CDSs equated to becoming engaged with the content to the extent that students effectively lose awareness of being in the testing environment.

I think a lot of how anxious I was feeling middle way once it started, especially with a couple of like—especially moments like, within it, where it actually turned into more of a conversation. It definitely helped, like, kind of reassure me that, oh, I kind of do know more than I think I may know. Or something like that, instead of just like, it's seeming more like a test, and then those few moments where it just flowed nicely, it felt more like a conversation (P49).

The instructor’s role in achieving and maintaining flow cannot be understated. Furthermore, they helped even the playing field by admitting and acknowledging that imperfection is a shared human experience, themselves included. Unwittingly during the first focus group, one of the graduate teaching assistants encapsulated this sentiment for the students.

And that's to be expected when you're first learning a language. And actually—so, if you happen to make an error while you're speaking and you notice and you correct it yourself, that's just as good as if you had taken time and not made the error. So, we don't want you to be too stressed about having perfect language, because in English we make mistakes too, right? And we catch ourselves and we fix it in normal conversation, so. We don't want you to stress too much about being perfect because we don't expect you to be perfect. I'm not perfect in French either (GTA2).

In terms of intervention, the graduate teaching assistant emphasized that instructors steering the conversation disrupts the ‘flow.’ “We—we usually step in like if we feel like the



conversation needs it and—but mostly, we're trying to get you guys to have a good—a feel for a normal conversation.”

The collective efforts of self-assessment, self-regulation, encouragement through social structure, and the interaction-feedback loop concocted a magic formula for achieving ‘flow.’ P49 affirmed the success of this strategy:

I felt the feedback was all pretty positive, because you were trying to make sure we still stayed encouraged in French. You didn't want us to feel like all of a sudden, we just tried speaking and we sucked. So, like, I felt like that was really good because obviously I was worried about it. And then all of a sudden, I had [INSTRUCTOR] and [they were] really uplifting after the whole thing and I was like, OK, cool. I did a lot better than I thought I was doing.

### *Self-Efficacy*

From within the sanctuary of ‘flow,’ students acknowledged the journey they had embarked upon. They exuded pride and a sense of accomplishment and felt comfortable maintaining a grounded view of their skills. The genuine connection to their peers and instructors enabled students to filter distracting anxieties from the environment, allowing them to relax into the situation. “I calmed down a lot more once we started, as I got into the flow of the conversation” (P68). P30 still felt nervous before CDSs, but during it “began to chill out.”

P53 felt ‘super relaxed’ to the extent that they “talked as much as [they] could and gave it [their] best shot.” Further, they appreciated being “able to control where the conversation went” in a “really comfortable setting.” With a “definite” sense of “no judgment,” P53 felt encouraged to take risks: “Like, hey, talk as much as you can and like, say what you can.”

These sentiments echoed throughout the class, with P74 noting increased comfort levels due to familiarization with peers and TAs who were not “laughing at” them “or judging every move and mistake” (P74).

The shared status of novice speakership took the edge off any pressure to be flawless. P21 emphasized that “not being able to speak it well wasn't really as much of an issue.” The freedom to make mistakes also led the way to make more realistic self-assessments about abilities. P41, “happy with” their progress, noted that while “it’s definitely not perfect, it’s much more than” they knew a few months prior.

Reflecting on their journey from January to May, P33 encapsulates the essence of 'getting into the flow' with a simple statement: “I wasn’t scared to try.”

### *Awareness of Difficulty*

Confidence in speaking French remained a challenge for many students. P35 deliberately rated themselves lower on the ACTFL proficiency scale due “to the the intense nervousness” they felt when speaking French.

The awareness of difficulty seemed to be a motivating factor for many students. Besides, “[s]peaking French is not an overnight thing and requires practice and patience” (P31). P66 highlighted inherent complexities in modality, emphasizing that reading and writing might come “almost easy” while listening “to what’s being said that form a sentence and speak it.”

P42 and P53 stressed the importance of immersion and real-world application, contrasting non-CLC rote learning with CLC practice that requires on-the-spot comprehension and response. They believed that diving into immersive experiences, “forcing yourself to listen carefully and like, pick out the words you do know” is vital for growth, even if it demands

immense effort. So having to really think about it, like hearing and processing that was really interesting” (P53). “You just have to like, try really hard” (P42).

P63 advised future students to practice and collaborate with their groups before the 'can-do' activities to manage expectations and ease anxieties. Emphasizing the benefit of these activities, P41 encouraged students to see the value in 'can do' statements as they truly aid in language learning. “Please don’t hate can do statement [sic], it helps you.”

### *A Way Forward*

Students recognized the importance of having a solid foundation in their French studies, expressing both excitement for future learning and apprehension about advanced grammatical topics in upcoming classes. They appreciated the tangible milestones provided by the CDSs, which acted as clear markers of their progress.

Over the course of the semester, there was a notable shift in confidence levels, with many becoming more comfortable with making mistakes, understanding that it is a universal part of the learning process. The curse of ‘perfection’ had been mostly dispelled. P69 grew to understand that “every learner for any language will make mistakes during speaking tests;” and that “not everyone's going to be perfect.” Forecasting the upcoming FLF 102 course, P41 said, “I think it's going to be difficult, but not impossible.” P31 agreed, despite the feeling like they were “trash at French.”

Even as they acknowledged the challenges ahead, particularly for those advancing to higher-level courses, there was an overall sentiment of growth and accomplishment. Feedback from instructors played a pivotal role in shaping their learning experiences, with students valuing a balanced approach of constructive criticism and positive reinforcement. “So, it was a good balance of like, OK, this is what I need to work on. But like we've made it a long way. So far.”

### ***Demonstration of Abilities***

When P8 started FLF 101, they “didn't know nothing.” They grew from “literally thinking 'oui' was spelled 'we,' like 'W-E'” to being able to form sentences. P48 acknowledged that CDSs enabled them to overcome the “block of not being able to get into a flow of the sentence. I can do better moving forward.”

Despite occasional mistakes, students like P71 appreciated the “opportunity” to showcase their knowledge. P61 highlighted the significance of these assessments in understanding the language and communicating effectively, while also offering instructors insights into tailoring lessons plans per observations made during CDS performances. “You obviously can't just look at French and expect to learn it. It can also show the professors what you know and what they need to work on teaching you.”

P70 and P24 both valued the conversational aspect of the assessments, emphasizing how they go beyond just knowing vocabulary to have an ‘actual conversation.’ They provided a glimpse into the real-time processing during the CDSs. “OK, I know what this word means. I know how to use it. I know how it like, it plays a role in a sentence” (P70).

P24, in particular, enjoyed the casual format of the CDSs, finding them more relaxing and a good indicator of students' capabilities. “It was a good way for students to show their skill set. P71 succinctly summed up the sentiment with, “They are actually helpful.”

### **Theme 5: Real-World Application**

Building upon the foundation of their evolving confidence and comfort with the French language, students began incorporating French into their own lives. Beyond CDSs, language proficiency encompasses 'actual' conversation, genuine interest, and skill transferability.

### ***‘Actual’ Conversations***

Swept into the ‘flow,’ P38 began to see how CDSs had evolved into conversation, including natural pauses. “And then it’s—if I didn’t know it, I just stopped for a second, thought about it and then kept going. It wasn’t like, I just—I had more confidence, so” (P38). By the end of the semester, students largely equated CDSs with ‘actual’ conversations that might transpire in a “native speaking country” (P42).

Initial perceptions of CDSs as redundant quickly shifted when students recognized their importance in facilitating ‘actual conversations’ beyond memorizing isolated vocabulary words. P21 had deemed CDSs “pointless” until recognizing their value in applying those skills in real-world situations. CDSs “forced” students to assemble the pieces into “cohesive conversation” (P65), viewing the 10-minute window to speak French as an ‘opportunity.’ This approach had been often overlooked in non-CLC classes, such as in several students’ high school experiences. “Actually, having conversation helps you understand it more (P51).

### ***Genuine Interest Development***

P17 believed that actively speaking the language is essential for learning, while immersing oneself by “listening to French music” also aided in pronunciation. P52’s positive experience with the class led them to revisit beloved movies dubbed in French, driving their enthusiasm to learn more. P49 took immersion even further by setting their phone’s language to French, ensuring constant engagement with the language.

Real value became evident as P41 applied their skills to befriending French exchange students. Building genuine connections and gaining confidence in their ability to apply what they had learned from engaging in authentic scenarios. “It makes me proud knowing what I learned as it applies to real life.” P3 added, “I feel like I’ve finally earned myself a trip to France, and I feel

pretty good.” Overall, the experience of speaking French in a group setting, though initially intimidating, became “just a normal conversation” for many students.

### ***Skill Transferability***

Real value became evident when students, like P41, were able to interact with native French speakers, building genuine connections and gaining confidence in their ability to apply what they had learned from engaging in authentic scenarios. CDSs transformed classroom learning into tangible, real-life communication skills.

The CDS experience from FLF 101 highlighted for students, like P58, the attainability of mastering a new language. Discovering “how comprehensive” they would be able to speak with depth of vocabulary and verbs they acquired not only enhanced their confidence in learning French but also opened their minds to the potential of successfully learning other languages. P66 affirms this possibility by acknowledging that with a modicum of effort, “If I truly try to learn French, I can!” (P66). P48 looked “forward to learning more French” as they could “now see it as obtainable.”

### ***From ‘Can-Do’ to ‘Fully Capable’***

P49's CDS journey in FLF 101 is notably distinct. Initially apprehensive about the “fear of being incorrect” in French, the impact of CDSs cascaded into various aspects of their life. Having no prior experience speaking French, P49 now actively sought out French-speaking Uber drivers for the sheer thrill of it— “just to seem cooler and stuff like that.”

Furthermore, P49 is determined to tackle one of the few sources of foreign language classroom anxiety to penetrate the eye of the storm, and it is not the challenge of scrambling for words. “I am fully capable of figuring out the words I need to use. The biggest thing that I need to work on now is pronunciation.”

P49 was able to direct their focus on this linguistic endeavor having overcome a hurdle far more imposing. “I have been able to prove to myself that I can speak French which has helped my anxiety go away.”

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the findings gleaned from student surveys and focus groups administered and conducted over the course of the FLF 101 semester. Participants completed surveys to describe emotions, feelings, and manifestations thereof as well as perceptions regarding their oral proficiency. Both semi-structured and unstructured focus groups asked participants to reflect upon their experience performing CDSs in French.

The findings identified five overarching themes related to the advantages, limitations, and challenges of implementing CDSs in language courses. While test anxiety remains prevalent, students demonstrate resilience in confronting this task, with their anxiety often stemming from the unfamiliarity of CDSs and uncertainty about the format or deviations from previous CDSs.

The communicative environment facilitated ample interaction between peers and peers, and peers and instructors, fostering an environment where students could hone skills towards achieving course outcomes. Despite this, some students felt overwhelmed or considered performing CDSs a burden, leading to confusion or feelings of inadequacy. Although confidence grew with respect to navigating CDS performances, this did not always translate to a greater confidence in skill demonstration, especially with regard to French pronunciation. However, students acknowledged the practicality and utility of CDSs, emphasizing their role in relevant real-world scenarios.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

This qualitative study sought to explore how students' experiences with CDSs evolve throughout a semester in FLF 101. CDSs were examined within the context of education and have been deemed effective for increasing language proficiency and self-efficacy. Additionally, the environment in L2 classrooms is often laden with the pressures of academic responsibilities, fear of negative evaluation and ensuing consequences. Strategies for mitigating anxiety and promoting positive, supportive learning environments were implemented. Yet, anxiety still persists.

By analyzing the data about the FLF 101 CDS experience, five themes emerged. These insights can inform the implementation of CDSs in the L2 classroom, as well as policy implications concerning the stressors of student life and ways to address them.

### **Summary of Student Experiences**

Throughout FLF 101, the student CDS experience transitioned from initial skepticism to appreciation. Theme 1 highlighted the pervasiveness of anxiety and uncertainty in the learning process, especially due to the novel testing format of CDSs, which contrasted with traditional L2 assessment. Theme 2 delved into adaptation and learning, spotlighting the evolving confidence students developed as they became familiar with the CDS framework. This process involved grappling with the unpredictable nature of CDSs, where the fixed grading structure sometimes clashed with spontaneous conversational elements and across instructors.

Themes 3 and 4 elaborated on the critical role of the learning environment and the support system within the CLC. They stressed that student success hinged on effective and thoughtful instructor guidance during vital junctures of the learning trajectory.



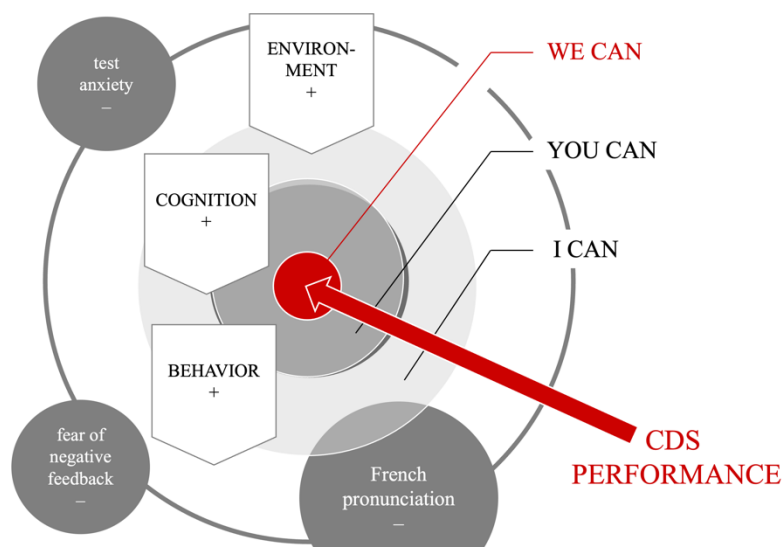
In reaching this proficiency awareness, students gained clarity about their linguistic abilities, celebrated their milestones, and formed supportive bonds with peers. However, not all students reached the same levels of proficiency or self-confidence, with some encountering great challenges that CDSs posed.

Lastly, Theme 5 emphasized the practical, real-world application of skills gained through performing CDSs. As the semester culminated, students took their newfound French skills beyond the classroom, integrating them into their daily lives, and voicing their enthusiasm for continued learning. Despite some apprehensions about future courses and the potential for language regression, students felt the foundational CDS approach in FLF 101 equipped them to face future linguistic challenges effectively.

### Discussion of Findings

**Figure 2.1**

*Revised Conceptual Framework with Findings*



The revised conceptual framework with findings integrates four pivotal elements central to the CDS experience: the CDS performance itself, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) (Horwitz et al., 1986), socio-cognitive triangular reciprocity (Bandura, 1977), and Vygotsky's (1987) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Each element interacts, influences, and is influenced by the others, constructing a complex, dynamic ecosystem that defines the student's journey through foreign language learning.

Stopping short of using an atomic structure for legibility concerns, that shape would better represent the dynamics surrounding the CDS experience. The dynamic, encompassing nature of FLCA components and triangular reciprocity do not operate on a fixed continuum such as the progression of time. Nor are they unidirectional. Neither is it fully captured by the two-dimensional representation of triangular reciprocity.

Further, a two-dimensional model is inappropriate for visualizing the intricate dance of elements within this phenomenon. It is rather a continuously flowing interaction where cognition, behavior, and the environment live and breathe. They revolve around the commanding presence of the CDS performance, the only constant within the model, exerting its gravitational pull and anchoring these dynamic interactions.

The previous conceptual framework inadequately encapsulates this complex, ever-changing landscape. The shifts and adaptations are not static or predictable. Each CDS experience, rich in its uniqueness, breaks free from the confines of structured patterns and deterministic rules. It is a realm where spontaneity, unpredictability, and FLCA reign, painting each student's journey with distinct strokes of challenges, adaptations, and triumphs.

The core of the CDS experience, the CDS performance, is the practical application of cumulative learning outcomes. It is not just a test of knowledge but an arena where skills,

emotions, and psychological elements converge. It is the epicenter where the perfect storm of anxiety, the support of reciprocity, and the shelter of the ZPD intersect.

FLCA encapsulates the emotional and psychological challenges students face. Its shadow, lurking behind the entire experience, often influenced the CDS performance. Addressing and mitigating FLCA was central to liberating students' full potential and optimizing the CDS experience.

Triangular reciprocity embodies the intricate interplay between the student, the learning environment, and the learning process. It underscores the symbiotic relationships and the dynamic exchanges that shape and are shaped by each actor. Triangular reciprocity is pivotal in amplifying or mitigating FLCA and in optimizing the ZPD inward creating a safe space that allows for mistakes and provides recourse when needed.

An emergent, yet integral actor, the ZPD encapsulates the critical space where learning is most effective. In the context of CDS and FLCA, the ZPD can be seen as a sanctuary, a protective shield where students are insulated from the intensities of anxiety and are optimally positioned to leverage the supports embedded within triangular reciprocity.

Adopting the analogy of a storm, the CDS experience revolved, evolved, and devolved over the semester. In this context, the ZPD, which now overlays the experience, encompasses various aspects of this metaphorical storm, including the inner and outer rainbands, the formidable eyewall, and the serene eye of the storm. Additionally, triangular reciprocity fortified the walls of the ZPD, shielding students from the elements.

Each socio-cognitive factor, marked with a '+' symbol, exerts a predominantly positive influence, contributing to the students' resilience and adaptability amidst the challenges. The 'environment' aspect is placed at a relative distance from the core, signifying the limited control

students possess over this external element, underscoring the adaptive and responsive nature of their journey through the storm of the CDS experience.

The arrow pointing inwards signifies the students' progressive journey towards the eye throughout the semester, illustrating a reverse dynamic from the original ZPD model. In this adapted representation, the critical space for development is situated at the core, marking a departure from the original design where growth radiated outward. Students initiate their journey from the peripheral ring, navigating through the concentric layers of challenges and lessons learned. Setbacks and solutions.

The transformation in the students' self-perception is encapsulated in the shift from uncertainty to the empowered declaration of 'I can....' This evolution underscores the influence of CDSs' positive language, which reframes the narrative around students' capabilities rather than inabilities. The absence of the phrase 'I cannot' accentuates the positive, encouraging ethos of CDSs, fostering a narrative of capability and progress rather than limitation and constraint.

As they progressed towards the outcome of the CDS performance, students, under the aegis of their instructors, began to recognize and tap into their latent abilities. Instructors acted as the compass, guiding students through the storm in achieving incremental successes. In a way, this forward perspective mirrors that of the classroom, in which students observed the expert.

When engaged in communicative activities, students navigated back and forth to the peripheries, using the 3-2-1 scale for self-assessment, reflection, and self-regulation. The CDS experience was the culmination of observation, hands-on practice, and demonstration of abilities. No longer a solitary endeavor moved together into the space of collective ability, where students and instructors co-constructed conversations using their combined strengths within the safety of the eye of the storm.

The ‘ideal’ exists at the heart of this model, wherein students felt protected from the elements, shielded by the eyewall, which was fortified with behavioral, cognitive, and environmental factors. In this critical space, students felt ‘comfortable’ and ‘relaxed.’

Comfort emanated from the supportive scaffolding provided by friends, peers, and instructors. Relaxation is a by-product of a leveled playing field where the freedom to make mistakes is not only permitted but embraced. This liberating atmosphere propelled students to take risks, not be ‘scared to try,’ and have fun. Comfort was found in the structural support of friends, peers, and the instructor. A sense of relaxation brought on by a leveled playing field and the freedom to make mistakes encouraged students to take risks, to try, to have fun.

The concept of ‘flow’ is achieved within this nurturing ideal. As students became aware that language proficiency did not equate flawless language production or effortless task fulfillment, their conversations began ‘to flow.’ Additionally, realistic expectations of their abilities enabled students to send out an SOS and appeal for help when adrift by listening to students passively, using their strength and assurance as a guide. Students responded to those calls actively and proactively, at times preempting a signal flare by guiding the way. By demonstrating that ‘I can.’

The outer rainband, while ‘scary’ and ‘unexpected’, yielded mild levels of anxiety levels where fear intermingled with excitement. The inner rainbands intensified anxiety and pressure. Swirling about were heightened emotions, the immersive CLC classroom, and deviations from the expected. The eye represented a sanctuary amidst the turmoil—an oasis of calm where whipping wind and rain were held at bay. Therein lay a juxtaposition where the chaos remained visible yet distant, offering students a momentary reprieve, an opportunity to bathe in the calming waters of ‘flow.’

The cyclical nature of the course structure allowed for some regularity in the experience: six content classes followed by one CDS, then a chapter exam occurring four times within the semester. The evolution and devolution of the experience differed at the individual student level and was dependent on a multitude of factors.

In the context of FLF 101, the element of unpredictability operated as a double-edged sword. Fear of the unknown, moving goal posts, and uneven terrain cut sharply and deeply. Yet, forging friendships and the spontaneity of each CDS generated ‘actual’ conversation— “just in French.”

For lack of a better term, the CDS experience lived somewhere between the ‘spin cycle’ and ‘tumble dry.’ Passing through the rainbands left students feeling uncomfortable, awkward, and weird. The primal urge to flee to safety following each CDS ‘cycle’ was amplified by the resonating echo of collective relief in the aftermath.

Yet, amidst the unpredictable storm, an undercurrent of transformation flowed. From the discomfort emerged warm friendships and feelings of happiness, pride, and being uplifted. Bouncing around and clashing within the entire CDS experience all the while were the dark gray circles of FLCA and shields of socio-cognitive factors.

This revised conceptual framework highlights the centrality of CDS performance, albeit diminished in size to encapsulate the concentration of energy and fragility of such a delicate, critical space. The CDS performance stands as a testament to the interplay of power and fragility that characterizes the student’s CDS experience. At the heart lies an ephemeral sanctuary echoing the dichotomy of resilience and vulnerability. Small but mighty, resilient but fragile, compromising the integrity of this critical space created an imbalance with the potential to send students hurtling well beyond the orbit.

The outermost gray circle represents the boundary of the entire CDS experience. Dominating this landscape are the three components of FLCA. Amongst them, French pronunciation emerges as the reigning force, casting its extensive shadow into the ZPD, ever present. Though formidable, it does not act alone; test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation trail in its wake, their presences, though less pronounced, still potent.

Each anxiety is labeled with a ‘negative’ symbol, bearing witness to their predominantly adverse influence within the landscape of the CDS experience. Yet, it is crucial to recognize the fluid nature of this influence. While formidable, their power can be used for good, spurring self-regulation, individualized learning plans, and communities of practice.

In summary, the four elements within this model interacted in the follow ways:

**CDS and FLCA:** The CDS performance is often influenced by the intensity of FLCA. A higher anxiety level can impede performance, while strategies to mitigate anxiety can enhance the outcome.

**FLCA and Triangular Reciprocity:** The dynamics between the student, learning, and environment can either fuel or mitigate anxiety. A supportive environment and effective learning strategies can reduce anxiety.

**ZPD Interaction:** The ZPD emerges as a critical space where learning is optimized. It is influenced by the FLCA and is shaped by the dynamics of triangular reciprocity. A supportive environment and reduced anxiety facilitate an effective ZPD where learning thrives.

**CDS and ZPD:** The CDS performance is optimal within the ZPD. Navigating through the ZPD, students are insulated from the debilitating effects of FLCA and are empowered to perform optimally, benefiting from the supports embedded in triangular reciprocity.

## **Conclusion**

The CDS experience unfolds and evolves within the concentric circles of the CDS performance, each layer echoing the multitude of influences and energies that converge within the storm. The smaller embodiment of the CDS performance in the revised framework highlights not its diminution but the concentration of energies, the collision of forces, and the delicate equilibrium that defines this ethereal space.

The updated conceptual framework epitomizes the complexity and dynamism of the CDS experience. It is not a unilateral, linear journey but a multidimensional expedition marked by the intricate interactions between CDS performance, FLCA, triangular reciprocity, and ZPD across the space and time of FLF 101. This framework serves as a lens, offering nuanced insights into the students' journey, unveiling the opportunities and challenges embedded within, and illuminating pathways to optimize the foreign language learning experience. It is a microcosm echoing the resilience and fragility, the power and vulnerability, that breathe life into the unfolding narrative of the student's journey amidst the storm and sanctuary of the CDS experience.

## **Implications**

### **The Importance of Tailoring CDSs to Context**

Every educational setting is distinct, characterized by its unique blend of student demographics, institutional norms, curriculum designs, and overarching educational objectives. Building upon this premise, the effectiveness of CDSs is intimately linked to their adaptability—their capacity to be tailored to the specific contexts in which they are employed.

Recalling the CEFR's foundations from whence CDSs come, it is worth reiterating the intended use as a heuristic rather than a prescriptive policy (North, 2014; Piccardo, 2020).



ACTFL (2017) further emphasizes that CDSs be tailored by implicitly stating that they are not to be used as checklists, set curricula, or definitive grading tools. Therefore, CDSs should reflect the communicative activities students engage in during class. Minor modifications can encourage students to adapt their skills, but this is effective only if they are informed that such changes might occur.

Contextual adaptation ensures that the content and format of these CDSs resonate with students' learning needs, effectively providing direction for students as well as standardized benchmarks for assessment. An illustration of this can be seen when adapting CDSs to the curriculum allowed students to frame them as having an 'actual' conversation, which many found to be "super laid back." Drawing from student experiences, P12 remarked, "At the end the can-dos felt more like actual casual conversation as opposed to reading a script."

Moreover, given that a considerable portion of class time is devoted to honing oral skills, the testing environment should emphasize the concepts that were practiced most in class. In a flipped model, students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with class content in advance. This ensures that classroom sessions prioritize speaking and language practice instead of revisiting ideas already presented in the textbook and workbook.

To further elucidate this point, consider that digital migration of written tests maintains validity (Tigchelaar et al., 2017; VanPatten et al., 2015), and students understand the process of completing exercises online. One practical suggestion that emerges from this alignment is the move to take paper tests online. Doing so would leverage the advantages of the digital realm and align assessment methods with contemporary practices, further enhancing students' engagement with CDSs.

The pitfalls of a generic approach or a one-size-fits-all methodology can potentially undermine the effectiveness of CDSs. Their true “power” and “effectiveness” lie in the flexibility to be molded, refined, and aligned with specific educational contexts and settings. This adaptability ensures that CDSs are both theoretically robust and contextually relevant, substantially enhancing their impact on student learning, engagement, and language mastery (Moeller & Yu, 2015; Shleykina, 2020; Faez et al., 2014).

When students recognize the practical application of CDSs in context, it fosters growth beyond simple memorization of words and phrases. Apart from language acquisition, its effectiveness also permeates into socio-cognitive domains. P12 delighted in their progress: “I am very proud of myself because I do not pick up languages easily, but I know a lot of French so far.” P57 grew in terms of their communication apprehension, “especially with speaking in front of other people.”

Additionally, students realize that they can learn. Several expressed a deep sense of pride and satisfaction in their progress in learning French. P12, P57, P20, P69, P49, P47, and P41 all communicated a feeling of accomplishment. On the other hand, P32 and P17 acknowledged that while they had made strides, there was still much more to learn and improve upon.

Further illustrating this commitment to learning, P17 had plans to dedicate the summer exclusively to improving their French proficiency. Additionally, there was palpable enthusiasm for the continuation of the learning journey, which was “pretty cool” (P49); P41 was “eager to keep learning,” and P8 was “excited to learn more.” Despite nearing graduation, P22's aspirations remained intact, hoping to continue learning the language with a diploma in hand.

While students felt overwhelmingly proud of their progress, they also maintained realistic expectations within their unique journeys. P40 was pleased and had not anticipated such

significant progress, and P36 was proud of the modest gains they had made. On the other hand, P32 felt they had made some progress, but “but nothing too significant let alone worth bragging about.” P59 recognized improvement and limitations, writing, “I have gotten better, but I am still not good.”

P35 noticed a marked improvement; at the start, they could only introduce themselves in French, but by the semester's end, they were able “to add more to that” and felt “less awkward when speaking French”. P62 celebrated their newfound ability to read “the French from this class” and looked forward to their next two classes. P45 observed their growth from “a little French” to “some sentences.”

CDSs provided face validity for the course, especially when framed in terms of progress. P68 was not only proud of their own achievements but also appreciated the teaching methods employed by the instructors. P15 found it easier to engage in more extensive discussions in French. P51 reflected on the substantial progress made in a single semester, surpassing their initial expectations. P48 felt more confident in being understood by native French speakers, marking a significant milestone for them. P67 summarized their growth from knowing only a few vocabulary terms to a much broader understanding.

In sum, the utilization of CDSs offers a multifaceted approach to language learning that prioritizes adaptability and context. By aligning them with individual educational settings and student needs, educators can foster an environment where students not only acquire language skills but also develop confidence and a genuine appreciation for their progress. The testimonials bear witness to the value of this personalized approach, emphasizing the need for educators to continue refining and adapting CDSs to maximize their power and effectiveness.

## 21st Century Skills

In today's complex, fast-paced, and interconnected world, 21st-century skills have become vital for surviving outside the walls of the classroom. These skills are integral to navigating and thriving in the modern landscape, and are spread across three categories: learning, which encompasses critical thinking and problem-solving; literacy, marked by digital, technological, and cultural knowledge; and life, characterized by adaptability, leadership, and social skills (P21, 2019; Carey, 2016; DeMillo, 2011; Woldeab & Brothen, 2019). CDSs when effectively implemented, can be instrumental in nurturing this skill set.

CDSs promote active learning and engagement, compelling students to process language, articulate their thoughts to the best of their abilities, and collaborate with peers. Without much direction or contextualization, the first CDS performance can prove to be a formidable task. P33 stated, “I’m very hesitant, and I don’t flow.” P12 initially found it “stressful” to form questions when working with students they “didn’t really know.” Comparable experiences stimulated critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, with students showcasing adaptability and resourcefulness when faced with stress and discomfort. P10 felt inspired by the feelings of “weirdness” and said, “I look forward to practicing speaking in this way to show what I can do.”

By the end of the semester, P2 felt more at ease collaborating with acquaintances, as they could comfortably discuss and strategize their conversation. “The last one was more relaxed. I did it with people I knew, and we met up to talk about how we wanted to take the conversation, so that helped.” P11 became “more confident in letting a conversation flow” while P2 “studied way less” owing to their adaptability and employment of social skills.

In fact, there was a subtle shift in language from ‘I’ to ‘We’, reflecting the transformation of personal responsibility to collective goals. “We understand the flow now,” said P55, and P44

became more confident with the support of friends they had “gained throughout the course.” The safety net of “friends willing to help” for when they “messed up” contributed greatly to the boost in confidence. P39 recognized that the “teachers were there to help” and their peers would “not judge.”

Some students viewed their propensity to assist others as an opportunity to demonstrate leadership ability.

At the beginning of the semester, I think that I was relying on the people in my group to lead the conversation. I was able to gather more confidence throughout the semester.

With the new confidence I had at the end of the semester I feel like I was able to help lead the conversation more (P46).

P53 found it comforting encouraging to know that the group could decide “what we talked about, or what we said” as they could “lead where the conversation went.” Students also identified specific situations to avoid in order to avoid forcing the conversation; instead, they introduced broad topics to facilitate more natural interactions.

Students adapted more than their approach to collaborating; some shifted their entire mindset about approaching CDSs. “Finally, my mindset of performing has changed from trying extremely hard to speak French correctly to having a conversation in French. It wasn't about the grade but trying to speak french [sic] (P60). P72 echoed this, speaking to the need to be “more dynamic and make sure you could answer your questions kind of on the spot.” P33 found spontaneous conversation much more beneficial than rote repetition. “Actually having to process and come up with an answer versus something that’s kind of pre-populated to say” would “make them learn” and “be a little more fluent.”

In the context of foreign language learning, the nuanced, interactive nature of CDSs makes them potent tools for developing communication skills specifically. Students are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in dialogues, discussions, and debates. They learn to articulate simple to complex ideas, listen attentively, respond thoughtfully, and respect diverse perspectives, which represent core components of effective communication.

Furthermore, the collaborative aspect is inherent in the CDS process. Students engage with peers, communicate thoughts, and build upon each other's ideas. This interactive, collaborative learning environment fosters a sense of community, mutual respect, and collective problem-solving, which is conducive to developing language proficiency as well as social, emotional, and interpersonal skills.

Incorporating CDSs within the educational curriculum is thus not just a step towards enhanced language learning but a stride towards equipping students with the multidimensional skills essential for the 21st century. Every conversation, interaction, and exchange within the CDS framework is an opportunity for students to refine these skills, preparing them to navigate the unpredictable playing fields of the modern world with confidence, competence, and adaptability.

### **Student Mental Health**

Research indicates that student mental health is a cornerstone of effective learning and overall well-being (Larson et al., 2022). However, it is often compromised by anxiety and stress, particularly in challenging academic environments (Lipson et al., 2022). Specifically, within the context of foreign language learning, the introduction and refinement of CDS must be approached with a heightened sensitivity to students' mental and emotional states (Broton et al., 2022).

CDSs, celebrated for their effectiveness in language acquisition and skill development, can inadvertently heighten anxiety levels due to the real-time, extemporaneous nature of the assessments (Lamis & Lester, 2011). Moreover, any perceived inequities throughout the class can engender a descent into feelings of frustration, inadequacy, loathing, and hopelessness (Sontag-Padilla et al., 2018). Consequently, educators and curriculum developers must strike a delicate balance, ensuring that the learning experience is enriching and transparent, yet not overwhelmingly stressful (Lattie et al., 2022).

It is paramount to adapt CDSs to students' learning paces, cognitive capacities, and emotional states. Tailoring these to fit within the confines of academic terms may necessitate adjustments to course content or to the quantity of CDS deployed. As highlighted by Limone & Toto (2022), further adjustments might encompass modifying the complexity of tasks, offering additional support, and integrating feedback mechanisms that are constructive yet gentle and effective.

Moreover, the incorporation of supportive structures to mitigate anxiety is undeniably essential (Larson et al., 2022). These structures can span from peer support networks, where students can share experiences and coping strategies, to professional mental health resources within the educational setting (Lipson et al., 2022). The objective is to ensure that the challenge posed by CDSs becomes an opportunity for growth, not a trigger for anxiety or stress (Broton et al., 2022).

Providing students with regular, multimodal channels for feedback is but one example of such supportive structures. In fact, P18 suggested this very notion using the example of the focus group. A weekly recitation-style setting would allow students to benefit from the more intimate setting, which for many would be a welcome change from the frenetic atmosphere of the large

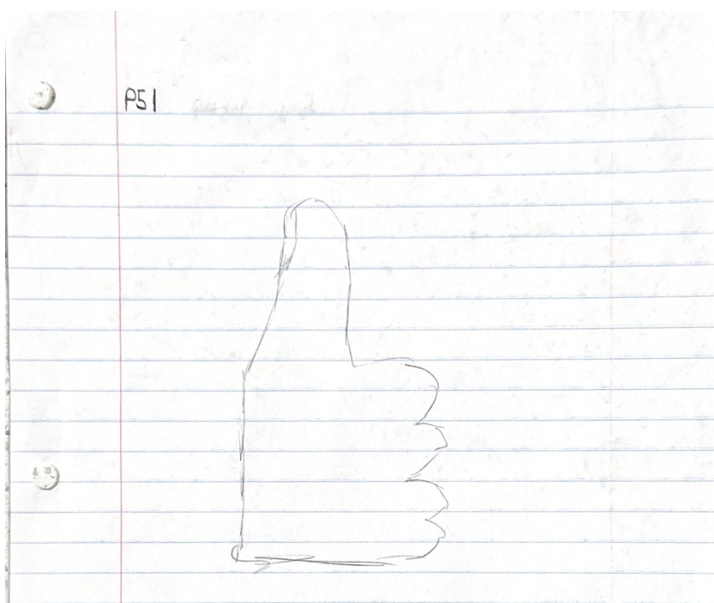
class. “There should be more one on one practice to make sure words are being pronounced correctly and that sentences are being put together properly,” they said emphasizing that instructors could provide more personalized feedback, enabling students to practice more effectively.

The focus groups effectively provided students a platform to voice their fears and anxieties, and much was covered about preparation techniques, and best practices: in a word, a reflective conversation, but also, an opportunity to check in with students who feel overwhelmed in the ‘fishbowl’ classroom to the point where they don’t even ask for help because, well, falling behind meant falling behind for good...

P51 left a ‘thumbs up’ during the second CDS focus group, while not a ringing endorsement, it shed light on the multimodal ways of communication students use to express themselves. This drawing can be seen all across the internet of things, and chances are, there are a few in your messages as we speak.

## **Figure 2.2**

*Example of Multimodal Student Feedback*





Additionally, students could benefit from the support of their classmates. “Peer support can play a crucial role in mental health” (Broton et al., 2022; Lamis & Lester, 2011; Sontag-Padilla et al., 2018). This level of support may very well change “hate” to “dislike,” or the feeling of being behind the curve to running with the pack.

I definitely feel like, more confident. I feel like going forward just cause I was really, really nervous before and I like, didn't know what to expect, and I didn't think that I'd be good at it, and like, knowing that I'm like, at the same level as the rest of my classmates is really just comforting because I just like, don't feel behind. I don't know why I felt behind before, but. I don't know it like, is a level playing ground I guess. And I'm like, excited to be able to keep learning how to keep speaking. So... (P41).

When students had a sense of playing on a level playing field, their collaborative potential changed from “we got through it” to “we overcame it together.” This was especially poignant for an international student whose spoke English as a second language. “I realized not only me have problems speaking. I can tell my teammates also have troubles doing the same thing, so I feel confident (P77). Referring to their peers as “teammates” demonstrates this shift to the collaborative effort as well as the acknowledgement of the collective struggle.

Hearing live mistakes and imperfections shows students that their efforts are not in vain, and in fact, any effort is better than remaining silent for fear of making a mistake.

“I thought it was pretty effective in helping me learn it. It was nice. I mean, it helped you understand hearing other people speak it more because you're hearing other people attempt to speak it and not someone who you know is perfect at speaking it. So, it's like you really have to pay a little bit more attention to what they're trying to say. So I thought it was useful in that sense (P32).

Students experienced a transition in feelings, moving from initial apprehension and dislike to a sense of collective overcoming. They recognized the value of shared struggles, emphasizing the comfort and empathy drawn from solidarity. While some students, like P42, approached language exercises such as "can dos" with excitement and viewed them as enjoyable opportunities to practice with peers, many expressed initial nerves about their own proficiency levels compared to others.

However, a recurring sentiment, voiced by P13, P39, P21, and others, was the relief and confidence they felt upon realizing that their peers were at similar skill levels. This leveled playing field reduced the fear of judgment, fostering an environment of understanding and support. Many students highlighted the comforting realization that everyone makes mistakes and no one is expected to be perfect. This was further echoed by P70, who over time became more at ease with making mistakes.

The setting of these sessions also played a significant role. P53 found the environment to be non-judgmental and encouraging, promoting open communication. Yet, some, like P73, expressed frustrations over the limited scope of their conversations, constrained by their beginner level proficiency. Despite this, the overarching sentiment remained positive, with students growing in confidence and comfort as they understood that they were not alone in their journey.

Navigating the dynamic landscape of student responsibilities often reveals underlying stressors that impact the learning experience. P73, for instance, offers a unique perspective, being a STEM major who chose to take French as a respite from the demanding rigors of chemistry, science, "biochem," and toxicology. The transition from Spanish in high school to French introduced linguistic challenges, especially in pronunciation, making the learning experience a mix of intrigue and overwhelm.

The initial immersion, while intense, was deemed potentially effective, hinting at the often-unexpected complexities of elective courses. P73's revelation, "I took French for fun, and I was like, maybe I want a minor in this. I don't think I will. Cause once we got to the later stuff, I was like, this is more work than fun," underscores the intricacy of balancing passion and practicality in academic choices.

This sentiment is echoed by P47, who, despite facing external academic pressures like essays and exams, managed to perform well in French, suggesting the resilience students often muster in multifaceted academic environments. As we delve deeper, it becomes essential to underscore that mental health considerations such as anxiety disorders, depression, stress from personal life challenges, and the pressure of maintaining a balance between academic and social life are all paramount.

Building on this, it is imperative to recognize that the adaptation of CDSs to context and a student's mental health is not solely about enhancing language proficiency. It is about ensuring that the learning journey is psychologically safe, supportive, and conducive to overall well-being (Lamis & Lester, 2011). This holistic approach, which considers both cognitive and emotional aspects, ensures that students are not just linguistically proficient but also mentally and emotionally resilient (Sontag-Padilla et al., 2018).

### **Language Proficiency**

The integration of CDS has shown significant strides in enhancing students' ability to use self-assessment to communicate effectively in a second language, resonating with the idea of proficiency as a "readiness to perform in a life-situation" as Kaulfers (1944) articulated. Additionally, CDS can effectively be used to frame lesson plans, units, tests, and curricula. However, the implications of this approach, which Heilenman & Kaplan (1985) describe as

operating on a 'functional trisection' encompassing function, topic or context, and accuracy, are broad and nuanced, offering both challenges and opportunities for educators and students alike.

CDSs build solid foundations by focusing on practical, real-world communication. As Lowe (1985) stated, "You must be able to use the language." They move beyond the traditional paradigms of rote learning and memorization, plunging students into interactive scenarios that mirror authentic exchanges. This immersion fosters not just the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar but the development of cultural competence and communicative skills that are essential in real-world interactions.

While self-assessment is a more introspective way of measuring language proficiency, the CDS performance allows students to demonstrate their hard work which contributed to their confidence-building. P60's reflection offers a student's perspective on the journey:

The amount of work that I had to put into speaking was a little bit more than I originally thought it would be. Over the course of this semester, my confidence in the can dos, you know, grew dramatically, and I think it's one of the better ways to kind of show what you can do. Well, obviously, it's a can do statement. That's a great play on words, haha.

Others provided insightful feedback on the CDS experience and their language proficiency. P12 noted that it offers a tangible experience, distinct from online exercises or just jotting notes, stressing the importance of pronunciation and active listening. P65 and P66 resonated with the sentiment that real-world engagement, especially speaking in French, is paramount to language acquisition. CDSs provided students with a guide for future learning while empowering them to realize their goals.

P61 viewed CDSs as instrumental for effective language learning and a mirror for instructors to gauge areas needing attention—including their own teaching methods, even though

the grading aspect could be daunting. P10, despite initial uncertainty, anticipates using this method to better showcase abilities. Lastly, P46 is optimistic about employing CDSs to validate their classroom learnings and measure their progress cohesively.

The effectiveness of CDSs in enhancing language proficiency is intrinsically linked to their execution. Tailoring them to the students' varying skill levels, learning styles, and emotional states is paramount. Differentiation and individualization ensure that each student engages with the language at a depth and breadth that is both challenging and achievable, aligning with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.

One such adaptation in terms of language proficiency was ACTFL's reframing of the ILR into educational objectives is both accessible and motivational for students (Barnwell, 1987). CDSs make language learning transparent and democratize assessment between learners and educators, thereby demystifying the precarious balance of assessment and power dynamics. (Dörnyei, 2009; Faez et al., 2011; Moeller & Yu, 2015; North, 2014; Summers et al., 2019). Moreover, the clear, positive language empowers students, thereby increasing motivation and confidence.

During the first focus group, one of the graduate teaching assistants was having trouble getting students to respond and likened the experience to 'pulling teeth.' He then said, "Would it help if I got down on your level? Yeah?" Cue enthusiasm and laughter along with the immediate dispelling of rigidity. The students were even receptive to learning how to properly pronounce a native French-speaking graduate teaching assistant's name. Upon concluding the focus group, which was conducted in English, students thanked the graduate teaching assistant in French as they left.

Educators must proceed with caution when using self-assessment as a means for evaluation; precision can be compromised by learners either overestimating or underestimating their capabilities (Moeller & Yu, 2015; Summers et al, 2019). Using the ACTFL pyramid, students overwhelmingly self-assessed as intermediate speakers of the language despite being aware of their limited coverage of topics from FLF 101. P45 said, “I will say I’m at the intermediate level. There are still things that I have to explore. Right now, I think I only know 2% of French.” Even perceptions of ability to self-assess vary greatly.

P48 highlighted the challenges of using self-assessment in gauging language proficiency. They reflected on difficulties in actively speaking and pronouncing, despite their comprehension abilities, stemming from their background in Latin and elementary Spanish. P47, embarking on the journey of self-assessment, felt a blend of anxiety and enthusiasm about verifying their grasp on French and aspired to confidently self-assess their language skills by the course's conclusion. Meanwhile, P74 saw an evolution in their confidence towards self-assessment over the term. Initially daunted by the weight these self-assessments held on their grades, they grew more eager to self-evaluate and demonstrate their proficiency as the course progressed.

One of the evident challenges is the anxiety induced by real-time, interactive language use. While this anxiety can be a hurdle, it also serves as a catalyst for profound learning. The experience of navigating through communicative challenges, making mistakes, and adjusting in real-time fosters a deep, intrinsic learning that static, non-interactive methods can seldom achieve.

In conclusion, the implications for language proficiency are profound. CDSs, when executed with precision, sensitivity, and adaptability, have the potential to transform foreign language education. They foster a deep, intrinsic learning rooted in real-world communication,

bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. The key is in the meticulous crafting, execution, and support structures that ensure each student is challenged, supported, and ultimately, profoundly enriched by the experience.

### **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety**

FLCA is an intricate aspect that educators must confront when integrating CDSs into the learning environment. The intimate connection between anxiety and language learning was palpably demonstrated throughout the study, with various aspects of CDSs either exacerbating or mitigating anxiety. Fear of failure, forgetting material, and general uneasiness are some of the factors contributing to this anxiety (Alsowat, 2016; Dikmen, 2021). Pronunciation was the largest contributor to this apprehension among students, which also suggests that students were geared towards being understood and communicating effectively.

On the one hand, the spontaneous, interactive nature of CDSs can induce anxiety, particularly among students who are apprehensive about real-time communication, making mistakes, or being evaluated. This anxiety can potentially impede learning and performance, making the consideration of FLCA essential in the implementation of CDSs. While there was a noticeable decrease in anxiety, some students might still be plagued by a deficit in self-confidence (Bensalem & Thompson, 2022).

P51 noted the initial strangeness of translating thoughts from English to French, especially with the interference of another language like Spanish in the process. “It was pretty– it was weird, but after getting into the conversation, it kind of got easier.” P57 appreciated the student-directed nature of the interaction, though they found maintaining a prolonged conversation challenging given their limited vocabulary. They also mentioned feelings of self-consciousness, especially when having to speak aloud in a language they were not confident in.

While students may have spoken the language before, many had never used another language for the purposes of communication. P9 explained, “I guess, for me, what made it awkward was just kind of switching over from English to French and not really having done that before in that conversational setting.”

There existed an insidious notion that one should already be familiar with French before enrolling in FLF 101, which contributed to the FLCA. P7 highlighted the challenges in formulating responses due to concerns about verb conjugation, tenses, and grammatical agreement rather than prioritizing communication. This could lead to negative feelings towards the purpose of CDSs and their perceived futility. P18 expressed skepticism about the usefulness of "can do" statements, noting that classroom interactions with peers might not constitute genuine learning. They emphasized the possibility of practicing incorrectly without proper guidance, leading to doubts about pronunciation and language use.

Conversely, when managed adeptly, the very aspects of CDSs that induce anxiety can also be their greatest strengths in mitigating it. The classroom environment holds transformative power to mitigate anxiety and foster growth in a welcoming, positive atmosphere (Wijay, 2023). P49 appreciated the positive feedback received, emphasizing its role in maintaining motivation and confidence in learning French. The participant felt reassured and more accomplished after interacting with a GTA who provided uplifting feedback.

Positive social pressure can yield effective results as both external and internal forms of social reinforcement (Bandura, 1986; Drury & Ma, 2003; Ibrahim et al., 2022.). Real-time interactions provide students with immediate feedback, allowing them to adjust, learn, and grow in the moment. Moreover, as students navigate through the challenges and triumph over them,



there is an intrinsic bolstering of confidence and reduction in anxiety. Over time, students were able to effectively manage their school-life balance as a result.

I will say like, especially with the last can do statement, I didn't study as hard. Like, I was watching Game of Thrones, and I was like, 'I got this. Tomorrow's cool'. So, like, I mean that's how chilled I was. While in the beginning I was like, 'Oh God, I'm going to fail.' But like, now I'm chilling like, you know. And I still did good. So, shout out to that (P2).

Over time, the dynamics of foreign language classroom anxiety have shifted due to various pedagogical approaches and personal experiences. P33 began the semester with trepidation, stemming from past difficulties with language learning. However, supportive instructors and TAs created an environment where the fear of learning a new language was diminished. P49's journey led to self-assuredness in speaking French, significantly alleviating anxiety, although pronunciation remains an area for improvement. P53 initially felt deflated after underperforming according to personal expectations, but this became a catalyst for seeking additional resources like French podcasts, proving the value of experiential learning outside the classroom.

P12 highlighted the tangible difference between casual conversation and traditional methods like online practices. This hands-on approach not only improved pronunciation and listening skills but also fostered relaxation and reduced the need for rigorous study. P47's experience underscored the feasibility of achieving good results even when unprepared, suggesting that such exercises should not be sources of excessive stress. P49 emphasized the potential of such activities to foster consistent engagement in class, while P25 found the class's pace pushing towards fluency, even if it felt a bit intimidating at times.

For P50, the prospect of showcasing one's proficiency in front of peers can be daunting, given the immediate feedback loop it provides. However, P39 described a more positive feedback experience, where recognizing and understanding French in everyday scenarios boosted confidence and validated the effort invested in the class.

Educators have a pivotal role to play in this dynamic. The support, encouragement, and feedback they provide can be instrumental in shaping the students' anxiety trajectories. Being attuned to each student's emotional landscape, and adapting approaches to provide individualized support, can turn potentially anxiety-inducing scenarios into powerful learning experiences. It is crucial to note that self-perceptions and intrinsic beliefs deeply affect learning (Bensalem & Thompson, 2022). Teachers need development and exemplars to effectively navigate and support this aspect of the learning process.

To harness the full potential of CDSs while mitigating FLCA, a balanced approach is essential. It involves integrating support structures that acknowledge and address anxiety, while simultaneously leveraging the interactive, real-time nature of CDSs to foster confidence, resilience, and profound learning. It is a delicate balance between challenge and support, where each step is meticulously calculated to ensure that anxiety, rather than a barrier, becomes a catalyst for unprecedented learning and growth.

### **Recommendations**

CDSs played a complex role in FLF 101 students' language learning, with both positive outcomes and challenges emerging from their narratives. Students reported an increase in confidence in their speaking abilities as the course progressed, attributing this to the repeated practice afforded by CDSs. They also found value in the active nature of the tasks, which pushed them to co-construct dialogue organically, helping them to develop conversational skills that

went beyond memorized phrases. Additionally, their comprehension of spoken French improved, likely due to frequent exposure to the language's sounds and rhythms during speaking exercises. Preparedness for exams was another advantage students associated with CDSs, as these activities provided a structured review of chapter content and enforced active engagement with the language.

However, the initiative was not without its initial drawbacks. Many students experienced anxiety when first faced with these speaking tasks, revealing a tension between the goal of language proficiency and the discomfort of public speaking (communication apprehension). Those with previous language learning experiences that lacked a strong speaking component were especially apprehensive, although they also recognized the potential benefits of this approach. Students' reactions to CDSs varied considerably, with some viewing them as beneficial while others saw them as stress-inducing rather than educational.

Over time, some students underwent a transformation in their views on CDSs. What began as skepticism gradually turned into an acknowledgment of the approach's effectiveness, a change often facilitated by positive feedback from the instructors. This feedback, along with an environment that encouraged adaptation, helped students become more comfortable and adept in their new language. The unpredictable nature of conversations that CDSs simulated also prompted the development of strategic study habits, improving students' adaptability and learning.

The consensus among students was that those embarking on this language course should approach "Can Do" statements with an open mind and a willingness to tackle challenges, emphasizing the value of these exercises in developing language skills. Regular practice, particularly through immersion in French language media, was recommended for further

reinforcing language acquisition outside the classroom. Students concluded that an open-minded approach to the instructors' methods could lead to a more positive and fruitful educational experience.

Reflecting on the course, students expressed an overall appreciation for the immersive aspect of CDSs. Despite initial misgivings, many were surprised by the extent of their language improvement, feeling proud of their achievements by the end of the semester. This suggests that, when coupled with supportive feedback and a proactive approach to learning, CDSs can be a powerful tool for enhancing language skills, fostering confidence, promoting an immersive learning environment, and achieving 'flow'.

Given these insights, it is recommended that students embarking on language learning—or any discipline where demonstration of skills is essential—should embrace CDSs as a powerful learning tool. The challenges initially presented by the CDS experience highlight the need for educators across disciplines to provide a supportive feedback mechanism and foster a classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and learning from mistakes. Language education and other fields that employ demonstration as an evaluative measure can take cues from this approach, leveraging CDSs to instill confidence, promote active engagement, and ensure that learning extends beyond rote memorization to the practical application of knowledge.

### **For Language Education**

**Clarify the Structure of the CDS Performance.** CDSs should strike a delicate balance between providing too much or too little structure. When articulated solely in English, they can either leave students without enough guidance or overwhelm them with too much, leading to the stress of crafting scenarios from loosely related CDSs. Educators should be clear about whether all objectives must be met or if a selection is sufficient, to avoid boxing in students and stifling

their creative use of the language. Simplifying expectations or providing specific goals can better guide students, especially for the first CDS of the semester.

Alternating structures throughout the course with advance notice could facilitate adaptation when students have a more developed linguistic repertoire. Alternatively, changing from an overarching theme such as “A Social Gathering” to “Choose Your Own Adventure” can provide students with the initial support they need while offering them some ownership of the CDS performance once confidence has grown.

**Improve Resource Navigation.** Reducing the number of resources that students must work with can alleviate the cognitive load and help them concentrate on what is truly important for their language development. Should many resources be required (e.g., for content-specific courses), it is essential to support students in using their time effectively. Variability in student capacity to navigate and utilize these materials, such as textbooks and the CDSs themselves, can significantly impact their learning process. Proper guidance can direct students to simplify their language rather than turning to Google Translate, which ultimately complicates their learning; thus, it is crucial to emphasize that CDSs are achievable with the classroom language and encourage strategic use over translation services.

Reinforce the achievability of CDSs by reminding students that all are attainable with the language presented in class. This encouragement can help mitigate the pressure to perform perfectly and emphasize the importance of using limited vocabulary and language strategies adeptly. For example, using rising intonation to transform statements into questions, or offering binary options can be very effective with limited vocabulary.

**Emphasize Live Performance.** CDSs should be executed in real-time to move students away from a reliance on memorization and scripted presentations. This encourages spontaneity,

which not only challenges students but also fosters growth in language and communication skills such as adaptability and improvisation. While some memorization of the class material is expected, CDSs should not be scripted; it is by way of extemporaneous communication that the feedback loop is enacted thereby providing students with a meaningful, effective language learning experience.

**Adjust the Pace.** Recognize that learning to speak another language is not instantaneous. As P31 stated, “Speaking French is not an overnight thing, and requires practice and patience.” A slower pace allows for more practice and reflection, prevents students from feeling overwhelmed, and provides opportunities for those who fall behind to catch up. It is therefore beneficial to spread out a textbook over more semesters, or at least to trim chapters based on student engagement and performance to alleviate pressure.

**Enhance Feedback and Reflection.** Incorporate a few mandatory self-assessment activities and meaningful instructor feedback, which can be facilitated by breaking larger classes into smaller groups. This approach allows for more targeted feedback and for students to catch up on missed assignments without falling behind. With a slower pace, this opportunity allows students to absorb and apply the language, reflect upon and discuss mistakes, and strategies for future improvement.

**Reduce Stressors.** By extending the use of a single textbook across more semesters, the stress associated with additional fees for new materials, acclimation to new curriculum rhythms, and production of excess teaching materials can be reduced. This not only aids in financial and educational stability for the students but also enables educators to focus on quality over quantity in their teaching resources.

**End on a High Note.** Configuring the curriculum so that students can finish with a sense of accomplishment rather than stress will contribute to a more positive learning experience. In the case of FLF 101, starting with a challenging chapter like Chapter 4 in a subsequent course (e.g., French 102) sets a high standard from the outset and could positively motivate students to deliver higher quality CDS performances.

These recommendations aim to foster an environment conducive to language acquisition, where students are equipped with the skills and confidence to navigate through their language learning journey, emphasizing growth, understanding, and a balance between structure and creativity.

### **CDSs in Other Disciplines**

CDSs are phrased in French as ‘*Oui, je peux!*’ and in Spanish as, ‘*Yo, sí, puedo.*’ Both expressions emphasize ‘*I can*’, thereby translating the concept of ‘Can-Do Statements’ into a proactive declaration. Regardless of the label it carries, a CDS retains its essence and can be modified for use in fields other than language teaching. For instructors looking to implement CDS in other disciplines, a comprehensive approach to training and student engagement is crucial.

### **For the Instructor**

**Embrace Imperfection and Growth.** Educators are encouraged to foster a learning space where growth is celebrated, and the expected imperfections of the educational journey are openly acknowledged. Through active dialogue about areas of success as well as those requiring enhancement, teachers can nurture an encouraging academic environment. A viable strategy could involve redefining evaluations such as exams or projects as steps in building a

comprehensive portfolio. Instead of merely submitting a singular, finalized work, students would engage in a process of progressive reflection, contributing to a culminating body of work.

### **Training Lens for the Instructor**

**Norm Expectations.** Make the greater goal of the CDS performance abundantly clear to students. Prioritize the outcome over the process but highlight that students have learned the process in class along the way. For languages, the goal is communication, which includes students asking and answering questions. Instructors should start the conversation but allow students to lead, providing support only when necessary.

For the automotive discipline, the overarching objective of any practical assessment is to effectively diagnose and address vehicular issues, for example. In this context, the emphasis should be on achieving a successful repair or maintenance outcome rather than strictly adhering to a prescribed set of procedural steps. For instance, when teaching students about engine diagnostics, the instructor might initiate the process by demonstrating the use of diagnostic tools, but then step back and let the students lead the troubleshooting efforts, stepping in only to guide or correct when they hit a snag.

For the accounting discipline, the primary purpose of their exercise is to ensure accurate financial reporting and compliance with accounting standards, for example. The focus should be on the correct interpretation and application of these standards to real-world financial scenarios, rather than the process of going through accounting motions. An accounting instructor might start a session by walking through a complex transaction, but then let the students take over the task of journalizing entries, conducting ratio analyses, or preparing financial statements, providing assistance only when they veer off course.



**Manage Student Expectations.** Students often ponder the nature of their interaction, what they should anticipate, and the format of the exercise. It is important to communicate that this experience is not meant to be a source of stress or intimidation but rather an enjoyable and engaging learning process where they are encouraged to direct the conversation. Considering that live performances can lead to unexpected variations, it is a good representation of actual communication scenarios outside the classroom. These surprises should be embraced rather than feared. With consistent standards in place, any variation becomes a valuable part of the learning experience, minimizing the potential for bias.

**Use Video Examples.** Presenting video samples from previous classes, with students' permission, can demystify the CDS process for incoming classes. To ensure the examples are current and align with the course objectives, the curriculum could include the creation of a CDS video as part of the final exam. This task could feasibly be accomplished within the typical three-hour exam period. Such videos could also be applicable in fields that involve public engagement or promotional activities. For instance, in a communication and media studies curriculum, students might produce how-to content for social media platforms or conduct a simulated news segment for a broadcast journalism class.

**Set Clear Standards.** Clearly delineate grading criteria for students outlining the specific conditions under which points might be deducted. Offer students a rehearsal of the test or a similar situation, giving them the chance to inquire about their performance and receive advice on improvement strategies. For the sake of transparency and for potential use as a future resource, document the CDS evaluations with audio recordings for spoken exams and video for practical skill demonstrations, allowing for open review and tailored feedback.

**Give Meaningful Feedback.** Practice strategic notetaking to capture and accurate representation of the student performance in order to provide meaningful feedback. Should the CDS performances be captured on video, students have the option to revisit these recordings with their instructor to deepen their understanding and enhance their skills. In addition, significant excerpts from the class's overall performance can be showcased in subsequent sessions for group learning. Moreover, it's beneficial to check in with students about the type of feedback they find most useful—whether they prefer it to be more detailed, more general, or perhaps even less frequent. Finally, maintain a record of the most common mistakes and discuss them in post-CDS reflection. Repeating those common mistakes can incur a one-point deduction, for example.

### **Training Lens for Co-teaching**

**Unified Approach.** Co-teachers should work in tandem, aligning their approaches and expectations. When collaborating closely, they synchronize their teaching methodologies, goals, and assessment standards, which fosters a stable learning environment across different sections of a course. This unity is crucial, especially in language education, where variations in teaching styles can lead to significant discrepancies in student experience and outcomes. By working in tandem, co-teachers can ensure that each student, regardless of the instructor or the nuances of the testing environment, benefits from the same quality of instruction and assessment criteria. This alignment helps to mitigate confusion and anxiety among students, contributing to a more equitable and effective learning atmosphere.

**Consistent Norming.** The practice of regular check-ins is pivotal in maintaining uniformity within co-teaching frameworks. By engaging in scheduled norming sessions, instructors can calibrate their grading scales and teaching methods against a set of agreed

benchmarks, which can be further exemplified through recorded examples of student work. These sessions allow educators to discuss and align their expectations, thereby reducing subjective variations in teaching and assessment. Norming becomes a continuous process of professional development and quality assurance, ensuring that all instructors evaluate student performance through a consistent lens. This upholds the integrity of the course's outcomes while providing a shared understanding among instructors.

**Documentation:** Documentation of the norming process can play a critical role in sustaining teaching quality, especially for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). By keeping a detailed record or recording of norming sessions, GTAs have a reliable reference to understand the expected standards of instruction and evaluation. This documentation acts as a guide, illustrating the nuances of the course's pedagogy and the rationale behind specific grading decisions. It serves as a valuable resource for GTAs to review and reflect upon, ensuring that their teaching remains in line with the established norms. Moreover, this archive of the norming process can inform the onboarding new GTAs, providing them with concrete examples of effective teaching practices and facilitating a smoother transition into their instructional roles.

### **Prioritizing Mental Health**

Active listening plays a crucial role in comprehending the factors that affect student behaviors and the stress they experience, particularly when it comes to CDS. Anxiety around CDSs may not be about performances themselves; rather, they could relate to deeper, perhaps unspoken, academic or personal challenges. Instructors should strive to create a communicative environment where students feel comfortable sharing their concerns. This can be achieved by providing different avenues for expression, such as open forums post-CDSs reflection classes, where students can collectively discuss their experiences and anxieties in a supportive group

setting, or through one-on-one discussions during office hours for more personal and individualized support.

Drawing from the findings on CDSs, it becomes evident that students desire a transparent and supportive system that listens to and addresses their specific needs. They look for a classroom culture where their voices are not only heard but also acted upon. Instructors can facilitate this by encouraging students to articulate their experiences, listening to their feedback about the process, and making adjustments to alleviate pressures where possible. For example, some students indicated the futility of raising concerns due to the pace of the class or negative testing experiences. In both instances, the students felt that their concerns were trivial in such a large class environment, or that no other student shared the same experience.

Furthermore, consistent with student feedback, it would be beneficial to normalize the discussion around the emotional and cognitive demands of CDSs. Encouraging students to share strategies that have helped them cope with these demands or to suggest improvements for CDS implementation can cultivate a sense of community and collective problem-solving. In this way, active listening is not merely a passive receipt of student concerns but a springboard for iterative enhancements to the learning process, thereby enhancing the learning experience and reducing anxiety related to CDS performance.

**Mitigating Test Anxiety.** Proactive administrative measures can effectively alleviate test anxiety. Implementing a required practice session that includes a period for reflection and open discussion can set clear expectations and address any questions regarding the process or the format. Inform students beforehand about the potential peculiarities of the experience, highlighting that it may be unconventional, ‘weird’ or contrived. Assure them that while the process may not always proceed seamlessly, this is an acceptable part of the experience.

When considering makeup exams, especially if the typical CDS is a group performance, make efforts to simulate the universal experience of all students. Utilize teaching assistants, faculty colleagues, or students seeking additional practice or volunteer experiences from relevant campus groups to provide the necessary group environment for those taking the exam later.

Adjust grading policies to reduce pressure, such as dropping the lowest score or allowing a higher-stakes final CDS to replace the lowest score. Overall encourage a mindset that is open to efforts and attempts without fear of failure or judgment.

In the field of computer science, prioritize the understanding of programming logic and problem-solving skills over memorizing specific syntax. In fact, allowing open searches in this case could elucidate strategies for locating the best resources amongst students and instructors alike. Encourage students to experiment with code and learn from debugging without the fear of making mistakes. Introduce scenarios where clients have imposed an urgent deadline, or when variables change.

In the field of mathematics, emphasize grasping concepts and applying them to solve problems rather than just getting the correct answer. Cultivate an environment where students feel comfortable exploring different solutions and learn from incorrect attempts without the pressure of immediate perfection.

CDSs stand as a transformative element in education, encouraging a tangible, outcome-based learning paradigm across various fields from language acquisition to technical subjects such as automotive repair or accounting. Such an approach naturally brings the practical application of classroom theory into sharp relief, amplifying student engagement and learning outcomes.

The key to success with CDS lies in cultivating an academic atmosphere that values progress, acknowledges the instructional potential of mistakes, and integrates mental health awareness to address and reduce the anxiety associated with performance assessments. Progressive, portfolio-based evaluations can reinforce this methodology, fostering a learning trajectory that is marked by continuous feedback, reflection, and a clear trajectory toward improvement and mastery.

In co-teaching environments, uniformity in expectations and approaches must be established to further solidify the efficacy of CDS and ensure fairness and clarity. Ultimately, when educators adopt CDSs into their curriculum, they are providing a clear roadmap of skills development that can be used both for self-assessment and assessment purposes. Reflecting on progress throughout the course paves the way for continued engagement or the realization of learning potential— what they can and will be able to do.

### **Further Research Directions**

**Longitudinal Studies.** The exploration of longitudinal trends across entire language sequences offers rich terrain for future research, particularly when these courses implement CDSs. By comparing courses that utilize CDS with those that do not, researchers can ascertain the long-term impacts of this approach on language acquisition. It would be beneficial to scrutinize how CDSs affect learner outcomes over extended periods, beyond the immediate course or academic year.

A key area of focus should be the unique challenges and highlights that emerge from the use of CDS within the French sequence. Identifying these elements could provide insights into the adaptability of CDS to the specific needs and contexts of French language learning. It may

also shed light on potential barriers to the effective implementation of CDS and highlight the most successful strategies that instructors have adopted.

Furthermore, examining the structure and interactional management of courses that incorporate CDS can reveal how this approach influences classroom dynamics and interaction patterns between students and instructors. Do CDS foster more student-centered learning environments, or do they require adjustments in classroom management to be effective? How do instructors balance structure with the flexibility that CDSs demand? Investigating these questions will deepen our understanding of the pedagogical shifts necessary for CDS to be most effective and how they align with traditional language teaching methodologies. This research can inform not only the practice of teaching French but also the design of language courses more broadly.

**CDSs and Language Acquisition.** Future research endeavors might profitably concentrate on understanding the role of CDSs in the context of language acquisition. One intriguing avenue is investigating perceptions of CDS effectiveness and how these perceptions correlate with tangible outcomes like course grades. This could involve analyzing whether students who engage with CDS feel more competent and whether this perceived competence translates into improved academic performance. Are students who are actively using CDS more likely to achieve higher grades, or do grades remain an inadequate measure of language proficiency?

Another aspect to consider is the impact of CDS on student engagement. It is critical to assess whether the implementation of CDS in language courses actively promotes greater participation and interest from students. Does the clarity of expectations and goals provided by CDS encourage students to invest more effort and take more initiative in their learning? Understanding the connection between CDS and engagement can provide valuable insights into

how these statements can be used to foster an environment where students are more motivated and invested in their language development journey. By delving into these areas, researchers can provide evidence-based recommendations for incorporating CDS into language curricula to enhance both student outcomes and experiences.

**Instructor's Perspective.** Studies should also delve into the instructor's perspective regarding the integration of CDSs into the curriculum. Assessing how educators perceive the efficacy of CDS is crucial, as their convictions and attitudes significantly shape the implementation process and their enthusiasm for teaching. This line of inquiry could explore whether instructors believe that CDS are congruent with their pedagogical philosophies and curriculum objectives, as well as how they adjust their teaching methods to include these statements.

Moreover, it is essential to examine the modifications that educators might need to enact in their teaching methods and curriculum adaptations to accommodate CDS. Research into the specific pedagogical approaches that educators devise in reaction to CDS would illuminate best practices and potential challenges. Questions of interest include whether instructors feel compelled to alter their assessment strategies, classroom activities, or even the modes of content delivery. How do these alterations influence the overall dynamics of the language learning environment? By capturing the instructors' adaptive measures and innovative approaches, research can provide detailed guidance for the effective incorporation of CDS into various educational contexts, thus improving both teaching practices and student learning experiences.

**Operational Logistics.** Future research directions should consider the operational challenges, opportunities, and solutions that arise from integrating Can-Do Statements (CDS) into large format courses, commonly referred to as 'megasections'. Researchers should explore



the various anticipated and unexpected obstacles that educators face when scaling up CDS integration. These challenges might include managing the complexities of student diversity, aligning the statements with a larger number of learning outcomes, and ensuring consistency in delivery and assessment across a broad spectrum of students.

Additionally, an important area of inquiry lies in student feedback on their experiences with CDS in these extensive course formats. Gathering and analyzing student perspectives can reveal how CDS affect their learning process and emotional well-being. Researchers should investigate how students suggest improving the CDS experience to alleviate anxiety and enhance engagement. This feedback is critical in refining CDS implementation strategies, creating more supportive learning environments, and tailoring approaches that best serve the students' needs in high-enrollment language courses. Through this, educators can develop more nuanced methods to deploy CDS that not only accommodate the logistical demands of megasections but also enrich the educational journey of each learner.

**Data Collection Ethics.** Investigations into Can-Do Statements (CDS) must rigorously assess the methods of data collection and the ethical considerations inherent in such research. One pertinent area of focus is the influence of researcher presence during the data collection process. It is essential to understand how the mere presence of researchers might affect participant behavior or responses, potentially leading to skewed data. This phenomenon, often referred to as the 'observer effect,' warrants careful examination to ensure the authenticity and reliability of the data obtained.

Another significant aspect concerns the role of instructors during data collection. The dynamics between students and instructors, or the instructors' perceptions of the CDS, could

impact the data, either by the way they are collected or by influencing student responses. Therefore, understanding this dynamic is crucial for interpreting data accurately.

The use of instruments like the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) also deserves attention, especially regarding the impact of negatively worded items within the instrument. The potential for such language to evoke negative responses or anxiety in participants must be carefully considered, as it can affect the validity of the findings.

Finally, ethical concerns raised in participant research, including issues of consent, anonymity, and the handling of sensitive data, must be meticulously addressed. Researchers are called upon to develop strategies that prioritize the welfare of participants, ensuring that ethical standards are upheld throughout the research process. By tackling these challenges, future research can pave the way for more effective, ethical, and accurate assessments of the role of CDS in language learning and beyond.

**The Future of CDSs.** As we look towards the future application and evolution of CDSs, it becomes vital to formulate recommendations for their subsequent iterations across various courses. These recommendations should take into account both the specific nuances of language learning and the broader educational context. For language courses, the focus should be on creating iterations of CDS that reflect linguistic and cultural competencies relevant to real-world communication. In a general context, CDS should be tailored to align with industry standards and practical skills needed in the workforce, thus maintaining their relevance and utility across disciplines.

Moreover, longitudinal insights from CDS implementation play a crucial role in informing their broader adoption or modification at the departmental or university level. Long-term data can reveal patterns of student success and areas needing improvement, enabling

educators to refine CDS to better support learning outcomes. These insights can also guide policy makers and curriculum designers in creating cohesive and standardized frameworks for CDS application, ensuring that these statements remain flexible and responsive to the evolving educational landscape. By harnessing these longitudinal insights, institutions can craft a strategic approach to CDS integration that not only respects the diversity of learning paths but also upholds the integrity and coherence of educational programs as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

### **Test Anxiety, the Immortal: It's Still 'a Thing'**

The unveiling of French pronunciation as a significant underpinning of test anxiety was a revelation. The anticipation was to encounter traditional elements of test anxiety, rooted in the students' apprehension towards assessments, their performance, and the impending judgment of their capabilities. However, the pronounced role of articulating in French was an unexpected derivative, illuminating the intricate layers of anxiety that students navigate. This intricate nexus between pronunciation and anxiety underscores the need for a nuanced approach to language education. It highlights an overlooked yet significant aspect, where the auditory and articulatory facets of language learning intertwine profoundly with students' emotional and psychological realms.

The dichotomy of the CDS experience, oscillating between supportiveness and a violent storm of emotions, laid bare an uncharted territory in the learning landscape. The classroom, a space traditionally viewed as a haven of learning, showed both sides of its face, where support and violence coexisted. Every stride towards mastery, every leap towards proficiency is marked by an intense, often tumultuous negotiation between the self and the learning environment. This trek across uneven terrain, marked by moments of support and episodes of emotional turbulence,

redefines success not just as an academic attainment but as a victory over an intensely personal and emotional battlefield.

### **The CDS Experience is a Harrowing Journey, and Overcoming Its Challenges is Truly an Incredible Feat**

The CDS experience, characterized by its demanding and intense nature, is likened to a tumultuous journey that students embark upon in the world of foreign language learning. It is infused with a mixture of anxiety, notably test anxiety and apprehensions surrounding French pronunciation, and the unpredictable terrains of interactive communication. Despite the well-structured learning environment, the students grapple with the intricacies of expressing themselves in a new language, where every word uttered, and sentence constructed is a step into uncharted waters. The immersive and dynamic nature of the CDS brings to light the innate vulnerabilities and uncertainties, amplifying the pressures and anxieties associated with language acquisition.

Yet, amidst the challenges and anxieties, an evolution occurs. With every interaction, conversation, and assessment, students' journey towards a transformative destination where fear and apprehension morph into confidence and mastery—tailored and appropriate to the level. CDS, although initially daunting, emerge as a travail where learning, adaptation, and growth are realized. Each student's ability to navigate this treacherous pathway, balancing the forces of anxiety with the burgeoning skills of communication, is a testament to the resilience and adaptability inherent in the learning journey. In the eye of the storm, where the tumult of emotions and anxieties rage, students find their sanctuary, a space where learning is not just an academic endeavor but a journey of personal and collective transformation.

## **CDS Performances Effectively Create a Critical Juncture Wherein Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) Emerges Inverted, acting as a Protective Shield Against the FLCA Stressors Surrounding the Entire Experience**

In the midst of CDS performances, an intriguing transformation occurs, shaped and defined by the convergence of anxiety and learning, a space where Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) takes on an unexpected role. Unlike the traditional interpretation of ZPD, within the confines of the CDS experience, it morphs into an inverted form, serving as a bastion against the turbulent waves of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). Each student, armed with their unique arsenal of linguistic skills, ventures into this realm where learning is both challenged and nurtured, and where the anxieties associated with mastering a new language are as palpable as the burgeoning confidence that emerges from each successful interaction.

The intersection of ZPD and FLCA within the CDS performances illuminates the dimensions between the learner's evolving capabilities and the inherent anxieties associated with the first steps into learning a new language. In this dynamic space, learning is not linear but is instead a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Each CDS performance becomes a mile marker of the broader learning journey, where the protective shield of the inverted ZPD offers both a refuge and a battleground. Here, students confront and negotiate their anxieties, not in isolation, but in the collaborative and interactive spaces where learning is as much a collective endeavor as it is a personal journey. Every conversation, interaction, and assessment within the CDS is a step closer to the eye of the storm, where the tumultuous journey of mastering concepts of a foreign language is realized, and where the protective embrace of the inverted ZPD heralds a space of transformative learning and growth.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

This qualitative case study, centered on the evolution of the CDS experience within FLF 101, has further elaborated on the interplay between anxiety and learning, revealing profound insights into the nuanced experience of students navigating through CDSs. I have now discerned that the harrowing journey of CDSs is not just a reflection of test anxiety and foreign language anxiety, but also an odyssey through the oscillating bands of comfort and challenge, fear, and triumph, orchestrated within the encompassing embrace of Vygotsky's inverted ZPD. Pronunciation, once a mere component of the learning experience, has emerged as a principal actor in the theater of FLCA, casting its long shadow upon the complex landscape of the CDS experience.

Students' narratives of their journey, painted with the brushes of apprehension, accomplishment, pride, and joy, have illuminated the stormy yet enriching learning environment of FLF 101. The hurricane analogy encapsulates this dynamic experience, where the ebb and flow of anxieties and triumphs orbit around the epicenter of CDS performances. The newly emergent conceptual framework encapsulates a more complex narrative, intertwining the forces of FLCA, the sanctuaries and tumults created by the ZPD, and the dynamic reciprocal relationships between environment, cognition, and behavior.

This study has highlighted the efficacy and power of CDSs, uncovering their latent potential to enhance language learning through proficiency awareness and confidence building. When carefully attuned and integrated into a curriculum that emphasizes communication, contextualized learning, and real-world outcomes over rote learning and flawlessness, students are poised for development and success. I thus advocate for the adoption and tailoring of CDSs in classrooms, which offer students a sound platform to truly showcase what they can, in fact, do.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### FLF 101 Can-Do Statements

Adapted from *Liaisons*, 2nd Edition (Wong et al., 2016)

*Note.* V = vocabulary, G = grammar

#### Chapter 1: *A Balanced Life*

1. V1: I can say three things that I typically do and three things that I typically don't do during the school week.
2. G1: I can ask someone else if that person does particular activities or not to see if our activities are similar.
3. V2: I can say two things that I do often, two things I sometimes do, and two things I rarely or never do.
4. G2: I can ask someone else about activities that person performs frequently, sometimes, or rarely/never.
5. V3: I can describe my weekly schedule including when I have class, when I study, and so on, and indicate on which days I do what activities.
6. G3: I can ask someone else about his/her weekly schedule (classes, studying, other activities) and also find out on what days that person does what activities.

#### Chapter 2: *Life's Joys*

7. V1: I can say one place where I am or am not going today and ask someone if he/she is going there, too.
8. G1: I can say two things that I am going to do tomorrow if the weather is nice, sunny, rainy, and so on and ask someone else if he/she is going to do the same or different things.

## Chapter 2: *Life's Joys* (Continued).

9. V2: I can say two sports that I do and ask others what sports they do.
10. G2: I can ask someone else what he or she is going to do today, tonight, tomorrow, this weekend, and so on.
11. V3: I can say two activities that I do during my leisure time and ask others if they like the same or different activities.
12. G3: I can describe how I do different activities (patiently, quickly, seriously, well, badly, and so on).

## Chapter 3: *Our Origins*

13. V1: I can tell someone where I am from and find out where he/she is from.
14. G1: I can tell someone three countries I am going to go to one day and find out which countries he/she is going to go to.
15. V2: I can say who is in my family and where these family members live.
16. G2: I can ask someone else about his/her family and where these family members live.
17. V3: I can describe the physical traits of two of my family members, including their size, height, hair, and eye color.
18. G3: I can ask someone else about the physical appearance of his/her family members (size, height, hair, and eye color).

## Chapter 4: *Spaces*

19. V1: I can describe my house, apartment, or room and find out what someone else's living space is like.
20. G1: I can say what tasks and household chore(s) I do each week and ask someone else if he/she does these chores or tasks as well.



Chapter 4: *Spaces* (Continued).

21. V2: I can say what buildings and facilities are in my neighborhood and I can give directions to one of them.
22. G2: I can ask someone else if he/she has certain facilities in his/her neighborhood to determine whose neighborhood has more resources.
23. V3: I can describe my favorite green spaces and state the types of activities I like to do there.
24. G3: I can ask someone else three information questions (for example, where, what, how many, which) about the types of green spaces in his/her hometown.

## Appendix B

### Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, Horwitz et al., (1986)

Ss indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the 33 statements below on a five-point Likert scale choosing from the following: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. The emphasis was included in the 1986 publication.

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.
2. I *don't* worry about making mistakes in language class.
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.
14. I would *not* be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.

17. I often feel like not going to my language class.
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.
22. I *don't* feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

## Appendix C

### Example of Display for Accessing Survey Information

Please complete these short surveys about your « Oui, je peux ! » #3 !

***before the OJP***



[\[shortened link\]/preojp3](#)

***after the OJP***



[\[shortened link\]/postojp3](#)

## **Appendix D**

### **Initial Reflection Survey Questions**

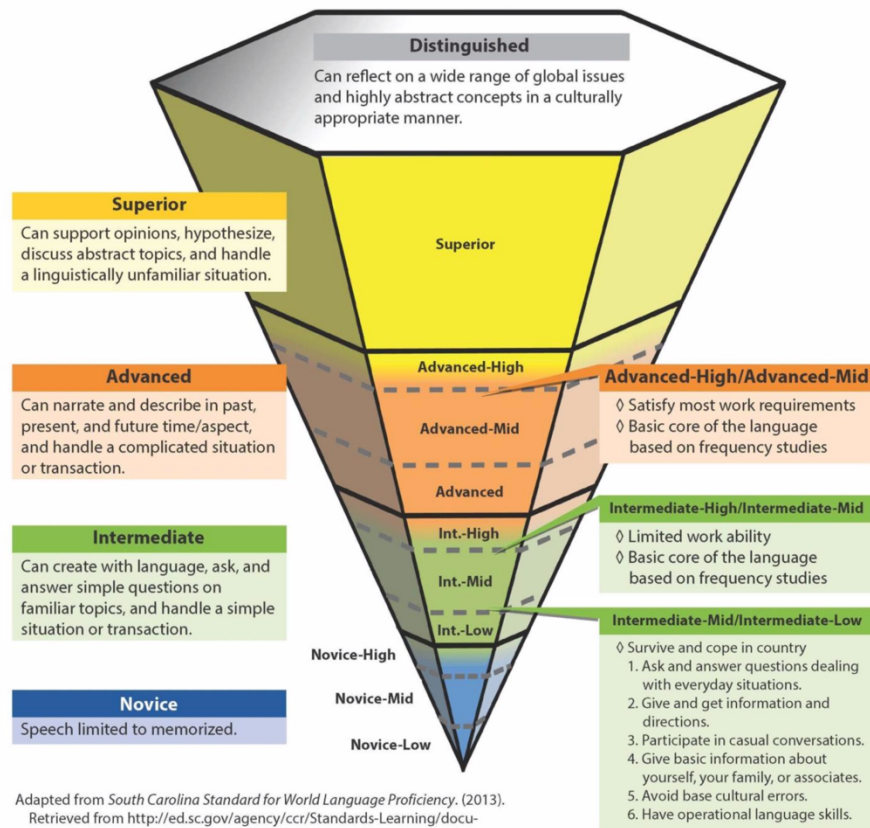
1. What is your last name?
2. What is your first name?
3. Which category below includes your age?
  - a. 17 or younger
  - b. 18
  - c. 19
  - d. 20
  - e. 21
  - f. 22-25
  - g. 25-29
  - h. 30-39
  - i. 40-49
  - j. 50-59
  - k. 60 or older
  - l. Click to write Choice
4. What is your race?
  - a. White
  - b. Black or African-American
  - c. American Indian or Alaskan Native
  - d. Asian
  - e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - f. Multiple ethnicity/Another race (please specify)

5. What is your gender?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Other (please specify)
6. What is your current academic rank?
  - a. High school
  - b. Freshman
  - c. Sophomore
  - d. Junior
  - e. Senior
  - f. Graduate (Master's)
  - g. Graduate (Doctoral)
7. How many years of French have you taken prior to FLF 101?
  - a. 0
  - b. 1
  - c. 2
  - d. 3
  - e. 4
  - f. 5+
8. Do you currently work in addition to taking classes?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes (part time)
  - c. Yes (full time)
9. Do you speak another language at home?
  - a. No
  - b. Yes (please specify)

10. Have you studied another language prior to FLF 101?
- No
  - Yes (please specify which)
11. If you answered "yes" to the question above, how many years did you study another language?
12. What are your thoughts and feelings about performing can do statements? (3 sentences min.)
13. Which emotions come into mind when considering performing can do statements?
14. How do these emotions manifest themselves?

[Figure: The ACTFL Proficiency Pyramid]

Figure 1. The ACTFL Proficiency Pyramid



Adapted from South Carolina Standard for World Language Proficiency. (2013). Retrieved from [http://ed.sc.gov/agency/ccr/Standards-Learning/documents/2013\\_SC\\_Standard\\_for\\_WL\\_Proficiency\\_08-13-13.pdf](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/ccr/Standards-Learning/documents/2013_SC_Standard_for_WL_Proficiency_08-13-13.pdf).  
 Adapted from ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012/>

15. Using the ACTFL Proficiency Pyramid above, what is your predicted proficiency level in French? What is your justification for this level?
16. Using a device such as your portable telephone or computer, please upload a short recording of introducing yourself in French.

17. How does this recording make you feel about your ability? Why?

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.  
Your response has been recorded.



## Appendix E

### Focus Group 1 Survey Questions

#### *Semi-structured protocol 1*

[CLASS NAME] [Semester #####)

[Start Time]–[End Time] | [Location ###]

[Day, Date]

[School Name]

Material to bring:

- Voice recorder
- Index cards with participant numbers
- Pen and paper
- Extra paper for students who have none

Reminders:

- If you get one thing correct, make sure to pass the voice recorder around!
  - Have students state their participant number (e.g., P#25) before speaking.
  - Write anything that comes to mind- your thoughts, questions (for students or me), observations, etc.
  - If the recorder fails, please use your phone if possible. If not, note summaries of answers.
1. Greet your groups and warm up with something light to get conversation started and to put students at ease.

*Semi-structured protocol 1* (continued).

2. The next part is to go over procedures and explain what the purpose of a focus group is (and that is not scary!) Feel free to use the language in bold italics verbatim.
  - a. State that nothing they say or do not say will reflect their can do grade. Keep in mind that nothing you say or refrain from saying will affect your can do grade.  
We want to hear your thoughts!
  - b. This will be recorded, so please the voice recorder as a “talking stick.” This is also a reminder that everyone should have a turn if they so desire. (If students don’t understand the concept of a “talking stick,” demonstrate that you can only speak if you have the talking stick.”)
  - c. Remind students to have some paper to jot down thoughts and questions (give students paper if they do not have any). You each have a participant number. On your paper, please write this number. These will be collected at the end of the class, so write legibly! Use this throughout to write down any thoughts or questions that you have.
  - d. Before you speak, and each time, please say your participant number. If you’d like to contribute, please raise your hand and note your question in writing. For example, “\*raises hand\* P43, the wheels on the bus go round and round...”

*Semi-structured interview protocol* (continued).

1. What are your goals for taking French?
  - a. (if necessary) Scholastic?
  - b. (if necessary) Personal?
  - c. (if necessary) Professional?
2. Who in this group has experience with can do statements?
  - a. (if yes) What was the format of those can do statements?
  - b. How did you react to speaking French in this way?
    - i. Your classmates?
  - c. What kinds of emotions were you experiencing before, during, and after?
3. For those who have experience in foreign language classes, did your instructor require you to speak the language for assessment?
  - a. (if yes) Can you describe that experience?
  - b. How did you like this type of assessment?
4. At the beginning of the semester, you completed a survey about your impressions on performing can do statements in FLF 101. What were some of your reactions knowing that you would be speaking French so early into your French course work?
5. Did you think can do statements would be an effective tool in this French class? Why or why not?
  - a. For those who did not think that can do statements are an effective tool, did you change your mind after the first can do statements?
6. In your opinion, how did Monday's can do statements go?
  - a. Was it awkward? Why do you think that was?

*Semi-structured protocol 1* (continued).

- b. Was it easier or more difficult than you expected?
- 7. Emotionally speaking, what were you feeling before you and your group was assessed?  
How did these emotions manifest? (shaking, good posture, speaking low...)
  - a. During?
  - b. After?
- 8. If you were confident in your performance, are you planning on continuing the way you prepared or changing it?
  - a. (if yes) How so?
- 9. If you were not confident in your performance, why do you think that was?
  - a. Will you change the way that you prepare?
    - i. (if yes) How so?
- 10. Let's now reflect back on the initial survey you completed. Would your responses be different from those that you first submitted based on this experience?
  - a. Thoughts and feelings?
  - b. Emotions?
    - i. Emotions specifically with can do statements?
  - c. Do you think that the ACTFL proficiency level you predicted was accurate?
- 11. Looking forward, there are 3 more can do statements in FLF 101. How do you feel knowing that this is on the horizon?
  - a. What are your predictions for the upcoming can do statements?
  - b. Personal predictions
  - c. Group predictions

*Semi-structured protocol 1* (continued).

12. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that you think is relevant or that we should know?

### ***Open protocol 1***

[CLASS NAME] [Semester #####)

[Start Time]–[End Time] | [Location ###]

[Day, Date]

[School Name]

Material to bring:

- Voice recorder
- Index cards with participant numbers
- Pen and paper
- Extra paper for students who have none

Reminders:

- If you get one thing correct, make sure to pass the voice recorder around!
  - Have students state their participant number (e.g., P#25) before speaking.
  - Write anything that comes to mind- your thoughts, questions (for students or me), observations, etc.
  - If the recorder fails, please use your phone if possible. If not, note summaries of answers.
1. Greet your groups and warm up with something light to get conversation started and to put students at ease.
  2. The next part is to go over procedures and explain what the purpose of a focus group is (and that is not scary!) Feel free to use the language in bold italics verbatim.
    - a. State that nothing they say or do not say will reflect their can do grade. Keep in mind that nothing you say or refrain from saying will affect your can do grade.  
  
We want to hear your thoughts!

*Open protocol 1* (continued).

- b. This will be recorded, so please use the voice recorder as a ‘talking stick’. This is also a reminder that everyone should have a turn if they so desire. (If students don’t understand the concept of a ‘talking stick’, demonstrate that you can only speak if you have the ‘talking stick’.
- c. Remind students to have some paper to jot down thoughts and questions (give students paper if they do not have any). You each have a participant number. On your paper, please write this number. These will be collected at the end of the class, so write legibly! Use this throughout to write down any thoughts or questions that you have.
- d. Before you speak, and each time, please say your participant number. If you’d like to contribute, please raise your hand and note your question in writing. For example, “\*raises hand\* P43, the wheels on the bus go round and round...”
- e. You can start the discussion with “What is a focus group?” This is a good time to practice passing the ‘talking stick’ and etiquette.
- f. At the beginning of the semester, you completed a survey about your impressions on performing can do statements. I’d love to hear more about your first experience.

## Appendix F

### Focus Group 2 Survey Questions

#### *Semi-structured protocol 2*

1. Did you meet your goals for taking French/FLF 101?
  - a. (if necessary) Scholastic?
  - b. (if necessary) Personal?
  - c. (if necessary) Professional?
2. At the beginning of the semester, you completed a survey about your impressions on performing can do statements in FLF 101. How do you feel now that you have completed 4 can do statements as opposed to none?
3. Were can do statements would be an effective tool in this French class? Why or why not?
  - a. For those who did not think that can do statements were an effective tool, did you change your mind after the first can do statements?
4. In your opinion, how did Monday's can do statements go in comparison to the first can do statements?
  - a. Was it more/less awkward? Why do you think that was?
  - b. Was it easier or more difficult that you expected?
5. Emotionally speaking, how did you feel before the final can do statement versus the first?  
How did these emotions manifest? (shaking, good posture, speaking low...)
  - a. During?
  - b. After?
6. Did you make any changes throughout the semester to your approach for preparing for can do statements?



*Semi-structured protocol 2* (Continued).

- a. (if yes) How so?
- 7. Was your confidence different from the beginning of the semester?
  - a. (if yes) How so?
- 8. Let's now reflect back on the initial survey you completed. How would you rate your proficiency at this point in the semester?
  - a. Thoughts and feelings?
  - b. Emotions?
    - i. Emotions specifically with can do statements?
- 9. You have now completed 4 can do statements. How do you feel knowing that these are in the past?
- 10. Having completed these can do statements, how will you move forward in other French courses or other courses?
- 11. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that you think is relevant or that we should know?

### ***Open protocol 2***

1. Greet your groups and warm up with something light to get conversation started and to put students at ease.
2. The next part is to go over procedures and explain what the purpose of a focus group is (and that is not scary!) Feel free to use the language in bold italics verbatim.
  - a. State that nothing they say or do not say will reflect their can do grade. Keep in mind that nothing you say or refrain from saying will affect your grade. We want to hear your thoughts!
  - b. This will be recorded, so please use the voice recorder as a “talking stick.” This is also a reminder that everyone should have a turn if they so desire. (If students don’t understand the concept of a “talking stick,” demonstrate that you can only speak if you have the talking stick.”)
  - c. Remind students to have some paper to jot down thoughts and questions (give students paper if they do not have any). You each have a participant number. On your paper, please write this number. These will be collected at the end of the class, so write legibly! Use this throughout to write down any thoughts or questions that you have.
  - d. Before you speak, and each time, please say your participant number. If you’d like to contribute, please raise your hand and note your question in writing. For example, “\*raises hand\* P43, the wheels on the bus go round and round...”
3. Think about your first can do experience. What thoughts come to mind?
4. Think about your last can do experience. Are your thoughts different from the first? Why or why not?

***Open protocol 2*** (Continued).

5. Looking back on your can do journey, what are your thoughts about speaking French in the first semester of class?
  - a. Did you think it was possible?
  - b. Do you think it is possible now?
  - c. How does that make you feel?

## **Appendix G**

### **Final Reflection Survey**

Please complete the following to match with your previous data.

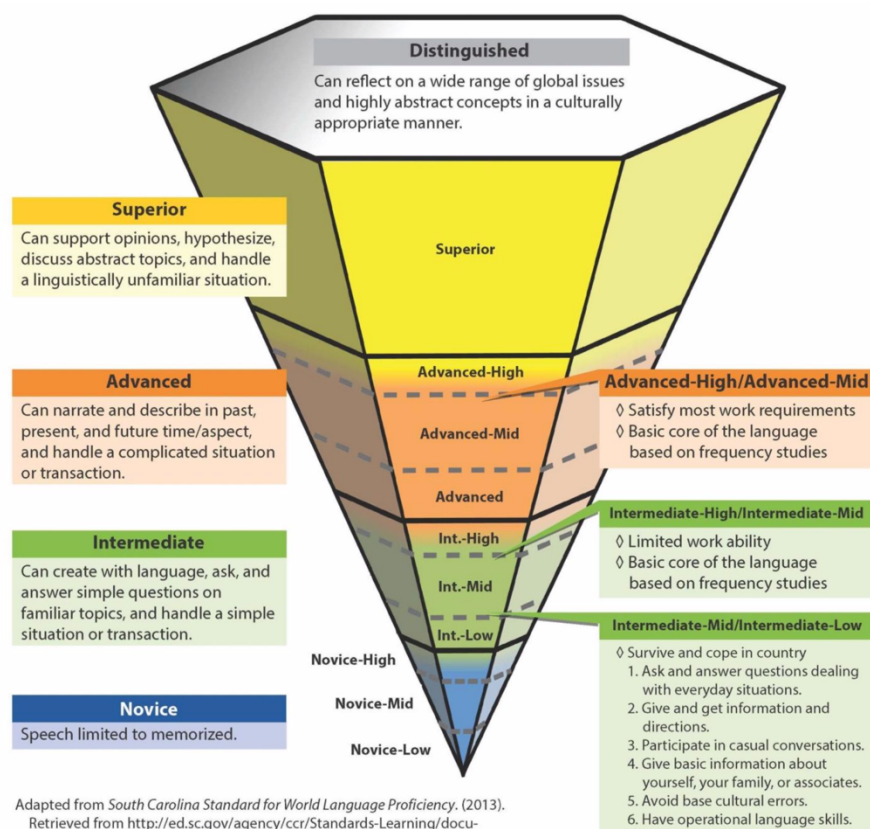
1. What is your last name?
2. What is your first name?
3. What is your email address?

Please respond to the following questions with a short answer (1-2 sentences).

1. Consider your initial emotions about can do statements. How have your emotions changed about performing can do statements from the beginning of the semester? (3 sentences min.)
2. Consider your initial emotions about can do statements. How have your emotions changed about performing can do statements from the beginning of the semester? (3 sentences min.)
3. What is different about performing can do statements at the end of the semester versus the beginning? (3 sentences min.)
4. What are you able to do now that you were not able to do in the past? (3 sentences min.)
5. Do you feel differently? Please explain. (3 sentences min.)

[Figure: The ACTFL Proficiency Pyramid]

Figure 1. The ACTFL Proficiency Pyramid



6. Using the ACTFL Proficiency Pyramid above, what is your predicted proficiency level in French after one semester?
7. How does this recording make you feel about your ability? Why?
8. What do you think of the progress you made?
9. Finally, what advice do you have for the incoming class of FLF 101 about performing can do statements? How should they approach them? Prepare for them? Any words of encouragement? What can you tell them about your personal experience?