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# Professional Development Based On The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages And The New Ontario French Immersion Curriculum: A Case Study of Reflective Practice

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Education

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Professional Development Based On The Common European Framework of Reference for  
Languages And The New Ontario French Immersion Curriculum:  
A Case Study of Reflective Practice

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Tiffany Mui

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, Ontario, Canada

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## Abstract

In this multi-phase case study, the teacher researcher aimed to determine how teachers can be assisted in implementing some principles of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages/CEFR* (Council of Europe, 2001) into their pedagogical practices for primary-aged children enrolled in early French Immersion programs. Through a series of interviews conducted over three phases and a five-month period, the researcher led the teacher participant through professional development (PD) to shed light on the PD needed for French Immersion and other FSL teachers to adopt key principles of CEFR-inspired pedagogy into their practice. The results suggest that PD should be offered at the board or provincial level for teachers to understand and be able to implement these pedagogical principles. Moreover, assigning early childhood educators who do not know French to work alongside full-day kindergarten French Immersion teachers impedes the ability of those immersion teachers who are familiar with principles of CEFR-inspired teaching to implement them. The results of this empirical study expand on previous research conducted on the feasibility of introducing the CEFR into Canadian FSL pedagogy. This ground-breaking research explores how educators grapple with a pedagogical innovation and the challenges they face when trying to implement it to meet their own and ministry goals.

## Keywords

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*; case study; French Immersion; full-day kindergarten; professional development; reflective practice

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

This case study was designed to profile a teacher engaging with *The Ontario Curriculum for French as a Second Language, French Immersion Grades 1-8* document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) through reflective professional development (PD) encounters with a teacher participant. This topic was explored through a case study involving two teachers, one of whom was the researcher. The purpose of their work together was to: (a) inform the teacher participant about the *Common European Framework of References for Language* (CEFR) and its inclusion of task-based language activities (TBLT), and whether (and if so, how) the framework was supported through the new Ontario French as a Second Language (FSL) curriculum, and (b) identify and document the strengths of (and challenges inherent in) her attempting to implement aspects of the framework, which constituted a pedagogical innovation for FSL in Ontario. My role within the study, as the researcher, was to work closely with the teacher participant. I was seeking to influence the teacher participant to adopt CEFR-infused activities within her daily practice while reporting on and analyzing her views. Our approach was to adopt a mentor/mentee relationship, paving the way for PD ideas, encouraging discussion and reflective practice (Schön, 1983). The impact of the discussions between teacher and researcher was explored over three research phases conducted over a five-month period, during which time the teacher participant examined the value and significance of having a “critical friend” who could scaffold her understanding of what the CEFR entailed and whether she could include some of its principles in her FSL classroom (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Thus, the question being investigated is, “How can teachers work together collaboratively to understand and draw on a pedagogical innovation such as the CEFR in a French Immersion classroom?”

## 1.1 Coming to the Research

French is one of Canada's official languages, and is spoken by nearly one-quarter of the population (Kissau and Turnbull, 2008). The Canadian federal government promotes linguistic duality in its citizens, in both French and English, and Canadians believe that it is important for their children to learn a second language (L2). In fact, Vandergrift (2006) states that 86% of parents want their children to learn another language. Among this 86%, 82% are Anglophones and 75% believe that French should be a child's second language. Ninety percent of Francophones believe that English should be the second language (Vandergrift, 2006). It is evident that French is a valuable language to the Canadian population. To address this, the Canadian government believes that there should be a way for each province and territory to link its unique L2 programs to a common framework that can then be applied internationally, using similar scales, and markers of achievement (Vandergrift, 2006).

As a teacher who has taught Kindergarten, Grade 1, and a combined Grade 1/2, I was interested in delving further into the new curriculum to investigate whether it aligns with, or is indeed infused with, the CEFR. The Ontario FSL curriculum specifically states that the curriculum "recognizes that, today and in the future, students need to be critically literate in order to synthesize information, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and thrive in an ever-changing global community" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5). These stated goals raise the question of what learning approach the curriculum proposes to ensure that young learners develop holistic literary skills while gaining the necessary tools (fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, comprehension in the L2, etc.) to thrive given the L2 expectations of their program (i.e., to communicate effectively and clearly using an L2, to understand reading, writing, and spoken production in an L2, and to feel as though they are making a difference in their

communities and societies with their knowledge of an L2.) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

I concentrated my efforts on conducting a case study that could be used not only for my own benefit, but for other educators involved in French Immersion students' L2-learning journeys. Throughout this research, the teacher participant and I adopted a mentor-mentee relationship. Although she was a fairly new graduate and had a background in second language/(L2) acquisition, she had not yet been formally introduced to tenets of the CEFR or how to use its ethos within the classroom (i.e., the Common Reference Levels, task-based learning and teaching/(TBLT), and the European Language Portfolio/(ELP) to maximize L2 learning). Having conducted the research and background reading on the CEFR and task-based language activities, I was able to offer her some insight into what the CEFR entails, through its reference levels, the ELP and, as is noted in sections 4.1.1.2 and 4.3.2.2, I recommended possible activities that she could build into her teaching. The conversations and information gathered within this study will provide some insight into the future of the FSL program and the CEFR, particularly for early learners, and will allow for other successful primary grade experiences.

## 1.2 The Research Problem

Canada is an officially bilingual country, and the FSL Document (2013) states that knowledge of French "allows students to communicate with French-speaking people in Canada and around the world, to understand and appreciate the history and evolution of their cultures, and to develop and benefit from a competitive advantage in the workforce" (Ontario Ministry of Education, FSL Document, 2013, p. 6). The problem that arises in French Immersion programs is that while children's language instruction understandably follows the curriculum closely, their French learning stays within the school and rarely surfaces outside of that context (Genesee, 1994).

Therefore, ties between the proficiency they develop in the program and whether they eventually gain a competitive edge in the workplace remain unclear. Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, and Crowley (2011) state that drop-out rates from FSL programs across Canada are high and there is widespread dissatisfaction with French language proficiency levels among students, teachers, and FSL programs. This dissatisfaction with proficiency levels, may arise from language being taught in isolation (i.e. rote drilling of grammar concepts), a limited amount of time allotted to authentic communication (i.e. choosing topics that truly interest students, not teachers), and the way language is used in specific domains such as mathematics and social studies (Genesee, 1994). One goal identified by the Ontario Ministry of Education's FSL curriculum document (2013) is to foster children's ability to communicate with others. This knowledge can be carried with them in future endeavours in an L2, such as gaining a competitive advantage in the workplace.

A true picture of students' abilities to conduct themselves in a French environment may not be entirely evident by adopting a narrow perspective of the curriculum and traditional ways of teaching and assessment. It was my intention for the teacher participant and me to discuss potential activities that could extend students' thinking in their L2, using task-based language activities and authentic language activities that align with the goals of the CEFR (and possibly with the new FSL curriculum).

### 1.3 Research Goals

Through this case study, the teacher participant and I worked collaboratively over the course of three phases of 6 interviews: four initially, one three months later and one five months later, to document not only our partnership, but also the struggles, challenges and successes we encountered while attempting to 'unpack' the CEFR and envisage CEFR-infused activities that

could be adopted in a French Immersion classroom setting. The ultimate goal of my research was to see how a teacher could be assisted in implementing CEFR-based learning and teaching in her classroom. The teacher needed to understand principles of the CEFR to be able to engage in task-based teaching and promote learner autonomy. My role was to provide PD to a teacher in a one-on-one setting to further her learning and overall knowledge of the CEFR.

It has been suggested that the CEFR promotes learner autonomy through its use of an action-oriented approach to learning (Little, 2009). "Can Do" statements, such as level A1 for written interaction, "I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form" (CoE, 2001, p. 26), stress students' independence and accountability for their learning through reflections on their learning and engagement in authentic communicative activities, like asking and answering questions (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013). The Ontario FSL curriculum does not make any direct connections to the CEFR or reference the Council of Europe throughout the entire document; thus, I hypothesized that the new FSL curriculum guidelines may not obviously steer teachers in the direction of a CEFR approach to L2 teaching. This approach provides authentic opportunities for students to engage in spoken French interactions, and task-based teaching opportunities. Students gain independence and fluency in an L2, while using self-assessment to determine where growth needs to occur to continue building on prior knowledge in French. Teachers may encounter challenges because of this lack of clarity within the curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). How, then, can teachers be assisted in implementing some principles of the CEFR into their FSL pedagogy for primary-aged children in a French Immersion classroom? This will be addressed throughout this thesis, as the conversations I had with the teacher

participant have the potential to inform successful PD initiatives aimed at supporting FSL teachers' attempts to understand the CEFR and infusing aspects of it (e.g. task-based teaching, self-assessment, and learner autonomy) in their pedagogical practices.

As a teacher researcher, I assisted in building the teacher participant's knowledge of the CEFR so that she could begin to understand the framework and principal goals of the document (e.g. task-based learning, authentic spoken interactions, and developing learner autonomy). We also discussed prospective activities that could be used in her future classroom to promote French language acquisition on a deeper level<sup>1</sup>, and worked through the FSL curriculum document auxiliary document (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2013) to reconcile the FSL teaching/learning expectations outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013), and by the Council of Europe (2001), as set out in the CEFR. During the research process, the teacher and I developed new ideas about practices that we could incorporate into our French Immersion classrooms. We also engaged in discussions about challenges or successes that could arise with the use of CEFR-based activities in conjunction with the FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). We revisited these discussion topics during two separate 'post' phases (the first was three months after the initial interview sessions, and the second, five months later).

## 1.4 The Significance of the Research

This research fills a gap in the literature as no previous Canadian studies have investigated the CEFR in relation to how it could be tailored to full-day kindergarten French Immersion students.

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<sup>1</sup> French language acquisition on a deeper level can involve students thinking in their L2 throughout the day, engaging in higher-order thinking, and also having conversations amongst themselves and challenging one another's thoughts and ideas.

The knowledge gained through this research is significant on various levels. The findings of this research provide a clearer perspective of how PD needs to be structured. The research also provides one L2 teacher's voice and highlights the struggles of using a new document without being given any direction. The timing of this study is appropriate because this is the first school year in which the FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) is being referred to within French Immersion classrooms. The participating teacher gained a better understanding of how to develop a classroom promoting maximal L2 learning environment for her FSL learners.

## 1.5 Definitions

The following terms are ones that will be used throughout this thesis. These terms are applicable to this cases study and are typically referred to by French Immersion teachers.

“Can Do” Statements (Council of Europe, 2001): Each proficiency level in the CEFR contains corresponding “Can Do” statements. These descriptors come from appropriate levels of the CEFR grids for each of the communication skills: listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction, and writing.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001): This teaching, learning, and assessment approach provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, and other resources across Europe and in other countries. The framework provides teachers with the means to reflect on their current practice to meet the real, individual needs of their learners. CEFR is an acronym used to refer to *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*.



The Communicative Approach: This is an approach to language teaching that focuses on meaning over form, emphasizes meaningful interactive activities, centres on communicative language needs and, when possible, highlights authentic tasks within the context of a classroom environment. The goal of the communicative approach centres on communicating in the target language (Ministry of Education, 2013). This approach was adopted by the CEFR, which came about as an extension of the communicative turn that began in the 1970-1980s. Canale and Swain (1980) describe communicative competence in terms of three components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence.

French Immersion: Within the context of Ontario, French Immersion is a program designed for students to have the opportunity to acquire a high level of proficiency in French while continuing with the development of their English language skills (x School Board, n.d.). The French Immersion program follows the same expectations as the English program where the only difference is the language of instruction. It is an optional program where students are encouraged to communicate in French as much and as consistently as possible. Students who do not speak French as their first language receive instruction in French in school and are immersed in the language and culture.

FSL: This is an acronym used to refer to French as a Second Language.

The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: This document replaces the 1998 and 2001 FSL curriculum documents (as well as previous versions). Beginning in September 2014, all FSL programs in Ontario are based on the expectations and goals that are outlined in this particular document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). All FSL teachers within the province of Ontario are required to espouse and meet the goals set out in this document.

Proficiency Levels (Council of Europe, 2001): A proficiency scale defines a series of ascending bands of language proficiency. It may cover the whole conceptual range of learner proficiency, or it may just cover the range of proficiency relevant to the sector or institution concerned. There are six levels of language proficiency, ranging from A1 to C2 (CoE, 2001).

Task-Based Language Teaching: This is an approach to teaching that was developed as an alternative method to traditional ways of teaching. The goal of this teaching process is to develop learners' linguistic and interactional competence as well as communicative competence by engaging them in meaning-focused communication through the performance of tasks (Ellis and Shintani, 2014).

## Chapter 2

### 2 Literature Review

The following section explores French as an L2 beginning with the broad context of French use within Canada, the acquisition of an L2, the CEFR, and then finally narrows in on French teaching and learning within a Canadian classroom.

#### 2.1 French Language Use in Canada

Canada has two official languages: English and French. They have been used in Canada for over 200 years, since 1763 when New France was surrendered to the British (Mougeon, 2013). At that time, there were approximately 80,000 French and 20,000 British individuals who resided in what is now known as Canada. Since 1941, French speakers fluctuated between 27% to 31% of the population until 1961. By 1996, their numbers decreased to 23.5%. One reason for this steady decline is that immigrants who come to Canada speak languages other than English or French, and many of them adopt English. Also, French speakers adopt English when they live outside of Quebec, Acadia and Franco-Ontarian regions (Henripin, 2013).

In 2011, Statistics Canada reported that nearly 10 million people indicated that they could conduct a conversation in French; however, the overall percentage of French speakers in 2011 was 30.1%, a 0.6% decline from five years earlier (30.7%) (StatCan, 2014). Overall, however, there has been a steady decrease in French speakers in Canada over the last 30 years. As stated earlier, international immigration has had a strong impact on the presence of French within Canada. In the last 20 years, approximately 235,000 immigrants have come to Canada each year, of whom more than 80% speak a mother tongue other than French or English. In general, a large

proportion of these immigrants adopt the English language and use it at work and in their everyday lives (StatCan, 2014).

It can be assumed that a large Francophone community will remain in Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario, but outside of these areas, the survival of such communities is much less certain. In at least three provinces, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland, the population of French speakers is declining quite quickly (Mougeon, 2013). There are individuals, however, who are working towards preserving the French language within educational settings. Canadian Parents for French (CPF) was founded in 1977 as an organization to promote French language learning opportunities for Canadian children. CPF has been linked to French Immersion programs since its beginning, and its mission statement includes providing educational opportunities for young Canadians to learn and use French. CPF members are mainly Anglophones who want their children to have the educational opportunities that they were denied or lacked (Canadian Parents for French, 2013). CPF provides educators, parents, and students with a well developed website on bilingualism that presents relevant research related to their mandate.

## 2.2 Acquiring a Second Language

Second language acquisition as an area of study began in the 1960s. There are a variety of perspectives on L2 learning, which include theories from Chomsky (1959), Krashen (1985), Long (1983), Swain (1985), VanPatten (1996), along with others. Chomsky (1959) argued that L1 acquisition differed from other kinds of learning. He believed that the learning took place inside the learner's head and was driven by an innate capacity for language, for which Chomsky coined the term, 'language acquisition device' (Chomsky, 1965). Krashen (1985) argued that language acquisition takes place when learners could understand grammatical forms that were

more developed than their interlanguage. Long (1983) posited that comprehensible input was achieved through interaction and, in 1996, revised the Input Hypothesis saying that it was feedback that learners received that allowed them to self-correct themselves through modified output (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). Swain (1985) concurred, positing the output hypothesis. VanPatten's (1996) stance was that learners relied on default input processing strategies, unless they were specifically taught to comprehend a sentence correctly. He proposed that to remedy this, Processing Instruction was necessary (Ellis and Shintani, 2014).

According to behaviourist theories on second language learning, the first language (L1) plays a role in second language (L2) learning, referred to as 'interlanguage' (Selinker, 1972) in that the L1 has an influence on the creative construction of the L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 2013). To further illustrate this point, L2 learning errors may parallel those of L1 learning, which is viewed as the natural process of learning a language. In learning a language, there are three main parts of L2 acquisition: a silent period, chunked speech, and the breakdown of chunked parts of speech to discover grammatical properties. These three stages lead to L2 acquisition (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). In addition to this, prior to mastering grammar, learners produce creative utterances, structural simplification, and semantic simplification.

These types of language learning described above, as identified by Chomsky (1959), Selinker (1972), Krashen (1985), Long (1983), Swain (1985), VanPatten (1996), Lightbown and Spada (2013) and Ellis and Shintani (2014), relate to the CEFR's notion that different dimensions of language are interrelated in all forms of language use. Any act of language learning or teaching is in some way concerned with these dimensions: strategies, tasks, texts, an individual's general competences, communicative language competence, language activities, language processes, contexts, and domains (CoE, 2001).

Another potent hypothesis is that L2 acquisition can take place if learners are constantly exposed to the target language. I agree with Ellis and Shintani (2014) that use of the target language should be maximized in class, and learners should be provided with or seek outside opportunities to experience the language in different contexts. Instructed language learning should also allow for ample opportunities for both structured L2 practice along with learner-initiated conversations and social interaction.

French language acquisition begins at various ages for FSL learners. Some children come from bilingual or multilingual households and receive monolingual and dual-language immersion from very early on in their lives. With regard to immersion programming, there are monolingual early immersion models that offer early-years experiences through one single language (i.e., French), and dual-language immersion programs that expose young children to two languages in their early-years' settings (Hickey and de Mejia, 2014). The latter are more common in the United States, and the former are more common in Canada. Depending on parental preferences, they may opt for immersion preschooling if they believe there are social, cultural or economic benefits to exposing their child to learning a language early on (Russette, 2013; Russette and Taylor, 2014). On the other hand, some parents may see early years immersion as low risk 'test cases' (i.e., to see how their child fares when the academic demands are looser) (Hickey and de Mejia, 2014). Young children are naturally motivated to take part in playful activities and are less self-conscious about errors than older learners, making them better equipped to acquire an L2. This is illustrated in the French Immersion play-based full-day kindergarten model (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Bjorklund, Mard-Miettinen and Savijarvi (2013) examined a Swedish language immersion context in Finland in which children were exposed to Swedish in an early-years

Swedish immersion environment (preschool and kindergarten). The focus of this research was on interaction and discussion strategies young children used as they learned Swedish in everyday interactions (Bjorklund et al., 2013). The researchers concluded that it is important to prepare teachers to provide children with target language input. Teacher L2 output or the language spoken by the teacher, should be provided explicitly throughout the day while in contact with children, regardless of the activity. As students explore activity centres that allow them to create and understand their own learning, they gain implicit knowledge. However, since early-years students do not yet have the vocabulary to navigate their L2 learning environment, they need explicit teaching to follow their self-selected initial learning. When teachers provide meaningful L2 input, students are more likely to use their prior knowledge for L2 learning (Bjorklund et al., 2013).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) document titled *Prologue: Acquisition of Oral Language as a Foundation for Literacy*, discusses what educators need to consider when planning instruction in French language classrooms: “Teachers create a classroom environment where students participate in everyday communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language rather than placing an emphasis on recall of vocabulary and language structures” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 4). Communicative, authentic, meaningful activities can contribute to implicit student learning and seem to take precedence within an L2 classroom rather than solely relying on explicit teaching such as rote grammar-related exercises. As the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) writes, students need to be engaged in their activities and these tasks need to be relevant to them.

Environments created in French Immersion classrooms should promote risk-taking, which is valued. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2012), “Students are

encouraged to listen and talk, share ideas, and become problem solvers even though they have not yet attained linguistic accuracy” (p. 4). Teachers are advised to assist student learning by drawing more out of learners’ personal experiences and making connections with students’ past learning (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario, 2001). Students are viewed as more apt to take risks with using their newly acquired language if it is done in an environment conducive to risk-taking, such as safe, nurturing classrooms. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2012) contends that it is crucial to present material to students only through the target language, a point echoed by Hickey and de Mejia (2013). The latter authors argue that when teachers translate material in the L1 to get past presumed weaknesses in the L2, these same teachers actually hinder students’ L2 language acquisition. While there is a body of literature that would argue that drawing on L2 learners’ L1 is useful, especially at the stage of “emergent bilinguals”, (Garcia, 2010), Hickey and de Mejia’s (2013) research suggests that teaching solely in the target language helps to maximize fluency, confidence, and positive attitudes towards the language. Furthermore, students interested in what they were learning understand and apply their new knowledge better because they have a passion and desire for using the materials associated with the themes that interested them. Nonetheless, teaching is context-bound. All classes are made up of different students with different interests.

Clearly, teachers play a large role in facilitating L2 learning, which can also be supported by using task-based language teaching. Task-based language teaching (TBLT), defined as a process of teaching to develop learners’ linguistic, interactional, and communicative competence through meaningful activities, is organized in a manner that allows for the development of learners’ communicative competence (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). There are opportunities for



learners to engage in various roles and participant organization structures, even in the primary grades (Lightbown and Spada, 2013).

For primary-aged students, examples may include meaningful tasks whereby learners can link their language learning to engaging in activities within the classroom, such as singing songs, playing games, dramatizing skits, engaging in conversations, describing a picture, or conducting surveys. Educators need to be aware of how a task-based syllabus is implemented, with three main tasks: pre-task, main-task, and post-task phases. Throughout TBLT, the teacher scaffolds, orients learners to focus on meaning, builds student confidence in using the L2, encourages learners to use the L2, and gives clear feedback to students. Willis (1996) writes that teachers can take on different roles including an active role, or a passive or facilitator role. They can also work as a task participant, working and learning alongside the students (Ellis, 2006).

### ***2.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages***

Background. The CEFR provides a foundation for this case study. The framework was developed by the Council of Europe (CoE) in 2001, after three decades worth of research on language teaching, learning, and assessment. The CoE has 47 member states and five observer countries, which includes Canada (CoE, 2001). Though produced in the early 1990s, the CEFR has been a work in progress since it was first introduced and is being continuously revised and edited. The CEFR document has been translated to 37 languages. Among the 37 translations are Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean (Faez et al., 2011). When it was first presented, the CEFR was viewed as controversial; however, the framework encouraged reflection and led “to the achievement of a consensus on the fundamentals and practices of language teaching, learning, and assessment” (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010, p. 2).

The goals of the CEFR are to provide guidelines on how to define levels of proficiency in learners at each stage of their language learning, on an ongoing basis (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010). Learners can be measured on the given scales throughout their lives; however, the CEFR not only benefits learners, but educators and educational administrators alike, as the framework gives them tools to reflect on their practice and allows for the “transparency of courses, syllabuses, and qualifications, thus promoting international co-operation in the field of modern languages” (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010, p. 3).

The way in which the framework is broken down (three broad divisions and then six levels within these divisions) is useful in understanding the language acquisition of French Immersion learners as they progress through the primary grades. The reference levels consist of (1) Basic User: A1, A2; (2) Independent User: B1, B2; and (3) Proficient User: C1, C2. Each level within the CEFR then has five categories that lay out what learners should be able to achieve. These categories include what learners should understand when listening and when reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing, as basic, independent, or proficient L2 users (Canadian Parents for French Ontario, 2010).

The CEFR is a tool used to define, track, and recognize progress in the language learning process. Furthermore, CoE (2001) claims that the CEFR allows learners’ progress to be monitored and measured at each stage of learning, on a lifelong basis. It is intended to describe the abilities of language learners and how they can communicate through understanding, speaking, and writing (Canadian Parents for French Ontario, 2010). The CEFR framework groups learners into a variety of levels of language proficiency based on their abilities to perform meaningful and authentic tasks (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

The CEFR provides a basis for the understanding of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, and other resources, across Europe (CoE, 2011). It provides countries with a way to universally assess language use based on reference levels. The CEFR gives schools and employers a way to create a shared understanding of language in order to determine the suitability for learning and work (Canadian Parents for French Ontario, 2010). The goal is to make a transparent tool to promote international co-operation in the field of modern languages (CoE, 2011).

Reference Tool. The principles of the CEFR include representing diverse languages and cultures in Europe (and now internationally), facilitating communication and interaction among, for example, Europeans of various mother tongues through a better knowledge of modern European languages, and achieving greater alignment in the development of national policies regarding modern language learning and teaching (CoE, 2001, p. 2). The Council of Europe (2001) has set out a guide for reference users, divided into nine chapters and four appendices, called, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*.

Language Scales. The CEFR global scale is a chart of internationally-recognized language levels that highlight specific and observable language behaviours within social or academic contexts. These statements describe the language proficiency according to the learner's performance within real-world contexts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

The scales that are used to define levels of language proficiency are as follows: Basic, Independent, and Proficient. Within these levels, they are subdivided into six global levels of performance. These stages are classified as follows in my adaptation from Vandergrift's Framework (2006):

Basic User. *Breakthrough (A1)*: ability to meet limited needs in highly predictable and easily recognizable situations by relying on rehearsed, organized situation-specific phrases.

*Waystage (A2)*: ability to communicate in simple and routine tasks related to a limited range of common social situations, requiring a direct exchange of information on familiar and routine situations.

Independent User. *Threshold (B1)*: ability to participate simply but effectively in a variety of social situations necessary to normal everyday occurrences and interactional needs in a range of contexts.

*Vantage (B2)*: ability to hold more than one's own in social discourse, e.g. effective argument in discussions, and using one's greater awareness of the language for purposes of self-correction and planning.

Proficient User. *Effective Operational Proficiency (C1)*: ability to engage in fluent and spontaneous conversations, ability to carry out complex work tasks and pursue university studies in the target language.

*Mastery (C2)*: ability to speak with precision, appropriateness, and ease.

Emergent learners, with their first exposure to an L2 environment in a kindergarten classroom, would begin their language learning at A1. Students with little to no experience with an L2 begin at the breakthrough stage and throughout their L2 journey, can work towards A2, B1, etc.

In addition to these levels, each global level can be further divided into sublevels to be able to “suit local needs and yet still relate back to a common system” (CoE, 2001, p. 32). As an example, Vandergrift (2006) writes, in situations where academic progress is slow, the Basic level could be further divided to create multiple sub-levels, such as A.2.1, A.2.2. By dividing the levels, this will give learners a clearer idea of where they are based on the levels (Vandergrift, 2006).

European Language Portfolio. The CEFR has been used for a variety of important assessment initiatives, most notably the European Language Portfolio (ELP). This portfolio is a reporting and pedagogical tool used by language learners to document their proficiency in all languages learned, including their first, and allows them to reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences. There are three specific parts to the portfolio, which include a language passport discussing the language experiences, a language biography that describes experiences in each language, and a dossier containing a selection of work that is representative of the learner’s proficiency. The benefits to using the ELP are many, including the promotion of plurilingualism, raising cultural awareness, and fostering the development of learner autonomy (CoE, 2001, p. 4). This development of autonomy also works towards encouraging lifelong language learning (Vandergrift, 2006).

The principles of the CEFR are intended to provide teachers and learners with a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for understanding language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines (CoE, 2001). The Ontario Ministry of Education’s new FSL curriculum (2013) shows influences of the CEFR, though it is not explicitly stated. Thus, understanding the CEFR as a reference tool that can be consulted when designing teaching and learning materials,

and using the reference levels provided within the CEFR, can support educators in the assessment of language proficiency.

## 2.4 Introducing the CEFR in Canada

The rationale behind the use of the CEFR within Canada begins with research conducted by Vandergrift (2006). He determined that the CEFR was the most comprehensive and comprehensible way to describe language proficiency and that this framework was flexible enough for use in Canada (Canadian Parents for French, Ontario, 2010). Vandergrift (2006) gives an overview of the need for a common framework for languages within Canada. He states that establishing a framework could create a common understanding of what functional proficiency of a language means (Vandergrift, 2006). Having a framework that can be applied to various cities and provinces within Canada would assist L2 educators in understanding what is expected of students in the French Immersion context, based on a continuum of progression within the L2 program. Vandergrift (2006) writes that in order to apply the common framework to Canadian education, it needs to be transparent and context-free to accommodate students of all ages and goals. The framework should be comprehensive to apply to formal education, employers and cultural institutions, flexible enough to allow each province or territory to connect this common framework to a larger one, and discriminating to accommodate learners in various academic contexts (Vandergrift, 2006).

Vandergrift (2006) argues that language learning is a lifelong task, with the ultimate goal being the attainment of language proficiency. Similarly, the new FSL curriculum repeatedly states that the goal of the document is to “motivate students to learn and to become lifelong learners” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 13). Through developing the skills necessary to become lifelong learners, and focusing on “enduring ideas” from grades 1 to 12, the new

curriculum sets out to encourage students to see themselves as lifelong learners for personal growth and for active participation as world citizens (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). However, language learning is not limited to one point in time, one single assessment or evaluation task; rather it is an improvement over a variety of learning opportunities that contribute to students' language proficiency (Vandergrift, 2006). Therefore, the CEFR provides a perspective of language proficiency at identified levels with the focus on individual progress in language performance, measuring progress at each stage of learning on a lifelong basis (Vandergrift, 2006). Since language learning is so complex and unique to each student, Vandergrift (2006) writes that a language framework should therefore be: theoretically grounded, empirically validated, and congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners. He also outlines various reasons as to why the CEFR, compared to other frameworks, is applicable in the Canadian context for analyzing language acquisition (Vandergrift, 2006). These include the CEFR as being a) theoretically grounded; b) empirically validated; c) face validity; d) transparent and user-friendly; e) context-free/context relevant; f) comprehensive; g) flexible and open.

Vandergrift (2006) outlines and compares language status, language policies, vision, mobility, curriculum, learning design, learning content, and assessment in the European and Canadian contexts. In a table form, Vandergrift (2006) demonstrates how the CEFR within the Canadian context is similar to that of the European and encompasses Canada as a country with two official languages, with schooling from kindergarten to grade 12, with multiple provinces and territories. Therefore, it is evident why Canada has chosen to adopt some of the CEFR's key tenets and use these standards to increase success within French Immersion programs.

Using the CEFR within the Canadian context can be particularly beneficial to students who move to other schools, since the data collected from each school can be understood at the other as they are based on the same competencies. This could further assist students in getting the appropriate assistance or enrichment, according to the CEFR levels. Schools could know where to begin by simply looking at the reference levels, rather than starting over again using a different diagnostic tool. Within my particular school board, there has been a lot of movement as a result of accommodation reviews and boundary changes. The CEFR levels could help teachers in situations like this get a sense of where their students are within their language learning experiences.

The CEFR aims to promote reflection, which leads “to the achievement of a consensus on the fundamentals and practices of language teaching, learning, and assessment” (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010, p. 8). It is not a standardization tool, which indicates that it is flexible and can be adjusted appropriately. It allows individual users of the framework to analyze their own unique situations and make the choices that they feel are appropriate to them in their own contexts, while still encompassing the key components of the framework (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010). The reference levels must be specific to students from kindergarten to grade 12 within the school context, and it is important to use the descriptors based on a common theory of learning, language proficiency, and individual cultural competence (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010). Descriptors need to be more specific and developed to meet target objectives, such as FSL in a minority or majority setting. Teachers could create assessments based on students’ level of language proficiency, and these descriptors could be used to reflect learners’ stage of competence. Examples of more in-depth descriptors could include global understanding, speaking, and writing scales, according to each unique user. The



students could all have access to grade- and age-appropriate scales that they could use to classify themselves. Examples of these are included in Appendix A.

Some jurisdictions across Canada are at very different stages of acceptance and integration of the CEFR with their language programs. The Atlantic Provinces seem to be one of the only multi-provincial organizations working to align the curriculum with the CEFR, creating materials for teachers and administrators, developing pilot units for teachers, and learning about how to implement CEFR-informed tests (The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2011). Canadian Parents for French Ontario (2010) reports that Saskatchewan and Nunavut's progress in aligning the CEFR with their curriculum is going slowly. Other provinces, such as Alberta and British Columbia have already implemented the CEFR. Alberta has been using the CEFR to determine students' levels of proficiency while British Columbia has set a goal for French Immersion graduates to use the CEFR in new curricula for French, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi, and Spanish programs (Canadian Parents for French Ontario, 2010).

Within Ontario, the CEFR is becoming more prevalent and teachers are more aware of the CEFR and its benefits. Along with the new FSL curriculum document (Ministry of Ontario, 2013), the CEFR can be used in conjunction with the expectations as outlined by the province. The CEFR can be referenced for planning, teaching, and assessment related to the curriculum expectations, learning styles, needs, and experiences of all students. The two main hindrances to the integration of the CEFR relate to the work required to ensure teachers are on board with the framework (i.e. teachers would need to see the additional value that the CEFR adds to their practices before changing how they teach) and how to integrate it into other language learning programs (The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2011).

The auxiliary document accompanying the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) features a ten-year plan. Years 1, 5, and 8 will allow school boards to create and submit to the Ministry an FSL plan that supports the provincial goals for FSL (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2013). The plan involves both the elementary and secondary levels, and includes at least one measurable goal based on district needs for each of the province's three goals for FSL. In Years 4, 7, and 10, school boards will be responsible for submitting a short progress report. The three provincial goals are as follows.

1. Increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in FSL.
2. Increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation.
3. Increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL.

(Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2013)

The purpose of this FSL plan would be to assist boards in thinking strategically about FSL and planning in order to support the provincial goals. It is hoped that observing developments in FSL over the course of ten years will assist the ministry to support continuity and alignment in areas of effective instructional practices in FSL programs across Ontario and to monitor trends in FSL education. An important component in the planning process is for each school board to establish baseline data, which can be used to prioritize needs and provide a foundation for measuring progress over time (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2013).

In addition to this over-arching provincial plan, the Ontario Ministry of Education has supported CEFR pilot programs in some school boards. A Southwestern Ontario research project by Majhanovich, Faez, Smith, Taylor and Vandergrift (2010) will be discussed in the following

section. It is evident that the CEFR will be introduced and re-introduced in Canadian provinces and that some are already adopting its practices.

## 2.5 The CEFR within the Canadian FSL Classroom

Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) report, *Describing FSL Language Competencies: The CEFR Within an Ontario Context*, presents research that was conducted in nine different school boards, across Ontario, and involved Core French and French Immersion teachers. Students were also participants within the research. Teachers implemented CEFR-informed activities in the classroom to observe the benefits of using such activities. Student self-assessments were sought through questionnaires and reflections (Majhanovich et al., 2010).

The questionnaires that were developed for students asked them to reflect on their level of language and cognitive development skills (Majhanovich et al., 2010). The results of using CEFR-informed activities in the classroom demonstrated gains for both Core French and French Immersion students in areas of learner autonomy, developing oral language ability, self-assessment and increased student motivation, real-life applicability, and ease of parental communication (Majhanovich et al., 2010). To determine the success of the CEFR activities, the teachers assessed perceived changes in the learners' oral proficiency.

In Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) research, as predicted, most teachers expressed the need for additional PD opportunities to attend workshops and in-service sessions to help them to better understand how to properly and further use parts of the CEFR in their classrooms. This is also echoed in Ellis and Shintani's (2014) findings where teachers found a variety of difficulties when trying to implement TBLT, including a lack of support from educators. There is a need for PD

opportunities to further understand the use and benefits of TBLT and the CEFR within teaching and learning.

In Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) study, teachers were provided with kits, developed by a group of experienced FSL teachers from the Thames Valley District School Board in Ontario. These kits contained a series of activities related to the "Can Do" descriptors from the appropriate levels of the CEFR for each of the communication skills within an L2: listening, reading, spoken production, spoken interaction, and writing. The purpose of these kits, once teachers were shown how to use them, was to promote CEFR-informed instruction in their classroom. Teachers also received a teachers' guide for each level, which involved A1, A2, and B1 levels (Majhanovich et al., 2010). The researchers of this study were interested in knowing whether there would be any change in student attitudes and confidence following the use of CEFR-informed activities (Majhanovich et al., 2010). Interestingly, comparisons between the pre- and post-test scores did not show any changes in learners' attitudes (Majhanovich et al., 2010).

TBLT also encourages students to be accountable for their own learning, whether through individual experiences or social interactions. Students' roles change from 'language learners' to 'communicators', and they are reportedly more ready to take on the performance of tasks with the knowledge they have gained through their L2 (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). Similarly, developing learner autonomy is a key aspect of the CEFR approach. These researchers wanted to discover teacher perceptions about learner independence (Majhanovich et al., 2010). The data indicated that teachers were skeptical of their students' ability to take charge of their own learning. However, this study supports the need for development of learner autonomy as a skill to be introduced at a young age and be present in all classrooms, as this is an important aspect of

French Immersion education in Ontario (Majhanovich et al., 2010). Within the study, researchers discovered that teachers using CEFR-related activities allowed students to gain a clearer understanding of their actual language ability.

In terms of teacher benefits, researchers discovered that teachers viewed CEFR-informed instruction as promoting language use, collaborative dialogue, and languaging<sup>2</sup> in a classroom in ways that traditional, teacher-directed ways of teaching cannot achieve (Majhanovich et al., 2010). The Council of Europe's (2001) goal of learner autonomy and L2 learning has two significant pedagogical implications, which involve the need for working with teachers and their beliefs about students' abilities, and also the need for working with students to show them how to engage in student-directed learning and reflect on their own learning (Majhanovich et al., 2010). Teachers involved in this research believed that the CEFR-based activities used in the classroom increased learner autonomy, self-confidence, and motivation.

Within the CEFR, children can see themselves as co-learners within the classroom and educators should strive to incorporate students' inputs within the program. For example, students can drive the curriculum expectations in various directions, based on their interests. If students are interested in simple machines, then a written narrative can be based on robots. If students are working with the concept of money, they can have a classroom store using their own toys to purchase. Student participation is what creates authentic learning and is what educators should be interested in to grasp students' attention. Furthermore, students can be responsible for setting their learning goals and determining their strengths and next steps.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Languaging' is a term coined by Swain (2006) describing "a dynamic, never ending process of using language to make meaning" (Majhanovich et al., 2010, p. 60).

Heydon and Wang (2006) argue that the curriculum should adopt a more ‘emergent paradigm’ approach to learning and teaching, whereby children are contributing participants to a curriculum and society at large, and are viewed as an important source of the curriculum. This statement holds much truth, especially as children get older and gain more independence, which is further supported by the CEFR. Students independently engaging in activities without much direction allow them to apply themselves and to make use of their prior knowledge. Following this, the teacher can then help students to identify the specific goals of the activities and to assist the learners in naming their learning<sup>3</sup> along with important concepts. Students are able to be completely in charge of their own learning while the teacher facilitates learning. Allowing students to take on an active role in their learning, such as providing contextual and real-life language experiences, encouraging the use of prior knowledge, or allowing students to connect their learning to their personal experiences, is what creates authentic learning for students and is what the goal of FSL teaching should be.

As children are maturing into junior-aged students, they should be given the opportunity to reflect on their learning. Heydon and Wang (2006) state that children are competent, confident learners and can make a valuable contribution to society. French Immersion teachers can indeed involve their students in curriculum planning through the use of the CEFR, specifically through Language Portfolios. Though such portfolios are not deeply explored through this particular research, Language Portfolios can allow students to see themselves as French-speaking individuals who make a valuable contribution to society in upholding the ability to speak

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<sup>3</sup> What is meant by “naming their learning” refers to students using the correct term to describe what they are doing. For example, when students rhythmically read a pattern implicitly (i.e., square, square, circle... square, square, circle...), they can be taught explicitly that the ‘square, square, circle’ part is called the core, or in French, “la régularité”.

bilingually. These portfolios can give students the confidence boost to be successful, not only in the classroom, but also in their everyday environments. The portfolio is a collection of students' outside-of-school L2 experiences. For example, a student could document a visit to Ottawa for the Family Day weekend where she spoke French to a waiter in a restaurant. Students apply both their implicit and explicit learning when they are able to use the knowledge gained within school, in out-of-school contexts.

## 2.6 Application of the Literature

Vandergrift (2006) identifies one particular weakness of the CEFR that is of significance to my research: it does not sufficiently discriminate for levels at the lower end of the framework. The most basic level achieved, A1, according to the CEFR, does not differentiate enough for beginning language learners (Vandergrift, 2006). This issue arose in my research, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. Vandergrift (2006) argues that there needs to be further differentiation for beginner users. The Basic User, A1 common reference descriptor reads as follows.

Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

(Vandergrift, 2006, p. 17)

This reference level could perhaps be modified to an even more simple reference level, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Possible Adjustments to Basic User Reference Levels (A1)**

Basic User	A1(iii)	Can recognize, understand and use a limited range of basic vocabulary which has been used repeatedly in class or has been specifically taught. Can describe him/herself using a limited number of grammatical structures and simple sentence patterns that he/she has learned by repeated use.
	A1(ii)	Can answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	A1(i)	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others.

A suggestion for emergent bilingual learners is that the Basic User Reference Levels for A1 be broken down into smaller skill descriptors (Vandergrift, 2006). This will allow the teacher to assist students in being successful in attaining each level instead of overwhelming both the teacher and learner with too many expectations.

Another point to consider is that the CEFR seems to be more geared towards older learners rather than elementary school-aged students. The ways in which the reference levels are worded lend themselves to older learners, who are more cognitively able to comprehend the language and have had more experience learning an L2 than immersion learners who are emergent bilinguals. The language is more sophisticated, which is further illustrated by this example of an A1 reference level: "Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer



questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has" (Vandergrift, 2006, p. 17). Based on my own teaching experience of working with kindergarten-aged students for four years, I have yet to meet a beginner French Immersion student (in junior kindergarten) who has received 100% French language instruction and can provide this degree of personal details about him or herself. This level is more likely to be achieved when a student has gained more experiential knowledge in the L2.

As Vandergrift (2006) suggests, this adapted table in Table 1 further breaks down the beginner, basic user reference level to encompass smaller areas of language proficiency than outlined in the CEFR. This table could be further modified and would be more applicable to early-years learners.

Language learning and teaching are at the centre of the CEFR, and other components are branched out from this milieu, such as teaching approaches, the curriculum, assessment, the user's/learner's competencies, the reference levels, the language use and the language user/learner, and tasks and roles in language teaching. All of these concepts work together to assist in the acquisition of language abilities, based on the CEFR (Council of Ministers of Education, 2010).

## 2.7 Overview of Canadian CEFR Research

A number of studies have been conducted on the CEFR, all focusing on various aspects of the principles of the communicative approach. There have been a few in particular that have shed light on areas that could be of some relevance to my research. The following sections will provide an overview of such studies and will aim to group and categorize them into clear headings.

### 2.7.1 The CEFR and Existing Professional Development

The CEFR has been used in a variety of educational environments, including post-secondary education. As the framework provides ideas for L2 teachers, there has been research conducted where students in a teacher education program have been introduced to the CEFR. In the next paragraphs, I will outline how researchers worked with university-aged students to explore an Intercultural Development Index, reflexivity, and the ELP as identified in the CEFR and how early immersion affected L2 learning in university.

Ragoonaden (2011) conducted a pilot study involving preservice FSL teachers in British Columbia. This study focused on teachers' intercultural development. An Intercultural Development Index (IDI), a statistically valid tool to measure intercultural competence, was administered to twelve preservice candidates. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures (Ragoonaden, 2011). The results were used as a basis to discuss the integration of intercultural competencies as identified in the CEFR. The study contributes to future research involving preservice teachers and further exploring intercultural competence.

Peguret (2014) set out to evaluate the circumstances that post-immersion students in their first year of French language study in university encounter with varied L2 background and levels of proficiency. What this study aimed to do was to assist students in surpassing the perceived plateau level of communication. Peguret (2014) observed students' use of *reflexivity*, relating specifically to a lack of engagement with learning strategies and long-term auto-regulation. This study related to an instrumental understanding of language and language learning of 82 students who provided insights into their use of strategies in an L2 through the analysis of two open-ended questions related to writing and speaking. The researcher found that there was an

extremely significant difference between students with a background in early immersion or French schooling and those from other FSL programs. The former used fewer strategies in their writing. This raises the question of how French Immersion students are applying their knowledge to their written output. Peguret (2014) wanted to find out pedagogical approaches to reactive students' reflexivity and determine how to encourage students to reflect on their prior knowledge of French learning.

The European Language Portfolio. Gagné and Thomas (2011) discuss their study, where the CEFR and an EPL (Electronic Language Portfolio) philosophy were introduced in a teacher education program in Ontario. There were supports given to students who were interested in creating an EPL for their own learning. The main goal of the study was to foster common learning of French language for future teachers. Gagné and Thomas's work (2011) raised awareness to individuals who taught French of the existence of a language portfolio (such as the EPL) and created support between colleagues teaching French and other language instructors.

Similarly, another study that took place in a university setting was part of an education course that was taken in conjunction with a French language course. Lemaire's (2013) goal was to assist French-speaking students living in Western Canada to reflect on their language repertoire and identity. The study involved a review of LaPlante and Christiansen's portfolio (2001) and the ELP, and students were asked to identify their strengths and challenges to focus better on their language development. Here, in this study, similar to that of Gagné and Thomas' work (2011), students were at the forefront of the study and were involved in the co-construction of learning French and delving into the language portfolio as set out by the CEFR. As in Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) study, learner autonomy was still a focus, and continued well into students' language learning journeys.

Another research study that encompassed the CEFR and the ELP is that of Mansilla and Riejos (2007). They provide a short overview of the history of the CEFR and ELP, and explain the aims and functions of the portfolio. Their study describes the ELP's use in Europe with the implementation of the portfolio into students' language learning. The research uncovered that most of the ELP users are students at the elementary school level. In a post follow-up interview, there was discussion of the most salient and practical points of the CEFR, reference levels, assessment opportunities, and the ELP. There were not many reports of students in higher education using the portfolio. Mansilla and Riejos (2007) observed that the results of the study were mixed but there were positive effects on the learning process, learning outcome, and learner motivation. However, there were challenges and drawbacks that were encountered by both teachers and students, including the rigidity of self-assessment, difficulty in handling and updating the portfolio, and the amount of time that the ELP involves (Mansilla and Riejos, 2007). This pertains to my study during which I tried to address the struggles and obstacles encountered by my teacher participant in her classroom, identify areas where she would like to explore next, and then set goals and steps to achieve these expectations.

Mandin (2010) used the CEFR and language portfolio with French Immersion graduates in the context of an introductory language methodology course in a Francophone institution. Students were to complete a two-page autobiographical narrative entitled, "My Life in French till now", create an action plan that included an analysis of errors they identified as targets in their learning, and the means or tools by which they chose to use to correct the identified errors. Their analysis of the autobiographical narrative stemmed from their life experiences, specifically when they were exposed to the French language. Their narrative was inspired by values that they developed and the choices they made relating to learning French. Students also included

significant experiences that they identified as pivotal in their motivation to pursue postsecondary studies in French, along with teachers, friends, and family who played an important role in their lives. Mandin's study (2010) was laid out in a way where students in an elementary school setting could be able to replicate the process, using more appropriate self-assessment strategies.

Turning to a study at the high school level, Kristmanson, Lafargue and Culligan (2013) engaged in an action-research project with Grade 12 students, using a language portfolio based on the ELP. This project involved a focus group with interviews conducted to gather data related to experiences and perceptions regarding L2 learning. The study focused on learners' experiences with the portfolio and its role in promoting learner autonomy. The main themes uncovered were those of general perceptions of learning, language learning experiences, and experiences with the language portfolio. The project discovered pedagogical possibilities for students learning a second or foreign language. The study suggested that developing learning autonomy presented opportunities and challenges for language studies. However, there needed to be continued exploration of learner voices, as this was an important direction to take for studies involving language portfolios based on the ELP principles and guidelines. Kristmanson et al. (2013) concluded that using student voices would allow educators to further understand ways in which ownership involvement and personalization could lead to more effective goal-setting, self-assessment tasks, and learner autonomy.

It is evident that because the CEFR is such a large document, each study discussed above aimed to highlight and focus on certain aspects of the document. It would be a challenge to find salient studies that reflected a number of parts of the CEFR, and the studies mentioned above all involved students of various levels of education, along with one important piece of the CEFR (such as the language portfolio or intercultural competence).

## 2.7.2 The CEFR and Teachers' Knowledge

My research indicated that there is not much literature involving teachers' PD related to the CEFR. The few pertinent studies are briefly discussed in this section.

The CEFR and professional development opportunities. Wernicke (2010) initiated a PD opportunity for FSL teachers from British Columbia, which involved a 2-week sojourn in France. The purpose of this opportunity was to address the shortage of qualified French teachers and the demand of effective PD and teacher education for FSL teachers. Dating to over a century ago, researchers stated that study abroad had been an integral part of language teacher education (Wernicke, 2010). However, there is little research related specifically to teachers studying abroad. Wernicke (2010) stated that by the time teachers entered French language classrooms as teachers themselves, many had not experienced a French-speaking environment or had extended contact with French speakers outside of the classroom. Based on the questionnaires and interview data, Wernicke (2010) revealed that teachers experienced the highest level of social integration during their stay, which is likely because of their professional engagement with target language speakers (Wernicke 2010). The researcher gave an overview of some of the major trends of study abroad research and how teachers have not been acknowledged in literature. There needs to be more research on PD for teachers abroad and opportunities for further research on teacher education.

Mison and Jang (2011) also provided a study that referred to the CEFR and the role it played in Canadian language education policies and curriculum. However, they observed that practical aspects of the CEFR, especially from within the classrooms, tend to be given little consideration. Mison and Jang's (2011) research aimed to bridge the gap between the CEFR's flexible and abstract tenets and teachers' existing knowledge, experience, and needs in classroom

assessment (Mison and Jang, 2011). They suggest that giving teachers the opportunity to use their own experience of teaching and learning and changing their beliefs by adapting innovative procedures that could work towards easing their tensions and conflicts could be more effective in promoting successful teaching or assessment methods.

The main concerns from FSL teachers that arose from this study included assessment transparency, consistency, and plurilingualism, all of which should be further considered within the classroom for teachers' support of the potential adaptation of the CEFR (Mison and Jang, 2011). The comments provided by teachers in Mison and Jang's work (2011) are echoed in my study. There is a need for teachers to have a universal understanding of expectations to ensure consistency and communication between FSL educators. This will ensure that students are given the opportunity to have the same type of learning in subsequent years, regardless of their teachers (Mison and Jang, 2011). Teachers within this study also discussed how consistency was a goal and ideally, teachers would have used the same types of assessments, teaching, and learning, based on the principles of the CEFR. However, many times, students came from different provinces or school boards, and teachers were expected to have a clear knowledge of the CEFR levels which students attained, but this was not the reality of such situations (Mison and Jang, 2011). The study also went into detail about students' use of English within the French learning environment, which relates to discussions I had with my teacher participant. In conclusion, Mison and Jang (2011) suggested that if Canada were to move ahead with the CEFR, it would be imperative to use teacher voice and perspective to ensure that this teaching and learning approach would meet their expectations based on the reality of Canadian classrooms.

The study that I found most pertinent to my own multi-phase case study was that of Piccardo (2013) who stated that this study was inspired by the growing interest in the CEFR.

Piccardo (2013) stated that there had been less attention given to the need for PD aimed at helping teachers grasp the conceptual density of the CEFR document. To begin the research, there was an exploratory phase aimed at investigating issues and challenges teachers faced regarding assessment within their everyday practice. The second phase was divided into two training sessions based on the CEFR followed by group discussions. The next phase focused on applying the knowledge of the concepts learned in the previous phase and considering real or potential teaching situations. Finally, a reflection and feedback session was held in small groups.

Piccardo's (2013) qualitative study was conducted in the Canadian context to investigate the impact of targeted PD on teachers' perceptions of the CEFR. The four-phase guided reflective process, conducted in Toronto, Ontario, helped teachers overcome their perceived notions of the CEFR and considered using the framework within their teaching practices. Piccardo's (2013) study, though on a smaller scale, argued that the CEFR is a complex document and requires a deep understanding for teaching and learning of an L2. Teachers need to receive guidance, training, and PD opportunities on how to use the CEFR. If teachers are assisted in understanding the CEFR through training, then educators will have the potential to independently make use of the CEFR. Linking the CEFR to pedagogical principles and choices can create changes for teachers that allow for success in their personal teaching practices (Piccardo, 2013).

There are many pieces to the CEFR framework, and not all of them can be explored through one study; however, similar to Piccardo (2013), my goal was to identify the challenge of implementing parts of the CEFR along with the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) without much direction, familiarize my teacher participant with the highlights of the CEFR, and allow her to reflect on her knowledge of it. My purpose was to



coach her through any of the perceptions or struggles that she identified as a teacher attempting to use some CEFR-based activities and teaching methods in her classroom. While much time and research has been devoted to developing language portfolios related to the CEFR; more research is needed on FSL teachers' experience with and perceptions of the CEFR. My goal in conducting a multi-phase case study was to contribute to teachers' PD on the CEFR, a document that is relatively new to FSL teachers in Ontario.

## Chapter 3

### 3 Research Methodology

This study incorporated principles of qualitative research and a multi-phase case study. A variety of sources was used to create triangulation within the findings and data collected. In this chapter, I discuss my research methodology.

#### 3.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry for achieving an in-depth understanding of human behaviour. Within this type of research, triangulation must occur to increase the validity and credibility of the results and findings.

Cohen and Manion (2000) state that triangulation is an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p. 254). Yin (2014) explains that there are six sources of evidence that are most commonly used in case study research. These include: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts.

In addition to these six sources of evidence, Yin (2014) discusses four principles of data collection that establish the construct validity and reliability of the evidence. The principles are as follows: use multiple sources of evidence, create a case study database, maintain a chain of evidence, and exercise care when using data from electronic sources (Yin, 2014).

Before beginning this study, I did a thorough literature review of documents pertaining to my area of study. These helped to inform me of other researchers’ beliefs and use this information to guide me in my thinking and research methods. Gaining knowledge in areas that I

would need to refer to throughout my study allowed me to become a more credible source for teaching my teaching participant.

Yin (2014) writes that “One of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview” (p. 110). This area was the main source of evidence in my study as the teacher participant and I worked together through a series of interviews to find authentic ways to embrace the collaborative learning that we did on the CEFR with some suggestions and discussions about possible activities and ways of assessing students’ language proficiency. Through the interviews, field notes were recorded using detailed transcribed logs of the dialogue that took place between the researcher and the teacher participant. There is also the idea of time triangulation, which relates to gathering data on multiple occasions, helping to examine the consistency of the data and interpretations over time (Brown, 2005). This was achieved through the study as the three phases conducted took place over the course of five months.

Yin (2014) believes that the data collection process for case studies is more complex than those used in other research methods. Because the researcher must have methodological flexibility, this data collection process requires quality control.

## 3.2 Case Study

My research is classified as a case study, as it provides “a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 289). This type of qualitative research observes and reflects real, authentic situations. Overall, the goal of my study was to empower teachers and allow them to see themselves as researchers in their own classrooms (Crocco, Faithfull and Schwartz, 2003).

### 3.3 Participants

The researcher took the lead in this study to engage a teacher in discussions of the CEFR, and whether this framework and TBLT activities could support the language acquisition of French language learners. I placed ads to find 1 or 2 participants for my study (see Appendix B).

Advertisements were posted in local areas, such as grocery stores, teacher resource stores, and libraries, with my e-mail address as a way to contact me should anyone be interested. The participant that I recruited was eager to participate in the research as a newer teacher.

Interviews with the teacher were conducted prior to, during, and after the research had been completed to get her thoughts, insights, and perspectives on the overall benefit of using the CEFR within her classroom, along with areas that needed to be further supported. We discussed potential activities, such as purposeful conversational dialogue activities, vocabulary-based learning, working with older students to model language conventions, and documenting learning through some sort of portfolio that could be done with her students. We also watched a variety of videos that highlighted some important aspects of an oral-based language activity within an L2 classroom. One video showcased primary learners working with junior students and another video outlined using the ELP.

At the beginning of the research, the teacher participant was to teach in a primary classroom. However, her teaching assignment changed and she accepted a French Immersion kindergarten teaching position for the upcoming school year. Had I known this from the beginning, I likely would have chosen a different teacher candidate. However, I did not want to stop the research midway, nor did I have another teacher participant available. We carried on with the study, relating our discussions to both the primary grades (as I had originally intended) and kindergarten.

Following the first phase, I followed up with the teacher participant through e-mail to see if there was more that she wanted to discuss at two later times. We discussed this possibility of having follow-up sessions to get an extended perspective of the helpfulness of the PD, and other needs that she had experienced within the classroom. The teacher participant was enthusiastic about having additional interview sessions because she wanted to voice some of her challenges and discuss certain situations with me in a professional manner.

### 3.4 Context

This case study has much value within a school setting. The potential for reflective practice to amalgamate theory and practice is why I believe in its merit. My study involved a teacher and a researcher working together to formulate a question to achieve a certain goal and then embarking on an intensive commitment to the project. This goal is meant to promote change, and in this regard, teachers and researchers are not working against each other in order to test a hypothesis, but rather working together to try to benefit each other's practices, and also students' learning experiences. In the case of my study, the teacher participant and I joined to deepen our understanding of the CEFR, discuss our views on the framework and its role in the revised FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), and use each other as an avenue for growth, challenge, and professional partnership.

### 3.5 Methods

In my research, two teachers worked together as a team to collaboratively address the issue at hand, which was deepening our understanding of the CEFR, identifying how the CEFR is related to the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), and exploring its strengths and limitations as a language acquisition tool in a classroom. As teachers, we also

engaged in reflection and co-learning by working alongside one another to achieve the common goal (Crocco et al., 2003).

The teacher participant and I positioned ourselves on equal levels and worked towards building each other's knowledge and challenging one another's thoughts in the process. The suggestion by Mison and Jang (2011) to include teachers' voices was evident through my research, where I worked towards getting my teacher participant's voice heard and inviting others in on challenges of a FSL teacher with the utilization of CEFR-infused practices within a classroom, without getting much or any direction on how to do so. My teacher participant's perspective and thought process were thoroughly documented through our discussions and her beliefs, opinions, and ideas were made clear through the representation of her voice within my study. The teacher participant and I engaged in informal discussions around the CEFR, which took the form of initial and final interviews and two follow-up interviews between the teacher and me. Specific interview questions for Phase 1 are included in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Initial interview questions were used to find out the teacher participant's prior knowledge of the CEFR and to allow her to reflect on her current teacher practices and philosophy. The final interview questions involved reflecting on our work together and identifying areas of growth and new learning, as well areas that may have fallen short of her expectations for our PD. These questions were used to drive our conversations during our initial interview and some were addressed again during our final interview session. During Phase 2, the questions that I used to prompt the teacher participant and my conversations are found in Appendix E. Phase 3 questions are located in Appendix F.

Phase 1. The first phase of the research took place in July, 2014. There were four series of working sessions, whereby the researcher asked pre-research interview questions and introduced key principles of the CEFR to the teacher. We continued to explore highlights of the CEFR, such as reference levels, self-assessment grids, “Can Do” statements, and watched a video that inspired the teacher participant to want to try primary/junior conversational role modeling. The video featured grade 1 and 2 students working alongside junior-aged children to strengthen French conversational skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.). The teacher and I examined the ELP and watched an accompanying video on the same topic and addressed learner autonomy and self-assessment within the classroom context (CoE, 2011). Our last interview session of the first phase included our post-research interview and a summary of focus areas identified for the future of FSL programming within an auxiliary document (Ministry of Education, 2013). These learning sessions were both formal, with the use of pre- and post-interview questions and the explicit teaching done by the researcher, and informal, through reflections and candid and open conversations about the material covered (Schön, 1983). The interview questions listed in Appendix B and C were used only during the first phase of the research.

Phase 2. This second phase of the research took place in October, 2014. I wanted to follow up with the teacher participant after the new school year had begun and re-visit the conversations we had during our first phase. I had her reflect on how our study affected her teaching within her L2 classroom and wanted to see what additional support she had had since beginning the school year. The questions asked are located in Appendix E. We had only one interview session in October, which was honest and informal. The teacher participant revealed struggles and challenges within the classroom.

Phase 3. The last and final phase of my research occurred in December, 2014. This single interview allowed the teacher participant and me to follow-up on the challenges that were discussed in October, 2014. A list of questions for this phase is found in Appendix F. This phase also provided me with some answers as to how the teacher participant felt about our PD experience and allowed her to reflect on the process. In an informal interview setting, the teacher participant was able to express her concerns with my study and with the way in which she was being supported in the classroom. This last interview was crucial in gaining some closure to the work we had intensely begun in July, 2014.

The initial purpose of Phase 1 was to allow me to gain a clearer understanding of the teacher participant's prior knowledge and concerns with the CEFR. Once we established her familiarity with the CEFR, I was better able to gauge where the research should go. Following the first interview in July, 2014, the teacher participant and I began to have discussions around the CEFR and I was able to offer further insight by presenting relevant literature and was able to have open and clarifying conversations about the CEFR and how this approach could be tailored to use within the classroom, and presented in a way that was of use to the teacher participant.

The discussions, teaching and learning within this mentor-mentee relationship allowed me to scaffold the teacher's learning in areas where she was lacking some background knowledge. Reflective practice is highly supported through collaboration on the part of the participants, with continuous dialogue being significant for the progression of the study and deepening of understanding, with all participants feeling comfortable in their discussions (Howes, 2001). I believe that this is a reflection of how at ease we were with one another since we shared professional understanding of the purpose of the study. We approached topics sincerely and were further able to understand one another's frustrations and perspectives. The



questioning process that took place furthered our understanding on the topic at hand and potentially questioned or challenged personal practice and beliefs. Each party within the research pushed the other to engage in critical thinking within a safe space (Howes, 2001).

This is reminiscent of the idea of participatory action research whereby everyone is valued equally and the ‘main’ researcher’s beliefs and views form only part of the research, and other participants’ perspectives are also considered (Burgess, 2006). It will be seen later that both my voice and the teacher participant’s views are included in the dialogue of the findings of the research.

The participant and I had ongoing interaction with one another through the initial audio-recorded interviews and transcribed reports of our conversations. These interactions and conversations documented our mutual understanding of the CEFR, and our conversations around activities that could be used at appropriate grade levels to assess language proficiency within the classroom.

Since the majority of my research took place over the course of July, this gave me a chance to work intensely with the teacher participant without having additional school-related tasks to fulfill. The main goal of the research was to inform and bring awareness to the teacher participant of how to approach teaching using the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) and CEFR-based teaching and learning approaches. This compact timeframe allowed us to speak freely and candidly about the strengths and challenges that we saw with aspects of the CEFR and gave us the opportunity to spend time discussing our own experiences and how the CEFR could benefit our learners.

### 3.6 Timeline of Research

The first set of interviews in Phase 1 took place over the course of four days, spread out between three weeks in July, 2014. The teacher participant and I had a post-interview three months later in October, 2014, and finally the last phase, two months after the post-interview in December, 2014. We completed a pre-research interview session where there were questions related to the CEFR. Following this, I presented key principles of the CEFR to the teacher participant and discussion occurred to gain clarification or to relay important information. The reference levels were also investigated and their role in the classroom was looked at in detail. I also presented the teacher with a video of a Grade 1/2 French Immersion classroom, featuring primary students engaged in a task-based language activity with older students (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.).

During the next discussion, we continued to review the CEFR and the participant was given some information about the ELP and how this could be beneficial in the classroom for developing learner autonomy and self-assessment skills. Post-research interview questions were given during the last meeting along with a chance for the teacher participant to reflect on the study. The following table provides a breakdown of the schedule that the teacher participant and I followed during our July, 2014 sessions as well as our follow-up interviews in October and December, 2014.

**Table 2: Research Timeline**

Session 1 (July, 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pre-research interview – questions listed in Appendix C</li> <li>- introduction of key principles of the CEFR, summary of each of the chapters of the CEFR document</li> </ul>
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<p>Session 2 (July, 2014)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- continued exploration of reference levels, discussing observations, language used, self-assessment grids, identifying differences among A1 – C2 levels in terms of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, writing</li> <li>- overview of “Can Do” statements and how students can assess their learning on a daily basis</li> <li>- viewed the video from “On est capable” video series (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d., <a href="http://resources.curriculum.org/fsl/oral/elementary.html">http://resources.curriculum.org/fsl/oral/elementary.html</a>) of Grade 1/2 French Immersion classroom</li> </ul>
<p>Session 3 (July, 2014)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exploration of ELPs through discussion and video, “Using the ELP”, Council of Europe, 2011, <a href="http://f.vimeocdn.com/p/flash/moogaloop/6.0.20/moogaloop.swf?autoplay=1&amp;clip_id=15984590&amp;server=vimeo.com&amp;show_byline=1&amp;show_title=1&amp;controller=player2&amp;view=moogaloop_swf&amp;referrer=http%3A%2F%2Felp.ecml.at%2FELP%2FELPVideos%2Ftabid%2F2371%2Flanguage%2Fen-GB%2FDefault.aspx&amp;cdn_url=http%3A%2F%2Ff.vimeocdn.com&amp;player_url=player.vimeo.com&amp;moogaloop_type=moogaloop">http://f.vimeocdn.com/p/flash/moogaloop/6.0.20/moogaloop.swf?autoplay=1&amp;clip_id=15984590&amp;server=vimeo.com&amp;show_byline=1&amp;show_title=1&amp;controller=player2&amp;view=moogaloop_swf&amp;referrer=http%3A%2F%2Felp.ecml.at%2FELP%2FELPVideos%2Ftabid%2F2371%2Flanguage%2Fen-GB%2FDefault.aspx&amp;cdn_url=http%3A%2F%2Ff.vimeocdn.com&amp;player_url=player.vimeo.com&amp;moogaloop_type=moogaloop</a>)</li> <li>- addressed learner autonomy and self-assessment and what these may look like in the classroom</li> </ul>
<p>Session 4 (July, 2014)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- post-research interview – questions listed in Appendix D</li> <li>- summary of focus areas identified in Framework for FSL in Ontario</li> </ul>

	<p>Schools document (Ministry of Ontario, 2013)</p> <p>Areas discussed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raising awareness of the benefits of FSL</li> <li>• Collaborating with parent organizations that support FSL</li> <li>• Exposing students at an early age to role models who use French</li> <li>• Engaging students and parents in discussions regarding possible future advantages of learning French</li> <li>• Celebrating the accomplishments of students in FSL</li> <li>• Hosting information sessions for parents about FSL program choices</li> </ul>
<p>Session 5 (October, 2014)</p>	<p>- follow-up after beginning of school year</p> <p>- reflections on how study affected teaching within the FSL classroom and if and how the teacher participant had been further supported in the learning of the new FSL Curriculum (2013) and/or the CEFR</p> <p>- discussions of any challenges that the teacher participant was encountering</p>
<p>Session 6 (December, 2014)</p>	<p>- discussion of Piccardo's (2013) study and how this study was similar to mine</p> <p>- follow-up questions regarding our PD experience and what resonated with the teacher participant and what could have been further improved</p>

	<p>- re-visited the challenges that were discussed during October, 2014 post-study interview</p>
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### 3.7 Data Collection

This multi-phase case study was intended to draw on three data sources: a document analysis, a series of interviews, and ongoing interaction between the teacher and researcher. To begin, the researcher served as a sounding-board for the teacher and listened to an attempt to answer any concerns that she may have about the CEFR that were addressed in the pre-research interview. After this, the teacher and researcher worked together to brainstorm possible CEFR-informed activities to use in the classroom. In terms of data collection, there are two sources that will be referred to throughout the research. The initial interviews, and the follow-up conversations between the teacher participant and researcher, three and five months following the first set of interviews. The dialogue between the two individuals was recorded using an iPad and transcribed by the researcher. The data collected was in the form of conversations and the information gathered was analyzed for recurring themes or patterns and also compared to the existing literature as presented by the researcher.

To complete this case study, two additional interviews were done between the teacher and researcher that highlighted interesting findings or reactions that developed throughout the research. The teacher and researcher discussed collaborating on ideas or continuing conversations around what had worked so far in the classroom and what needed to be further strengthened.

The pre- and post-interview design allowed for a concise overview of the CEFR. The participant reported she was satisfied with the time commitment required by the study and the knowledge gained as well as the chance for interaction and reflection.

### 3.8 Observations and Field Notes

The discussions centred on how the teacher could make use of ideas for task-based and CEFR-inspired activities to enhance her students' receptive language, given the activities and opportunities that related to the expectations of the curriculum. Therefore, observations of the open discussions, conversations, and interviews with the researcher to reflect on the case study process were noted. The researcher created anecdotal and field notes while interacting with the teacher, and made connections between prior literature and discussions related to language acquisition through the CEFR model.

The way in which the research was conducted can work towards shedding light on what still needs to be done to ease educators' transition to using the CEFR within their daily practices and making use of the new FSL curriculum document in their classrooms. The mentor-mentee relationship can be a form of PD in the future for teachers wishing to investigate their own questions and concerns.

### 3.9 Data Analysis

Through transcribed interviews, the researcher noted what was said by the educator during reflection periods. These conversations occurred after a salient point had been presented to the teacher participant and the researcher re-visited the concept to hear the teacher participant's thoughts on the ideas. Any prominent points were recorded along with emphasis on speech, to show emotion, about a topic in which the teacher or researcher felt strongly.

The teacher participant was encouraged to reflect on how various concepts could be implemented into her teaching or affect the way in which she thought about teaching. Patterns in conversations with the teacher were analyzed using curriculum expectations and CEFR scales. These reflections and big ideas gave the educator a chance to capture her own learning and identify differences in her ability to think critically about her practice, and also allow the researcher to make connections and comparisons between activities, dialogues, or teaching styles that allow for further language acquisition. The researcher also highlighted any noteworthy or recurring features of the multi-phase case study to ensure that all of the vital concepts had been accounted for within the discussions (Cohen et al., 2011).

After conducting the first four initial interviews with the teacher participant during July, 2014, I had about six solid hours of discussions. Transcribing the dialogues was a time-consuming process, but a useful one, as this allowed me to find patterns in our conversations and find connections between each interview. After transcribing, I made a point of listening to the audio-recordings numerous times to search for new patterns and to really get a core sense of where my teacher participant's learning was going. I made notes to myself on the teacher participant's emotions and strong statements and used these as anchors to develop the themes. I did the same kind of analysis for both follow-up interviews in October and December, 2014.

With a written log of the conversations, I was then able to group the information gathered into four distinct categories, ones that I discovered were of utmost importance for both the teacher and my learning. The four themes identified that will be further discussed in the Findings Chapter are: The CEFR Framework and Reference Levels; Student Success, Classroom Practice, and The Teachers' and Parents' Roles. These themes allowed me to relate our discussions back to the CEFR and the principles identified throughout the framework.

### 3.10 Ethics Approval

After a few adjustments and modifications to the design of my study, the research was deemed an ethically sound procedure, as the data collected was only between two adults: the teacher and the researcher. After gaining the research ethics board's approval to conduct the study with a teacher away from the school and outside of class time, I was then able to begin my research (see Appendix G). Once the teacher participant was aware of the premise of the research and was clear about the intent, tasks (i.e., discussions and audio-taped interviews), and time commitment involved in the study, she signed the consent form.



## Chapter 4

### 4 Findings

This chapter discusses relevant information gathered from the discussions between the teacher and the researcher during the three phases. Throughout this chapter, the quotes reflect both the teacher participant's and my comments. Both of our voices were important in the development of this research because of the nature of the discussions. We would reflect and elaborate on each other's points and push one another's thinking to allow for a more balanced and shared experience. While this positionality and reflexivity might be viewed negatively in quantitative research (e.g., as bias), with the research focus on reflective practice it is a reflection of the joint effort expended by both the researcher and participant to make this study meaningful to both parties involved and show evidence of reflective practice (Schön, 1983).

#### 4.1 Phase 1

Phase 1 took place in July, 2014. A series of four interviews were conducted to allow the teacher participant to a) become familiar with the CEFR; b) discuss possible classroom activities and to look at the reference levels with a closer lens; c) learn about the ELP and identify ways to incorporate this into the classroom; and d) review our learning and understand focus areas identified by the province of Ontario including benefits to be seen in the near future.

##### 4.1.1 Themes

The data gathered from the first phase is organized into four sections: The CEFR framework and reference levels, student success, classroom practice, and the roles of teachers and parents.

- 4.1.1.1 Theme 1: The CEFR and Reference Levels

When I first began my discussions with the teacher participant, I was surprised to learn that she had already heard about the CEFR. Having just finished her Bachelor of Education studies the year before, I was impressed that she had done some prior investigating on the framework through her discovery of teaching a L2 and L2 acquisition. She was unsure of what exactly the acronym stood for, but had a general idea that the CEFR "is a framework for judging language assessments" and "learning about language and providing the threshold for where people can go - like a starting base and where they can go" with their learning. Although she had a pre-conceived notion of what the CEFR entails, I assisted in clarifying her understanding of the framework and how it is a reference tool to define, track, and recognize progress in the learning process of a language.

We had some thorough discussions about how the framework is divided into three broad sections or common reference levels: (1) Basic User, (2) Independent User, and (3) Proficient User. I explained the two additional levels, or proficiency levels, in each stage: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, and C1 and C2. I talked about how the CEFR is not simply a tool that is used in schools, but that it goes far beyond the realm of education, leading into post-secondary education and the workplace. The teacher participant recognized the importance of L2 learning being a lifelong journey. She stated that learning an L2 "has to be fluid and has to continue." We came to the conclusion that L2 learning is ongoing and never stops. The CEFR helps educators to understand that the mastery of a language is not measured by marks or participation in class, and that the learning goes further than the school walls into application in real-life situations.

When we conversed about the reference levels, the teacher participant was interested in learning how to assess or use the CEFR and curriculum to gauge how students are doing, based

on its universal scales (CoE, 2011). It was clear that the teacher felt it was helpful to be able to compare students, not to each other, but to a global reference level that would indeed tell her where the children stand, based on the language proficiency levels as laid out in the CEFR. She agreed that the CEFR appears to be leaning towards an individualized way of education rather than differentiated. Looking at the difference between differentiated instruction, and knowing where to place students on the reference levels, she explained her thinking in the following sentences.

You have to figure out how to differentiate it [the program], 20 different ways. For every student. I think, I am somewhat bothered by the term of differentiated instruction because I think about a term that we used to use at the business [her previous entrepreneurial venture] was individualized instruction. Because that's what I'm doing. I'm teaching you individually, the way you need to learn. And that differentiating among these three potential slots that I need to put you in, I need to teach to you. And it's almost impossible to do in a group of 20 or 30, totally impossible. Because I can't. I can differentiate to three different groups that I perceive as being the learners in the classroom, but if I'm wrong, then no one's learning anything.

She expressed her frustrations with the traditional way of teaching because when ability-grouping children, teachers may slot students into three to five different "groupings". However, if student A is reading at level 3 and student B is reading at level 5, they are not actually at the same level, but for time and convenience, they are put together. The teacher participant enjoyed how the CEFR gives students each a different goal to achieve and that it is realistic that not all learners will be at the same level, at the same time. We also agreed that it is beneficial for

teachers to be able to determine where their students need to start, based on their previous experiences. If students happen to change schools, their next teacher would be able to carry on the learning from where the child left off. If all educators were able to use the CEFR, we came to the realization that there would be a much clearer picture of what the students can achieve, when compared to looking at a report card and seeing a “B” under oral language. Giving students letter grades or numerical grades is not as clear as referring to the reference levels and having the subsequent teacher look at the level of the particular student and understand exactly what the child can do.

This leads to our observations of the "Can Do" statements. The teacher participant expressed positive sentiments about the "Can Do" statements and agreed that within the CEFR, they are used appropriately for both teachers and students. She saw the "Can Do" statements as an avenue to build students' independence and accountability for their learning. The statements also give them an idea of how to proceed to the next targeted goal. When asked about whether or not "Can Do" statements motivate students in their learning, the teacher participant responded by saying that she agreed with the idea of the positive way in which the statements are written.

Putting a positive spin on learning helps students to see their successes and allows the teacher to celebrate the gains that the children have made. "Can Do" statements can also be useful for students to self-reflect on their learning and understand what they know and what they need to work towards learning. During our discussions, I pointed out to the teacher participant that these "Can Do" statements not only help students, but also assist teachers in their assessment. When writing report cards, teachers can use the statements to identify criteria for each reference level of what the child has learned over the course of the term. Educators can use

these statements to their benefit and incorporate them into their report writing, commenting on what students have achieved so far.

The information within the CEFR may not lead teachers to a precise activity; however, what the statements do give teachers is the overall expectation, and teachers need to then devise a plan on how to execute appropriate activities within the classroom.

The CEFR Framework considers language learning to be a lifelong journey, and the discussions that my teacher participant and I had also related to this theme. We addressed how to better create authentic activities, or make use of TBLT that relate to the curriculum, reference levels, and “Can Do” statements to consider ways to further support students in building their language proficiency and using the framework as a way to better assess learners’ knowledge, skills, and areas of needs.

- **4.1.1.2 Theme 2: Student Success**

There is a large emphasis on learner autonomy within the CEFR. Students are encouraged to take accountability for their learning and ownership for their accomplishments in an L2 environment. The teacher participant and I discussed how critical it is to allow students to speak. Traditionally, classrooms would feature the teacher at the front of the room while the students are quiet and listening. The way I described it to the teacher participant was, "I think the way that we were taught, was the traditional way, like you be quiet and listen to me. “The sage on the stage”, as they like to call it. Whereas now, it's like you passing the baton over to them [the students], so that's the difference.” In an L2 classroom, there should be talking and lots of it. Students need to practice using the language, and certainly they need to hear and listen to the language, as spoken

by the teacher, but much of the learning occurs when students are able to transfer their knowledge into their own conversations.

During our interviews, the teacher participant made note of the French culture being evident outside of the physical classroom. Encouraging students to speak using the target language, wherever they may be, will allow them to extend their language use into a variety of situations. She felt that giving students the opportunity to express themselves, not only in the classroom context, but also one another is valuable for their language acquisition. Here, I explain the need for giving students a voice and letting them speak.

They're [students are] so guided and directed, they need that freedom to be able to speak from their mind and use words that they might not necessarily use, you know, in a teacher conversation but to their friends. So even in the hallway, I encourage the kids to speak in French in the hallway, because, you know, they're talking about what they're going to do at recess, or you know, just things that they wouldn't normally talk about in the classroom, but it's still developing their language and giving them confidence.

The teacher participant agreed and responded by saying, "Absolutely. And also, it's facilitating that environment within the school culture. I think that's important." Showing children that it is acceptable and encouraged to speak outside of the classroom is what is going to help integrate use of the language into their daily lives. If students see French as being useful or 'mandatory' in the classroom only, then they are not going to see their language learning as being a lifelong journey or applicable to their lives, which is what the CEFR aims to do.

Taking the learning one step further, students who are given a voice and feel proud of their L2 learning may also gain confidence. The children will see the value in having another language, and this will fuel their desire to continue to learn. Speaking the language outside of school, in various situations, will help students to see the big picture of why they are learning an L2 and will also build their self-confidence. It is evident which students embrace the language, as these are the children who speak French during recess time or during their lunch break.

Watching a video from the “On est capable” series (Ministry of Ontario, n.d.) also allowed the teacher participant to observe a positive CEFR-based activity done in a classroom. The video showcased a teacher who provided students with feedback and spoke to and with students to encourage them (both primary and junior children) to form longer sentences and consider more creative questions. It was helpful to see this type of purposeful conversational activity within the classroom because all too often, teachers are expected to read about an idea and envision what it is 'supposed' to look like in their classrooms; however, seeing this lesson and the various measures the teachers went to in order to create a positive, CEFR-infused lesson was inspiring for my teacher participant.

As noted in the Council of Europe’s (2001) document, one of the goals of the CEFR is to promote student confidence in their L2 communication skills (p. 5). The video allowed the teacher participant to see that students, even at a young age, are able to carry out conversations using solely French and use cues and gestures to understand questioning. It was evident, in the video, that students did the majority of the speaking within the lesson. There was a small teacher-directed part during the introduction of the activity, followed by a large period where students were communicating with one another, a reflection period, and a chance at the end to improve areas identified as needing attention.

The teacher participant discussed having learning centres based on key vocabulary, and allowing students to interact with the materials and “I would have to really listen in on them as they discussed and played with each other. If the conversation happens to be in English, that is alright, because that is the language they know, but I would be looking for signs of the students using the proper French word.” The teacher participant gained more insight on taking on different roles as a teacher, and learning how to let students engage in their own learning and try not to intervene as much. I furthered our conversation by suggesting that by providing learning opportunities that make use of authentic and meaningful language activities, students will likely be using the vocabulary learned in class to converse with one another. Teachers can also facilitate language learning using learning centres by asking questions about the targeted vocabulary. Throughout this case study, I felt it was crucial that the teacher participant and I consider authentic TBLT that mirror a real-life context and encourage the use of language for communication that is similar to real-life use of the language (Faez et al., 2011, p. 14).

An activity or routine that can be vital in the classroom could be tracking student progress. I informed the teacher participant about ELP and the benefits of using them to narrate students' adventures within their French education journeys (CoE, 2001). We were able to find a video from the “Using the European Language Portfolio” website, under the “Understanding the ELP” heading, that documented students, in Europe, using their ELPs (CoE, 2011). The video was a mini-documentary of how various countries, in Europe, use the ELP. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students about how the ELP was beneficial to their teaching and learning, respectively (CoE, 2011). I discussed with the teacher participant that the children featured in the video used a template for their ELP, but that if she were to adopt the same idea, her students would not necessarily have to complete a booklet, like the ones shown in the video.



The teacher participant could find some other way to document and follow students' accomplishments. The language portfolio could be of use to my teacher participant because of her knowledge of her emergent learners and the early childhood educator could assist the teacher in recording students' voices within their junior and senior kindergarten journeys.

Although I felt that there are ways for younger students to use a similar idea to ELPs, the teacher participant stated, "And if it's [the ELP] more oral-based, I think that's more written as well, so then waiting until grade 1 maybe to implement that is when it could be used. Because then they [students] have a rich enough vocabulary to look at what is happening along with their language conventions."

I challenged her thinking by asking her, "What if there were students in kindergarten who could express themselves fairly well in French?" She then altered her answer to say that whenever the teacher thinks that the students in his or her class are ready to channel and document their learning through pictures, writing, speaking, etc., then that is when an ELP-type activity could be introduced to the learners. She answered by saying this:

There's a lot to consider, like the ELP and the CEFR reference levels. There's a lot more that we could unpack from that, but this is a great starting point and gives me something to think about how I can jumpstart the oral language. I think that's the thing with JK/SK [junior and senior kindergarten]. They're all at different levels, so students could start an ELP if they're ready, I guess. As a teacher, I have this great opportunity, to help these kids speak French, and their French is for a long time.

Similarly, ELPs can be started when students express an interest in it, such as when they begin to share lived experiences with classmates, and then ELPs can be introduced for those particular students. Again, as the CEFR involves student autonomy and individualized learning, so can the implementation of ELPs within the classroom.

We saw the benefits of the CEFR approach to learning that can be carried through a number of passages and years of students' lives. Vandergrift (2006) wrote that language learning is not limited to one point in time, assessment or evaluation, but an improvement over a variety of learning opportunities that define students' language acquisition and proficiency. The teacher participant commented that language learning is a continuous process and that individuals' language learning never really comes to an end: "Learning a second language has to be fluid and it has to continue. Always. So having this idea like, "Once you graduate grade 12, you're done!" There's no way that you're done because if you go into a very technical field, you're going to learn the vocabulary and language associated with that." The teacher participant's thoughts seem to support the CEFR notion that learning an L2 spans over the course of many years and experiences. It is our job as educators is to encourage and fulfill this in our students.

- **4.1.1.3 Theme 3: Classroom Practice**

Not only is it important for students to have the opportunity to speak in the classroom, but also they need to have authentic experiences in which to use their acquired vocabulary. The teacher participant made an observation that sometimes, French classrooms involve worksheets or trivial, forced discussions between students. However, the CEFR promotes students having a working knowledge of the language and L2 teachers need to give students the tools that are realistic and applicable to their lives. As seen in the CEFR, teachers are encouraged to select

tasks that are purposeful and meaningful for the learner, and provide a challenging but realistic and attainable goal, involving the learner as fully as possible (CoE, 2001).

As the teacher participant had experience going through a series of interviews to gain a teaching position, she recounted the difficulty she encountered when asked about a topic in which she had no experience or interest. However, when she had a French-speaking fluency interview, the individuals asked her to tell them about her own children, her teaching experience, and her life, in general. She firmly stated that she better answered interview questions that were related to her life when compared to questions that were irrelevant to her everyday experiences. The interviews the teacher participant had allowed her to reflect on the importance of providing meaningful activities and tasks for students to complete in an L2. It was eye-opening to be able to relate an experience that an adult had to students' classroom experiences. In talking through our thoughts and perspectives, we solidified the understanding that it is much richer to give a practical task to have students write about something that interests them while applying their knowledge, contrary to having them complete an arbitrary grammatical worksheet.

Creating authentic learning opportunities goes hand-in-hand with activities that are used in the classroom. The teacher participant and I both strongly agreed that providing students with the chance to explore topics that interest them and are meaningful to them as learners is what will take them to that next level of language acquisition. Using vocabulary in authentic ways, rather than just being able to name a picture allows a child to develop his or her speaking and comprehension skills. While teachers circulate the classroom, hearing students use the language within their centres is authentic because the children are engaged in the work, and applying their knowledge at the same time.

As previously mentioned, the teacher participant and I discussed changes that could be considered when implementing a CEFR-based classroom, and using activities that complement the framework and emphasize oral communication in an L2. After our learning sessions, our main conclusions were that the goals of an L2 classroom are to encourage students to enjoy learning a language and to find ways to embrace student-centred learning without solely relying on teacher-directed activities. I summed this up by saying that within the classroom, successful activities are achieved by “making it fun, making it oral-based, and making it pertinent to their lives.” She agreed and added, “And making the activities applicable. And finding ways to use them in authentic contexts.” Students take pride and ownership of their classroom activities when they feel that they are relevant to them.

An activity that the teacher participant particularly enjoyed and referred back to numerous times was inspired by watching a video from the "On est capable" series (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.), documenting a grade 1 and 2 primary French Immersion classroom. This series, comprised of a variety of video clips from different age groups and levels of French (Core and Immersion) was released by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The aims of the videos are to engage and inform FSL teachers of various activities for student-led conversations, present ideas that allow students and teachers to engage in reflective practice, and give examples of ways to improve student proficiency in their oral French. The video documented primary students engaging in conversations guided by junior students using key vocabulary explicitly taught in the classroom. Reflecting upon the video, the teacher participant said, "Awesome. To find something to do outside of the reading buddies. Because that is done to death," along with a later reaction stating, "Like you said it's not just reading buddies where the two teachers stand at the back of the room gabbing. But that teacher was going around and intentionally asking really authentic,

rich questions." It is clear that the teacher participant felt that the activity shown in the video would be valuable and worth trying in her classroom. To sum up our discussion, students, no matter what grade level, should have the ability to converse with one another at a level that is appropriate for both parties. Younger and older students can benefit from one another in this type of communication activity.

This new CEFR-inspired outlook on reading buddies gave students a purpose for visiting with another grade and also allowed both groups of students to work on various skills, such as questioning and responses. We stated that the older students had a concrete rationale for speaking to their younger peers, which was to model questioning and engage in spontaneous conversation with other students. Not only did the older students get the chance to work on interacting with a younger audience, but also the primary children got the opportunity to listen to their role models within the school and to practice vocabulary acquired during class time. Both students and teachers were responsible, key players in this activity.

- **4.1.1.4 Theme 4: The Teachers' and Parents' Roles**

Although it may seem as though the CEFR-infused approach to teaching may not involve the educator in the same ways as traditional learning, there are aspects of the teacher's role that can play a part in the success of students and their L2 experiences. Below are some highlights of what was discussed during interviews with the teacher participant.

First and foremost, the teacher participant felt as though it is integral for teachers to have high expectations for their students. Her beliefs allow learners to achieve and meet the goals set out for them by the curriculum, the framework, and also the educators. The teacher clearly stated this when she said, "When we set the expectations really high, then they [the students] will

achieve them. When we set them low, then they don't." If teachers believe that their students can, then they will see results that were perhaps unimaginable. Giving students a target to attain, in addition to scaffolding, and assisting them in their learning to meet this goal, is what teaching and learning is all about.

Along with creating an authentic environment where children are given activities that matter to them, teachers should be intentionally asking questions that reflect meaningful, rich, and higher-order thinking from their students. The teacher participant revealed that she is attempting to ask richer questions to begin her students' participation efforts and learning at the beginning of each school day. By taking our discussion and being able to see where it fits into her own teaching, the teacher participant was evidently gaining from our learning together and seeing how the CEFR could fit in to her L2 program. Students can further their learning and stretch their thinking when given the opportunity to do so, and this can be achieved with questioning that encourages them to further explain themselves or dig deeper for a better response.

Early years are crucial to developing a strong basis for L2 learning, and students who have the opportunity to learn two languages (likely English and French in Ontario) simultaneously can be better equipped for language learning in the future (CoE, 2001). Teachers need to strive to speak in French day in and day out in the junior and senior kindergarten learning environment, as this is the way that the students will gain consistent exposure to French language (Bjorkland et al., 2013). Furthermore, especially when children are entering the school environment at such a young age, it is imperative for teachers to create a safe place where students are not reprimanded for mistakes made while trying to gain oral competence in French. Rather they should be coached and modeled to use appropriate sentence structures in order to

learn and gain fluency in the L2. Students will become better risk-takers if they are situated in an environment in which they feel comfortable to step outside of their comfort zones. The teacher participant expressed that she makes a conscious effort to coach students along in their speaking rather than tell them what was said incorrectly. The teacher participant and I believe that educators need to create a positive and safe environment through modeling, especially in an L2. Teachers are the main source of language production for many students and without the correct and reassuring modeling, some students may not be able to thrive in the program. Students are just beginning to learn an L2, so educators need to understand, as the CEFR states, that L2 learning is an ongoing experience that may not ever surpass level A1; however, students are allowed to take their individual journeys and take their L2 learning as far as they can. Inspiration to continue learning French may also come from the patience and safety that teachers provide to their students.

Within the CEFR context, especially in a French language learning environment, educators need to have a solid working knowledge of the curriculum and find ways to connect the provided activities to the expectations and objectives of the document. An example of this could be in an interactive activity with primary and junior students being paired up to converse with one another. The teacher participant expressed an interest in understanding how CEFR-infused activities can further relate to the different ages and learning styles of the goals of the activities. We thoroughly discussed how teachers need to give students the ability to comprehend situations and conversations in an L2 by building learners' contextual knowledge.

The Council of Europe (2001) suggests that scaffolding students' learning so that they may be able to sift through important information, known words, and be able to deduce a new term will assist children in their everyday learning and life. The CoE (2001) further suggests that

students need to be taught to listen for the meaning and to decipher a particular word to understand the message being conveyed, and this begins with the teacher and his or her ability to gently guide students in expanding their thinking. Through the CEFR, there is certainly more of a focus on French Immersion programming being orally based in Ontario schools, and this is the practical real-world knowledge that students can gain. Communicating orally and understanding the L2 is much more concrete in real-life contexts, such as ordering off menus or asking for directions. The teacher participant liked the focus of the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) being more oral because she believes that too many students come out of French programs believing that they are bilingual, but in reality, their oral communication is weak. The language that students will likely use in their daily lives and future experiences will stem from being capable and competent in communicating orally.

Though much FSL learning occurs in the classroom, some CEFR goals involve out-of-school contexts where students are able to apply their learning of an L2 and use the language in practical ways based on their particular experiences (CoE, 2001). For parents, this may seem like a difficult task, to foster French learning, when many parents of students in French Immersion programs do not speak the language themselves. As the teacher participant noted, “If they [parents] don’t know anyone that speaks French outside of school, then it only becomes a school thing. There’s a French camp in the summer so there’s lots, like the Canadian Parents for French, they do a lot of great things. Or French movies. Just bringing that culture into the wider community.”

Parents can also play a fundamental role in providing students with experiences that allow their children to grow and use their French. Many of the discussions I had with the teacher participant centred on a variety of experiences that showcased her daughter using her French



speaking skills in an out-of-school context. The teacher participant shared stories about her daughter's visit to Ottawa and ordering from a menu. Her daughter was able to transfer her knowledge from the classroom to a real-life situation with a French speaker other than her teacher. The teacher participant reflected on our discussions of the “Can Do” statements (CoE, 2001). “Looking at the reference levels, my daughter “Can engage in extended conversation on most general topics in a clearly participatory fashion, even in a noisy environment.” This type of additional L2 support seems much more feasible when a parent speaks the target language; however, children can get together outside of school to practice their French while non-French speaking parents can, in some ways, facilitate the learning. Allowing students to communicate with one another off school grounds can be a way for them to validate their language (CoE, 2001). Taking students to French-speaking communities can also show them the practicality of learning an L2 and also being able to experience and appreciate the French culture and traditions first hand.

Parents need not feel intimidated about their student learning an L2, as there are a variety of organizations, such as Canadian Parents for French, which can assist parents in seeking French opportunities for their children, such as day camps or movie evenings. If parents are clearly showing their enthusiasm for the language, then this will be obvious to the child and create an internal enthusiasm and excitement for French as well. Parents positively modeling the impact of learning an L2 can inspire and transfer onto their children (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

#### 4.1.2 Challenges

This section considers the recurring challenges that the teacher participant saw with the implementation of the CEFR. Some of the ideas were echoed by the researcher, as well. This

section is divided into subsections based on the theme that was discussed. This section will focus on challenges encountered with implementing parts of the CEFR, misunderstandings or observations of the CEFR, a lack of information to assist teachers in using the CEFR, and in-class struggles.

- **4.1.2.1 Challenges with Implementing Parts of the CEFR**

The first step in implementing pieces of a new teaching approach is to gain teacher trust and interest in the initiative. As this is of utmost importance, the teacher participant and I discussed thinking that it may be challenging to get teachers on board with the CEFR. As a variety of pedagogical approaches have been introduced to educators over the last few decades, hearing about something 'new' may intimidate teachers. Perhaps there may be some teachers who seem pessimistic when it comes to the idea of putting a new way of teaching into practice. The teacher participant seemed frustrated with the ideas that have been thrown her way, with little to no support to assist her. She also argued that some teachers may hesitate at the thought of the CEFR and say "that we're not European, we're Canadian, so why are we using this?" Since she teaches in a community where French speakers are not the majority, unlike in European countries, she alluded to the idea that some educators may feel as though the level of French in Ontario does not need to reach the same standards as those in Europe. Canadian teachers may feel as though our country is not in the same category as the European Union and may be weary to adopt *their* approach. However, at the end of the discussion, the teacher participant also expressed that though some educators may feel as though the CEFR is not applicable to Canadian education, the framework was a great tool and there was no need to re-invent an approach that has had success in other countries.

Through our interviews, the teacher participant also expressed her view that the CEFR seems much more individualized and less differentiated. She explained this by saying that differentiation is dividing students up based on their supposed achievement levels, thus into three or four groups. Individualization occurs when each student receives exactly what he or she needs, and does not end up in neat and tidy groups based on what the teacher presumes. The framework functions in a way that is conducive to cater to individualized language learning because each reference level is analyzed based on students' unique situations.

The Council of Ministers of Education (2010) support this individualized way of teaching, writing that individual users can make choices that they feel are appropriate to them within their own contexts. Teachers can hone in on their students' oral language proficiency and scaffold their learning to work towards meeting the "Can Do" statements as laid out within the framework. Teachers can consider where students are and then build on their distinctive skills from there.

Some additional questions that we had about using the CEFR within Canada came from The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (2011). This facilitator's report was published in 2011, following a one-day meeting with key stakeholders from across Canada to assess the commitment to the CEFR among its participating stakeholders. They reviewed the state of CEFR implementation in national and provincial contexts, identified factors enabling and challenging CEFR development and progress, identified priorities for future implementation, and facilitated sharing, learning, and networking among participants (The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2011). This report informed readers that The Atlantic Provinces seem to be working on aligning their curriculum with the CEFR and creating materials for teachers and administrators. The teacher participant and I were intrigued to know why there was

evidence of implementation of the CEFR within the Western provinces, but the CEFR had not yet appeared to the same extent in Ontario. Through our interviews, the teacher participant expressed concerns with communication amongst educators and administrators, and even from coast to coast within Canada.

Through various job interviews the teacher participant applied for, she noticed that the “standards of French” between provinces, mainly Ontario and British Columbia seemed to be different. This is further stressed in Faez et al.’s (2011) research stating that there is a widespread dissatisfaction with levels of French language proficiency among students, teachers, and FSL programs. The ways in which questions were posed to the teacher participant by the Western Canada school boards seemed to be of a much higher level than her interview questions from Ontario school boards. This reflects the emphasis on the CEFR within those identified higher caliber provinces. She also noticed that the entrance level for French fluency testing appeared to be of a higher quality than she was used to experiencing. The chosen words and ways of questioning were similar to how an L1 French speaker would speak. The teacher participant discussed the need for the CEFR, not only for students, but for educators, to keep the standards fairly equal across the country. Much like the reference levels for students, the CEFR could promote this type of gauge for teacher standards of French. Adopting the same principles, Canada would not only see a more linear and transparent way of teaching, learning and assessing an L2, but would also be able to observe a framework that would assist in keeping a French oral fluency standard amongst educators within the country.

Looking at the auxiliary document that serves as a supporting text for the French Immersion curriculum document (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2013), the teacher participant and I studied the 10-year plan to fully implement the curriculum. We questioned whether this

plan was realistic and if it would indeed be helpful in evaluating the success of the new curriculum. The plan consists of implementing the plan as stated by the school board, collecting data, and monitoring progress. Every other year, school boards are required to submit another 3-year plan. Certainly there will be a learning curve with such a model; however, the teacher participant and I wanted to challenge the plan in saying that ten years seems to be quite a lengthy amount of time to be calculating the gains of the curriculum. She was uncertain that Ontario would really adhere to the timeline and continue to evaluate, observe strengths, discuss challenges, and keep up with the plan set out for putting the curriculum document into practice over ten years. Without seeing immediate results or the whole picture, the teacher participant and I considered this to be not only taxing on teachers, administrators and the Ministry of Education, but also could lead to a mundane process within the province. The teacher participant suggested that perhaps there needed to be a short-term plan for observing the effects of the CEFR and the curriculum document, which could be included in the 10-year plan, but on a smaller scale, completed by individual schools.

In summary, the challenges that were discussed between my teacher participant and me stemmed from teachers being able to realize that the CEFR is simply a name, and that all of the principles and theories within the framework related to teaching an L2 are not unique to Europe. That is simply where the document was developed. There are over 37 countries using the CEFR according to the Council of Europe website, including China, Japan and Korea (Faez et al., 2011). Another challenge identified through my study was the implementation plan of the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). As FSL teachers are becoming accustomed to using the document in combination with CEFR approaches, the 10-year plan projected by the Ministry may not be realistic. There may need to be some short-term goals

identified for teachers to continue to pursue their interests in making use of the document and seeing the value of the CEFR.

- **4.1.2.2 Misunderstandings or Observations of the CEFR**

When asked about the CEFR and if she had any queries about the framework, the teacher participant made a remark that people might view it as a rubric rather than a variety of reference levels. For assessing student work, teachers have become accustomed to looking at achievement charts that gauge student tasks based on four categories of knowledge and skills and four levels of achievement. To further guide teachers in their assessment and evaluation of student learning, the chart provides criteria and descriptors (Ministry of Ontario, 2013). Level 1 signifies achievement that falls much below the provincial standard. Level 2 represents achievement that approaches the standard. Level 3 is used when students demonstrate the provincial standard for achievement. Level 4 identifies achievement that surpasses the provincial standard (Ministry of Ontario, 2013). Sometimes, students are able to move from one level to the next within a term, months, or a year. The way in which the CEFR and the global scales are organized is reminiscent of a rubric, which educators nowadays are so used to seeing.

The achievement levels from level 1 to 4 are also set up in a chart-like table with headings at the top and down the sides. Just glancing at the CEFR, educators may believe that they know what the levels mean based on their experience using rubrics. However, as the teacher participant stated, "So it's [the CEFR is] not like Level 1 through 4. I feel like when people see this for the first time, they will say, "Ok I've seen this before, I know how to do this." But it is nothing like that. You can't just easily switch between the two. You're building on one so much to get to the other." The CEFR is not a way to evaluate or assess students on one particular project or activity. Rather, the reference levels and grid are much deeper and long-lasting, taking

children from their beginning years of learning an L2, right through to their possible professional lives. Additionally, students continuing their L2 learning develop and benefit from a competitive advantage in the workforce, as noted in the FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This does, indeed, promote the idea of the CEFR as being a lifelong journey and that learning an L2 can allow individuals to have a more competitive edge when searching for employment.

Another observation that the teacher participant shared during our discussions was that between each level of the CEFR, there seems to be a large leap to attain the next level of proficiency. The teacher participant made the following comments:

I feel like there's a bigger jump between each section. It's not like A1 to A2. I would picture it like A1 plus 7 months equals A2. Or 7 months and 2 weeks. Who knows, depends on how much time somebody is spending on it. But it's different from other graphs or different charts that say this leads into this. They're totally spaced. And I think that could confuse people. Because it's not saying this, then this, then this... And you just have to follow this path and then I'll go there and there. There's big learning in between each level.

The teacher referred to the misconception between an achievement level rubric and the way in which the CEFR is used. She was correct in saying that the CEFR does not provide children with a simple task of achieving the next proficiency level overnight. It does not take a mere adjustment to go from level A1 to A2 as is sometimes possible in achieving a level 3 from a level 2. Oftentimes, extra support, such as a reading tutor, or a home-reading program are put in place to help students move from a level 2 to a level 3. However, looking at the CEFR scales,

it may take years for an individual to move from A1 to A2. A person may very well work towards accomplishing a level each year, or work on mastering a reference level over the course of two or three years, perhaps more. It is possible that they may never achieve that level of mastery. The CEFR is a tool that provides learners with a framework that can assist and follow students throughout their L2 experiences, not plainly a table that is filled out by a teacher and used for short-term assessment purposes.

- **4.1.2.3 Lack of Information**

The main concern that the participant shared with me throughout the interviews was that there was insufficient information regarding the CEFR provided for teachers. Teachers have not been given information regarding training or PD opportunities, even if they were looking to seek introductory or additional information about the CEFR. FSL consultants can be contacted; however, there seems to be a long waiting list to get in contact with personnel from certain school boards. The time allotted for working in a small group with a leader is also limited to half a day to a day each time, so this does not seem to be enough to really delve into the new curriculum and the CEFR. There is a definite lack of communication from educators' program directors and administration about workshops related to the new curriculum. Similar to the teacher participant, many teachers may feel left in the dark and unsure of where to go to gain knowledge about these two areas.

With a lack of PD opportunities, teachers are left to gain awareness on their own, in addition to what educators already do daily inside and outside of the classroom. The teacher participant seemed frustrated when she complained, “So I think that from the administration point of view, that there’s a lack of, you know, communication there, and then just between colleagues, it’s not like an even playing field.” She was referring to a perceived breakdown in



communication between administration and teachers. Information provided to one teacher was not necessarily passed on to others. Additionally, there may be somewhat of a competitive feel in teaching where teachers are not open to sharing opportunities with others. This onus on individual educators can be taxing and challenging. It is difficult for teachers to find the extra time to learn and understand the new curriculum document and to familiarize themselves with supporting documents such as the CEFR, without being given workshops, time, or resources.

Furthermore, teachers are not given time to work collaboratively with their colleagues to discuss and plan TBLT activities. Without being given time during school hours, professional activity days or staff meetings, many educators find it daunting to make time to plan such working sessions. The teacher participant illustrates this point further when discussing the lack of time given to work through the new curriculum.

Well I think if there aren't enough resources to follow along, teachers don't have a whole bunch of extra time to create the material to add to this. So it needs to come as a full set if this is the avenue in which we're going, "This is what we think would be most appropriate for language learning and here's how you would achieve it." Because I don't think it's fair to say, here's what we're doing, and you figure out how to do it. Because then you have people doing all kinds of different things that may or may not relate to that at all.

Working alongside colleagues has many benefits and allows teachers to share their ideas with one another in a safe environment. Educators can work together to challenge each other's thinking and also assist one another in developing a common understanding of the focus. Just

like students are encouraged to progress in a safe environment and learn from one another, teachers should be expected to do the same.

The teacher participant and I also discussed the length and appropriateness of PD sessions. Communication is also lacking for PD opportunities. The teacher participant expressed frustration at not being involved in a half-day CEFR-based workshop in June, 2014. She felt there needed to be clearer communication from administration and from leaders of PD to get the message out to teachers about PD occasions. The teacher participant discussed the idea of having PD within the school, during staff meetings or Professional Activity Days. What this would achieve would be a common learning goal for schools, particularly French Immersion ones. For example, this could be spent investigating what should be at the forefront of student achievement and learning, which I would argue would be the new FSL curriculum (Ministry of Ontario, 2013) for this year. Understandably, schools have different needs; however, if principals were to dedicate some time for staff to really digest the curriculum, then perhaps other areas of need would also be addressed in giving time to educators to work together and learn about what concerns them as teachers and their pupils.

Providing teachers with a sufficient amount of information and time to learn about new teaching approaches is vital. As shown in the above paragraphs, the teacher participant seemed annoyed, discouraged, and deflated when discussing the amount of time devoted for teachers to attend PD sessions or receive release time to work with their colleagues. As my teacher participant conveyed, teachers are not equipped with tools, suggestions or ideas; however teachers must learn to adopt an entirely new way of teaching. Because of this obvious dissonance and teachers feeling inadequately prepared to take on teaching approaches as they are introduced to them, educators may, at times, ignore the initiative or perhaps give up altogether. It is a

constant struggle for teachers to keep up with the current practices and although teachers want to do what is best for their students, this sometimes comes with a price: A price that teachers want to pay, but it comes as a challenge.

- **4.1.2.4 In-Class Struggles**

I found my conversations with the teacher participant helpful as we were able to use one another for support and to express our concerns. Within the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), the CEFR is most linked to a focus on oral fluency in an L2, thus much of the learning occurs within the classroom while hearing and listening to French being spoken by the teacher and conversed amongst students. The teacher participant voiced her opinion about some concerns that she had about successfully using the CEFR to both her and her students' benefits. She revealed that she was feeling inspired and "I'm just trying to wrap my head around it [a CEFR-inspired classroom]. And giving them [students] the vocabulary that they need to have those rich conversations. And speaking French in the classroom. And making sure that is always happening." The teacher participant was slowly coming to understand how to find ways to encourage rich vocabulary constantly in the classroom. We discussed having a word bank, which was a suggestion given by a teacher in the video we watched (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.), but she wanted to gain more ideas of how she could: a) use rich vocabulary in her teaching, and b) give students the tools to begin to use this type of language within the classroom in their own conversations.

When discussing conversational vocabulary, the teacher participant said that "having a list of ideas and then being able to share those with another teacher to team teach together" would be helpful to guide her in the right direction when trying to scaffold her students to engage in meaningful conversations. She stated that she would appreciate a resource that includes a list

of rich, open-ended questions that she could use with her students that would encourage them to think critically. She wanted a resource that she could refer to that could give her learners a chance to expand their thinking and allow them to think outside the box. This is something that FSL teachers could possibly work on together in the future and then share with other teachers.

Another challenge that goes along with CEFR-infused activities is finding the time to engage students in language-rich activities. Following our viewing of the video (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.), where junior students were paired up with younger ones to develop conversational skills to utilize and practice familiar vocabulary, the teacher participant and I talked about how this would look within our classrooms. We discussed how some language-rich activities may not be able to be slotted into a teaching period or a specific amount of time. An example of the effort the teacher participant made to fulfill this task was when she changed her class schedule during last year's academic school year. She approached the principal of her school to ask for her timetable as a planning time teacher to be re-arranged for a few weeks. This allowed her students to work in 100-minute blocks to complete inquiry-based, authentic learning projects. Teachers may wish to embed continuous activities into their daily schedules and may have to alter their timetables and spend 100 minutes teaching, executing, practicing, reflecting, and re-visiting a CEFR-infused oral-based activity. This would mean some flexibility on the part of educators, but the end results could be beneficial to students if the right amount of time was given to allow students to excel in this particular way of learning. This would entail a structural shift to accommodate the implementation of CEFR-based activities, but students would be able to get more out of their learning that could enhance their knowledge, not only of the concept, but of their language use.

Finally, an ongoing struggle in a French Immersion classroom is the use of English. Many L2 educators have varying views on how much L1 should be spoken in the classroom. Perspectives range from none at all to alternating each sentence between the L2, the L1, and then back to the L2. The teacher participant and I had conversations about the challenges of speaking French throughout an entire day. This includes times where children are really struggling with a task. She believes that “when teachers get tired, they get lazy and switch to English.” At the moment, the frustration of the child may subside with the initiation of the L1, but the child's French language acquisition will not grow from this way of handling the situation. The teacher participant said this about the topic at hand.

Part of the problem that we have in our French Immersion program is that if kids aren't confident, then we revert to English. And that doesn't build their confidence. It's a half-English program, which is not what it's supposed to be. So having them use the French in that safe environment, like “If you said it wrong, I'm going to model it for you.” And then being able to hear it and then move on. And not telling them that it's necessarily incorrect.

There is much truth to this statement and although teachers may have an inner struggle with how to balance the L2 with the L1, using a CEFR-based approach would signify that the target language be used at all times. Students would see their teachers modeling the use of the language and gain language conventions from surrounding themselves with a variety of sentence structures, new vocabulary, and ways of communicating with others.

This balancing of English and French within a French Immersion program also poses another challenge for my teacher participant. During the summer of her interviews, she accepted

her assignment to teach French Immersion kindergarten for the upcoming school year. She was very worried and expressed concerns about how her early childhood educator (ECE) would fare within her classroom. Almost all of the ECEs that are hired within her school board are non-French speaking. During our interviews, the teacher participant and I articulated our concerns with the structure of the classroom, having one French-speaking adult and the other as primarily English-speaking. We questioned how students could be immersed within their L2 if only half of the teaching team spoke French. The teacher participant felt having an ECE work alongside her, who could not fully support the program, would be a hindrance, at least with the linguistic aspect.

As the target language is stressed in an L2 classroom, providing authentic and meaning-focused tasks using the target language is expected. However, the teacher participant was wary that conversations between herself and the ECE, or the ECE and students would create a need for English to be a language option in the classroom (CoE, 2001). The teacher participant expressed her concerns in a critically aware way. Much of what she stated was true; however, in my view, the challenge of being a teacher is working with what you are given. This was an opportunity for me to present her with suggestions to expand her creativity and think of ways that she could involve her ECE, whether or not French was his or her forte. She believed that this added challenge of having an English-speaking ECE in an L2 program could be “overcome if you have an ECE that’s totally on board.”

Again, this is related to the notion of lack of resources. Hopefully, ECEs placed in FSL environments will have learning opportunities throughout the year to learn how they can still be involved in their classroom whilst having no background in the language. The teacher participant’s uneasiness is likely going to be felt by others in this situation. The full-day French

Immersion kindergarten program paired with the CEFR presents a disconnect: the target language cannot possibly be used throughout the day when half of the teaching team uses solely English. This major roadblock will be further investigated in the Discussion section, found in Chapter Five.

### 4.1.3 Summary of Phase 1

In analyzing the discussions that took place between the teacher participant and me during our first phase, I came to the realization that I helped her in forming a deeper understanding of the CEFR framework and its reference levels.

The main idea that she took from the framework was that it was a tool that followed a student throughout his or her journey of learning an L2. It is an ongoing assessment of the learning of an L2. She made the comparison between the CEFR reference levels as being individualization versus differentiation, as the levels are unique to each student, rather than a group of students. In this way, the CEFR is a specialized tool that allows students to be successful and identify their next learning goals as a way to self-assess their learning based on a variety of criteria. The teacher participant said that the “Can Do” statements were presented in a positive way, which she felt would be useful in her classroom, as she was a firm believer in positive reinforcement and creating a safe learning environment for her students.

The use of authentic language also came up and the teacher participant stated that if classrooms were adopting CEFR-informed ways of teaching and learning, this should be reflected within the school environment. According to her, hearing French in the hallways, in the school yard, on announcements, and during assemblies, were all ways to further promote the French learning and show students that French is indeed all around them. This would transfer

into the classroom with the use of authentic learning opportunities for students and allow them to engage in tasks that would mean something to them and spark their interests.

The teacher participant was particularly eager to try out an activity in her own practice where reading buddies would be changed to conversational buddies. Primary and junior students would work together, not necessarily to read to one another, but to speak to each other and practice their use of French. While this is happening, the teachers would circulate and listen in on conversations, guiding students to take their discussions one step further. The teacher participant felt that the role of the teacher in a CEFR-based classroom would be to model the language and to give students the chance to not only hear the language, but to use it and practise the L2 with their peers.

The teacher participant learned that the CEFR approach was action-oriented and oral-based, and that students should constantly be interacting with the language and building off one another during open-ended activities that encourage French speaking and practice using familiar vocabulary. Modeling the L2 and helping students to identify their strengths and next steps can also be done through feedback. The teacher participant had had prior experience with giving students descriptive and specific feedback that could help them to enhance learner autonomy and independence, and allow them the opportunity to self-assess themselves and know where and how to take their learning to the next step.

The teacher participant expressed the belief that parents also have a role in students' learning of an L2, and there were a variety of organizations that could inform parents of ways to further support their students' learning. This could be done through camps, movie nights, or trips



that could allow students to showcase their French, and having enthusiasm and excitement for the learning coming home from school.

Some challenges were discussed, with the main issue being getting teachers on board with adopting the CEFR pedagogical approach. To do this, however, we concurred that teachers would need to be further informed about what the CEFR is all about and how to implement this into a classroom, in a manageable way. The teacher participant noticed the possibility that other educators may see the CEFR as being similar to achievement levels (as outlined in curriculum documents). Teachers may feel as though they already know about the CEFR, even when they have not been educated on how it looks and how it is supposed to work in an L2 classroom. She also noted that another problem with trying to put the CEFR into action arises with a lack of PD or workshops to inform teachers in understanding the framework. The teacher participant expressed frustration and dismay with the shortage of opportunities there have been thus far for teachers to learn about what they are actually supposed to be doing in their own classrooms. Another layer is added to the teacher participant's challenges with the full-day kindergarten programming. She would be working with an English-speaking ECE who would not be able to fully immerse herself into the CEFR-infused classroom because she had no working knowledge of the target language. We imagined that this would create a massive barrier for the teacher participant to deal with and this would impede her ability to fully adopt the CEFR framework and deliver 100% French to her students each and every day.

## 4.2 Phase 2

As the research conducted took place over the summer, most of the conversations with the teacher participant were based on past lived experiences, hypothetical situations, and hopes for the near future. The purpose of the follow-up session was to compare what we discussed in our

initial sessions during Phase 1 to her more recent and lived experiences. We met during the second week of October to see if, and if so, how, the study affected her outlook on teaching an FSL classroom, if and how she had been further supported in her learning of the new FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) or the CEFR, and everyday occurrences that she had been witnessing in her own classroom.

From our follow-up conversation, I learned that my teacher participant was now a full-time French Immersion full-day kindergarten teacher with 28 students. This warrants an ECE, who worked well and complemented the teacher in the classroom; however, had limited to no French experience. Much like in the summer, the teacher participant appeared to have a similar positive outlook on teaching and expressed many times that she was enjoying her position (more than she expected to, given the circumstances), and had mainly motivated students and supportive parents.

#### 4.2.1 Themes

There were a few highlights that stood out for me while we were speaking about her new environment and various attempts to support a CEFR-based classroom. These subjects will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

- **4.2.1.1 Theme 1: Influence Participation in Study Had on Participant's Practice**

There were multiple avenues mentioned in our conversation that uncovered that the study conducted throughout the summer resonated with the teacher participant and opened up some new learning opportunities for her.

First, when I asked the teacher about the research and what she took from it, she responded by saying that she knows now that the “bar can be set higher in second language learning, especially in the primary grades.” She understood in the summer, and after the new school year began, that children possess more skills than we often give them credit for, and she was seeing first-hand how students could be like little sponges and could soak up the language provided to them in meaningful ways. The teacher participant made the connection that by allowing her students to engage in authentic tasks that related to their lives, and conducting these in the L2, students were able to pick up new French vocabulary and use them in context.

The teacher participant was particularly eager and interested to try the idea of reading buddies and took the process one step further by having the children speak with one another using authentic conversation opportunities. She admitted to carrying this out with her kindergarten students, already, within the first few weeks of school. The teacher said that she was more willing to try activities that she felt would expand students’ oral language and give them occasions to speak and use their acquired French. She and a grade 3 teacher set up “les compagnes de conversations”, and the teacher participant felt that the activity was going fairly well but identified that at this point, the kindergarten students had limited French vocabulary so it became a challenge when the younger students did not know or understand what the older students were asking them. Even when the teachers circulated and encouraged the older students to use vocabulary that the kindergarten-aged students had been implicitly and explicitly taught, difficulties arose. The teacher participant stated, “Even if they are using vocabulary that has been taught to them, such as colours, like “*Quelle couleur est-ce que tu portes aujourd’hui?*”, the kindergarten students have no idea. And then the grade 3 students are like, “They don’t understand what we are saying!!” and then they get frustrated.”

What I learned is that the grade 3 teacher and teacher participant decided to take a step back and had the older students engage in play with the kindergarten children, using French while they interacted with their toys and in their activity centres. The discussions were not made as formal, so the older students were not given a bank of questions to ask the students; rather they took the lead and engaged the kindergarteners in what they were currently doing. I praised the teacher for reflecting on what was successful and what was not in the activity, and then modifying the lesson to suit the learners. CEFR-based activities promote authenticity and making learning meaningful to students, and for kindergarten-aged children, playing with a toy is an authentic way to get learning across to students. I reassured the teacher that in a few months, the students may be able to take the activity one step further and keep up with the concept of engaging kindergarten students in more oral language opportunities, especially with role models and students whom they idolize.

The teacher participant stated that the CEFR sparked her interest in knowing whether or not the children were actually taking their learning outside of the classroom and perhaps into their homes. She revealed that her students were not speaking to one another or to the teacher in French in the classroom at this point in the year. However, she mentioned that she spoke with a student's parent and received very positive feedback. The mother told the teacher participant that her daughter was trying to speak only French at home and the child was saying a variety of phrases and words that she had been learning at school. This gave the teacher participant positive feedback to hear that students were in fact taking their learning home and the French language was coming out in the children's lives. This particular parent also had a French-speaking parent (the student's grandparent), so the L2 was actually meaningful to the child outside of the school context and she was clearly seeing the importance of learning it: to communicate with her

grandparent. The teacher and I discussed that children take risks where they feel most comfortable, and beginning to use French at home was a first step to using the L2 in the classroom. I spoke encouragingly to the teacher and noted that if the French was already being showcased at home, it was only a matter of time before the students started using the language at school, with their peers, and adults, and this growth would continue throughout the year.

Another point that we discussed thoroughly during our study was the idea of using French all the time. Whether for instructions, for conversations, or for routines, the teacher participant agreed that the oral production competency of the CEFR was being most reflected within the new FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). She provided ample chances for students to learn French and key vocabulary, and encouraged her students to sing and do chants and poems, which they also sang and recited at home. It was clear to me that the teacher was obviously making a solid effort to try to make the program exclusively French and use oral language as her foundation for a solid L2 environment to further enhance her students' learning.

A noteworthy point from my discussion with the teacher participant was when she stressed that, when words or questions were written on the board or important vocabulary was discussed, she asked the ECE specifically *not* to translate these phrases or words at all. Instead, she used pictures, cues or gestures to further illustrate and explain the question or word. However, if students were still confused about the French language, and another student translated the word, then the teacher guided students to speak to the student with the answer and encouraged him or her to 'translate' the word for his or her peers. "We use the kids to translate the unknown word rather than us saying it." This was setting a model and precedent that the teacher and ECE aimed to use only French in their teaching. I commended the teacher for

standing her ground and communicating with her ECE that translating words for students who become frustrated, or students who were looking for an answer in their L1 was hindering learning and that this could be better addressed. This sent a definite message to students and showed them that French was the only language heard in an FSL classroom. This also could translate to students understanding that the ECE is beginning or building on her learning of an L2, and even as an adult, sees French language acquisition as a lifelong journey.

- **4.2.1.2 Theme 2: Lack of Professional Development**

Since my study commenced in the summer, I was curious to learn whether or not the teacher participant was given any additional PD that allowed her to continue her learning using the foundation that we had created together. She seemed unimpressed, yet not surprised, that there had been no opportunities for additional PD since the implementation of the new FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Although the document is specific for grades 1-8, she felt that as a kindergarten teacher, she needed to understand in what direction her students needed to be moving. She said that it would be practical to have the chance to learn more about the curriculum and to see how she could better prepare her students for their future learning endeavours. She was hopeful that in the near future, there would be workshops provided for FSL teachers, but for now, “there has been nothing said about the CEFR or the new curriculum. There has also been nothing about FDK [full-day kindergarten].”

This lack of PD opportunities was concerning to her, as she was a novice teacher to the kindergarten realm and received little direction as to where to take her students in their L2 learning. When asked about how she felt about the lack of guidance she received from the school board she said, “I find it frustrating because with a bunch of new teachers, there isn’t someone who has the experience or knowledge of best practices.” The teacher participant yearned for

someone to be able to give her accurate advice on her program, but the arrangement of her staff this year involved many first-year or new-to-kindergarten teachers. Together, hopefully these teachers can collaborate to help one another problem solve, but there is a need and a huge demand for curriculum leaders, administrators, and the school board to fund some PD or release time for French Immersion teachers to work together to begin to understand how to maximize their use of the target language with the program blueprint and provide some kind of guidance and support for those educators looking for new ideas and tools to allow for student success.

## 4.2.2 Challenges

Of course with successes, come challenges. This was what I was most looking forward to learning about, as the interviews were conducted in the summer when the teacher participant was not teaching. However, now that she had witnessed some struggles, I was eager to hear about her experiences and how the knowledge she gained about the new FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) and CEFR-based teaching and learning came into play when she encountered obstacles. We discussed some difficulties that the teacher participant experienced in her own classroom; however, I was most interested in how the ECE's role was affecting the CEFR approach within the teaching.

- **4.2.2.1 English-Speaking ECE Presence in French Immersion Classroom**

When asked if the presence of the ECE counteracted how the teacher saw a CEFR-influenced classroom, she answered by saying that “the language of discussion in the classroom is in English.” The teacher expressed that if she and the ECE were discussing student work or conversations heard between students, or lesson ideas for the near future, the language of these types of conversations between them was in English. All of the ideas and concepts that the

teacher wanted to do or see could not be expressed in French because the ECE did not speak the language. This went against the teacher's new-found philosophy on a CEFR-based classroom containing 100% French. The students were hearing English, even if the language was not directed to them, and they were also seeing their role models in the classroom as speaking English to one another. There was some dissonance here, which the teacher described trying to counteract by using French when speaking to her students. In addition to this, the teacher told me that the ECE "doesn't know any French outside of me pre-teaching her vocabulary that she needs to teach to the kids."

The teacher went through lessons with the ECE so that she would then be able to teach students key vocabulary, such as shapes and Halloween-based words, and how to say them. The teacher wanted the pronunciation to be correct, and similarly, the ECE wanted to say the words correctly as well. This was something that the teacher participant and I discussed in the summer. However, it was evident that this was an extra step that the teacher had to make to ensure that French was being maximized and utilized during teaching opportunities. After the activities were completed with the ECE, the teacher reiterated that discussions about what happened were not being done in French, even though the vocabulary was taught using French. The teacher confessed that having an ECE as an extra person in the class was helpful; however, obviously detracted from the French language component. This conversation was not intended to devalue the ECE, but reflected the French Immersion teacher's concern for preparing the children to manage content-based instruction (in math, language arts, etc.) through the medium of French beginning in grade 1. She felt that French should be introduced as much as possible in the kindergarten year to prepare the children to face the grade 1 French Immersion curricular expectations the following year. The teacher participant told me that the beginning of the



kindergarten year had been difficult as she could only speak English to the ECE; however, the teacher-participant appreciated that the ECE had since picked up on key words and phrases (e.g., to close the door): “The ECE doesn’t really know what is being asked, but she sees me pointing to the door and hears “la porte” and then figures that I want her to close the door.” Much like students learn an L2 and learn the meaning and context of words, the ECE was doing the same.

- **4.2.2.2 Lack of French Culture throughout the School**

Another unfortunate challenge the teacher participant encountered was that the administrators of the school did not speak French. The teacher participant told me that the principal did not speak French, so all announcements were delivered in English. Even when there were students making announcements, this was done in English. In addition to this, the teacher stated that French was not used during whole-school assemblies. It was evident that students were getting mixed messages. Their teachers spoke French and emphasized the importance of using French in the classroom, while the principal and office co-ordinator were non-French speakers. Important messages were conveyed in English, and school functions were conducted in English. The use of the French language was not consistent at this school, even though there was a concentration on oral language and the specific role that principals play within the new FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

During our summer discussions, the teacher participant and I talked about how French being used around the school, such as using the language in the hallways and outside during recess time, sets the tone. The value and emphasis on French needed to be present to create the whole-school culture of learning the L2. I suggested to the teacher that perhaps announcements could be done by a French-speaking teacher. I also felt as though the junior and intermediate students, who were mostly well-versed in French by this level, needed to take more

responsibility for their learning and speak French over the announcements. The case of having an English-speaking principal is likely not unique to this school; however, other French Immersion centres that are experiencing similar challenges could work in partnership to create solutions on how to better equip the school to embrace French learning.

- **4.2.2.3 French Immersion Full-Day Kindergarten Compared to English Full-Day Kindergarten Model**

The full-day kindergarten model seemed to be an issue at the forefront of my teacher participant's mind. We talked about this in Phase 1, but she also communicated this during the post-discussion that "the FDK [full-day kindergarten] model says that you don't know the difference between the teacher and the ECE", although, in a French Immersion full-day kindergarten setting, "that is impossible. You can always identify each individual because the teacher is the one speaking French while the ECE probably does not." This is a major concern for French Immersion teachers embarking on the journey of establishing an effective L2 classroom when the other educator in the classroom only speaks English.

Following the CEFR approach to making use of purposeful French conversations to achieve fluency in oral production, hearing French in a kindergarten classroom was not happening and the quality of language in the classroom environment shifted immediately because of this lack of exposure to the target language. The teacher participant complained that the full-day kindergarten language program in English could not be compared to the French, as this was an unrealistic and perhaps unattainable expectation to create given the partnership of educators. As activity centres are a large part of student learning, the children are exposed to opportunities where they can do both implicit and explicit learning, which is fundamental in their

own growth. However, the language piece will continue to become a struggle where rich questions and conversations almost always come from the teacher.

Although the L1 of students can and should be honoured in an L2 classroom, the teacher should be using the target language to facilitate conversations and questioning opportunities. Even so, the teacher said that when she would circulate during children's activity centre time, teaching them common language and vocabulary specific to their interests, she felt as though she could not give students enough time and exposure to enable them to actually use the new words. While it would be helpful for two French-speaking educators to be facilitating conversations in French with the students during activity centres, the teacher was doing her best to work with the given situation.

- **4.2.2.4 Lack of Appropriate Materials for French Immersion Kindergarten Learners**

Since beginning this school year, the teacher participant felt obtaining resources that were age- and developmentally-appropriate for her learners was an ongoing challenge. Reading to her students in French was a challenge because the books available were at such a high level. The vocabulary used was complex and the nature of the books did not seem to appeal to her learners, either because they did not understand what the book was about, or the book was too simple. She revealed that "picture books that have one word per page are super boring for them and don't keep their interest. Other ones that have more info that we can talk about goes over their [students'] heads and they have no idea what the book is saying and they just become uninterested." I agreed that finding appropriate resources in French was scarce and this was a common complaint among FSL teachers.

In English, it would seem to be easier to implement a variety of resources because students already have the L1 vocabulary to navigate the story and the language does not play a role in their comprehension of the book. For example, children's story book characters, such as *Clifford, the Big Red Dog* (Bridwell) or *Franklin the Turtle* (Bourgeois) are fairly easy to understand, whereas in French, these books contain rich and advanced language for students who have not had much experience with the language. It is evident that a CEFR-based, language rich classroom needs to have materials readily available to scaffold students' learning, and finding proper materials proved to be difficult thus far for my teacher participant. Still, she understood that it took time to acquire and build her classroom library without spending all of her money. We discussed how looking at authentic books (such as actual print, not photocopied books) better engaged her students, as they felt as though they were looking through a "real" book. Holding, looking through, and reading a published book with coloured, glossy pages is more meaningful to students, which is where FSL teachers, particularly at the primary level, need to be further supported to encompass the whole-language aspect of their programs.

#### 4.2.3 Summary of Phase 2

This second phase was a necessary step to bring some closure to the July, 2014 study. It was helpful to provide the teacher with an avenue to voice her thoughts and think aloud. Based on the discussion we had, her experience within the classroom seemed to be going well. I do feel as though the research was a positive PD opportunity for her to learn more about teaching FSL and to work through the trials and tribulations of not only understanding the expectations of the full-day kindergarten program, but also creating awareness of the CEFR-based approach to teaching and learning, and integrating the presence of an ECE. It appeared as though the teacher's emphasis on French was still evident and fresh and that she was attempting to bring as much

French into the classroom as possible. It was a difficult feat to try to not only get the students speaking French, but also to support an adult in the classroom whose role is just as important as the main educator.

The teacher participant reported that she found our conversations about the CEFR and how they are embedded into the language-based approach to teaching and learning an L2 helpful. For her situation, however, the full-day kindergarten model in French Immersion was making it difficult to amalgamate the CEFR-based approach with the vision of the full-day kindergarten model. The English-speaking ECE made it difficult for the teacher participant to embrace the French culture within her classroom.

I was eager for the final meeting with the teacher participant later at the five-month point in the study to see if her thoughts about the CEFR had grown, changed, or altered based on her experiences and how her CEFR-based classroom was developing.

### 4.3 Phase 3

The teacher participant and I met for the final time in December for the third and final phase of the study to assess her learning over the three phases and to discuss the challenges that she mentioned in Phase 2 as well as final phase of the study. I wanted to meet with the teacher to see if she had resolved any of the struggles that she had been having in her classroom, and identify subsequent steps or next phases that she identified as being necessary to continue with her learning about the CEFR.

#### 4.3.1 Themes

This last phase allowed the teacher participant and me to examine our PD and the learning outcomes from our multiple interview sessions. Our focus for this third phase was on our case

study, but we reflected on the experience with the hopes of educating others on the actual learning, ways to improve the learning, and further steps to take to make the PD worthwhile. The themes identified in Phase 3 were the impact of the PD, the usefulness of the PD, perceptions and reflections on the PD, and finally, future PD.

- **4.3.1.1 Theme 1: Impact of Professional Development**

As my multi-phase case study examined how teachers can collaborate to become more comfortable in using some aspects of the CEFR in their French Immersion classroom, I was particularly focused on getting my teacher participant's feedback on the work that we did together. I asked her if she thought that the PD sessions that we had impacted her learning, and if so, in what ways.

The teacher participant enthusiastically stated that our work together had inspired her to set higher standards and expectations for her students. She also said that our discussions sparked her curiosity and she had done some additional research on her own, about the CEFR.

She reported that she was very proud of her learning as a result of her participation in this project as illustrated through some interactions she had with her colleagues while in her school staff room. When a document on the CEFR was brought into the school, she revealed to other teachers that she had learned about the CEFR, and they were intrigued to learn how she knew about it because they had no knowledge of the framework. She explained what she knew about the CEFR to the degree that she felt comfortable in sharing.

The teacher participant's discussions with me over the summer obviously impacted her positively, especially in the eyes of her colleagues. Knowing more about the CEFR than her colleagues, and being able to use the knowledge to enlighten others allowed her to share her

experiences from the research. The work we did together allowed her to reflect on her own life and past work experiences, providing her with the opportunity to reflect on how these experiences influence her current teaching practices.

The teacher participant began to intentionally observe the French that she used in her classroom and adjusted how she wanted to structure the play-based kindergarten program to suit French Immersion learners. She recognized that she was using more English than she had hoped to use, and this was mainly because of the ECE in the room. Our research gave the teacher participant an opportunity to gain more insight and awareness of what kinds of supports her students required. When I asked her if the English presence in the classroom improved since we last spoke in September, she candidly responded by saying that the ECE still experiences challenges with promoting the L2 in the classroom and will sometimes resort to just telling students the answer in English rather than using picture cues or referring to discussions had with the teacher during lessons.

This discussion led me to suggest that perhaps she needed to tell the ECE, in a professional way, that the students need to be surrounded by French and immersed in the L2 while in the environment. She agreed that, based on our PD and her understanding of the CEFR as being an oral-based, action-oriented way of teaching, her expectations for the use of French needed to be higher. The teacher participant and I discussed that since students knew how to get around using French by asking the ECE questions, that the ECE needed to be more firm in reinforcing language expectations with the students.

This PD enabled the teacher participant to feel more open to sharing and being able to take risks in her practice. She took on a leadership role within her kindergarten division and was

working with another teacher to practise conversational French. Her colleague was a first-year teacher and wanted more exposure speaking French so that she, in turn, could feel confident in speaking French to her students. The teacher participant worked towards having conversations with this colleague and assisted her in achieving her colleague's personal goal. In addition to this, the teacher participant told me that there would be school board personnel going to visit her school to observe a French Immersion full-day kindergarten classroom. She volunteered to have her classroom observed to get feedback on what she was doing and what she should change in her practice.

My colleagues were like, "Why did you say yes to them coming in [to observe]?" and I said, "What do you mean, "Why did I say yes"?" They're the top dogs in this game, so if they come in and say, "Whoa, no, no... you can't do that!", then tell me that, and I will change it. And that's the thing I've learned. It's not about me, it's what I've implemented, but it's not about me as a teacher. It's about what I think will work, and if they tell me, "That's not going to work. That's not the model we want.", then ok, let's do the work and change it. I'm not threatened by them coming, whereas other people are. That's the point! It's their job to help you in your classroom and to guide you in what they want to see. I want to learn!"

The approach to learning and PD that the teacher participant and I used this summer allowed her to reflect on different areas of her life, her practice, and her areas of growth. These positive outcomes provide evidence that this PD opportunity was successful for this particular teacher. It is evident that the teacher wants to continue to learn and grow as a person and educator and will be looking for more chances, such as the one we had, to embark on furthering her learning.



- 4.3.1.2 Theme 2: Usefulness of Professional Development

I was interested in finding out how the teacher participant felt about the value of the process to determine if the PD could be useful to others, given a similar opportunity. She reflected and said that the study was useful since a teacher would be leading another teacher on the journey. The teacher participant stated that asking others' perceptions on the CEFR, introducing the CEFR to them, and asking bigger questions, such as, "What does this look like in your classroom? How are you implementing it?", are ways to get educators thinking about their own practice, in relation to their knowledge of the CEFR. She felt as though having someone, who is in the same teaching role as the researcher, guiding, making suggestions, approving, and giving feedback was beneficial to her professionally. She felt that the give and take, the listening and mentoring, was a good way for teachers to become more familiar with the goal of the research.

I also wanted the teacher participant's insight on how to organize a similar type of PD that could be completed during the school year. She suggested that lunch and learns are a way to fit in learning sessions during the school day. Following the meetings, teachers could work towards keeping an open dialogue going between one another and checking in with one another to make the learning process more intentional. I echoed her sentiments and added that teachers could observe each other and give feedback during the next lunch hour or meeting time.

We discussed the potential of using planning times in more of a collaborative manner. This is something that could be brought to the administrator's attention by asking him or her to coordinate the two teachers' planning times, stating that "This is a project we want to work on for the year, and this is how you can help and support me in this endeavour." Having purposeful, practical, and authentic colleague interaction is a way to improve educators' practices, but also to

make them accountable for their role within the school, to seek further PD opportunities and to create them for themselves if necessary.

In terms of gaining feedback from our PD sessions, the teacher participant was very open and honest about what she would have liked to have done differently or aspects that would have made the study more applicable to her. She was particularly interested in knowing more about the “How?” of the CEFR. She asked, “How do I do it? What does it look like when I say I want all my students to reach A1? How do I get them there? What is the practical day-to-day schedule and what does this look like in my kindergarten classroom?” All of these questions were legitimate inquiries, and because we were involved in research during summer time, we discussed that it would not be possible to try out our ideas or lessons on actual students and reflect on their learning.

The feedback received from the teacher participant was extremely helpful in allowing me to reflect on the process and find ways to better speak to and help future educators who are interested in learning more about the CEFR. The practical piece would be what would resonate with the teachers; however, I must reiterate that the purpose of my study was to introduce a teacher to the key tenets of the CEFR and highlight key aspects of this teaching and learning approach. Potentially, if the study were to continue, the more practical usage and incorporation of some parts of the CEFR into the classroom would be further addressed, along with the possibility of going to observe the teacher in her classroom.

- **4.3.1.3 Theme 3: Perceptions and Reflections of PD**

Learning about the teacher participant’s thoughts and feelings around the study was also useful information to have because I would want to ensure that the best measures were taken to assist

her in feeling as though her voice was well-represented, that her struggles were addressed, and that she felt comfortable in our working environment and partnership.

I gave her an overview of Piccardo's (2013) work and reviewed with her the four phases in which learning took place in this particular study (introduction of new concepts, analysis of concepts and links to practice, application of knowledge of concepts, and reflection and feedback on the process). We discussed how some teachers, when first hearing about the CEFR, approach it with somewhat of a negative perception. I told her that sometimes teachers can get very overwhelmed with new approaches that are given to them because as educators, they have not yet been introduced and exposed to the concepts in the proper way. However, when asked to reflect back on her perceptions of the CEFR from the beginning of the study, she expressed that her background in languages allowed her to approach the CEFR with an open mind. She wanted to learn more about ways of teaching and learning that she could use in her own classroom. The teacher participant did not have any pre-existing attitudes towards the CEFR, but in the future, if teachers were to feel a bit hesitant about learning more about the CEFR, I would suggest that the researcher approach the subject in a way that is familiar to the participant. I would relate the CEFR back to practices that are already happening in the L2 classroom, but perhaps are not yet recognized as associated with the CEFR.

In addition to her opinions on her willingness to learning more about the CEFR, I was also curious to know if our learning sessions gave her any more confidence in using parts of the CEFR in her classroom. She said that "At this current moment, I don't know enough to feel confident. I feel like I know a little, but I would want more information and resources and pathways to get there to feel confident". I wanted her sincere opinion of how the PD was structured and how confident she felt that our learning together influenced her practice. I asked if

she would have felt better about using parts of the CEFR with her students had we gone through activity booklets based on the framework (even if they were not geared towards the kindergarten level), and then created lessons based on those activities. She concurred and also mentioned that “Assessment would also be key. How am I assessing to know that the students are where they are, at this level? And then if they were assessed by someone else, would they come up at the same level? Because assessment is always subjective and I think that becomes an issue.”

The PD that we engaged in definitely introduced the teacher to appropriately using the CEFR; however, it would take more sessions, cycles, or phases, to really hone in on various aspects of the CEFR that interested her and addressed her specific needs. Our learning journey gave the teacher participant a snapshot and a view into the various avenues of the CEFR, but our study did not allow for additional time to delve into the heart of assessment or resources.

I asked the teacher participant what parts of our research together resonated with her and which areas of the CEFR she was already using in her classroom. As mentioned in my earlier findings, the teacher participant had been using reading buddies in a different context, and allowing the older and younger student partnership to take on the role of communication buddies. She stated that her first experience with the communication buddies was not successful since the junior and senior kindergarten students did not have the vocabulary to engage in conversations with grade 3 students. The communication buddies idea evolved and quickly became learning buddies. The pairing of kindergarten and junior students allowed for modeling, leadership, and positive interactions between different age groups, in French. The CEFR does mention conversational partners as a way to build phonological control in students’ L2 and focus on developing the communicative language ability in students (CoE, 2001). The teacher hoped that this weekly activity would allow students to form a bond and relationship with other

students. I praised the teacher for taking an idea, trying it, and adapting the activity to suit her learners' needs. She gave her best effort to try to successfully implement communication buddies, re-evaluated the situation, and figured out ways to accommodate and engage the learners in a way that worked for them at this point in the school year.

The teacher was of the view that kindergarten and grade 3 students enjoyed the process of working with one another. This was a first step to incorporating the French language, from different sources, into the classroom. I reminded my teacher participant that the goal of the research was not to make her a CEFR expert, but rather, to learn about it and find ways to create CEFR-based activities that her learners could benefit from doing. This success that she shared with me is an example of how to be adaptable and look for ways of learning that not only follow pedagogical approaches, but work for students as well.

- **4.3.1.4 Theme 4: Future Professional Development**

When asked about her general opinion of how PD should be structured in the near future, she was quick to respond that “Half-day workshops are more than enough for much of the information that is given to teachers.” The teacher participant also stressed that follow-up was extremely important. She expressed that “going to a seminar four months ago and not hearing anything else about it is useless. It is gone after the workshop ends.” There are numerous trends or teaching approaches that are introduced to teachers without much planning or long-term overview of the impending problems that teachers may encounter. This is why there is an important place for PD such as the case study she and I experienced together. We were committed to the study during our discussions, but more importantly, have stayed in contact to follow-up on progress within her classroom and supporting one another in our endeavours. The

teacher participant said that PD, as of late, had no practical application, and if there was no follow-up to what has been learned, then the knowledge disappeared from her mind.

The teacher participant reflected on the education system as a whole. She asked the question, “Outside of motivation for betterment of self and students, and personal learning, where is the motivation to learn more?” She stated that this type of attitude creates an apathetic educational system where people do not necessarily want to go above and beyond their job description and take time away from their own lives. She said that some educators “maintain a status quo and do not look at what is best for their students.” She made a significant point in that PD is mainly sought out at the teacher’s discretion as to whether or not there is time or room for this type of self-learning.

### 4.3.2 Challenges

As noted earlier, the teacher identified some challenges that she was having with allowing English in the classroom due to the presence of her English-speaking ECE in Phase 2. I wanted to follow-up on this previous conversation to find out if the problems the teacher identified had gotten any better or had been resolved.

- **4.3.2.1 English-Speaking ECE Presence Update**

The teacher revealed that the ECE is still using English in the classroom while the teacher is trying to use visual cues and have the students decode what they are hearing from gestures and pictures. The teacher said that “Students’ brains do not have the chance to even use the French when she [the ECE] is in the classroom. They know how to get around the French piece by asking the ECE instead of coming to me”. L2 acquisition can only take place when learners are constantly exposed to the target language (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). The teacher stated that she

continually reminds students to try to speak in French but this does not make communication easy between the ECE and the students. I asked the teacher to reflect on her own use of English in the classroom because it seemed as though she was really focused on the English used by the other educator in the room.

She revealed that she is conscious of speaking English to include the ECE in conversations and that this is “somewhere where I can grow”. She identified the importance for her students to learn French. Her aim was to strive to eliminate English from the classroom and to get her students to use their acquired French and then re-evaluate areas that needed further teaching or focus within the classroom. I told her that from my observations as a grade 1 teacher, play-based learning in kindergarten has definitely changed the level of language coming into grade 1. The teacher participant predicted that this is because, in most cases, 50% of the teaching team used English in kindergarten, thus allowing the program to become a half-time instead of a full-time French Immersion program. The main language of communication becomes English, and students do not have the oral knowledge to speak to one another in French. The teacher realized that it was her responsibility to take control over her students’ learning environment and inject as much French into them as possible, and to find other activities for the ECE to be actively involved in: activities that do not necessarily require whole-class teaching in English.

- **4.3.2.2 ECE Roles and Responsibility for the ELP**

If the teacher wanted to take the CEFR language portfolio idea and create a journal or pictures of students’ French experiences and growth, the ECE could be in charge of making the actual booklets. “She could work on gluing pictures or drawings into the scrapbook, sorting the work, and listening to students’ stories and narratives and recording these into the portfolio”. This

aspect of the language portfolio could be of particular interest to my teacher participant, as she and her ECE could be the first educators to document the students' beginning French encounters.

As the language of communication of the students would likely be in English, the teacher participant and I discussed ways to include her ECE in a vital role of this documentation process. Students could recount their experiences in their L1 and the ECE would not have to teach in French, but listen to students' voices and transcribe what they say in English. Even though this part of the program would be in English, the English language would not be used in an instructional setting. The teacher complained that with 28 students in her kindergarten class, this could be a time-consuming and daunting task. I suggested that perhaps she create portfolios for her senior kindergarten students, to start out with this year.

I also suggested that her ECE could take the lead in making documentation boards, where there could be photos of students learning and speech bubbles to fill in, noting student voice, their thoughts, and explanations of what the picture shows. The teacher did say that in her classroom, they "do have documentation boards, for science, math, outdoor exploration, and language, but these could be updated or changed more frequently." She felt this would be a responsibility that the ECE would be interested in taking on. The ECE needs to find roles in the classroom that can support the teacher and the learning of the students, but realize that the learning needs to be in French for the students to succeed in this program. All partnerships will vary, but it is up to the teacher and ECE to find ways to make their presence cohesive and balanced within the French language learning environment.



- **4.3.2.3 Continued Lack of Resources**

The final, ongoing challenge that the teacher and I discussed was that of resources. She continued to protest about the lack of resources available to her as a French full-day kindergarten teacher. She grumbled about the comprehension of French and written French being low at this point in the year. She required “books that have one or two sentences per page or pattern books with beautiful illustrations to get the children inspired and thinking about the language through picture cues”. Unfortunately, the teacher participant was not able to successfully find one-sentence French books in Ontario. She stated that she would travel to Quebec to find age-appropriate books, “but then, those might be age-appropriate for French first language speakers... Ahh, it’s so annoying!” To have a CEFR-infused classroom, the teacher participant would require books in the target language that students would be able to comprehend. The teacher stated, “My go-to is reading in English on the carpet because I don’t have the proper materials or resources that I need to do a stellar French lesson.”

When I asked her about this intentional choice to use English in the classroom, she said, “Well I do read French books, but then I have to modify what the book says, and the book loses its meaning, and I get frustrated so I just find an English book to read.” This frustration is likely felt in other FSL classrooms, not just in kindergarten, but in the primary grades, as well. The challenge, as the teacher participant informed me, was “finding appropriately leveled books that students can be interested in.” Funding was given to full-day kindergarten programs, but a lot of this money went to manipulatives, toys, and hands-on materials. However, especially in a French Immersion full-day kindergarten environment, schools and the ministry need to consider what is needed to be able to incorporate the French language into a play-based environment. This was an area that I was not able to further explore with my teacher participant, but I did tell her that I

would search for resources with appropriately leveled language and content that would be suitable for her teaching and her students' learning.

### 4.3.3 Summary of Phase 3

In summary, I found this additional post-interview to our earlier follow-up discussion to be particularly useful because the teacher participant helped to shed light on the research opportunity that we had together in the summer. We were able to further our learning together and discuss options on how to include her English-speaking ECE in her otherwise L2 classroom environment. I learned about what worked and what she would have liked to have explored more of through our discussions and our learning sessions. What seemed to be the most dominant theme of the teacher's feedback was the need to see the CEFR in practice and how to achieve the various reference levels we discussed. Finding ways to use CEFR-based activities in the classroom was an area where we could have spent more time exploring. I would be open to furthering our learning with this teacher to discover activities that work in the kindergarten setting. I would also be interested in working with the teacher participant to plan lessons or units based on the key beliefs of the CEFR, complete with activities, curriculum expectations, goals, and assessments clearly laid out so that the lessons are achievable in the classroom.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Discussion

In the following discussion, I will address some key points that were highlighted through the interviews I had with the teacher participant and discuss how these are areas for concern. These topics include the benefits of case study-based PD and the overarching issue of English-speaking ECEs in a French Immersion program. I will also connect the findings of my study on a larger scale, which include lack of appropriate resources and embracing lifelong learners.

#### 5.1 Reflective Practice as Professional Development

Reflective practice is an effective method of addressing common concerns felt by teachers, as this type of research encompasses identifying problems, collaboratively, and working together to find a solution or ways to address the issues at hand. This type of research can allow teachers to bring about "...practice improvement, innovation, change or development of social practice, and the practitioners' better understanding of their practices" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 345), which was necessary to address the CEFR in relation to the FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

I was able to identify a pressing issue at the forefront of the teacher participant's practice, and we engaged in our own PD to professionally grow together and reflect on the CEFR, a document that neither of us had been formally introduced to in our professions. We identified a learning curve in our teaching and attempted to fill in necessary gaps to get us to where we needed to be in order to understand facets of the CEFR to improve our teaching. In doing my own background research, I aimed to influence my teacher participant and highlight the beneficial and practical aspects of the CEFR within an L2 classroom.

A lack of PD, time, and resources are significant obstacles for teachers. The teacher participant indicated numerous times her disappointment at the lack of support that teachers are receiving, and it is very likely that there are other educators who feel the same way. The teacher participant and I are hopeful that we will begin to receive some additional assistance in implementing the CEFR in our classrooms. However, we feel that first and foremost, teachers need to be on board with the framework so that they may seek out CEFR-related PD, if and when it becomes available. Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) research illustrates that most teachers expressed the need for additional PD opportunities to attend workshops and in-services so that they may better understand the CEFR within their classrooms. Again, this notion played a role in the teacher participant's lack of confidence in using the CEFR in the upcoming school year, simply because she complained that there were no resources available to her to use with her students.

Bringing the CEFR to life in the classroom was a focus of the discussions between the teacher participant and me. We came to a consensus that teachers need to be informed. Educators may experience difficulties if they feel as though they have not been given sufficient information to implement the framework and engage their students in appropriate activities, based on the CEFR. There may also be misconceptions regarding the document, leading to issues in understanding, transferring knowledge to others, and addressing L2 teaching within the classroom. If the teacher participant and I did not embark on this journey together, we would not have had the chance to examine and analyze the CEFR and all that this framework has to offer. Without being given classroom ideas, such as those provided in the "On est capable" series (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.), or other suggested CEFR-infused activities, motivated teachers may encounter problems implementing the framework and have nowhere to look to gather this necessary information. Viewing resources and becoming familiar with credible

sources to assist teachers in learning more about the CEFR was informative; however, these materials required time to find and view. Without this type of case study, teachers would not necessarily be motivated to go beyond what they are given to search for answers themselves.

The type of reflective practice I employed for my study should be more frequently considered and promoted to all educators. Teachers need to take the initiative if they want results. Waiting around for PD opportunities is only wasting time that could be used to make positive steps to achieve success in the classroom. My research can be considered in other facets, not just in FSL environments, because teachers need to see themselves as researchers and take the initiative to take on professional learning in various capacities. There is value and a larger implication of the findings from my study. L2 PD opportunities, up to now, have been rare; thus, whether (or the extent to which) French is valued is not evident. Perhaps reflective practice should not only be contemplated at the school level, but also at the board level.

Following my research, it is my hope that administrators will see the importance of the use and implementation of more frequent professional learning, and either afford teachers or encourage them to seek out opportunities for reflective practice. That is, teachers should be provided with opportunities to reflect, share their reflections with one another, and offer professional suggestions to assist colleagues when the need and/or issues arise. It would be useful to allot time in the work day for French Immersion grade or division group teachers to work with one another throughout the year. When a "new" concept such as the CEFR is at the forefront of a school's focus or the curriculum, collaboration amongst teachers is beneficial and effective because they are then able to talk through their concerns and think aloud, thus leading to a deeper understanding of the issue. The concerns raised in my study are not unique to the CEFR and the FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). When

considering other ministry initiatives, the recommendations that I am making for PD structures could be applied to other educational innovations as well.

Such collaboration may result in the need for more funding or release time for teachers, but these types of group meetings are more effective and authentic when teachers are the agenda-makers of their time, rather than working solely from top-down initiatives. Teachers can begin to think about what PD would look like during the school day and how much teacher involvement would be necessary to engage in such a project. Teachers can consider what it would look like to plan, learn, and reflect together and find ways to build PD into their weekly programs.

Teamwork between teachers could alleviate some of the individual workloads within the FSL learning environment. The activities that need to be developed within a classroom can be shared amongst other teachers, both in the school, and within the school board.

## 5.2 Early Childhood Educator Language Barriers

Although at the beginning of the research, I was not aware that my teacher participant would be assigned to teach full-day kindergarten, we began to address some emergent L2 learner issues during our conversations. In a full-day kindergarten French Immersion program, students are expected to take part in the same learning as L1 learners, with an additional language of instruction and engagement. Hickey and de Meijia (2014) express the belief that young children are naturally motivated to take part in playful activities. Furthermore, emergent L2 learners are less self-conscious about errors or mistakes that they may make while beginning to learn a language. As a future kindergarten teacher, this information was vital for the teacher participant.

Her role in the classroom would be to facilitate the French learning through engaging teaching, stories, meaningful activities, and conversing with her learners. The teacher should be

aware of her students' ability to take the language further than perhaps emergent older students would be able to if they were coming into this type of program. Younger students would have the ability to take part in play-based activities and actually 'play' with the language and willingly take risks. However, with the full-day kindergarten program comes another piece of the puzzle in the person of the ECE.

ECEs and teachers should be working closely with one another, and the teacher participant and I discussed some possible ways to make this happen in the classroom. Bjorklund et al. (2013) write that it is important to prepare teachers on how to provide children with the target language. Especially in the type of situation that the teacher participant faced, with a solely English-speaking ECE, the two educators would have to work together cohesively to develop strategies so that they could both be involved in the teaching and learning of the L2. It would be helpful for teachers and ECEs to prepare activities that they could both execute, based on the flexibility, open-mindedness, and willingness of the ECE to take on these tasks with his or her developing French language skills. Examples of such tasks include creating language portfolios for students, designing documentation boards, and scribing students' ideas. If the ECE was not comfortable, then the teacher would have to deliver this material to the students while the ECE was given another responsibility. For example, the ECE could circulate in the classroom, listening for key vocabulary that students use in their activity centres. Of course, there would always be the risk that the children would have some exposure to the L1 in the L2 classroom, particularly with half of the teaching team speaking mainly English. However, the ECE could facilitate basic discussions in the L2 using pre-taught vocabulary.

Hickey and de Meija (2013) stress the need for an L2 classroom to contain only the target language. It is crucial for material to be conveyed to learners, especially first-time French

students, exclusively using the target language. There is a structural problem with the program that cannot be resolved easily. The full-day kindergarten program seems to cater only to English classroom settings, since the teacher and ECE would both be well versed in the target language, which is English. However, it seems as though, as the teacher participant identified, the government did not fully consider how the program would ‘look like’ and ‘sound like’ in a French Immersion classroom. Placing an English-speaking ECE into the classroom does not meet current standards for immersion learning.

It is compelling to think about how and why French Immersion students are seen as parallel to English students given the linguistic disparities to make it appear more palatable to parents concerned that their children might ‘fall behind’ in an L2 learning environment; an observation Lyster (1990) made almost three decades ago. If a program is deemed beneficial to learning in an L1, it does not necessarily mean that the program can be easily transferable to an L2 environment. What the full-day kindergarten situation is creating is that of a forced, contrived environment that is not only hindering L2 growth, but also the growth of the educators. English-speaking ECEs are not able to fully use their knowledge and capacity to teach and learn with students because of the language hindrance. Hickey and de Meija (2013) also echo a concern that the teacher participant discussed, namely that teachers revert to English when they become tired or they see the level of frustration in the student is escalating.

The teacher firmly believed that with the English speaking educator in the room, the French Immersion program had now become a half-English program. The teacher participant’s feeling is significant because many French Immersion teachers strive to speak to their students in the target language, but when children become frustrated, teachers automatically switch to the language in which students are more comfortable. This may not only create an issue for ECEs,



but it is one that teachers must face as well. The teacher participant revealed that although she attempts to read French books, she needs to modify what the book says, causing the book to lose meaning. She then becomes frustrated and finds an English book. The teacher's personal struggle to consistently use the target language in the classroom undermines the purpose of the program and the CEFR itself. This situation impedes the students' L2 language acquisition (as is discussed in the next section). Hickey and de Meija (2013) agree when they write that teachers translate material in the L1 to get past supposed weaknesses in the L2; however, these actions actually hinder their students' L2 language acquisition. If students are expected to gain confidence, fluency, and positive attitudes towards the L2, then teachers must also model this and use only the target language, for the benefit of the program and also the students.

The English-speaking ECE issue creates a sizable challenge for full-day kindergarten programs in the French Immersion context. It adversely affects the students' L2 acquisition when the program is basically reduced to 50% French exposure. The teacher participant believed that there is a lack of consideration from the government for French Immersion learners in creating this stumbling block for the early years programs. The problem that remains is that full-day kindergarten French Immersion teachers are supposed to create an L2 classroom culture for students, yet the hired ECE speaks only English. This need to be addressed, as adopting the English full-day kindergarten model cannot happen without further consideration or analysis of how the program affects the L2 classroom.

### 5.3 Lack of Appropriate Resources

Connected to appropriate language within the classroom is the issue of funding appropriate resources. Teachers who are put into a full-day kindergarten classroom are given a monetary allowance to cater to the program needs, such as student-directed learning through play, inquiry,

and exploration. Materials that teachers may receive for their classroom include sandboxes, light tables, building blocks, and magnifying glasses, to name a few. However, the complicated part of running this program in an L2 is not the manipulatives and materials that students may need to use to facilitate their learning, but the resources necessary to support the learning in the L2. The teacher participant noted many times that she lacked resources in her classroom to provide a language-rich environment for her students. Print materials are not readily available to her and she revealed that most of her stories or activities are translated during her own time or using her own money. The teacher participant's need for resources is evident from her disclosure that she resorted to reading English books to her students due to the high language and vocabulary level found in the available French books. She noticed the students' lack of engagement because of a lack of comprehension.

Perhaps the allotment of money going towards full-day kindergarten learning should be reconsidered, particularly for French Immersion teachers. The amount of money spent on materials for the classroom does not seem as pressing as the resources necessary to use within the classroom. Having items such as audio-books, age-appropriate read aloud storybooks, simple guided reading books, translated activity cards, and blackline masters that are already produced, seem to be a higher priority for the teacher participant. All of these resources can be created by teachers, but this is usually done during their own time. If teachers had, at their fingertips, these kinds of resources readily available to use with their students, then more time could be given to developing new ideas, creating documentation boards, and spending time learning with students, rather than on recreating and developing new resources.

It seems as though the government has taken an English-based program and automatically assumed that the French-based program has the same needs to be addressed.

However, there are slight differences between the two learning environments. There should be additional funding given to L2 teachers to purchase resources that are applicable to them in their classrooms, and that will support language acquisition. Once students are given the tools to allow them to succeed in acquiring an L2, then the other materials (such as the ones used in English classrooms) can be further considered.

The types of resources mentioned in Majhanovich et al.'s report (2010) included in the activity kits would be worth exploring as the teachers from this research noticed a difference in student success after using the CEFR-infused activities. Perhaps if there was a kindergarten version of this resource, then this could be brought into FSL full-day kindergarten classrooms. These activities should be ones that have been tried and tested in other capacities, by teachers and/or researchers, so that educators are aware that the activities are indeed age-appropriate and suitable for their emergent bilingual learners. Teachers are not only lacking PD opportunities to further their own learning, but also materials that can assist them in the classroom.

Resources are not limited to tangible items – they can also come in the form of school board personnel, including subject experts. Following my study, PD could be revised at the board level so that French Immersion schools could draw on the FSL knowledge that is available. Perhaps FSL consultants knowledgeable about the CEFR and other topics of concern could visit schools weekly and meet for a short amount of time with a group of teachers who are interested in furthering and broadening their knowledge. This could be seen as daunting to some teachers with commitments after school hours, but perhaps a mutual time could be suggested so that all interested teachers could be included if release time could not be provided during the school day. Alternatively, time could be freed up for teacher reflection and collaboration during assemblies. In that way, teachers would not miss teaching or content-related activities. Finding

creative solutions is necessary since when students are given the proper tools to jumpstart their language learning, they gain the foundation necessary to continue their L2 learning and gain the knowledge on which they can build in subsequent grades.

## 5.4 Lifelong Learners

As lifelong learning is also a vital aspect of the CEFR, the teacher participant referred to a number of experiences that she had that allowed her to see how French affects students and carries over into their everyday lives. The teacher participant witnessed, first hand, students showing their enthusiasm for learning an L2 and using the acquired L2 to communicate with others. She stated that students are applying their knowledge and motivation for learning the L2 when they are using it in all capacities of their lives, such as at school in the hallways and at recess, or at community events or birthday parties. The learning of an L2 is never-ending and ever-lasting, and my study allowed the teacher and me to see the possibility and difference that can be made through using the target language in authentic and real-life situations.

It was helpful for the teacher participant and me to examine the role of students within an L2 classroom. As Ellis and Shintani (2014) write, students' roles change from a 'language learner' to a 'communicator'. There is much truth to this statement, as the teacher and I realized. In giving students useful and practical vocabulary that allow them to speak amongst themselves, to answer questions, or to form clear sentences, teachers are able to equip students with strategies to engage in conversations, discussions, and dialogues. As professional educators, we were able to join in conversations, discussions, and dialogues to further our learning. We were able to witness students achieving L2 expectations through the “On est capable” video (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.). We also thought of past experiences where students showcased their learning through language-rich spoken activities. Once the explicit teaching and learning is done, students

are then able to reflect on their proficiency and oral language acquisition in the L2. Students are therefore continuous learners, but are well on their way to becoming communicators. Learners develop a sense of self-motivation and Majhanovich et al.'s report (2010) also refers to this idea as the development of learner autonomy. The CEFR encourages learner independence and the teacher participant believed that students can reach goals that are given to them. This is true, provided children are given the opportunity to engage in appropriate and authentic activities. Giving students high expectations will allow them to succeed, and Majhanovich et al. (2010) believe that students can learn on their own.

Vandergrift (2006) further supports the notion that language learning is a lifelong task and that the ultimate goal is the attainment of language proficiency. The CEFR provides a perspective on language proficiency that focuses on individual progress in language performance, measuring the progress at each stage of learning on a lifelong basis (Vandergrift, 2006). It is evident that the FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) whole-heartedly supports the idea of learning French as an advantage in the future for students. Having this ability to communicate in an L2 gives students the competitive advantage in the workforce and will open their opportunities to other avenues in their lives. Students who are given the tools to practice how to communicate effectively and proficiently within the classroom have an advantage in the workplace. For this reason alone, the learning of the L2 should be considered to be a lifelong journey – one that transfers into other aspects of students' lives.

Lifelong learning does not only occur in students, but in adults as well. As educators, I believe that we all possess an inner motivation to continue learning, as this is our mandate, as teachers, to educate. Teachers, as lifelong learners, should feel inspired to seek PD and it is their responsibility to make this happen. As discussed earlier, the lack of PD that has been offered to

FSL teachers since the introduction of the FSL curriculum document has been disappointing this school year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). We not only questioned the accountability of FSL consultants and program heads, but the responsibility of educators. Teachers who are not willing or able to engage in PD outside of school hours would not be able to stay up-to-date with current or best practices. These concerns allowed me to ponder my study and reflect on the fact that I did not have many teachers interested in participating in my research. I did, however, find someone who was a lifelong learner and was committed to working with me over the summer to conduct my multi-phase case study. It was surprising that there was not more interest in my study, given the lack of PD that is available to FSL teachers in particular.

## 5.5 Summary of Discussion

The three phases of interviews with the teacher participant led me to believe that the points discussed above were the most compelling findings. The type of research allowed us to engage in deep conversations about the CEFR, and her journey to understand how to adopt the framework into her classroom. We thoroughly discussed her overarching challenge of working with an English-speaking ECE in a French Immersion program. We also talked about how appropriate resources needed to be purchased using a different perspective for French Immersion full-day kindergarten classrooms rather than relying on the same materials used in L1 classrooms. Finally, the thread of lifelong learners that appears in the CEFR and the latest version of the FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) were woven throughout our interviews.

As noted in other studies, such as those conducted by Majhanovich et al. (2010), Mison and Jang (2011), and Piccardo (2013), the findings from my study also support the need for further PD. Teachers must be given the necessary time and information to absorb new ideas to

gain further understanding to assist them in making use of certain principles of the CEFR in their classrooms.

## Chapter 6

### 6 Summary

The purpose of my 5-month long case study was to learn how teachers can be assisted in implementing some principles of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CoE, 2001) into their FSL pedagogy and practice in a French Immersion classroom, mainly primary-aged children. Through this case study, the participant and researcher embarked on a ‘self-reflective enquiry’ to improve our practices. Through a series of three phases involving interviews, we were able to identify a common concern of understanding the CEFR and its connection to the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) and work collaboratively to address the perceived problems. We carried out discussions that allowed us to become reflective practitioners and challenge each other’s thinking and learning (Schön, 1983).

There were a number of sources that were consulted throughout this research. The most prominent ones include the works of Ellis and Shintani (2014), the Council of Europe’s (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, Vandergrift (2006), Majhanovich et al. (2010), Mison and Jang (2011), and Piccardo (2013). Ellis and Shintani (2014) gave an overview of L2 acquisition and focused on meaning-focused instruction as an approach that allows learners to be engaged in processing input and output in a variety of communicative contexts (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). The CEFR provided a foundation for my research having been developed by the Council of Europe in 2001 after three decades of research on language teaching, learning, and assessment. The framework encourages achievement of a consensus on the fundamentals and practices of language teaching, learning, and assessment. The goals of the



CEFR are to provide guidelines on defining levels of proficiency in learners at each stage of their language learning. The CEFR allows for transparency and promoting international cooperation in the field of modern languages (CoE, 2001).

Vandergrift's (2006) research determined that the CEFR was the most comprehensive and comprehensible way to describe language proficiency. Vandergrift (2006) deemed the CEFR as being flexible enough to use in Canada and that establishing a framework could create a common understanding of what functional proficiency of a language means. He argues that language learning is a lifelong task; the ultimate goal being the attainment of language proficiency (Vandergrift, 2006). Majhanovich et al.'s (2010) report presents research conducted in nine different school boards across Ontario. Core French and French Immersion teachers were involved in the study and implemented CEFR-informed activities in the classroom, through kits provided to them, to observe the benefits of using such activities. The results of using such activities presented gains for both Core and Immersion students in areas of learner autonomy, developing oral language ability, self-assessment and increased student motivation, real-life applicability, and ease of parental communication (Majhanovich et al., 2010). This study identified that most teachers expressed the need for additional PD opportunities through workshops and in-services to help them better understand the CEFR (Majhanovich et al., 2010).

Mison and Jang's (2011) research aimed to bridge the gap between the CEFR's tenets and teachers' existing knowledge, experience, and needs in classroom assessment. They believed that giving teachers time to understand their experience of teaching and learning and adapting innovative procedures could ease tensions and conflicts that could arise when trying to adapt to a new teaching or assessment method (Mison and Jang, 2011). Piccardo (2013) served as a basis

and affirmation of my research, as she highlighted the need for teacher PD to be conducted in phases, which was similar and pertinent to my study.

The three phases of my study allowed me to gain some key findings. Understanding the CEFR and its reference levels was the first discovery that I made through discussions with the teacher participant. Fully understanding the CEFR before trying to adopt parts of it within the classroom is necessary. The teacher participant had some understanding of the framework, but there were gaps in her understanding that needed to be clarified through a closer lens. We discussed, in depth, how to better create authentic activities, make use of task-based language teaching that relate to the curriculum, reference levels, and “Can Do” statements to consider ways to further support students. This teaching and learning process was necessary in our study to create a basis for our discussions.

Second, student success was a recurring theme because as educators, we want the best for our students. We identified that setting high expectations for students to achieve as beneficial to their learning, and that honouring the student voice through L2 learning is critical. Through the use of activities where children feel comfortable and confident in practicing their speaking, they are given opportunities to celebrate their learning and language proficiency instead of being silenced by their teachers. The option of using an ELP was explored, even for kindergarten-aged students, as this type of document provides a way for students to see the growth in their language learning and record their experiences in learning the L2.

Classroom practice and seeing the practicality and potential links between the CEFR and the FSL curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) was crucial for the teacher participant to see the purpose of being involved in this study. We thoroughly discussed how a CEFR-infused

classroom would look and sound like in an ideal situation. However, in the second phase of our study, the teacher participant revealed that the ECE who shared her classroom was an English-speaking individual. This went against the view expressed in our discussions that classroom interaction should be conducted entirely in French.

The two main threads that were revealed through my study were that PD of any sort is lacking for FSL teachers being introduced to the CEFR and/or the new FSL curriculum document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), and that placing an English-speaking ECE in a full-day French Immersion kindergarten program is defeating the purpose of the L2 environment. It is evident from these deficiencies that FSL and the CEFR are not at the forefront of our province's education agenda. With the introduction of a new curriculum document and a framework that is unfamiliar to most teachers, one would think that school boards would be encouraging teachers to seek out more information on the new initiatives as efficiently as possible. The fact that there has been little to no PD offered to educators sends a strong message to FSL teachers.

Another layer that is added to this situation is the implementation of full-day French Immersion kindergarten programs that typically feature one French-speaking educator and one English-speaking educator. This is a problematic scenario, especially in an environment where students are supposed to be exposed to the L2 all day to build their oral receptive and production skills. This circumstance veers the program away from its values and creates misconceptions for teachers, students, and parents.

The research question that I hoped to answer through my study was, "How can teachers work together collaboratively to understand and draw on a pedagogical innovation such as the

CEFR in a French Immersion classroom?” I would say that I successfully answered this question through my study. By working closely with a teacher participant who was interested in furthering her lifelong learning and growth as a French Immersion teacher, we unpacked parts of the CEFR that we deemed most useful to our classrooms. We achieved a solid start to creating a foundation for our personal teaching practice. Having a critical individual to teach to, reflect with, and learn from is a way to build collaboration and knowledge. The time committed to this study allowed both the researcher and teacher participant to gain knowledge that otherwise would likely not have been addressed through PD opportunities. Teachers need to begin to see themselves as researchers and target their needs first and foremost. If this means embarking on an independent study rather than waiting for an opportunity to arise, then student achievement and success are at the forefront of education. Teachers initiating their own PD relates to teachers being lifelong learners, which is also tied to the values that L2 educators attempt to instill in their students.

## 6.1 Points to Consider

This study allowed me to gain information on the teacher participant and how to assist her in understanding the key tenets of the CEFR and our three phases gave us plenty of time to reflect on our practice and the study. However, being able to see the teacher participant in her classroom would have added another factor to the study because I would have been able to see if the knowledge from our work together transferred into her teaching. In addition to this, I would have had the chance to give her constructive feedback or share my observations with her, based on the CEFR knowledge base we gained together.

Second, I had hoped that I would have the chance to interview two teachers. Due to the summer holiday, I was only able to work with one teacher participant. I appreciated the time and insight that she provided me with, but I think that having another person's perspective could have

been informative. With two participants, I could have had the opportunity to not only compare each participant's experience with the literature, but compare and contrast the two journeys with one another. This could have led to a more profound and eye-opening discussion and, depending on the findings, could have reflected more teachers along with their experiences, rather than just one educator's point of view.

While concerns could arise when discussing teacher/ECE relations in an L2 classroom, my goal was not to downplay the value of having an, but it was to highlight the challenges that were revealed in my study with regard to including ECEs who are not French-speaking into full-day kindergarten classrooms; it revealed that the ECE's expertise and knowledge were limited in the context of the language barrier that the situation created.

## 6.2 Limitations

The study was conducted during the summer months. As teachers usually have other commitments during their time off from school, I was only able to find one teacher participant to participate in my study. This limited the findings of my study to one single educator. Ideally, having two or more teacher participants would have allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of teachers' reflections on the PD and could potentially allow for some generalization. However, given the constraints of the study, I focused solely on one teacher.

Another limitation to the study related to the design. In future research, I would like to observe students and teachers in action to see the reality of her classroom and be in a better position to provide them with critical feedback and suggestions.

The FSL curriculum document (Ministry of Ontario, 2013) used to guide my study was also limited to Grades 1-8, French Immersion; that is, it did not pertain to French Immersion

kindergarten. As this relates to my current background in education, I was eager to explore the curriculum with a teacher participant. However, the new FSL curriculum did not relate entirely to her or my initial goal of the research.

### 6.3 Future Research Recommendations

In discussing with my teacher participant areas where the study could have been improved, I suggested identifying the teacher's goals and what she deemed as being useful and helpful and then structuring the PD around her needs. I proposed that she and I could have worked together to create some lessons that would be considered to be CEFR-based lessons, even throughout the summer. We could have run through the lessons and done a mock lesson-type rehearsal while identifying different curriculum areas and reference levels that the lessons would encompass.

This is something that I would hope to better achieve if I were to conduct a similar study in the future. More often than not, professional learning is done in a teacher-directed way. However, just as we are trying to move our students from teacher-directed to more child-centred learning, perhaps this is the start of a change in the way that PD opportunities are conveyed. Rather than ministry objectives being presented to teachers, perhaps teachers will have the opportunity to visit other classrooms to see a variety of programs and activities used within a French Immersion classroom that are of importance to them, which will be considered as a PD activity.

In the future, researchers should consider conducting classroom observations to see other teachers attempt to implement the CEFR and see how CEFR-infused activities looked like in the classroom context. Researchers should spend extended periods of time with teacher participants implementing the CEFR so researchers could help the participant evaluate the effectiveness of the learning sessions and assist the teacher to begin to independently use the CEFR to its fullest potential in the classroom. This could give the researcher the opportunity to see if his or her

study was indeed helpful and beneficial to the teacher participant's practice. I believe that even though the study may be complete on paper, there is still a need to connect with teacher participants to learn how they are faring in the classroom environment and perhaps hear about how their students are reacting to changes and performing in the L2 setting. The teacher participant and I both agreed that if there was the potential for a second round of the case study, we would both be interested in carrying on what we have already started and continuing to grow together and to offer suggestions and feedback to one another. I would be able to observe her in the classroom and provide her with some insight as to what I saw, and she would be able to give me valuable information about how the research is being carried out.

If teachers want to go into classrooms, they should make use of video cameras/iPads to document L2 learning in the classrooms, provided they receive ethical approval. This can allow researchers to listen to and watch the experience multiple times to accurately observe the students, teachers, and surroundings. Classrooms are busy places, and having a way to re-live the experience can further assist researchers. Teachers should also make time for co-learning sessions to learn more about the pedagogy behind The Ontario Curriculum for FSL (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), The CEFR (CoE, 2001) in order to develop a common understanding of CEFR-related activities appropriate for early primary classrooms. By having these types of discussions, teachers can co-plan around rich classroom experiences and share ideas with each other. The researcher(s), along with the teacher(s), should meet regularly to discuss their observations, student work, and documentation of student learning. It would be beneficial for teachers to record student dialogue and conduct interviews/conferences with their students. As an independent exercise, participants (the researcher and the teacher) could be asked to complete a self-study of their practices, whereby they could engage in their own reflection on

their practices. This exercise would give teachers an opportunity to digest the conversations had between them, while also bridging the gap between research and practice. The self-study component that would accompany collaborative discussions could be recorded and transcribed, which can be referred or added to by the author at any time (Galman, Pica-Smith, Rosenberger, 2010).

Other recommendations for future research could involve action research, case studies, or teacher-based inquiry as models for reflective practice. Teachers can take on an active role as the researcher in their own classrooms, following a similar model to my particular area of research. Teachers can embark on their own research and collaborate with one another to do mini-studies in their own classrooms or perhaps engage in more ongoing discussions and reflection with their colleagues. Depending on the area needing to be addressed, this type of collaborative learning can be more useful and practical than teachers attending professional learning sessions. This type of colleague interaction could help to ease teachers' struggles, when they are given the time and opportunity talk about their interests with another educator.

However, a potential problem that could arise through teachers working with one another is that there could be some misconceptions around the CEFR. If the teachers involved in working with one another are unknowingly confused or muddled on certain premises of the teaching approach, then this could perpetuate misconstrued information filtering into classrooms. Perhaps a better suggestion would be to contact somebody, such as a learning coach, who has a more thorough and deeper understanding of the CEFR to come in to work specifically with teachers to educate them, in a small-group learning session, on the CEFR and ways to work towards implementing and achieving a CEFR-infused way of teaching. Once teachers have a well-rounded understanding, and have engaged in some of their own learning, through reading articles



and consulting credible and robust literature, then teachers can be more likely to successfully self-teach one another and conduct their own learning around the CEFR. When teachers engage in their own inquiries, they tend to have a profound connection to the problem being investigated, and also have a stronger commitment to putting forth their greatest efforts to achieve what is best for them and their students.

Finally, following my research, what I could do to initiate a change in PD would be to follow up with my school board to inform them about my study. After learning about my experiences, I would propose that the school board look into ways that they could provide teachers with some time to work collaboratively with one another to try to understand what the CEFR looks like. Perhaps monthly meetings could be set up to provide teachers with an out-of-school experience to discuss their findings and information related to the CEFR and give each other ideas on CEFR-related activities or how different educators are using the CEFR in their own classrooms. Teachers could also collaboratively explore ways to maximize the use of target language within their classrooms (Ellis and Shintani, 2014). This would be particularly helpful for kindergarten teachers to discuss how to incorporate the L2 whilst working with an English-speaking ECE. Another idea that could be more useful and practical for teachers is to have a multi-series workshop that divided up important components of the CEFR, much like the interview sessions between the teacher participant and me. That way, teachers would all be getting the same information at the same time about the same document. Perhaps ECEs could also be invited to such sessions and PD to further their understanding and gain joint knowledge along with their teacher counterparts. Every educator present at the workshop would gain a succinct overview and awareness of the CEFR, would encompass more of the heart of the framework, and learn how to make use of it within the classroom. This type of mutual effort

could give teachers and ECEs the motivation to learn more about the new curriculum, connect with other teachers for discussions, and provide educators with the means to plan with other L2 teachers and reflect on their experiences when meeting again. A discussion forum could also be set up for teachers to converse and exchange ideas, successes, and challenges with colleagues who have a similar interest in L2 learning and the CEFR. The implications of this research may be applied to other FSL programs, French Immersion grades, or other language programs (e.g., Spanish and Mandarin).

## 6.4 Final Words

The integration of the CEFR into the curriculum needs to be gradual. In the Ontario context, the new curriculum was introduced without much background on the CEFR. There is some front matter that informs educators of FSL programs about the beliefs and goals of the new curriculum, but the relation to the CEFR is intertwined within the language and not overtly revealed (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

Through my research, the teacher participant and I worked together to find authentic ways to embrace the collective learning that we did on the CEFR with some suggestions and discussions about possible activities, and ways of assessing students' overall language competency and proficiency in an L2. For a teacher who had not had any additional PD or learning sessions, the teacher participant was eager to gain further understanding on how to further L2 acquisition for her students.

I feel as though my multi-phase case study was successful because the teacher participant gained knowledge that she did not have before, and thought of ways to involve her ECE, who needed to teach through an English lens. The French language in the classroom will hopefully

continue to build in the remainder of the school year and hopefully, with this PD, I can create awareness for the need to re-evaluate the distribution of money and resources within the full-day kindergarten environment, particularly because the needs and foci of French Immersion teachers are much different from English teachers.

The goal of this research was to shed light on areas that have been thoroughly researched in an L2, but not necessarily introduced to all L2 teachers in an accessible way. There is a demand for research to continue to develop the growth of French Immersion programs within the province, and the findings from this research can offer supplementary information on what is a pressing issue that seems to be of relevance at the present time. This multi-phase case study documented two teachers working together to enhance their understanding of language acquisition in a classroom and discover strategies to meet the targeted expectations, while also considering the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CoE, 2001) for all French Immersion learners.

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<sup>4</sup> x is used to make school board and location of research anonymous.

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## Appendix A: CEFR Levels A1 to B1

		A1	A2	B1
S P E A K I N G	<b>Spoken Interaction</b> 	Can greet, say <i>please</i> and <i>thank you</i> , and ask for directions to another place in the school. Can respond non-verbally to basic directions to a place in the school when the other person supplements speech with signs or gestures. Can give simple answers to basic questions when given time to reply and the other person is prepared to help. Can make basic requests in the classroom or playground (e.g., for the loan of a pencil) and respond appropriately to the basic requests of others.	Can ask for attention in class. Can greet, take leave, request and thank appropriately. Can respond with confidence to familiar questions clearly expressed about family, friends, school work, hobbies, holidays, etc., but is not always able to keep the conversation going. Can generally sustain a conversational exchange with a peer in the classroom when carrying out a collaborative learning activity (making or drawing something, preparing a role-play, presenting a puppet show, etc.). Can express personal feelings in a simple way.	Can speak with fluency about familiar topics such as school, family, daily routine, likes and dislikes. Can engage with other pupils in discussing a topic of common interest (songs, football, pop stars, etc.) or in preparing a collaborative classroom activity. Can keep a conversation going, though he/she may have some difficulty making him/herself understood from time to time. Can repeat what has been said and convey the information to another person.
	<b>Spoken Production</b> 	Can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where he/she lives and people he/she knows, especially family members.	Can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms his/her family, daily routines and activities, and plans for the immediate or more distant future (e.g., out-of-school activities, holiday plans).	Can retell a story that has been read in class. Can retell the plot of a film he/she has seen or a book he/she has read and describe his/her reactions. Can describe a special event /celebration in the family (religious festival, birthday, new baby, etc.). Can give an account of an experience or event (travel, an accident, an incident that occurred, etc.). Can briefly give explanations and reasons for opinions and plans.
W R I T I N G	<b>Writing</b> (if appropriate to the age of the pupil) 	Can copy or write his/her name. Can copy or write words and short phrases that are being learnt in class. Can copy or write labels on a picture. Can copy short sentences from the board. Can spell his/her name and address, and the name of the school.	Can enter newly-learned terms in a personal or topic-based dictionary, possibly including sample sentences. Can write short texts on specific or familiar topics (e.g., what I like to do when I'm at home). Can write a short message (e.g., a postcard) to a friend.	Can write a diary or news account with accuracy and coherence Can write a short letter describing an event or a situation Can write a brief summary of a book or film Can write an account of his/her feelings or reactions to an event or situation Can write a short dialogue to be performed by puppets

		A1 BREAKTHROUGH	A2 WAYSTAGE	B1 THRESHOLD
U N D E R S T A N D I N G	<b>Listening</b> 	Can recognize and understand basic words and phrases concerning him/herself, family and school. Can understand simple questions and instructions when teachers and other pupils speak very slowly and clearly.	Can recognize and understand frequently used words relating to him/herself and family, classroom activities and routines, school instructions and procedures, friends and play. Can understand a routine instruction given outside school (e.g., by a traffic warden). Can understand what is said in a familiar context such as buying something in a shop (e.g., price). Can follow at a general level topics covered in the mainstream class provided key concepts and vocabulary have been studied in advance and there is appropriate visual support. Can follow and understand a story if it is read slowly and clearly with visual support such as facial expression, gesture and pictures.	Can understand the main points of topics that are presented clearly in the mainstream classroom. Can understand the main points of stories that are read aloud in the mainstream classroom Can understand a large part of a short film on a familiar topic provided that it is age-appropriate. Can understand detailed instructions given in all school contexts (classroom, gym, playground, etc.). Can follow classroom talk between two or more native speakers, only occasionally needing to request clarification.
	<b>Reading</b> (if appropriate to the age of the pupil) 	Can recognize the letters of the alphabet. Can recognize and understand basic signs and simple notices in the school and on the way to school. Can recognize and understand basic words on labels or posters in the classroom. Can identify basic words and phrases in a new piece of text.	Can read and understand very short and simple texts that contain a high proportion of previously learnt vocabulary on familiar subjects (e.g., class texts, familiar stories). Can use the alphabet to find particular items in lists (e.g., a name in a telephone book).	Can read and understand the main points in texts encountered in the mainstream class, provided the thematic area and key vocabulary are already familiar. Can read and understand descriptions of events, feelings and wishes. Can use comprehension questions to find specific answers in a piece of text. Can use key words, diagrams and illustrations to support reading comprehension. Can follow clearly written instructions (for carrying out a classroom task, assembling or using an object, following directions, etc.).

Reference: David Little workshop, “Curriculum, pedagogy, assessment: putting the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) to work in a national school system”, Friday, May 22, 2009.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter



### **Professional Development based on the Common European Framework of References for Languages and the new French Immersion Curriculum: An action research study**

**Dr. Shelley K. Taylor, PI**

**Tiffany Mui**

**Western University, Faculty of Education**

**If you are currently teaching French immersion in the elementary panel (SK-Gr. 3) you are invited to participate in a research study.**

**Participation involves meeting with a fellow immersion teacher to discuss implementing the new French Immersion Curriculum that is infused with the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*' task-based approach to L2 teaching. The study involves meetings outside of school to discuss your journey to understanding the new curriculum, and completing pre-/post-questionnaires.**

**If you would like more information and are interested in participating, please contact Tiffany Mui at [\(e-mail address\)](#).**

## Appendix C: Phase 1 Initial Interview Questions

### **Phase 1 Initial Interview Questions**

1. Have you heard of the CEFR? What do you understand about the CEFR?
2. How do you see the CEFR being connected to the new FSL curriculum document?
3. What tools or in-services have you been given to assist you with implementing the new FSL curriculum document?
4. What do you need to know about the CEFR or TBLT before designing appropriate activities for your learners?
5. How are you already engaging your students in task-based language activities?
6. Can you reflect on how learning and effectively using the CEFR within your practice could affect your teaching?
7. Do you think there are any misconceptions that teachers (or perhaps administrators) have about implementing something new, such as the CEFR?
8. Do you have any other questions or concerns about the CEFR or the new FSL curriculum document?

## Appendix D: Phase 1 Final Interview Questions

### **Phase 1 Final Interview Questions**

1. Following our discussions, what do you now understand about the CEFR?
2. Do you see the CEFR as being connected to the new FSL curriculum document?
3. What new tools and additional knowledge have you been given to assist you with implementing the new FSL curriculum document?
4. What else do you need to know about the CEFR or TBLT before designing further age- and grade-level appropriate activities for your learners?
5. How do you feel about how you have been recently engaging your students in task-based language activities?
6. What are your perceptions about “Can Do” statements? Does the use of these statements influence student motivation?
7. Can you reflect on how learning and effectively using the CEFR within your practice has affected your teaching since beginning this research?
8. Do you think there are any additional misconceptions that teachers (or perhaps administrators) have about implementing something new, such as the CEFR?
9. Do you have any other questions or concerns about the CEFR or the new FSL curriculum document after participating in this research?
10. Can you identify at least one area in which you feel you most improved?
11. Can you name some “a-ha!” moments for you throughout this research?

## Appendix E: Phase 2 Interview Questions

### **Phase 2 Interview Questions**

1. How has your school year been thus far?
2. Do you feel as though our work on the CEFR has helped you to prepare your students for acquiring a second language?
3. What new ideas did you bring into the classroom that resulted from our discussions in the summer?
4. What types of professional development, if any, have you gotten since the school year began?
5. I know you were really interested in setting the bar high for your learners. Do you think that you have achieved this goal of yours thus far?
6. How is the dynamic in the classroom between you and your ECE? Do you get along well? Have you encountered any challenges yet?
7. Do you feel confident in using some aspects of the CEFR in your classroom? Why or why not?

## Appendix F: Phase 3 Interview Questions

### **Phase 3 Interview Questions**

1. Reflect on our professional development experience and the study conducted. What are your thoughts on our learning?
2. What changes have you seen from October until now, if any?
3. Tell me about some successes that you have witnessed in your classroom.
4. Has the situation between the ECE speaking English and you promoting French in the classroom improved any since the last time we spoke?
5. What would you have liked to learn more about during our learning sessions?
6. Do you feel like the topics we covered were enough to give you a fairly solid handle on the CEFR?
7. Have you gotten any professional development opportunities yet?
8. How would you like to see professional development structured in the near future?

## Appendix G: Ethics Approval Notice



**Western  
Research**

Research Ethics

**Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board  
NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shelley Taylor  
**Department & Institution:** Education/Faculty of Education, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 105315

**Study Title:** An investigation into implementing the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages task-based approach to L2 teaching within the parameters of the new French Immersion Curriculum: A qualitative case study

**Sponsor:**

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** June 20, 2014

**NMREB Expiry Date:** June 30, 2015

**Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol		2014/06/01
Other		2014/06/01
Advertisement		2014/06/01
Letter of Information & Consent		2014/06/18

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the HSREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

*Ethics Officer*, on behalf of Riley Hinson, NMREB Chair

**Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information**

Erika Basile ebasile@uwo.ca	Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	Mehdi Mekhal mmekhal@uwo.ca	Vicki Tran vicki.tran@uwo.ca
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*This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.*

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Tiffany Mui

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:** Wilfrid Laurier University  
Brantford, Ontario, Canada  
2003-2007 Honours B.A.

Wilfrid Laurier University  
Brantford, Ontario, Canada  
2003-2007 B.Ed.

**Honours and Awards:** Dean's Honour Roll  
2003-2004

**Related Work Experience** French Immersion Elementary School Teacher  
Guelph, Ontario  
2007 - Present