

This article is an advanced online publication. It should be cited as

Rehner, K., Lasan, I., Popovich, A. & Palta, Z. (2020). The Impact of CEFR-Related Professional Learning on Second-Language Teachers' Classroom Practice: The Case of French in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. Advanced online publication.

The Impact of CEFR-Related Professional Learning on Second-Language Teachers' Classroom Practice: The Case of French in Canada

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of professional learning about the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) on second language (L2) teachers' classroom practice. Ninety self-selected French as a second language (FSL) teachers across Canada responded to an online survey about their planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation practices before versus after their professional learning. The results revealed that the impact of such professional learning is wide-reaching and remarkably consistent across all three areas of practice. The teachers reported that their professional learning spurred them to start presenting language through speech acts and based on students' needs, to emphasize not only linguistic but sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence as well, and to focus more intently on students' ability to communicate in the L2. The teachers also reported that they increased the use of authentic materials and developed communicative and action-oriented tasks that simulate real-life situations. The findings suggest that CEFR-related professional learning may be used successfully to inspire L2 teachers to implement CEFR-informed classroom practices.

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'impact de l'apprentissage professionnel lié au Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues : apprendre, enseigner, évaluer (CECR) sur la pratique professionnelle des enseignants de langue seconde. Quarante-vingt-dix enseignants de français langue seconde (FLS) auto-sélectionnés à travers le Canada ont répondu à un sondage en ligne au sujet de leurs pratiques de planification, d'enseignement et d'évaluation avant versus après leur apprentissage professionnel. Les résultats ont révélé que l'impact d'un tel apprentissage professionnel est de grande envergure et remarquablement égal à travers les trois domaines de pratique. Les enseignants ont signalé que leur apprentissage professionnel les avait incités à commencer à présenter la langue à travers des actes de parole et selon les besoins des élèves, à mettre l'accent non seulement sur les compétences linguistiques mais aussi sur les compétences sociolinguistiques et pragmatiques, et à se concentrer plus

attentivement sur la capacité des élèves à communiquer en utilisant la langue seconde. Les enseignants ont également signalé qu'ils ont augmenté l'utilisation de matériaux authentiques et qu'ils ont développé des tâches communicatives et actionnelles qui simulent des situations réelles. Les résultats suggèrent que l'apprentissage professionnel lié au CECR peut être utilisé avec succès pour inspirer les enseignants de langue seconde à mettre en œuvre des pratiques en classe basées sur le CECR.

The Impact of CEFR-related Professional Learning on L2 Teachers' Classroom Practice: The Case of French in Canada

In use in many countries around the world, “The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)” (Council of Europe, 2001) describes the knowledge that language learners acquire and the skills they develop at particular levels of second language (L2) competence. The framework adopts an action-oriented approach (e.g., Lions-Olivieri & Liria, 2009; Piccardo & North, 2019) and emphasizes the need for L2 learners to develop communicative language competences. It recognizes that other competences, not exclusively related to language, such as knowledge, skills, and ability to learn, are equally important to provide individuals with personal, educational, and professional autonomy. The framework also encourages L2 program designers, instructors, and administrators to reflect on their practice and make improvements that address learners' authentic needs. While the CEFR does not seek to promote one teaching strategy over another, it stresses that language learners are to be viewed “as ‘social agents’ and members of society who have tasks to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning” (CEFR, p. 9). In this view, teaching strategies must allow students to practice their language skills within meaningful contexts and with specific objectives. Therefore, teaching practice should incorporate more tasks that promote authentic student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction.

Although the framework provides “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc.” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1), research focusing on the impact of the framework in these areas has found its influence to be uneven. On the one hand, it appears that the framework has had the greatest impact to date in the area of assessment, particularly in the use of six common reference levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2) and their corresponding descriptors in standardized tests of language proficiency (e.g., the *Diplôme d'études en langue française* [DELFL], which is a CEFR-aligned proficiency exam for French as a foreign and/or second language administered by the French Ministry of Education and enjoying international recognition and prestige). The framework has also had considerable impact on language policy and has been shown to be useful in the development of language curricula, syllabi, and materials.

The CEFR was recommended for use in Canada as early as 2006 (Vandergrift, 2006) and was endorsed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada in 2010 (CMEC, 2010) to address the need for an assessment tool of Canada's two official languages, English and French, and to help resolve issues in the teaching of French as a second language (FSL) and other languages. However, despite this endorsement, the uptake of the framework across Canada, like elsewhere in the world, while growing, has been

uneven. In a recent working document (European Commission, 2018) submitted to the Council of the European Union, a European Commission-led thematic working group reported that, although in the majority of the European countries it had studied, “all national tests are linked to the levels of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)” (p. 38), a great deal of diversity was observed in how language competences were assessed.

Adoption of the CEFR in Canada has also been stronger in languages other than English, as often other scales (e.g., Steps to English Proficiency [STEP] in Ontario) have been adopted for English (something which has been detrimental for the cross-fertilization of research and practice in different languages). In this study, we focus on the impact of the CEFR in FSL classrooms in Canada, particularly as it relates to how CEFR-related professional learning is influencing the classroom practices of in-service teachers (referred to simply as ‘teachers’ in the present article). This is an area that research suggests has so far been little influenced by the framework.

Literature Review

Research on the impact of the CEFR in the areas of teaching and assessment, whether in Council of Europe (COE) member countries or in Canada, may be divided into empirical studies that rely on data collected from L2 teachers through various instruments, such as questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups (e.g., in COE countries: Ilin, 2014; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007; Moonen et al. 2013; in Canada: Faez, Majhanovich et al. 2011; Faez, Taylor et al., 2011; Kristmanson et al. 2011; Mison & Jang, 2011; Piccardo, 2013, 2016) and non-empirical studies relying on document analysis or reviews of previous CEFR-informed studies (e.g., in COE countries: Béréšová, 2011; Figueras, 2012; Jones & Saville, 2009; Makhamova, 2017; in Canada: Arnott et al., 2017).

Magnitude of the Impact of the CEFR: COE Countries and Canada

Empirical and non-empirical studies focusing on the impact of the CEFR in COE countries suggest that although the framework is generally well-known, well-established, and well-received in these countries, its impact has so far been somewhat limited in terms of the scope of the uptake (European Commission, 2018), its reach among L2 teachers (Broek & van den Ende, 2013), and its cross-institutional consistency of use (Moonen et al., 2013). As observed above, the impact of the CEFR appears to be uneven across the areas of planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation (e.g., Béréšová, 2011; Figueras, 2012; Jones & Saville, 2009; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007). For example, Moonen et al. (2013) reported that the use of the framework extended only as far as using CEFR-related textbooks.

In the Canadian context, empirical and non-empirical studies reveal a relatively-recent, voluntary, and on-going nature of the adoption of the CEFR across the provinces and territories (e.g., Brogden et al., 2017, Piccardo et al., 2019). Arnott’s (2013) survey of empirical studies suggests that the framework is making greater inroads in provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and New Brunswick. The CEFR has already been shown to have had some impact on curriculum development (Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2014;

Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2013) thanks in large part to the growing popularity of the DELF among teachers, students, and parents (e.g., Rehner, 2017a, 2017b; Vandergrift, 2015). While research into this washback effect was conducted in the 1990's and early years of the twenty-first century (e.g., Andrews, 2004; Bailey, 1996; Cheng, 2005; Messick, 1996), there has been no recent research into this phenomenon in the Canadian context.

The CEFR's Impact on Teaching: COE Countries and Canada

Non-empirical studies of the impact of the CEFR on teaching in COE countries (e.g., Béréšová, 2011) suggest that the major change inspired by the framework is a shift from a knowledge-based focus on teaching grammar and vocabulary to a competence-based focus on teaching communicative skills. In Ontario, Canada, for example, the current curriculum promotes a movement towards a more action-oriented approach where learners are viewed as 'social agents' and where language competence is demonstrated through the completion of tasks which are authentic and meaningful (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Some researchers have argued that this re-orientation in approach to L2 teaching has occurred more on paper than in practice (e.g., Figueras, 2012; Makhamova, 2017). However, some evidence exists to suggest that pre-service teachers view the framework's communicative and action-oriented approach to L2 teaching positively (e.g., Ilin, 2014), and therefore, the effects of L2 pre-service focused on the CEFR may lead to an increase in uptake in classrooms in the near future.

By comparison, in empirical studies by Moonen et al. (2013) and Rehner (2017a), teachers reported that, in addition to using CEFR-related textbooks, the framework had inspired them to adopt a more communicative and competence-based approach in their teaching, to focus more on language use and the development of oral skills, and to encourage students to take a more active role in their learning. The teachers further reported that whereas at the lower CEFR proficiency levels they privileged developing their students' communicative effectiveness, they increased the emphasis on grammatical accuracy as students made progress toward higher levels of proficiency.

In Canada, studies by Faez, Taylor et al. (2011) and Faez, Majhanovich et al. (2011) suggest that L2 teachers who have tried using CEFR-aligned teaching kits provided to them by the researchers viewed the framework's communicative and task-based approach positively. They appreciated that the action-oriented instruction focused on language use, encouraged authentic use of the target language, helped improve oral language ability, built student confidence, and increased learner autonomy. Related to this focus on links between teachers' perceptions of the CEFR and their classroom practices, a study by Vandergrift (2015) documented teachers' views of how their familiarity with the DELF exam informed their in-class teaching. The findings indicated that since becoming familiar with the exam, the teachers increased the number of interactive speaking activities they used in their teaching and used more authentic documents in tasks designed to develop their students' receptive skills. While the above studies by Faez, Taylor et al. (2011), Faez, Majhanovich et al. (2011) and Vandergrift (2015) show an initially positive impact of familiarity with the CEFR on teacher attitudes and practice, more research is needed to gauge the long-term impact.

The Impact of the CEFR on Assessment: COE Countries and Canada

Bérešová (2011) has suggested that since the CEFR was introduced in central and eastern Europe, L2 teachers have begun to base their evaluation of student performance on language competences (i.e., spoken production, spoken interaction, listening, reading, and writing) rather than on L1-to-L2 translation tasks targeting specific grammatical structures and vocabulary domains.

As to empirical research in COE countries, L2 teachers in Moonen et al.'s (2013) study reported a shift toward using formative assessments of all four skill areas, increasing their attention to the assessment of oral skills, and using CEFR-related assessments from CEFR-related textbooks. Pre-service L2 teachers in Ilin's (2014) study favourably summarized the framework's potential impact as moving away from a product-based type of assessment toward a process-based type, suggesting that such a change would likely lead to increased learner autonomy and personal responsibility.

In Canada, empirical studies of the impact of the CEFR on assessment suggest that L2 teachers believe that several potential advantages exist in using the framework. For example, L2 teachers in Mison and Jang's (2011) study appreciated the transparency, consistency, and global validity of the reference levels and descriptors. Faez, Majhanovich et al. (2011) showed that L2 teachers responded favourably to the framework's positively worded can-do statements because they believed they would motivate students to learn and would help them develop awareness of their L2 learning potential and limitations. Further, L2 teachers in Piccardo's (2013) study came to view the framework not solely as an instrument that sets and maintains teaching standards, but also as a tool that allows them to explore their approach to teaching. Finally, one of the FSL teachers in Vandergrift's (2015) study reported that, in contrast to evaluations focused on assessing the acquisition of isolated grammatical rules, the DELF exam expanded the focus of their evaluation to include more contextualized language use.

Our study contributes to this growing body of literature exploring the impact that the CEFR is having on teaching and assessment, as well as the magnitude of this change, by examining the practices of FSL teachers who have participated in CEFR-related professional learning.

Methods

The data for this study comes from two Canadian research projects (Rehner, 2017a, 2017b) with a shared interest in investigating the impact of CEFR-related professional learning on FSL teachers' classroom practice. One project was funded by the Government of Ontario and the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage and provided data from the province of Ontario. The other project was funded by the DELF Centres of Canada and *l'Association canadienne des professionnels de l'immersion* (*The Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals*) and provided data from the rest of Canada. For both projects, the data were collected in the spring of 2017 using the same online survey.

Participants

This study draws on data collected from a total of 90 FSL teachers from across Canada. An open call for participation was sent out by the DELF Centres of Canada to FSL teachers across all Canadian provinces and territories except Ontario (see below). Surveys were completed by FSL teachers in eight of Canada's 10 provinces and in one of the three Canadian territories, with the majority of the data coming from provinces with high levels of CEFR uptake, namely Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario (see below). With regard to the data from Ontario, it was collected using the same survey but in the context of a study undertaken for the Ontario Ministry of Education. The participating teachers from Ontario were specially selected by the FSL lead in their school board, and it is therefore possible that these teachers included many who were positively oriented toward the CEFR. As Table 1 shows, all teachers in the sample completed the DELF corrector-examiner training, which was a condition for inclusion in the study, along with other forms of CEFR-related professional learning. The DELF corrector-examiner training and refresher experienced by the teachers included learning about the theoretical foundations of the DELF exam and its alignment with the principles of the CEFR. The other most frequent types of CEFR-related professional learning reported by the teachers included school and board conferences or workshops related to the CEFR, and other CEFR-focused conferences or workshops organized by various pan-Canadian and provincial institutions that promote, support, and research the teaching of FSL.

Table 1

Teacher participation (%) in CEFR-related professional learning

Teachers (%)	CEFR-related Professional Learning Opportunities
100	DELF corrector-examiner training
66	DELF corrector-examiner refresher
56	School/board conferences or workshops
43	Other conferences or workshops
34	Self-directed learning
29	Job-embedded professional learning
27	Provincial meetings
27	Regional learning events
22	Coaching/mentoring
8	DELF trainer sessions

With regard to the number of years throughout their teaching career that the teachers reported having participated in various CEFR-related professional learning opportunities, 35% reported one to three years, 32% reported four to five years, and 33% reported six or more years. The majority of the teachers in the last category (80%) reported between six and eight years, with 13 being the greatest number reported. As such, the teachers' CEFR-related professional learning experience is clearly intensive and extensive and is part of a coordinated effort in many parts of Canada to offer such sustained experiences to FSL teachers. Concerning the teachers' years of teaching experience, there was a roughly even distribution across four major categories: one to seven years of

teaching experience (27% of the teachers), eight to 15 years (24%), 16 to 23 years (27%), and 24 or more years (22%), with 34 years being the greatest number reported.

In Canada, FSL instruction is taught in three types of programs: French Immersion, which offers students the greatest number of instructional hours in French in content-based classes; Core French, which offers the fewest number of instructional hours in French with French as the object of study; and Intensive French (called Extended French in Ontario) which includes various combinations of French Immersion and Core French (e.g., Ontario's Extended French programs, in which Core French is offered alongside particular subjects taught with French as the medium of instruction). With regard to the French program the teachers reported teaching in at the time of the survey, 43% reported teaching exclusively in French Immersion, 38% exclusively in Core French, 2% exclusively in Intensive French, and 17% in a combination of these programs.

Finally, the survey asked teachers to choose a specific FSL class to have in mind while responding to the survey and to report the CEFR level that best reflected the proficiency of the students in this specific class. As Table 2 shows, most teachers chose to have in mind a class at the A1, A2, or B1 levels when answering the survey, while fewer chose a class at the B2 level, and none elected to have in mind a class at the C1 or C2 level.

Table 2

CEFR Levels of teachers' envisioned class

% of Teachers	CEFR Level	CEFR's Categorization of Users
30%	A1	Basic Users
30%	A2	
23%	B1	Independent Users
7%	B2	
0%	C1	Proficient Users
0%	C2	

Instrument and Analysis

Available in French and in English, the online teacher survey comprised four sections. The first section asked teachers to report the background information summarized above. The remaining three sections asked teachers to respond to a series of closed and open-ended questions related to their classroom practices in the areas of planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation 'before' versus 'after' their CEFR-related professional learning experiences. Because the teachers responded to all questions in the survey after their professional learning experiences, all of the data collected from them are retrospective in nature. The teachers indicated their frequency of use of particular practices on a scale of zero to five, where zero represented "no use" and five represented the "most-frequent use". These two extreme points on the scale were given the verbal descriptors of "never" and "often" in the survey. These numerical responses were used to calculate mean frequencies as indicators of the teachers' central tendencies. To analyze open-ended questions, emergent categories were identified within the responses, answers were attributed to these categories, and mean frequencies were calculated.

Results

The results of the study are presented below using the survey themes of planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation. The organization of the survey itself into these three themes reflected the learning, teaching, and assessment aspects of the CEFR. The teachers' responses are presented according to the various questions posed to them in each section.

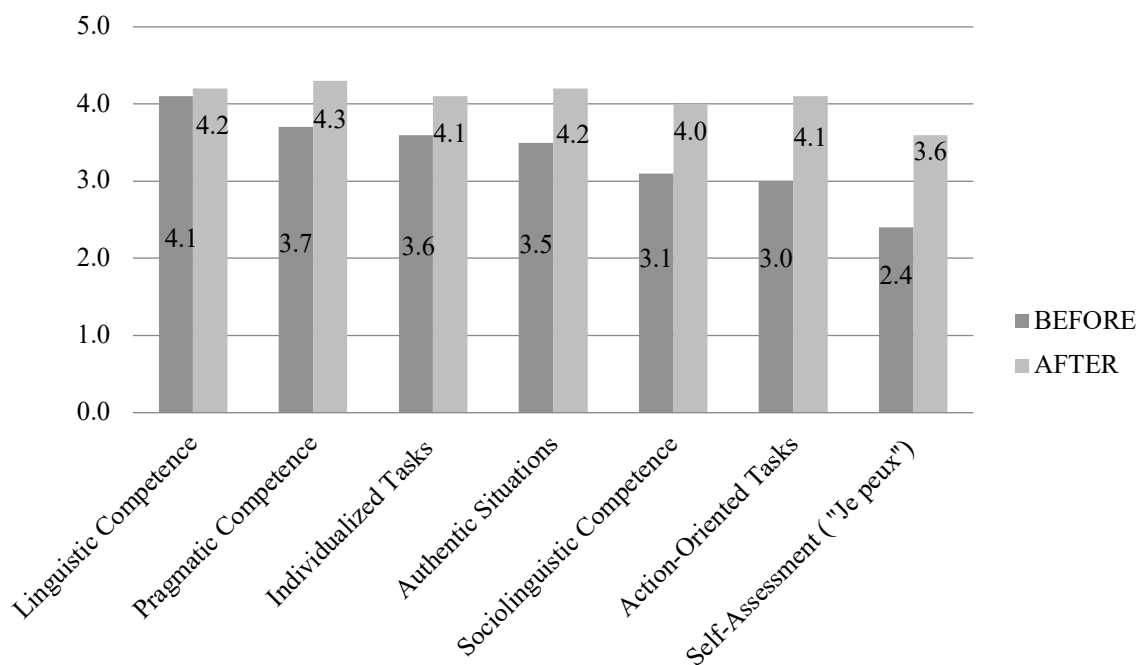
Planning Practice

“Which items figured most prominently in your planning to develop your students’ French proficiency, and how often did you use each item in your planning before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning?”

As Figure 1 shows, before their CEFR-related professional learning, the teachers reported focusing their planning most often on creating opportunities for their students to develop their linguistic competence (a mean score of 4.1 out of a maximum of 5). In contrast, after their professional learning, the teachers indicated a more balanced approach in their planning and reported focusing more evenly on creating opportunities for their students to benefit from the use of each of the targeted items.

Figure 1

Frequency (0-5) of strategies in FSL planning BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning

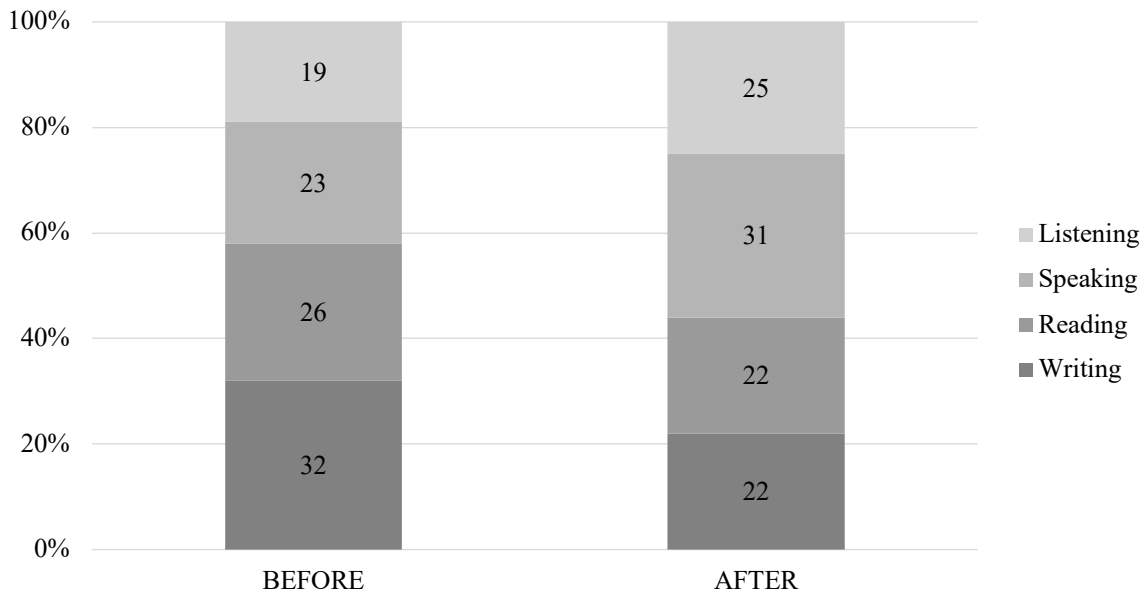


“What percentage of class time did you plan to allot to each language skill in your planning before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning?”

Figure 2 shows that before their CEFR-related professional learning, on average the teachers reported planning to allot 32% of their class time to opportunities for their students to develop their writing and 26% of class time to reading skills. In contrast, after their professional learning, on average the teachers indicated a shift toward privileging speaking and listening skills (allotting 31% and 25% of their class time, respectively, to these oral skills).

Figure 2

Proportion (%) of focus on skills in planning BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning



“What aspect of the CEFR has been most important in your planning and why?”

As Table 3 shows, the aspects of the CEFR that the teachers reported most often as being important in their planning were a focus on oral communication (33% of teachers), authentic tasks (32%), the use of *je peux (I can)* statements (14%), and a focus on listening skills (14%). The teachers also mentioned the importance of action-oriented tasks (8% of teachers), the nature of assessment and evaluation (8%), the nature of reading and writing (8%), and the adoption of a balanced approach by focusing on developing all four skill areas: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (6%). Note that since some teachers provided answers that contributed to more than one of these categories, here and elsewhere throughout the present paper the percentages for open-ended questions do not necessarily add up to 100%.

Table 3*Most important aspects of the CEFR in the teachers' planning*

(%)	Aspects of CEFR
(33)	Focus on oral communication “The oral aspect as they are learning another language.” “[I] was always wondering about activities to encourage oral production - the DELF provides some good ones.” “Students need to feel confident that they can engage in conversations for a variety of purposes.” “Speaking, students need to practice this skill in order to become confident and proficient.” “Giving all students the opportunity to communicate orally.”
(32)	Authentic tasks “Students are more engaged with the topics/lessons.” “Meaningful situations that will apply to the students in the future.” “Authentic language learning opportunities because that is where real life will take them.” “More authentic approach at language acquisition compared to previous approaches that focused more on rule memorization and writing and then speaking.” “Authentic situations as they contextualize the learning and engage students the most.”
(14)	<i>Je peux</i> statements “Allowing students to understand the steps involved in learning French- metacognition, goal setting.” “The <i>I can</i> statements...have guided my planning...to plan with the end in mind. The different levels clearly outline key points that students should have in their repertoire.”
(14)	A focus on listening skills “... listening skills because they are the foundation for learning a L2.” “Listening to be able to then communicate.”

“In what ways, if any, has your experience scoring the DELF (during your DELF training) developed or refined your understanding of the CEFR and impacted your French planning?”

Table 4 shows that the teachers' experience scoring the DELF during their DELF training pushed them, most often, to revisit their planning (79% of teachers), to better appreciate the importance of oral comprehension and production (27%), and to revisit the expectations they place on their students and the methods they use to assess them (21%). The teachers also mentioned that scoring the DELF helped them to better understand the process of language learning (20% of teachers), to appreciate the importance of a balanced approach by focusing on all four skill areas (6%), and to develop a better understanding of the connection between the CEFR and the curriculum (3% teachers) and between the DELF and the CEFR (2% teachers).

Table 4

Impact that scoring the DELF has on the teachers' understanding of the CEFR and on their FSL planning

(%)	Impact of DELF-Scoring	Sample Responses
		“Students must be viewed as social agents, and must be provided with authentic, action-oriented tasks in order to maximize their success.”
(79)	Revisit planning	“It's helped me be a more effective FSL teacher since I do a lot less talking and don't plan my units around grammar.” “Planning more valuable activities; more practical and useful for the students' life.”
(27)	Importance of oral comprehension and production	“It helped me understand the importance of listening and speaking - to have students become proficient in the basics before moving on.” “Confirmed the need to use listening and speaking activities...as a springboard for improving reading and writing skills.” “It's been a well-needed reminder that I do not work with enough aural documents and, at the end of day, students will benefit from more speaking and listening activities.” “Listening activities that engage the students in communicating and expressing ideas.”
(21)	Revisit expectations and assessment	“Made me have a better understanding of what to reasonably expect from my students. Changed the way I assess and evaluate students.” “Impacted my understanding with regards to the expectation of level of French.”

“What changes, if any, have you made to the instructional resources you use in your teaching to reflect your CEFR-related professional learning?”

The majority of teachers (88%) reported that their CEFR-related professional learning inspired them to make changes to the resources that they use in their teaching. As Table 5 shows, the teachers reported using resources specifically informed by or aligned with the CEFR/DELF (30% of teachers), using authentic documents and action-oriented tasks (27%), and employing activities that help students develop listening and speaking skills (26%). They also mentioned using technology (such as the Internet) to play audio/video clips (19% of teachers), a wider range of reading materials (9%), fewer resources focused on grammar (9%), and resources that they create themselves (7% teachers).

Table 5*Changes to teaching resources inspired by CEFR-related professional learning*

(%)	Teaching Resources
(30)	<p style="text-align: center;">Specific CEFR/DEL F resources</p> <p>“CEFR related resources - using them more often.”</p> <p>“More DELF resources because they are more authentic and closely aligned with the CEFR”</p> <p>“I use the CEFR in Action scenarios a lot and the DELF junior Scolaire book.”</p> <p>“DELF resources and pedagogical materials reflecting teaching practices in language acquisition.”</p>
(27)	<p style="text-align: center;">Authentic documents and action-oriented tasks</p> <p>“I focus on the basics using a variety of different authentic activities.”</p> <p>“[Using] examples from one of my resources entitled Scenarios for an Action Oriented Classroom and building on them, by allowing students to take ownership for their learning.”</p> <p>“I have changed what I am looking for when vetting a resource. I want something authentic, that the students will relate to.”</p> <p>“I have completely revamped my program to make it more authentic and useful.”</p> <p>“More authentic resources such as newspaper articles, and tourist brochures.”</p>
(26)	<p style="text-align: center;">Activities that focus on listening and speaking skills</p> <p>“Listening activities that engage the students in communicating and expressing ideas.”</p> <p>“Activities involve talking about themselves and their surroundings.”</p> <p>“I use videos more often and engage students in more oral interactions in class.”</p> <p>“More oral resources allowing students to hear other French speakers”</p>

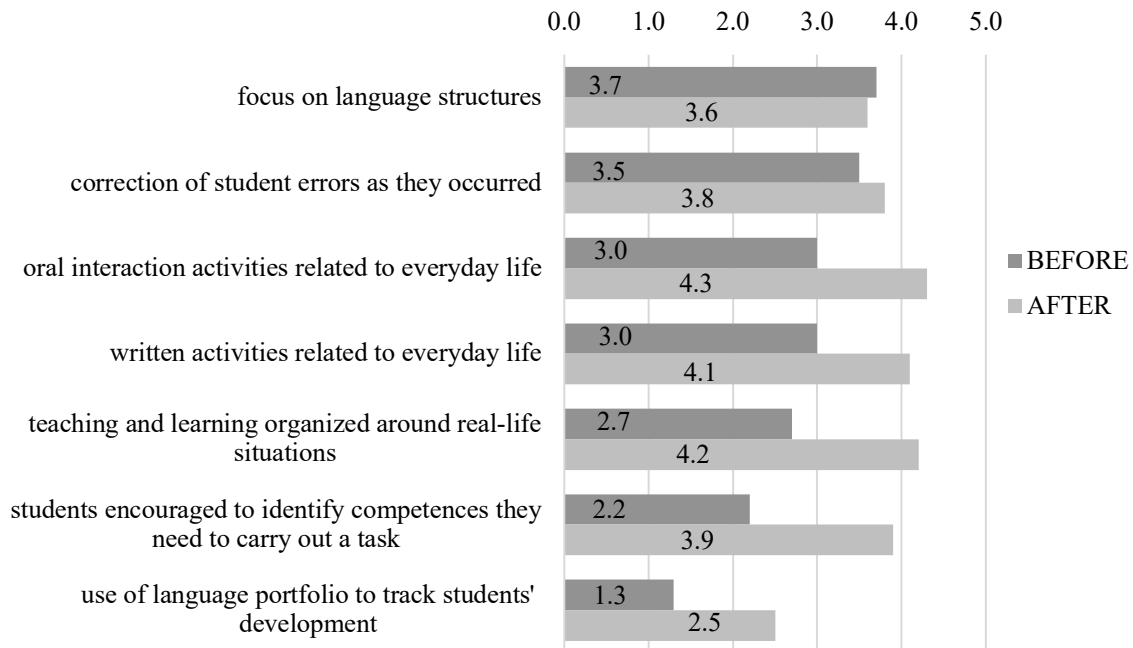
Teaching Practice

“Please consider the following statements concerning your FSL classroom practices and indicate how often you made use of each item before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning.”

Figure 3 shows that before their CEFR-related professional learning the teachers reported most often making use of practices that involve teaching language structures (a mean response of 3.7 out of a maximum of 5) and correcting student errors as they occurred (3.5). In contrast, after their professional learning, the teachers reported increasing the frequency of using each of the targeted practices, with the exception of the practice that involves teaching language structures, which remained relatively unchanged. The practice that the teachers reported increasing their use of the most was encouraging students to think about the competences they would need to develop to carry out a task (2.2 before versus 3.9 after).

Figure 3

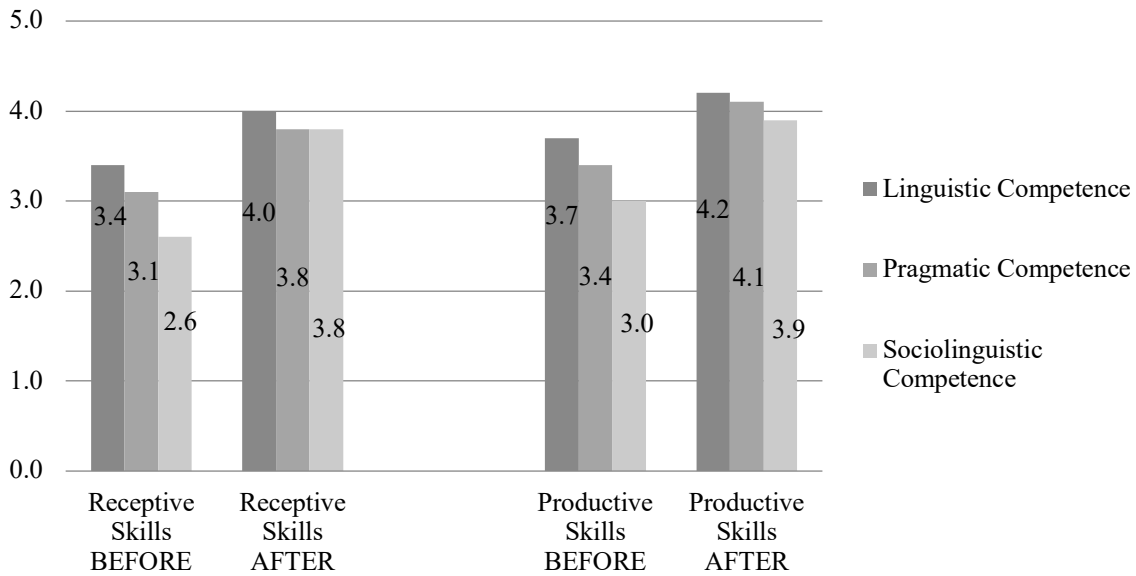
Frequency (0-5) of teacher practices BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning



“Please indicate the emphasis you placed on linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences when your teaching was focused on students’ receptive versus productive skills before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning.”

As Figure 4 shows, whether focused on the development of their students’ receptive skills (i.e., listening or reading) or productive skills (i.e., speaking or writing), before CEFR-related professional learning, the teachers reported placing the most emphasis on linguistic competence (with a mean response of 3.4 out of a maximum of 5 for receptive skills and a mean response of 3.7 out of 5 for productive skills), less emphasis on pragmatic competence (receptive: 3.1; productive: 3.4), and the least emphasis on sociolinguistic competence (receptive: 2.6; productive: 3.0). In contrast, after their CEFR-related professional learning, whether focused on the development of receptive or productive skills, the teachers reported having increased emphasis on all three competences, particularly sociolinguistic (receptive: 3.8; productive: 3.9). Even though the teachers still reported a slightly greater emphasis on linguistic competence, whether focused on receptive or productive skills, the results indicate that after their professional learning the teachers adopted a more-balanced emphasis across the three competences.

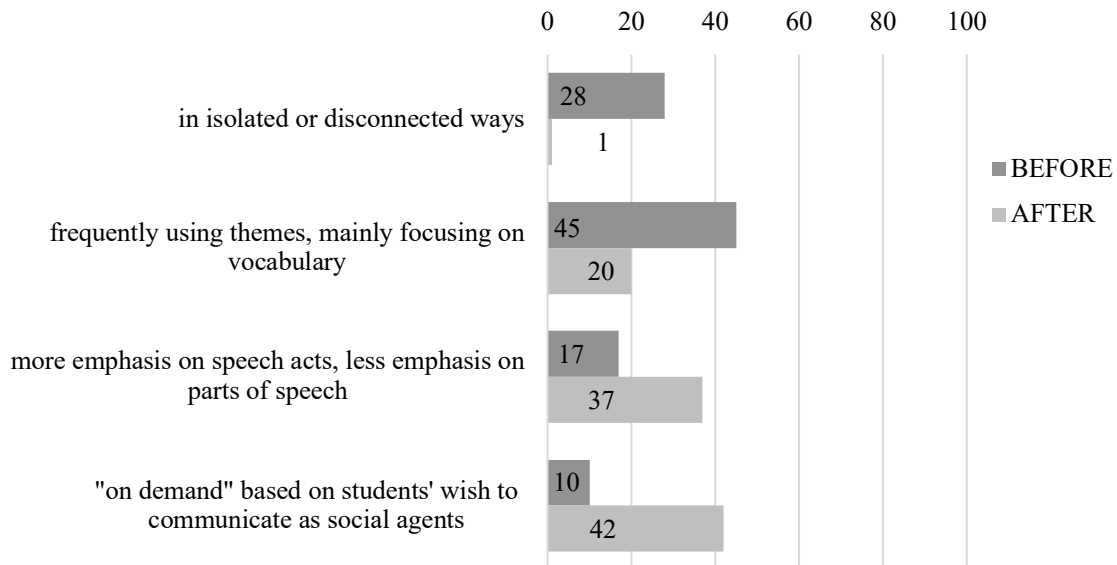
Figure 4
Emphasis (0-5) on competences in receptive and productive skills BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning



“Please select the statement that best reflects how you presented language in your FSL teaching before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning.”

Figure 5 shows that before their CEFR-related professional learning the teachers presented language most often in theme-based (45%) and in isolated or disconnected ways (28%). In contrast, after their professional learning, the teachers reported a near-complete reversal, with presenting language on-demand (42%) and through speech acts (37%) being reported by nearly 80% of the teachers.

Figure 5
Presentation of language (%) BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning



“Please describe one effective activity that you use to teach grammar and/or vocabulary in context after having participated in CEFR-related professional learning.”

Nearly all the activities that the teachers reported using to effectively teach grammar and/or vocabulary in context after their professional learning required students to use language in meaningful and purposeful ways. As Table 6 shows, these activities included using language in context (reported by 23% of teachers), guided reading (20%), and role-playing authentic situations (20%). The teachers also reported using audio/visual prompts (18%) and guided class conversations (11%).

Table 6

Effective activities to teach grammar and/or vocabulary in context

(%)	Activities	Sample Responses
(23)	Students using language in context	<p>“I find that modeling grammatical structures and then having them repeat/apply to their own context is very effective.”</p> <p>“[Crystal ball]...tell me what's in your future”</p> <p>“Really understanding the purpose of ÊTRE [the verb ‘to be’] and AVOIR [the verb ‘to have’] in describing self (presenting self to someone).”</p> <p>“The students were really upset about the school dress code ... They had to write letters to the principal to express their opinion and make suggestions in a polite and formal manner.”</p>
(20)	Guided Reading	<p>“Students read a new text, identify or question a new grammatical structure, grammar is taught and then practiced by students”</p> <p>“Shared Reading, and Read-aloud”</p> <p>“Passage of short story describing the past for teaching the past tense within context.”</p>
(20)	Role plays of authentic situations	<p>“Role Play - authentic situations (movies; shopping, etc.); peer interviews/ conversations (meeting someone for the first time, for example)”</p> <p>“Rehearsed or modeled interaction by me and students”</p> <p>“Creating real life scenarios.”</p> <p>“Planning a vacation in a French-speaking region”</p>

“Please describe one effective activity that you use to encourage authentic, spontaneous student-to-student interactions after having participated in CEFR-related professional learning.”

As Table 7 shows, the activities that the teachers reported to encourage authentic, spontaneous student-to-student interactions included role-playing authentic situations (36% of teachers), guided class conversations (22%), and partner or group work, including peer editing (22%). The teachers also mentioned using audio/visual prompts to elicit opinions and encourage discussion (12%). Activities reported by 10% of teachers did not fit into any

of these categories and included using language in context, inquiry-based learning activities, and projects based on can-do statements.

Table 7

Activities to encourage authentic student-to-student interaction

(%)	Activities to Encourage Interaction	Sample Responses
(36)	Role-plays of authentic situations	<p>“Role Play - authentic situations (movies; shopping, etc); peer interviews/conversations (meeting someone for the first time, for example)”</p> <p>“Videotaping simple conversations to share with me in a social media format (Google docs)”</p> <p>“I provide students with a situation, like signing up for a yoga class at the gym and encourage them to act it out”</p> <p>“Role plays with real life situations (ex. You think your locker mate has stolen your IPod. Confront your partner and try to resolve the issue.)”</p>
(22)	Guided class conversations	<p>“I try to begin my lessons with a quick 5-minute interactive dice game where the students ask and answer a series of questions.”</p> <p>“Share what they have been reading in class, what they understand, examples of figure of speech, etc.”</p> <p>“Giving menus and students discuss what they would like to order and why.”</p> <p>“Discussions on current events or events occurring in school (i.e., student council elections)”</p>
(22)	Peer/group work	<p>“Speed-dating pour parler au sujet de la fin de semaine ou les vacances”</p> <p>“Small group discussions on topics of interest to students where they are asked to provide their own opinion.”</p>

“Which change in your teaching practice, as a result of your CEFR-related professional learning, do you believe has had the greatest impact on your students’ proficiency?”

As can be seen in Table 8, the teachers believe that their students’ proficiency has been impacted most by providing them with more oral and listening practice (44% of teachers), by putting less focus on decontextualized grammar and more focus on language in context (18%), and by increasing the use of authentic situations and resources (17%). The teachers also mentioned the positive impact of establishing clear criteria and goals (8%).

Table 8*Changes in teaching practice with greatest impact on proficiency*

(%)	Changes in Teaching Practice	Sample Responses
(44)	More oral and listening practice	<p>“Allowing more time for students to practice their oral skills by either asking/ answering questions or by having short discussion about a topic that is placed on the board.”</p> <p>“More oral activity - role plays; classroom routines, etc.”</p> <p>“Allowing students time to talk to one another has increased their confidence and proficiency.”</p> <p>“Intentionally focusing on building capacity in students' oral production through action-oriented, authentic tasks and discussions”</p>
(18)	Less decontextualized focus on grammar and more language in context	<p>“Letting go of grammar lessons”</p> <p>“Less reliance on teaching grammar separately and always through being exposed to the language in context”</p> <p>“What are they going to say, not do they know the passé compose [past tense]”</p>
(17)	Use of authentic situations and resources	<p>“Use of authentic activities”</p> <p>“Modeling and using authentic setting (real-life situations)”</p>

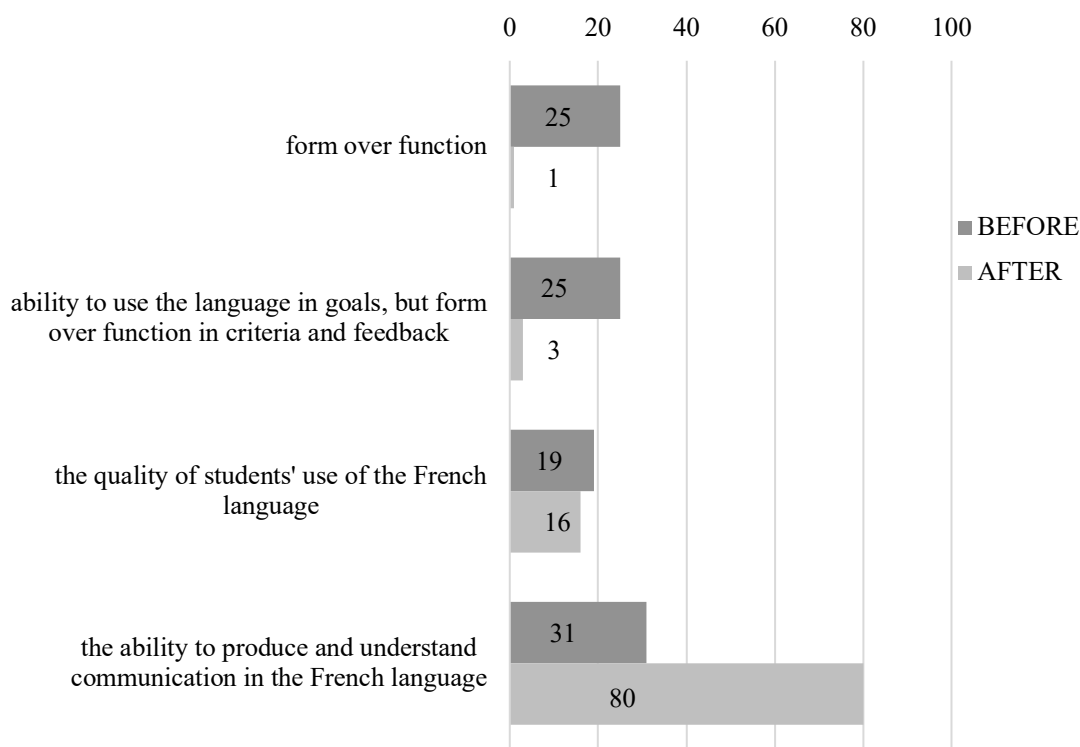
Assessment/Evaluation Practice

“Please select the statement that best describes the emphasis of the learning goals, success criteria, and feedback in your teaching before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning.”

As Figure 6 shows, before their CEFR-related professional learning, 25% of teachers reported focusing on form in their learning goals, success criteria, and feedback. Another 25% of teachers reported focusing on form only in their success criteria and feedback. Nineteen percent of teachers reported focusing on the quality of their students' use of French, and 31% reported focusing on their students' ability to produce and understand communication in French. In contrast, after their professional learning, 80% of teachers reported focusing on their students' ability to produce and understand communication in French, and 16% reported focusing on their students' quality of French.

Figure 6

Emphasis (%) of learning goals, success criteria, and feedback BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning

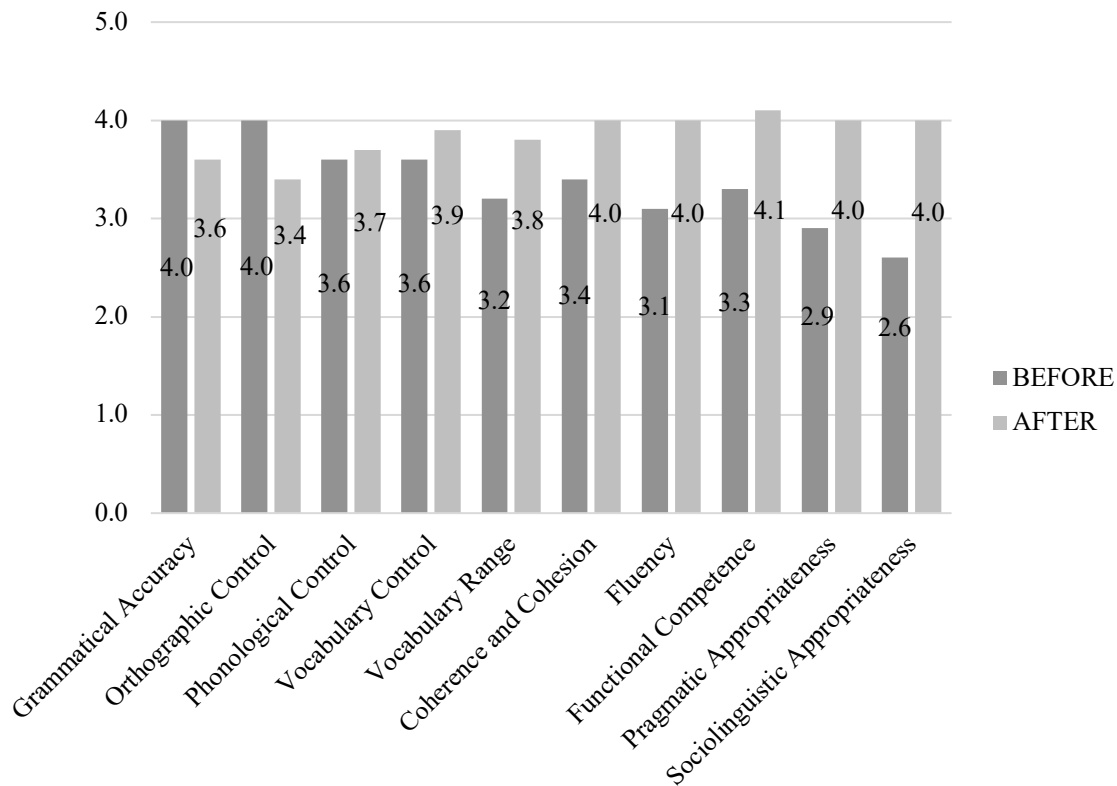


“Please indicate how often you targeted the following aspects of your students’ work in your feedback before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning.”

Figure 7 shows that, before their CEFR-related professional learning, the teachers most often targeted grammatical accuracy (4.0) and orthographic control (4.0) and least often targeted pragmatic appropriateness (2.9) and sociolinguistic appropriateness (2.6). In contrast, after their professional learning, the teachers reported an inversion in their focus. On the one hand, the teachers reported greatest and nearly balanced emphasis on functional competence, sociolinguistic appropriateness, pragmatic appropriateness, fluency, coherence and cohesion, and vocabulary control (4.1-3.9). On the other hand, the teachers reported the least emphasis on phonological control, grammatical accuracy, and orthographic control (3.4-3.0).

Figure 7

Frequency (0-5) of targeting aspects of students' work BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning

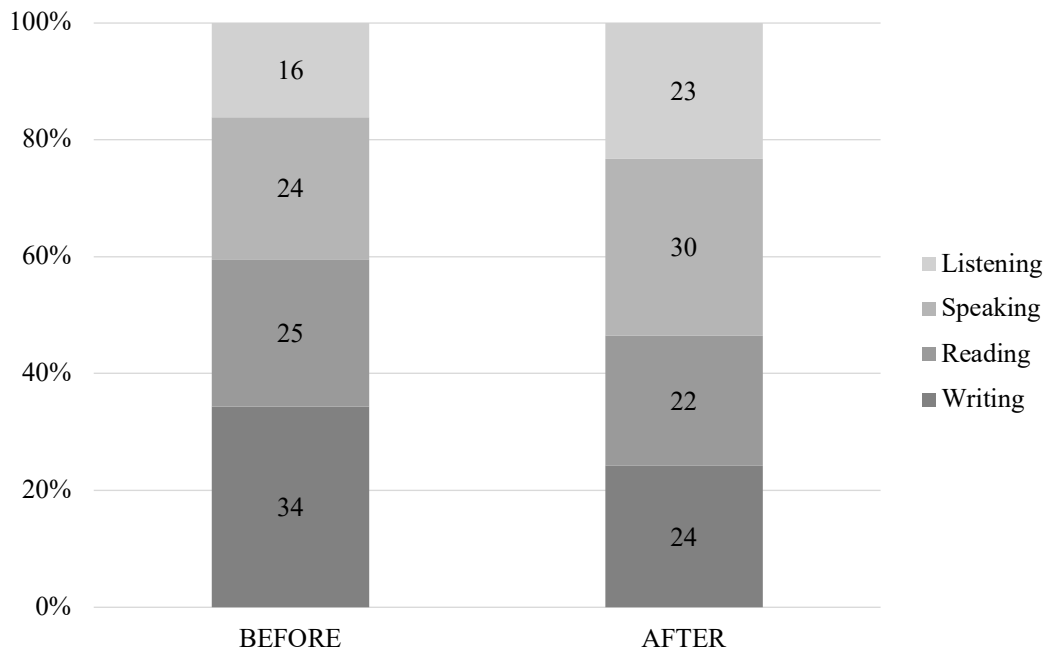


“Please indicate what percentage of your summative evaluation was devoted to each skill area before vs after your CEFR-related professional learning .”

As Figure 8 shows, before their CEFR-related professional learning, the teachers reported, on average, devoting most of their summative evaluation to written skills (35% of their evaluation was devoted to writing and 25% to reading) rather than to oral skills (24% of their evaluation focused on speaking and 16% on listening). In contrast, after their professional learning, on average, the teachers reported privileging speaking in their assessment (allotting 31% of their focus to this skill) and distributing their remaining focus evenly across the other skills (writing: 24%; listening: 23%; and reading 22%).

Figure 8

Proportion (%) of skills in summative evaluation BEFORE vs AFTER professional learning



“Which change in your own assessment practices do you believe has had the greatest impact on increasing your students’ French proficiency?”

As Table 9 shows, the changes in assessment practices that the teachers reported having the greatest impact on their students’ proficiency included increasing their focus on speaking (21% of teachers), changing the form of their feedback (16%), and focusing on communication (14%). The teachers also reported the positive impact of focusing on listening (12%), using authentic tasks (11%), focusing on all four skills (9%), and using formative assessment (7%).

Table 9*Changes in assessment practice with greatest impact on student proficiency*

(%)	Changes in Assessment Practices	Sample Responses
(21)	Focus on speaking	<p>“Switched to more speaking assessments (often and valued)”</p> <p>“Put the emphasis on oral expression”</p> <p>“Higher expectations in terms of oral expression”</p>
(16)	Form of feedback	<p>“More detailed feedback”</p> <p>“Providing frequent feedback that is meaningful. Not simply saying ‘that was great.’”</p>
(14)	Focus on communication	<p>“Having students get their point across in a manner in which it is understood in a confident and effective manner”</p> <p>“Focusing on student context (message) instead of always on grammar”</p> <p>“Focus on communication of ideas rather than exactitude of the language structures”</p>

Teacher Group Analyses

Additional analyses of the data were performed to determine whether particular practices and their frequencies reported by the teachers in response to each survey question were similar across various sub-groups of teachers (e.g., across teachers who had an A1 vs A2 vs B1 vs B2 class in mind while responding to the survey, or teachers who had one to three years vs four to five years vs six or more years of CEFR-related professional learning experience). As Table 10 shows, except for two questions (planning question #1 and assessment/evaluation question #2, which are marked as ‘mostly’ rather than ‘yes’), each of these additional analyses revealed that the teachers across the various sub-groups reported remarkably similar practices and frequencies. The label ‘mostly’ for the two exceptions in Table 10 indicates instances where particular sub-groups of teachers reported slightly different effects of their CEFR-related professional learning on their practices.

Table 10
Impact of Professional Learning by Teacher Groups

Planning Questions	Teacher Groups Analyzed	Patterns Shared Across Groups
1. Strategy use	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning French program type	Mostly
2. Four skills	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning Years of French teaching experience	Yes
3. CEFR aspects	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning French program type	Yes
4. DELF-scoring	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of French teaching experience Years of professional learning	Yes
5. Resource use	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning French program type	Yes
Teaching Practice Questions	Teacher Groups Analyzed	Patterns Shared Across Groups
1. Teaching Practices	CEFR-level of envisioned class French program type Years of professional learning	Yes
2. Emphasis on Receptive and Productive Competences	CEFR-level of envisioned class French program type Years of professional learning	Yes
3. Presentation of Language	CEFR-level of envisioned class French program type Years of professional learning	Yes
4. Activities for Teaching Grammar / Vocabulary	CEFR-level of envisioned class French program type Years of professional learning	Yes
5. Activities for Student Interactions	CEFR-level of envisioned class French program type Years of professional learning	Yes
6. Changes in Teaching Practice	CEFR-level of envisioned class French program type Years of professional learning	Yes
Assessment/Evaluation Practice Questions	Teacher Groups Analyzed	Patterns Shared Across Groups
1. Learning Goals, Success Criteria, and Feedback	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning Years of French teaching experience	Yes
2. Aspects of Students' Work	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning French program type	Mostly
3. Four Skills	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of French teaching experience French program type	Yes
4. Changes in Assessment	CEFR-level of envisioned class Years of professional learning French program type	Yes

Discussion

Analyses of the responses to the online survey designed to explore the impact of CEFR-related professional learning on FSL teachers' classroom practice in the areas of planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation may be summarized with the following observations about the magnitude and nature of the impact.

Magnitude of Impact

With regard to the magnitude of the impact, the teachers' reported practices show that professional learning related to the CEFR is inspiring changes to classroom practice across varied groups of FSL teachers at the Pan-Canadian level. Although a few isolated differences emerged among particular sub-groups of teachers in relation to two of the 15 survey questions, teachers across a wide spectrum reported remarkably similar influences of CEFR-related professional learning on their planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation practices. Unlike previous reports of the impact of the CEFR in COE countries (e.g., Figueras, 2012; Jones & Saville, 2009; Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007; Moonen et al., 2013), the data in our study indicate that the impact of greater familiarity with the CEFR is far-reaching in the areas of planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation.

Nature of Impact

Concerning the nature of the impact, the teachers reported extensive and varied changes in their practice. These changes can be regrouped and understood as two comprehensive sets of changes in their classroom practice. One comprehensive set of changes in line with the CEFR is a shift in how the teachers are presenting language in the classroom. In terms of planning, the teachers reported designing action-oriented tasks and tasks that involve authentic language situations to help their students develop communicative abilities; distributing their focus in their planning more evenly across linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competences; and increasing the amount of classroom time they planned to allocate to speaking and listening. This new focus in planning contrasts with the teachers' former focus on helping their students to develop, above all, their linguistic competence, particularly in writing.

With regard to teaching, the teachers reported using teaching and learning situations designed around real life and using activities that simulate oral and written interactions in everyday life. They further reported distributing the emphasis of their teaching more evenly among linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic competences whether helping their students to develop their receptive or productive skills. To this end, they reported presenting language in the classroom almost exclusively through speech acts or based on what the students wished to communicate, in contrast to their former approach of presenting language in the classroom in theme-based or isolated and disconnected ways.

Concerning assessment and evaluation, in terms of learning goals, the teachers reported emphasizing communicative skills, especially helping their students to develop their ability to produce and understand communication in French. The teachers reported preferring forms of evaluation that resemble authentic situations, targeting students' ability to communicate, and focusing their summative evaluation primarily on speaking. This new

focus contrasts with the teachers' former focus on grammatical accuracy and orthographic control.

The second set of comprehensive changes reported by the teachers in line with the CEFR is a shift toward using teaching strategies and materials that are informed by authentic and everyday uses of the L2. Concerning planning, the teachers reported building their lesson plans around the use of CEFR-related resources, authentic documents, action-oriented tasks, activities that help students to develop listening and speaking skills, technology (e.g., the Internet), a wider range of reading materials, and their own resources to produce tasks that the students can relate to, that allow them to take charge of their own learning, and that are consistent with the curriculum.

With regard to teaching, the teachers reported increasing the number of tasks that require using the L2 in context, guided reading, role-plays of authentic situations, audio/visual prompts, and guided conversation to help their students to develop their communicative ability by connecting classroom L2 learning to authentic everyday uses of the L2 and by allowing students to express their ideas and opinions on topics that they find relevant. In terms of assessment and evaluation, the teachers reported a preference for assessing students while they were accomplishing authentic tasks (instead of using traditional testing methods) to reflect their increased use of authentic tasks in their teaching, and increasing the use of assessment tasks that focus primarily on speaking and communication.

All of these changes are in keeping with those reported in previous research on the impact of the CEFR on classroom practice (Béresešová, 2011; Faez, Majhanovich et al., 2011; Faez, Taylor et al. 2011; Moonen et al., 2013; Rehner, 2017a; Vandergrift, 2015), such as the shift toward competence-based and communicative approaches to L2 teaching; an emphasis on the development of oral skills; increased use of interactive speaking activities; and a shift away from decontextualized assessment that tests knowledge of grammar and vocabulary toward assessment that focuses on all four skills and that, in contrast to the former approach, increases the focus on oral skills.

What is particularly noteworthy in the Canadian context is that the shift toward CEFR-informed classroom practices was reported by teachers across the various FSL programs, including Core French and French Immersion, two programs with vastly different underlying principles of pedagogy. On the one hand, CEFR-inspired changes in the approach to teaching in the Core French program are perhaps more dramatic because this program has a history of being more teacher-centred, grammar-oriented, and analytical rather than student-centred, authentic, or communicative (e.g., Arnott, 2011; Lapkin et al. 2009; Rovers, 2013). On the other hand, although French Immersion is often touted as the program with better results in terms of students' communicative ability, the shift toward CEFR-informed classroom practices in this program with their increased focus on speaking skills and oral communication may be poised to address concerns about grammatical accuracy and vocabulary range in French Immersion students' production (e.g., Cummins, 2014; Knoerr, 2010; Lazaruk, 2007).

Conclusion

This study has explored the impact of CEFR-related professional learning on the classroom practice of Canadian FSL teachers. The findings have revealed that participation in this type of professional learning is having a far-reaching and consistently powerful impact on the areas of planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation. The resulting changes in practice were reported across teacher groups in response to nearly every question regardless of their particular characteristics (i.e., number of years of CEFR-related professional learning, number of years of teaching experience, CEFR proficiency level of the class the teachers had in mind while responding to the survey, and the French program they were teaching in—Core, Intensive, and/or Immersion). The teachers reported changing how they are presenting language in the classroom from isolated and disconnected ways that privileged linguistic competence and that focused primarily on helping students to develop their writing skills to, instead, presenting language through speech acts and based on students' needs, emphasizing not only linguistic but pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence as well, and focusing on helping their students to develop their ability to communicate in the L2.

The teachers also reported increasing the use of strategies and materials grounded in authentic and everyday uses of the L2 and communicative and action-oriented tasks that simulate real-life situations that are relevant to the students. They indicated that their assessment and evaluation of student performance is now also in line with this reoriented focus—no longer emphasizing, above all, linguistic accuracy primarily for the written skills but, rather, focusing on students' ability to comprehend and produce the language to accomplish real-life action-oriented goals.

Two cautionary points, however, need to be made with regard to the limitations of the study, with implications for the generalizability of its findings. First, as mentioned at the outset, as a result of the recruitment methods employed, some of the teachers in the sample are likely to be among the most knowledgeable, interested, and active teachers engaging with the CEFR in Canada. Second, the findings of the study are based on the teachers' retrospective self-reports of their practices before and after their CEFR-related professional learning rather than on direct observations of their classroom practice and, as such, need to be considered in this light. While there is, thus, room for further research to address these limitations and to add to the picture captured by this study, the current findings provide, at the very least, an informative and valuable window into how CEFR-informed professional learning is transforming the views of highly-engaged teachers as concerns their own pedagogy.

In sum, the findings of the present study suggest that CEFR-related professional learning is successfully inspiring these Canadian FSL teachers to make changes in their reported planning, teaching, and assessment/evaluation practices that are very much in line with the spirit and principles of the CEFR. This study suggests that the CEFR in Canada is spreading from “paper to practice” and that a shift inspired by the framework toward competence-based, action-oriented, and communicative L2 teaching is starting to take place.

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