Alleviating Oral Communication Anxieties in College French Classes: The Impact of Professor-Student Connections

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Alleviating Oral Communication Anxieties in College French Classes:
The Impact of Professor-Student Connections

Claude Cassagne

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In Partial Fulfillment of the
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Anna M. Farrell, Adviser
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My sister Nicole is my rock and my hero. She always knew I could do it even when I kept telling her that I was fed up. She is a special angel walking this earth and she constantly touches lives. Everyone is a better person because of knowing her. I am lucky that she is my sister.

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Thanks to my friends Dan, Paul, and Amy who were supportive and who encouraged me to keep going.

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Dedication

Even though she left this earth in 1978, I would like to dedicate this to my mom, Anita, who continues to be in my head and in my heart and who, while she was here, was the bravest angel of them all. She is proud of me, I’m sure of that. She was not a regular human being. She was beyond extraordinary. Despite all the adversities that she faced, she still found a way to always laugh or use humor in everything she did. I miss her terribly and I would do anything to see her or hear her again. I would also like to dedicate this to my two sisters, Chantal and Nicole, who live in France. It was impossible to imagine this accomplishment when I was a little kid doing mischievous stuff, but perseverance and resilience paid off. I am the person I am today thanks to my mom and my sisters. I love you all immensely. Thank you.
Abstract

Oral communication anxiety (OCA) is a challenge for many college students studying a foreign language. This phenomenon has yielded many studies explaining OCA exists, relating it to personality traits and concluding educators play a large role in either reducing or aggravating such anxieties. However, research is lacking in the role professor-student rapport and connections play in affecting OCA. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to seek student perception on (through their worldviews), and recommendations for, professor teaching practices as it relates to anxiety and rapport-building. The participants are and were students of French in an undergraduate private liberal arts college in the Midwest region of the United States. Some of the findings referring to teaching practices were expected while other findings were surprising. For example, the very people who should reduce anxiety (professors) were sometimes the ones who aggravated it unknowingly. The recommendations participants shared were also unpredictable, surprising, and unexpected especially as they pertained to professor-student rapport outside of the classroom. Among recommendations were that professors make the academic environment as relaxed and welcoming as possible. Teaching practices, such as focusing on small group or pair activities were valued for their relatively low impact on oral communication anxiety and students recommended professors focus on these types of activities. Rapport building outside of the classroom was not deemed as important to students who experienced oral communication anxieties and no suggestions were made to improve it. The participants were concerned about the rapport inside of the classroom and professor pedagogical approaches.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Setting the Stage

According to the National Social Anxiety Center “the fear of public speaking is the most common phobia ahead of death” (Montopoli, 2017, para. 1). The anxieties caused by public speaking, also known as glossophobia, affect nearly 75% of the population. Language courses, and other courses where public speaking is required, provide an environment where anxieties can be created and fester. It is within the domain of foreign languages taught at the undergraduate university level that I situated my study. More specifically, I focus on oral communication and the inability or unwillingness for college students to participate in French oral tasks because of anxieties. This dissertation advances the argument that a nurturing, welcoming, and encouraging academic climate helps students who experience oral communication anxiety.

The goals of this study were to explore speaking anxieties in French language students, the reasons these fears exist, the ways in which they manifest themselves, and methods professors use to diminish or eliminate those worries as well as teaching practices suggested by participants. Through a rigorous review of the literature, I maintain there is not sufficient research regarding the relationships and rapport between students and professors that could benefit the learner to alleviate oral communication anxieties. Through analyzing the data collected, I show there are efforts professors can make to establish positive and nurturing relationships with students, calm the stressed learners and, as a result, encourage them to participate willingly and enthusiastically.

A positive professor-student relationship may benefit learning in college and throughout life. Smith (2015) pointed out students learn best and show improvement when it is accompanied by quality rapport between instructor and student, while Carson (1996) found many years after
graduating college, students still praised professors who had a favorable and constructive relationship with them. From a professor’s point of view, Starcher (2011) saw positive evidence of deliberately building rapport with students and observed classroom discussions flowed more easily and student engagement, in and out of the classroom, increased.

The relationship between learner and educator is of importance. All of Wilson’s (1996) 28 research participants in her study on professor-student relationships referred to the importance of this rapport. On the other hand, and as Wilson (1996) stressed, it is not always the teacher who tries to reach students. “Students spoke of times when they had tried to make the first move by approaching professors who seemed unapproachable, because they knew that making connections could make the difference between their success or their failure in certain courses” (Wilson, 1996, p. 437). It apparently was not easy, and students faced difficulties while trying to initiate these connections. This lack of approachability may discourage students to be more open and participate and, consequently, impede learning.

There are a number of studies affirming that interactive connections between educator and student, not only inside but also outside of the classroom, are crucial in promoting healthy and professional relationships (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Jorgenson, 1992; Ramsden, 2003). Nonetheless, a gap exists in the area of building rapport inside and outside of the classroom and diminishing anxieties in class and potentially increasing oral participation.

In the next section, I explain the problem of practice and how this study connects to educational leadership. Then, the statement of purpose provides the overall direction to my study. Following this, I provide the framework for my inquiry, and I continue with a summary of previous research, which will be comprehensively explored in Chapter Two. What comes after are my research questions followed by an overview of the research site. I then describe the
significance of the study and I explain my positionality as a researcher. I proceed with a small list of definitions and a section on limitations of the study. I end the chapter with a conclusion briefly explaining what will come in the subsequent chapters.

**Problem of Practice**

An abundance of research emphasizes that students encounter unnecessary stress and anxiety when navigating public speaking especially when dialoguing in second and third languages particularly at the beginning levels (Bodie, 2010; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Horwitz, 2010; McCroskey, 1977; Toth, 2011.) One of the problems noted in these studies is that students are required to speak the target language in front of peers and professors in an impromptu manner, but educators do not provide them with tools to alleviate the anxiety that accompanies this requirement. Studies show students do not have confidence speaking a foreign language, thus generating anxiety, and suggest there are ways professors can help. Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016) advocated the view that professors lament their students’ lack of participation, but also that professors do not know how to resolve the issue. According to Florescu and Pop-Pacurar and Moskovsky, Alrabai, Paolini, and Ratcheva (2013), motivation and participation are interrelated. In other words, if students are not motivated because of a stumbling block such as anxiety or fear, they will not participate. These researchers also illustrated how teachers’ intentional and encouraging behaviors create the motivation students need to confidently engage in public speaking.

In this dissertation, I set out to discover what happened when professors took extra steps to connect with students on a personal level, such as holding office hours outside of their scheduled office hours, attending extracurricular activities and speaking to students about their interests. I predicted the students would exhibit increased self-confidence, achieve higher
proficiency levels in the target language, attain a willingness to communicate, become more comfortable in their ability to take risks and, most importantly, significantly contribute to the decline of anxieties when speaking a foreign language. However, the data showed professor-student rapport was less impacted by activities outside of the classroom than teaching practices inside of the classroom. Some participants mentioned connections with their professors outside of the classroom were neither sought nor expected.

**Situating the Study within Educational Leadership**

The field of educational leadership seeks to solve problems in educational settings. While curricular changes can be made at the highest administrative levels with superintendents, principals, college presidents, provosts, deans, supervisors, and department chairs, I chose to explore the potential for change at the classroom educator level. I maintain problem solving should be introduced as part of professors’ pedagogies and practices. It can start by tweaking lesson plans, creating a classroom environment that invites student participation, welcoming student mistakes, teaching critical thinking, and can continue by deliberately changing the academic culture and climate. Even though it is not easy, professors as educational leaders need to engage in reflexivity, perhaps even surrendering some power and decision-making to students. Being an effective leader in the educational field requires professors take frequent risks and teach risk-taking to students. Beghetto (2017) explained teachers need to invite uncertainty, I might even add risk-taking, into the classroom. I would even contend professors need to teach that not everything can be prepared in advance when it comes to communicating in a foreign language. Professors should teach this kind of risk-taking to their students.

My research belongs in the field of educational leadership because it presents a problem present in a college setting. As Flynn (2017) wrote, educational problems exist because goals or
values are not met and, while some things are out of educators’ control, changing the social, academic, and motivational classroom environment is within their control. Changes that start in classrooms have the potential to influence departments, schools, and communities.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore educator-learner rapport, specifically student perceptions of professors’ interactions with their students through teaching practices and encounters outside of the classroom. Moreover, I investigated whether these interactions or connections improved or eliminated the fear and anxiety that college students experienced when speaking a new language. I aimed to discover which actions and steps professors can take in and out of the classroom to lessen or eliminate student anxieties as perceived by learners as a result of positive and nurturing rapport.

**Significance of the Study**

The fear of public speaking is real. Many careers, including teachers, performers, news anchors, politicians, religious leaders, attorneys, and motivational speakers, require public speaking, and yet fear of public speaking remains high. Montopoli (2017) reported individuals fear judgements and negative appraisal by others. This study is important as it suggests reasons for anxieties found in college students and offers solutions that, if followed, have the potential to assuage or eradicate public speaking or oral participation fears.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that guided my research was comprised of three interrelated concepts: Academic, motivational, and social climates in and out of the college foreign language classroom. Anderman, Andrzejewski, and Allen, (2011) defined academic climate as an environment where educators support students’ learning and promote interactions with the taught
content. They defined motivational climate as the way in which students find purpose and meaning with engagement in interpersonal tasks. For example, what are students’ motivations for participating in oral communication exercises and how do they find meaning in such activities? Finally, they defined social climate as the way in which teachers support students and the positive teacher–student rapport and connections that can unfold.

Although the three climates can be defined separately, it was not my aim to untangle them as I agree with Anderman et al. (2011) who stated all three dimensions, or climates, interact dynamically with each other. Oral communication, which very frequently causes anxiety in students, lives at the nexus of the three climates. In order for oral communication anxiety to be reduced or eliminated, the three climates need to come together and contribute to surmounting this apprehension. By the nature of their interconnectedness and with the goal of overcoming anxieties experienced by college students, careful attention to the three climates on behalf of the educator can make it possible for students to participate in oral communication, an academic activity necessary to the success of foreign language learning.

**Brief Overview of Previous Research**

There are many studies reporting on student anxieties (Hjeltnes, Binder, Moltu, & Dundas, 2015; Horwitz, 2001; Nash, Crimmins, & Oprescu, 2016) including anxieties associated with oral participation (Bodie, 2010; Cheng et al., 1999; McCroskey, 1977; Rassaeiy, 2015; Toth, 2011), and especially speaking a foreign language (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Other research reported on anxieties associated with poor performance (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Cheng et al., 1999; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Salehi & Marefat, 2014). In other words, anxieties, which are ubiquitous and have debilitating effects, do not appear out of the blue: they must come from somewhere and be caused by something.
Moreover, various investigations have associated anxiety with personality traits (Diener & Lucas, 2019; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Kayaoglu, 2013; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; Oz, 2014; Zarrinabadi, 2014). Introverts, for example, may have a difficult time speaking in front of groups of people. When college students are asked to speak in front of others as part of an assignment, and especially for a grade, anxieties surface in certain personality traits and can greatly impact learning and performing as well as make it difficult to process and retrieve information (Núñez-Peña, Suárez-Pellicioni, & Bono, 2013; Stack, 2018). Núñez-Peña et al. (2013) added anxiety is the foremost cause of low grades and leads to negative attitudes toward the subject matter taught, thus influencing student performance. Professors can play a large role in helping students. I believe personality traits were an important part of this study because it seems anxieties come from certain innate attributes. However, there is only so much people can do to change their fundamental traits. As a result, there must be help that can come from professors in the way they act inside and outside of the classroom.

There is also research on the role of college professors in alleviating or eliminating student anxiety with speaking skills in the target language (Aida, 1994; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Mohammadi, Biria, Koosha, & Shahsavari, 2013) and how a nurturing environment positively comes into play (Dewaele, Witney, Saito, & Dewaele, 2018; Fassinger, 1995; Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016; Gkonou, 2013; Moskovsky et al., 2013; Young, 1991). There is, however, very little advice offered on exactly what professors should do and there are fewer studies about significant outcomes pointing to improvements in oral communication anxiety resulting from connections between professors and students (Andrzejewski, & Allen, 2011; Burleson & Samter, 1990; De Vito, 1986; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Graham, West, & Schaller, 1992; Sparks, 2019). Furthermore, there is little guidance and negligible research on how to create a relationship
between students and professors that is both professional and personal. Having reached the conclusion that, despite the amount of available research on anxiety, oral communication apprehension, redefining the classroom environment, and teachers’ roles in alleviating student anxiety, there remains a gap in combining the social, academic, and motivational climates to form the formidable help students need to reduce or eliminate oral communication anxiety in college foreign language courses. My research questions address this gap.

**Research Questions**

As a guide to my research, I investigated the following research questions:

1. What practices do college students in French identify as being valuable in building student/professor rapport inside and outside of classroom?
2. What practices do college students in French identify as being valuable for reducing oral communication anxiety inside and outside of the classroom?
3. Which changes do college students in French suggest can be made in professors’ pedagogical approaches, classroom atmosphere, and rapport-building to alleviate learners’ oral communication anxiety?

**Research Site and Participants**

I chose to situate this study in a small, private liberal arts Midwestern college referred to as Wildwood College.¹ Wildwood College provides a challenging, liberal arts education where students can thrive and grow socially, academically, and personally. Wildwood prides itself in stressing internationalism, multiculturalism, and service to society, and it prepares students to live and function in a globally connected world. The average class size is small (16), and the

---

¹ Pseudonym
The ratio of faculty to students is 10:1. The college offers exclusively four-year undergraduate degrees.

The participants I contacted ranged from 18 to approximately 27 years old because some of these students will have graduated as early as 2016. The students enrolled in French classes, whether for general requirements or for a major or minor, and the population was chosen from their attendance in French classes during the five-year period beginning in the Fall of 2015 and ending in the Spring of 2020.

**Positionality of Researcher**

Plusses and minuses of my years as an educator reveal I have preferences and strong opinions about the way I teach and those have been shaped by the varied experiences I have had the opportunity to encounter. It is important to discuss these experiences as they may impact the way that I relate to this study as both a researcher and French professor.

In the Fall of 1990, when I was still an undergraduate student, I was enrolled in a French film course and each of the students were asked to present an aspect of a film we watched. I was not very experienced in engaging an entire class even though I had fulfilled the task of student-teaching at another undergraduate college, had led choral rehearsals, and helped fellow students with private voice lessons. This time, and thanks to my previous experience, I took it more seriously and the results were noticeable. One of the students came to me after class and commented about my ease and comfortability in front of a large group. At the time I was not certain why I exhibited those attributes. It could be due to the fact that I am a singer and theater performer thanks to years of training in the performing arts. It may be ascribed to the fact that I am gregarious and extroverted. Perhaps it was because I had not used notes during the presentation and engaged my classmates and professors with verbal and non-verbal methods. Or
it was all of the above. No matter. Engaging my classmates with a nod, a friendly smile, eye-to-eye contact, positive feedback, and thought-provoking questions proved a positive academic and motivational climate could turn students’ public speaking anxieties into uninhibited curiosity about the subject matter and a boost in self-confidence.

In 1991, I graduated with a second bachelor of arts and became a professional choral singer while performing my duties as French teaching assistant during my master of arts program. Since I am a French native speaker, I am often asked to teach French diction to solo singers as well as to choral groups. One year, during the 1990s, I was a tenor singing with a professional choral organization and one of our pieces was the French national anthem: “La Marseillaise.” It was with nervousness that I agreed to coach the choir on French diction. Upon finishing the rehearsal, one of the sopranos came to me and said I had the soul of a teacher. Thus, I embarked on an educational career spanning more than 30 years. Over the years, I learned what I was doing was engaging my students instead of asking for their compliance. After observing my classes and seeing how I interacted with my students outside of class, my supervisors and department chairs always commented about the outstanding rapport we have, whether fourth grade pupils, seniors in high school, undergraduate and graduate students, or other adult learners.

Throughout my more than 11 years as an undergraduate and graduate student, I have not witnessed many educators who truly engaged their students. Additionally, I only recall a handful of professors with whom I had a good relationship. These few professors gave me reason to want to excel in their classes. Thinking of one graduate school professor, I distinctly remember them asking me ahead of time which topics I would prefer to speak about during my oral examination. During the oral examination, this professor proceeded to ask me questions in which I was able to show my expertise. They chose to help me shine during an extremely stressful test. However,
during the same test, another professor chose to find a topic in which I had very little knowledge and remained on the same topic for what seemed an eternity. They chose to corner me and expose my shortcomings. I want my students to shine just as I shined, thanks to this amazing professor who I will always remember. I do not want to corner my students as there is no value in it.

It is because of the few connections I experienced with professors that I continue reaching out to all my students hoping my students will excel as well. Some of them who are now teachers have contacted me to ask for advice on how they can now reach their own students the way I connected with them. The personal connection I have tried to make with students has grown over the years. When I was a younger teacher, the connections I made with students were sometimes perceived by students as friendships equal to those they create with their peers. As the professor-student age gap grew wider, it became clear to me boundaries needed to be set but the personal connections needed to be present. I realized the academic and motivational climates I created were not enough. The social climate inside and outside of the classroom became increasingly important as I saw these interpersonal efforts made a difference in students’ perceptions of themselves and their academic performance.

Connecting with students in an interpersonal way is paramount. Sparks (2019) acknowledged individuals interested in education have known the relationship between a student and an educator can be of crucial importance to how well students learn. Frymier and Houser (2000) remarked the teacher-student relationship is characterized by its interpersonal qualities, meaning there must be a give and take element and negotiating has to take place. Yet, this friendly contact between student and professor should not be confined to the four walls of a classroom. De Vito (1986) illustrated this point by explaining this rapport begins on the first day
both student and teacher walk into class, attains a sense of affinity and closeness, and ends when there is no longer daily contact between educator and student, most likely after graduation. Several other studies (Anderman et al., 2011; Burleson & Samter, 1990; Graham et al., 1992) also described the value these relationships hold.

Today, I am a French professor in a small, private Midwestern college. My quest to reach students and to establish connections has not waned. I am still tirelessly finding ways to make my classroom as stress-free as possible and, as a result, make connections with students. Through the span of my teaching career, I have seen students respond to faculty who are approachable, personable, relatable, and who welcome student mistakes, often leading them to pursue further studies in the language. These faculty attributes are developed through frequent reflexivity, which was integral throughout my research. Reflexivity means researchers, through a set of self-posed questions, examine themselves rigorously for the fact there cannot be neutrality, objectivity, and a sense of detachment, all the while accepting they will uncover things about themselves that may be unknown or may not be desirable to know (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). There are certain sets of beliefs from which I cannot disassociate myself and these perspectives, or positions, shaped my study. Comparing my expectations to my findings revealed some unexpected results, whether wanted or unwanted, and that is a result of reflexivity. It is good for educators to frequently question the methods they use, to search for updated means of reaching out to students, to implement these new methods and to improve them again and again.

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout this study, I used a number of key terms. They are defined below:

**Anxiety**: “An emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually
have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or a rapid heartbeat” (American Psychological Association, 2020, para. 1). In my study, anxiety refers to the potentially immobilizing fear students experience when speaking a foreign language, especially in the presence of peers or professors.

**Cognitive strategies:** “One type of learning strategy that learners use in order to learn more successfully. These include repetition, organizing new language, summarizing meaning, guessing meaning from context, using imagery for memorization” (Cognitive Strategies, n.d.).

**Corrective feedback:** “A teacher’s reformulation of a learner’s erroneous utterance in a correct form” (Rassaei, 2015, p. 99).

**Metacognition:** “Refers to the processes used to plan, monitor, and assess one’s understanding and performance. Metacognition includes a critical awareness of a) one’s thinking and learning and b) oneself as a thinker and learner” (Chick, Karis, & Kernahan, 2009, p. 4).

**Metalinguistics:** “A branch of linguistics that deals with the relation between language and other cultural factors in a society” (“Metalinguistics,” 2020).

**Oral communication anxiety** “An individual's discomfort in talking in front of others” (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, p. 562).

**Target language:** “Language other than one's native language that is being learned” (“Target Language,” 2020).
Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the participants are high achieving students as defined by grades and test scores. They were and are college students at an elite liberal arts institution in the Midwest. As a result, findings may not be representative of a varied college population. This is an item suggested for further research. Second, as I have taught at multiple institutions, some of the students may have known me before this research. Even though all responses were completely anonymous, some students may have attempted to give answers they thought I would want to hear. To balance this limitation, the majority of students who received the written interview did not know me or had not taken my courses. Finally, this study is limited to French language students. Courses in other languages and non-language courses involving public speaking should be considered for additional studies.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the scope of this study including the problem of practice, research questions that frame the study, an overview of the research, the context of the research, the significance of the study, definition of important terms, and limitations. More specifically, I argued the importance of professors lending a helping hand to students experiencing anxieties lies in change of behavior and attitude in some educators. If students are able to lessen or eliminate the fear of speaking a foreign language in public, they may be able to do the same in their native tongue.

In Chapter Two, I explore previous research in detail, provide context and further gaps in studies, and set the stage for subsequent discussion utilizing my original research. Chapter Three presents my research methodology and associates my research questions with the methodology. Chapter Four outlines and explains my findings. Finally, Chapter Five concludes this dissertation
with a final discussion of my study, the contributions I have made to existing research, and future recommendations.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

Felman (2018), of Medical News Today, defined anxiety as “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.” Additionally, the Mayo Clinic (2018) stated anxieties “interfere with daily activities and are difficult to control.” In this study, I focus primarily on foreign language anxiety (FLA). Foreign language anxiety, having some of the same characteristics as general anxiety, was defined by Rassaei (2015) as an “intense feeling of tension, apprehension, and even fear when learners think of a foreign language” (p. 100). Understanding and trying to solve the puzzle of student anxieties when it comes to speaking a foreign language at the college level is at the heart of this study. In this chapter, I present bodies of literature detailing possible causes of and solutions to these anxieties. First, I explore how college students’ personality traits may either help or hinder their confidence in speaking a foreign language. Then, I examine ways in which anxieties manifest themselves. Next, I outline why a positive and nurturing classroom environment helps alleviate student anxieties. I end this literature review with what I believe is the most important aspect of solving student anxiety in a world language classroom, and that is the intentional relationship and rapport that professors develop with their students to help them overcome the fear of speaking a target language.

Context

Public address, a system of communication, has long been taught and debated, dating back to Ancient Greece with the help of Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato (Hauser, 2002). The fear of oral communication (or public speaking) in college students was central to my research and has been the subject of several studies for over 78 years. As early as the 1940s, instruments to
measure cognitive aspects of communication anxiety were used. Gilkinson (1942) surveyed 420 college students with a questionnaire intended to reveal levels of anxiety or confidence of students when speaking to fellow students. After four months of speech training, Gilkinson (1942) reported student anxiety with public speaking was significantly lessened. Paul (1966) used the personal report of confidence as a speaker questionnaire, an abbreviated form of Gilkinson’s (1942) instrument. Although Paul’s (1966) instrument was smaller, findings showed satisfactory internal uniformity, or reliability. An additional study used the social interaction and self-statement test (Glass, Merluzzi, Biever, & Larsen, 1982) for specific evaluation of cognitive anxieties related to oral communication and public speaking. Another cognitive assessment of public speaking anxiety was McCroskey’s (1997) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, which was administered as a 5-point Likert scale and assessed trepidation not only with public speaking, but also with public meetings and group discussions. McCroskey became one of the foremost experts in communication anxiety. McCroskey has written and co-authored numerous articles on communication apprehension (CA; Daly & McCroskey, 1975; Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey, 1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1982, 1992, 2006, 2009) and, in a seminal and influential article, defined it as a condition associated with communication from one person to another (McCroskey, 1970).

Emerging from McCroskey’s impressive body of research, other researchers were influenced and encouraged to publish articles on CA. Anxiety scales are still being used but other studies have been done where the instruments include not just Likert-scale surveys (or similar) but also open-ended questions, face-to-face interviews, observations, and case studies. There are several causes and solutions to communication apprehension, which has led my readers and I to the literature review that follows.
Personality Traits and Anxieties in the World Language Classroom

Malleability of Personality Traits

Oz (2014) used 168 Turkish university students majoring in English and deduced personality traits had a strong influence in whether students chose to participate and, therefore, what their assessment outcome would be. Because personality traits seem to affect anxiety and student outcomes, it may be advantageous for students to explore the possibility of altering some of the traits that lead to anxiety. The argument that personality traits can be changed and are not necessarily fixed has kindled research interest.

Dweck (2008) stated individuals fit into two different categories when asked about changing their personality, the group who believe their characteristics are fixed and another group who believe their traits are malleable and can be changed. Dweck (2008) further claimed the flexible group is more open to new learning, more likely to be risk-takers, and better able to recover from a lack of success. However, Dweck (2008) and Aronson, Fried, and Good (2002) argued a malleable theory can be learned. Aronson et al.’s (2002) study showed how some minor mediations can produce significant results with perception, influences, and behavior. When Aronson et al. (2002) encouraged their participants to adopt a malleable theory, the participants (who were also students) appreciated the academic process more, showed a greater commitment to academia, and earned better grades.

A longitudinal study performed by Robins, Fraley, Roberts, and Trzesniewski (2001) was not as adamant concerning definite and deliberate change of personality traits as Dweck (2008) and Aronson et al. (2002). Despite admitting personality traits can be changed systematically, Robins et al. (2001) also acknowledged their findings indicated personality traits were consistent and continuous over a person’s life. Overall, it seems experts agree about possible means of
changing personality traits. The inference is that if students possess certain personality traits that may hinder their willingness to communicate, there is the prospect these traits can be altered.

Effects of Personality Types on Human Behavior and Willingness to Communicate

MacIntyre, Dornyei, Clément, and Noels (1998) presented a general model of factors that impact students’ willingness to communicate (see Figure 1). In this model, there are six layers. Layers I, II, and III stand for conditions that impact willingness to communicate (WTC). Layers IV, V, and VI characterize durable effects on the process (MacIntyre et al., 1998.) Starting at the top of the pyramid, Layer I is characterized as communication behavior, which includes students speaking in class, reading articles in the target language, and watching videos in the target language. Layer II, willingness to communicate, is about keenness to speak the target language with classmates or educator. Layer III is characterized as situated antecedents of communication, meaning going beyond WTC and moving to a desire to communicate as well as more self-confidence in speaking L2. Layer IV, entitled motivational propensities, relies on three important points: motivation between two or more people, motivation between two or more groups, and confidence. Layer V, the affective and cognitive context, refers to changeable elements not closely related to language learning such as attitudes within a group, the function of being social with others, and individual language skills that will affect WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998.) It is interesting to note that personality is included at Layer VI, which is the last item in “enduring influences on L2 (second language) communication situation,” and the furthest from Layer I’s “immediate, situation-based context” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p, 547). MacIntyre et al. (1998) referred to personality as inclusive of stable characteristics.
A system emerging from MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) WTC’s pyramid, and branching off the personality factor, includes five broad traits that can be remembered with “pthe acronym OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism” (Diener & Lucas, 2019, para. 1). This five-trait model, developed in the 1980s, is well-known in psychological trait theory. Diener and Lucas’ study (2019) provided additional information not found in Oz (2014) or McCroskey and Richmond (1987) as they newly noted “someone who scores high on a specific trait like extraversion is expected to be sociable in different situations and over time” (Diener & Lucas, 2019, p. 1). This seems like an obvious observation and conclusion, but extraversion is part of Diener and Lucas’s (2019) Five-Factor Model.

These five traits were suggested as five distinct groups because they described the five principal facets of human personality that helped researchers classify traits (Diener & Lucas, 2019). This system helped early researchers make sense of where to place everyone according to their personality. Descriptions of each trait, used as secondary traits (for example, public
speaking anxiety and impatience), included extraversion vs introversion, inventive vs cautious under openness, organized vs careless under conscientiousness, and compassionate vs detached under agreeableness. These descriptions contributed more depth and veracity to the idea that personality characteristics are most likely responsible for students’ behaviors (Diener & Lucas, 2019). In fact, this study concluded a key argument in the field concerns the corresponding power of people’s traits contrasted with the situations in which they find themselves as predictors of their conduct (Diener & Lucas, 2019). The syndrome proposed by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002)—communication uneasiness, angst as a result of negative assessment, and test anxiety—is somewhat connected to the OCEAN model as it tried to make sense of various behavior groups to explain where anxieties come from (Diener & Lucas, 2019). However, the 2002 group of characteristics is more suited to anxieties encountered in foreign language classrooms.

Studies have shown personality traits are linked to a willingness or unwillingness to communicate. Oz (2014) believed personality traits and willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2 WTC) were connected, whereby certain personality traits were conducive to successful oral communication while others were not. Oz (2014) stated “WTC evolved from three concepts: unwillingness to communicate, predispositions toward verbal behavior, and shyness” (p. 1475). An individual’s personality traits could influence the way in which they communicates in a foreign language.

Furthermore, the display of more than one personality trait may prove to be helpful or unhelpful with a person’s willingness to communicate in a foreign language (Oz, 2014). For example, if students describe themselves as extroverts, this personality trait could predispose them to be more comfortable with verbal behavior such as participation and gregariousness. The opposite could be said of students who are introverts and associate with shyness as an attribute.
(Oz, 2014). Oz (2014) made a strong case about the association of students’ willingness to communicate and their personality types. Outgoing individuals are less likely to have a fear of speaking in front of others than reticent and shy individuals. Zarrinabadi (2014) found “teachers' wait time, error correction, decision on the topic, and support exert influence on learners' WTC” (p. 291). The implication is that teachers’ behaviors could contribute to a classroom environment that is conducive to increased communication enthusiasm, resulting in fewer instances of student anxieties, and contributing to more oral participation. The unwillingness to participate stems from communication apprehension. This domino effect continues and there have been findings that indicate how learning is impacted by how a fear of public speaking leads to a reluctance in class contribution and results in an impact on learning.

Influences of Anxieties on Learning

Psychological issues plague young people today. Saleh, Camar, and Romo (2017) revealed “according to health surveys, young people from 12 to 25 years old suffer from an insufficient level of psychological health” (p. 19). Poor psychological health was clarified by the authors as “discomfort that is reflected in several ways including depression, anxiety, stress, and sleeping disorders” (p. 19). Tying to the idea that certain personality traits played an important hand in the presence or absence of anxiety, this study set out to determine the influence of certain factors such as self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy and anxiety and their connection to stress found in students (Saleh et al., 2017). On a negative note, most university students included in the study demonstrated high levels of stress and emotional anguish accompanied by low levels of confidence, optimism, and self-assuredness (Saleh et al., 2017). These distressing situations present in college students would seem to be exacerbated by other direct or indirect stress and anxiety in courses that require oral participation and communication.
McCroskey (1977), stated fear of speaking in the presence of others is possibly the most common form of communication apprehension. Astoundingly, McCroskey reported Americans’ number one fear was oral communication. In McCroskey’s study (1977), data from 20,000 college students at Michigan State University, Illinois State University, and West Virginia University showed “between 15 and 20 percent of American college students suffer from debilitating communication apprehension” (p. 28). By debilitating, the author meant “apprehension of sufficient magnitude to interfere seriously with the individual’s functioning in normal human encounters” (p. 25).

McCroskey (1977) further shed light on the subject by estimating communication apprehension had a negative impact on learning. In other words, the student’s anxiety interfered with his or her completion of assignments. This study found there was a significant relationship between a teacher’s expectations for his students and students’ actual accomplishments. The teacher is now implicated in the student’s poor achievement results, and I later explain how teachers’ attitudes, lessons and expectations can help alleviate student anxiety. McCroskey (1977) helped to elucidate this problem by arguing just as the level of communication anxiety escalated, opinion toward school became more negative. However, no solution was given for either the learner or the educator.

Not all impact is negative. Methods are frequently employed in an attempt to overcome shortcomings. If personality types are responsible for individuals’ anxieties, it is crucial to assess whether students are able to use their personality traits to language-learning strategies positively. Whether introvert or extrovert, individuals express dissimilar ways of coping with anxiety. It is evident there is a need to explore students’ emotional and physical health as it is impacted by the apprehension of interpersonal tasks.
Results of Anxiety

College students experience anxieties inside and outside of the classroom and the consequences of anxiety can be devastating. As we have seen, personality traits may be at play. Cheng et al. (1999), in a research performed with students from Taiwan, added the lack of self-certainty seems to be a vital part of anxiety. However, Toth (2011) showed anxiety was related to language learning and there were certain characteristics that may cause anxieties. Some of the causes were feelings of pessimism, tendency to display negative emotions in class, and a heightened sense of awareness about making mistakes when speaking the target language in front of teachers and classmates. Some of the negative emotions and actions students shared with Toth (2011) were tenseness, discomfort, fear of lessons, and not attending class. Other students pointed out they were uneasy when asked to participate and feared what may happen if the teacher called on them. In extreme cases, students said they experienced trembling, numbing, and sweating when called to participate as well as their hands turning red as a result of wringing them. Some students even divulged, by the end of the term, they were losing their hair, had stomach issues, and experienced high blood pressure (Toth, 2011). That seems drastic, but it does show that anxiety can be the cause of serious problems in a minority of students.

Another concern shared by these English majors was the fear of making mistakes (Toth, 2011). Students were afraid of their inaccuracies and errors while speaking the target language and were nervous about their inability to express themselves effectively (Toth, 2011). As disturbing as it sounds, the same students listed the teacher as a cause of anxiety. Students revealed their belief that if they made too many mistakes, their grades would suffer. Different students emphasized the humiliation that may occur if the professor corrected them in front of others, especially if the corrections were accompanied by belittling comments. Finally,
classmates were listed as a cause of anxiety. One student explained they were more afraid of classmates than the teacher and tended to measure themselves against their classmates (Toth, 2011). Added to personality traits which may cause anxiety, these are just some of the anxieties students experience that may hinder learning.

Aida’s (1994) study assessed the correlation of language anxiety and Japanese language learning in the United States. Aida made a general and important statement citing several language teachers and researchers showed concern about anxiety preventing world language learners from attaining a better level of proficiency. The concerns about student anxiety are valid. To surmount this obstacle, and thus open the door to another environment for students where they can find peace and relief from aspects of oral communication rendering them nervous, schemes must be developed to alleviate anxieties.

Alleviating Anxieties

Research has shown it is possible to alleviate anxieties and there are steps students can take to deal with their anxieties. Hjeltnes et al. (2015) suggested a “mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program for academic evaluation anxiety” (p. 1). They found there were five salient patterns of meaning (themes): (1) finding an inner source of calm, (2) sharing a human struggle, (3) staying focused in learning situations, (4) moving from fear to curiosity in academic learning, and (5) feeling more self-acceptance when facing difficult situations. (p. 1)

Nash et al. (2016) augmented the discussion by including “public speaking desensitization exercises and assessment” (p. 586) for the participants, and noted, as a result of the desensitization, participants were more gratified, less fearful, displayed less indecision, and manifested less confusion pertinent to public speaking and public speaking assessment. Despite
the positive outcome resulting from the desensitization exercises, the authors admitted their research did not examine factors such as students’ diminished self-assurance while using and maintaining eye contact, and gestures while speaking in public (Nash et al., 2016). Nash et al. (2016) conceded there was a need to “explore students’ emotional experience of engaging in public speaking learning activities and assessments, and to capture what factors the students themselves consider as impacting upon their emotional and motivational perception and behavior” (p. 597).

Regarding public speaking anxiety (PSA), Bodie (2010) listed a number of treatment possibilities that exist for PSA, and many of these options can be transferred to and completed in the classroom. The role of instructors in helping students lessen or eliminate anxiety in the classroom is important. Bodie (2010) offered the suggestion that educators need be mindful of how students react to feedback, how negative the feedback is, and when the feedback is given. Bodie (2010) admitted there were gaps in his research by stating, “additional research needs to be conducted on PSA remediation with particular focus on the mechanisms underlying treatment effects” (pp. 91–92). Educators must help students with the fear of public speaking and Bodie (2010) added researchers have a duty to make the most appropriate information available to assist with communication anxiety.

I applaud the fact Bodie (2010) suggested tactics teachers can use to alleviate student anxiety with oral performance, but it is clear there is a gap, as Bodie (2010) stated, in rectifying and correcting anxiety. Part of this research was to understand and assess anxieties in the foreign language classroom. It goes without saying that if students demonstrate a fear of communicating orally in the presence of a group and in their native language, the same will have to be said about communication in a foreign language.
Oral Communication Anxiety in a Foreign Language

Many foreign language college courses require students to do presentations and interpersonal tasks in front of the class. Oral participation is a requirement for a grade and is the same as public speaking. Anxieties associated with speaking a foreign language in public manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) stated teachers have long been aware learning a foreign language is been a stressful experience for students. Rassaei (2015) boosted Bodie’s (2010) ideas and observed anxiety is most unambiguously present in the speaking characteristics of language use. Rassaei (2015) strengthened the argument that oral communication in language classes engendered dread in students by writing that interpersonal tasks cause feelings of anguish in FL students much more than in other students. It is clear that the response to speaking a foreign language in public is significant. Although it may not be possible to completely eliminate anxiety, it is often possible to alleviate it.

Certain personality traits may play a hand in second language learning. Diener and Lucas (2019) defined personality traits as “enduring dispositions in behavior that show differences across individuals, and which tend to characterize the person across varying types of situations.” Diener and Lucas (2019) and McCroskey and Richmond (1987) came to the conclusion that there are five main traits, “or antecedents of Willingness to Communicate in a Second language (L2 WTC),” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, p. 138) which play a significant role in successful language learning and L2 communication: introversion, self-esteem, communication competence, communication apprehension, and cultural diversity. The definition of willingness to communicate in a second language is “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (Oz, 2014, p. 1475). Oz (2014) listed traits similar to Diener and Lucas (2019) and McCroskey and Richmond (1987) such as “extraversion,
agreeableness, and openness to experience” as noteworthy in predicting and setting the psychological context for WTC (p. 1473). These studies position personality traits as following individuals through life, being different for everyone and distinguishing one person from another in various situations. Diener and Lucas (2019) and McCroskey and Richmond (1987) staked their claims by researching and reporting on what previous studies had found but did not add any original research. They concluded, from the research and theories they compiled, personality traits have a major impact on interpersonal communication (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Diener and Lucas (2019) explained, with the knowledge a child exhibited certain personality traits, it is possible to explain the effect on their willingness to communicate in a foreign language.

An additional personality trait that may affect anxiety is perfectionism. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) decided to include this trait in their study to shed light on the association between foreign language anxiety and perfectionism. The results of this study revealed a link between language anxiety and perfectionism. Other symptoms commonly observed in perfectionist students included a reluctance to respond to questions unless they were certain of the exact response, excessively emotional and disastrous reactions to minor letdowns, and low productivity due to procrastination or excessive start overs (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). This is significant because perfectionism is sometimes viewed as a desirable trait by students but can act as a stumbling block. If a perfectionist is not certain the answer is absolutely correct, they may create unnecessary stress and anxiety for themselves by not participating at the cost of learning outcomes. This inability to participate may lead to a decrease in self-confidence and escalate a situation that should not have been present.
It is noteworthy to see the word “anxiety” is included as a result of a personality trait. Could there be other traits that induce anxiety in language learners? As discussed earlier, Rassaei (2015) defined FLA as a strong emotion infused with stress, angst, tension, and panic when students contemplate the learning of a foreign language. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), although predating Rassaei’s (2015) research by 13 years while stating similar findings, explained FLA is a particular syndrome that may be related to three established anxieties associated with language use: communication uneasiness, angst as a result of negative assessment, and test anxiety. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) previously defined communication apprehension as “an individual's discomfort in talking in front of others” (p. 562). That does not seem like a large revelation, but MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) listed another cause of anxiety as a student's worry with the assessment of teachers and peers regarding their performance and competence in the target language. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) emphasized language learning is accompanied by frequent occurrences of errors and mistakes can be the source of anxiety in some students as one of their concerns is to make positive socially acceptable impressions on their peers while speaking the target language. In another study, MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) explained individuals who are deeply distressed about what others think of them tend to behave differently in ways that downplay the possibility of adverse evaluations. As with individuals who experience communication anxiety, people who are afraid of negative evaluation infrequently begin conversations and their interactions are minimal. Language students who face this apprehension tend to sit in the classroom inactively, and retreat from participating in activities that could increase their language skills (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Another study connecting personality traits, anxiety, and classroom performance would complement the existing research of causes and effects of anxiety.
Thus, it seems more than plausible that traits, either inherited or acquired through experience, have an impact on learning a foreign language and, more specifically, producing oral communication with fear and anxiety. I next explain how certain personality traits and types could affect human behavior and, therefore, result in a willingness or unwillingness to communicate, especially in the foreign language classroom. It is clear the correlation between anxiety and academic achievement is a problem that can be overcome. Grades should not suffer at the hands of anxiety.

**Understanding Impact on Anxiety Through Assessment Tools**

Achieving high levels of proficiency in a foreign language seems important but the quest to achieve high proficiency may cause anxieties. Several scales have been designed to measure student anxiety in relation to academic performance. In their study, Alpert and Haber (1960) included an “achievement-anxiety scale which has been devised to indicate not only the presence or absence of anxiety, but also whether the anxiety facilitates or debilitates test performance” (p. 207). The research concluded that anxiety influenced the way in which students perform academically. If performance is hindered, higher levels of proficiency may be difficult to achieve. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) devised the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) that explored the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety. In short, this scale showed it is easy to identify foreign language students with incapacitating anxiety because they possessed similar characteristics such as being unsure of themselves, agonizing about making mistakes, thinking other students are better, having feelings of trepidation when having to speak, and being embarrassed. The findings indicated a large number of students felt strong anxiety with one or more parts of foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). Seeming unimpressed by the FLACS, Sparks, Ganschow, and Javorsky (2000), indicated there was the
possibility of confounding association between language skills and anxiety. In other words, Sparks, Ganschow & Javorsky (2000) suggested that, for example, the anxiety factor and the student’s language skills did not correlate properly and left the reader with a sense of confusion and misunderstanding.

Claiming to improve on the FLCAS, Walker and Panayides (2014) created the foreign language classroom anxiety inventory (FLCAI), which was administered to Cypriot high-school students, and stated this new scale “demonstrated more convincing evidence of unidimensionality and the optimal 5-point Likert scale functioned better” (Walker & Panayides, 2014, p. 613). One of the differences in the scales was the FLCAS included 33 items while the FLCAI only included 18. Walker and Panayides (2014) asserted this difference resulted in higher levels of validity and reliability. The authors explained the FLCAI was analytically superior to the FLCAS because the degree of reliability was not lessened by the scale reduction, the categories function much better, and the “unidimensional structure of the scale is more convincing with a much higher strength in the main dimension measured by it” (Walker & Panayides, 2014, p. 630). In addition to these scales, other research studied the effect of anxiety on academic performance.

Cheng et al. (1999) investigated the connection between second language writing and speaking anxiety and achievement (p. 417). The study concluded despite the minute correlations, all of the anxiety variables in the second language classroom were considerably and negatively associated with the performance of speaking and writing tasks (Cheng et al., 1999). Horwitz (2001), in her own study, offered useful insight into second language anxiety and concluded anxiety is a trigger of inadequate language learning in some students and offered possible sources to this anxiety. The mention of possible sources was relevant because part of my
research focused on students’ personality traits as possible helpful attributes or stumbling blocks for second language oral communication ease or discomfort. One of the aspects I wish Horwitz (2001) would have explored is oral communication as a cause of anxiety, and not only reading and writing.

In discussing oral performance, Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) published a replication study. The research focused on an original study by Phillips (1992) who reported on the consequences of language anxiety in students’ oral test performances. However, Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) added the element of assessing how anxiety affects oral assessment in university foreign language students. Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) included several educators felt students were frequently anxious about learning a new language, especially in a classroom setting, and this discerned anxiety appeared to be related to substandard student performance. To make the study more credible, the researchers presented an internationally endorsed “English language proficiency test (quick placement test or QPT)” (p. 172). Like Cheng et al. (1999), Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) found considerable correlation between language anxiety and performance particularly orally. Still, there is an important gap that begs to be filled. Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) urged a search into how oral communication anxiety could be harnessed to ease oral performance as well as the continuation to alleviate enfeebling anxiety effects that seem to impede success in foreign language oral communication. Learning how to overcome an anxiety may be used to an individual’s advantage particularly with foreign languages. Speaking a foreign language can be debilitating for some students but students may exhibit the same anxiety with other means of assessment.

Anxiety is not merely demonstrated in oral skills. Salehi and Marefat (2014) “investigated the effects of foreign language anxiety and test anxiety on foreign language written
test performance” and discovered that there was a powerful correlation between foreign language anxiety and written test anxiety (p. 931). Salehi and Marefat (2014) declared test anxiety is real and includes anxiety around writing, listening, and reading tasks. This is important because if students show unease while speaking a foreign language, they may also demonstrate the same stress while performing a written, listening, or reading test. If an educator can find methods that lessen student anxiety while speaking a foreign language, it is possible to do the same with other foreign language tasks. Relieving test anxiety should be at the top of a professor’s list. Can a classroom environment provide the impetus for students to willingly engage?

**Positive and Nurturing Classroom Environments**

**Academic Climate**

Professors should promote student-to-student interactions. A positive emotional climate can increase the possibility of class participation (Fassinger, 1995). Fassinger (1995) homed in on how educators affect student interaction while, generally, other students’ roles tend to be overlooked. However, Fassinger (1995) added it does not appear unreasonable to presume that classroom climate is created by students as well as professors and it is not unusual for faculty to hear frequent student objections about classmates who dominate class interaction. Fassinger (1995) made several assumptions concerning professors, students, and their peers:

- First, we thought of classrooms as groups with norms created by faculty and fellow students; second, we assume that students possess characteristics that may shape interaction such as interest comprehension and confidence; third, we moved beyond tallies of student-professor interactions and assessed students perceptions of themselves and their peers and their professors. (p. 85)
Interestingly, Fassinger (1995) advanced the topic of traits by concluding professor traits had no bearing on student interaction and asked if professors had any influence on class participation. Furthermore, Fassinger’s (1995) analysis boldly suggested students’ willingness to participate was not influenced by professors’ interactive methods, their personal touches, and whether they appeared to be supportive, and also elaborated that faculty's most important impression on class participation came from course designs including class activities conducive to positive and nurturing climates, which were more likely to help elicit and nurture interaction. This research suggested advancing and improving student confidence could be the beginning of class participation sought by instructors. However, Sparks (2019), Frymier and Houser (2000), De Vito (1986), and Anderman et al. (2011) would likely have agreed with each other about the assessment of professors’ behaviors in relation to student performance and were convincing concerning the fact that a positive and nurturing relationship between student and teacher was a behavior that can lead to better academic outcome.

Aida (1994) likewise identified the role of the teacher as one of the keys to lessen student anxiety. The findings of Aida’s (1994) study pointed out the role of teachers as powerful to abate tension in the classroom by creating friendly and supportive surroundings that can help lower the disconcerting feelings students experience when facing the fear of making mistakes in the presence of their classmates. In other words, the learning environment is important in order to provide students with a comfortable and safe place in which to learn. Aida (1994) added when educators can sense the anxiety in foreign language learners, and when actions are taken to reduce anxiety, learners are bound to learn more. Moreover, Aida (1994) indicated students are exasperated by teachers who do not show empathy toward their needs and who do not communicate well. By being responsive to students’ needs and maintaining an encouraging
atmosphere, foreign language teachers are able to bolster anxious students’ learning by building an environment free of threats and where positive learning takes place, in addition to helping them (students) gain effective study and learning methods (Aida, 1994).

The research seems to indicate that students respond positively to a more relaxed classroom mood and this relaxed mood helps relieve or eliminate nervousness and unease when communicating in a foreign language. The learning environment and the classroom climate provided by the educator appear to have considerable influence on students. Yet, students have motivations driving their actions. Some motivations could be a better grade, self-improvement, and pleasing the teacher.

Motivational Climate

As previously stated, anxiety can manifest itself in different ways and can have distinct causes. Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016) expressed college professors often decry the absence of student motivation with and participation in classroom activities, while asking for solutions to the situation. This lack of motivation may be engendered by the existing student anxiety. Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016) confirmed there is evidence that motivation drives some student behavior. What motivation could students have to either participate or stay silent? Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016), like Aida (1994), put the responsibility to lessen anxiety on the educator. Some of the suggestions made by the authors include an improved rapport between professor and student resulting from overcoming issues with communication, which can be achieved by the educator showing respect and confidence in students, manifesting passion for the subject, featuring humor in the classroom, exemplifying an optimistic attitude, and providing advice and encouragement (Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016, p. 62). Fassinger’s (1995) view corresponded with statements made by Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016) about the students who
lacked motivation to participate because of feelings of inadequacy. In this study, Fassinger (1995) measured poise and included worry of appearing less than astute to classmates and instructors (p. 93). Although professors can try to lessen anxiety by welcoming all student questions and by reiterating to students the learning process intrinsically involves making mistakes, it seems as though professors’ pleas will not be enough (Fassinger, 1995, p. 93). Instead, teachers could ask classes to create their own rules for classroom interaction. Professors might ask students to produce lists of actions (non-verbal cues such as eye contact, and nods of approval) that have the potential to build their confidence as well as a list that diminishes it.

Fassinger (1995) further asserted when students are conscious that class involvement affects their grades, they will take the appropriate actions by participating. So, professors should consider offering extra credit for participation, which can supplement the students’ grades. However, this does not help with classroom climate, which, if used to create a relaxing and nurturing atmosphere, may have an influence on how students feel and perform.

Moskovsky et al. (2013) are of the same mind as Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016) and Fassinger (1995) but elaborated by adding the element of second language learners, declaring that “teachers’ motivational behaviors correlate to enhanced motivation in second language learners” (Moskovsky et al., 2013, p. 34). The purpose of Moskovsky et al.’s (2013) research was to address motivational strategies in the language classroom and their effect, which was missing in previous studies. Thus, this article reported on the principal findings of a project that involved over 300 Saudi-Arabian EFL learners and 14 teachers. An experimental and control group were formed. The experimental group was taught using motivational strategies while the other group was taught without motivational strategies (Moskovsky et al., 2013). Questionnaires were given before and after the study to assess motivational levels. The findings indicated and
reinforced the ways in which teachers behaved were powerful and influential tools to inspire and stimulate students (Moskovsky et al., 2013).

Gkonou, (2013), corroborated Moskovsky et al.’s (2013) study by suggesting “to improve teacher education and training and to slightly deviate from the exam-oriented nature that the Greek educational system imposes on EFL learning” (Gkonou, 2013, p. 51). The study revealed students were intimidated by and disappointed at the errors they made in class because they knew in advance they might utter an incorrect answer, which would increase their level of anxiety, and create a feeling of low achievement. The result was an expected fear of failure (Gkonou, 2013). Despite the concern for student well-being shown in Gkonou’s (2013) study, and although suggestions were given for further research, there was no advice on how educators could lessen student anxiety and fear of failure. Motivations pushing the student are a large factor on their willingness to partake in class activities, but the student cannot be held wholly responsible if participation is lacking. A large amount of empirical research has been conducted in the area of educators’ pedagogical approaches related to student involvement in the classroom.

**Pedagogical Approaches and Teacher-Student Collaboration**

Frymer and Houser (2000) believed there are skills professors should possess and be able to impart to students. They referred to those skills as referential skills, which means professors should explain content efficiently. There probably are very few things less frustrating to students than leaving class in a confused state. Furthermore, and related to students’ emotional needs, Frymer and Houser (2000) emphasized if teachers can explain concepts clearly, it may contribute to reducing students’ feelings of uncertainty. Uncertainty may lead to anxiety and when students have a difficult time understanding what the teacher wants, they are discouraged and experience feelings of failure because of unclear expectations (Frymer & Houser, 2000). Additionally,
Frymer and Houser (2000) wrote about ego support meaning educators’ actions should encourage learners’ behaviors to validate their (the students) efforts. Frymer and Houser (2000) continued by explaining ego support exemplifies the relational side of teaching that meets students’ emotional needs and motivates them to succeed.

Other teacher strategies may help students become more comfortable in a classroom setting. Young (1991) revealed a learner-centered classroom, where anxiety has been greatly reduced or eliminated, is a challenge for second language teachers. In order to meet this challenge and understand the root of the problem, Young’s (1991) article listed six potential sources of anxiety in the classroom, ways in which anxiety was manifested in learners, and a list of suggestions for reducing anxiety: language anxiety comes from agitation about personal and interpersonal events; how students view language learning; what instructors believe about language teaching; the ways in which instructors and learners interact; classroom procedures; and language testing. Personal and interpersonal issues included decreased self-confidence and vying to be like or supplant others. Competitiveness may increase anxiety when language learners compare themselves to others (Young, 1991). Students can be anxious, stressed, and frustrated when speaking the target language if they feel certain perfect pronunciation is the most important aspect of a language (Young, 1991). However useful, Young’s (1991) list of suggestions seems disconnected and does not bring teachers and students together as collaborators and as agents of change. A student-centered classroom would certainly involve student suggestions and opinions.

Foss and Reitzel (1988), whose participants were English as a second language (ESL) students, made several pedagogical suggestions for teachers’ consideration. According to Foss and Reitzel (1988), the most important element to combat learning and communication anxiety is
self-perception. The authors claimed students experiencing communication apprehensiveness, not only language learners, suffer from low self-esteem, have feelings of low self-worth in comparison to other students, and perceive themselves as inferior communicators. Foss and Reitzel (1988) added language learners have extra fears such as sentiments of ineptitude when trying to understand a new language and the helplessness felt when presenting themselves in a way that is inconsistent with the way they see themselves. Recommendations offered by Foss and Reitzel (1988) included asking students to determine which part of communicating in the target language stresses them the most. The educator may start the conversation by explaining everyone uses a set of beliefs that come from families, cultures, and life experiences. The discussion is followed by asking students to make a list of the fears they have about speaking the new language. When seeing the combined student list, say, projected on a screen, Foss and Reitzel (1988) found students realize they are not alone with their anxieties especially if several students list the same fears. Another advice given to teachers by Foss and Reitzel (1988) is students use journaling to express their feelings. Journaling may then turn into an activity where students choose to share their feelings on anonymous surveys, in class, or in private meetings with the teacher. Students’ voices are critical and need to be heard by teachers who seek to help their students.

von Worde (2003) interviewed 15 foreign language students (French, German and Spanish) about the pedagogical elements that cause them to be anxious. Using the participants’ voices, von Worde (2003) transcribed student comments that offered suggestions to educators on instructional practices to reduce anxiety. Some of the student comments were for teachers to use a slower pace so learners could process grammar and vocabulary and to lessen the amount of material taught in one semester. von Worde (2003) reported students suggested placing student
desks in a semi-circle, which would contribute to the wholeness of the class. The participants also mentioned a relaxed atmosphere in an effort to reduce anxiety and added the classroom environment is connected to the way in which the teacher conducted the class. Moreover, one of von Worde’s (2003) participants echoed Foss and Reitzel (1988) and recommended the teacher explain to the class that anxiety is not an uncommon problem. Likewise, Salehi and Marefat (2014) recommended teachers endeavor to lower language and test anxiety by establishing a welcoming and sympathetic atmosphere in class, thus encouraging students to become more involved in class activities, and by teaching some anxiety-reducing tactics to the students. Salehi and Marefat (2014) contemplated the teachers’ need to lower consternation and increase self-confidence by encouraging students’ involvement in classroom activities and creating a comfortable atmosphere. Activities need not be stressful and can include entertaining and enjoyable components. Fun and games promote an anxiety-reducing classroom. Ideas advanced by von Worde’s (2003) participants were to include skits, plays, and games.

Teachers have a strong influence on how comfortable students feel and are advised to construct a classroom environment in which learning not only takes place but also exceeds student and teacher expectations. Yet, a teacher cannot do it alone. It takes an educator and their students to collaborate on ways to decrease anxiety by heeding all students’ opinions and recommendations equally. This exemplifies teacher empathy and concern. However, the role of the teacher has not always been that of a compassionate and supportive individual, but it has evolved. Teachers used to see themselves as experts spewing out information for students to absorb.
Views on Educator Roles

Freire (1972) explained teachers demonstrated antiquated pedagogy by seeing the student as a vessel who needed to be filled with information much like a customer (educator) depositing money into their bank account (learner). Freire (1972) also lamented the lack of communication between teacher and student and the fact the teacher presented the material and expected the students to repeat and memorize it. With reference to Freire (1972), Jacobs and Alcock (2017) described the banking idea is like checking off items on a lesson plan list and teaching with no intent for student engagement.

Jacobs and Alcock (2017) added to Freire’s (1972) antiquated pedagogy explanation with a list of their own: students seen as robots, obedient receivers, and followers. Jackson (2011) affirmed in order to reach adolescents, teachers must make use of networking platforms and create sets of collaborative activities connected to these platforms, something that is relatable to modern-day students and makes instant connectivity to education. Jacobs and Alcock (2017), supporting Jackson (2011), further believed educators should focus on students’ interests and strengths rather than their weaknesses, this being accomplished partly by collaborative work. Thus, if students can see teachers are striving to help them learn with means connected to their (the students) daily lives, learning becomes relatable and fun without losing its educational purpose. The student becomes engaged, not merely compliant, and the teacher’s role is perceived as an ally and not a foe. Rote learning will then be replaced by critical thinking, collaborative learning, project-based assignments, and creativity (Jacobs & Alcock, 2017). von Worde’s (2003) student participants echoed the sentiment of teachers providing an atmosphere where there was support and empathy, where the teaching methods did not threaten students and where
thematic units covered relevant and relatable topics to students. But educators have not always been on board with a too friendly and relaxed environment.

In the past, most instructors considered their role in the language class to be “less a counselor and friend and objected to a too friendly and unauthoritative student-teacher relationship” (Young, 1991, p. 428). Some educators were reluctant to change and to give up some power in the classroom because that is the way it had always been done and there was no reason to change it. Young (1991) added:

Instructors who believe their role is to correct students constantly when they make any error, who feel that they cannot have students working in pairs because the class may get out of control, who believe that the teacher should be doing most of the talking and teaching, and who think their role is more like a drill sergeant’s than a facilitator’s may be contributing to learner language anxiety. (p. 428).

Although these statements seem generational, and the actions listed by Young (1991) may not exist in every language classroom today, the issue still persists that language educators have the responsibility to diminish or eliminate the concerns and apprehensions students experience when speaking a new language. It seems incumbent on the professors to evaluate their teaching styles, so students experience less anxiety. There is a very important reason to change teaching techniques: to help and empower students. Young (1991) also wrote the social milieu or setting the instructor creates in the classroom can have tremendous results for the learners.

Consequently, it appears teachers can help students overcome parts or all of their anxieties. Young (1991) added it becomes critical for teachers to perceive the signs of anxiety in foreign language students as paramount in addressing anxiety in the classroom. It is clear
students sometimes do not respond well to in-class teacher correction especially in front of peers and this can cause anxiety. Corrective feedback is such an example.

**Corrective Feedback**

What does not seem to work is the harsh correcting some professors practice openly rendering some students unresponsive. Rassaei (2015) conducted research in which 101 English as a foreign language (EFL) students with high and low foreign language anxiety benefited or experienced disservice when the teacher properly paraphrased an incorrect answer given by a student or gave corrective feedback. Each student was given a questionnaire. As expected, the low-anxiety students responded well to either feedback. However, the high-anxiety students responded better to the paraphrasing method rather than corrective feedback. Rassaei’s (2015) study explained, in the last 20 years, the effects of corrective feedback have been the subject of growing research in the realm of second language (L2) acquisition. Corrective feedback does not need to be negative and the way in which teachers approach it is key. Rassaei (2015) cleared up the definition of corrective feedback by explaining “as an implicit corrective feedback, a recast is defined as a teacher's reformulation of a learner's erroneous utterance in a correct form” (p. 99). Recasting, or modifying the way an educator phrases the correction, has potential. Furthermore, Rassaei (2015) justified the use of recasting in saying recasts present an important benefit in comparison to other types of corrective feedback because recasts afford teachers the ability to correct and model while giving students the chance to focus their attention on message and improving their communicative objectives. Rephrasing a student’s error a short while after the error occurred without pointing out a particular student can help reduce oral communication fear and can even lead to more participation. There are different types of corrective feedback. Lyster and Ranta (1997) stated metalinguistic feedback (teacher’s way of providing constructive
feedback without uttering the correct form) was an explicit type of corrective feedback and defined it as statements, details, or questions related to the way in which a student uttered a sentence. Accordingly, metalinguistic feedback unambiguously warned students against their errors and encouraged them to take notice of proper target forms and at the same time increased their understanding of those forms by providing metalinguistic information (Rassaei, 2015). Adding the element of guilt or incorrectness to a student’s learning process even in an unbeknown and unintended way, contributes to anxiety. This could lead the student’s brain to shut down. Teachers need to be aware of students’ fears and anxieties in order to alter their teaching style.

Dewaele et al. (2018) saw eye-to-eye with Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Rassaei (2015) in this body of literature by stating teachers play a role in reducing student anxiety and by “examining whether—and to what extent—foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and foreign language (FL) classroom anxiety (FLCA) are linked to a range of learner internal variables and teacher/classroom-specific variables within one specific educational context” (p. 676). If professors can devine students’ signs of anxiety, they may be able to alter the way in which class interactions are undertaken to not aggravate or worsen the anxiety. In this study, Dewaele et al. (2018) explored the role of foreign language teachers in managing students’ emotions. The participants in Dewaele et al.’s (2018) research were 189 Greater London high school students (49 girls and 140 boys). The students were given a questionnaire comprised of several questions including demographics, attitudes toward foreign languages, how many teachers students took courses from, their attitudes toward the educators, the frequency of classes, the proportion of time spent on writing, reading, speaking, and listening, and how predictable the teacher was (Dewaele et al., 2018). They concluded successful teachers encourage enthusiasm and enjoyment
in their students and spend very little time worrying about their FLCA. This included generating a cordial and disquietude-free environment without focusing on single negative emotions (Dewaele et al., 2018). These mood detectors may very well bring students around from a state of almost being catatonic to willing participation, thus reducing apprehensions and anxiety in the world language classroom.

Language Learning Strategies

Mohammadi et al. (2013) would likely agree with Salehi and Marefat’s (2014) notion as their study investigated the correlation between language learning strategies (LLS) and foreign language anxiety (FLA) with university students from Iran (Mohammadi et al., 2013). Their results showed, generally, language learning strategies correlate relevantly and importantly with language anxiety (Mohammadi et al., 2013). One of the solutions offered was teachers may be able to play a role in helping students by utilizing certain language learning strategies. Mohammadi et al. (2013) argued if teachers can customize LLS to the needs of students, learning may be improved as well as their degree of language anxiety. They added there is a need to shift the teacher’s role from someone who shares their knowledge to a facilitator in the process of language learning which demands a mutual respect between the teacher and the students (Mohammadi et al., 2013).

Adding to LLS, and reinforcing von Worde’s (2003) claims, Matsuda and Gobel (2004) assessed planning diverse activities such as partner and small group work, games, and authentic skits may improve class atmosphere and reduce anxiety because students feel more comfortable and prefer speaking as part of a small group than being on display before the entire class. Matsuda and Gobel (2004) suggested strategies including deliberately encouraging students to take risks while learning a language such as guessing the meanings of words and phrases in
context or speaking, even though mistakes may be made. It is important for teachers to play the role of reassurer and Matsuda and Gobel (2004), whose ideas are parallel to those of Foss and Reitzel’s (1988) and von Worde’s (2003), offered the suggestion that teachers should discuss the issue of language anxiety with students because it reinforces the assurance that these feelings are normal, and the teacher expects them. By realizing this, the teacher shows they understand the students’ sentiments and brings on the possibility of decreasing a part of the stress associated with assessment (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004).

Kayaoglu (2013) had similar findings as Zarrinabadi (2014), Oz (2014), Diener and Lucas (2019), and McCroskey and Richmond (1987) regarding the relationship between personality traits and learning a foreign language. Kayaoglu’s (2013) research used equal amounts of participants who were extroverted and introverted students and used the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and strategy inventory for second language learning (SILL). The findings indicated, with the exception of communicative strategies, introverts used a larger variety of critical self-perceptions about how they think and conscious mental activity strategies than did extroverted students. The important phrase segment was with the exception of communicative strategies. Communication strategies while learning a foreign language usually mean employing speaking skills to negotiate or communicate in the target language. This study implied introverted learners did not use a greater range of strategies to help them overcome their fear of speaking a foreign language. Findings associated introverted learners (shy, reserved, withdrawn, reticent) positively with language learning strategies in every aspect except oral communication (Kayaoglyu, 2013).

The proof teachers’ attitudes and behaviors in the classroom help students become more comfortable and lead to more participation and less fear when speaking the target language is
inescapable. Are there additional steps teachers can take to propagate the idea that oral communication in a foreign language does not give birth to fear? It is up to the professor to break (so to speak) the wall that impedes better communication between educators and students. Teachers can be seen as approachable and helpful by students instead of projecting an unfriendly and unwelcoming aura. If professors are serious about helping their students be successful in the domain of anxiety, a better rapport must be constructed in and out of the classroom. Moreover, if anxiety acts as a learning deterrent, it makes sense for educators to reflect on their approach to pedagogy and how educator-student rapport is perceived and can be achieved to combat cases of nervousness.

**Social Climate: Relationships, Rapport and Connections with Educators**

It is well-known in the education world that the relationship between student and teacher can be critically important to how well students learn (Sparks, 2019). Frymier and Houser (2000) saw the teacher-student relationship as an interpersonal relationship. Indeed, there must be two-way communication and negotiation between educator and student. It is not enough for professors to walk into a classroom, deliver educational concepts, leave the classroom, and lock themselves in their offices except for the few weekly office hours. De Vito (1986) described teaching as a “relational process that follows the development stages from initial contact, through intimacy, to dissolution” (p. 53). The friendly contact between professor and student should not limit itself to the classroom or office walls. It may be present through emails, phone calls, and meetings outside of office and classroom hours. It has the potential to continue until the student is no longer enrolled in the course and could even remain until the student graduates and after. Taking De Vito’s (1986) ideas a step further, Graham et al. (1992) based their “Relational Teaching Approach (RTA) on the belief that teaching involves a process of relational
development and requires effective interpersonal communication skills to achieve satisfying outcomes” (p. 208). Additionally, Graham et al. (1992) argued convincingly teachers and students are faced with goals they hope to fulfill. The attainment of these goals is dependent upon the teacher and student's capacity to cooperate with each other with the aim to resolve conflict. One of the conflicts may be the student’s issues about communicating in the target language. How can the professor help the student navigate and conquer this obstacle? Graham et al. (1992) proposed the means used to cultivate and sustain friendships, such as communication skills, is an example of a style aimed at understanding the advancement of relationships. However, the professors cannot simply become the student’s friend. As Graham et al. (1992) explained, there are differences in learner-educator connections that do not possess the equivalence normally correlated with friendship. The relationship must be based on improving learning. Graham et al. (1992) concurred and maintained that the rapport that is created between teachers and students impacts learning in a direct and indirect manner. von Worde (2003) found students referred to the helpfulness of a personal relationship with the teacher and one student even reported when students and teachers allow their personalities to permeate the confines of the classroom walls, the class becomes more interesting. Nevertheless, the teacher-student relationship must remain professional.

Professor-student relationships, in comparison with adolescent friendships, were examined in a questionnaire created by Burleson and Samter (1990). They developed the “Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ) as an instrument to measure the value of specific communication skills for young adults” (p. 169). Part of the questionnaire evaluated what was important about friendship to young adults. It may be possible to transfer those skills to a teacher-student relationship, but there must be boundaries. The “CFQ was designed to evaluate
8 communication skills: conversational, referential, ego supportive, comforting, conflict management, narrative, and regulation skills” (Burleson & Samter, 1990, p. 169). Cognitive complexity was the key factor in this part of the research and, as Burleson and Samter (1990) indicated,

ego support, comforting, regulative behavior, and conflict management were considered more important by persons who were cognitively complex. The skills of persuasion, narrative, referential, and conversational ability were found to be more important to friendship among persons low in cognitive complexity. (p. 173)

The majority of young adults may associate feelings of friendships with their heart instead of their head, so the intellectual complexity associated with an individual may not be an important variable. In other words, low cognitive complexity does not necessarily mean that emotions are approached and processed in a less or more efficient manner than high cognitive complexity. It may not be a good idea for students to imitate the friendship behaviors they experience with their peers to the rapport they encounter with professors. If the friendship line must not be crossed between an educator and a student, how can teachers demonstrate care for their students?

Frymier and Houser (2000) used the term “immediacy behaviors” to describe and understand the teacher-student relationship. Immediacy behaviors can be exemplified by acts that communicate kindness, friendliness, engagement, psychological attachment, communication readiness, and positive influence at the same time. They clarified teachers’ use of verbal and nonverbal communication enables student learning. In addition, they observed behaviors that characterize verbal immediacy are comprised of smiling, making eye contact, navigating around the classroom, and using their voice with a variety of pitches (Frymier & Houser, 2000). They concluded friendship is not the only kind of rapport where communication skills are essential
adding that the communication that occurs between teachers and students is interpersonal as well as content driven. However, Frymier and Houser (2000) did not differentiate between the two levels of rapport. The evidence is growing that successful teaching means personal communication between educators and learners as well as knowledgeable and effective delivery of the content as is explained by Frymer and Houser (2000). Frymer and Houser (2000) perfectly declared when teachers and students transcend the official roles teachers and students hold and start seeing one another as individuals, interpersonal relationships are established. When communication becomes relational, individuals develop mutual respect and trust (Frymer & Houser, 2000).

Anderman et al. (2011) identified with Frymer and Houser (2000) in their study on how teachers create encouraging environments that support students’ views on motivation and learning. Their goal was to point out high school teachers whose students recognized them as supportive and motivating in the classroom (Anderman et al., 2011). They posed the following question: “How do effective high school teachers create classroom contexts that students perceive as supportive of their motivation and engagement” (p. 969). Additionally, they listed three core themes: strengthening student insight, developing and preserving rapport, and classroom management. Rapport was part of their research, but it did not constitute the bulk of it. Anderman et al. (2011) wrote a mandatory element of successful teaching was the creation of an educational setting that could support students’ motivation and learning. Perhaps one of the most important part of this research was the inclusion of students’ assessments of motivational, social, and academic climate. Anderman et al. (2011) defined social climate as teachers who use a mix of affability, caring, humor, and enthusiasm while teaching, and who showed respect for and belief in their students’ intellect and ability to achieve.
Academic climate was explained as the ways in which educators behaved, inclusive of paying attention to key points, making certain that students understood the subject matter, probing for deeper understanding, asking for clarification, and guaranteeing all students had the opportunity to respond (Anderman et al., 2011). Moreover, Anderman et al. (2011), emphasized students were encouraged and urged to ask questions, come see teachers before or after school and suggested teachers develop lesson contents and connected their curriculum with relevance to students’ everyday lives, and popular media, thus developing interest and engaging in their students’ personal lives. Just as important, teachers shared how the content was relevant to their own lives. Anderman et al. (2011) implied the teacher-student relationship should include interest in students by extending contact outside of the classroom. For example, teachers asked about and attended activities in which students were involved and expressed concern when students appeared to be anguished or not feeling well. Personal lives are a touchy subject for adolescents and great care and sensitivity should be taken when teachers enquire about their students’ personal affairs. Discretion should be observed when teachers put students on the spot or single them out, whether in class or outside of class. In their study, Anderman et al. (2011) noted teachers did not single out students in public, and handled student misconduct without interrupting the lesson. Nevertheless, there must be something more educators can do to initiate and foster good rapport with their students.

Sparks (2019) thought so but cautioned us by maintaining “people sometimes mistake a kind of casual familiarity and friendliness for the promotion of really deep relationships that are about a child's potential, their interests, their strengths, and weaknesses” (p. 8). Sparks (2019), and Anderman et al. (2011) argued teachers have the powerful potential to connect socially with students, but it is not enough. Connecting with students means going deeper and forming a bond
around interests, habits, and common themes. This sort of inquiry may lead to teacher effectiveness (Sparks, 2019).

The existing research encompassing student anxieties, sources, and effects of these anxieties, and means of solving this puzzle is compelling. However, gaps subsist. These oversights stem from the observation that little research is available on the intentional and deliberate relationship that can be formed between professors and students inside and outside of the classroom to diminish or remove foreign language concerns and apprehensions. Reimagining the relationship between educators and learners should be a priority not only for teachers, but also for students.

**Conclusion**

This literature review tackled three crucial themes related to anxiety, whose context was the second language classroom. I investigated how personality traits play a role in determining anxiety as a reaction to public speaking and, more specifically, to foreign language oral communication, how academic climate and teacher roles can contribute to anxiety reduction, and the ways in which positive professor-student rapport is linked to students’ willingness to communicate. The research corroborated the views that some personality traits lead to anxiety in college students. Some college courses require public speaking in one form or another, and this exacerbates student anxiety even more. Several studies confirmed more relaxed classroom environment helped alleviate some students’ anxieties, while other studies linked the role of the teacher as conducive to establishing a more comfortable classroom atmosphere. Finally, the relationship that can be constructed between educator and learner may significantly impact students positively by reducing their anxieties.
In Chapter Three, I describe the methodology used to collect data in an effort to obtain college students’ opinions about the effects of the rapport between educator and learner, and whether this bond contributes to an increase in oral participation and a decrease in anxiety. In Chapter Four, I disclose the findings and analysis of my research. Finally, Chapter Five provides a discussion of my conclusions’ interpretations, where I situate the findings, and implications within the field.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapters have outlined the evidence for anxiety in students when faced with the requirement to speak in front of others, especially in a foreign language. These anxieties may be related to personality traits but can likely be overcome if educators alter the academic, social, and motivational climates. I have shown it is important for teachers to include classroom activities that do not create stress, but rather activities that put the students at ease and provide an environment where fear of public speaking is diminished or eliminated. Research has shown a positive relationship between professor and student has the potential to help anxious learners overcome fear of public speaking. However, previous research has fallen short of offering means that educators can use to break the wall that exists between teacher and student when it comes to building connections both inside and outside of the classroom.

The construction, cultivation, and continuation of professor-student rapport, as well as ideas on means to achieve and sustain such rapport, was a gap in previous studies. Therefore, in this chapter, although oral communication anxiety was not a prerequisite in order for students to participate, I discuss the methods I used to explore whether the students who did experience oral communication apprehension benefited (or not) from positive and intentional rapport with one or more professors from the same department were helped by professor-student connections. This chapter presents the epistemology with which I aligned myself, my research design, how and why I chose my participants, my role and positionality as a researcher, research ethics I needed to respect, procedures I adopted, analysis information, and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to my study.
Epistemology

The epistemological approach I chose was interpretivism. Interpretivists’ aims are to discover, understand, seek in-depth insight into their participants’ lives, and look for relative meanings. Rapley (2018) and Dudovskiy (n.d.) referred to subjectivity as an essential piece of interpretivism, meaning my experiences, life history, preconceptions, and lack of neutrality contribute greatly to my research. Because of this subjectivity, I realize I cannot disassociate my values and worldviews from my research. Rapley (2018) and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) also stated research guided by interpretivism is judged on its credibility, trustworthiness, and the fact the findings can be confirmed. Validity, reliability, and confirmation bias were areas that were important to me. Additionally, Rapley (2018) and Charmaz (2006) agreed the researcher is an integral part of the study as a full participant, which describes my approach. One of the important facets of interpretivism is accepting there are multiple realities (Dudovskiy, n.d.; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2009; Rapley, 2018). In other words, I must accept other people will think differently than I do and they will view issues from a different viewpoint. Reflexivity is also an integral part of interpretivism, meaning the researcher will have views and opinions before starting the research but, as the research progresses, those views may change, and this could lead to a change in the researcher’s practices and perhaps values and ethics (Rapley, 2018).

Research Design

This study was qualitative in nature. I chose this approach because of the need to understand different views and perceptions on oral communication anxieties in college students and how the relationship built between professor and learner may lessen such anxieties. Additionally, qualitative methods can be exploratory (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019; Maxwell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten & Newhart, 2018), and
as I investigated the links between educator and student rapport and anxiety reduction, I sought to uncover students’ opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings on the topic. To get at this data, I used a case study method whereby emerging themes, words, phrases, and ideas were compiled and analyzed. A case study is often used in qualitative research (Patten & Newhart, 2018). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained a case study is a deep investigation of a single organization such as a college, or a bounded system. By a bounded system, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated it is confined to the same institution and participants sharing the same characteristics. This study was bounded by students who took French at the same institution of higher learning during the five-year period from Fall 2015 to Spring 2020. Patten and Newhart (2018) and Fraenkel et al. (2019) wrote case study research centers around a small number of cases dealing with certain phenomena. For my purposes, the phenomena was anxiety in college students and the roles professors played to reduce or eliminate these anxieties. With the case study method, I collected and analyzed data so I could express interpretations relevant to my research and provide useful conclusions of multiple realities expressed by the participants (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Research Questions

1. What practices do college students in French identify as being valuable in building student/professor rapport inside and outside of classroom?

2. What practices do college students in French identify as being valuable for reducing oral communication anxiety inside and outside of the classroom?

3. Which changes do college students in French suggest can be made in professors’ pedagogical approaches, classroom atmosphere, and rapport-building to alleviate learners’ oral communication anxiety?
Participants

The participants were chosen from the French department at Wildwood College. The participants took French in the department dating back to the Fall of 2015 and continuing until the Spring of 2020. The five-year range provided a potential sample. Five-hundred and seventy-six students were contacted. A five-year time span was chosen because, for graduates, their college experience was still vivid. Of the number of potential participants who were contacted, 52 responded. The sample also provided a mix of current students and alumni. During these five years, many professors, some of whom are retired, will have taught French at Wildwood College, and this gave a richer amount of information stemming from various pedagogical approaches. The participants ranged in age from 18 to approximately 27 years old.

Role of Researcher

My position and role in relation to the participants was as a hands-on and active participant or, in other words, a complete insider (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I consider myself a complete insider because I am familiar with the setting where I collected the data. I understand that my role was subject to change as the data was collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). I based my findings and recommendations on students’ answers to the written interviews, which informed me of the anxieties students perceived in their French courses at Wildwood College, and the value of pedagogical approaches as they related to rapport building.

On a very basic level, and as a professional educator, one of the reasons that pushed me to do this research was my desire to help students succeed and develop critical and communicative skills that will help them in my classes, in other professors’ classes, and in their life journey. Another purpose was to publish participant and researcher recommendations in
which all educators are encouraged to take active steps to help remedy the often-found anxiety in students. I position myself as an expert because of my 30 years of teaching experience and my regular attempts at trying new methods to help my students alleviate oral communication anxiety. My personal and professional experiences enabled me to empathize with the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Research Ethics**

Before beginning my research, it was important to consider what ethical issues might surface during the study and plan how these issues needed to be addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical research included the protection of participants from being harmed and making certain that confidentiality of data was respected (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Prior to the Institutional Review Boards’ approval from Concordia and Wildwood, I consulted with my advisor and committee to determine which ethical issues might arise during my study and the solutions that addressed the issues. Furthermore, I sought approval from the survey and questionnaire committees and the French department chair by submitting to them the completed written interviews I planned on using (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also discussed my research proposal with the IRBs and survey committees.

Participation in my study was optional and all written interviews received were anonymous and contained no identifiers. Wildwood College’s Survey Coordination Committee and Alumni Association contacted previous French students dating back to the Fall of 2015 and continuing until the Spring of 2020. This ensured current students class standings, and grades would not be affected, if such a worry were to arise. It also protected participants’ contact information.
It was a priority to disclose the purpose of my study and to refrain from pressuring participants to sign a consent form (see Appendix A; Fraenkel et al., 2019) if participants were unsure whether or not they wanted to participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were informed about the significance of the research and how valuable their part was. Likewise, I avoided deceiving participants. I did not use misrepresentation, falsification, or misinformation toward participants, which may have led to manipulation in order for them to react in a certain manner. It was my hope that this led to a greater written interview response. In addition, it was my goal to respect potential power imbalances and exploitation of participants by realizing and sharing with the participants that I would not solely benefit from the findings but that the participants would have an important voice for me to consider my dissertation with an equity lens.

After the data were collected, I stored them using appropriate security measures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were saved on a USB key encrypted with a password and locked in a cabinet. During the data reporting phase, it was my priority to avoid falsifying authorship, evidence, data, findings, and conclusions. It was of the utmost importance to avoid disclosing information that would harm participants and I communicated in clear, appropriate language (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I avoided disclosing only positive findings.

**Instrumentation**

I used a written interview that took approximately 20 minutes to complete. I have included the written interview in Appendix B. The written interviews were anonymous and had no identifiers attached to them. A written interview is similar to a spoken interview, but participants communicate their opinions and answers in written form (Hoffman, 2019). This allowed participants to take as much time as they wished to formulate and share their thoughts.
and ideas. The written interview is also a way to eliminate the awkward conversation fillers, pauses, and hesitation markers that often occur during spoken interviews. One drawback to the written interview was the inability to ask probing questions. The anonymity of the written interview further protected the current students who participated in the study.

Before sending out the written interview to the participants, I piloted it to friends and colleagues to check for clear wording and meaning, difficulty in comprehending questions, spelling, and grammatical errors and suggestions for improvements (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), and to establish how long the interview took to complete. The 11 questions included in the written interview were divided into three major categories with two to five questions per category: building professor-student rapport outside of the classroom, building professor-student rapport inside of the classroom, and reducing anxiety in the classroom. The written interview questions were developed in relation to my research questions, theoretical framework, and the gap I identified in the literature regarding whether students experienced oral communication anxiety and what actions professors took to reduce this anxiety through teaching practices and rapport-building. After consultation with my advisor, and approval from IRBs as well as survey committees, and the French department chair, the written interviews were emailed to the participants.

**Procedures**

Data collection for the written interviews began at the end of October 2020 and closed on November 23, 2020. The Wildwood College Survey Coordination Committee and the Alumni Association contacted students on my behalf by sending them the written interview. A reminder email was sent one week prior to the closing date. I included the open-ended questions on Google Forms and participants were able to type in their answers with as much detail as they
wished. Prior to completing the questions, participants consented to or declined involvement in the written interview. Participants who declined involvement were not given access to the questions.

**Data Analysis**

Saldaña (2011) stated the intent and results of data analysis are to divulge to readers new perceptions of what was observed and realized during research about the experiences and emotions of human beings. Analytic choices must correlate with research methods and conceptual framework. From this correlation, it is possible to form appropriate answers that best depict and properly demonstrate the study’s findings (Saldaña, 2011). With this in mind, I wanted to show relationships between my methodology and framework to ensure my findings answered my research questions.

**Thematic Analysis and Codes**

There were major themes and codes that emerged from my data analysis. I examined the data carefully to classify the most important themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used an inductive approach that allowed the themes to arise from the data. Stemming from the written interview categories, I compiled my codebook (full codebook can be found in Appendix G) with three major categories and some key sub-categories including:

- professor support inside of the classroom (student well-being, a relaxed and low-stakes climate, refraining from cold calling, professor humor, environment where mistakes were allowed, smiling, and nodding);
- professor support outside of the classroom (office hours, professors attending extracurricular activities, unexpected campus encounters, and department events); and
• student recommendations (not forcing participation, having more small group discussions, and providing a low stakes academic climate).

In an effort to respect the way in which participants phrased their opinions, I employed what Strauss (1987) called in vivo coding. In vivo coding is simply relaying the participants’ words and phrases verbatim.

**Validity and Reliability**

It was vital that I validate the veracity of my study data and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Validation, that is to say drawing proper conclusions from the written interview findings, was demonstrated through salient points such as triangulation, clarification of researcher positionality, reflexivity, and piloting the written interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2019; Wangsness Willemsen, 2016). In my study, triangulation established the dependability and trustworthiness of the data collected and the data pointed to the same conclusion. Even though my participants came from the same college, they were all different in terms of personality and their individuality provided me with a diverse range of perspectives (Maxwell, 2013), which added to the validity I sought (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Because of my position in this study, readers had the right to know my background as it pertained to my research and how I could benefit (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result of personal commitment, attachment to this study, and subjectivity I could not ignore, I used reflexivity to scrutinize myself through the whole of this research. I feel that I did grow and change throughout the research process. I was willing and ready to change, and I adapted my research questions as appropriate. I experienced growth both professionally and personally. Reflexivity also meant that, as the study progressed, my firmly established educational beliefs came into question and evolved as a result of self-scrutiny (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
One of the reflexive strategies was positionality. Positionality established my stance and attitude toward my study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Clarifying my position as researcher was essential for me and to my readers because I am an expert as a French educator, and I come with many years of experience, which could have led to confirmation bias. Reliability is the extent to which measures, such as written interviews, generate the same findings on repeated attempts (“Reliability,” 2020). In my research, reliability was achieved by the consistency shown between the data collected and the results. Another way to look at validation and reliability after analyzing data and developing findings was akin to saying: “Did I get it right?” (Saldaña, 2019).

Did I persuade the readers?

Lastly, because qualitative research is a work in progress by nature, I realized my data collection and analysis were temporary, ever evolving, and constantly included emergent thoughts and themes. My reflection and analysis changed often as the project advanced. That is not to say I did not have organized plans and methods before the data collection and analysis phases, but those plans sometimes needed to be altered to best serve the study. For example, Wildwood College pushed back the date they sent out the written interview by several weeks to avoid final exams. This allowed participants time to focus on the interview questions without distracting them from their exams.

Potential Confirmation Bias

In my research confirmation bias was acknowledged and efforts were made to opposing viewpoints. I attempted to overcome confirmation bias by reading my participants’ answers carefully and having an open mind. Considering different perspectives, beliefs, and values were at the forefront. By going through this research, I uncovered and interpreted new evidence that may have been counter to what I believe and contrary to my many years of experiences as an
educator. I discovered data that was unexpected and with which I did not agree, but this data came from my participants’ opinions and these opinions mattered to them and to me.

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

Assumptions

There are certain assumptions I took for granted and made regarding my study. One of them was the notion that multiple realities exist in my research: the researcher’s, the realities of the participants, and the reader’s reality or the audience interpreting the results. Another assumption was my study would include multiple perspectives as participants’ experiences are not monolithic. One assumption I did not make is that my readers were familiar with terms I used (Fraenkel et al., 2019). I provided definitions for the following terms: anxiety, cognitive strategies, corrective feedback, metacognition, metalinguistics, oral communication anxiety, and target language. Finally, I assumed participants acted in good faith and their answers were sincere and truthful. It was my hope my study design reduced any complications to a bare minimum.

Limitations

There were limitations (items out of my control) in my study. There was the possibility that some students knew the researcher and would feel the need to provide answers perceived as satisfactory or pleasing in the written interview, but this was remedied by the use of additional participants who took French from other professors. An additional limitation was the nature of the written interviews. Although participants were able to type in as much information as they wanted, I was not able to probe their replies further. In-person or phone interviews would have provided more in-depth data.
Delimitations

Delimitations are the intentional choices a researcher makes and the boundaries that are set. In other words, delimitations are within the researcher’s control. In my study, delimitations were identified as factors I selected. First and foremost, the problems of practice in my research, which are the oral communication anxiety that college students experience in the world language classroom and the lack of help from professors to reduce this anxiety, were delimitations because I deliberately chose to write about these problems. The research questions and the theoretical framework I adopted were conscious choices as were the population I decided to investigate and the geographical region in which the participants studied. I only used French language students who recently graduated from or who still attended Wildwood College. I purposely did not include students of other world languages. These were the parameters of my study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I included my research design, how and why I chose my participants, my role and positionality as a researcher, research ethics I needed to respect, procedures I adopted, data analysis information, and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations to my study. Through carefully planned data collection, I set the stage and provided context for findings that addressed my research questions of why oral communication anxieties exist in college students studying a foreign language and how to alleviate those anxieties, principally through personal rapport between educator and learner. In Chapter Four, I reveal my findings as well as my analysis. Chapter Five is a discussion of my interpretations, as well as the implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and scholarship.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Introduction

Very little has been written about how connections and rapport between educators and students could be the key to either greatly reduce or possibly eliminate the often-immobilizing oral communication anxiety students experience. Anderman et al. (2011) aptly addressed the factors that add to issues college students navigate when asked to speak a foreign language in the classroom. They listed three climates they believed contribute to anxiety: social, motivational, and academic climates. The social climate refers to non-academic connections educators and learners experience mostly outside of the classroom. In my research, the motivational and academic climates should be non-threatening, comfortable, and relaxed classroom environments professors create to help their students overcome oral communication anxieties. Tying the three climates to possible solutions to student anxiety is not only possible but necessary. It was my aim to demonstrate professors hold the key to helping students overcome oral language anxieties through rapport building inside and outside of the classroom and by changing their pedagogical approaches.

The data I collected provide invaluable information coming from current and recent students of French who gave insight into which professor practices did and did not work in and out of the classroom. Participants were also asked about their perceptions regarding professor-student rapport that have the potential to lessen oral communication anxiety. This essential data is intended to inform professors’ practices and provide reflexivity opportunities for educators. Reflexivity can lead to positive changes in teachers’ pedagogical practices as well as directly and indirectly helping students to feel more relaxed in the college foreign language classroom.
In conjunction with the motivational, social, and academic climates in my theoretical framework, my research questions sought answers from students whose perceptions of the climates speak to the professor-student rapport, whether this rapport within the climates decreased their oral communication anxiety, and, most important, what suggestions students had regarding professors’ teaching practices that could potentially lessen learner anxiety. In this chapter, I set out to demonstrate how positive and nurturing connections between college professors and their students inside and outside of the classroom walls can lead to increased self-confidence and lessened oral communication anxiety. Anxiety can be felt by anyone, but not everyone reacts to and handles anxiety in the same manner. Further, anxiety can be exacerbated or appeased by educators and by the teaching and learning environment. Educators can provide support and create a learning environment conducive to stress-free learning.

Professor support manifests itself in a variety of ways and in different places. In this chapter, I examine findings from categories appertaining to professor support inside of the classroom, professor support outside of the classroom, and student recommendations for professors’ teaching practices. Because students and professors meet in a common campus classroom or online for courses, professors’ practices can take advantage of this common space to show support for students. Usually, classes meet on campus and in person. Since Covid-19 appeared, Wildwood College decided online courses were the best course of action from March 2020 until October 2020. Thereafter, professors were given the choice to continue online or to teach in a hybrid form (online and in person courses). Many professors chose to teach exclusively online.
Support Inside of the Classroom

In my research, support inside of the classroom refers to the rapport or connections that can be built between professors and students in the classroom and reducing anxiety through teaching practices. Thinking about reducing anxiety through teaching practices, the two teaching methods I chose to explore and analyze through the replies to my written interviews were verbal and non-verbal cues professors used in the classroom.

Rapport Building

A language professor’s primary responsibility entails teaching the topics associated with course titles. That is, after all, what a professor must do on a fundamental level to fulfill job obligations. Certainly, professors can choose to supplement the contractual agreement of teaching a course by warmly greeting students as they enter or exit the classroom, and providing help immediately before or after the class, but the only aspect of teaching that is necessary is instruction. Presenting lessons to students does not necessarily mean there will be interaction between professor and student. Lecture-style courses may offer very little interpersonal or human connections to the students.

As some participants noted regarding the entire class, they preferred “more discussion-based classes to engage more with students,” they enjoyed when professors “engaged students in classroom discussions,” and “interactive activities” were favored over lectures. Other respondents pointed to “discussions with partners,” which made them more apt to speak the target language. A few participants contributed, “casual discussions” made the class inviting and provided for “a collaborative atmosphere.” One student wrote professors “asked our opinions on assignments.” This type of collaboration gives students the affirmation they have a voice in their education and engagement is more important than compliance. Positively, for the Wildwood
College French Department, a few participants affirmed “professors have done a great job of making it a safe environment,” and another participant added “in my experience Wildwood French professors generally did a good job of encouraging participation.” The data collected from my participants revealed their preferences and aversions to certain pedagogical and interpersonal approaches. Overall, it is clear students disliked lecture-based courses and received the most satisfaction from teaching practices focusing on interactive activities featuring oral communication competence in small and large groups.

A small number of participants mentioned professors showed no interest in and did not provide support for students inside of the classroom. A student stated, “I've never seen their [professors] interest in my well-being individually,” and constructively added “but they could often tell when students were more stressed than usual and would sometimes change around assignments or exams to accommodate that.” This is worthy of consideration from the teachers’ point of view. If a few students were under the impression professors did not show interest in them, the professors’ teaching practices need to be reexamined to include every student as an integral part of the class.

A number of students wrote about their appreciation when professors would remind them to “take care of themselves and their well-being.” One student commented on the Wildwood French Department that “professors generally cared about their students, mindful of workload, and overall considerate of students’ well-being.” More personally, one student appreciated the fact their professor showed care for them and stated, “when I have been sick in class, professors have told me to take care of myself.” Another respondent affirmatively answered, “yes, they were very flexible and understanding of working around my personal needs. Including allowing me to show up early to class to work on exercises that would be otherwise stressful to complete.”
Another example of concern shown by French professors at Wildwood College is a student who commented their professor “engaged with me in that class in a very individualized and concerned way. I was going through a terrible time in my personal life and the professor was always responsive and kind.” Finally, yet another illustration of the personal touch French professors at Wildwood College brought to individual students, is a statement from a student who “had a particularly bad semester health-wise and the professor allowed me to have an incomplete so I could take care of finishing the work during the break so that I didn't have extra stress at the time.” Such actions may seem obvious, but to some students, it showed the professors cared about them.

Less serious, but still appreciated, were when professors asked how students were and about their day before, during, or after class. This sort of chit-chat may not seem like much and could sometimes appear superficial, but, according to the students, it made a difference, contributed to rapport-building, and was anxiety-reducing. This example of rapport-building was especially useful to the participants when tragedy struck the campus community or when students were navigating difficult personal issues.

My study also revealed the need for interpersonal connections was especially welcomed since the appearance of Covid-19. Covid-19 was particularly difficult for some students who needed more time to complete assignments. A respondent remarked,

it's as simple as asking how you're doing, and all my French professors have done this. In the classes I've taken during the pandemic, professors have been understanding and adapted workloads and work styles to limit stress and maintain productivity and enjoyment.
One student added “particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic my French professor has often asked our class how we are all doing at the beginning of class every day.” This is just an example of a simple good-will gesture on the part of the professors but, to the students, it was more than that. Participants were thankful when professors allowed for extensions on assignments and showed general flexibility. Covid-19, however, only affected courses from the Spring of 2020 forward. Most of the participants who answered the written interviews did not experience problems or need help during a pandemic.

During difficult times in the college community, some professors canceled classes to allow students time and space to process their feelings and reactions. This was beneficial to some participants who observed, “French professors have cancelled work or extended deadlines to reduce anxiety” and “professors have cancelled class to allow space for students to absorb and process difficult news or situations that have occurred on or off-campus.” When classes were not cancelled, some students recalled professors allowed them to “step away from class when needed” reinforcing the respect professors had for their students.

These displays of kindness extended by professors are in line with Sparks (2019) who noted the relationship between professor and student can be critically important to student learning. Furthermore, Frymier and Houser (2000) and the participants’ opinions complemented each other by stating the teacher-student connection revolves around being an interpersonal relationship, which means there must be negotiations between teachers and students such as flexibility, understanding, and empathy.

By law, US schools must offer disability accommodations to students who have academic challenges, such as professors providing notes on or recording of class lectures, longer time-limits on assessments, and flexibility with absences and assignment deadlines. Even though
honoring student accommodations is a requirement for professors, one student stated, “some French professors were sensitive to disabilities accommodations for testing or attendance” and another participant added, “in the past, when I experienced mental health issues, I had some individual meetings with French professors to discuss accommodations/how to help me do my best in the class, given the situation.”

Professor support inside the classroom is not always associated with difficult times or tragedies in students’ lives or on campus. A participant commented, “a professor would bring oranges and other snacks, especially before the tests.” Food is not exclusively related to hunger and, from my experience, it has positive emotional or psychological effects. Of course, when a class takes place during students’ breakfast or lunch hours, it could have negative learning consequences if students are hungry. From personal experience, providing food such as small croissants with a chocolate spread for a morning course fueled the students’ willingness to participate and increased learning. The professor is then seen as someone who cares about the psychological well-being of students related to learning. By providing students with food or snacks, the professor is actually, and additionally, feeding a need students have to be cared-for thus building rapport between professor and students.

Other than lessening anxiety with food, data revealed a few students appreciated when professors talked to the entire class about oral communication anxiety. These data are similar to previous research (Foss & Reitzel, 1988; Mastuda & Gobel, 2004; von Worde, 2003), stating the teacher should play the role of reassurer and discuss oral communication anxiety as a normal emotion. A Wildwood participant indicated, “some professors talked to students about anxiety related to speaking in class.” Preparing students for the eventuality of anxiety did help participants. Denying the fact students experience oral communication anxiety is not helpful. In
contrast, it is helpful to inform students that anxiety might happen, that it is an acceptable
reaction, and that it can be surmounted.

Additionally, students valued and respected the fact certain professors would tell their
classes making mistakes was fine and a part of learning a second language. Moskovsky et al.’s
(2013) participants would see eye-to-eye with my participants about the fact that making
mistakes with oral communication increases the levels of anxiety and gives students a false sense
of low achievement. A respondent wrote, “it is important to create an environment where it is
okay to make mistakes and where students are not afraid to speak in French.” Other students
added Wildwood French professors “allowed room for mistakes,” and “reminded everyone that it
is okay to make mistakes.” One professor encouraged students “to make mistakes and
downplayed the impact (which is rationally speaking zero) of making mistakes.” Some
participants confirmed the helpfulness of the Wildwood College French Department by
remarking “most French professors have consistently stressed that making mistakes is ok and
they try to be encouraging when speaking to the class.”

The data make it clear a safe, relaxing, calming, and inviting environment is a precious
and needed commodity for students. In the same vein, much previous research has documented
the positive effects of a teaching climate that is encouraging, relaxed, free of discomfort,
welcoming, sympathetic, safe, positive, and nurturing (Aida, 1994; Anderman et al., 2011;
Dewaele et al., 2018; Fassinger, 1995; Frymer & Houser, 2000; Salehi & Marefat, 2014; von
Worde, 2003; Young, 1991). Drawing from the data, the participants clarified these academic
environments, or academic climates, can be achieved through a variety of means. What seems to
have calmed students is what some of the participants called a “low stakes” environment. Among
these participants, one of the students mentioned, “professors have done a great job of making it
low stakes and a safe environment.” Although no students explained what they meant by a low stakes environment, according to DePaul University’s Center for Teaching and Learning (“Low-stakes assignments,” n.d.), a low-stakes environment involves assessments that do not significantly affect students’ final grades. For me, a low-stakes environment provides students with comments on ways to improve their French speaking and writing skills without giving a grade on formative assessments. The summative assessments, such as end of chapter, mid-term, or final examinations are graded but not before students receive feedback on improving their work.

Just as important as a low-stakes climate, was the mention of joking and humor to lessen anxiety. Some students enjoyed when their professors were “bubbly” and happy. Thus, professors improved the academic and social environments. As a few students noted, professors made “jokes to make the environment less serious and scary,” and “professors are also very personable and make jokes and laugh with the students which makes a much more friendly environment.” Another student added, “the best way a French professor reduced anxiety in the classroom was basically making jokes with us.” Two other participants agreed by maintaining that professors established a non-stressful climate “by joking around and not being very strict or serious” and “by being amiable and joking around with students.”

It may be a stretch to expect professors to be actors as if on a stage in front of their students, but theatricality may help professors relate to their students and, therefore, build rapport. Playing charades might not be everyone’s favorite activity but findings from the written interviews indicated students were fond of playing games to lessen the stakes and provide a relaxing, fun environment while supplying learning opportunities. Previous studies have drawn the same connections between a relaxed environment that included skits, plays, and games (von
Worde, 2003) and a lessened sense of anxiety in participants. Moreover, my participants’ narratives and recommendations align to previous studies (Aida, 1994; Anderman et al., 2011; Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016) reporting the classroom climate benefitted from humor and enthusiasm, which exemplified an optimistic attitude and gave students encouragement. It is true not all educators can use drama as a tool but, as participants added, simply navigating around the classroom, and sitting among groups shows enough support to help with student anxiety.

Humor may not be perceived similarly by all students and caution should be taken not to harm students with unwelcomed banter. Professor banter may lead to rapport misinterpretation on the student’s part. The same participants who welcomed joking and humor in a professor, equaled this practice to something “like a friend or peer might do.” One student explained “some professors sat and talked with us on an even level so that it felt easier to talk to them more as a peer rather than the person who grades us.” Nevertheless, care should be taken not to treat students like friends.

The rapport between student and professor is an important issue that needs to be considered by professors and students. Some of the respondents shared the point of view that professor-student connections should be on the same level as student-student friendships, but one participant also noted that “rapport is important, but boundaries are important as well.” The friendships students experience with friends of the same age should not be the same friendships or rapport between student and professor. The data mentioning relationships between professors and students being equal to student-to-student connections is an issue that has been described in previous research. Some of the cautions researchers mentioned were not to confuse a professional and academic relationship with a peer-to-peer relationship and being especially mindful that a professor-student relationship should not be viewed on equal terms but rather with
the purpose of advancing students’ academic efforts (Burleson & Samter, 1990; Graham et al., 1992; Sparks, 2019).

While educator professionalism is key, a number of students divulged they benefitted from informal conversations about their lives and interests. The data included students who wrote professors “have provided support by engaging with students on their own interests as they fit with the class topic.” About partner activities, participants shared, “in some exercises we would only talk about what our partner had said, like their interests.” Anderman et al. (2011) and Mohammadi et al. (2013) held the same views as respondents when they concluded teachers should customize lessons to fit the students’ needs and tie their curriculum to be of relevance to students’ everyday lives.

Similar to von Worde (2003) and Matsuda and Gobel (2004), whose studies concluded small-group activities lessened anxiety and improved class atmosphere, a few students seemed to prefer small-group conversations as it did not expose their oral proficiencies or deficiencies in front of the whole class. By holding such conversations, the data unveiled students were more engaged and, later, able to partake in conversations with the entire class without fear of negative appraisal from their classmates. So, the low stakes environment was popular with the majority of participants. Public speaking in one’s native tongue is difficult enough for some people, but it is more challenging in a second language.

Some students welcomed the chance to speak English or even Franglais (a mix of French and English) in class. As one participant noted, “it was always helpful to feel like Franglais (speaking a mix of French and English) wasn't taboo.” The same student went on to state “professors who encouraged us to just say what we wanted to say in any mix of English/French/incorrect grammar played a huge role in reducing my anxiety to speak, because I
knew it didn't have to be perfect every time.” Many foreign language teachers are asked by their supervisors to always speak French with all students regardless of the course level. The use of all French is exemplified in a personal experience when I was teaching high-school French. During a course where I habitually spoke all French, I uttered the words “17th century.” Unbeknown to me, my supervisor was standing outside of the classroom. After the class, my supervisor asked me why I spoke two words of English as it was expected that I spoke French 100 percent of the time while in class. Additionally, and not included in my data, one of the departments in which I worked prided itself in speaking French at all times for all levels as this was official department policy. Some of my participants disagreed with speaking French exclusively, and added being allowed to speak English or a mix of French and English (Franglais) lessened their anxieties.

Teaching practices are essential in student success and in helping reduce anxiety; in the next section, I discuss which teaching practices professors engaged to reduce anxiety.

**Reducing Anxiety Through Teaching Practices**

Data have already shown professors’ teaching practices are important to students and to their well-being. But have professors been able to specifically reduce anxiety through their teaching practices? If public speaking in front of a large group presents a problem for some individuals, it may be advisable for them to practice in front of small groups and even for just another person. Students overwhelmingly said the professor teaching practice that reduced anxiety the most in a classroom setting was working in pairs or small groups. Students shared it reduced their anxiety when professors “allowed students to work in small groups” as well as “being put into small groups nearly every day in every French class, which helped me have less anxiety.” A student detailed, “we often split into small groups which helped speaking in French to seem less scary since there weren't as many people watching us and listening.” It is evident
small group work was a helpful practice for students who experienced oral communication anxiety.

Even though a few participants noted speaking French with classmates sometimes gave them a feeling of inferiority and led them to comparing their speaking skills to others, they nevertheless preferred to speak in smaller groups rather than in front of the class. Prior to group or pair work, participants remarked how helpful it was when professors emphasized the classroom was a safe environment and reiterating to their students mistakes were fine. It may be obvious to educators, but aside from announcing mistakes were okay, students stressed the fact that perfection should not be expected by their professors. Similar findings were noted by Young (1991), who stressed students felt anxious and frustrated if their pronunciation was not perfect. During small group speaking activities, a method appreciated by students was when the professor was “just walking around to see how they could help.” One respondent described professors “would also stand in between desks or walk between desks to reduce the physical separation between teacher and student.” Participants felt less noticeable as professors navigated between rows of desks without stopping.

As a whole, the data showed the conversations students favored were ones about their interests, favorite pastimes, and extracurricular activities. If conversations about personal lives were of relevance to students especially as they worked in small groups, it may be useful for the sake of improving oral communication and public speaking anxiety to gradually increase small group sizes and eventually hold those discussions as an entire class. Participants responded more to intimate conversations about items of interest to them, and this may give them the incentive to contribute to large group discussions about the same activities their classmates enjoy.
Moving on from small group discussions, participants commented on teaching practices aimed at the entire class. As discussed in the previous section, an informal and friendly classroom environment made a big difference in students’ comfortability and in their willingness to participate. Again, according to the data, the environment is one of the important positive influences in reducing anxiety and making students comfortable with oral communication. Students thrived in a “calming environment,” and where professors would “create a laid back enough environment where students feel comfortable to potentially make mistakes and thus feel more comfortable voluntarily speaking in class.” As a testament to the teaching effectiveness of French professors at Wildwood College, one student volunteered French professors “have built an inviting environment.”

According to T. Nuttall (personal communication, 2019) the stress and anxiety many students experience creates a learning environment not conducive to actual learning. The brain shuts down deep learning pathways when students are under stress, which impacts the level of information absorption. My participants explained an intimidating atmosphere is a disservice to students. Participants’ comments about a safe and comfortable learning space contributed to their higher-level learning and success in French classes. The classroom environment is considered the third teacher (parents are the first teacher, classroom teachers are the second teacher, and the environment is the third teacher; T. Nuttall, personal communication, 2019). The impact of the environment on learning is a bigger issue than many people realize.

Many participants kept returning to what they called “cold-calling” as an undesirable teaching practice in some professors. Students conveyed the anxiety they felt when being cold-called or picked to speak without volunteering. Cold-calling is a kind of forced participation students did not appreciate, especially among the learners who tended to experience oral
communication anxiety at a greater level than others. A student explained, “cold calling for fun is much better than cold calling in a scary classroom.” This student did not mind being cold-called, but the academic climate had to be inviting and comfortable. In one case, a student pointed out, “cold calling students is a truly terrifying experience, and I don’t think it should be done.” Cold-calling was mentioned as especially uncomfortable when a professor would call on a student for an answer to a question and wait for an answer. One student mentioned, “cold-calling does not always give students enough time to formulate a response in French to the level they would like” and added,

there is a difference between letting students sit and squirm in silence after a question has been asked which may pressure students to think of something quickly or not respond at all after too much time has passed, and encouraging students to take ten seconds to think of a response and then raise their hands.

Data clearly show these uncomfortable silences significantly raised anxiety. It seems cold-calling is not a practice in which professors should engage especially if it is followed by awkward silences.

A small amount of data indicated uncomfortable silences were not only aimed at individual students. Professors would ask questions to the entire class and wait, for what students said was a long time, for any volunteer to answer. What did seem to be helpful was when a student volunteered but had trouble finishing a sentence, and the professor “jumped in to help.” Of course, the rate at which students process thoughts is different. However, data also conveyed a few students did not wish to be interrupted by professors as this allowed them to think about what they wanted to say. But, the danger in this is that the uncomfortable silences some learners dreaded could set in. It seems there is a fine line professors walk between choosing volunteers
who always have quick answers and waiting for students who need time for thought-processing. Because of some contradictory data, there is no conclusive answer. However, if some students relish the idea of participating and others prefer not to be cold-called, there must be a balance between respecting students’ fear of oral communication and allowing others to express themselves. It cannot always be the same students who participate because timid students will become increasingly alienated, compare themselves negatively to others, and evaluate their French oral skills as inadequate against extroverted classmates’ skills. This may increase introverted students’ oral communication anxiety, raise their levels of self-awareness, and intensify low self-esteem.

Many participants did not just concentrate on negative teaching practices. Students were grateful for professors who established clear guidelines at the beginning of the semester. A few respondents remarked it was helpful when professors gave “clear guidelines within our abilities, using words of encouragement” and “setting clear guidelines for assignments and tests.” Detailed schedules, ample warning about assessments, and rubrics were all examples given of clear and realistic expectations.

But what happens when unexpected events prevent teaching or learning from temporarily continuing? The data pointed to professor flexibility and less rigidity. One student emphasized one professor “offered extensive office hours and was very flexible in doing so.” Moreover, and agreeing with another participant, a student commented “French profs were often flexible with deadlines and most concerned about our learning, as opposed to due dates,” while another student agreed professors were “flexible with assignments should we need an extension due to personal reasons.” On a more private note, one participant even shared, “yes, they were very flexible and understanding of working around my personal needs.” That is not to say the
Students have a keen sense of awareness about making mistakes when speaking a foreign language, especially in front of a teacher or a whole class (Toth, 2011). Additionally, Toth (2011) maintained, and the data in my research corroborated, when students were conscious of making mistakes, they experienced negative emotions such as tenseness, discomfort, and fear, which sometimes led to deliberately missing class. Making mistakes in a foreign language is usual and is to be expected at all levels. Positive reinforcement can be a teaching tool in the way professors correct students. Students acknowledged the positive impact they felt when professors corrected errors only when necessary and practiced kind correcting. A student described that “it became a regular part of class to be corrected kindly when we spoke.” Commenting on more than one professor, a participant wrote, “they were always kind, even when correcting me in a class setting.” Another testimony stressed, “it was always helpful to me when I would make a mistake in class and the professor would correct me kindly and in a way that did not make it a big deal or something embarrassing.” Additionally, a participant “really appreciated when we were encouraged to speak even if we didn’t know what to say exactly and then the professor would help us finish the sentence or nicely correct us.”

Kind correcting was exemplified in the data as not telling the students what the mistakes were but to rephrase the incorrect student responses into a correct phrase in the style of a casual conversation addressed to the entire class. Likewise, Toth (2011) also contended unkind correcting, which could lead to student humiliation, may happen if the teacher corrected a student in front of the full class. Data revealed students reacted negatively to unkind correcting.
and developed anxiety. Rearticulating a student’s incorrect answer was a preferred type of feedback among students and provided important benefits such as concentrating on the message and not the error. Focusing on the student who made an error may be the cause of undue anxiety. A few students felt “repeating questions” and sometimes “several times” and in different ways helped them.

An unexpected teaching practice mentioned in previous headings and repeated in this section by a few students was the use of English or Franglais in class. One respondent asserted they “understand the point of French classes is to speak in French” as they added “the professors we connected to the most were the ones that would, once in a while, bring down their barriers a little bit and speak in a little bit of English.” Immersion is a debate with which nearly every professor struggles. Speaking only the target language trains the students’ ears to hear the language and forces them to make meaning at what is being uttered. However, some students may not be prepared to hear nothing but French and may leave the classroom confused and frustrated. Confusion and frustration could lead to anxiety, and some students mentioned they would skip class because of feeling inadequate and being afraid to be called on or be unprepared as a result of not understanding everything the professor said in the target language. This is especially true of beginning levels as a few students disclosed. One participant, referencing anxiety they experienced with speaking the target language, commented, “generally, practices that give me a little time to think about my answers, without having to produce them immediately are very helpful for reducing my anxiety” and added, “this is especially true in lower levels, I think, when it takes more thought to come up with vocabulary/correct conjugations.”
Reducing anxiety can come in the form of what was said and what was not said, referred to as verbal cues and non-verbal cues. These cues given by professors are signs students are doing well, giving the correct answer, and making improvements. These teaching practices contribute to a positive motivational climate. How professors choose to create, organize, and implement teaching practices that motivate student oral participation is a clear key to student willingness to communicate. If there is a feeling of equality among students such as professor reminders to students that every student is in the same situation and no one is superior or inferior to another, a sense of community will be built where oral communication will no longer create anxieties but rather create an environment where students will want to participate.

Verbal Cues

The notable verbal cues respondents provided as a means to reduce anxiety are the actual encouraging words professors said to students in the target language. There were no overwhelmingly similar answers among the participants and some comments were given in English while others were in French. Verbal praise and encouragement appear to be important to students and, judging from the replies to the written interviews, professors are not strangers to doling out praise and positive reinforcement even if students’ answers were not always correct. As one student wrote, “the occasional verbal praise or acknowledgement of improvement was really nice.” Another participant commented professors used “words of encouragement whenever I got stuck on a particular word or conversation. I never felt like I wasn't smart enough just because I messed up.” Aside from words of encouragement, a respondent remarked they welcomed the times when professors “encouraged everyone in the class to speak and answer questions.” Additionally, a student remembered when “professors encouraged folks to speak
their best French, even if it wasn't the best. Often, our French accents were not the most authentic, but that did not stop professors from engaging with what we said.”

“Très bien” (very good), “bien fait” (well done), and “bon, bon” (good, good) were all basic words of encouragement pointed out by students, words often uttered by French language educators. Although saying “well done” to a student may seem like a perfunctory action on the professors’ part, it does mean a great deal to some students. Pertaining to oral communication, one student provided detailed French phrases they heard their French professor say: “Ne t’inquiètes pas” (don’t worry about it), and “je ne te juge pas” (I am not judging you). Students of the Wildwood College’s French Department said these encouraging phrases affected them positively. While these French comments were uttered by professors about oral communication, professors would not include them as comments in writing assignments. Encouraging students with positive oral remarks helps students with willingness to communicate. Because these French phrases were not mentioned by other participants could mean they were not helpful to everyone or certain students thought it was normal for professors to use them. One participant appreciated when a professor thanked them for volunteering. Again, that might be a given for professors to be thankful for student volunteers, but it nevertheless seemed important to verbalize it. Finally, one professor asked students the following question: “What’s the worst thing that could happen?” Participants enjoyed it and saw the humor and helpfulness in it.

Non-verbal cues exist independently from verbal cues (Ballester, 2015) and can be just as effective as verbal cues. Some cues are given without uttering a word and can be just as effective as verbal reinforcement. All these cues have the strong possibility of leading to a change in student behavior. In other words, it may help students overcome their oral communication anxiety and give them a stronger sense of self-worth, thus increasing participation.
Non-Verbal Cues

The non-verbal cues contained in respondents’ replies do not include many examples, but they are worth mentioning. These are examples participants gave as anxiety-reducing methods, which are most likely familiar to many educators. Non-verbal cues are characterized as unspoken signals including gestures, body language, facial expressions, and eye contact that communicate messages to individuals. The number one piece of data retrieved from the written interviews is the act of smiling. Correspondingly, Frymer and Houser (2000) clarified when professors use verbal and non-verbal cues such as smiling, it puts students at ease and enables learning. Participants agreed smiling can be comforting and reassuring. When a professor smiles, they may be expressing happiness and can instill confidence in students who experience oral communication anxiety. Additionally, a smile may improve well-being and self-esteem, which, in turn, can lessen stress. Following close behind the reference to smiling is nodding. A gentle nod has the possibility of affirming what the students are saying and can show approval. Some students preferred when professors did not interrupt them when they were speaking. Nodding and smiling can express agreement and acceptance. Struggling students could certainly benefit from these two non-verbal cues especially if they need more time to process answers without being verbally interrupted by professors. Participants mentioned eye contact as another method that demonstrated “speaking” especially during conversations and general communication. A professor who engages in eye contact with students will show they are actively listening and paying attention. Eye contact may convey respect, which was important to several participants.

But non-verbal cues should be actions not limited to behavior demonstrated above the shoulders. Data showed body language, as well as encouraging and expressive gestures were noticed by several respondents. Students remarked some professors were “open with their body
language,” while other professors used “welcoming and understanding body language and facial expressions” that helped “to reduce anxiety.” Another participant noticed that professors used “relaxed body language and facial expressions” as non-verbal cues that reduced anxiety. Body language can deliver the wrong ideas such as boredom, impatience, and other negative signs. However, students referred to positive body language used by their professors. This may include a relaxed posture, encouraging hand and arm gestures to prod the students for more ideas, and leaning in to show active engagement.

One final comment made by a student was the use of stickers on homework and assessments. While stickers may be used in lower elementary grades, they are not likely to be used at the college level. Stickers may remind some students of a time when adolescent and adult anxieties were not present and when life seemed simpler. However, I maintain—as the student’s comment suggested—if using stickers helps students relax, raise morale, and encourage them, more power to the professors who used them! It was important for this study to determine professor support happening inside of the classroom, but it was just as essential to gauge professor support outside of the classroom. In the next section, I discuss support outside of the classroom and how participants viewed its importance.

Support Outside of the Classroom

One of the areas not adequately covered in my literature review was professor support outside of the classroom. This inadequacy is due to the limited literature available on this topic. There may be a stigma associated with professors seeing students outside of the four walls of the classroom or away from the Zoom screen. For this study, developing connections with students outside of the classroom does not entail meeting individual students in restaurants, or in public places that may be construed as inappropriate for undergraduate students and their professors. It
may be suitable for some graduate students, but this kind of relationship is beyond the scope of my study. For undergraduate students at Wildwood College, professor support outside of the classroom included office hours, chance encounters on campus, meeting at department events, informal dinners at professors’ houses where the entire class was invited, and emails.

The overwhelming response to how students felt supported outside of class was through professors’ office hours. Holding office hours is a requirement for each professor, and participants mentioned how it helped them. A participant noted they “always appreciated when French professors made themselves available before and after class and during office hours to help with anything I did not understand.” Another student reported “office hours are nice, as well as French instructional labs. Rapport however was not the easiest to build outside of a classroom setting.” Data revealed some students attended office hours strictly for academic reasons, whether it was for additional explanations of grammar functions, needing help with study abroad questions, or seeking advice on coursework. Some faculty members were official advisors while other professors were not college-assigned advisors but were trusted by the student for helpful advice. Office hours also offered some participants the opportunity to speak to professors about personal issues or, as a student stated, “ranting about life in general.” Another participant noted, “I did find that one professor to be a wonderful source of comfort and a great communicator outside of class.” The same participant added, “they (the professor) were so lovely and helpful in my French class and I regret to only have had them for one class.”

Despite the positive effects of office hours, one student wrote “I don't like going to office hours unless I have a concrete question to be answered. I don't want to look dumb or have them answer a question that I could have figured out on my own.” It is a little worrisome one student felt inadequate about asking questions to professors during the privacy of office hours. Office
hours are more inviting than asking questions in class in front of peers. If one student commented on this, it is possible more students feel this way, but my data did not show it. This may be an area in which professors could improve. For example, professors might frequently announce office hours are a welcoming environment in which students can ask anything without being judged. There is no such thing as a stupid question and professors can first answer a student’s question by thanking the student for the question and stating it is a great question. It is important to note the participant who shared this feeling did not actually state professors made them feel dumb, but rather they did not want to appear dumb.

Students can sometimes feel isolated on a college campus as it is different than being on a high school campus. Even though college students might relish the idea of being away from parents and living an independent life, they seemed to be drawn to professors with whom they felt a connection. Some students felt uncomfortable meeting a professor alone in their office, but informal and unanticipated encounters on campus such as the library, the campus center, other academic buildings, or while walking outside were welcomed connections. A participant was thankful professors’ offices were “open to just pop in and say hello, as well as just saying hello in settings like hallways or sidewalks on campus.”

It seemed if students saw professors outside of the classroom and away from the learning environment, those friendly encounters and encouraging conversations demonstrated teacher support. Of note is a student who did not just come to the professor’s office hours for academic questions or concerns but wrote the professor was “always open to meeting with you or just listen to you.” Moreover, participants noted there were times when French students and French professors would meet at organized department events where rapport was also built. This was exemplified when a student commented, “French professors have built rapport by joining
students at events at the French House on campus and generally encouraging conversation and connection outside of the classroom.” In some cases, informants enjoyed “the French Lecture Series and French department events” as it was “one way I felt that the professors helped support me outside of the classrooms.” Additionally, it was while the department presented events such as movie nights, barbecues, or other culturally themed evenings students were able to see professors in a different light. The informal conversations that developed during such events added to the rapport started inside of the classroom.

Professors inviting classes to their homes for a meal was appreciated by some participants. A respondent stated,

one professor I have had multiple times hosted brunch at their house, and with another professor we went on a museum field trip. Others attend French department events, and the casual gatherings provide a great opportunity for conversation and increasing ease.

The practice of inviting students to one’s house is encouraged by Wildwood College. A small number of respondents who attended dinners at professors’ houses reported feeling a stronger sense of rapport and support. Professors can also feel a better sense of rapport when meeting students outside of class and, as some students agreed, these informal gatherings provided a relaxed atmosphere away from the seriousness and rigor of academia.

While casual get-togethers and classes were attended by all or the majority of students, there were cases when students could not come to class, sometimes for more than one day. On such occasions when students were absent from class due to illness or other issues, participants answered some professors “contacted them by email to ask about their well-being and if there was anything they could do to help.” This gesture, which is not a job requirement, showed how some professors cared about their students.
In a minimal number of cases, students felt rapport was not easy to build, and one participant noted “professors were not particularly helpful outside of the classroom.” It is not reasonable to expect relationships to blossom in a few quick encounters. It takes longer periods of time than meeting on a campus sidewalk for five minutes. Building connections may take more than unexpected and quick encounters on campus as students and professors aim to go from one building to another with a specific purpose in mind. In cases such as these, both parties may be pressed for time and are attempting to run errands between classes. It could be fair to state being helpful is not on professors’ minds as they hurry to accomplish the day’s business. As a participant explained, “it is difficult to establish and build rapport in these situations.” Other than official classes and department events, meaningful connections seem difficult to create and maintain and that is not anyone’s fault. There are, however, other means of showing support for students outside of the classroom. One of them is to attend students’ extracurricular activities.

**Extracurricular Activities**

Attending student activities is not a requirement and is not expected by school officials, department heads, or students. It is notable not much of the data talked about professors attending students’ matches or concerts. It is, after all, a time commitment in the late afternoons, evenings, or on weekends and does not constitute part of a professor’s duties. The few professors who attended students’ extracurricular activities were noticed by participants. Students often ask professors to attend extracurricular activities. When noticing professors at their extracurricular events, participants revealed professors “often made an effort to come to big events,” “go to sporting events which is always nice,” and “attended my concert with the orchestra.”

Despite the perceived lack of interest in student activities stated by some participants such as “my professor didn't show any interest in my extracurriculars,” “I don't remember an
instance where a French professor has shown interest in my extracurricular activities,” and “I have not experienced any French professors showing interest in my extracurricular activities,” a few participants reported professors did ask about activities in which they were involved such as sports, theater, and music. However, one participant explained “my French professors did not show particular interest in my extracurricular activities, nor was this an expectation of mine,” though professor interest was noted by one student who shared, “French professors were curious about students’ lives.” In their study, Anderman et al. (2011) denoted the connection between professor and student should go beyond the four walls of a classroom. Similar to my findings, Anderman et al. (2011) went on to state these connections can begin in the classroom by professors asking students about their extracurricular activities and can be followed by professors attending student events. In addition, my participants referred to French events where professors interacted with them and asked about their activities. Some professors asked students to fill out questionnaires at the beginning of the semester and some questions pertained to favorite activities at Wildwood College. From that list of student activities, respondents wrote some professors included discussions about extracurricular activities in class, which made participants more comfortable with oral communication.

If a professor attended a concert or a sporting event, it was not unusual for the professor to speak with the student after the event. One student mentioned emailing the professor to thank them for attending the extracurricular activity and how much it meant to them. Some of the activities participants listed were baseball and football games, choral concerts, theatrical performances, and dance, instrumental, and vocal recitals. Similarly, students mentioned being invited to and attending professors’ events. In general, activities outside of class involving students and faculty were positive connections and contributed to relationships and, possibly, to
reduction of oral communication anxiety in the classroom. However, according to the data, not many of these connections continued after the classes were finished.

**Connections after Completion of Classes**

The question of whether professor-student rapport continued after completion of coursework was asked as part of the written interviews. Prior to this study, it was my hope the rapport did continue as a testament to the value of such connections. The majority of the participants affirmed the relationships had not continued, and a handful of students stated Covid-19 as the cause (“It’s been negligible with Covid” and “Covid hit us hard”). The lack of connections after completion of courses was simultaneously surprising and not surprising. It was surprising because all the time and effort that might have been put into these relationships was only for a specific period of time (the class taken by students) with no need for connections due to the nature of the academic relationships. Students may only want to be connected to their professors for as long as they take courses from them. But it also may not be surprising because of previous participant comments divulging the kind of rapport was simply not sought or disappeared organically. One student stated “once I graduated, the connection ended which is understandable to me because I didn't feel like I had a strong enough connection with the professors once I was no longer around to see them regularly.” One student, perhaps expressing regret, contributed “unfortunately, I haven't had any connection with professors in the French department since graduating.” Another reason, and as mentioned before, is that a few students wanted to connect with their professors much the same as their connections with other students and, in the long run, it may not be possible or even advised. Even though student-student connection may last longer than professor-student connection thanks to age similarities, there
may be psychological or emotional reasons why educators and learners are no longer connected once the classes are finished.

Nevertheless, some respondents did state some connections continued on campus as long as the students attended Wildwood College. Some participants “worked in the French department and saw professors often,” while others “emailed them to see when they are free to catch up or just swing by the department in hopes to see them” and one student explained, “if I was ever in the French building or saw my professors around campus, they would say bonjour!” Participants who no longer took classes from one professor but had a class with another French professor had the opportunity to see their previous professor at department events such as trivia or karaoke nights, movies, or picnics. Emails were frequently mentioned as a means to ask professors about the French major or minor and to also enquire about study abroad opportunities.

Aside from these few comments, it appears as though the rapport between the French professors and their students did not, for the most part, continue. If a stronger student-professor connection is not sought, what do students want or need from professors? The data showed students valued the professor-student rapport inside of the classroom more than outside of it. What more do students wish professors would do to improve rapport, and lessen anxiety? So far, the data have shown how students’ anxieties benefitted from established professor teaching practices. In the following section, I discuss what participants recommended professors could do to improve the classroom climate and lessen oral communication anxiety.

**Student Recommendations for Professors**

When participants were asked which suggestions they had for professors regarding rapport or teaching practices to reduce anxiety, only two wrote about “chit-chatting before or after class” and “talking to students about life outside of class,” both of which are representative
of rapport outside of the classroom. The rest of the suggestions and recommendations students made referred to teaching practices and not rapport-building. This may explain why there were no continued connections after coursework ended.

The recommendations given by students were specific to anxiety-reduction. Some of these suggestions were for professors not to force participation, explaining lessons more clearly, speaking the target language at a slower pace, working on pronunciation as a class (such as listen-repeat), professors making themselves more vulnerable and open, being more understanding and sympathetic to student mistakes, and professors being more approachable and empathetic. Some of the suggestions were also given in previous sections. For example, one participant suggested playing games in class, which some professors are already doing. The words “low stakes” appeared five times, but this was also something for which students were thankful in certain professors’ practices.

Students would appreciate teachers not forcing participation and thus refrain from cold-calling, which has clearly been a cause of anxiety. But some students disagreed and wished professors made everyone speak as, to them, this was the only way to improve. The issue of participation for all students or just for volunteers is inconclusive. Toth (2011) pointed out some students felt nervous when teachers asked them to participate. Similarly, my respondents did not like being cold-called. Although it is unclear from the data whether students view required participation or volunteer participation as an equity or equality issue, professors should be prepared to deal with this kind of attitude. It is not the students’ choice to decide what is best for the whole class and whether every student needs to participate equally as a course requirement. Students learn best in different ways and equity tells us everyone should be given the opportunity to communicate orally in the ways that most benefit them. For example, some students prefer to
participate in smaller groups, others enjoy speaking in front of the entire class, and some students feel more comfortable attending office hours for individual meetings where French can be spoken.

Frymer and Houser (2000) and von Worde (2003) elaborated if professors explained lessons with more clarity and used a slower pace that would allow students time to process answers, might reduce student anxiety, and increase their feelings of certainty. Likewise, in my research, certain students wanted professors to explain concepts clearly, speak slowly, engage the class in pronunciation activities, and write new vocabulary on the board, but these recommendations were limited. Most recommendations were about the varied personalities of the professors. One participant wrote professors should make themselves more vulnerable and open. One student wrote “make yourself vulnerable so the students can be too!” This openness demonstrated by professors is also identified in von Worde’s (2003) study. von Worde (2003) used students as participants who testified to the fact that when teachers would allow their personalities to become part of the lessons, the class would suddenly become more interesting.

However, just as some students are uncomfortable speaking in front of others, some professors may not be comfortable with vulnerability. It may be helpful if professors would share their own language learning experiences and that not everyone has the chance to grow up in a bilingual environment. One of the things that needs to be explained is what it means to be vulnerable and what is appropriate or not appropriate. Respondents valued professors who are understanding. The word understanding as it was generally stated would have benefitted from a definition by the participants who suggested it. Should the professors be understanding about oral communication anxiety, students needing processing time or space, or students needing to be left alone when experiencing personal issues? The answer is unknown but may consist of a
combination of all the mentioned reasons. Nonetheless, it is clear from the data professors should exercise some sort of understanding.

Aside from being understanding, students valued professors who were more approachable. There again, being more approachable needs more context because it could mean more office hours, sharing more personal information, or a number of other things. If lack of approachability aggravates anxiety, it is worth considering. On the other hand, professors, just like students, may be averse to sharing personal information with their students. Like my participants, Aida (1994) also elaborated on how students yearned for empathy from teachers. Students may feel exasperated and frustrated if educators do not make efforts to meet their students’ needs. This irritation and annoyance may lead to unneeded anxiety and could affect students’ feelings of self-worth and negatively alter their performance.

Throughout the data, participants were conscious of the pervasiveness of making mistakes and its unavoidability for language students. They also suggested professors make it clear that making mistakes is acceptable. Comments from the data included “make sure students feel that they can mess up and make mistakes without being in trouble” and “reiterating that mistakes are okay and part of learning.” For one student it was important to “feel comfortable making mistakes, which in turn encourages them (students) to try new things.” One can try new things in a “laid back enough environment where students feel comfortable to potentially make mistakes and thus feel more comfortable voluntarily speaking in class.” This implies that if mistakes are perceived as normal and tolerable, the willingness to communicate orally will face less resistance. For one student, the fear of making mistakes was deterring them from participating because of embarrassment or not wanting to be judged as they stated, “
when I feel like I can't make mistakes in class, it's just easier to sit quietly and hope I don't get called on as it feels embarrassing to make mistakes when it feels like that's all professors are noticing or judging you on.

If the classroom climate is inviting, nurturing, and accepting, the fear of oral communication because of making mistakes will be less present.

The academic and motivational climates were important to other participants who volunteered that “creating an environment where mistakes are encouraged would be great. One student suggested that professors include a disclaimer “that it’s okay to be nervous and make mistakes repeatedly throughout the course” and to “make it clear that mistakes are okay, and good, and part of the learning process.” One student gave the impression that some professors have a difficult time demonstrating their acceptance for mistakes and offered, “professors need to be okay with mistakes.” Humor was mentioned previously as an element of teaching practice. Here, one recommendation was “professors using humor is really helpful as it makes the class seem like a space that is meant for learning and where mistakes can be made.” Students may experience an increase in self-motivation if the academic and motivational climates include humor to lessen anxiety. Students may also come to class more often and be willing to take risks even if they have experienced oral communication anxiety.

**Conclusion**

The data I collected was a mirror into the varied worldviews of my participants. Some of the comments were contradictory while some respondents agreed with their peers. I drew parallels and disagreements with my literature review. As a whole, patterns emerged affirming teaching practices were more valued than professor-student connections outside of the classroom. Although students appreciated seeing professors outside of the classroom at
department events and on campus for brief and casual conversations, the casual encounters did not constitute rapport-building. Furthermore, students did not expect to have continuing connections with their professors after the conclusion of courses.

Students kept commenting on their fear of making mistakes while speaking French and advised professors to speak to classes about anxiety being a normal and expected feeling. Participants further recommended professors make it clear mistakes were not only acceptable but welcomed. It is advised that professors also state mistakes are a normal part of learning a foreign language. In Chapter Five, I present the overarching contribution of my study, give implications and recommendations for policy and practice, and share recommendations for future scholarship.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

While undertaking this study, I wanted to solve the puzzle of professor-student rapport as it affected oral communication anxiety in college students who took French as a foreign language. Subsequently, I asked the following research questions:

1. What practices do college students in French identify as being valuable in building student/professor rapport inside and outside of classroom?
2. What practices do college students in French identify as being valuable for reducing oral communication anxiety inside and outside of the classroom?
3. Which changes do college students in French suggest can be made in professors’ pedagogical approaches, classroom atmosphere, and rapport-building to alleviate learners’ oral communication anxiety?

The written interviews sought input from college students in French about professor-student rapport outside of the classroom, professor-student rapport inside of the classroom, professor teaching practices that reduced anxiety, and student recommendations for professors to reduce oral communication anxiety. The participants’ answers successfully shed light on the dilemma I was trying to unravel.

Although there exists previous research about scales measuring student anxiety (Gilkinson, 1942; Glass et al., 1982; McCroskey, 1997; Paul, 1966), personality traits associated with oral communication anxiety and willingness to communicate (Diener & Lucas, 2019; Dweck, 2008; MacIntyre et al., 1998; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; Oz, 2014), oral communication anxiety in the foreign language classroom (Bodie, 2010; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Rassaei, 2015), positive classroom climate (Aida, 1994;
Anderman et al., 2011; De Vito, 1986; Fassinger, 1995; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Sparks, 2019), and pedagogical approaches (Foss & Reitzel, 1988; Frymer & Houser, 2000; Young, 1991), I did not find many studies about educator-learner connections that would result in alleviating foreign language oral communication anxiety at the college level. This study helped to fill that gap. In this chapter, I discuss implications and recommendations for practice, policy, and scholarship related to professor-student rapport as it relates to oral communication anxiety among college students and recent alumni.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Colleges and universities are places where high expectations exist. Language professors at Wildwood College demand the highest level of performance from each student. Yet, those expectations may cause anxiety in students. Students in my study affirmed they experienced varied levels of anxiety ranging from mild feelings of annoyance to missing classes due to intense anxiety. Most participants disliked and felt uncomfortable speaking French in front of an entire class and professors. However, speaking a foreign language is necessary for oral communication success in the classroom, and certain employment such as translating, interpreting, publishing, becoming a flight attendant, teaching, working for Francophone companies, and choosing a career in tourism and hospitality. Teachers seem to be conscious of students who experience oral communication anxiety (Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016), but my participants noted, despite efforts their professors made in teaching practices, anxiety was still present. Anxiety may never be completely eradicated from the foreign language classroom, but the data were nevertheless clear about the need to change certain teaching practices.

Briefly, the recommendations for practice I include below are: providing a safe and relaxed environment, speaking to classes about anxiety, announcing participation is voluntary
(no cold-calling), establishing a low-stakes environment, planning more small group and pair activities, using humor and games, reiterating participation is not a competition with other students, and gauging students’ moods. All these recommendations are listed in order of importance to my participants and belong in the academic/motivational climate.

In addition to implementing anxiety-reducing activities throughout the semester, professors can start the semester by speaking to students about oral communication anxiety. Participants offered the suggestion that students would benefit from professors reassuring their classes by indicating oral communication anxiety is normal in language classes and the majority of students experience it. Although anxiety may have been a feeling experienced in previous French courses, it need not be present. Professors can announce participation in front of the entire class is voluntary and grades will not depend on it. Professors can further encourage their students to speak in small groups, which may give them the impetus and self-confidence needed to participate in front of the entire class. However, this encouragement can also be followed by restating that, though participation is expected, students are encouraged to participate in front of the whole class if this does not cause anxieties. There are other ways to participate without causing anxieties such as during small group or partner activities, singing a song together with classmates, taking part in listen-repeat exercises, and games where there is no individual exposure. In time, timid students may increase their willingness to participate. The data showed the students who were not as willing to speak in front of the whole class and were more apt to participate in small groups became more confident and were eventually not afraid of their classmates’ evaluations and appraisals.

According to the participants, more effort to lessen anxiety needs to be made by professors. Even if a handful of students are stressed about speaking a foreign language in class,
the implication is that every student’s individuals needs should to be addressed. Some of the suggestions made by students about teaching practices in need of improvement were listed by other participants as helpful methods professors were already demonstrating. One of my previous supervisors was convinced that, unless students are forced to speak the language in an impromptu manner and in front of others, they (the students) would not be prepared to survive and communicate in a country where the target language is spoken. This belief has come at a price for some participants. Some students felt inadequate when speaking in front of the professor, who they believed judged them and, worse, compared them to other students. These feelings of inadequacy did not only implicate the educators, but various participants commented on how other more proficient students made them feel indirectly ineffective because of the difference in communicative skills. Feelings of inadequacy may lead to low self-worth and cause students unjustified anxiety. The combination of professor expectations, and perceived judgements by classmates and teachers was enough for some students to stay home instead of coming to class and face humiliation. As listed by participants, professors must speak to their classes about oral communication anxiety as something normal and expected. The discussion can then continue and include professor remarks about how the classroom climate will be safe, nurturing, comfortable, relaxed, and fun.

Including entertaining and kinetic activities such as games and skits in the French classroom was very important to some respondents and could provide an environment that would be low-stakes. An example of a low-stakes environment would be to provide students with helpful comments for improvement instead of grades, as formative assessments. Moreover, a professor might take notes from overheard pair activities and conversations or might make a compilation of written errors from compositions. Notes on written and spoken activities can then
be shared on an overhead projector with the entire class at a later time without identifiers to protect students who may feel targeted or who could feel a sense of embarrassment. These are examples of a low-stakes climate students claimed would help relieve their oral communication anxiety.

Another recommendation from participants was that professors know their students’ names and perhaps even gauge students’ moods. When a student is navigating a difficult time and shows it through body language or non-verbal cues, the professor is advised to be aware of the student’s anxiety and proceed gently and appropriately by leaving that particular student alone in class, and perhaps emailing to check-in later. Shyness and anxiety are displayed differently in different students and that is why it is essential to know students as quickly as possible at the beginning of the semester. I am not including recommendations for the social climate because it was not important to my participants. Students did appreciate professors’ attendance at their extracurricular activities and at department events, but these social events did not help with student in-class oral communication anxiety.

Implications and Recommendations for Policy

The aim of my research was not to change an entire college’s policies. However, it became clear to me that, if particular policies were to change, it would be at the classroom level where there is a strong opportunity for professors to positively impact students. The problem I saw involved professors and their students inside of a classroom. Department chairs would do well to observe, review, and evaluate professors’ classes and which practices are being implemented that may aggravate student anxiety. Pedagogical issues ought to be addressed with individual professors and in department meetings. Aside from comments by the department chair and discussions in meetings, it would be advisable for professors to observe other professors’
classes in the same department and/or in other language departments. By observing other educators, new anxiety-reducing methods could emerge and be implemented in any classroom. The department may also consider organizing professional development opportunities for its members that address teaching practices that benefit or hinder students especially as it pertains to oral communication anxiety. Interested professors could be proactive and seek out workshops or presentations that focus on teaching methods. Finally, professors might consider recording their own classes and engage in reflexivity. It is hoped that, if professors become experts on pedagogical approaches that reduce oral communication anxiety by attending a number of seminars or classes, educators can then present the skills needed to better meet the needs of all students to other language instructors.

Overall, I recommend policy changes start at the department level. Ideas can be shared at meetings. From these ideas, individual professors can choose to strengthen their pedagogical expertise by attending other professors’ courses to learn about methods used in the same department and/or other departments. Following these observations, professors can implement new anxiety-reducing practices in their own classrooms. Finally, the supervisor or department head could conduct observations in courses where the lesson plans include a variety of activities that help students to reduce their anxieties. Another reason why I believe, for my research, policy must begin to change at the micro level is that anxieties are manifested in different ways by every individual and each student reacts dissimilarly when faced with apprehensions. Therefore, it is incumbent on the professor to begin the change needed in their own classroom.

**Implications and Recommendations for Scholarship**

Even though the sample for this study was adequate as a dissertation study, future research would benefit from a quantitative study using a larger sample, or follow-up in-person or
phone interviews to ask probing questions. Also, since I only sought participants from a small, private, Midwestern liberal arts college exclusively serving undergraduate students, I would recommend this research be extended to community colleges as well as larger colleges and universities throughout the United States of America and even throughout the world, including undergraduate and graduate students. Larger higher education institutions might provide different answers as their class sizes are often larger, thus having the possibility of providing more diverse class dynamics and connections between professors and students.

Additionally, since my literature review included a large section on personality traits leading to student anxiety, I would recommend preliminary phone interviews be administered exploring the connections between personality traits and anxiety to ascertain whether some students are predisposed to oral communication anxiety. This could be part of a longitudinal study where the same students would be observed, interviewed, and analyzed over a longer period of time. Further, I did not ask my participants any demographic information as it was beyond the scope of my research, but it would be beneficial and would add another analytical level to ask participants about their demographics such as age and gender. Demographics coupled with personality traits may provide information about oral communication anxiety that would take the research in another direction.

It would be extremely interesting to conduct additional studies focusing specifically on oral communication anxiety during Covid-19. The findings may indicate whether anxiety increased, decreased, or stayed the same. One of the interests would lie in how teaching practices changed because of online education due to Covid-19, and what impact this had on oral communication anxiety.
Finally, I would like to see my research expanded to professors. Now that I know what student perceptions, understandings, and recommendations are for reducing oral communication anxiety through professor practices in and out of the classroom, future research could pose similar questions to professors. It is my hope that whatever future research takes place, this study will act as a foundational base on which to add.

**Unexpected Findings and Reflexivity**

At the outset of this study, I wanted to undertake this research to provide evidence that students benefited from connections with professors outside of the classroom and it was my hope the data I received would prove such rapport decreased or eliminated oral communication anxiety in the French college classroom. However, I was taken by surprise to discover few students sought professor-student rapport outside of the classroom or after applicable coursework was finished nor did they expect it. I thought if students felt closer to their professors, it would reflect on oral participation in the classroom. Aside from attending office hours, seeing professors at department events, exchanging emails with professors, superficial encounters on campus where pleasantries were exchanged, and coming early or staying after class, students did not feel the need to see professors outside of class. The kind of rapport that could be built between professors and students outside of the classroom may not be the answer according to Wildwood College students of French. Participants overwhelmingly agreed teaching practices were the important thing and certainly far more important that rapport-building outside of the classroom.

This has caused me to reflect on my teaching practices. It would be more valuable to focus on what I can do inside of the classroom rather than pursue connections outside of the
classroom. Certainly, I will still attend students’ activities, but its purpose will not be to build connections but rather to show support.

**Conclusion**

It is clear college students in French at Wildwood College do not look to connections or rapport with their professors outside of the classroom as the answer to reducing oral communication anxiety. The overwhelming participant responses pointed to better teaching practices as a means to reduce oral communication anxiety. Although attending students’ extracurricular activities and having unexpected conversations on campus are welcomed by students, they are not professor behaviors that contribute to student well-being, self-worth, and confidence when speaking French in class. Students commented on how helpful and encouraging French professors are at Wildwood College. Because professors are concerned about helping their students with oral communication anxiety, it is advisable for the professors to examine their teaching practices to further alleviate all students who are experiencing anxiety while speaking French in front of large groups. I hope my research has shown professors seem to be “doing a good job” according to participants and more work could be done in the area of teaching practices and professors will take this advice at heart as it will benefit all students.
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Appendix A: Consent Form

ORAL COMMUNICATION ANXIETY IN FRENCH COURSES – PROFESSOR/STUDENT CONNECTIONS

You are invited to be in a research study examining the impact of professor-student rapport on college students’ oral communication anxieties in French classes at Wildwood College. You were chosen because you were a French student at Wildwood College during the period of September 2015 to May 2020. Your answers will remain completely anonymous and will only be used for this research project. No personal information will be released. There are no risks or benefits to you in participating. The written interview is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. By choosing not to participate or withdrawing, your relationship with Wildwood College and its French professors will not be harmed. If you have any questions about the project you may contact the Concordia University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by emailing irb@csp.edu or by calling 651-641-8723 and by contacting Wildwood College’s IRB.

This study is being conducted by Claude Cassagne, Doctoral Candidate, Concordia University, St Paul, Minnesota, Department of Educational Leadership.

Please do not include any identifiers in your replies (professor name, class name, class number, class level, semester, or year you took the course)

By selecting “I agree” below, you are allowing the information you supply to be used in this research project. Thank you.

I agree

I do not agree
## Appendix B: Written Interview Questions

### Building Rapport Outside the Classroom

1. How, if at all, have French professors shown interest in your well-being?

2. In which ways, if any, have French professors provided support inside the classroom to build rapport?

### Building Rapport Outside the Classroom

3. In which ways, if any, have French professors provided support outside of the classroom and class hours to build rapport?

4. How, if at all, have French professors shown interest in your extracurricular activities?

5. How, if at all, has your connection with French professors continued after the course was completed?

### Reducing Anxiety Inside the Classroom

6. In what ways, if any, did your French professors’ teaching practices* reduce anxiety in the classroom?

   *Teaching practices refers to professors’ actions and behaviors as well as classroom activities that facilitate student-to-student communication skills.

7. Thinking of verbal cues, state which verbal cues, if any, French professors have used that reduced anxiety?

8. Thinking of nonverbal cues, state which nonverbal cues, if any, French professors used that reduced anxiety?

9. What recommendations do you have for French professors to reduce oral communication anxiety and why?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about student-professor rapport and/or reducing oral communication anxiety that has not been asked or mentioned?

### Personality Traits: Introversion and Extroversion

11. Do you identify mostly as an introvert or mostly as an extrovert?
Appendix C: Concordia University, St. Paul IRB Approval

TO: cassagnc@csp.edu
CC: Humans Subjects Review Committee File

The IRB Human Subjects Committee reviewed the referenced study under the exempt procedures according to federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.104d (2): RESEARCH THAT ONLY INCLUDES INTERACTIONS INVOLVING EDUCATIONAL TESTS (COGNITIVE, DIAGNOSTIC, APTITUDE, ACHIEVEMENT), SURVEY PROCEDURES, INTERVIEW PROCEDURES, OR OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR (INCLUDING VISUAL OR AUDITORY RECORDING).

Study Number: 2020_88
Principal Investigator: Claude Cassagne
Title: Alleviating Oral Communication Anxieties in the College Foreign Language Classroom: Connections Between Educator and Learner

Classification: [X] Exempt  [ ] Expedited  [ ] Full Review

Approved [X]

Approved with modifications: [ ] [See attached]
Declined [ ] [See attached]

Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research. Please remember that any changes in your protocol need to be approved through the IRB Committee. When projects are terminated or completed, the IRB Committee should be informed in order to comply with Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Regulations, Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 (45 CFR 46). If you have questions, please call the IRB Chair at (651) 641-8723.

Signature: [Signature]
Chair, Humans Subjects Review Committee
Date: October 17, 2020

Concordia University • 1282 Concordia Avenue • St. Paul, Minnesota 55104-5494 • 651.641.8230 • www.csp.edu
Appendix D: Wildwood College IRB Approval

Wildwood College Institutional Review Board

Date: October 22, 2020

TO: Claude Cassagne

Department of Educational Leadership, Concordia University Department of French and Francophone Studies, Wildwood College

FROM: IRB Chair

Wildwood College IRB

RE: Alleviating Oral Communication Anxieties in the College Foreign Language Classroom: Connections Between Educator and Learner

Dear Mr. Cassagne,

Thank you for sharing with Wildwood’s IRB materials documenting the protocols for your research project “Alleviating Oral Communication Anxieties in the College Foreign Language Classroom: Connections Between Educator and Learner.” I also received a copy of the letter from Concordia University’s IRB noting its approval of your project.

Since current Wildwood students may participate in your project, Wildwood is considered an engaged institution and therefore may also participate in the review of protocols. After reviewing your research protocols and materials and your methods for obtaining informed consent and protecting the confidentiality of respondents, I have determined that no additional measures to protect research participants are necessary. Your informed consent procedures, research
procedures and interview protocol are well-designed to ensure the confidentiality, autonomy, and interests of your subjects. I also note that your protocols comply with Wildwood’s best practices for human participants research during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a matter of course, I want to make sure that you are in touch with Wildwood College’s Survey Coordination Committee, as the intervention you propose is also subject to the review and approval of that body.

If you encounter unanticipated problems regarding risks to human participants or if you wish to make a change to the protocols detailed in your application, please be sure to be in touch with Concordia University’s IRB.

Do let me know if you have any questions. Good luck with your valuable research.
October 27, 2020

Hi Claude (cc: Department Chair),

The Survey Coordinating Committee has approved this survey. Claude -- I'll follow up with you separately with some logistics.
Appendix F: Wildwood College French and Francophone Studies Department’s Chair

Approval of Written Interview Questions

Dear Claude,

It looks like everything is in order and you have all the committees’ approval. I appreciate that you revised the questions. Since Wildwood’s IRB and the Wildwood Committee have approved your questionnaire, I feel I can approve it as well. Can you remind me of the period you are surveying? and are you surveying all French courses or language sequences?

Félicitations et à bientôt,
### Appendix G: Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor support outside classroom</th>
<th>Professor support inside classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attending extracurricular activities</td>
<td>Interest in well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office hours</td>
<td>Calming/relaxing/inviting/safe environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department events</td>
<td>Low stakes/allow mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations/connections on campus</td>
<td>Casual/informal conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailing</td>
<td>No cold calling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kind, supportive, encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Recommendations</strong></td>
<td>Allow English/Frangais</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t force participation</td>
<td>Joking/games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe, comfortable environment</td>
<td>Recasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistakes ok</td>
<td>Kind, positive correcting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>Smiling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors more vulnerable</td>
<td>Nodding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>Allow time to process tragedies/issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy, compassion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low stakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No cold calling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t expect perfection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect personal issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>