# Investigating ways of preventing students' anxiety during spontaneous Target Language use in the MFL classroom

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A Research & Development Project Submitted for the MSc Learning & Teaching 2015

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‘In general, educators have two options when dealing with anxious students: 1) they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety-provoking situation; or 2) they can make the learning context less stressful’. (Horwitz et al, 1986: 131)

**Investigating ways of preventing students’ anxiety during spontaneous Target Language use in the Modern Foreign Language classroom.**

## Abstract

Researchers, teachers and learners agree on the importance of spontaneous speech in the second language, though previous research has found that this is the most frightening language skill. A review of the literature has suggested that educators have two options when dealing with anxious students: they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety-provoking situation; or they can make the learning context less stressful. The aim of this research project was to discover what impact each of these options had on learners' stated levels of anxiety. Following interventions on three classes alongside a control group, data from questionnaires, interviews and observations indicate that explicit affective strategy training only helped students who were already highly anxious. Making the learning context less stressful had observable positive results on all pupils. Whilst students and teachers believed that a combination of methods would bring about the optimum level reduction in oral communication anxiety, results indicate that this was not the case. Therefore further research is planned to identify how best a mixed-method approach could work for all pupils.

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# 1. Rationale

## 1.1 Speaking is important yet underdeveloped

Oral communication, by its very name and nature, is an essential skill to be learnt in the pursuit of second language acquisition. This is reflected in current legislation in UK schools, where it is one of the four key skills along with listening, reading and writing throughout the Key Stage 3 and 4 programme of study and post-16 syllabuses and specifications. Not only researchers but also students agree on the importance of spontaneous speech. In Liu & Littlewood's study (1997), when university students and teachers were asked to choose two features (out of a choice of 10) that they considered most important for successful spoken academic communication, both parties agreed that unplanned, spontaneous speech was the most important. This view is supported by Ofsted, who state that 'the natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern languages course' (Department of Education and Science, 1990). Yet despite this, speaking has been found to be the weakest skill in four out of five schools (Ofsted, 2011) and is viewed by pupils as the least well-developed skill (Ofsted, 2008).

Within the context of an all girls selective private school, in the lower school, speaking is assessed with equal weighting to the other three skills of listening, reading and writing. Indeed in GCSE and A level examinations it is assessed as 30% of

the overall grade. Speaking is viewed by the students as important, yet they remain reluctant to use the L2 in the classroom. Despite the fact that teachers at this school work hard to develop speaking confidence, through lunchtime conversation clubs and one-to-one practice sessions in lesson time, students at this high-achieving school have even been known to ask if they can simply read out their written prepared answers in response to a spontaneous question. My goal as an MFL teacher is to promote creative speech, gradually prompting students towards spontaneity within meaningful situations. As a language learner, too, I feel it is paramount to be able to communicate with native speakers but is also one of the most difficult skills.

## 1.2 How is stress manifested in learners and what is it's impact?

Yalçin and Inceçay (2014) report that anxious foreign language students identify speaking in the target language as the most frightening language skill. Indeed, psychologist McCroskey described symptoms he had experienced during his time teaching (and can be seen in the research school and many UK schools today) when it was time for pupils to speak in public: crying, fainting, disappearing, people claiming they are not ready, and absence (2006:90). In addition to this, the worsening state of children and young people's mental health in the UK, in particular the sharp rise in the number of schoolgirls at risk of emotional problems of 7% over the last 5 years (Mundasad, 2015) has been widely reported in the media recently, suggesting that anxiety has a clear impact on achievement.

This stress and anxiety can also be seen in pupils in the school I currently work at. Many students are reluctant to communicate in the L2 and need counselling when it is time for speaking assessment. In the last few months, one able student who was very capable in other areas of French language learning had a panic attack because her hard working ethos stumped by the specific requirements of L2 oral production. I can empathise from my own experience as a linguist that engaging in a number of cognitive processes for oral communication in a foreign language can cause a lot of anxiety, in front of peers, teachers and unsympathetic native-speakers.

## 1.3 How can we reduce speaking anxiety?

Faced with the problem of anxious students, one solution for encouraging participation and motivation suggested by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2012) is the Group Talk model, which involves group tasks based on learning and expressing phrases which can then be used to express opinions on a range of engaging stimuli. It is also pleasing to see that the KS2 Framework for Languages (DfES, 2005) boasts Language Learning Strategies as one of its essential strands, which may go some way to reducing anxiety in the context of oral communication.

In my own school context, my department already works hard to support individuals who show high levels of anxiety on a one-to-one basis. I wonder whether

a whole-class approach to reducing anxiety may be more effective. The school is also researching other ways to make speaking more appealing, including investing in a range of resources aimed at promoting spontaneous target language use.

As a recent learner of Luganda (a Bantu language widely spoken in Southern Uganda) during my time teaching in East Africa, my strategy for conversation survival was to learn key phrases that were suitable across a number of contexts and would allow me to contribute spontaneously to conversation, such as 'kitufu' (it's true) and 'tofaayo' (it doesn't matter). In my own teaching experience I have enjoyed teaching strategies to L2 learners and feel that this gives them a sense of agency. I have often wondered if my passion for teaching language learning strategies and my concern for reducing L2 speaking anxiety could be effectively combined in the pursuit of spontaneous MFL oral communication in the classroom. I feel that this is of ultimate importance in a climate of apparent British reluctance to learn a foreign language at all, and the declining level of achievement in this domain (Saunders, 1998).

## 2. Review of the Literature

Though research into language learning anxiety has focused on a wide variety of questions and issues, this literature review provides the background of language learning anxiety and gives various explanations presented by several researchers,

focussing in particular on oral communication anxiety. It then attempts to address two suggestions in the research for lowering anxiety in the language classroom, firstly on strategies that tackle oral communication anxiety in particular as studied in L2 research, followed by ways of making the learning context less stressful. Finally, questions for further research on L2 oral communication anxiety reduction are highlighted.

- What is the goal of MFL speaking and what are the problems?
- Why is anxiety a problem for language learning?
- Why are students so anxious?
- What suggestions does the research offer?
- How can strategy instruction help language learners overcome their fear of speaking the Target Language?
- How can a less stressful learning environment affect learners' communication anxiety?

A comprehensive review of the literature reveals that comparisons among studies are often hindered by a lack of consistencies in a variety of areas, such as a lack of clearly defined vocabulary. Much of the research support for the arguments made here is drawn from first language (L1) contexts, without conclusive evidence that the results are directly transferrable to the L2 field.

## 2.1 Introduction - What is the goal of MFL speaking?

Developing oral skills is an essential goal for Modern Foreign Language teachers, and one that is highly valued by researchers and learners alike. For example, although opinions differ on the mechanics of why and how oral interaction contributes to language acquisition, it is still generally believed to lead to a growth in L2 competence (Gass & Varonis, 1994). In Liu & Littlewood's study (1997), when university students and teachers were asked to choose two features (out of a choice of 10) that they considered most important for successful spoken academic communication, both parties agreed that unplanned, spontaneous speech was the most important. Echoing this research, the Professional Development Consortium in MFL's second of four research based principles relating to oral interaction is that 'learners need to be encouraged to speak spontaneously and to say things that they are not sure are correct' (PDC in MFL, 2014). However according to evidence this is not always the case.

## 2.2 Anxiety

In recent years, the focus of language instruction has shifted from the narrow concern of developing the linguistic competence of the learner to the larger concern of responding to the language learner as a whole person within a larger social context. It is clear that the efforts of practitioners should be to promote spontaneous use of the target language, yet research and language teachers'

experience illustrate that language learning contexts are especially susceptible to causing anxiety arousal (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989; MacIntyre, 1995: 90). Campbell and Ortiz (1991: 159) believed that up to half of all language students experience debilitating levels of language anxiety, yet language anxiety is a complex phenomenon.

### 2.2.1 What is anxiety?

In the first theory of its' kind, Spielberger defined anxiety as 'the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system' (1983: 15), a theory that has been used in a considerable number of studies. In the field of second and foreign language acquisition, anxiety is widely regarded as an affective variable, usually defined as 'the emotional side of human behaviour in the second language process' (Brown, 1987: 99). This was termed by Krashen as an 'affective filter' (1981), a metaphor used to represent learners' imaginary negative emotional barrier which is erected when they feel threatened by, disinclined to engage with or emotionally unreceptive to the language input available to them. Anxiety is one of five affective variables found in the literature (Krashen, 1982) – anxiety, motivation, self-esteem, attitude, risk-taking. Among all of the affective variables, anxiety is one of the most researched, widely accepted as an interference to language acquisition, yet its interpretation is often inconclusive.

While students may participate actively in activities incorporating other skills such as reading, writing and listening, anxiety has been found to be a unique factor affecting learners' oral production. Both nervous students and researchers report stress when they have to speak in the L2 in the classroom (Wörde, 2003). It is therefore Horwitz et al's (1986) first type of anxiety, that of communication apprehension – a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people that is of particular interest to the language teacher in the pursuit of spontaneous target language use. According to Horwitz et al (1986), difficulty in speaking in dyads or groups (oral communication anxiety) or in public is just one manifestation of communication apprehension. Indeed, data from a study of 20000 students at three universities in the USA suggested that 15-20% suffer from debilitating communication apprehension (Friedman, 1980). Whilst the vast majority of research has taken place in EFL contexts, it could be argued that their findings may still be seen to have relevance to any second language learning context. Similarly, in interviews with Krashen, Omaggio, Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin, (Young, 1992) all five respondents agreed that speaking (as opposed to listening, reading and writing) in the foreign languages was probably the biggest cause of anxiety. Krashen's view was that 'we often expect people to perform beyond their acquired competence' (p. 163), forcing them to break the silent-period before they are ready.

Despite ongoing research into language anxiety, its effects on learners appear complex and difficult to measure. Horwitz et al (1986) went some way to identify language anxiety in the classroom with reliability and validity through their landmark Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), pilot tested by seventy five introductory Spanish students at the University of Texas. However, there remains a distinct lack of concrete methods for classifying and identifying language anxiety.

### 2.2.3 Effect of anxiety on language learning

#### *2.2.3.1 Positive or negative?*

It has been confirmed by research that pupils' anxiety exists in the classroom and it has generally been viewed as a particularly negative psychological factor in the language learning process by many of the researchers and academics who have considered its considerable impact since as early as the 1950s. Yet researchers such as Daubney (2007) have questioned the notion that anxiety is always a negative influence, arguing that anxiety 'may complement creativity in the classroom and spur students on to perform better'. Some have even pointed to the potential benefits of anxiety (Mathews, 1996; Spielmann and Radnofsky, 2001). However, whereas 'facilitating anxiety produces positive results, too much anxiety can cause poor performance (Scovel 1978). It is this debilitating rather than facilitating measure, based on Alpert and Haber's construct (1960), that will be henceforth discussed.

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**Figure 1 – Inverted 'U' relation between anxiety and performance (MacIntyre, 1995: 92)**

### *2.2.3.2 Effects on second language acquisition and achievement*

Unfortunately the research into the relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning has provided mixed and confusing results, though it is clear that oral communication anxiety can have physiological effects – even adult learners were found to avoid eye-contact with their teacher altogether in Mohamad & Wahid's study among male and female business students in one Malaysian university (2009).

The pattern of evidence generated from the large group of studies on human communication in general suggests that oral communication anxiety typically leads to a consistent pattern of communication avoidance or withdrawal from situations

where communication is likely to occur, '…which then turns out to be a real problem as those learners hardly ever volunteer to respond to questions, and rarely carry out a conversation in L2 with their peers and the teacher' (Savaşçi, 2014: 2686). This was described by Lucas (1984), within the context of Japanese EFL learners in USA universities as both 'devastating' (p. 593) and 'catastrophic' (p. 597). This is a worry for all language teaching professionals because it drastically reduces their output (Krashen: 1982), which is already low in the UK schools context.

Eysenck (1979: 364) reconceptualised language anxiety in terms of cognition, concluding that:

> Worry and other task-irrelevant cognitive activities associated with anxiety always impair the quality of performance. The major reason for this is that the task-irrelevant information ... competes with task-relevant information for space in the processing system.

Similarly, Krashen (1981) claimed that anxiety contributes to the affective filter, preventing students from receiving input and therefore language learning fails to progress. Further research into language anxiety since then has also suggested that anxiety is conducive to cognitive interference in performing specific tasks (Covington, Omelich & Schwarzer, 1986).

The relative importance of Stern's observation (1983: 386) that, 'the affective component contributes at least as much as and often more to language learning than the cognitive skills represented by aptitude assessment' is supported by data reported by Gardner, Smythe, Clément and Gliksman (1976). Though their research was carried out in Canada, therefore the context is not directly translatable to this study's context, the reliability, validity and thus utility of the research on approximately 1000 students for each grade level across five grade levels showed French class anxiety among the 3 highest correlates in 11 of 15 possible cases, behind language aptitude and motivation. It could therefore be concluded that anxiety is one of the most reliable predictors of unsuccessful second language learning, a claim also echoed by Arnold (1999: 8), who cites language anxiety as 'possibly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process'. However, Young (1986) also concluded in her study on the relationship between anxiety and foreign language proficiency ratings in unofficial test situations that once the effects of an individual's target language proficiency were accounted for, the correlations were no longer significant – I.e. oral performance no longer decreased as anxiety increased.

### 2.2.4 Why change?

Many questions remain unanswered regarding language anxiety. Indeed, only Oxford (1999) has investigated whether language anxiety is a short-term or lasting characteristic. Sadly, what the research evidence shows is that the language

classroom is the optimum climate for communication apprehension and the teacher's 'job is doomed to failure if the affective ground in which the sticks are planted is not firm' (Dörnyei & Malderez, 1997: 65). Horwitz et al have provided a suggestion (1986: 131):

> In general, educators have two options when dealing with anxious students: 1) they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety- provoking situation; or 2) they can make the learning context less stressful.

Knowing now what we do, this research study will investigate ways in which educators can both help learners to cope in spontaneous language situations and make the learning context itself less stressful. According to Young, the objective in ridding language learning of unnecessary anxiety is to promote language acquisition and the interest and motivation to do this. By reducing anxiety as a barrier to learning, 'we will begin to move in that direction' (1991: 434).

## 2.3 'Help them to cope with existing anxiety provoking situation' – strategies

### 2.3.1 A definition of language learning strategies

The strategies that language learners employ to understand, learn or remember information has been a primary concern of the researchers dealing with the area of foreign language learning since the mid-1970s. Grenfell (2007: 10) states that 'in the early days of language learning strategy research, the word "strategy" was often used synonymously with "techniques", "tactics", "tricks" and general dispositions.'

Despite some lack of clarity, it is nevertheless important to decide on a definition. Macaro (2003: 109) helpfully defines learning or learner strategies (which will be used as a definition in this study) as:

> The actions that learners take in order to decode, process, store and retrieve language. For example, deciding to skip an unknown word in a text and come back to it later is a learner strategy.

However, in his overview of recent advances into research on motivation to learn a foreign or second language (L2), Dörnyei (2003) suggests that strategy research faces serious theoretical difficulties surrounding the specific definition of the concept of 'learning strategies' and their measurement, as echoed by other researchers' concerns over the substantial problems of definition, scope and applicability (Lynch, 2009; Macaro, 2006). Swan (2008) goes so far as to argue the danger that the term 'strategy' becomes too heterogeneous and all-inclusive to be useful:

> In fact, during the past decade educational psychology has moved towards abandoning the term 'learning strategy' altogether, and learners' strategic contribution to their own learning has increasingly been discussed under the label of *self-regulatory learning* instead (Dörnyei, 2003: 17).

### 2.3.2 Towards a taxonomy of language learning strategies

There has been a comprehensive attempt over the years by a number of researchers to develop a taxonomy of language learning strategies of potential value to the second language learner (Wenden & Rubin, 1987; O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-

Manzanares, Küpper, & Russo, 1985; Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1992; Ellis, 1994). Rubin (1975), for example, provided some much needed strategy classification consisting of *direct* and *indirect* language learning strategies. Direct strategies are specific procedures that learners can use to improve their language skills. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, include evaluating one's learning and cooperating with others. Alternatively, Fillmore (1979) only observed five participants but identified two main groups of language learning strategies – *social* and *cognitive*.

Further to these studies, three other larger studies proposed taxonomies using a range of data collection techniques. O'Malley and Chamot's taxonomy (1990) used interviews and observation to define three types of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social or affective and is used as a basis for much current research. Wenden's less popular taxonomy uses similar metacognitive strategies, though he labels these 'self-management strategies' (1991).

Thirdly Oxford, who is one of the key researchers in the field, developed her own taxonomy of strategies using a different method of data collection through observation and interviews (1990), attempting to redress the perceived problem that many strategy inventories appeared to emphasise cognitive and metacognitive strategies and to ascribe much less importance to affective and social strategies. Described by Ellis as 'perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning

strategies to date' (1994: 539) and similarly to Rubin (1975), she divides language strategies into two main groups: *direct* and *indirect* strategies. All direct language strategies require mental processing of the language, but the three groups of direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) do this processing differently and for different purposes. Strategies that support the language learning process are called indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies). These have become a landmark taxonomy of strategies are outlined in the table below.

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**Figure 2 – Oxford's strategy classification system (1990: 17)**

In summary, all of the categorisations proposed in the literature ultimately tend to acknowledge - to varying degrees of stress and importance – the similar themes of socioaffective, cognitive and metacognitive strategies among others.

However, the plethora of inventories has been criticised by Swan (2008: 271) as an 'enormous proliferation of strategies that is a disturbing feature of some of the literature'. He suggests instead an approach categorised by target such as 'ways of memorising vocabulary', 'ways of internalising difficult grammar rules'. However, this may simply replicate existing strategies but under different subheadings. Ridgway (2000), too, expresses his alliance with the many sceptics of strategy-based approaches. His point is not so much that skills and strategies don't exist, but that since they cannot be differentiated empirically, and since practice appears to be at least as good a way of developing them as explicit training, they are not useful concepts for developing a methodological approach in the receptive skills, particularly in listening.

### 2.3.3 Oral communication strategies

The underlying assumption pervading strategy research is that appropriate classroom organization and detailed task definition, although imperative, are not always sufficient for achieving successful non-native language interaction. As a result, 'oral communication strategies specifically focus on strategic behaviours that

learners use when facing communication problems during interactional tasks.'

(Nakatani, 2006: 152)

Attempting to redress the lack of research on oral communication strategies, especially a lack of a fully established set of assessment procedures. Nakatani (2006) developed an Oral Communication Strategy Inventory (OCSI). Carried out within the EFL context in Japan, piloted with 80 students and then used with a further 400 other students, student results were compared with the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

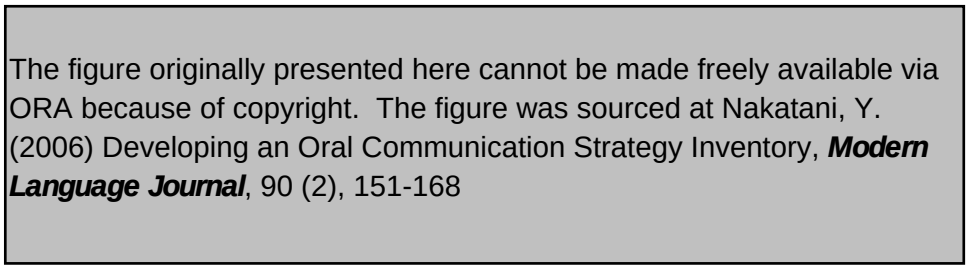



**Figure 3 – Nakatani's OCSI (2006: 155-156)**

Though other researchers like Oxford and her colleagues have tried over the years, no study deals with an entirely reliable and valid strategy inventory for communication tasks or allows a way of systematically gathering information about learner perception of strategy use during communicative tasks. Whilst remembering that the nature of strategy use and frequency of their use depend to some degree

on both specific classroom contexts and on student proficiency levels, most of the existing research is specific only to EFL contexts and it is therefore difficult to draw direct comparisons.

### 2.3.4 Affective strategies for anxiety reduction

Higher level learners in Nakatani's 2006 study reported using strategies for controlling affective factors, indicating that the specific training that focuses on raising learners' awareness of such strategies could have a positive outcome, though Nakatani goes further to point out that there has been little research on how learners use these strategies. Indeed, most affective strategy research consists of theoretical or correlational studies based solely on learners' perceptions rather than intervention studies.

Nevertheless, affective strategies, one strand of Oxford's three indirect strategies could be seen to have a direct application for lowering oral communication anxiety, as detailed in the table below (Oxford 1990: 141):

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**Figure 4 – Oxford's Affective Strategies**

I would suggest that there is a need for more longitudinal research on the model and type of affective strategy instruction that is most effective for reducing anxiety during spontaneous target language use.

### 2.3.5 Can anxiety-reducing strategies be taught explicitly and successfully?

It is clear that strategy research has the potential to impact curriculum design and pedagogy. Cohen (1998) and Wenden (2002) among others advocate the incorporation of learner strategy training into learning programs, though Chamot (2004: 23) states that 'research on language learning strategy instruction needs to build on the relatively few studies in this area'.

There is little agreement on the issue of whether strategy instruction should be integrated into the language curriculum or taught separately. In her synthesis of various research studies, Chamot (2004) reports that most researchers in second language acquisition agree on the importance of explicitness in strategy instruction. She argues that 'teachers should certainly opt for explicit instruction and should probably integrate the instruction into their regular coursework, rather than providing a separate learning strategies course' (2004: 19). As she points out, comparative research on these two areas is lacking in second language acquisition.

In a study (1997) investigating the effects of strategy training, in which the experimental group was systematically trained in a range of strategies, Nunan found that subjects outperformed the control subjects on measures of motivation. While training in semantic and structural mapping to improve reading comprehension is supported by more robust evidence, By contrast, the results of Rossiter's (2003) intervention study examining the effects of affective strategy instruction on measures of second language proficiency and of self-efficacy (rather than anxiety reduction) provided no significant between-group benefit, suggesting that teachers should not devote valuable time to the ongoing development of affective strategies. Evidently the small number of studies and varied relevance and reliability certainly brings about questions of whether this strategy training is measurably effective.

Among the more sceptical commentators on the effectiveness of training in communication and learning strategies in general (Rees-Miller, 1993; Tudor, 1996),

Swan (2008) argues that teachers risk 'swamping them with multifarious and complex inventories of ill-defined strategies.' Swan concludes that in selecting strategies for teaching, these can only be constructive when they are genuinely teachable, clearly targeted and plausibly effective.

Ridgway (2000) warns that a strategy-based approach may depreciate the value of practice. Though his argument is not based on a specific study and must therefore be treated with caution, he even argues that when a learner is fully engaged with an activity (in his example a listening text), there is no cognitive capacity remaining for conscious strategies to operate. In addition, he warns of situations where the teacher is instructing in communicative skills which students already possess innately (e.g. guessing, predicting), making the process redundant and the teacher appear patronising.

Unsurprisingly, Graham (2007) found that very few teachers working with advanced learners in England spent time on promoting learning strategy use, perhaps because teaching practitioners are at a loss as to which specific strategies would be best taught, and how. More intervention studies are needed that identify clearly what kind of strategy instruction works with what kinds of learner and provide effective guidance for teachers.

Training learners to use certain strategies appears successful but the evidence is not compelling (small number of studies, varied relevance, varied reliability).

## 2.4 'Make the learning context less stressful'

But despite the great deal of research focusing on L2 speaking anxiety, and the common denominator among foreign language methods or approaches being the emphasis on creating a low anxiety classroom atmosphere (Underwood, 1984), relatively few studies have suggested clear ways in which teachers can realistically make the learning context less stressful. Young reminds us that addressing the affective concerns of students is not to say learners should not be expected to produce in an FL or SL classroom; but that teachers should provide instruction that will increase their chances of success once they have to produce. Rather that 'first and foremost is the notion that language-learning context can be made less stressful by designing in-class instruction and developing language learning materials that give priority to the learner first' (1991: 245-246). Despite this, rarely are instructors given specific examples of how to reduce unnecessary anxiety in the foreign language class, which may, in turn, enhance learner motivation and positive attitudes toward second language learning (Young, 1991).

From a careful review of the research, some suggestions, both direct and indirect, for reducing language anxiety emerge. One qualitative investigation (amongst an

overwhelming majority of quantitative research) by Samimy and Rardin (1994) on 100 adult learners within a community language learning setting confirmed existing research which indicates that language learning anxiety can be responded to positively by approaches, methods and techniques which focus on 1) a supportive environment, 2) a non-judgmental teacher attitude, 3) activities that relate personally to learners, 4) activities that facilitate individual and community achievement and 5) peer support. Despite a lack of clearly defined vocabulary, it is based on these five areas that the literature review continues.

### 2.4.1 A supportive environment

The empirical evidence to date suggests that establishing a supportive environment is of upmost importance for teachers. Samimy and Rardin's descriptive study focused on Community Language Learning (CLL), an adult language learning situation characterised by security and group support. Though the investigation was based on adult learners, its thoroughly thought out methodology means that many of its findings may also have implications on SLA amongst younger learners. Whilst some learners in the study found other members of the class a hindrance, the vast majority of learners found a supportive environment a positive and facilitative experience. This suggests that some features of a humanistic and learner-centred approach such as CLL can be instrumental in creating a less anxiety-provoking environment, thereby alleviating unnecessary emotional barriers, but also enhancing language learning. However, the research failed to give clear guidance of

how to create a supportive environment aside from 'student-generated conversations, tape recordings of these conversations, and transcriptions which are then used for additional study. Games and songs complement these activities, allowing ample time for reflection on the student generated material' (pg 381).

### 2.4.2 A non-judgmental teacher attitude

According to Horwitz et al (1986: 132),

> Foreign language anxiety can probably be alleviated, at least to an extent, by a supportive teacher who will acknowledge students' feelings of isolation and helplessness and offer concrete suggestions for attaining foreign language confidence.

Further studies have gone into more detail about what exactly a teacher can do to reduce anxieties based on instructor- learner interactions. According to the language learners in Young's (1990) investigation of students' perspectives on anxiety and speaking, instructors who had a good sense of humour and were friendly, relaxed and patient, who made students feel comfortable, and who encouraged students to speak out were cited as helpful in reducing foreign language class anxiety. Young later (1991) indicated that instructors may need to assess their error correction approach as well as their attitudes toward learners. Price's subjects in interviews with highly anxious students (1991) also gave numerous suggestions for ways instructors could reduce language anxiety, such as giving students more positive reinforcement.

### 2.4.3 Activities that relate personally to learners

In the 1990s Dolly Young produced a body of data which recommended ways of reducing the learners' affective filter. First and foremost was her notion that language-learning context can be made less stressful by designing in-class instruction and developing language learning materials that give priority to the learner first, not to external factors, such as the material (for example, the textbook), or tests (1999: 245-246). She suggested several examples including using pictures to present vocabulary and associating the vocabulary with students and objects in class; personalizing grammar; and pairing students to work with another student or other students (1991). Young's efforts are certainly in alignment with Krashen's suggestion within the Natural Approach, that the best way to reduce language anxiety is to make the message so interesting that students forget that it is in another language:

> If pedagogy is consistent with the Input Hypothesis, that is, if input is comprehensible and interesting, if students are not forced to speak before they are ready and are not asked to perform beyond their acquired competence, this will do a great deal toward reducing anxiety' (Young, 1992: 164).

### 2.4.4 Activities that facilitate individual and community achievement.

Saunders and Crookall (1985) posit that playing games with the language, in particular games with an emphasis on problem-solving, can also reduce language

anxiety because players can be more easily forgiven for errors of judgment and poor communication within a game rather than in a real situation. They do advise, however, that:

> Some care has to be taken in the overzealous introduction of play in simulated contexts within the classroom, especially when games have the potential of arousing too much excitement, anxiety, or competition amongst more experienced or critical participants (1985: 171).

Long & Porter (1985) go further to purport that it appears to be the combination of small-group work with two-way tasks – I.e., with a mutually beneficial outcome - that is especially beneficial to learners in terms of the amount of talk produced, negotiation of meaning and comprehensible input obtained. This style of learning that facilitates individual and community achievement is in direct contrast to the more traditional competitive and individualistic classroom structures.

### 2.4.5 Peer support

Peer support has been widely promoted over the last 30 years within the general communicative approach to SLA. In a more broad sense, group work can be seen as beneficial within the Vygotskyan paradigm of sociocultural theory, in that development first 'appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane' (Vygotsky, 1981: 163). Stevick summarises group-related issues as being very much at the heart of the affective dimension of the L2 learning process in particular, arguing that success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses,

but more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom (1980: 4).

In contrast to the long tradition of 'adult centrism' (Johnson 1981: 5) in the classroom based on the belief that real learning is only possible from student-teacher interaction, and the so called ‘teacher effect’ investigated by Lee & Ng (2010) which is one known to be one of the main reasons for students’ reluctance to speak aloud in the L2 classroom, Varonis and Gas (1983) were some of the first researchers who argued for the value of non-native conversations as a nonthreatening context in which learners can practise language skills and make input comprehensible through negotiation. Since then, numerous studies have underscored the importance of group work as a positive affective climate that typically generates less anxiety and stress than other learning formats (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Young, 1990 &1992; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Dörnyei & Malderez; 1997). In addition, Johnson et al. (1995) point out that cooperation also produces more effective coping strategies to deal with anxiety than competition.

As can be clearly seen, on the whole, small group oral interaction in the L2 classroom has long been considered beneficial to communication apprehension reduction and this has been endorsed on both pedagogical and theoretical levels. However, studies have revealed a number of problems and limitations of small

group interaction in language classrooms, namely noise and distraction from the task and some pupils' domination or failure to participate (Pica & Doughty, 1985). One commonly held belief is that student-student interaction can only lead to the exchange and eventual fossilization of errors (James 1994), and that learners cannot provide each other with the accurate grammatical and sociolinguistic input that NSs can (Porter 1983). However, Pica & Doughty (1985) found that students perform at the same level of grammatical accuracy in their L2 output in unsupervised group talk as in public communication between teacher and pupil. Second language acquisition research has also shown errors to be an inevitable, even 'healthy', part of language development. Long & Porter (1985) and Dörnyei (1997) also warn that more information is needed as to the optimum size, composition, and internal organisation and cohesion of groups.

### 2.4.6 Case Study: Group Talk Method

Group Talk is a language learning project in one British school, which won the European Languages Label Outstanding Contribution in 2013, the European Award for Languages (EAL) in 2008. It has now been adopted by many other UK schools and has been labelled by OFSTED as outstanding practice. The aim of the Group Talk project is to 'create language learners who, above all else, interact confidently and spontaneously in the target language' (Ofsted, 2012: 1).

What is most interesting about the Group Talk model is that it marks a dramatic shift in the relationship between research and practice. It was not derived from theoretic models or justified by any research literature (meaning that it cannot be valid action research) but rather derived from teachers' practices and experiences. Nevertheless it exemplifies facets of theoretical models by coincidence. One report details the methods used in this project, which appear to mirror the five main methods found in the research literature that may help to make the learning context less stressful (Ofsted, 2012: 2):

- 'By providing the resources and technical support needed'
- 'By ensuring high expectations and a high level of consistency from all teachers'
- 'By making discussions meaningful and relevant to students'
- 'It feels like you're teaching yourself'
- 'Classrooms are set up cabaret-style to facilitate collaborative learning'

Since staff introduced the methods, students 'can often be heard in their modern language lessons using the target language spontaneously and with great enjoyment' (2012: 1). Yet despite its apparent success, there are no valid or reliable

studies into why or how it is so effective, and no conclusive proof of its longitudinal validity and therefore must be treated with caution.

This methodology may have strong implications for the current investigation due to its UK context, within the same Local Education Authority as this study's school, and its correlations with current research's suggestions for reducing language learning anxiety. However, this project is run in an 11-16 mixed academy rather than a privately maintained 11-18 all-girls school and therefore some of the methods may not work so effectively in this study's context.

## 2.5 Further suggestions in the research literature

### 2.5.1 Both methods together

According to the Professional Development Consortium (PDC in MFL, 2014), their 4th principle of Language Learning based on research evidence is that:

> Students should be explicitly taught strategies to use when faced with communication difficulties. These should be used alongside techniques for developing their oral fluency, such as repetition of tasks and chunking of pre-learnt words into whole phrases.

This claim may support indications in L2 research that a combination of both affective and effective learning experiences may create the optimum context for reducing oral communication anxiety but further research is clearly needed.

### 2.5.2 Can practice make perfect?

Through questionnaires adapted from FLCAS, focus-group interviews and open-ended essays, the researchers Yalçin and Inceçay (2014: 2624) established that 'practising speaking spontaneously supports students in the process of overcoming their fear.' However it is important to note that this was a small study on only 12 students in an EFL context amongst university students. There was also a gender bias with 9 female participants and only 3 male participants (find quote about gender?) though this could be seen as a useful piece of evidence in the all girl context. Similarly DeKeyser (2010) maintained that meaningful practice can be useful for fluency in speech , whilst Lightbown noted that practice is 'clearly beneficial and even essential '(2000: 243), though neither researcher says much about its role in reducing anxiety.

In stark contrast to these findings, human communication researcher McCroskey warns that simply practising as a 'method', the only method employed in helping people overcome communication anxiety up until 20 years ago, is 'demonstrably not only ineffective but seriously harmful to the individual with high CA' (2006: 90). Lucas (1984), too, argued that firstly levels of communication anxiety had to be lowered, followed only then by practice, thus leading to improved communication. This echoes Krashen's claims that 'learning does not become acquisition' (1982: 83) and 'practice does not make perfect' (1982: 279) as well as those of Ellis (1994: 83) that 'the results [of empirical research] are not very encouraging for practice'. With such conflicting views, it is therefore necessary to tread carefully when investigating

this within a secondary school context. In response to this lack of clarity, Young (1999) indicates that in-class practices should be process-oriented, offering pre-reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks before requiring learners to 'perform.'

Alternatively, Price (1991) suggests that instructors make clear that the classroom is a place for learning and communication and that mistakes are a part of that process, encouraging them to do so.

# 3. Research Questions and hypotheses

## 3.1 Research Questions

In light of the literature review, a number of research questions emerge:

- Do pupils in this context feel anxious about spontaneous target language use?
- What impact does explicit strategy training have on learners' anxiety levels during spontaneous oral communication tasks?
- What impact does the use of a less stressful learning context have on learners' stated levels of anxiety during spontaneous MFL speaking?
- Does a combination of the two bring about the optimum level reduction in oral communication anxiety?

- What further suggestions do pupils and teachers have about decreasing anxiety?

### 3.2. Hypotheses

It could be hypothesised that:

- Pupils in this context feel anxious about spontaneous target language use
- Explicit strategy training will have some positive impact on learners' anxiety levels during spontaneous oral communication tasks.
- The nature of social interaction means that the use of a less stressful learning context will be more effective than strategy training on learners' stated levels of anxiety during spontaneous MFL speaking.
- A combination of the two will bring about the optimum level reduction in oral communication anxiety.
- Pupils and teachers will have further suggestions about decreasing anxiety.

## 4. Research methodology

In order to fully answer the emerging research questions, systematic and thorough action research methodology was required. This was based on the original model by social psychologist Lewin, often referred to as the originator of the action research model, represented in figure 5.

The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Dickens, L. and Watkins, K. (1999) ***Action research: rethinking Lewin. Management Learning***, 30 (2), 127-140

**Figure 5 – Lewin's Action Research Model (Dickens & Watkins, 1999: 133)**

## 4.1 Project design

### 4.1.1 Participants

The research took place in an independent, selective girls-only secondary school of 400 pupils, located in a small town in the South of England. I chose to complete the action research cycle by comparing the school's three mixed-ability classes of Year 9 French pupils. Each student has one hour lesson of French per week. This allowed collaboration with another teaching colleague, as I teach two French classes and she teaches the other class in the year group. The study involved around 45 pupils in total who were in their third year of learning French, though some may have studied languages previously in primary school.

The interventions took place amongst the three groups as set out in the table below. A fourth control group of around 15 students was also added for the purpose of comparison (though these were Year 8 French students). The complete intervention

cycle lasted one complete academic term lasting 12 weeks between January and April. During this time, all of the Year 9 French classes were following the same programme of study, with the topic of school for the first 6 weeks, then changing to hobbies for the following 6 weeks. All classes completed the pre-intervention questionnaire in week 1 of the intervention cycle, followed by interviews within that same week. All post-intervention questionnaires and interviews were carried out in week 12 of the intervention cycle. Further data collection was carried out throughout this intervention period, in the form of teacher interviews and lesson observations.

### 4.1.2 Intervention

| ***Timeline*** | ***Topic*** | ***Control Group*** | ***Group 1*** | ***Group 2*** | ***Group 3*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Week 1* | School | ***Pre-intervention questionnaires*** | ***Pre-intervention questionnaires and interviews*** | ***Pre-intervention questionnaires and interviews*** | ***Pre-intervention questionnaires and interviews*** |
| *Week 2* | School | No intervention | Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation | Group Talk | Group Talk |
| *Week 3* | School | No intervention | Using music | Group Talk | Group Talk |
| *Week 4* | School | No intervention | Using laughter | Group Talk | Group Talk |
| *Week 5* | School | No intervention | Making positive statements | Group Talk | Group Talk |
| *Week 6* | School | No intervention | Taking risks wisely | Group Talk | ***Mid-intervention questionnaire*** |
| *Week 7* | Hobbies | No intervention | Rewarding yourself | Group Talk | Using progressive relaxation, deep |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | breathing, or meditation / Using music |
| *Week 8* | Hobbies | No intervention | Listening to your body | Group Talk | Using laughter / Making positive statements |
| *Week 9* | Hobbies | No intervention | Using a checklist | Group Talk | Taking risks wisely / Rewarding yourself |
| *Week 10* | Hobbies | No intervention | Writing a language learning diary | Group Talk | Listening to your body / Using a checklist |
| *Week 11* | Hobbies | No intervention | Discussing your feelings with someone else | Group Talk | Writing a language learning diary / Discussing your feelings with someone else |
| *Week 12* | Hobbies | ***Post-intervention questionnaires*** | ***Post-intervention A questionnaires and interviews*** | ***Post-intervention B questionnaires and interviews*** | ***Post-intervention questionnaires and interviews*** |

**Figure 6 – Intervention Outline**

### 4.1.3 Control Group

The control group did not take part in any targeted interventions, but completed a questionnaire at the beginning and end of the term, which would allow for the comparison of students' reported levels of anxiety having only experienced further practice of speaking French.

### 4.1.4 Group 1 - 'Help them to cope with existing anxiety provoking situation'

Group 1's intervention was in the form of explicit strategy instruction for coping with anxiety. Each lesson focussed on a different affective strategy based on Oxford's

(1990) diagram of indirect affective strategies within the context of the topic areas studied at the time. The purpose of this intervention was to elicit whether strategy intervention had any observable impact on learners' stated levels of anxiety during speaking activities, and if so, which of the following strategy types in particular the students found more or less helpful for reducing their anxiety:

- Lowering your anxiety
    - Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation
    - Using music
    - Using laughter

- Encouraging yourself
    - Making positive statements
    - Taking risks wisely
    - Rewarding yourself

- Taking your emotional temperature
    - Listening to your body
    - Using a checklist
    - Writing a language learning diary
    - Discussing your feelings with someone else

Each lesson was not exclusively dedicated to explicit strategy instruction, but was more of a segment (approximately 15 minutes per lesson), usually a starter activity which was then practised throughout the rest of the lesson (Unit plan and PowerPoint available in Appendices G and I). Students were also given a strategy checklist to refer to and use each lesson (Appendix H).

### 4.1.5 Group 2 - 'Make the learning context less stressful'

The second group's intervention made the learning context less stressful in the form of the Group Talk method. Each lesson featured a Group Talk activity of around 15 minutes, in different parts of the lesson according to the need. The principal purpose of this intervention was to find out whether making the learning context less stressful had any observable impact on learners' stated levels of anxiety during speaking activities, and if so, which elements in particular the students found more or less helpful for reducing their anxiety. An incidental purpose of this particular intervention was also to ascertain whether the Group Talk model would be as effective in a different school context. Each of these tasks was carefully designed to include the following elements, indicated by Samimy and Rardin (1994) to have a positive effect on language learning anxiety:

1) a supportive environment

2) a non-judgmental teacher attitude

3) activities that relate personally to learners

4) activities that facilitate individual and community achievement

5) peer support

Students sat in groups of 4 facing each other, having selected their own groups, and using colloquial conversation vocabulary they had learnt in the first lesson of the intervention, discussed items such as school subjects and hobbies, as per the Group Talk practice model. PowerPoints, pupil resources and unit plans are available in Appendices I to L.

### 4.1.6 Group 3 - 'Make the learning context less stressful' then 'Help them to cope with existing anxiety provoking situation'

The purpose of the intervention on the third group was to discover whether both methods combined had the best impact on reducing learner anxiety during speaking activities. The third group underwent similar shorter versions of both interventions, experiencing the Group Talk method first, then given the Likert scale questionnaire once again. This was then followed by the strategy instruction intervention, so that the group did not use the strategies they had learnt in the first half term during the Group Talk method, which may have altered results. Extracts of materials are available in the Appendices K and L.

The collaborating teacher, working with Group 2, received all lesson plans, PowerPoints and handouts in advance and discussed them with me, before integrating the intervention into the course. In order not to bias response to the

lessons, the researcher was not present during any of these classes. All groups were entitled to receive both interventions – therefore once data collection was complete, Groups 1 and 2 received instruction in the method that they had not experienced during the action research cycle.

## 4.2 Data Collection Instruments

A mixed-method approach comprising the merits of both qualitative and quantitative research and data was used during the investigation, which would allow as comprehensive a picture as possible of the complex issues to be investigated (Cresswell and Plano Clark, 2011). In light of the literature, a number of fundamental methodological issues are raised by the covert and complex nature of anxiety. Therefore in selecting research methods I was keen to echo those used by other successful researchers such as Oxford (1996) and Horwitz et al (1986). Many sources of data were analysed to interrogate the research questions as described below.

### 4.2.1 Pupil Questionnaires

Firstly, I chose to distribute questionnaires before and after each intervention, described by Oxford (1996: 25) as 'among the most efficient and comprehensive ways to assess the frequency of language learning strategy use'. They are a most

favoured method in SLA research and have a number of advantages (adapted from Gass & Mackey, 2005):

- More economical and practical than individual interviews
- Can elicit longitudinal information from learners in a short period of time
- Can elicit comparable information from a number of respondents.
- Can provide both qualitative insights and quantifiable data

One criticism of questionnaires is that they usually do not provide a complete picture of the complexities of individual contexts, whilst Morrison (1996) also points out respondents right to both validity and reliability. For this reason I chose to include one open ended question at the end of the questionnaire for respondents to add anything they felt was lacking, in addition to the use of other research tools. It was also important to give out a pilot questionnaire to a different teaching group (in this case a different Year 8 French class) in order to make sure that the questionnaire was easily understandable and suitable adjustments could be made before it was rolled out on a larger scale (Oppenheim, 1992).

I elected to use Likert (1932) scale questionnaires in which, in a similar manner to much SLA research which has been conducted to establish levels of oral communication anxiety, Likert scales in particular are a very useful question type for enabling researchers to get an overall measurement of a particular topic or opinion,

collect specific data on contributing factors and quantify subjective views whilst allowing for comparisons within and between data sets. 5 situation specific measures of anxiety at start, including a test question opposite to others as a control (questionnaire can be found in Appendix A). These were used firstly to measure pupils' overall state of anxiety, based around the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al (1986), a 33 item self-report instrument which has become the benchmark scale, widely used and adapted since its conception in 1986. Once analysis on this section was complete, to identify the most anxious, least anxious and mid anxious pupil from each class, further data from the questionnaire would then also be used to discover pupil preferences regarding various aspects of the interventions.

### 4.2.2 Pupil and teacher interviews

Questionnaires were supported by interviews from three pupils from each class, described by Cohen, Manion and Morrison as 'a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard' (2011: 409). Pupils were identified anonymously from their initial questionnaire as having high, medium and low anxiety. Each pupil took part in two audio recorded one-to-one semi-structured interviews, one before and one after the interventions took place. Focus-group interviews were decided against, as this in itself may create communication apprehension in some pupils, the very thing we are trying to find out

more about and prevent. Dictaphones were positioned discretely so as not to place pressure on anyone.

Unfortunately, time and logistics did not allow for training students in the use of the think aloud protocol, which has been the preferred introspective measure in the field of second language acquisition research. Instead, stimulated recall was used in the post-intervention interviews, a data elicitation tool where the researcher prompts the learner to 'recall and report thoughts that he or she had while performing a task' (Gass & Mackey, 2005: 78). This methodology is gaining increasing popularity in second language research as it has been in fields such as cognitive psychology and educational research where many of these introspective models originated. It has been used widely by L2 researchers for the last 60 years (Kagan, Krathwohl & Miller, 1963; Clark & Peterson, 1981) and enables participants 'to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy' (Bloom, 1953: 161). Some potential problems relate to issues of memory and retrieval, timing and instructions when using the stimulated recall methodology. Therefore, based on suggestions by Gass and Mackey (2000), I was very careful to ensure that data were collected immediately after the task was completed and the subjects had very strong stimuli regarding the intervention. I followed the stimulated recall with further unstructured open-ended questions in order to further explore preliminary ideas expressed by participants.

One advantage of interviews in general is that they can allow researchers to investigate phenomena that are not directly observable (Gass & Mackey 2005), as is the case with anxiety, and responses in interviews can be developed and clarified. However, interviews can also pose potential drawbacks. One must be wary when questioning of the halo effect, in which participants try to please the researcher by giving the answers or responses they think are expected. Another limitation of interviews are that they are time consuming and therefore a smaller sample is often taken.

Two collaborating teachers were also observed and interviewed (this was audio-recorded) so as to find out these key individuals' subjective experience.

### 4.2.3 Observation

Further data were collected through less structured observations in the form of field notes. Though this does not allow the researcher to access participants' thought processes, it does help to gain a deeper and more multi-layered understanding of the participants and their context (Gass & Mackey 2005).

## 4.3 Data Analysis

### 4.3.3 Nature of research instruments and data sets devised or selected to inform evaluation

The Likert scale questionnaire was analysed statistically to show trends or patterns as detailed by Griffee (2012).

The pupil stimulated recall recordings were listened to. Though Walford (2001) insisted that you should not transcribe as it lacks key data from interviews such as body language and pauses, these were then transcribed because transcription is then a data copy that can be analysed and codified. With clear pre-defined categories, transcription would not be necessary, but with a more inductive approach (bottom up) with no clearly defined categories, transcription was a more suitable method in this case, though the voice recordings were also listened to repeatedly. After transcribing the verbal reports, each transcript was read several times and a preliminary analysis made individually with the scripts. These were then coded into categories and sub-categories, allowing cross-comparison between the data. Interview data are friendly in the sense that they can be used in conjunction with other kinds of data. As such, data from the pupil interviews were able to be combined with the ordinal data from students' answers to the questionnaire to explain and strengthen my interpretations, a method suggested by Vandergrift et al (2006).

## 4.4 Ethical considerations

All research was undertaken in strict keeping with British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011), having been approved by the University of Oxford's Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC).

### 4.4.1 Ethical issues

Steps were taken to ensure pupils' welfare and anonymity throughout the investigation. Teachers already have high legal and moral obligations on them, which as a basic minimum ensure that children are not put at risk, and indeed mean that teachers have a responsibility to protect and support children's personal welfare. The study did not involve any vulnerable groups and the topic was not a sensitive one.

Part of the research did involve interviews with pupils who had been identified from their responses in the questionnaire. However, in order to ensure comparison and analyis at an anonymised level, and for pupils not to be identified individually, consent forms for numbered pupil questionnaires will involve a tick box. Having completed analysis of the questionnaires guaranteeing anonymity, a number key, which was stored and locked separately from the questionnaires, was used for identifying a pupil for interview. Further consent was sought for them to take part in the interview.

### 4.4.2 Informed Consent

Operating as a member of the school community, rather than as an outside researcher, the work to be undertaken in the research was, from the pupils' perspective, no different from the usual self-monitoring and professional discussions with colleagues which are to be found in good schools. To request parental permission would suggest that this was an exceptional activity and would therefore embarrass the research school. To obtain consent of participants for activities which did not go beyond normal good practice, consent was obtained from the head teacher. Pupils were allowed to opt out of any research processes that went beyond usual practice, for instance, if pupils were asked to be involved in interviews at the end of the school day or over lunch. Where other teachers were involved, they were given full knowledge of the research aims and methods. All participants were asked for their informed consent to carry out a questionnaire or interview (see Appendices A and C).

### 4.4.3 Data storage

Research data were captured, transferred and stored securely. Hard copies of data were collected in the form of paper questionnaires and interview notes. These were stored securely in a lockable filing cabinet during the research project. These will be securely destroyed with a shredder upon successful completion of the research project.

Audio recordings of interviews with learners and teachers were recorded on the researcher's Dictaphone, stored in a lockable filing cabinet, or on a digital audio recording device with the recordings transferred to a password protected USB memory stick. Recordings were listened to in private, out of earshot. The files will be deleted following successful completion of the research project.

Soft copies of any data stored in word processing documents were stored on a password protected USB memory stick stored in a lockable filing cabinet. Any necessary data transfer occured on the researcher's private computer over a secure network. On completion of the dissertation, these digital files will be deleted from both the memory disk and word processor recycle bin.

## 5. Findings

The qualitative and quantitative data collected provide an indication of student and teacher perceptions on oral communication anxiety in the MFL classroom. In the table below (figure 7), the average student responses to the 5-point Likert scale pre-, mid- and post-intervention questionnaires are provided. Further responses are available in the Appendix B. The results from these will be referred to in the subsequent section where the research questions will be answered using all the sources of qualitative and quantitative data collected, and interpreted in light of the data in the extant literature.

| **Questionnaire Results Averages** | | **Control Pre** | **Control Post** | **Group 1 pre** | **Group 1 post** | **Group 2 pre** | **Group 2 post** | **Group 3 pre** | **Group 3 mid** | **Group 3 post** | **Combined average** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **1** | **I feel confident when I speak French in class** | **3.40** | **3.30** | **2.77** | **2.62** | **2.55** | **3.91** | **3.36** | **3.36** | **3.07** | 3.15 |
| **1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 2.20 | 2 | 2.92 | 3.08 | 2 | 2.55 | 2.38 | 2.71 | 2.71 | 2.51 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 2.10 | 3 | 3 | 2.62 | 2.55 | 2.82 | 2.43 | 3 | 2.64 | 2.68 |
| 4 | It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 3.10 | 3.60 | 3.23 | 2.85 | 3.27 | 3.82 | 3.07 | 2.79 | 2.64 | 3.15 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 3.80 | 3.80 | 3.23 | 2.85 | 2.55 | 2.91 | 3.50 | 3.29 | 3.07 | 3.22 |
| | **Confidence Measure** | 14.6 | 15.7 | 15.15 | 14.02 | 12.92 | 16.01 | 14.74 | 15.15 | 14.13 | 14.71 |
| **5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **6** | **Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed** | **3.80** | **3.50** | **3.69** | **2.85** | **3.64** | **3.64** | **3.50** | **3.57** | **3.64** | **3.54** |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (e.g. relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4.30 | 4 | 3.69 | 3.77 | 3.45 | 3.36 | 2.93 | 2.79 | 3.21 | 3.50 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (e.g. positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 3.70 | 3.60 | 3.54 | 3.23 | 3 | 3.18 | 3.71 | 3.50 | 3.36 | 3.42 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (e.g. body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) | 3.10 | 2.90 | 2.92 | 3 | 2.82 | 2.73 | 1.93 | 2.07 | 2.36 | 2.65 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | helps me feel less stressed | | | | | | | | | | |
| **8** | **A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed** | **3.70** | **4.10** | **4.15** | **4** | **3.91** | **3.91** | **4.14** | **4.14** | **3.93** | **4.00** |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 4.30 | 4.10 | 4.38 | 4 | 4.18 | 4.09 | 4.43 | 4.50 | 3.86 | 4.20 |
| 9b | A non-judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 4.80 | 4.50 | 4.69 | 4.23 | 5 | 4.64 | 4.57 | 4.79 | 4.71 | 4.66 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 4.70 | 4.80 | 4.31 | 4.62 | 4.45 | 4.18 | 4.07 | 4.14 | 4.14 | 4.38 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 4.20 | 4.10 | 4 | 3.69 | 3.91 | 3.73 | 4.14 | 4.36 | 4 | 4.01 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 4.33 | 4.22 | 3.91 | 3.23 | 3.91 | 4.09 | 4 | 4.07 | 3.93 | 3.97 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 3.56 | 4.10 | 4.23 | 3.62 | 4.36 | 3.64 | 4.29 | 4.14 | 3.93 | **3.99** |
| 11 | A less stressful context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 3.67 | 4 | 3.31 | 3.23 | 3.64 | 4 | 3.69 | 3.93 | 3.86 | 3.70 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 3.89 | 4.10 | 3.54 | 3.15 | 3.27 | 3.27 | 3.36 | 3.50 | 3.29 | 3.54 |

**Figure 7 – Average class responses to Likert scale questionnaires**

The questionnaire results indicated that, as expected, a less stressful environment was more popular on average than strategy training amongst pupils both pre and post-intervention. The interview data revealed broad trends in relation to the research questions. The themes that emerged were the importance of teacher attitude, the role of practice, and the impracticality of a number of the strategies taught. The discussion includes further details. Excerpts of transcripts can be found in Appendices D and F.

## 6. Interpretation of the findings in relation to the original research hypotheses

All forms of data were combined and analysed in order to gain as clear and as deep a comparison as possible to the original research hypotheses. The control group's results were in line with the hypothesis that their confidence and comfort in speaking the target language would barely change. However, this may defeat the argument in some students', teachers' and researchers' minds (for example Yalçin and Inceçay (2014)) that practising speaking spontaneously would help students to overcome their fear. Rather, the case that it is more in line with McCroskey's (2006) warning that practice is ineffective in reducing communication anxiety  and Ellis' (1994) viewpoint that the results of empirical research are not very encouraging for practice.

## 6.1 Do pupils in this context feel anxious about spontaneous target language use?

Across the board in the pre intervention questionnaires, the average answer to the statement 'I feel confident when I speak French in class was 3.02, closest to the neither agree nor disagree reaction, suggesting that the pupils at this school were neither particularly stressed nor especially comfortable in speaking the language. In response to the statement 'I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes' the overall average across all pre and post intervention questionnaires was 3.22, closest to the 'neither agree nor disagree' answer. This may go against what was previously suspected about students in the literature (that students are more anxious about language learning than other types of learning), though this may simply represent the individual context of these particular learners in this particular school. That said, there were indeed some highly anxious students, who stated anxiety of some sort, including words such as 'nervous', 'apprehensive', 'embarrassing', 'scary', 'under pressure' to describe their language learning context.

However, when asked during interviews whether they feel better at language learning than their peers, as expected, 'higher anxiety' students felt they were worse at French than others, 'medium anxiety' felt about the same in all lessons and 'lower anxiety' felt that they were better than their friends. Similar results were provided by Price's (1991) qualitative interview which echoes the claim that anxious learners tend to believe that their language abilities are less proficient than those of their classmates. These findings suggest students'

almost self-fulfilling causality predicted by the literature (Schwarzer, 1986; Stern, 1983; Gardner et al, 1976; Eysenck, 1979; Krashen, 1982; Arnold, 1999) between foreign language anxiety and eventual achievement. This is what Gregerson described in an interview study to investigate how anxious and non-anxious English-learning Spanish students react to their own errors as anxious learners' 'self-derogatory bias' towards their own competence (2003: 29).

A number of reasons for anxiety were cited by both students and teachers during the interview process. When asked which parts of speaking French they find stressful, many students admitted their fear of making mistakes. Whilst some students cited 'changing grammar' as a cause of stress, similarly to MacIntyre's findings in 1995, these students claim that 'pronunciation' was a cause of anxiety, which is in direct contrast to Price's (1991) reports on interviews with highly anxious former language students that indicated that his participants did not care about pronunciation.

Similarly, one teacher stated that many students are reluctant to speak at this school 'for fear of making a mistake'. Interestingly, this finding is also backed up by one of the class observations on a class of Year 9 German students carried out for this study. Whilst before the lesson students were worriedly preparing before the teacher called them out one by one for speaking practice, later on in the lesson, groups of students were enjoying speaking the foreign language as part of a vocabulary acquisition board game together. This observation is perhaps similar to what Young described as 'inducing anxiety' in 1991, a pre-emptive fear of a student having their errors corrected, and a believable attitude in this

selective, high performing school. This could indicate that it is cognitive, rather than social aspects that are holding students back and causing foreign language anxiety.

The investigation also brought to light some of the school's teachers' misconceptions about the reasons for their students' anxieties relating to speaking. Whereas teachers tended to describe Horwitz et al's 1986 communication apprehension (fear of talking in groups) as a cause for student anxiety, such as 'people laughing at you' and 'not feeling great', for example, 'but they're not so keen to speak on their own to me because of peer pressure or whatever else it might be', this was not an emergent theme during pupil interviews. This suggests that individual schools should attempt to ascertain the reasons for their students' anxiety, which may than help them to design teaching methods that address specific concerns.

## 6.2 What impact does explicit strategy training have on learners' anxiety levels during spontaneous oral communication tasks? Which of these methods in particular do pupils find the most helpful for reducing negative stress in spontaneous TL use?

### 6.2.1 What impact does explicit strategy training have on learners' anxiety levels during spontaneous oral communication tasks?

Comparisons of Group 1's pre- and post-intervention questionnaires reveal that students' measures of panic during speaking tasks had reduced. In the case of the least, medium and most anxious pupil in each of the two classes who received strategy instruction, 5 out of these 6 pupils' overall view that strategies could help went up overall. These findings echo researchers' claims (Nunan, 1997; Cohen, 1998; Wenden, 2002) that explicit strategy training may have some benefits. Teachers in the study, too, considered strategy training to be effective. For example, according to Teacher A:

> Yeah, and I think they're helpful across the curriculum, I think that's what we should be doing as part of school life anyway, cos lots of them do suffer from self –esteem and negative self-image, so anything we can do in our classrooms is gonna benefit them in the wider world.

Indeed, when asked what could be done to reduce anxiety, 2 out of the 3 Group 3 students who had received both Group Talk and strategies training suggested strategies first, which may suggest the possible effectiveness of explicit strategy training in this area.

By contrast, explicit strategy training was perceived by teachers as 'ineffective'. When Teacher B was asked, whether strategy instruction would be effective, they responded, 'Not too much, cos you almost don't want to feed a problem, to their brains', and 'I'd rather deal with someone who appears not to be OK, rather than to put the problem in their minds before it's happened'. These teachers may have a valid point, that strategy training may have a negative effect because it causes them to focus solely on their nerves and anxieties, which they may not have otherwise been thinking about. A point for teachers to note may be that phrasing strategies positively may lead to a more positive effect, for example labelling them strategies for confidence rather than strategies for anxiety reduction.

In Group 1's post-intervention, a striking feature of students' responses was the importance of practice. The high anxiety respondent stated 'I think I feel a *bit* less nervous but I need to, like, practise more' and the medium anxiety pupil claimed 'I think I'd be less stressed now because we've had more practice'. This seems to point students' attribution for lower anxiety more to practice rather than better use of strategies, of which there was no mention when asked whether they feel more or less nervous about speaking French than at the time of their pre-intervention questionnaire. As Hassan et al suggest (2005), strategy training may not be able to replace the actual practice of teaching and learning the nuts and bolts of

learning how to speak. Chamot (2004) may also be correct in her argument that 'teachers … should probably integrate the instruction into their regular coursework, rather than providing a separate learning strategies course' (2004: 19).

### 6.2.2 Who does it have the most impact on? High or low anxiety pupils?

Though seemingly ineffective on the whole, it is important to note the mostly positive effect that explicit strategy training had on highly anxious students in this study. For example in Group 2 pupil 13 and pupil 7, who both recorded low confidence levels in the pre-intervention questionnaire, more than doubled their recorded confidence levels following the intervention. Both teachers interviewed acknowledged the positive impact of strategy training on high anxiety speakers and are already using it as a method on individual students:

> Teacher A: I've been trying some of that with my really stressed girls.
>
> Teacher B: Yeah, I mean I've actually done that this year with some Year 11 girls preparing for controlled assessments and with an upper sixth girl.

Unfortunately, for those with high level of confidence, strategy training lowered their confidence significantly as seen when comparing pre- and post-intervention confidence scores. This finding supports evidence in Koch and Terrell's 1991 study, that indicate that activities that are anxiety-reducing for a majority of learners can be anxiety-producing for some learners due to their beliefs or individual learning styles. Brown reminds us in his Principles of language learning and teaching (1993) based on an analysis of a wide range of SLA research, no two learners are the same and personality is a major player in the quality

of language learning, therefore a blanket whole-class approach may not help the vast majority of students.

### 6.2.3 Which of these methods in particular do pupils find the most helpful for reducing negative stress in spontaneous TL use?

When the three pupils in Group 3 (who were submitted to both interventions) were interviewed and asked what can be done to make a student feel less stressed about speaking the foreign language, there were 4 mentions of doing relaxation activities, 4 of encouraging yourself and only 1 suggestion of taking one's emotional temperature. These data were representative of the general trend in the questionnaire data - that the most helpful strategy intervention method was 'Lowering my anxiety' with an average score of 3.5, closely followed by 'encouraging oneself', with monitoring emotions being the least popular method. This finding was supported by pupils' recollections of what strategies they found useful, such as 'deep breathing' and 'just take a minute.' It was also supported by teacher interviews: 'I've talked to them about how they can manage their anxiety, and what practices they can put into place, erm, to make sure it doesn't overcome them, overwhelm them.' However, some respondents found certain aspects of the anxiety-reduction technique more useful than others in terms of their practicality – 'Well it's just, when you've been asked to say something you can't listen to music'.

'Encouraging myself' was also a quite popular method with an average questionnaire score of 3.42. Though one teacher wondered whether 'it would be seen as a bit patronising!' with

one pupil stating 'I knew some of them before and I used them before as well' suggesting that teachers may be wasting their efforts introducing this strategy.

It is interesting to note that by far the least popular choice in average rankings in order of importance of strategies for both classes who received strategy instruction, both in pre and post intervention questionnaires on all counts was 'taking my emotional temperature', which may suggest that they are not aware or willing to connect their language and emotions, despite the fact that one teacher suggested the need to 'be aware of how your feeling and how this affects your delivery of the language' .For example in Group 3's pre-intervention questionnaire, no responses favoured this strategy. 21.4 % of the group strongly disagreed, 64.3 % disagreed, and 14.3 % neither agreed nor disagreed that this strategy would help them feel less stressed. For this class, the importance of this strategy did improve slightly after the explicit strategy training, but was still regarded as the least important strategy. In these cases, these students' view of taking your emotional temperature remained the same in 3 cases and went up in 3 cases, suggesting this strategy training has either no or some effect across all levels of anxiety, rather than a negligible effect on their view.

Overall the findings of this research project echo Rossiter's 2003 warning that recommendations that extensive strategy instruction be conducted need to be reconsidered because training learners to use certain strategies appears successful but the evidence is not compelling.

## 6.3 What impact does the use of a less stressful learning context have on learners' stated levels of anxiety during spontaneous MFL speaking? Which of these methods in particular do pupils find the most helpful for reducing negative stress in spontaneous TL use?

### 6.3.1 What impact does the use of a less stressful learning context have on learners' stated levels of anxiety during spontaneous MFL speaking?

The results of this research project across all data sets showed that the 'less stressful learning context' intervention had an overwhelmingly positive effect on reducing student anxiety. In Group 2, following their 'less stressful learning context' intervention, the high, medium and low anxiety all indicated that they felt less stressed as a result, '...cos I think I understand it more and I'm concentrating more in lessons cos I find it more interesting now'. When given a choice of methods in the questionnaire, across all classes but the control group, pre-intervention questionnaires indicated that a 'less stressful context' would help them feel less stressed about speaking, more so than coping, with a pre-test average of 4.32, with 4 agreeing and 5 strongly agreeing. Across the board, this was the more popular of the two methods for reducing anxiety. In the class that received both interventions, their opinion of this method went up after they had received the intervention.

For Group 3, who received the full term of this intervention, their opinion remained the same post-intervention, though this group also recorded the biggest consistent measured decrease in anxiety across the class according to the results of the questionnaires. All their levels of anxiety decreased, including pupils of low, medium and high levels of anxiety. It is

important to note, though, that this was because they began with relatively low levels of confidence compared to the other groups. Teachers also agreed that a less stressful learning environment make them feel more confident -'Oh yeah, undoubtedly.', though one was clear to point out the possible barriers to this - **'**it's not always possible to change the environment, erm, it's very difficult for a teacher working with limited resources, limited space.'

### 6.3.3 Which of these methods in particular do pupils find the most helpful for reducing negative stress in spontaneous TL use?

Though the average scale indicates a clear ranking order of these methods for a less stressful learning context, there is little consensus between classes in the questionnaires over which methods work best or whether some of these elements are expendable. Therefore, it may be true to state that a more general approach may be the most effective.

#### *6.3.3.1 A non-judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed*

Despite ranges of opinion between classes and in pre and post intervention questionnaires of the groups who received this intervention, the statement 'a non-judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed' was the top priority on every count, suggesting the teacher has more sway than previously thought. In fact, it was the most agreed with phrase in the questionnaire with 91.5% of all 106 questionnaires filled out stating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

There also appeared to be a clear acknowledgment from both teachers during their interviews of the importance of their role in affecting student anxiety. For example Teacher A stated, 'I think if you've just got a really encouraging smiley positive teacher who might give a few, who might say, I've made mistakes in the past but I've learnt from them, it's really nothing to worry about, just have a go with the language and have fun with it.' Teacher B independently backed up this statement, saying, 'Err, smile a lot, this helps to relax them, and use body language.'

#### *6.3.3.2. Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed*

Teachers also provided some useful insight into the positive effects of pair and group work on learners' stated levels of anxiety, seen by students in the questionnaire as the second most important aspect of a less stressful learning context, with an average ranking of 4.38, as seen in the interview extracts below when questioned about how group work can affect pupils' confidence speaking the target language:

> Teacher A: I think group work is really positive, erm, because they learn from each other. And maybe your peers are, I don't know, a small group, is less daunting than speaking to the class. And you can ask questions of each other and check things, and it's reassuring to think that other people have similar doubts.
>
> Teacher B: The thing I've noticed the most is, it erm, really makes them enjoy it more. Because it's such fun, it's just nonsense a lot of the time, but they're trying, they're practising new words, they're experimenting with the language in a fun way. And they love a good row! They love arguing with each other so it's sort of getting the point across in a fun way. It's really good.

#### *6.3.3.3 A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed*

When asked what can be done (aside from strategies) to reduce anxiety, 2 of the 3 respondents in Group 3's post-intervention interviews claimed the importance of a supportive environment – ' You kind of need a class that will support you and if you get it wrong not laugh at you or judge you'. Most respondents also agreed a supportive environment helps them feel less stressed, giving it an average Likert Scale questionnaire score of 4.20.

#### *6.3.3.4. Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed*

The teachers interviewed were adamant that activities relating to pupils personal interests help students feel less stressed. For example Teacher B indicates the existing situation: 'and this is the problem half the time is that they're memorising chunks that they don't actually understand, but if it's personal they understand it, it's relevant, and so they should be more confident with that'. Teacher A suggests what the Group Talk scheme is already implementing successfully 'by making discussions meaningful and relevant to students' (Ofsted, 2012):

> I think, erm, it makes them much more willing to engage with it if they're talking about something that's close to them, erm, something about them, something that they see as being, like a realistic application of the language. Something that they can talk to someone of their age, someone who's from a different country, about.

This also has echoes of what Rossiter (2003) described as a focus rather on teaching meaningful language in response to learners' needs and interests. The pupil questionnaire responses did indicate that the majority of students agreed that discussing personal hobbies or interests helped reduce their anxiety, though the amount they agreed with it lessened after the intervention.

Furthermore, there was no mention of this factor at all in any of the student interviews, which may mean that it holds less weight for anxiety reduction than assumed by their instructors.

#### *6.3.3.5 Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed*

Though the least important method on average in student questionnaires, the idea of a sense of achievement was still viewed positively by students, with teachers singing the praises of this technique because it enables students to experience success in the language. As one teacher put it:

> Encouragement is everything. And that happened yesterday with my Year 9 speaking exam. And at the end, I just gave them a massive, really, applause and a bonbon and said that, you know, that they'd gone out on a high, and shown respect for the language, and they loved that.

This reflects Long & Porter's (1985) idea that two-way tasks with mutually beneficial outcomes can be especially beneficial to learners.

## 6.4 Does a combination of the two bring about the optimum level reduction in oral communication anxiety?

Data gathered from pupil interviews suggest that pupils believe that a combination of both a less stressful learning context and explicit strategy instruction would be the best approach when dealing with speaking anxiety in the language classroom. Highly anxious students seemed to be the most convinced, for example, 'I think both really help in their own way. And I think, yeah, they'd benefit from both.' This opinion was also reflected in one teacher interview response: '

> To me they're inter-linked, it's hard to separate those actually! Strategies are vital, erm but so's the… I can't separate them.

However, the data from the questionnaires paint a different picture. In Group 2, the Group who encountered both interventions, the average result was that confidence measures increased after the 'less stressful learning context', then confidence levels actually dropped to lower than their original level following the strategies intervention. This suggests that more individual approaches are needed to reduce the anxiety of individual pupils, otherwise they may actually be harmful to learners' confidence, especially for those with high levels of stated confidence (for example pupils 6 and 13). This evidence is substantiated by Koch and Terrell (1991) who found that activities that are anxiety-reducing for a majority of learners can be anxiety-producing for some due to their beliefs or individual learning styles. Despite this disappointing result, following both interventions, learners in this group's stated level of panic decreased, as well as their stated level of nervousness when the teacher asks questions for which a student has not prepared in advance, suggesting these methods may be particularly effective in the context of unassessed spontaneous target language, which this study sets out to achieve.

## 6.5 What further suggestions do pupils and teachers have about decreasing anxiety?

Pupil interviews reveal only a small number of suggestions not already included in the investigation, apart from the mention of the word 'practice', suggested by 10 of the 33 students who filled out the comments box asking for further suggestions for reducing anxiety in the pre-intervention questionnaire, as well as two thirds of pupils in the post-

intervention interviews. This overwhelming focus on the importance of practice also suggests that neither a less stressful learning context nor explicit strategy instruction are a valid replacement for preparation and practice. A comparative study in this area would be invaluable. The importance of practice was also expressed by Teacher B in her interview:

> Interviewer: And do you have any further comments or suggestions for reducing speaking anxiety in MFL?
>
> Teacher B: It is practice, practice, practice. And the children who have more practice are more confident. The more confidence they have, the better they are, and the anxiety is reduced. That's really really noticeable. But it's having the time to give them the practice that they need. It just helps if they've got a parent at home as well, who can help them, I think. Just form a brilliant relationship with the kids. But even then a lot of them are terrified, which is a shame, isn't it. But it's always going to be difficult isn't it? I think, err, what … is doing at the moment is really good, a conversation club.

The other teacher in this action research project suggested the following when asked for her further suggestions:

> Playing them little clips of other people speaking English, erm from other countries and them making little mistakes but it doesn't actually impede the message. I think that's a good way of showing that you can make mistakes but the communication is clear, you know what they're trying to say… erm, when other people are trying to speak English, erm, I think that can help.

# 7 Conclusions

## 7.1 Limitations

It is clear that the investigation has some limitations. Many of the results are qualitative and subjective, though attempts to increase validity have been made throughout as previously discussed and with the addition of quantitative questionnaires. Lynch aptly summarises the

main issue with self-report methods used in this study, as in many others: 'The disadvantage is that investigations based on self-reported behaviour are inevitably one step removed from the behaviour itself' (Lynch 2009: 82). However, this does not mean that all self-report data are invalid, only that they cannot be trusted in all cases (Ericsson & Simon, 1993).

The variables in this research project were also limited by the fact that the subjects studied were part of a rather controlled group of high performing, hardworking girls. Donald (2010), too, reminds us that conclusions cannot be generalised or simplified as being applicable to all learners because all learners are different from each other. Evelyn Hatch's (1978) reminder that research findings should be 'applied with caution' also rings true here. It is essential to see whether the methods of the current study can be carried out across different foreign language contexts and different languages before any generalizations can be made.

Clear limitations of the Group Talk model were supported by observations. For example students are only provided with a relatively small amount of vocabulary to use spontaneously, and with little content, it was difficult for students to sustain a conversation in the target language at great length. The research was also limited small group sizes due to the limitations of the context and by the fact that some of pupils were unable to complete questionnaires at beginning and end – therefore samples became smaller because both were needed for direct comparison.

## 7.2 Collaborative Process

A large amount of collaboration occurred in this action research cycle, at the point of determining the focus of the research, as well as during the intervention and data collection. Further collaboration also occurred during teacher interviews, and the research findings have been disseminated at both department and school level, which has led to the development of a plan for reducing speaking anxiety across the school's MFL department, with a possible further action cycle occurring in the next academic year.

## 7.3 Summary of findings

The aim of the present study was to investigate ways of preventing students' anxiety during spontaneous Target Language use in the Modern Foreign Language classroom. In the wake of this study, a repeat of the research would be useful to establish whether the results can be replicated, over the longer term, or indeed across other contexts such as boys only, mixed, or more multi-cultural schools. A systematic and critical review has found that in light of the attempts to respond to the five research hypotheses, a number of conclusions can be drawn:

Pupils at this school were neither particularly stressed nor especially comfortable in speaking the L2. However, the reasons for the anxiety in this piece of action research appeared to be more cognitive rather than social, as usually depicted in L2 research literature.

Overall confidence levels declined after explicit affective strategy intervention. Pupil and teacher interviews revealed that this method was seen as impractical, patronising and placed in students' minds the idea that they should be nervous. The least popular strategy across all of the groups' taught strategies in both their pre and post-intervention questionnaires was 'monitoring emotions'. However, strategy training had the most positive effect on anxious students, for example in Group 2 pupil 13 and pupil 7's low confidence levels more than doubled with strategy training.

Making the learning context less stressful had observable positive results on all pupils. Across all classes but the control group, in pre-intervention questionnaires, participants agreed or strongly agreed that this would help them feel less stressed about speaking. In all questionnaires, this was the more popular of the two methods for reducing anxiety. 91.5% of all 106 questionnaires filled out were either agreed, or strongly agreed that 'a non-judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed', a more influential factor than group work, as maintained in the literature. This suggests that the teacher's role may be more important than previously thought.

Whilst students and teachers stated that a combination of methods would bring about the optimum level reduction in oral communication anxiety, in the class who received both interventions, the strategy training actually had a detrimental impact on the gains made in the 'less stressful context' intervention. The findings of this project build upon results in the extant literature which imply the need for a more combined approach, such as Chamot's

advice that (2004) 'teachers should …. Probably integrate the instruction into their regular coursework, rather than providing a separate learning strategies course' (2004: 19).

None of the three methods were seen as a replacement for simply practising speaking the L2. Data from all research tools indicated that this was seen by both learners and teachers as the best method for reducing oral communication anxiety, mirroring the call from other researchers of the importance of time and space for oral interaction experiences in programs of L2 study.

## 7.4 Recommendations for further study

It is hoped that further research would discover whether the more cognitive rather than social cause for anxiety is unique to this particular school or whether it is a similar case in other schools. A further point to question would be whether the reason for this is due to teacher's error correction as indicated by Young (1991) and what can be done to remedy it.

A future direction of research could be to ascertain whether an individualized approach to explicit strategy instruction could be considered, especially for more anxious pupils, as different students prefer or need certain strategies for particular tasks.

Considering the pupils' onus on the importance of the teacher's role in the present study, further studies would be useful to discover what specific actions a teacher can take to reduce pupil anxiety.

A more detailed, comparative study is recommended to find out whether practice is a valid factor in reducing oral communication anxiety.

## 7.5 Implications

This small scale research project has clear implications for ongoing professional practice and collaborative professional learning within the wider educational context, the research school and in the researcher's own practice. It has encouraged this researcher to draw on and balance what works in practice with evidence from the research literature and rethink the pedagogy used in the day to day running of the classroom. In particular it has led to the creation of a low-anxiety classroom wherever possible, using the Group Talk method as a starting point and not as the ultimate solution. It has also led to a reconsideration of the affective strategies taught to both more and less anxious interlocutors and to the more implicit and longer-term teaching of these strategies, as well as a renewed emphasis on the value of practising oral interaction in the language learning environment.

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# 9. Appendices

## Appendix A – Questionnaire

**Investigating ways of preventing students' anxiety during spontaneous Target Language use in the MFL classroom**

**Department of Education, University of Oxford**

**PRE/POST INTERVENTION PUPIL CONSENT FORM AND QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear Pupil,

As part of my Masters degree at Oxford University I am conducting a small scale research and development project. Its aim is to discover whether:

a) helping pupils learn to cope with a stressful situation
b) making the learning environment less stressful
c) both

reduce pupil anxiety when speaking French in class. I hope you will help me by completing the questionnaire below.

Many thanks,

| |
|---|
| **By ticking the box below I agree to complete the questionnaire. I am aware that I may be asked to complete an interview for which further consent will be requested. I know that can refuse to participate in any research activities at any time:** |
| I agree to take part in this project. Key: Pupil Number |

**********

**For each question please circle the statement that applies to you personally.**

1. **I feel confident when I speak French in class.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

2. **I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

3. **I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**4. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**5. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**The following items help me feel calmer and less anxious about speaking French:**

**6. Learning how to cope with a speaking task that may make me anxious.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**7a. Lowering my anxiety (e.g. relaxation/music/laughter).**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**7b. Encouraging myself (e.g. positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself).**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**7c. Taking my emotional temperature (e.g. body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings).**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**8. A less stressful learning context.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**9a. A supportive environment.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**9b. A non-judgemental teacher.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**9c. Working in pairs or groups.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**9d. Activities that relate to my personal interests.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**9e. Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**10. A less stressful learning context <u>together with</u> learning how to cope with a speaking task helps me feel <u>most calm</u> about speaking French.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**11. A less stressful learning context makes me <u>more</u> confident about speaking French than learning how to cope with a speaking task.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**12. Learning how to cope with a speaking task makes feel <u>calmer</u> about speaking French than a less stressful learning context.**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

**13. What further suggestions do you have for decreasing anxiety when speaking French without preparation?**

## Appendix B – Questionnaire Results

| Raw Data Control Pre-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | I feel confident when I speak French in class | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| | Confidence Measure | 12 | 13 | 12 | 16 | 16 | 17 | 15 | 16 | 15 | 14 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 8 | A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | - | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | - | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | - | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | - | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |

| Raw Data Control Post-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | I feel confident when I speak French in class | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 5 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| | Confidence Measure | 18 | 16 | 11 | 16 | 12 | 17 | 13 | 20 | 15 | 19 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 8 | A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | - | 4 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 5 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 |

| GROUP 1 Raw Data 9A Pre-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | I feel confident when I speak French in class | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 5 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
| | **Confidence Measure** | 22 | 17 | 17 | 13 | 14 | 18 | 8 | 14 | 17 | 10 | 21 | 21 | 5 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | **Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed** | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 |
| 8 | **A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed** | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 3 |

| GROUP 1 Raw Data 9A Post-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | **I feel confident when I speak French in class** | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| | **Confidence Measure** | 16 | 19 | 13 | 15 | 12 | 17 | 16 | 14 | 15 | 13 | 18 | 19 | 15 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | **Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed** | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 8 | **A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed** | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 |

| GROUP 2 Raw Data Pre-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | **I feel confident when I speak French in class** | 4 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 3 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| | **Confidence Measure** | 18 | 6 | 18 | 19 | 10 | 18 | 8 | 11 | 7 | 15 | 12 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | **Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed** | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 8 | **A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed** | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 3 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |

| GROUP 2 Raw Data Post-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | **I feel confident when I speak French in class** | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| | **Confidence Measure** | 20 | 13 | 20 | 18 | 9 | 16 | 14 | 16 | 16 | 20 | 14 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | **Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed** | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 8 | **A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed** | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 4 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 |

| GROUP 3 Raw Data Pre-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree | | 3 – Neither agree nor disagree | | | | | 2 – Disagree | | 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | |
| 1 | I feel confident when I speak French in class | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree | | 3 – Neither agree nor disagree | | | | | 4 – Disagree | | 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | - | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| | Confidence Measure | 13 | 14 | 17 | 14 | 14 | 20 | 10 | 15 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 19 | 16 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree | | 3 – Neither agree nor disagree | | | | | 2 – Disagree | | 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | |
| 6 | Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 8 | A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 5 | | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 5 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 |

| GROUP 3 Raw Data Mid-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | I feel confident when I speak French in class | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 3 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| | Confidence Measure | 18 | 11 | 16 | 17 | 17 | 18 | 13 | 14 | 9 | 19 | 16 | 12 | 16 | 16 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 8 | A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 |

| GROUP 3 Raw Data Post-intervention Questionnaire Results | | Pupils | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | **I feel confident when I speak French in class** | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 1 – Strongly agree 2 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Disagree 5 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | I start to panic during speaking tasks | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance | 3 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | It embarasses me to volunteer answers in my language class | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| 5 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class then in my other classes | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| | **Confidence Measure** | 15 | 10 | 17 | 11 | 17 | 19 | 11 | 14 | 9 | 18 | 16 | 12 | 15 | 14 |
| 5– Strongly agree 4 – Agree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 2 – Disagree 1 – Strongly disagree | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | **Learning how to cope helps me feel less stressed** | 3 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| 7a | Lowering my anxiety (eg relaxation/music/laughter) helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| 7b | Encouraging myself (eg positive statements/wise risk taking/rewarding myself) helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 |
| 7c | Taking my emotional temperature (eg body awareness/emotion checklist/diary/sharing feelings) helps me feel less stressed | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 8 | **A less stressful learning context helps me feel less stressed** | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 9a | A supportive environment helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 9b | A non judgemental teacher helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| 9c | Working in pairs or groups helps me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 9d | Activities that relate to my personal interests helps me feel less stressed | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9e | Activities that give me and my classmates a sense of achievement help me feel less stressed | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| 10 | A less stressful context AND coping helps me feel most calm | 5 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11 | A less stressul context makes me feel less stressed than learning to cope | 4 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| 12 | Learning to cope makes me feel less stressed than a less stressful context | 3 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 |

## Appendix C – Pupil Semi-Structured Interview Template

**Investigating ways of preventing students' anxiety during spontaneous Target Language use in the MFL classroom**

**Department of Education, University of Oxford**

**PRE/POST INTERVENTION INTERVIEW PUPIL CONSENT FORM**

Dear Pupil,

As part of my Masters degree at Oxford University I am conducting a small scale research and development project. Its aim is to discover whether:

a) helping pupils learn to cope with a stressful situation
b) making the learning environment less stressful
c) both

reduce pupils' anxiety when speaking French in class. I would like to interview you as part of this research and hope you would be able to help me.

Many thanks,

**By signing here I agree to participate in this interview (my data will remain anonymous) and I am aware that I can refuse to participate in any research activities at any time:**

Pupil name:

Pupil signature:

Date:

**********

**TYPICAL PRE/POST INTERVENTION PUPIL INTERVIEW QUESTION SCHEDULE**

1. How do you feel when speaking French on a one to one basis with your teacher? Why/Why not?
2. How do you feel when speaking French to your partner? Why/Why not?
3. How do you feel speaking French in front of a group of fellow pupils? Why/Why not?
4. Do you like speaking French in front of the class? Why/Why not?
5. Do you prefer speaking French in groups or in front of the class?
6. Do you find some aspects of speaking French stressful?
7. If so, what could you do to make speaking French less stressful?
8. How can the teacher make the situation less stressful?
9. What could your classmates do?
10. What would be the ideal number of French lessons in a week?
11. Do you think you are better or worse at French than your friends?
12. Do you have any further comments or suggestions you would like to add?

## Appendix D – Pupil Interview Transcript Extracts

| Group 1 | Medium-Anxiety | Pre-intervention |
|---|---|---|

*How do you feel when speaking French on a one to one basis with your teacher? Why or why not?*

Er..I become really really nervous and I get quite panicky and I just forget everything. Like almost instantly. As soon as it's mentioned.

*How do you feel when speaking French to your partner?*

It's alright because I feel less under pressure to do well – if I make a mistake it's not really as bad.

*How do you feel speaking French in front of a group of your fellow pupils?*

I become quite nervous because there's obviously more people to impress. But it's alright because we're all friends so I don't feel like they're judging me at all.

*How do you feel speaking French in front of a real French person?*

Um, I do get nervous because I've done it before and I do get nervous, like I forgot a few things but because they were quite understanding about it, it was ok. So I didn't feel like I had to do really well at all.

*Do you like speaking French in front of the class?*

I don't dislike it per se but it sometimes does make me a bit nervous, like if I have to do well.

*Do you prefer speaking French in groups or in front of the class?*

In groups.

*Which parts of speaking French do you find stressful? Which are the scary bits?*

Probably when if you have to change something for it to make sense. Like the IR, RE and ER verbs, you have to change it with whatever you're talking about.

*How about what you could do to make speaking French less stressful?*

I should probably tell myself more often that I can do it because whenever I do it I get panicky but then do it anyway even though I'm panicked…so like there's no point in being nervous about it.

*How can the teacher make it less stressful?*

I don't think it's the teacher making it stressful to be honest it's just, myself telling myself that I need to be stressed about it because it's something important.

*What can your other classmates do to make it less stressful?*

I don't know (laughs)..No I'm not sure sorry.

*What would be the ideal number of French lessons in a week?*

Probably two because in one we have to try and cram everything in. And then with two we have more time to learn about it, so we don't just have to rush it all with each individual subject.

*Do you think you are better or worse at French than your friends?*

Umm..I don't know, I'd say we're roughly about the same standard. I sometimes find things a bit easier than other people but then I find things more difficult than other people do so.

*And do you have any other further suggestions of how we can help you and your class speak French?*

Maybe, every so often, not big tests but I find it quite helpful when we do, like, just little speaking tests. Yeah instead of, well obviously we have to do like a big one at the end, like in the summer exams. But it sometimes helps when you can just practise every so often. But maybe not in front of the whole class. Just the teacher outside or something, for a practice.

| Group 3 | High-Anxiety | Post-intervention |
|---|---|---|

*How do you feel when speaking French in class to your teacher?*

I feel a little bit apprehensive that I might get it wrong. But I kind of try to calm myself down before.

*And what can be done then if you're feeling nervous about speaking?*

Erm, well you can like be aware of your body and just think, like, it's not that bad, it's just a small thing just to see how I'm doing and stuff.

*And is there anything that the teacher can do or the school can do to help make it feel less stressful?*

I don't know. You kind of need a class that will support you and if you get it wrong not laugh at you or judge you.

*And which activities help you feel the best about speaking?*

Probably group activities because you're working as a team. You need to kind of help each other.

*DO you think that compared to this time last term do you feel less nervous about speaking?*

Yes. Cos now I know all these things that I can do to help make myself feel more relaxed before I speak in class.

*In lessons we've done group talk and we've done strategies. Group Talk: DO you think that was helpful?*

Yes because you get to work as a team.

*And how about the strategies was that helpful as well?*

Yeah cos you get to know like, yeah.

*Which do you think was the most effective?*

Probably the strategies?

*If I was to do it again with another class, do you think I should just do the strategies and leave the group talk?*

I think both really help in their own way. And I think, yeah, they'd benefit from both.

## Appendix E – Teacher Semi-Structured Interview Template

**Investigating ways of preventing students' anxiety during spontaneous Target Language use in the MFL classroom - Department of Education, University of Oxford**

**PRE/POST INTERVENTION INTERVIEW TEACHER CONSENT FORM**

Dear Teacher,

As part of my Masters degree at Oxford University I am conducting a small scale research and development project. Its aim is to discover whether:

a) helping pupils learn to cope with a stressful situation
b) making the learning environment less stressful
c) both

reduce pupils' anxiety when speaking French in class. I would like to interview you as part of this research and hope you would be able to help me.

Many thanks,

**By signing here I agree to participate in this interview (my data will remain anonymous) and I am aware that I can refuse to participate in any research activities at any time:**

Teacher name:
Teacher signature:

Date:

**********

**TYPICAL PRE/POST INTERVENTION TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTION SCHEDULE**

1. How do you think pupils feel about speaking the target language in your classroom? Why/Why not?
2. When you were a student how did you feel about speaking French/German/Spanish? Why/Why not?
3. What could be done to help pupils feel at ease when speaking the target language spontaneously?
4. Would a less stressful learning context makes me feel more confident speaking the target language? If so, how could this be done?
5. Would a more structured task help pupils feel less anxious about speaking the target language? If so, how could this be done?
6. How could the teacher's behaviour make pupils feel more or less nervous about speaking the target language?
7. How could group work affect the confidence of pupils speaking the target language?
8. How do activities relating to students' personal interests affect their emotions towards speaking the target language?
9. How could activities that give pupils or a class a sense of achievement make students feel about speaking French?
10. Do you think teaching students strategies for coping with an anxiety-provoking situation would help them to panic less about speaking French?
11. Would teaching strategies for lowering anxiety help at all?
12. How about teaching pupils to encourage themselves?
13. Would showing students how to "take their emotional temperature" help them at all?
14. Which do you feel would be the most effective method for reducing pupils' anxiety during spontaneous target language use in class?
    a) helping pupils learn to cope with a stressful situation
    b) making the learning environment less stressful
15. Do you think both of these methods together would be more effective?
16. Do you have any further comments or suggestions you would like to add?

## Appendix F – Teacher Interview Transcripts

**Teacher A**

**How do you feel about speaking the target language in the classroom?**

I think it's really important but I do find it's an effort, erm, but it's good to have, erm, instructions in the target language because they pick the language up without kind of realising.

**When you were a student how did you feel about speaking French in class?**

Erm, I, I used to like doing pair work actually, and I did Alevel Italian about 5 years ago and I found that doing pair work was much less daunting than speaking out in front of the class.

**And what could be done to help pupils feel at ease when speaking the target language spontaneously?**

I always say to them, look, , you know, make mistakes, that's fine, no one's gonna laugh at you , erm, just have a go, you can go a long way, erm, with a language just putting a smile on your face and kind of delivering it confidently even if you don't feel great. Erm, and don't worry too much about accuracy because at the end of the day it's communication that's key. It's better if you say something rather than nothing for fear of making a mistake.

**Would a less stressful learning environment make them feel more confident?**

Oh yeah, undoubtedly.

**How could this less stressful learning context be brought about? Classroom environment.**

Oh, well, it would be ideal, wouldn't it, to have little language rooms, like little music practice rooms.

**Would a more structured task help?**

Yea, any support, any scaffolding that we can give them, is always really beneficial. The more able students might feel a bit constrained by that, nut the less able really appreciate it I think.

**How can the teacher's behaviour help pupils feel more or less nervous about speaking the target language?**

I think if you've just got a really encouraging smiley positive teacher who might give a few, who might say , I've made mistakes in the past but I've learnt from them, it's really nothing to worry about, just have a go with the language and have fun with it.

**How can group work affect pupils' confidence speaking the target language?**

I think group work is really positive, erm, because they learn from each other. And maybe your peers are, I don't know, a small group, is less daunting than speaking to the class. And you can ask questions of each other and check things, and it's reassuring to think that other people have similar doubts.

**How do activities relating to their personal interests affect their emotions towards speaking?**

I think, erm, it makes them much more willing to engage with it if they're talking about something that's close to them, erm, something about them, something that they see as being , like a realistic application of the language. Something that they can talk to someone of their age, someone who's from a different country, about.

**Giving pupils or a class a sense of achievement, how does that affect their relationship to speaking French?**

Well, undoubtedly it's gonna make them experience success in the language and make them realise they can do it and it's not completely beyond them.

**Do you think that teaching students strategies for reducing speaking anxiety would help them at all?**

Yeah, I mean I've actually done that this year with some Year 11 girls preparing for controlled assessments and with an upper sixth girl. I've talked to them about how they can manage their anxiety, and what practices they can put into place, erm, to make sure it doesn't overcome them, overwhelm them.

**So you think strategies for lowering anxiety might be helpful?**

Oh, without a doubt, yeah, absolutely.

**How about teaching pupils strategies to encourage themselves, like reward yourself afterwards, tell yourself you can do it, do you think those work?**

Yeah, and I think they're helpful across the curriculum, I think that's what we should be doing as part of school life anyway, cos lots of them do suffer from self –esteem and negative self-image, so anything we can do in our classrooms is gonna benefit them in the wider world.

**And would teaching students to take their emotional temperature, like, thinking about their breathing, etc., do you think that sort of thing would help them?**

Yeah, absolutely, if they could think, yeah, Ok, how am I feeling right now, red angry, green calm and lying in a nice field, amber kind of a bit neutral, I think it's really important to be aware of how your feeling and how this affects your delivery of the language.

**If you could only teach one thing, either change the learning environment OR strategies, which would be the most effective do you think?**

I think it's really difficult because obviously schools don't have loads of different resources, loads of different rooms, you can't really change the environment that much so I think it's much more important to teach them strategies and then these will come in handy for life at different stages.

**So together they're most effective?**

Oh, more effective, of course, but erm, yeah, as I say, it's not always possible to change the environment, erm, it's very difficult for a teacher working with limited resources, limited space, hmm.

**And do you have any further suggestions for reducing speaking anxiety in MFL?**

Playing them little clips of other people speaking English, erm from other countries and them making little mistakes but it doesn't actually impede the message. I think that's a good way of showing that you can make mistakes but the communication is clear, you know what they're trying to say, and encouraging them to be a sympathetic listener, erm, when other people are trying to speak English, erm, I think that can help……

No, I think speaking is always gonna be tricky, and it is difficult for us to mimic the accent of other languages, but, we really need to keep going and to keep trying to encourage kids to speak other languages because, we're in danger of becoming, kin of, Anglo centric I think.

**Teacher B**

**How do you think pupils feel about speaking the target language in the classroom?**

They don't mind speaking in pairs or groups, but they're not so keen to speak on their own to me because of peer pressure or whatever else it might be.

**And how do you feel about speaking the target language in the classroom?**

I like it, sometimes it's frustrating when you can't get the point across but it's essential.

**When you were a student how did you feel about speaking French in class?**

Umm, I don't remember speaking very much French in class! It's really weird that actually.

**And what could be done to help pupils feel at ease when speaking the target language spontaneously?**

Erm, I think do more pair, group work, let them enjoy it. Erm games, with languages speaking, more practice at lunch times one to one, try and make them relax with you, erm, drilling. I think that's it really.

**Would a less stressful learning environment make them feel more confident, like changing the classroom or changing the teaching?**

It would. It's just finding a way of making that happen. That's the hard bit.

**Have you got any suggestions of how it could be done?**

Less stressful environment? Again it's sort of the task that you set, it's um, an exam is always going to be very stressful, and it's very hard to reduce that stress. I think you can reduce that sort of stress by doing pre-exam practice, drilling, which I've just suggested for one of my Year 10s for next year. Erm, lots of one to one drilling and get her used to me. Erm, but just do more, pair, group work, Group Talk, make it fun. My Year 10s currently love doing, having reactions to anything I said, so make them have a reaction. And they were trying lots of improvised reactions and made them fun with French sounds and almost erm, exaggerating the language and that worked really well.

**How can the teacher's behaviour help pupils feel more or less nervous about speaking the target language?**

Err, smile a lot, this helps to relax them, and use body language. Erm, pictures to help them understand what you're trying to say, repetition, tone of voice, err using rhythm and syllables, but I think particularly, yeah the rhythm really gets them going actually.

**How can group work affect pupils' confidence speaking the target language?**

The thing I've noticed the most is, it erm, really makes them enjoy it more. Because it's such fin, it's just nonsense a lot of the time, but they're trying, they're practising new words, they're experimenting with the language in a fun way. And they love a good row! They love arguing with each other so it's sort of getting the point across in a fun way. It's really good.

**How do activities relating to their personal interests affect their emotions towards speaking?**

Discussing them? Its better I would have thought, because they can relate to it. So they need to understand what they're saying. And this is the problem half the time is that they're memorising chunks that they don't actually understand, but if it's personal they understand it, it's relevant, and so they should be more confident with that.

**Giving pupils or a class a sense of achievement, how does that affect their relationship to speaking French?**

Huge I would say. Encouragement is everything. And that happened yesterday with my Year 9 speaking exam. And at the end, I just gave them a massive, really, applause and a bon bon and said that, you know, that they'd gone out on a high, and shown respect for the language, and they loved that. To the bitter end.

**Do you think that teaching students strategies for reducing speaking anxiety would help them at all?**

Yes. I've been trying some of that with my really stressed girls, and that's breathing, erm, and yes, sort of, getting, taking stock before they answer. Erm, trying to help them to improvise, not to pre-learn and if they do forget what they were going to say, that they can just come up with something else and that it doesn't matter. They struggle with that massively, but that's important that they know that.

**Would teaching strategies for lowering anxiety in general, would that help them to feel better about speaking?**

It would, we just need to help them come up with the right strategies. That's the hard bit, isn't it?

**How about teaching pupils strategies to encourage themselves, like reward yourself afterwards, tell yourself you can do it, do you think those work?**

Yeah, we don't I think it could work actually, but, whether they'd see that as just, if they were almost congratulating each other, whether it would be seen as a bit patronising! But you can do it in a fun way.

**And would teaching students to take their emotional temperature, like, thinking about their breathing, traffic lights etc., do you think that sort of thing would help them?**

Now and again. Not too much, cos you almost don't want to feed a problem, to their brains, I'd, I like to just check that they're ok, and…. I'd rather deal with someone who appears not to be OK, rather than to put the problem in their minds before it's happened.

**If you could only teach one thin, either change the learning environment OR strategies, which would be the most effective do you think?**

Ooooh. To me they're inter-linked, it's hard to separate those actually! Strategies are vital, erm but so's the… I can't separate them.

**So together they're most effective?**

Yeah, it has to function well as a whole doesn't it.

**And do you have any further comments or suggestions for reducing speaking anxiety in MFL?**

It is practice, practice, practice. And the children who have more practice are more confident. The more confidence they have, the better they are, and the anxiety is reduced. That's really really noticeable. But it's having the time to give them the practice that they need. It just helps if they've got a parent at home as well, who can help them, I think. Just form a brilliant relationship with the kids. But even then a lot of them are terrified, which is a shame, isn't it. But it's always going to be difficult isn't it? I think, err, what … is doing at the moment is really good, a conversation club. And you just sit and chat, you know, in a non-exam environment, so that when they do an exam then it's not quite so bad. But a lot of the problems in exams are what a lot of the children put in their own heads. It's not us so much, it's them.

## Appendix G – Group 1 Strategy Intervention Outline

**GROUP 1 STRATEGIES INTERVENTION PLAN**

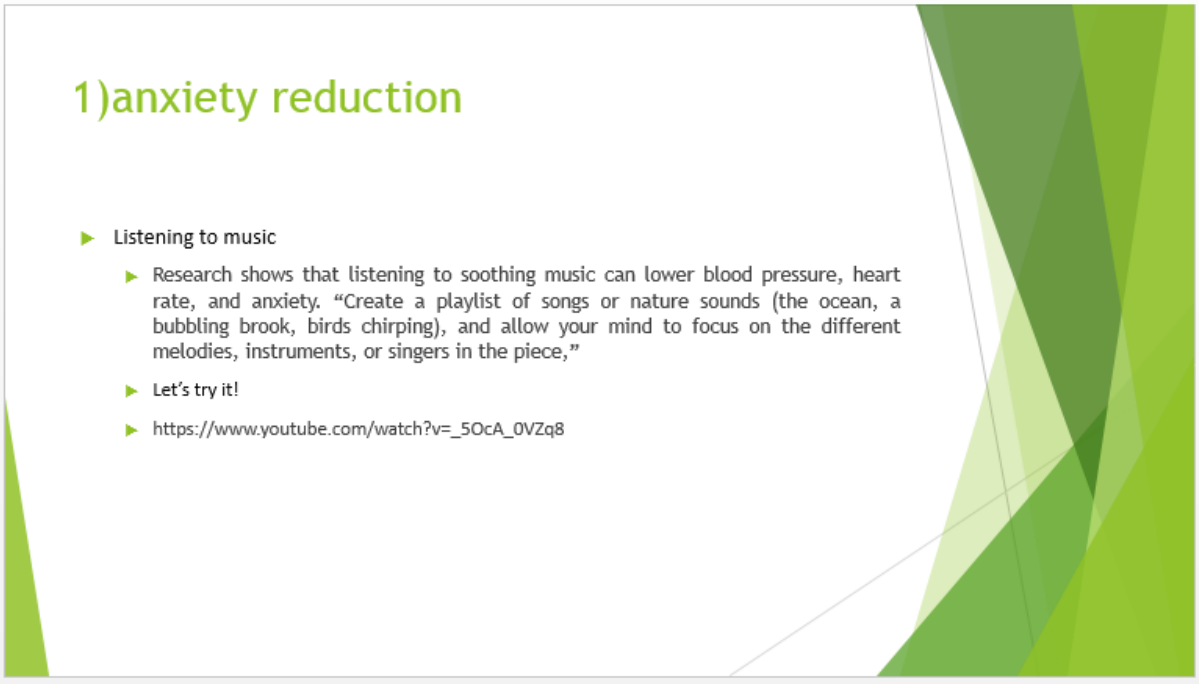
| **Weekly Plan** | **Strategy** | **Activities** |
|---|---|---|
| Lesson 1 | | Starter & main: A l'école<br><br>Plenary: **Pre-intervention questionnaire (and interviews in same week)** |
| Lesson 2 | LOWERING YOUR ANXIETY | Starter & main: A l'école<br>Plenary:<br>Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation |
| Lesson 3 | | Starter: Using music<br>Main & plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 4 | | Starter: Using laughter<br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 5 | ENCOURAGING YOURSELF | Starter: Making positive statements<br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 6 | | Starter: Taking risks wisely<br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 7 | | Starter: Rewarding yourself<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 8 | TAKING YOUR EMOTIONAL TEMPERATURE | Starter: Listening to your body<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 9 | | Starter: Using a checklist<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 10 | | Starter: Writing a language learning diary<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 11 | | Starter: Discussing your feelings with someone else<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 12 | | Starter & main: Les loisirs<br>Plenary: **Post-intervention questionnaire (and interviews in same week)** |

## Appendix H – Group 1 Strategy Intervention Pupil Strategy Checklist

**Strategies for coping with anxiety during speaking tasks**

| If you feel anxious what could you do to calm yourself down? | Examples | Have I used these today? |
|---|---|---|
| **Lowering your anxiety** | Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation | |
| | Using music | |
| | Using laughter | |
| **Encouraging yourself** | Making positive statements | |
| | Taking risks wisely | |
| | Rewarding yourself | |
| **Taking your emotional temperature** | Listening to your body | |
| | Using a checklist | |
| | Writing a language learning diary | |
| | Discussing your feelings with someone else | |

## Appendix I – Group 1 Strategy Intervention Powerpoint Slide Excerpt






## Appendix J – Group 2 Group Talk Intervention Outline

1) a supportive environment (sit with peers)

2) a non-judgmental teacher attitude (removing "teacher effect"/ reminding pupils this is not a test)

3) activities that relate personally to learners (e.g. discussing Harry Styles/instagram etc)

4) activities that facilitate individual and community achievement (prizes for best vocabulary user/group)

5) peer support (group work)

| **Weekly Plan** | **Activities** |
|---|---|
| Lesson 1 | Starter & main: A l'école<br>Plenary: **Pre-intervention questionnaire (and interviews in same week)** |
| Lesson 2 | Group Talk: Introducing group talk and vocabulary treasure hunt<br>Main & plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 3 | Group Talk: Discussing general interest pictures<br>Main & plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 4 | Group Talk: Discussing school subjects<br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 5 | Group Talk: Discussing homework<br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 6 | Group Talk: Discussing favourite teacher<br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 7 | Group Talk: Reviewing Group Talk vocabulary<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 8 | Group Talk: Discussing general interest pictures<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 9 | Group Talk: Discussing sports<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 10 | Group Talk: Discussing celebrities and music<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 11 | Group Talk: Discussing chores<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 12 | Starter & main: Les loisirs<br>Plenary: **Post-intervention questionnaire (and interviews in same week)** |

## Appendix K – Group 2 Group Talk Intervention Key Phrases



## Appendix L – Group 2 Group Talk Intervention Powerpoint Excerpt






## Appendix M – Group 3 Dual Intervention Outline

**Intervention must include:**

1. **GROUP INTERVENTION PLAN**
   1) a supportive environment (sit with peers)
   2) a non-judgmental teacher attitude (removing "teacher effect"/ reminding pupils this is not a test)
   3) activities that relate personally to learners (e.g. discussing Harry Styles/instagram etc)
   4) activities that facilitate individual and community achievement (prizes for best vocabulary user/group)
   5) peer support (group work)

2. **STRATEGIES INTERVENTION**

1) anxiety reduction
2) self-encouragement
3) monitoring emotions

| **Weekly Plan** | **Activities** |
|---|---|
| Lesson 1 | Starter & main: A l'école<br><br>Plenary: **Pre-intervention questionnaire (and interviews in same week)** |
| Lesson 2 | Starter: Introducing group talk and vocabulary treasure hunt<br><br>Main & plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 3 | Starter: Discussing general interest pictures<br><br>Main & plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 4 | Starter: Discussing school subjects<br><br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 5 | Starter: Discussing homework<br><br>Main & Plenary: A l'école |
| Lesson 6 | Starter & Main: Discussing favourite teacher<br><br>Plenary: ***Mid-intervention questionnaire*** |
| Lesson 7 | Starter: Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation / Using music<br><br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 8 | Starter: Using laughter / Making positive statements<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 9 | Starter: Taking risks wisely/ Rewarding yourself<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 10 | Starter: Listening to your body/ Using a checklist<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 11 | Starter: Writing a language learning diary / Discussing your feelings with someone else<br>Main & Plenary: Les loisirs |
| Lesson 12 | Starter & main: Les loisirs<br><br>Plenary: **Post-intervention questionnaire (and interviews in same week)** |