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Evolving notions of literacy-based teaching: A case study of graduate student instructors

Heather W. Allen, *University of Miami*
Beatrice Dupuy, *University of Arizona*

Part Four

Researching Foreign Language Graduate Student Professional Development

Chapter 9

Evolving Notions of Literacy-Based Foreign Language Teaching: A Qualitative Study of Graduate Student Instructors

Heather Willis Allen, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Beatrice Dupuy, University of Arizona

Over the past decade, educators and researchers alike have shown renewed interest in advanced foreign language (FL) teaching and learning in the United States, a phenomenon influenced by various factors, including post-9/11 critical language initiatives and a growing sense of the limitations of communicative competence as an appropriate goal to orient collegiate instruction. As Byrnes (2006) explained, given that communicative competence has been associated "primarily with interactive, transactional oral language use," its focus "does not readily articulate with the kinds of language use that collegiate language departments as academic units consider to be desirable, indeed indispensable, for their intellectual presence on campus and in the world of humanities scholarship" (p. 244). Perhaps no publication better exemplifies the need for rethinking the goals of collegiate FL education than the 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) Report, which proposed reform as follows:

> Unified, four-year curricula that situate language study in cultural, historic, geographic, and cross-cultural frames; that systematically incorporate transcultural content and translingual reflection at every level; and that organize the major around explicit, principled educational goals and expected outcomes. A curriculum should consist of a series of complementary or linked courses that holistically incorporate content and cross-cultural reflection at every level. (p. 5)

Whereas the 2007 MLA Report contained bold statements regarding needed changes in the undergraduate FL curriculum, implications of such changes for future professors' readiness to teach in a transformed curriculum were not evident in the report's limited comments on graduate student education, i.e., "graduate studies should provide substantive training in language teaching and in the use of new technologies" (p. 7). Nowhere did the report make specific recommendations as to what the actual *content* or *forms* such "substantive training" should entail. Left unanswered were questions including: What pedagogical approaches are most appropriate to unify the study of language and cultural, historic, geographic, and literary content? What activities and tools might best instantiate reforms called for in the report through in-service graduate student instructor (GSI) professional development? These oversights underscore the necessity for articulating new

goals for GSI professional development given the large-scale pedagogical change necessary to carry out the report's curricular aims.

In recent years and concurrent with the rise of New Literacy Studies (New London Group, 1996; Gee, 1996), numerous applied linguists working in collegiate FL departments (Allen & Paesani, 2010, Byrnes, 2006; Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006; Kern, 2000; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) have argued in favor of literacy-based pedagogy as one pathway to curricular reform[1] and as an overarching concept to challenge teachers to rethink traditional perceptions of language versus culture or literature. This chapter reports on the outcomes of one FL department's efforts to reform GSI professional development by focusing on the concept of literacy to better integrate pedagogy for lower-division language and advanced-level literary-cultural content courses. In the following pages, we provide a brief overview of research on FL GSI professional development. Next, we describe the literacy-based pedagogy seminar in which participants were enrolled, outline the study conducted, and present its findings. Finally, we discuss implications of this study for rethinking FL GSI professional development.

GSI Preparation to Teach in the Collegiate FL Curriculum: A Brief Overview[2]

A recurrent theme in scholarship on FL graduate students' preparation as teachers in U.S. universities over the past 20 years has been the desire to move beyond a teacher *training* paradigm and establish *professional development* that more appropriately reflects the long-term needs of graduate students. Regrettably, published literature does not support the fact that professional development has been transformed to any meaningful degree in recent years.[3] Supporting this assertion, and reflecting the limited scope of professional development, a survey of 24 language program directors (LPDs) found that 22 of their departments required just one FL teaching methodologies course (referred to hereafter as the "methods course") typically focused on lower-level language instruction and completed one semester before or concurrent with the first teaching assignment (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010). This model reflects Freeman's (1993) notion of *frontloading*, or trying to equip teachers at the outset for all that they need to know and be capable of doing throughout their career. Further, this model is particularly problematic given the long-documented language–literature divide (Byrnes, 2005; MLA, 2007) present in many collegiate FL departments (particularly those with graduate programs), which is sustained in part through the methods course, as it has traditionally focused on language and literature as "clearly separable units" (Bernhardt, 2001, p. 199).

Although research documenting the outcomes of GSI professional development is limited, three studies highlight the constraints of methods courses. Brandl (2000) surveyed GSIs in five FLs on perceptions of the most beneficial professional development components. His findings showed that informal discussions about teaching with peers or the LPD were more influential than orientation activities, the methods course, and pedagogy workshops. The author concluded that the

methods course's rating was due to two factors: First, the amount of information introduced makes it difficult to process, apply, and synthesize; and second, the relation of theory to classroom teaching is a struggle for new teachers.

A second study by Rankin and Becker (2006) explored how a GSI of German translated theoretical knowledge into his first semester of classroom teaching and concurrent enrollment in a pedagogy seminar. Their findings revealed conceptual and cultural filters that influenced how the GSI read research, selected ideas to incorporate into teaching, and implemented those ideas, leading the authors to conclude that models of teacher development based on knowledge transmission are inadequate, as knowledge from research is not simply accumulated and put into action.

A third study by Allen (2011) explored two GSIs' development of expertise in literacy-based teaching over three years. Findings showed that everyday notions of language learning and pragmatic concerns dominated the GSIs' first semesters of teaching Spanish, during which time neither participant demonstrated the ability to think through concepts of literacy in constructing instructional practices. Course readings and opportunities for scaffolded learning during a second pedagogy seminar were of significant value for consolidating conceptual understandings of literacy. Accordingly, Allen concluded that FL departments should consider expanding pedagogy coursework beyond the initial semester of teaching and articulating other ongoing forms of professional development to support conceptual development throughout GSIs' teaching trajectories.

For FL GSIs, the drawbacks of the frontloading model are compounded by few opportunities to teach the types of advanced undergraduate FL courses that they would be expected to teach as professors. According to an MLA survey, GSI teaching is confined overwhelmingly to lower-division teaching: Overall, approximately 80 percent of teaching assignments are in lower-level courses, even for GSIs in their fourth year of teaching or beyond (Steward, 2006). In other words, Ph.D. students who have chosen literature and culture as their emphasis likely complete their studies without designing instructional materials for upper-division literature and cultural studies courses—something often seen as a requisite to demonstrate readiness for university positions.

Several investigations of GSIs' views of their preparation as teachers highlight incongruities between the focus of professional development and typical responsibilities of FL professors. Gonglewski and Penningworth's (1998) survey of graduate students of German found a gap between professional development activities rated as important versus those actually done, particularly for coteaching or participating in research with faculty. Two studies focusing on GSIs' self-efficacy for teaching questioned whether perceived competence in teaching language translates into teaching literature. Mills and Allen (2007) found that for GSIs of French, despite moderately high efficacy for teaching language, comments relating to teaching literature were more negative. A follow-up study (Mills, 2011) of teacher self-efficacy for GSIs of French reported that only 20 percent of participants felt techniques for teaching language would be useful in teaching literature. The author concluded that although GSIs may possess valuable pedagogical knowledge for teaching language as well as content knowledge of literature, they do not necessarily know how to integrate the two domains.

To summarize, in light of recent calls for change in collegiate FL instruction, a need exists to reconsider two significant limitations of current practices in GSI professional development. First, novice GSIs may not establish needed connections between theoretical knowledge and classroom instructional practices during preservice or early in-service methods courses. Second, it is questionable whether existing pedagogical knowledge and teaching techniques related to lower-division language instruction can be readily integrated into more advanced literary–cultural courses. As Wurst (2008) advocated, the FL profession needs to "re-examine best practices in training our graduate students so that they will be able to, for example, negotiate the literature/language split," and move beyond the "lecture–discussion model of their professors" (pp. 58–59).

Research Design

In view of the challenge of providing GSI professional development germane to both lower-division language and advanced undergraduate literary–cultural courses, this chapter reports on one phase of a longitudinal qualitative study of GSI experiences learning to teach in a collegiate FL department. The objective of this phase of the study was to determine how participation in a second pedagogy seminar influenced GSIs' notions of *literacy* (Kern, 2000) as a framing construct for the undergraduate FL curriculum. Three research questions were addressed:

1. In what ways did GSIs' conceptual understandings of literacy develop through participation in the seminar?
2. Which conceptual and pedagogical tools related to literacy did GSIs perceive as most relevant for teaching and what challenges did they encounter as they to applied them to instructional design?
3. How did GSIs' understandings of literacy's role in the undergraduate FL curriculum evolve through participation in the seminar?

Theoretical Framework. This study embraced the perspective of Vygotskian cultural–historical psychology, better known as sociocultural theory (SCT) in SLA research. Besides its application for researching language-learning processes, SCT has been used for studying teacher cognition and professional development in a range of contexts (see Johnson & Golombek, 2011, a recent collection of SCT-based language teacher education research).

Johnson (2009) outlined the following characteristics of conceiving language teacher development from an SCT perspective: 1. Teachers are viewed as *learners of teaching* rather than performers of teaching; 2. Learning to teach is understood as *a dynamic process of social interaction* wherein teachers appropriate, reconstruct, and transform existing social practices of teaching based on individual and local needs; 3. Teacher learning is seen as both *internal and collective activity* that shapes not only teachers' own actions and thoughts but also student engagement in language learning and their learning outcomes; and 4. Professional development is considered *a conceptual process*, wherein teachers' own everyday concepts of language, learning, and teaching (i.e., their deeply engrained

notions about what language is, how languages are learned, and how they should be taught based on their own language-learning experiences) encounter scientific concepts (i.e., research and theory encountered in academic and professional settings) about these subjects, creating the potential for reorganization of their experiential knowledge and formation of new knowledge.

Thus, professional development should "present relevant scientific concepts to teachers...in ways that bring these concepts to bear on concrete practical activity, connecting them to their everyday knowledge and the goal-directed activities of teaching" (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 2). Further, as Johnson (2009) explained, teachers' conceptual development depends on the availability of "multiple and sustained opportunities for dialogic mediation, scaffolded learning, and assisted performance as they participate in and learn about relevant aspects of their professional worlds" (pp. 4–5). These recommendations are critical if professional development is to overcome the inertia of FL teachers' everyday concepts, particularly regarding the separation of language and culture and the notion that "grammatical accuracy is a precursor to successful communication" (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007, p. 884). In other words, SCT-oriented teacher education does not subscribe to a model of knowledge transmission but instead views knowledge as developing through social interaction between less experienced teachers and their peers and more experienced counterparts responsible for their professional development.

Lantolf and Johnson (2007), as well as Smagorinsky, Cook, and Johnson (2003), have proposed that professional development should foreground one overarching concept to unify curricula and provide teachers with coherent notions of teaching and learning. The concept centered on in the pedagogy seminar in this study was *literacy*, defined as follows:

> [T]he use of socially-, historically-, and culturally- situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships...literacy is dynamic—not static—and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. (Kern, 2000, p. 16)

In this regard, literacy is viewed as multidimensional—not only linguistic but also cognitive and sociocultural (Kern, 2000). According to Kern, literacy-based instruction offers a means of narrowing the pedagogical gap between lower-level language instruction and more advanced, content-centered instruction by reconciling the teaching of communication with that of textual analysis. Kern described seven principles of literacy to guide instruction including *collaboration*, *conventions*, *cultural knowledge*, *interpretation*, *language use*, *problem solving*, and *reflection and self-reflection* (2000). Whereas language use, conventions, and cultural knowledge represent core elements of literacy-based instruction, they are taught in conjunction with the processes of interpretation, collaboration, problem solving, and reflection. Taking into account the varied instructional needs of learners, the New London Group (1996) articulated four types of activities, or curricular components, to include in literacy-based instruction—*situated practice*, *overt*

instruction, *critical framing*, and *transformed practice* (see Allen & Paesani, 2010, as well as the chapters by both Kern and Paesani in this volume for more comprehensive discussions of the principles of literacy and four curricular components).

Two final constructs relevant to this study are conceptual and pedagogical tools. *Conceptual tools* mediate decision making for planning, instruction, and assessment and include theoretical principles, concepts, and frameworks, whereas *pedagogical tools* have more local, immediate utility and include instructional practices, strategies, and resources (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). The distinction between conceptual and pedagogical tools is significant as novice teachers often encounter difficulty instantiating pedagogical applications of theoretical concepts and frameworks (Rankin & Becker, 2006). Grossman, Smargorinsky, and Valencia further posited five degrees in the process of appropriation, or adopting, certain conceptual or pedagogical tools for use in teaching: *lack of appropriation* (due to incomprehension, resistance, or rejection of the tool), *appropriating a tool's label* but not its features, *appropriating surface features of a tool* yet not understanding how the features contribute to a conceptual whole, *appropriating conceptual underpinnings* and being able to use the tool in new settings, and *achieving mastery* in the tool's use.

Participants. Five Ph.D. students in romance studies at a private university in the Southern United States took part in a longitudinal study over a three-year period. Criteria for participation in this phase of the study included credit-seeking status in the "Literacy and Advanced FL Teaching and Learning" course (referred to hereafter as the "literacy seminar") and current assignment as a GSI. Among the participants, two specialized in French literature, two in Spanish Peninsular literature and one in Latin American literature. Participants' ages ranged from 26 to 30 years, averaging 27 years. Two participants each identified Spanish (Andrea and Maria) or French (Amélie and Vincent) as their first language and one (Lizzie) was an English native speaker. Only Lizzie was raised in the continental United States, whereas Andrea grew up in Puerto Rico and Maria in Cuba, both arriving in the United States just before college. Amélie and Vincent came to the United States after college in France—Amélie for an M.A. program in French literature and Vincent to teach social studies in a French immersion program. Among the participants, only Amélie had FL teaching experience prior to her Ph.D. studies. Participants' demographic and academic profiles are displayed in Table 9.1.

Teaching and Professional Development Context. During the participants' first year of Ph.D. coursework and one semester prior to their first teaching assignment, they completed a required one-semester methods course.[4] Given the communicative nature of lower-level French and Spanish courses and textbooks in use, several pedagogical approaches (CLT, literacy-based teaching, and task-based instruction) and related instructional strategies were introduced in the methods course.[5] Conceptual tools of literacy that were introduced included the principles of literacy and the four curricular components.

In addition to the methods course, participants were involved in ongoing observations of teaching by their LPD and pedagogy workshops. Three participants were also completing coursework in bilingualism, applied linguistics, and FL

Table 9.1. Participants' Demographic, Teaching, and Academic Information

Pseudonym/ Gender	Age/ Citizenship	Teaching Experience	Academic Profile
Amélie/F	26/French	4 years, elementary and intermediate French	3rd year student specializing in the contemporary French novel
Andrea/F	27/American	2 years, elementary Spanish, elementary	3rd year student specializing in late 20th and 21st century Spanish
		Spanish for Heritage Spanish students	Caribbean and Brazilian literature
Lizzie/F	27/American	3 years, elementary and intermediate Spanish; 1 year English as a FL in an elementary school in Spain	4th year student specializing in immigration and contemporary Spanish narrative
Maria/F	25/American	2 years, elementary Spanish	3rd year student specializing in late 20th- and 21st-century Spanish novel
Vincent/M	30/French	1 year, elementary French; 3 years social studies in a French immersion middle school in the United States	2nd year student specializing in semiotics and French cultural anthropology

pedagogy to fulfill requirements for a doctoral certificate in SLA and teaching offered in the department. The seminar described below was open to all romance studies Ph.D. students, regardless of whether they were pursuing the certificate or not.

Regarding the typical teaching responsibilities of participants, beginning in their second year of Ph.D. coursework, each taught one first-semester elementary language course in French or Spanish per term. With few exceptions, during the third year of their Ph.D. studies, each taught one second-semester elementary language course per term. By their fourth year, each taught one early intermediate language course per term. At the time of the phase of the study reported in this chapter, one participant was teaching a first-semester elementary language course (Vincent), two were teaching second-semester elementary language courses (Amélie and Maria), one was teaching an elementary-level course for heritage Spanish speakers (Andrea), and one was teaching an early intermediate Spanish course (Lizzie). During the academic year following this phase of the study, several participants (Amélie, Andrea, and Maria) cotaught third-year literature or cultural studies courses with faculty.

The Literacy Seminar.[6] As previously described, literacy was used as the overarching concept to frame the seminar. This notion was chosen to bridge GSIs' previous teaching experiences and pedagogical knowledge related to teaching

lower-level language courses with the seminar's focus on instructional design for advanced undergraduate courses and rethinking dichotomous perceptions of language versus culture, language versus literature, and "productive" versus "receptive" skills. Seminar content was organized into three modules. The first focused on definition and discussion of conceptual tools including the *principles of literacy*, *design of meaning*, *available designs, discourse*, *genre*, and the *four curricular components* (Kern, 2000; New London Group, 1996). The second module targeted applications of concepts previously introduced through published "case studies" of literacy-based FL courses and extension of the interrelationship of reading, writing, and speaking. Examples of pedagogical tools introduced were *reading matrix*, *journal writing*, *mapping*, *graphic organizer*, *directed-reading-thinking activity*, and *writing for speaking* (Kern, 2000; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). Students worked in pairs to design and present a model instructional sequence, choosing specific tools to incorporate from readings. During the last module, students worked each week on a final project to design a syllabus and sample unit for an advanced undergraduate course in literature or cultural studies. Several sessions were dedicated to planning course goals, objectives, organization, materials, and assessment.

Data Collection and Analysis. SCT and qualitative research methods informed both data collection and analysis, and multiple data sources were gathered during and after the 14-week seminar. In keeping with the theoretical grounding of the study, participants' personal narratives (Pavlenko, 2007) were the primary data sources, emphasized for their value in gaining insights into the GSIs' thoughts, feelings, and challenges related to literacy-based FL teaching. These included oral (pre- and postseminar interviews that were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim) and written narratives (weekly reading summaries and reflections and postseminar reflections). To gain an understanding of each participant's history as language learners and teacher, secondary data included demographic profiles, language-learning autobiographies, and statements of teaching philosophy dating back to the methods seminar. Yet, as Pavlenko (2007) warned, personal narratives cannot simply be considered as factual data to be subject to content analysis, so effort was made to avoid relying solely on participants' subject reality but also to examine teaching artifacts that each participant created during the literacy seminar (model instructional sequence, syllabus project materials).

Analysis of data began with identifying patterns and themes from transcribed interviews and follow-up reflections and, to a lesser degree, reading response journals. Each reference in interview transcripts and reflective portions of reading reactions to either conceptual or pedagogical tools of literacy was coded as one meaning unit and labeled with a code name based on the theme expressed. In addition to focusing on mentions of conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy, participants' perceptions of affordances and/or constraints to literacy-based instruction were coded as were beliefs about teaching and learning. Thus, a total of five coding categories were used. Next, instructional documents created as part of the module instructional sequence and syllabus project were analyzed for ways in which participants attempted to instantiate conceptual and pedagogical tools of

literacy in light of their narratives. Through triangulation of various data sources, we sought to determine whether alignment was seen between what participants said regarding conceptual tools guiding their teaching practices and how this conceptual understanding was evidenced in teaching artifacts. Finally, statements of teaching philosophy from the end of the methods seminar were compared to comments from the end of the literacy seminar comments to determine if evolution was seen in which concepts were named as relevant to each participant's teaching.

Several strategies were used for verification of this study's analysis. Multiple data types were collected using recording devices and verbatim transcriptions when appropriate. Data sources were analyzed separately and later triangulated to establish a confluence of evidence. Conversely, the researchers searched for negative evidence by looking for disconfirming data to refine working hypotheses. Member checks took place as participants read transcribed interviews, verifying their accuracy and adding clarifications. Despite these strategies, this study has a number of limitations related to data collection. Future research design could improve on the current study by recording classroom teaching and using stimulated recall to facilitate discussion of alignment (or lack of alignment) between GSIs' discourse on instruction and their teaching practices. In addition, future investigations would be well served to take a longitudinal approach, analyzing the evolution of conceptual understanding over a longer period of time than one semester, to study how mastery in the use of such tools emerges and what activities and contexts facilitate mastery.

Findings

Developing Conceptual Knowledge of Literacy. At the seminar's start, participants possessed varying, often nonsystematic conceptual understandings of literacy. Whereas three participants (Andrea, Maria, Vincent) identified it as one of several concepts informing their teaching approach, their comments showed that definitions of literacy and views of how literacy-based teaching relates to other instructional approaches differed.

For example, Maria claimed that "[i]t is not enough [for students] to be a grammar expert or a 'human dictionary' if they do not know how to use [the FL] in real life." She also explained that it is insufficient to "direct the class to the communicative approach and ignore the other components" (i.e., focus on form). She went on to link these two disparate notions by claiming that as a teacher, her approach was "very eclectic" and situated "in the middle of the two extremes: literacy-based approach and communicative approach." In this regard, although Maria foregrounded two conceptual tools introduced in the pre-service methods course, *CLT* and *literacy*, she did not possess an understanding of commonalities between features of the two concepts. Instead, she had internalized pseudo-conceptual understandings of CLT and literacy, resulting in her thinking that the two approaches were incompatible. In addition, Maria's belief that an "eclectic approach"

is useful to accommodate students' varied learning styles emerges as a mediating element in her pedagogical thinking.

Andrea and Vincent both viewed literacy and CLT as compatible and identified CLT as their primary approach to teaching. Because Vincent did not clearly see a meaningful role for "interesting use of content" in CLT, he hoped to incorporate more literature into his teaching lower-level French courses so that students might "take more interest in the class" and he might "take more pleasure in teaching." Andrea described her teaching as "communicative based" but also "literacy informed." Her statement of teaching philosophy from the end of the methods course pointed to her belief that literacy's grounding in texts offered students something not possible in a teacher-created context. She explained, "Authentic materials expose students to discourses, different genres, and different registers that do not necessarily arise in a classroom setting." A repeated theme in both her statement of teaching philosophy and language-learning autobiography was a desire to avoid instruction wherein learners feel "infantilized," a "very frustrating" situation that she had experienced learning Italian. Thus, remarks by both Andrea and Vincent demonstrate how their own everyday concepts or personal notions of what language learning should be (i.e., entail interesting content, avoid infantilizing students) led to a willingness to explore the type of text-centered instruction advocated in a literacy-based approach.

At the literacy seminar's start, Amélie and Lizzie also explained that texts played an important role in their teaching approach. However, neither linked the use of texts to the concept of literacy. Instead, both focused on input, output, and CLT as conceptual tools guiding their teaching, notions that they had been introduced to in previous FL pedagogy courses. As Amélie explained,

> [*I*]*nput* is where it starts...I try to have them produce as much *output* as possible to make them practice. I'm also into authentic documents...but *interpretation*, I don't think we do it enough. I don't know if this is because of the level, or I don't think they can do it, or I don't think we have enough time, or I don't think this is what we should do...I go for more understanding and speaking about it a little bit. (Interview, 1/21/2009, our emphasis)

Amélie's comments suggest that prior to the seminar, rather than appropriating a literacy-based understanding of the use of texts, she viewed them as a springboard for language practice and production of output. Furthermore, while mentioning one of the principles of literacy, *interpretation*, she seemed to resist its application to lower-level language instruction in favor of a more comprehension-production oriented notion of using texts.

By semester's midpoint, participants' reading responses pointed to shifts in their understandings of literacy. Lizzie explained,

> I no longer consider literacy as just knowing how to read and what the words say. I realize that a *sociocultural* understanding of the text is just as important in getting what the text means. Also I'm using

more texts in class and asking questions that are not necessarily comprehension questions. (Written reflection, 3/5/2009, our emphasis)

Her response indicates that Lizzie's notion of literacy now included not just its linguistic but also its sociocultural dimension. In addition to articulating some conceptual underpinnings of literacy, she also was starting to reconsider some of her own classroom practices, i.e., moving beyond mere comprehension questions related to texts, in light of her evolving understanding of literacy.

Similar to Lizzie, Amélie also explained at the midpoint of the literacy seminar that she had a new sense of "what I do with texts...trying to provide more independent thinking and interpretation." She further wrote that she had become "self-conscious as a teacher of the way I design/orientate my discussion in class" and was making attempts to "pay more attention to the activation of students' background as a way to increase oral production and motivate interest." These comments illustrate that Amélie was striving to include at least two principles of literacy (Kern, 2000) in her teaching—*interpretation* and *problem solving*—moving away from her former emphasis on comprehension and now incorporating the notion of activating students' schemata when working with texts. However, one also notes a continued role for "production" by students in her thinking, indicating that, in a sense, she is attempting to reconcile CLT and literacy-based concepts.

A common thread in participants' postseminar interviews was an expanded notion of the concept of literacy. Several participants highlighted its cognitive and sociocultural dimensions. In Amélie's words, "it's the convergence of the linguistic [and] cultural aspect and the thinking process." As Andrea described,

Before I just sort of thought that [literacy] was writing plus reading...but it has evolved into a much greater understanding of what it means to create and *interpret meaning*. It depends on the environment, the group of people using the language, the time period. (Interview, 5/5/2009, our emphasis)

Other comments in postseminar interviews pointed to participants' increasingly concrete understanding of how literacy could be applied in classroom teaching. Lizzie now viewed FL learning as "not about just practicing the language... it involves participation...engaging with texts." Furthermore, she also felt that students should be given opportunities to "talk back about what they are doing" and "reflect on their own experiences" learning Spanish. Vincent explained, "Now I can envision literacy as the main starting point from which I want to design courses...it's a broad term to which you can apply any materials."

Three participants (Amélie, Maria, Vincent) expressed difficulty in understanding and applying theoretical concepts and, in particular, those related to literacy, during the methods course. Discussing her initiation to a literacy-based approach, Amélie said, "It just disappeared among the rest...I was familiarized with [CLT] before so if there is one or a couple of articles dealing with something different, it's fine to discover, but then *it's lost among so many other readings*" (our emphases). Similarly, Vincent stated,

The first pedagogical class, you have to learn how to behave in class, how to assess your students—*there are so many other things*. It was very focused on [CLT], and, important also, we are communicating always, so this is the point of the first class. (Interview, 5/5/2009, emphasis our own)

Maria also had difficulty moving from understanding the conceptual tool of literacy to instantiating it in her teaching. As she explained, "[M]aybe I knew the concept, but I didn't know in more simple terms how to like use it and how to maybe *make it work for my classes"* (our emphasis). Thus, she may have appropriated surface features of the conceptual tool of literacy, but she did not appear to have appropriated its conceptual underpinnings in a way that enabled her to apply the tool in her own teaching.

These comments suggest that despite the inclusion of CLT and literacy-based approaches in the methods course, applications of literacy were later minimized by some participants, perhaps owing to a sort of theoretical overload in the methods course. Only later, following the seminar focused solely on conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy, did several participants begin to think *through* concepts of literacy and apply literacy-based pedagogical tools in teaching.

Applying Conceptual and Pedagogical Tools of Literacy in Instructional Design. During and after the seminar, the ways in which participants claimed to use conceptual and pedagogical tools related to literacy in their teaching varied considerably. Three participants (Andrea, Maria, and Vincent) stated that they used a literacy-based framework (i.e., the four curricular components, New London Group, 1996) when planning instruction. For example, Andrea explained that in her advanced intermediate Spanish course, "Conceiving classes in terms of *situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing*, and *transformed practice* has made the process very smooth for me and very clear for the students." In particular, she claimed to use the pedagogical tool of the reading matrix in overt instruction activities to help students make connections between textual meaning at the sentence level and the paragraph level. Regarding Vincent's advanced elementary French course, he wrote,

What I find myself doing most of the time is to frame the lesson in accordance to the *four curricular elements* defined by the New London Group. I always try to associate the *overt instruction* with a *situated practice* and then from the listening–reading–viewing of the authentic material, I generally move on to an extension activity soliciting students' interpretive skills. The homework often consist[s] of a *transformed practice* activity. (Written Reflection, 10/20/2009, our emphases)

Other participants (Amélie, Lizzie) did not mention using this framework, instead focusing on specific pedagogical tools related to literacy-based teaching. Interestingly, both stated that they had trouble understanding the definitions of the four curricular components. As Lizzie explained, "I'm still grappling with what is critical framing versus situated practice...sometimes I'm confused which is which." However, Lizzie claimed to use graphic organizers in her intermediate

Spanish course to facilitate students structuring their thoughts in writing before speaking. Amélie continued organizing her intermediate French lessons using a CLT-oriented framework, but displayed continued evolution from her former stance on interpretation in lower-level FL courses, stating that she no longer viewed texts as merely "an 'excuse' to study vocabulary and have students practice their comprehension, grammar, and oral/written production." After using a reading matrix to teach a song, Amélie explained:

> [A]t first, I wasn't sure they would put the effort into it, because I was asking a little more than we usually ask from them. And also because of the linguistic barrier, maybe I thought there would be a breakdown or they wouldn't understand...but no, I don't know... that worked! So that was good. (Interview, 5/5/2009)

Thus, although Amélie's remarks demonstrate that she did not possess a unified notion of a specific conceptual tool (e.g., the four curricular components) guiding her use of a specific pedagogical tool (e.g., reading matrix), they do suggest that successful use of the reading matrix may have led to shifts in her beliefs about the value of interpretive activities.

The difficulty of instantiating conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy when designing instructional materials was evident in participants' teaching artifacts and postseminar comments. Two recurrent challenges included 1) designing activities focused on how linguistic and stylistic choices shape meaning and 2) articulating learning objectives in a manner consistent with a literacy framework.

Participants' instructional sequences, syllabi, and sample units suggested that they embraced the inclusion of *critical framing* activities highlighting cultural, historical, ideological, political, and social dimensions of texts. However, *overt instruction* activities (i.e., focusing learners' attention on linguistic and schematic resources) were limited, typically examining vocabulary rather than schematic resources or how language choice enables or constrains meaning in particular textual genres. For example, Maria and Lizzie created a lesson around one act of the play *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* in which students were guided from pre-reading to collaborative reading to expansion activities including a comparison of the play and its cinematic adaptation. However, no explicit focus on language use was present beyond brainstorming terms such as *diálogo* (dialogue), *dramaturgo* (playwright), *escena* (scene), and *personajes* (characters). Similarly, Amélie and Andrea's instructional sequence using an excerpt from the novel *Le Gone du Chaâba* centered on cultural and historical elements, only incorporating a focus on vocabulary in a reading matrix on thematic content. Even in sample units of three to five lessons, participants included few activities focused on language use. This pattern suggests that they may have still possessed an understanding of successful reading as decoding words, which could explain their focus on word definition rather than on why certain words were chosen and the effects produced.

The second challenge pertained to articulating syllabi goals (i.e., general learning outcomes) and objectives (i.e., statements about how the goals will be achieved) consistent with a literacy-based approach. Participants struggled to instantiate the notion of integrating linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural aspects

of literacy development when writing course objectives, instead falling back into a traditional "four-skills approach plus culture" orientation.

For example, in Vincent's objectives for a French culture course, he stated, "Students will develop their communicative skills by using the three modes of communication...Moving from one skill to another will allow students to reinforce their linguistic abilities...students will improve their reading, listening and viewing skills." Thus, although the first statement attempts to avoid a four-skills approach, the others contradict it and contain only vague statements on language development. Amélie also struggled with her course's objectives, writing in her syllabus that the course would

> enhance students' conversational and writing skills in [French]... This will be achieved through numerous assignments of different types that will provide students with the opportunity to interact in writing and orally, acquiring linguistic conventions and working with different textual genres. The use of both oral and textual materials will provide students with numerous opportunities for reading and listening practice.

Although Amélie's objectives displayed a four-skills approach, she did include the concept of *genre* and one of the principles of literary (*conventions*). However, she did not provide specific information as to which genres would be targeted or what concrete interpretive learning outcomes would be anticipated.

In comparison to other participants, Maria and Andrea went a step further in articulating course objectives reflective of a literacy-based approach. In Andrea's syllabus, objectives included developing students' "ability to exchange, support, and discuss their opinions and perspectives on topics dealing with contemporary and historical issues of the Spanish Caribbean" and "awareness of registers and codes that apply to different genres" of 20th century Spanish Caribbean texts. Maria's contemporary Spanish literature syllabus, focusing on an "alternative literary canon," contained the objective that students "present, describe, and defend their position and reaction" to narrative and poetry from three historical periods. In this regard, both participants evidenced the capacity to think through conceptual tools of literacy in their instructional design at a level more abstract than just planning a sequence of classroom activities.

To summarize, three participants claimed to think through conceptual tools of literacy in planning instruction after the seminar, whereas all five participants stated that they used at least one pedagogical tool of literacy in their teaching. Teaching artifacts created during the seminar revealed two challenges with a common element. That is to say, attempting to integrate a focus on linguistic development into content-oriented instruction, even with the explicit intent to do so, was often elusive for participants.

Forming New Perspectives on the Undergraduate FL Curriculum. As stated in the literacy seminar's description, one explicit goal was to facilitate the rethinking of the traditionally differing pedagogies and foci of lower-level language versus advanced literary-cultural FL courses. Although none of the participants had taught advanced undergraduate courses at the time of the seminar, comments by several

reflected beliefs about the language–literature divide, which participants appeared to be poised to repeat, short of their views being challenged through professional development.

For instance, in her preseminar interview, Amélie stated that advanced undergraduate courses involve "less time and focus on everything that is grammatical and language" because students "are supposed to master or know the language by then." Lizzie explained that literature courses are "really relaxed because a lot of times the students have the language skills," allowing a focus on "analyz[ing] the text differently than just learning the language." Similarly, Vincent called teaching literature "completely different" than teaching language and "more about the content than about the form." In each of these cases, participants seemed to see explicit focus on language use as unnecessary in content-oriented courses, perhaps reflecting their own experiences as students in addition to their personal beliefs.

Andrea's and Maria's statements reflected a different view, namely, that continuity exists across the undergraduate curriculum, with the primary difference being in teacher expectations for reading. Nevertheless, they saw progression toward content-focused courses as "a big jump" for students. Andrea articulated her opinion as follows:

> For the lower-level classes I think you're setting a foundation in terms of cultural and social norms of the other language…In the upper levels or bridge courses, I think it's more sort of complicating it maybe…the discourse of the other language is set here [in] your book…so it's deepening the understanding and creating [language] in a way that is understandable to others.

Both participants saw the amount of language students could read as a key difference in lower- versus upper-level courses. Maria stated that in literature courses, "They have to do a lot more in terms of analysis and the number of pages." Her comments also reflected uncertainty as to whether strategies for teaching language would be useful in teaching literature, as she said, "I'm very aware and conscious that I need the tools to do that. One thing is how I feel about literature…another thing is how to get to the student."

After the seminar, whereas each participant recognized shifts in his or her perceptions of desirable goals for the undergraduate FL curriculum, the focus of their comments differed from one another. Andrea possessed a new realization of the cognitive demands faced by students in advanced undergraduate courses, viewing literary–cultural content as different from language, not just quantitatively (i.e., amount of reading) but qualitatively (i.e., what discourse types are chosen). Exposure to literacy-oriented pedagogy led to Lizzie understanding the complexity of advanced language learning differently: "They hit a plateau where there is no language focus anymore but they're expected to read really complex, dense texts…the texts are more difficult without having any type of available designs still being worked out." Thus, Lizzie was now more cognizant of the need for continued focus on language development. As Maria articulated it, the transition could be "less painful" if instruction avoided "disconnecting things." Andrea

spoke of teaching "through the text but also never forgetting that they are language learners." She, along with Maria, stated that teachers must explicitly shape how students interact with texts to maximize language learning.

Amélie's and Vincent's evolving perceptions of the FL curriculum and the use of literacy as a framing approach focused on reenvisioning the role of textual thinking in lower-level language courses. Amélie saw moving beyond language "production" to "reflection" as critical. She explained, "You just don't want them to read and understand the words." Vincent said that shifts in his thinking would not change *what* he taught but *how* he designed instruction to "have the students work in different ways" with texts.

One encouraging finding was that several participants stated that they now considered literacy-based instruction a means of weaving together their own scholarly and teaching interests, domains that they once perceived as separate. In Amélie's words, "There is a way to include our interests and our passions, literature, into the classroom, to share it with people, to teach it at the same time as language." Vincent, who previously stated that he hoped a better grasp on literacy would increase his own pleasure in teaching, now said that he could "envision teaching in a more interesting way, because you can bring literature into the language class." This finding was also reflected in the fact that for the final project, three participants developed syllabi related to the focus of their Ph.D. qualifying exam or dissertation prospectus.

Discussion

This study's findings demonstrate how participation in an advanced pedagogy seminar several semesters after the methods course influenced GSIs' conceptual understandings of *literacy*, its application in classroom instruction, and its role as a framework to structure the undergraduate FL curriculum. In this regard, the study responds to previous calls for research on professional development bridging the curricular gap between language and literature (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2011; Byrnes, 2001, Mills, 2011). Further, it validates previous research on professional development of GSIs identifying challenges of integrating theoretical knowledge into teaching practice (Allen, 2011; Brandl, 2000; Rankin & Becker, 2006). This study has also demonstrated the usefulness of adopting the perspective of SCT for tracing teacher development. Although teacher cognition has been called the "unobservable" dimension of teaching (Borg, 2003, p. 81), this research provides evidence of how conceptual development can be captured by analyzing 1) which conceptual and pedagogical tools are appropriated in teachers' discourse on instruction (what teachers *say*) and 2) the transferability of theoretical and pedagogical tools introduced through formal instruction into classroom practices and teaching artifacts (what teachers *do*).

The following statements summarize findings related to each of the study's research questions:

1. Through involvement in the seminar, participants progressed toward a more theoretically based definition of literacy and an awareness of

its cognitive and sociocultural dimensions, particularly when compared to their understandings of literacy after the preservice methods course. However, conceptual development varied considerably among participants, and some struggled to reconcile their own personal notions of language learning and concepts related to other instructional approaches (i.e., CLT) with literacy-based concepts.

2. Although participants claimed to use at least one conceptual or pedagogical tool of literacy in their teaching after the seminar, not all demonstrated alignment in designing instruction that reflected alignment in conceptual *and* pedagogical tools of literacy. Whereas some GSIs appeared to think through theoretical concepts of literacy (e.g., I want to carry out an *overt instruction* activity) in choosing pedagogical tools or instructional strategies (e.g., therefore, I will use a *reading matrix*), others seemed to pick pedagogical tools in a less systematic fashion, without explicitly grounding their choices in a literacy-based framework. Participants' teaching artifacts also evidenced their difficulty to integrate a focus on language use with content-oriented instruction. When such a focus was present, it was conceived of narrowly, typically examining definitions of words or expressions rather than exploring form–meaning connections. Thus, despite a belief that fostering advanced literacy in a FL entails focus on language as a means of meaning making in literary or cultural texts, participants had difficulty instantiating that notion.

3. Prior to the literacy seminar, several participants' comments suggested that the language–literature divide may very well be repeated in the next generation of FL professors. However, through involvement in the seminar, participants claimed to begin grasping the potential of literacy-based pedagogy to bring about greater continuity in the undergraduate FL curriculum. For some, this sensitization related primarily to incorporating more textual thinking in lower-level language courses, whereas for others, it concerned the need to focus more on language development in advanced courses.

Despite each participant reading research on literacy-based FL teaching, dialogic mediation of their understandings of that research through discussion with colleagues and their instructor, and assisted performance in carrying out tasks like the instructional sequence and syllabus project during the seminar, this study's findings demonstrate the gradual and difficult process of conceptual development. Although more systematic theoretical understandings of literacy did emerge among participants after the literacy seminar, identical paths of conceptual development did not, asserting the notion that teachers do not simply accumulate theoretical knowledge and put it into action (Rankin & Becker, 2006). In addition, this study revealed the difficulty of aligning specific conceptual tools of literacy with related pedagogical tools to use in classroom teaching. In other words, although some participants may have possessed conceptual underpinnings related to literacy, they could not consistently explain or demonstrate how to instantiate those concepts in concrete ways.

One thread emerging in this study was the role of participants' everyday concepts of language learning, beliefs, and previous experiences in mediating their understandings of the scientific concept of literacy and its application in the undergraduate FL curriculum. It was not the case that those with the most FL teaching experience (Amélie and Lizzie) were able to more readily understand concepts of literacy than other participants. To the contrary, Amélie and Lizzie appeared to struggle when trying to integrate old and new concepts from different instructional approaches (e.g., input versus meaning design). As Vygotsky wrote, conceptual development is truly a "twisting path" (1987, p. 156), even when, as this study shows, it is supported by multiple and sustained professional development activities.

Implications

A number of practical implications for LPDs and collegiate FL departments relate to this study's findings. Given that developing conceptual understanding for FL instruction integrating the study of language, literature, and culture is a long process, as demonstrated by the findings, we suggest a model of GSI professional development that conceives of learning to teach *in*, *from*, and *for* practice. This model entails the following:

1. *Formal instruction* (i.e., coursework) *on theoretical constructs of literacy* alongside strategies and techniques consistent with those theoretical constructs; in other words, continual grounding of classroom practices in theoretically driven notions of the development of FL literacy. Given participants' new understandings of literacy and shifts in their teaching practices during and after the literacy seminar, this study underscores the value of expanding formal pedagogical instruction beyond the methods course and focusing on one framing construct relevant to language and literary–cultural teaching. That said, given the prevailing conditions and financial and structural constraints under which collegiate FL departments operate today, coursework should be viewed as just one form that conceptually driven TA professional development might take. A series of face-to-face or online workshops might be a more flexible alternative worth considering.

Another feature of our proposed model of GSI professional development is the creation of a mediational space to support GSIs' conceptual development through dialogue and assisted performance among GSIs and between GSIs and their LPD and other faculty members. The following elements provide the structure needed for such mediation to take place:

2. *Structured and sustained reflection* both during pedagogy coursework and beyond regarding individual GSIs' pedagogical thinking and classroom experiences throughout the process of learning new theoretical approaches and instructional practices. An example of how this could be accomplished is through an online blog wherein individual GSIs share their experiences and cognitions related to teaching and dialogue with their LPD, peer GSIs, and other faculty members.

3. *Collaborative opportunities to develop expertise related to teaching both language and literary–cultural content*, e.g., cocreating and coteaching literature

and cultural studies courses with a faculty member, developing instructional materials for advanced undergraduate courses and receiving feedback on the materials from peers and/or a faculty member, and incorporating literary–cultural content and literacy-based techniques in lower-level language courses.

This study's findings also point to the need to consider the following questions: How does GSI professional development reflect the reality of graduate students as *individuals* (not simply cohorts) with varied cultural and educational backgrounds and views? Because GSIs glean varying levels of conceptual understanding from pedagogy coursework and some fail to align guiding conceptual frameworks with related pedagogical tools, how might individual GSIs' ongoing conceptual development be supported after formal coursework? Beyond the suggestion given above regarding structured and sustained reflection, developing tools and activities to mediate the growth of conceptual development remains a critical task of applied linguists and LPDs in FL departments. However, this study has shown that taking an explicitly conceptual focus during pedagogy coursework is a useful starting point that should be expanded in ongoing professional development activities such as discussions of teaching observations or pedagogy workshops.

Conclusion

This study of graduate students' conceptual understandings of *literacy* reveals the value of professional development reaching beyond lower-level language teaching and the potential of literacy-based pedagogy to weave together linguistic and literary–cultural content. It also suggests that developing instructional materials and practices consistent with a pedagogy of literacy is a tremendous challenge. Therefore, it is hoped that a continued focus on conceptually driven, reflection-focused, and classroom-based GSI professional development and empirical study of its outcomes will bring about a more symbiotic relationship between FL graduate students' identities as teachers and scholars of language, literature, and culture.

Notes

1. As one reviewer pointed out, literacy is not the only framework that has been proposed to better integrate the collegiate FL curriculum; other alternatives discussed in existing literature include the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* and genre-based pedagogy. We would argue, however, that as a framework, literacy is unique in its theoretical underpinning that facilitates coherent curriculum construction.

2. Space limitations preclude a comprehensive review of approaches and tools that have been used for FL graduate student professional development in U.S. institutes of higher education or a complete list of empirical studies on this topic. Such a review can be found in Allen & Negueruela-Azarola (2010).

3. We do not wish to denigrate in any way important strides made in the preparation of GSIs over the past two decades, including increasing numbers of applied linguists and FL education specialists within FL departments and more theoretically grounded methods courses informed by research from SLA,

psychology, linguistics, and education. Instead, we argue that the scope and focus of GSI professional development has remained unchanged, despite the changing contours of the profession.

4. This was the case for all participants except Vincent, who took the methods course during his first term of teaching.

5. This was the case for all participants except Lizzie, who took the methods course two years before the other participants. Her course concentrated only on CLT and did not introduce literacy-based concepts. It should also be noted that Amélie had completed a previous methods course during her M.A., and that course also focused only on CLT. She reenrolled in a second methods course during her Ph.D. work.

6. A detailed description of the literacy seminar and its syllabus can be found in Allen (2010).

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