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# The methods course revisited: From a skills-based to multiliteracies approach.

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# **The methods course revisited: From a skills-based to multiliteracies approach**

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# Overview

- Introductory activity
- Background
- A new model for the FL methods course
- Questions & comments

# I. Introductory activity: Experiences & perceptions of the methods course

- In your groups, list the topics included in your methods course.
  - Which two topics do you consider the most important?
  - What are two limitations or shortcomings you perceive your methods course to have?
- How confident are you of the following (*very, somewhat, not at all*):
  - The methods course prepares instructors to teach both lower-level language & advanced literary-cultural content courses
  - The methods course helps new teachers understand how to integrate the study of language, literature, and culture

## II. Background—Call for change

2007 MLA Report's recommendations:

- Reform of undergraduate FL programs that situates language study in “cultural, historic, geographic, and cross-cultural frames” (p. 5) through a “more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole” (p. 3)
- Sustained collaboration among all members of the undergraduate FL teaching corps

# FL graduate student professional development & the 2007 MLA Report

Two minor references:

- “graduate studies should provide substantive training in language teaching and the use of new technologies” (p. 7)
- “teach graduate students to use technology in language instruction and learning” (p. 9)



“It is indeed within ‘the methods course’ that the (future) profession is socialized into the ‘lang-lit split’ ... if the only teacher preparation available is language teacher preparation a clear message is sent that language gets taught, but the corollary collocation for literature remains awkward. A further part of the message communicated within the structure of the traditional methods course is that language and literature are clearly separable units. As long as this message is sent from the outset of the graduate student socialization process, the ‘lang-lit split’ will remain entrenched in graduate departments”  
(Bernhardt, 2001, p. 199)

# History of the methods course

- Originated in the 1980s out of collegiate FL departments' need to train graduate student TAs who were responsible for a large part of lower-division language instruction
- Focus: "Aims at preparing instructors for their immediate departmental tasks" (Azevedo, 1990, p. 25) and covers matters both pedagogical and practical in nature
- The requirement of a one-semester pre- or in-service methods course has become the norm for collegiate FL departments (Allen & Negueruela, 2010)

# **Is the methods course keeping pace with changes in the FL profession?**

In reference to the content of the methods course, based on an analysis of 31 methods syllabi, Wilbur (2007) wrote: “It appears that preservice teacher methodological training may not be keeping pace with the social and professional forces that depend on it” (p. 94)

# Shortcomings of the traditional methods course – *conceptualization*

- **Transmission-based** model (Johnson, 2009): Novices are taught by experts who transmit their knowledge to teachers; emphasis on reading the research and replicating methods and techniques presented through one's classroom practice
- **Frontloading** model (Freeman, 1993): Teachers are equipped at the outset for what they need to know and be able to do over the course of their career

# Shortcomings of the traditional methods course – *problematic assumptions*

*Assumption 1:* Novice TAs can apply theoretical ideas related to FL teaching and learning introduced in the methods course to their classroom teaching practice.

- Several studies question whether novice TAs are able or willing translate theory to practice during early in-service methods courses (Allen, 2011; Brandl, 2000; Dassier, 2011; Rankin & Becker, 2006)
- Wilbur's (2007) analysis of 31 methods syllabi found that less than half included activities to foster theory-practice connections

# Shortcomings of the traditional methods course – *problematic assumptions*

*Assumption 2:* Are strategies and techniques for teaching lower-level FL courses traditionally introduced in the methods course useful for later literary-cultural teaching assignments?

- Several studies suggest that FL TAs' confidence in their language-teaching abilities does not translate into similar levels of confidence for teaching literature and culture (Gorell & Cubilos, 1993; Mills, 2011; Mills & Allen, 2008)

# Shortcomings of the traditional methods course – *content* (I)

- The “post method condition” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) often results in **eclecticism** in the methods course as instructors grapple with “the plethora of methodologies that have been devised and promoted as responses to the profession’s quest to identify effective instructional practices as determined by SLA research” (Wilbur, 2007, p. 87)
- The **lack of focus on strategies for teaching literary-cultural content / texts** in the methods course may not adequately prepare TAs for their long-term teaching responsibilities (Mills, 2011; Mills & Allen, 2007)

# Shortcomings of the traditional methods course – *content* (2)

- Findings from studies analyzing the content of FL methods courses question whether they facilitate the formation of a **coherent base** for teaching language, literature, and culture by novice FL teachers (Byrd, 2007; Wilbur, 2007)
- According to Wilbur's (2007) analysis of 31 methods syllabi:
  - Teaching language through literature was present in just two syllabi
  - Teaching reading was absent in one third of the courses
  - Teaching culture “appeared to be a sideline experience” in most courses

# III. A new model for the methods course—Theoretical framework

*Literacy:*

[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)

# Why literacy in TA professional development?

- Facilitates a long-term approach to TA development given that the concept of literacy applies to TAs' current (lower-level language courses) and future(advanced literary-cultural) teaching assignments
- Challenges TAs to rethink traditional perceptions of language versus culture or literature and 'productive' versus 'receptive' skills by reconciling the teaching of 'communication' with the teaching of 'textual analysis.'

# Seven principles of literacy

- Interpretation
- Collaboration
- Convention
- Cultural knowledge
- Problem-solving
- Reflection and Self-reflection
- Language use

(Kern, 2000)

# Key elements of literacy-based teaching: Available designs

LINGUISTIC

SCHEMATIC



writing system

formal schemata

vocabulary

genre / style

syntax

content schemata

cohesion / coherence

stories

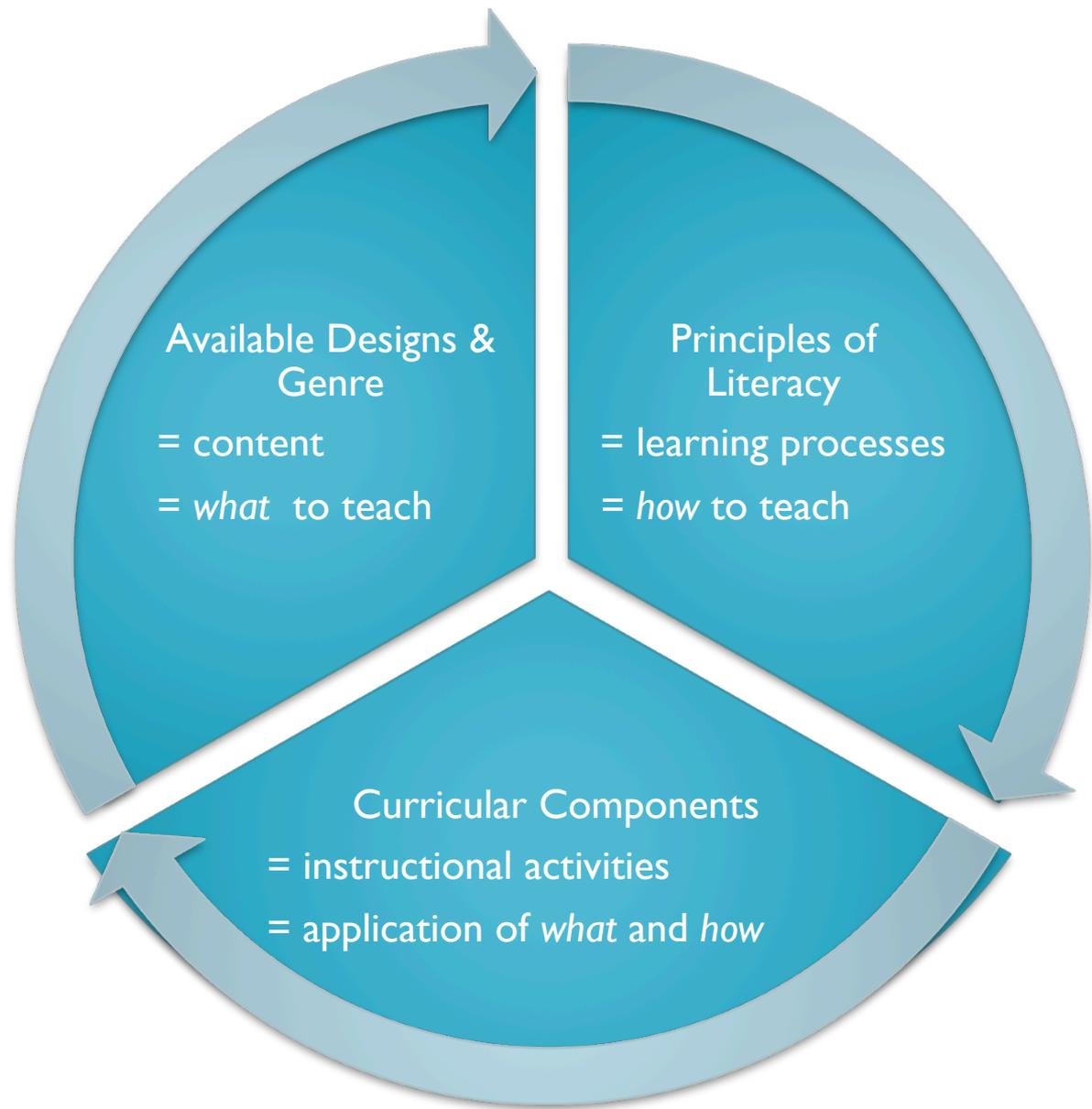
# Key elements of literacy-based teaching: The four curricular components

- ***Situated practice*** = experiencing
  - Spontaneous, experiential learning without conscious reflection
- ***Overt instruction*** = conceptualizing
  - Explicit learning / instruction of skills and knowledge needed for competent participation in activities
- ***Critical framing*** = analyzing
  - Relating meaning to social contexts and purposes
- ***Transformed practice*** = applying
  - Application of new understandings, knowledge, and skills to use knowledge and produce language in creative ways

(Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996)

# Key elements of literacy-based teaching: Genre

- *Genre*: “an oral or written rhetorical practice that structures culturally embedded communicative situations in a highly predictable pattern, thereby creating horizons of expectations for its community of users” (Swaffar & Arens, 2005, p. 99)



New London Group (1996), Kern (2000)

# Conceptualizing teacher learning from a sociocultural theory perspective

- Teachers are *learners of L2 teaching*
- Learning to teach is a dynamic *process of social interaction*
- Teacher learning is *both internal & collective activity*
- Professional development is *a conceptual process*; the use of *one overarching concept* can unify curricula & provide teachers with coherent notions of FL teaching & learning

(Johnson, 2009; Lantolf & Johnson, 2007; Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003)

# III. A new model for the methods course

- *Course goal:* To provide novice FL TAs with experiences that bridge SLA research on communicative, literacy-based teaching and classroom practice through an ongoing cycle of theoretical discussion followed by practical application of theory using reflective and collaborative activities
- *Overarching concept:* Literacy

# Course objectives

1. *Familiarity with theoretical foundations* of SLA and their practical applications and implications for communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching
2. *Understanding of key concepts* of communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching
3. *Understanding of classroom techniques* for communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching
4. *Ability to apply key concepts* related to communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching to designing instructional materials, lessons, and assessment tools
5. *Increasing engagement in pedagogical discourse* on collegiate foreign language teaching and learning

# Course components

- Reading reaction blogs
- Reflective teaching journal (including concept maps)
- Lesson study
- Instructional unit portfolio
- Written summative assessment (key concepts & their classroom applications)

# Reading reaction blog

Summary and identification of key concepts for all assigned readings; Creation of questions related to the content of readings as well as potential questions for in-class discussion

- Weekly (except during Lesson Study)
- Dialogic - « Blogger of the week »

# Reflective teaching journal

Personal reflections on experiences and challenges of day-to-day teaching and efforts to carry out pedagogical strategies and techniques introduced in the course

- Periodic - One reflection every 2 to 3 weeks
- Dialogic - Responses from the instructor
- Includes concept maps

# Lesson study

- An alternative to microteaching focused not on teacher performance but collaborative lesson planning and gathering and analyzing evidence of student learning
- An activity carried out twice during the semester
- A four-step process that occurs over a 10-day period

# Lesson study

- Step 1: Collaboratively plan the lesson, its objectives, and the role of each team member
- Step 2: Teach the lesson, gather data on student learning, share data among team members
- Step 3: Analyze the data collected in a written report (individual)
- Step 4: Share findings with other teams in an oral presentation and decide collectively how the lesson could be reformulated to minimize its shortcomings

# Instructional unit portfolio

- TAs select a textbook chapter for the course they will be teaching the following term and plan a series of five sequential lessons based on pedagogical models introduced in the methods course
- TAs are encouraged to each select different chapters to maximize the amount of literacy-based instructional materials created across the cohort
- The project includes peer review and individual conferences with the course instructor

# Written summative assessment

- End-of-term examination to assess TAs' understanding of theoretical concepts and pedagogical strategies introduced in the course
- Includes identification questions (define  $X$  and explain how  $X$  relates to classroom practice) and a more comprehensive task (essay format)

# Summary of course features

- Facilitates a long-term approach to TA professional development by merging ‘communication’ and ‘textual analysis’ through the concept of literacy
- Looks ahead to TAs future roles as professors of FL literature and culture
- Reconceptualizes the four skills as interrelated components of literacy development
- Reconceptualizes grammar and vocabulary as available designs essential to FL literacy

# Summary of course features

SCT Principle	Course components
Teachers are <i>learners of L2 teaching</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instructional unit portfolio</li><li>• Teaching reflection</li><li>• Lesson study (planning, teaching, revising)</li></ul>
Learning to teach is a dynamic <i>process of social interaction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lesson study (planning, debriefing)</li><li>• Reading reaction blogs</li><li>• Class discussions</li></ul>
Teacher learning is <i>both internal &amp; collective activity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading reaction blogs / blogger of the week</li><li>• Teaching reflection</li></ul>
Professional development is a <i>conceptual process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading reaction blogs</li><li>• Concept maps</li><li>• Written summative assessment</li></ul>

# Professional development beyond the methods course

- Identify long-term, individual goals and a plan for achieving them
- Conduct interrelated workshops on a topic or concept related to literacy that encourage collaboration, reflection, problem solving
- Participate in reflective blogging on a topic or concept over the course of a semester or year
- Organize teaching apprenticeships with faculty teaching outside the introductory course sequence

# Questions? Comments?

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The PERCOLATE Project:

<http://www.percolate.arizona.edu/doku.php/start>