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Teacher education and multiliteracies  
pedagogy—current trends and future directions  
(symposium contribution)

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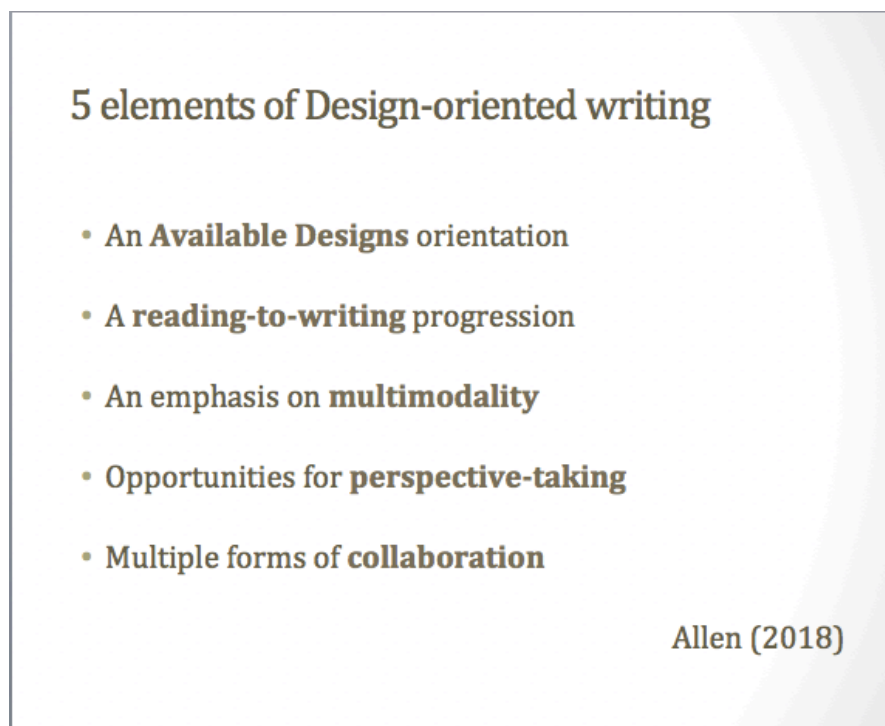
Symposium: Teacher education and multiliteracies pedagogy—current trends and future directions.

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Writing is an essential component of our personal and professional lives, more present and complex now than ever given its role in electronic communication. However, in recent years, numerous scholars have critiqued the limited uptake of second language writing research in collegiate foreign language departments, where traditional writing instructional practices persist, despite innovative approaches often present in ESL and English programs.

Among studies focused on instructors' perspectives and practices of teaching writing, both the ACTFL Decade of Standards survey and Mills and Moulton's (2017) survey of Romance language instructors concluded that written presentational communication was ranked low for curricular emphasis and perceived value in comparison with other linguistic modalities. A study by Hubert and Bonzo found that among 153 instructors surveyed, most did not have active knowledge of process, genre, or post-process writing theory and few indicated a specific theory or approach that informed their teaching. A follow-up study by Hubert of 10 instructors' practices of teaching writing revealed that most did not incorporate pre-writing or peer review activities and grammatical accuracy was over-emphasized at the expense of what the authors called "additional aspects ... so crucial to the development of good writing skills" (p. 85).

Taking these findings into account, my current research argues for a Design approach to teaching collegiate FL writing, which integrates concepts from multiliteracies pedagogy and L2 writing research. Kate has already mentioned the notion of meaning design, which entails both the creation and interpretation of texts and the content, forms, and organization in texts. I suggest that Design-oriented writing should incorporate five elements:



**5 elements of Design-oriented writing**

- **An Available Designs orientation**
- **A reading-to-writing progression**
- **An emphasis on multimodality**
- **Opportunities for perspective-taking**
- **Multiple forms of collaboration**

Allen (2018)

- First, a focus on Available Designs, or broadening the lens beyond grammatical accuracy to embrace the idea that the resources needed to create effective, engaging texts are multifaceted and include schematic, visual, and spatial elements.
- Next, reading-to-write activities can be used to sensitize learners through analysis of model texts to appropriate use of Available Designs in specific textual genres.

In particular, textual borrowing is used to assist learners as they identify lexical, stylistic, or organizational elements of the model text to use or adapt in their own writing.

- The third element is multimodality, supporting students as they compose with a variety of modalities and technologies including visual Available Designs and hyperlinks.
- Perspective-taking, the fourth element, relates to the advantage of writing described by Kern in 2000 as “allow[ing] learners’ language use to go beyond ... ‘functional’ communication, making it possible to create imagined worlds of their own design” (p. 172). In other words, by shifting one’s point of view at various levels of language and meaning, awareness can be gained of new language, culture, and context-specific meanings.
- The final Design writing element is collaboration, or facilitating a writing cycle in which social interaction facilitates the development of a writing community and includes pre-writing activities, individual writing conferences, peer feedback, text read alouds, and self reflection on writing.

To summarize, these 5 elements provide a vision for what a multi-dimensional and Design-focused orientation to teaching writing entails and how it can be accomplished.

I will transition now to describing the challenges of Design-oriented writing instruction. These comments are based on my experiences as a supervisor of first year collegiate French courses, as a teacher educator for graduate teaching assistants who staff those courses, and as a co-researcher of TAs’ perspectives and practices of carrying out Design

writing instruction. In Spring 2017, we collected data including interviews, teaching materials, classroom observation recordings, and written reflections with 4 TAs during a term in which they taught two cycles of Design writing, which served as summative projects. The TAs were in their fourth semester of teaching collegiate French courses, had completed one pedagogy course on multiliteracies instruction the previous year and, at the time of our study, were completing a second course. Design writing instruction was not new to these TAs, but this was the first term when they prepared in-class writing workshops independently. Challenges that arose as these TAs carried out Design-oriented instruction were both conceptual and related to classroom implementation.

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## Design-oriented writing instruction: Conceptual & implementation challenges

- Acknowledging teachers' **everyday concepts** of what writing is, how it is learned, & how it should be taught
- Supporting teachers' evolving understandings of new **scientific concepts** related to Design-oriented writing
- Providing **responsive mediation** within "safe **structured mediational spaces**" for how to teach Design-oriented writing

Johnson & Golombek (2018, p. 2)

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First, interview data and written reflections revealed that TAs' personal notions and ideologies, or what sociocultural theory calls *everyday concepts* of writing did not always

align with the notion of Design writing instruction, and, at times, were in conflict with it. For example, when asked early in the study how they saw the role of writing in language learning, 3 TAs described it in almost purely linguistic terms as a discrete skill area. As one explained, writing requires “put[ting] all the puzzles pieces together ... your conjugations, and the vocab, and the sentence structure.” Just one TA’s conceptualization of writing was more multi-dimensional. In that case, the TA described writing as including grammar, vocabulary, content knowledge, social cues or norms, and register.

Second, data also showed that the TAs’ understandings of some new theoretical or *scientific concepts* of Design writing and related pedagogical techniques introduced in their pedagogy courses remained incomplete. For example, the TAs learned that Design writing entails a focus on specific textual genres and appropriation of a variety of related Available Designs. They also learned about the pedagogical technique of textual borrowing to transition learners from analyzing model texts to writing their own texts. However, interview data revealed that the TAs’ understandings of textual borrowing varied, with one defining it as using a linguistic “toolkit” for “borrowing different words and expressions” while others saw it as a strategy for not just appropriation of vocabulary but also genre and formatting conventions. Another theme seen in both interview data and written reflections was a tension between TAs’ everyday concepts of plagiarism and the use of textual borrowing in Design instruction. As one TA explained to her students during a writing workshop, “there is a fine line of course between textual borrowing and plagiarism. They’re two very different things. Be very careful... A couple of words here and there, an expression, not, I would say, a very long, full sentence.” A different TA

asked in his written reflection “where does one draw the line between textual borrowing and plagiarism?” This conceptual tension appeared to constrain the amount of time that some TAs dedicated to textual borrowing activities in class and how they constructed those activities.

The third challenge I want to highlight was not directly reflected in our study’s finding but emerged as an implication for teacher-educators. The TAs whose perspectives and practices of Design writing were investigated were no longer early novices, and they had participated in two semester-long pedagogy courses on multiliteracies instruction. Those courses included multiple means of strategic mediation of TAs’ understandings of Design writing, written reflections on their teaching practices, and assessments of conceptual understanding. They had also participated in observations of teaching and post-observation discussions each semester and numerous team meetings, which, in part, focused on how to carry out multiliteracies instruction and course assessments, including Design writing projects. However, their conceptual understandings of Design writing remained incomplete and the ways in which they enacted Design writing instruction reflected that incompleteness. My belief is that this incompleteness arose not out of teachers’ resistance or lack of effort but, more than anything, to insufficient theory-practice connections or, as Johnson and Golombek described it, “more often than not ... [scientific] concepts are not linked to the day-to-day activities of teaching and learning in L2 classrooms” (2018, p. 7). What was needed was what Johnson and Golombek call *responsive mediation*. Responsive mediation takes places within professional development activities in which teacher-learners and teacher educators interact and

teacher-learners “play with their emerging understanding of the [scientific] concepts they have been exposed to... and as they attempt to enact alternative ways of teaching that they are not yet able to do without assistance” (p. 8).

I will now conclude with three ideas as to what the potential content of such responsive mediation might look like for Design writing instruction and working with teacher-learners in the context of collegiate FL programs.

## Design-oriented writing instruction: Enhancing teacher learning & effectiveness

- Creating opportunities for **dialogic interactions** with teacher-learners related to everyday & scientific concepts of Design-oriented writing
  - Incorporating learning-to-teach experiences beyond the methods course, e.g., **practice teaching** (Johnson & Arshavskaya, 2011) or **lesson rehearsal** (Trojan & Peercy, 2016) into the pre-instructional preparation
  - Providing time for **collaborative analysis of model texts** used in reading-to write activities
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- First, it would include opportunities for dialogue between teacher-educator and teacher-learners on evolving understandings of new theoretical concepts of Design writing and how those concepts might align or clash with teachers’ beliefs and ideologies of writing. Such dialogue might take the form of written blogs shared between an individual teacher and his or her teacher-educator or in-person



discussions during meetings among teachers. This dialogue might also include opportunities for teacher-learners to verbalize and compare their conceptual understandings, to ask questions about their understandings, and to receive feedback from their teacher-educator.

- Second, preparing to carry out Design writing should include more than tips and materials for classroom instruction and lesson planning. Instead, the pre-instructional stage should be a *learning-to-teach* experience in which a teacher-learner can participate in *practice teaching* or *lesson rehearsal* during which the teacher-educator and other teacher-peers ask questions, scaffold performance, and provide feedback.
- Finally, our study's data support the idea that the pre-instructional phase of Design writing should include dedicated time for collaborative analysis by teachers of the model texts to be used in instruction. It was evident in studying TAs' teaching materials and recorded classroom observations that understanding of how certain textual genres were constructed, what the required "moves" were in model texts, and how those moves were instantiated was a recurrent challenge. Collaborative textual analysis should precede lesson planning so that teacher possess an explicit understanding of how Available Designs function in the texts they will have their students read and write.

Clearly, the path toward developing expertise in Design writing instruction is a challenging one, but there is much that teacher-educators can do to accompany and

support teacher-learners and maximize their professional development experiences.

Thank you.

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