Rethinking the role of language and literary-cultural content in advanced learning contexts (Invited Plenary)

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Rethinking the Role of Language and Literary-Cultural Content in Advanced FL Learning Contexts

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Overview

• Advanced-level FL learning: Challenges

• The role of language and literary-cultural content in advanced learning contexts

• Literacy and the multiliteracies approach

• Reading-to-write: Literature and creative production

• Illustrative examples and empirical evidence
Developing Advanced-Level FL Competencies: Challenges

• Language-literature divide (MLA, 2007)

• Little focus on development of content knowledge in advanced language courses

• Little focus on development of language competencies in advanced content courses (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Mantero, 2002; Polio & Zyzik, 2009; Zyzik & Polio, 2008)
Developing Advanced-Level FL Competencies: Challenges

• Lack of coherent frameworks for organizing curriculum and instruction (Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Paesani & Allen, 2012)

• Limited scope of FL writing tasks & links between reading literature and writing:

  “American students are trained primarily to recall and reproduce factual content, **leading to a brand of literacy that emphasizes the consumption of information** … [They] perform most adequately at straightforward informative writing tasks (factual reports, descriptions) and **least adequately at persuasive and imaginative writing tasks**” (Kern, 2000, p. 33).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>INTRODUCTORY &amp; INTERMEDIATE LANGUAGE COURSES</strong></th>
<th><strong>ADVANCED LITERATURE &amp; CULTURE COURSES</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>development of functional abilities to communicate everyday needs, thoughts</td>
<td>development of analytical and critical thinking skills</td>
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<td>focus on language forms and conventions</td>
<td>focus on cultural and literary sensibilities</td>
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<td>expression of personal opinions and familiar ideas</td>
<td>expression of new ideas, analysis, and synthesis</td>
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<td>reading and writing as support skills for language practice</td>
<td>reading and writing as integral to learning literary-cultural content</td>
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<td>classroom organized around language</td>
<td>classroom organized around content</td>
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<td>functional texts (ads, weather reports, stories, menus, etc.)</td>
<td>literary and cultural texts (poetry, prose, drama, histories, letters, etc.)</td>
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<td>collaborative, supportive, small group environment</td>
<td>serious, lecture- and discussion-oriented learning environment</td>
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Kern (2000); Maxim (2006)
LITERACY

“A PERSON WHO WON’T READ HAS NO ADVANTAGE OVER ONE WHO CAN’T READ.”

~Mark Twain
Source: The New Yorker
Literacy is the 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 these relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic – not static – and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge (Kern, 2000, p. 16).
Defining Literacy

• Literacy-oriented instruction encourages learners to interact with the content of texts:
  • Language use
  • Conventions
  • Cultural knowledge

• Through the learning processes of:
  • Interpretation
  • Collaboration
  • Problem solving
  • Reflection & Self-reflection

Available Designs & Texts
= content
= *what* to teach

Principles of Literacy
= learning processes
= *how* to teach

Pedagogical Acts
= instructional activities
= application of *what* and *how*
Available Designs

LINGUISTIC
- writing system
- vocabulary
- syntax
- cohesion/coherence

SCHEMATIC
- org. patterns
- genre/style
- stories
- content schemata

Available Designs & Texts
= content
= *what* to teach

Principles of Literacy
= learning processes
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Pedagogical Acts

- **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
Reading to Write: Rationale

Reading at home
Talking in class
Writing at home

Kern (2000)
Reading to Write: Rationale

Kern (2000, p. 132)
Reading to Write: Rationale

“Writing requires reading for its completion, but also teaches the kind of reading it requires” (Lodge, 1977)

“writing and reading depend on many of the same composing processes” (Hirvela, 2004, p. 2)

“reading and writing are always socially-imbedded activities involving relationships, shared assumptions, and conventions as well as individual, personal acts involving imagination, creativity, and emotions” (Kern, 2000, p. 111)
# Reading-to-Write: Pedagogical Acts

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Reading</strong></th>
<th><strong>Writing</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SITUATED PRACTICE</strong></td>
<td>Scanning for information, Predicting</td>
<td>Summary sentences, Free writing, Blogging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERT INSTRUCTION</strong></td>
<td>Synonym substitution, Information mapping</td>
<td>Outlining, Revising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRITICAL FRAMING</strong></td>
<td>Genre comparison, Critical focus questions</td>
<td>Reflective journaling, Peer editing, Analytical essays</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TRANSFORMED PRACTICE</strong></td>
<td>Text elaboration, Story retelling</td>
<td><strong>Creative writing</strong>, Genre reformulation</td>
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Example 1: Advanced Composition

- **GOALS:** sensitizing students to relationships between form and content; providing experience in creative writing; furthering students’ abilities to speak in advanced ways

- **ORGANIZATION:** 4 modules, 4 authors and genres (descriptive tales/Delerm; ethnotexts/Ernaux; short stories/Gavalda; **verse and prose poetry/Baudelaire**)

- **INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS:** progression from reading-focused to writing-focused activities; interpretation and use of linguistic and schematic resources in texts to design meaning
CREATIVE WRITING TASK: students draft their own prose version of “L’Invitation au voyage”

- List of “ten essentials” for writing a Baudelairian prose poem *(critical framing)*
- Graphic organizer to flesh out ideas and identify key vocabulary and themes *(situated practice)*
- Initial drafting of the poem *(transformed practice)*
- Peer review, instructor conferences *(critical framing)*
- Revision *(overt instruction)*
- Roundtable during which students present a summary of their poem’s focus and read the poem aloud *(situated / transformed practice)*
Student Reactions (Allen, 2009)

- Roughly 1/3 of students reported enhanced confidence in writing.
- Approximately 1/2 of students noted that reading-to-write increased their awareness of how and why stylistic features are used in texts.
- 2/3 of students identified new understandings of reading-writing and reader-writer relationships.
- Some students’ goals shifted from using correct grammar and vocabulary to understanding the multiple ways to express the same idea.
Student Reactions (Allen, 2009)

• “In the beginning, I didn’t understand exactly why we were doing the text analyses, but now I realize that it’s really important to deconstruct a text to understand it. Reading and writing work together to help the writer make the best text possible” (p. 380).

• “I had the opportunity to be author and reader. Sometimes there are things you can’t see in our own work, but you can identify it in the work of someone else” (p. 380).

• “Before, I wrote only for myself and not for the reader […] many times while writing my story, I paused and thought of my reader […] a good author cannot write without considering his audience” (p. 380).
Example 2: Advanced Grammar & Stylistics

• **GOALS:** studying grammar through texts; linking course to others in the curriculum; developing advanced reading, writing, and speaking competences

• **ORGANIZATION:** 8 units, one chapter in grammar book and 2-3 excerpts of *Exercices de style* (Queneau, 1947) per unit

• **INSTRUCTIONAL FOCUS:** progression from reading-related tasks to grammatical analysis and practice to writing-related tasks; interpretation and use of linguistic and schematic resources in texts to design meaning
CREATIVE WRITING TASK: students create their own “Exercices de style”

- Students tell the same story four times in four different genres
- Matrix of information related to story line (when, where, who, what, how) *(situated practice)*
- Focus on specific available designs in each text (e.g., formality of tone, inversion in questions)
- Initial drafting of the text *(transformed practice)*
- Peer review, instructor conferences *(critical framing)*
- Revision *(overt instruction)*
- Reflective journaling *(situated practice / critical framing)*
Student Reactions (Paesani, ms.)

- Students perceived multiliteracies-oriented activities as positively contributing to ability to learn, understand, and use French grammar both at the start and close of the course.

- Over time, students identified multiliteracies-oriented activities more frequently as contributors to grammatical development.

- Initially, students did not perceive writing in different genres and styles as a contributor to grammatical development; at close of course, perception of this activity showed most positive gain of all literacy-oriented activities.
Student Reactions (Paesani, 2006, ms.)

• “The adaptation of the Queneau texts was not limited to the simple use of rules learned in the book or in class, but included the personal interpretation one adds to a piece of writing” (2006, p. 626).

• “The Queneau readings and the opportunity to write in a certain style helps me to understand and use grammatical forms we learn… when I read and write, I think I can better understand the aspects of style and tone” (Amy).

• “Overall, the reading and writing activities have contributed to my progress in grammar by helping me recognize grammatical structures and by forcing me to think about them. For example, the first time I read an excerpt from Queneau, I read for comprehension. But in studying it, I began to wonder why Queneau used a grammatical structure or a particular word” (Veronica).
Thank you

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