

## **Fostering multiliteracies through a global simulation approach in intermediate French: A curricular project**

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### **Introduction**

In recent years, communicative competence has come to be associated “primarily with interactive, transactional oral language use,” (Byrnes, 2006, p. 244), a goal which many scholars have argued oversimplifies purposes of language in use and undervalues the intellectual contributions of foreign language (FL) departments to humanities scholarship (ibid.) As a way to fill this curricular and instructional gap, scholars (e.g.: Allen & Paesani, 2010; Kern, 2000; Swaffar & Arens, 2005) have proposed a pedagogy of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) to frame collegiate FL curricula and instruction, and encourage students to interpret and think critically about discourse through a variety of contexts and textual genres. Central to a multiliteracies approach is the notion that language use is informed by participation in specific discourses from the standpoint of particular social roles. Global simulation (GS) is one pedagogical approach conducive to fostering learners’ multiliteracies. In this article, we discuss the development and implementation of a multiliteracies-oriented GS in 4th-semester French.

### **Global Simulation**

Global simulation (GS) was initially developed in France for L1 French and quickly adopted and adapted by L2 French instructors in and beyond France. More recently, instructors of other languages have also implemented GS in their classrooms. A GS consists in the creation of a fictitious yet culturally grounded world in which learners take on character roles related to a specific context, for example, a hotel, company, or museum (public sphere contexts) or an apartment building (private sphere). In the latter model, a “story” framework is required to structure tasks, events, and problems, and characters must adopt discourse styles consistent with their imagined identities and with the attendant social demands of the simulation. As such GS provides learners with a socioculturally-based framework in which they can begin to understand how language and other Available Designs are called on differentially based on identities, situations, and tasks, and develop an awareness of discourse practices.

### **Multiliteracies**

Although elements of multiliteracies-based approaches to FL teaching can be found as early as 1991 in Swaffar, Arens & Byrnes’ (1991) framing of the teaching of reading, the roots of multiliteracies can be traced to the 1996 New London Group’s (NLG) seminal article, “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures”. Today, it is no longer enough for learners to be able to accurately construct and understand sentences to convey or receive information; they have to develop the ability to understand, interpret, and produce a variety of multimodal texts in the target language, and understand how language and other symbolic systems are used in order to design meaning (Kramsch 2006, p. 251).

Several elements of a pedagogy of multiliteracies informed curriculum development, materials selection, and lesson creation in this GS-based course. Design of meaning, defined in [Table 1](#), is a core element of a pedagogy of multiliteracies and can be best understood as an active, dynamic and transformative process, which involves the construction of meaning-form-function connections while engaging in the interpretation or creation of texts. In order to carry out a pedagogy of “design” and “multimodality” and facilitate learner engagement in acts of meaning design, NLG proposed four curricular components ([Table 2](#)). Although represented sequentially in Table 2, they do not represent a sequence-to-be-followed, but rather offer “a map of the range of pedagogical moves” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 19) that can be taken in any sequence to best respond to learners’ literacy needs.

### **Context**

This fourth-semester French curriculum was developed at the University of Arizona. Fourth semester French is the last course in the lower-level sequence and one that satisfies the university foreign language requirement for students enrolled in a BA degree program. It is also the gateway to upper-division courses in the French program. The current GS curriculum strives to expose students to a range of texts and genre types so as to foster learners’ linguistic, sociocultural, actional, discourse, and symbolic competence.

### **Materials and curriculum development**

We designed this simulation around the original “*L’Immeuble*” framework by Debyser (1980) in which characters are residents in the same apartment building. Debyser’s framework was based on George Perec’s novel “*La vie mode d’emploi*” (1978) in which the author described in detail the daily life of an apartment building’s tenants. We set the simulation in the 17<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris with the intention of exposing students to mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods with a diverse population in terms of age, ethnicity, and social class. Following several discourse continua (primary - secondary (Gee, 2011); private - public; narrative - expository (Maxim, 2009), we mapped out a progression of themes which were then mapped to target language functions and forms ([Appendix A](#)).

As the goal of the simulation was to develop students’ awareness and use of discourse styles based on social roles, we devoted the first week of class to developing understanding of multiple modes of communication (including image, gesture, written and oral language, etc.) and language registers. Week two focused on broad notions of identity and specific identities in contemporary France, and included critical framing discussion around notions of stereotype and prejudice. Character selection took place at the end of week two and consisted in giving students distinctive characteristics within four identity categories: origin, gender, age and professional sector. By giving students these criteria, it allowed for a diverse group of identities reflective of contemporary multicultural France. We based the distribution of characters’ identity factors on recent data from [INSEE](#) (National Institute of Statistical and Economic Information). Following the presentation of the French work system in week four, students then chose professions for their characters. (Themes of subsequent modules are presented in [Appendix B](#).) A variety of authentic texts were selected which ranged in genre type from informal to formal language registers, with the goal of exposing students to varying language forms and functions and multiple communication modes.

Lesson plans were developed around primary and secondary texts, and activities were framed within the Four Curricular Components. For example in the module on the *concierge* and the *gardien*, our goals

were to: 1) develop awareness of both traditional and evolving roles and stereotypes of this important figure in a French *immeuble*, 2) reweave a previously studied genre (the self portrait), and 3) foreshadow the module on work life through discussion of the role and function of a *gardien*. We began by first introducing students to the profession (the *gardien*) through situated practice activities with a website where the profession is explained ([Le métier](#)). Day two of the sequence focused on the specific experience of a particular *concierge*, using [Rencontre avec ma concierge](#) (see [Appendix C](#)) as a primary text. Finally, on day three, we moved into texts that allowed us to work on representations of the *concierge* in literature and film and worked on direct and indirect characterization (see [Appendix D](#)) using excerpts from the novel “L’Élégance du hérisson” (The Elegance of the Hedgehog) by Muriel Barbery, and the corresponding [film excerpt](#). The coupling of film and novel allowed us to draw attention to design differences between these two distinct generic representations of Renée’s self-portrait. At the culmination of the module, students were asked to reflect on their understanding of this role and why they think this role/function exists in France and not in the US (see detailed teaching sequence in [Appendix E](#)).

### Use of Web 2.0 tools

Various Web 2.0 tools were selected to facilitate the development of multiliteracies including digital literacies (see [Appendix F](#)).

Web 2.0 Tool Used	Purpose	Frequency of use	Interactant
<a href="#">Moodle 2.2</a> Modules			selves
File	- deliver content to students	daily	
Quiz	- deliver formative and summative assessments of learning	weekly	
Forum	- engage students in critical framing reflections as themselves--both privately and publicly in dialogue with classmates--about various themes and texts presented in class	semi- weekly	
<a href="#">ThingLink</a>	- students mark a <a href="#">world map</a> with the origins of the people students read about in <a href="#">portraits of immigrants in France</a>	monthly	selves
<a href="#">VoiceThread</a>	- students present characters’ apartment, family, and travels	monthly	characters
<a href="#">Eyejot</a>	- assess oral production where description (primary discourses) or opinions (secondary discourses) are elicited - students record video-mail messages to neighbors	monthly	selves and characters

<a href="#">Facebook Pages</a>	- develop character identity with brief bio, birthday, occupation, photos; interact with other building residents to develop ongoing relationships, and express opinions about more complex topics	daily	characters
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**Conclusion/Some suggested resources**

Combining these two frameworks, GS and multiliteracies, allows us to teach language as social signifying practice, where links between linguistic forms and social practice can be made explicit and learners can begin to grapple with differences in how language and other systems of meaning are used based on identity and context, and in the process become aware of LC2 discourse practices.

Notions that were touched on in this article and outcomes of learners enrolled in this curriculum will be more fully addressed in upcoming publications. In the meantime, we recommend that you consult the references cited in this article ([Appendix G](#)) as well as the [New Learning](#) website, especially the suggested [Knowledge Processes](#) activities that can give readers ideas for activities based on the four curricular components.