

Appropriating and Using Conceptual Tools of Literacy:  
The Development of Teaching Expertise by  
Future FL Faculty

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# Rationale for the study

- Given recent calls (e.g., MLA 2007 Report) to better integrate the study of language and culture in the undergraduate FL curriculum, the effectiveness of professional development for today's FL graduate students is ever more salient.
- However, little empirical research has investigated the development of teaching expertise for graduate student instructors (GSIs) or the specific outcomes of their participation in professional development on their teaching cognitions and practices.

# Background

- GSIs play an important role in undergraduate FL education, teaching more than one half of elementary-level language courses in Ph.D.-granting departments (MLA, 2007)
- The dominant model for GSI teacher preparation is flawed & is consistent with Freeman's (1993) notion of frontloading, i.e., attempting to equip teachers at the outset for all they need to know & be capable of doing throughout their career
- This model for GSI teacher preparation is also problematic given the historic language-literature divide in U.S. collegiate FL departments

# Research Questions

1. What roles do GSIs' language teaching/learning-related beliefs play in their evolving conceptual understandings of literacy and its application to FL instruction?
2. What are the learning outcomes for GSIs of participating in a one-semester seminar introducing them to conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy?
3. How do GSIs instantiate conceptual knowledge related to literacy in the FL classroom?
4. Which activities and tools from the seminar contributed most to GSIs' conceptual understandings?

# Conceptualizing teacher learning from a sociocultural theory perspective

1. Teachers are *learners of L2 teaching* rather than performers of teaching
2. Learning to teach is as a dynamic *process of social interaction* wherein teachers appropriate, reconstruct, & transform existing social practices of teaching based on individual & local needs
3. Teacher learning is *both internal & collective activity* that shapes not only teachers' own actions & thoughts but also student engagement in learning & learning outcomes
4. Professional development is *a conceptual process*, wherein L2 teachers' own *everyday concepts* of language, learning, & teaching encounter *scientific concepts* about these subjects embraced by their profession, creating the potential for reorganization of experiential knowledge & formation of new knowledge. 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)

## Theoretical framework: Levels of appropriation of *conceptual & pedagogical* tools

1. Lack of appropriation due to incomprehension, resistance, or rejection
2. Appropriating the concept's label but none of its features
3. Appropriating surface features of the concept but not understanding how various features contribute to a conceptual whole
4. Appropriating conceptual underpinnings & being able to use the concept in new settings
5. Achieving mastery in implementing the concept

Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia (1999)

# Research design: The participants

- Cross-institutional: Two R1 universities, one public & one private
- 17 GSIs
  - 4 males, 13 females; ages: 22-42
  - 9 Ph.D. students; 8 M.A. students
- Cross-language: Spanish (4), German (4), Russian (3), French (3), Japanese (2), Korean (1)
- Participants' previous FL teaching experience: No (11), Yes (6)

# Research design:

## The course objectives

1. Familiarity with theoretical foundations of second / foreign language acquisition and a range of practical applications and implications for communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching
2. Conceptual understanding of principles of communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching
3. Conceptual understanding of classroom techniques for communicative, literacy-oriented language teaching
4. Ability to design materials, lessons, and assessment instruments consistent with conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy-oriented language teaching introduced over the course of the semester
5. Critical insights about teaching language through cultural texts of all types to develop literacy in the foreign language

# Research design: The course— Framing concepts

- Literacy: “dynamic, culturally and historically situated practices of using and interpreting diverse written and spoken texts to fulfill particular social purposes” (Kern, 2000, p. 6)
- Principles of literacy-based FL teaching: 7 principles of literacy, design (Available Designs, Designing and the Redesigned)
- Curricular components: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, transformed practice (New London Group, 1996)

# Research design: Data collection and analysis

- Data sources: **Pre- and post-semester questionnaires**, weekly reading blog postings, **bi-weekly reflective teaching journal, concept maps**, lesson study documents (3 cycles), instructional unit materials, **post-semester interview**
- Analysis of narrative data: Double coding for mentions of concepts related to literacy-based teaching & the level of appropriation evidenced in each mention; focus on how concepts are being understood, transformed, and instantiated

# Case 1: Amanda

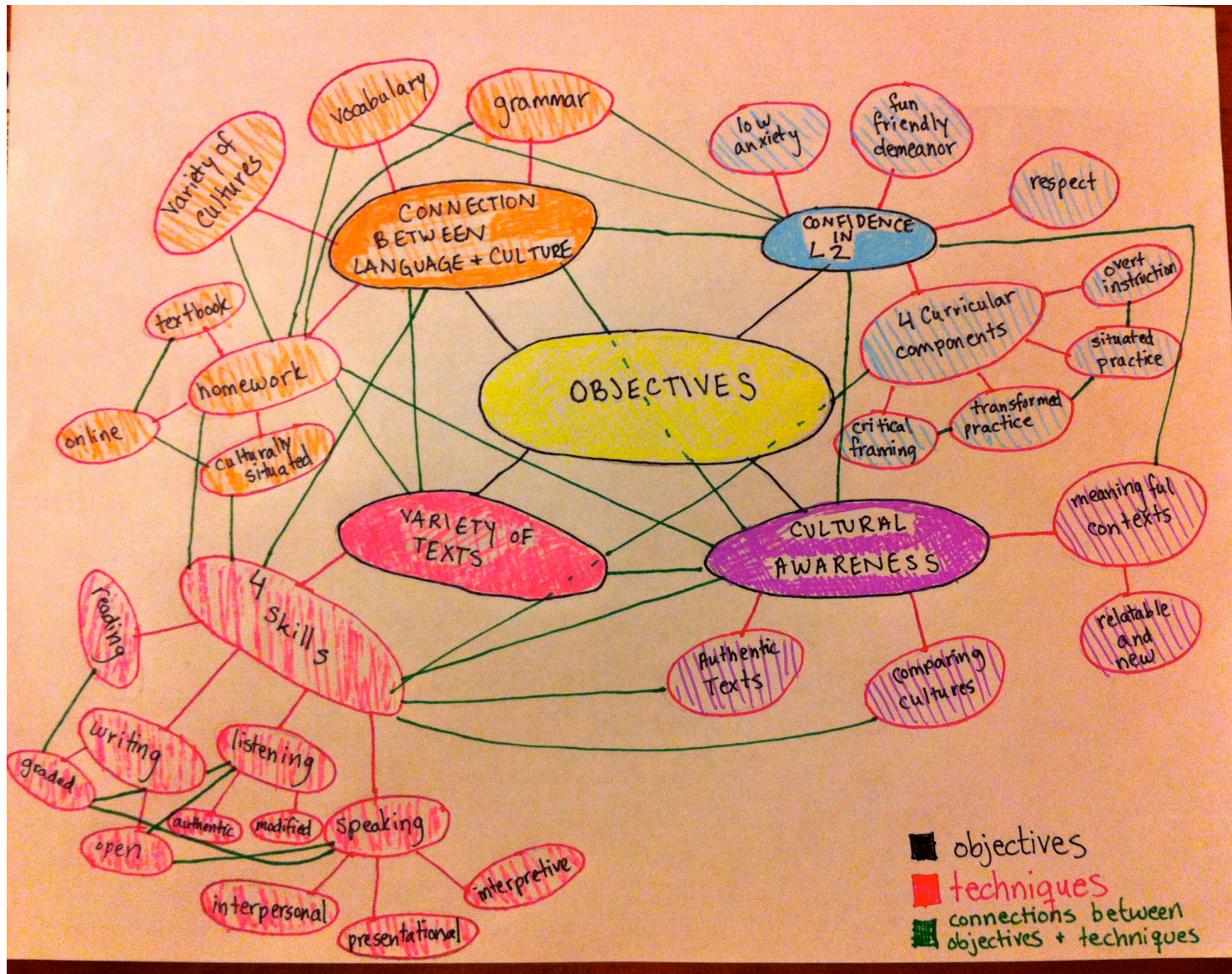
- **Pre-semester demographic information**
  - 25 year-old American female
  - BA in Art History/Spanish, MA Spanish, PhD candidate in Spanish
  - Taught 1<sup>st</sup> year Spanish during her MA
- **Pre-semester notions of FL teaching**
  - **Important elements of FL teaching:** Developing proficiency & maintaining in-class immersion
  - **Priorities of FL teaching:** Providing an immersion-like classroom where students feel comfortable & want to participate
  - **Biggest anticipated challenges:** Getting away from direct in-class grammar instruction

# Case 1: Amanda

- **Developing conceptual knowledge of literacy**
  - Pre-course notions of literacy/being literate (08/25/2010)
    - “the ability to read and write almost every word in one’s native language ... the ability to comprehend a majority of spoken or written language. I would imagine that it would also entail being ‘literate’ in the particular nuances of a culture.”
  - Reflective journal entries
    - RJ 4 (10/12/2010) Midterm reflection & concept map
    - RJ 7 (11/30/2010) Final reflection & concept map
  - Post-semester interview (12/7/2010)



# Concept map: End of semester



# Case 1: Amanda

- **Applying conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy in instructional design**
  - Reflective journal entries
    - RJ 4 (10/12/2010) Midterm reflection
    - RJ 6 (11/9/2010 ) Teaching lesson reflection
  - Post-semester interview (12/7/2010)

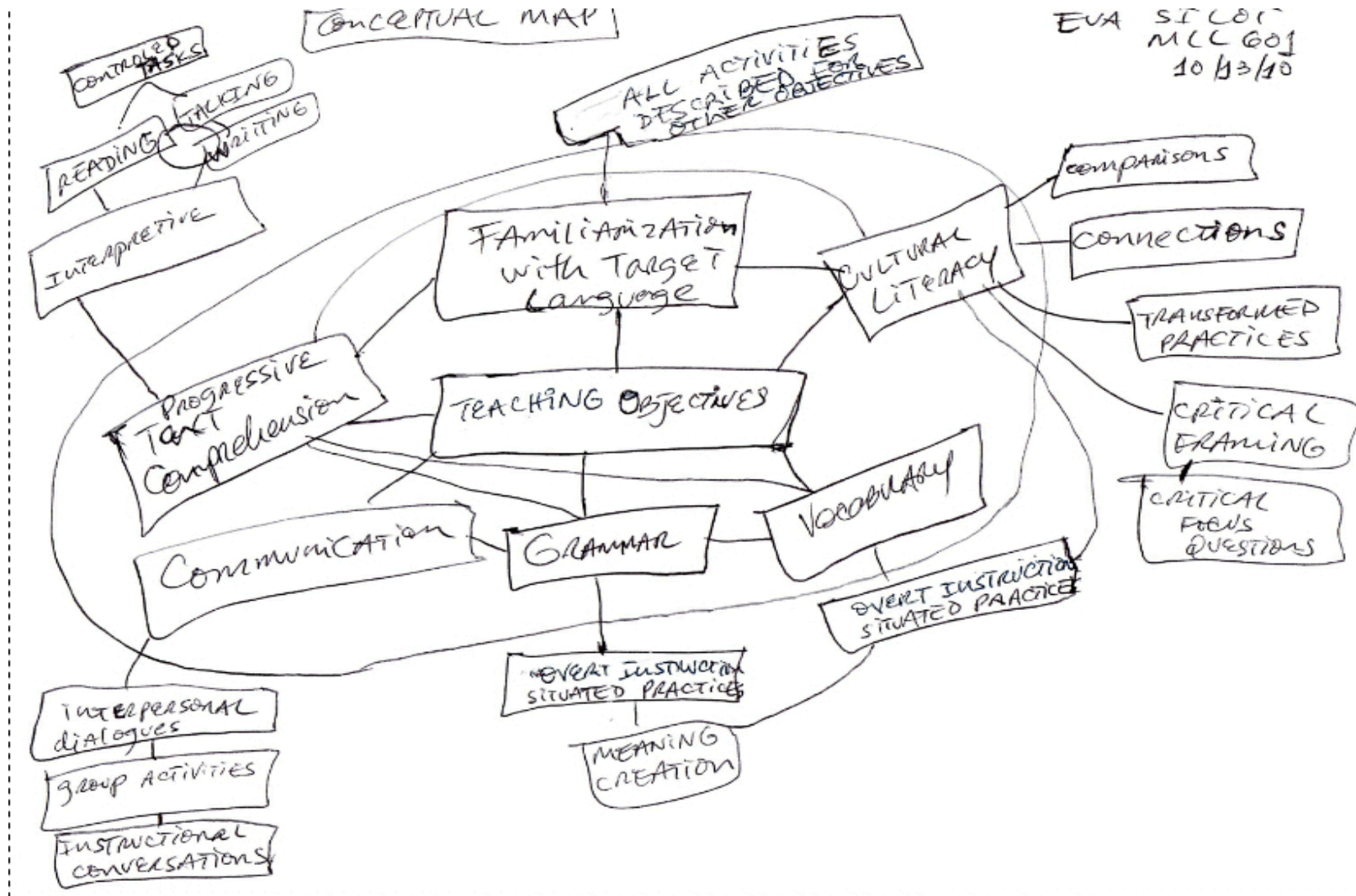
## Case 2: Elena

- **Pre-semester demographic information**
  - 39 year-old Cuban female
  - MA in International Relations (US), Ph.D. candidate in Romance Literature, concentration in Spanish Literature
  - No previous FL teaching experience
- **Pre-semester notions of FL teaching**
  - **Important elements of FL teaching:** Consistency, organization & choosing a right method
  - **Priorities of FL teaching:** Consistency, organization & choosing a right method
  - **Biggest anticipated challenges:** Meeting the school's & students' expectations

## Case 2: Elena

- **Developing conceptual knowledge of literacy**
  - Pre-course notions of literacy/being literate (08/25/2010)
    - “the acquisition of minimal educational requirements which allow persons to navigate in an educational or cultural system ... it means to not feel intimidated to produce in a FL despite the mistakes (grammatical or others) that you would eventually do”
  - Reflective journal entries
    - RJ 4 (10/14/2010) Midterm reflection & [concept map](#)
    - RJ 7 (11/30/2010) Final reflection & [concept map](#)

# Concept map: Midterm



# Concept map: End of semester

EVA SILET  
MIL 001  
11/30/10

## CONCEPTUAL MAP<sub>2</sub>

### MAJOR CONCEPTS GUIDING my TEACHING

### TECHNIQUES to address my teaching OBJECTIVES

COMMUNICATION

Language Use

Conventions

Problem Solving

CULTURAL Knowledge

Interpretation

Reflection and Self-Reflection

- INSTRUCTIONAL CONVERSATIONS

- CRITICAL FOCUS QUESTIONS

- SITUATED PRACTICES

- GRAMMAR and VOCABULARY PRESENTATIONS

- TRANSFORMED PRACTICES

- CONTROLLED ACTIVITIES

- SCAFFOLDING

- COMPARISONS

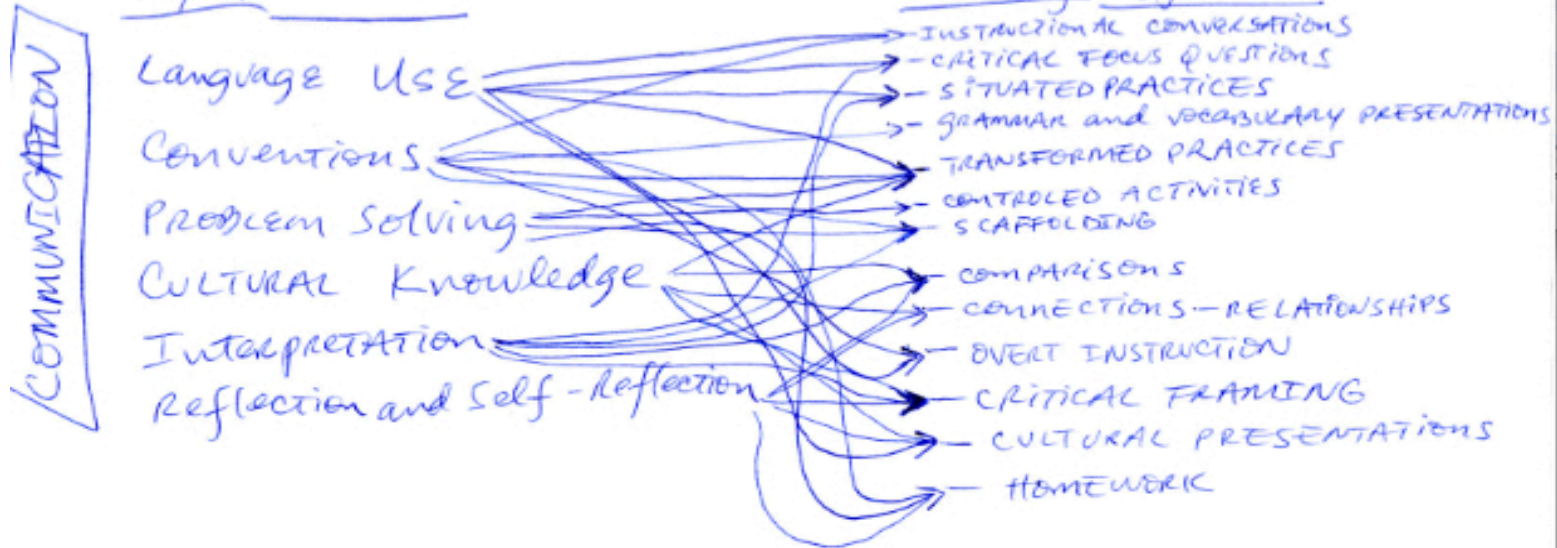
- CONNECTIONS - RELATIONSHIPS

- OVERT INSTRUCTION

- CRITICAL FRAMING

- CULTURAL PRESENTATIONS

- HOMEWORK



## Case 2: Elena

- **Applying conceptual and pedagogical tools of literacy in instructional design**
  - Reflective journal entries
    - RJ 2 (9/12/2010)
    - RJ 6 (11/10/2010 ) Teaching lesson reflection
  - Post-semester interview (12/7/2010)

# Emerging themes

1. Structuring teaching practices through concepts of literacy proved overall difficult for these novice teachers, more for some than others. Levels of appropriation evidenced by each participant:
  - Amanda –Appropriating surface features -> conceptual underpinnings
  - Elena –Appropriating a label -> surface features
2. Activities & tools that were perceived as the most valuable affordances for enhancing conceptual understanding of literacy-based FL teaching:
  - Lesson study (Amanda, Elena); Reading & blog reactions (Amanda); Class discussions (Amanda); Workshop handouts (Amanda, Elena); PPTs (Amanda, Elena)
3. Constraints to literacy-based FL teaching:
  - Time (Elena), lack of ready-made materials (Elena), textbook (Amanda, Elena), syllabus (Amanda)

# Conclusions and future directions

- Instantiating literacy-based FL pedagogy is tremendously challenging for GSIs and the ability to “think through” literacy-based concepts in constructing teaching practices is a gradual, often difficult process
- The traditional model of a one-semester methods seminar as the primary means of facilitating theory-practice connections for novice FL GSIs is insufficient

“[T]he changes required in TA education are so pervasive as to be beyond one’s professional reach ... it will not suffice to leave untouched the marginal position of TA education within the intellectual-academic work of graduate programs. It is unsatisfactory to retain the structures that have institutionalized that marginalization and even trivialization of language instruction” (Byrnes, 2005, p. 136)

# Conclusions and future directions

- Future research should continue to explore:
  - the longitudinal emergence of conceptual development by FL GSIs
  - which in-service professional development activities are most effective for supporting this developmental trajectory

# For more information

- This presentation & related publications:

<http://works.bepress.com/heatherwillisallen/>

- Further information on the PERCOLATE project:

<http://cercll.arizona.edu/doku.php/projects/materials>

- Further information on FL teacher professional development taking a conceptual and literacy-based approach:

<http://cercll.arizona.edu/doku.php/development/workshops>