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Engaging the World: Social Pedagogies and Language Learning

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ing Language with the World
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Chapter 5

Social-Pedagogical Life Imitates Art: Scaffolding the Voices of L2 Fans and Critics

Stéphanie Pellet, Wake Forest University

Lindsay Myers, University of Missouri-Kansas City

Introduction

This chapter describes a modular, open-access, intermediate French course (Pellet & Myers, 2016) anchored in a constructivist approach to social second language (L2) reading and writing. With the support of digital librarians at Wake Forest University (WFU), a website, *Tout le monde: A Collaborative Intermediate French Program* (<http://cloud.lib.wfu.edu/blog/toutlemonde/>), henceforth TLM, was first piloted during the fall 2016 to support language learning within a social pedagogy framework. It built upon a literacy-based textbook, *Littéralement Parlant* (Pellet, 2016), meshing two distinct but complementary solutions for addressing the challenge of teaching L2 literacy. While *Littéralement Parlant* represents an attempt to design an Intermediate-level curriculum centered around reading, the website encapsulates “modules,” a series of interconnected tools, including a blog (both written and audio), a social reading platform, and opportunities for extramural fan expression. All aspects of the course are thematically linked to the short story and eponymous film *Odette Toulemonde* by Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt (2006). In this chapter, we provide a blueprint for conceptualization and implementation of social pedagogies in an intermediate-level language class and reflections on best practices and hurdles in doing so. After situating our approach within literacy, sociocultural, and social pedagogy frameworks, we describe the course, the development of the program, and the digital tools selected to support student learning and present an analysis of student production and reaction. We close with a discussion on the scalability and adoptability of this approach.

Social Approaches to L2 literacy

L2 literacy elaborates on the traditional L1 model (development of textual understanding and writing skills) stemming from a new awareness of the complex social interactions linked to a global society (hence, the concept of multiliteracy).

Kern (2000), in particular, articulated L2 literacy in response to common teaching practices that did little for fostering cultural awareness and discourse competence. In contrast with a traditional conception, his definition of L2 literacy focuses on “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 those relationships” (p. 16). Grounded in a sociocognitive perspective, Kern’s (2000) definition is articulated around seven key principles: interpretation, collaboration (writing for an audience), cultural conventions, cultural knowledge (“reading and writing function within particular systems of attitudes, beliefs, customs, ideals, and values,” p. 17), problem solving, (self-) reflection, and language use. Taken together, they correspond to a “macro-principle: literacy involves communication” (p. 17). In continuity with the work of the New London Group (1996), he adapted the following four components as the pedagogical basis of a literacy approach to foreign language teaching: situated practice (relevancy to students’ experiences), overt instruction (including meta-language), critical framing (situating communication within social contexts), and transformed practice (manipulating existing texts with explicit awareness of the communicative and social contexts).

A key part of literacy is the integration of language skills. For instance, Barré-De Miniac, Brissaud, and Rispaïl (2004) stated that “it is no longer a simple matter of learning to read or to write, but also of reading and writing to learn” (p. 12); literacy as defined here encompasses speaking and listening as well since it extends the notion of text to include written and spoken boundaries, indeed including visual documents (e.g., advertisements), and across mediums (traditional vs. digital). Similarly, Kern (2003b) noted that “in literacy-based teaching the relation between reading, writing and talking is not linear but overlapping” (p. 52). In Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning’s (COERLL) online reading module, Swaffar and Arens (2010) view reading in terms of a holistic curriculum that “emphasizes how the parts of a whole relate to each other to form the whole. From this perspective, reading relates to speaking, writing, listening comprehension, and culture” (A Holistic Approach to Reading section, para. 2). The third of their series of reading tasks, rereading, is particularly relevant to our project, which involves “active L2 production such as verbal or written analysis and argumentation” (A Holistic Approach to Reading section, para. 6) and longer, more complex discourse. This involves critical thinking so that “cultural context and the individual foreign language learner’s own identity emerge as central to all acts of production” (A Holistic Approach to Reading section, para. 6). Essentially, this perspective on rereading as a set of tasks promoting skill integration goes hand in hand with cultural literacy.

The lack of a coherent and integrated programmatic approach within language departments negatively influences the development of advanced learners’

competences (Byrnes, Maxim, & Magnan, 2003; Kern, 2000). To remedy this situation, Kern (2011) proposes that “a general goal of literacy-based language teaching is to reconcile communicative language teaching, with its emphasis on face-to-face verbal interaction, with the development of learners’ ability to read, discuss, think, and write critically about texts. Accordingly, literacy-based teaching focuses on language use in social contexts, but integrates critical reflection about how discourse is constructed, how it is used toward various ends, and how it relates to the culture(s) that gave rise to it” (p. 4). L2 literacy, consequently, is seen as a necessary programmatic response to a complex, multicultural society.

The tenets of a constructivist, student-centered pedagogy naturally support this approach. Particularly significant for our project, which seeks to empower students as readers becoming authors, “[s]ociocultural theory, like interactionist SLA emphasizes the importance of learner interaction, but it is interested less in negotiation-evoked adjustments in input than in the social and cultural situatedness of learner activity, learners’ agency in co-constructing meanings (as well as their own roles), and the importance of mediation by tools and signs” (Kern, 2006, p. 187). In parallel with learner’s autonomy (Little, 2007; Savignon, 2007) and the construction of a learner’s identity not modeled strictly after the native speaker’s (Kramsch, 1997), sociolinguistic approaches to literacy view reading and writing in their cultural and social contexts.

At the center of transformational discussions on student engagement lies a framework harnessing the social aspects of learning. In other words, “[s]ocial pedagogies provide a way to tap into a set of intrinsic motivations that we often overlook: people’s desire to be part of a community and to share what they know with that community” (Bruff, 2011). Social pedagogies capitalize on the contemporary “participatory culture” (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2006), which features “strong support for creating and sharing creations with others” and “members who feel some degree of social connection with one another” (pp. 5–6). Similarly, undergraduate students noted that courses that had a profound impact on them included writing for their fellow learners because such writing “requires a different approach and a different authorial voice” and by “seeing different styles of writing and presentation, they become able to distinguish different levels of excellence” (Light, 2001, p. 65). Bass and Elmendorf (2012) promote social pedagogies that involve opportunities to interact with an “authentic audience,” which means—and this is a critical aspect of their approach—someone other than the instructor. The three key areas they outline for course design and implementation—design (of effective social pedagogies), scaffolding (by supporting student work in stages), and assessment (that takes into consideration the connections between intermediate processes, formative assessments, and final products)—serve as a guide for the organization of this chapter.

Web 2.0 has proved to be a transformative, constructivist platform for self-regulated language learning (Thomas, 2009; Sharpe, Beetham, & de Freitas,

2010), allowing for knowledge co-construction (active learning; Schank, 1994), including metacognition, peer-to-peer writing and editing, intercultural communication (Thorne, 2003; Ware & Kramersch, 2005), and intercultural exploration (Arnold, Ducate, & Kost, 2009; Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Mailliet, 2001; Hanna & de Nooy, 2003; Lee, 1998). Combining a redefined conception of L2 literacy and social approaches, TLM takes advantage of online social tools to create channels of expression across asynchronous modes (written, oral), allowing students to negotiate meaning together and communicate with each other not just for authentic interactions but to build knowledge together (e.g., social reading for enhancing textual understanding). In proposing a collaborative virtual space to the students, designed to become an aggregate but cohesive set of digital tools, we find Kern's (2015) three key processes of technology particularly productive: design, transformation, and mediation. "[D]esign is the creative process (and product) of transforming existing resources into new ones, in relation to particular needs, purposes, and contexts" (p. 7), with a focus on transformations as "reworkings, reframings, and recontextualizations of symbolic resources having to do with language, communication, and identity" (p. 7). Mediation recognizes the impact of not only the medium being used but also "the ways that physical environments, cultural contexts, social role relations, and activity frames affect how people communicate" (p. 8). From the outset, the social L2 literacy project discussed here was conceived as process oriented, one where the media adopted would foster transformative "reframings and recontextualizations," empowering students not only as readers but also collectively as knowledge producers.

Collaborative Program Development

In the intermediate-level program at WFU, we implement a literacy approach to learning French, inviting students to read a complete short story as a segue to reading-intensive, upper-level courses (at least with regard to length and level of difficulty). It enacts Kern's proposal that "literacy can be used as an organizing principle to design language curricula that problematize the linguistic, cognitive, and social relationships that link readers, writers, texts, and culture" (Kern, 2003a, p. 2). The two overarching course objectives lend themselves to an organic integration: the first objective was to get students to engage with the text through close, in-depth reading, and the second was to foster (a degree of) learner empowerment via "the implementation of a methodology for language learning that focuses on authenticity in contents, context, and task" (Rüschhoff, 2009, p. 43). In the case we describe, integration was achieved at multiple levels.

The textbook *Littéralement Parlant* (Pellet, 2016) was developed by the instructor specifically around the short story "Odette Toulemonde" to support an integrated approach, complemented by an online, open-education French grammar resource, *Tex's French Grammar* (<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tex/>;

Blyth & Kelton, 2000). The objective of the textbook is to promote both learning to read and reading to learn. The curriculum, like the short story, is divided into seven learning units or chapters centered around the reading process, each explicitly named for its link to the story.

Developing students' reading ability guided the choice of the short story "Odette Toulemonde"—at the intermediate level, students are not doing literary analysis but developing their L2 literacy skills as previously defined. Shorter than a novel yet an authentic text originally written for native speakers of French, it allows students to read a whole text, from beginning to end. Set mostly in Belgium, it tells the story of a young widow, struggling to make ends meet, who lives for the books written by her favorite author, Balthazar. When the latter, well-to-do and successful, is shaken by a merciless critique of his latest novel, he somehow lands in the small apartment where Odette lives with her two children. There, he discovers a much simpler but potentially more meaningful way of living. Balthazar is at risk of losing his identity as a talented author, and Odette, a simple fan, unexpectedly gains a voice by being acknowledged by Balthazar, in what is normally a one-way relationship. The story provides opportunities for exploring important questions regarding relationships between author and reader and/or fan and the potentiality of entering into a two-way dialogue (as opposed to a one-way, author-controlled communication). Such questions echo issues raised in L2 education: L2 learners' identity, their ability to gain a voice to express their ideas, teacher-controlled communication, and the lack of authentic readership students experience when they write solely for the teacher.

The short story is brief and uses contemporary vocabulary and structures that are adequate for a course focused on everyday language skills, and its storyline echoes relatable, universal themes (e.g., relationships, parenthood). The limited number of characters (two main characters and six secondary characters) helps students keep the storyline straight. Before Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt published the story, he directed the eponymous movie, which offers an opportunity for comparisons between the cinematic and literary texts and enhances the students' reading experience. This juxtaposition of media is supported by our "read-talk-watch-re-read" course design in which corresponding film clips are selected for in-class viewing after initial reading and comprehension checks. "Odette Toulemonde" provides the foundation for creating a learning community with the common goal of reading a short story (supporting each other in the process), turning language learners into authors with their own voice, writing for each other and potentially for the francophone community at large, and co-constructing knowledge via story-inspired, authentic, process-oriented assignments.

The conception and implementation of such a large multicomponent project require careful handling of legal and copyright issues (for the short story and the movie). The TLM website, which hosts the course social tools, was designed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC

4.0), which enables reuse, including remixing and derivative creation, by other educators and scholars but prohibits use for commercial gain without further permission from its authors. The TLM title is geared first toward the students themselves: inviting them to take part and ownership in the making of the website. It was also conceived as an open resource for other French instructors.

No e-book is currently available for the short story itself; students purchased a paper copy of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt's story "Odette Toulemonde," which allowed the instructor to make available to them a teacher-annotated version of the text (glosses and grammar aids) via the learning management system. For the same reason, the social reading component of the course remains access-restricted on the TLM website. While an e-book would present obvious advantages, the hybridity of multichannel reading and reacting is not without potential benefits, including the anecdotal feedback from students who enjoy holding, reading, and finishing a book.

In the first iteration of the TLM program, 18 students, mostly freshmen, enrolled in the intermediate-level course (FR 153), which meets five times per week for 15 weeks. Students reported having taken between three and four years of high school French prior to taking this first college-level course. At the beginning of the semester, all students signed author agreements, whereby they gave their consent to participate in and to publish online graded assignments in various media formats as part of the course requirements. On the TLM website, students' production sits alongside instructor-prepared materials on the program website and by design becomes part of the input for others, which MacKinnon and Pasfield-Neofitou (2016) label Open Educational Resources (OER) "produsage" and in particular small-scale "little OER."

Scaffolding Modular Social Pedagogies

In the subsections that follow, we describe the tools and approaches that together form the social pedagogies of the TLM program: blogs, social reading, and extramural fan and critic activity.

Blogs.

Blogs are now well integrated in L2 learning, and their effectiveness is also well documented (see Thorne & Black, 2007). They provide an authentic context for students to expand L2 writing skills in various areas, including academic writing (Bloch, 2007), L2 fluency and accuracy (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008), metacognition (Yang, 2009) or self-reflection (Alm, 2009), to support exploration of L2 reading (Raith, 2009) and L2 culture learning (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005; Lee, 2011), or even as a medium supporting the development of oral skills (Pinkman, 2005). Their most salient feature, viewability, highlights the sharing affordance of blogs (Carney, 2009) expanding readership beyond the teacher (Thorne & Payne, 2005).

Carney (2009) identifies four areas where blogs can support language education: motivation, authenticity, collaboration, and literacy. Fernheimer and Nelson (2005) discuss the importance of understanding the blog genre as a discourse type with the potential to establish “classroom community norms that embrace engagement with others” (sec. 18); to cultivate this community, they required reading and responding to others’ work: “interleaved written responses mitigate against the tendency to see one’s writing as a lone ‘voice in the wilderness’” (sec. 18). Thorne (2009) observed that “blog use formed an interstitial communication space where both academic and nonacademic discursive features were articulated through personally relevant expression, in essence that students were writing both to fulfill a class requirement while also writing to and for one another” (p. 87). Blogs have the potential to increase students’ sense of autonomy and agency (empowerment), expanding on the concept of student-centered teaching. Franklin-Matkowski (2007) similarly observed that blogging seemed to have several positive attitudinal and language outcomes:

1. Students’ fluency increased.
2. Students wrote with voice.
3. Students’ confidence in their writing increased.
4. Students valued feedback from their peers which helps them learn about audience.
5. Students felt open and willing to express and share their writing, thereby creating a community.
6. Students developed and defined blogging as a genre appropriate for their class blog. (p. 119)

Nevertheless, this individualistic or highly personal space is not collaborative *per se* and requires careful articulation of expectations of contributions (see Krause, 2004). Carney (2009) also highlights the critical role played by teachers, citing Kern (2006): “Teachers must be prepared for new ways of structuring tasks, establishing exchanges, guiding and monitoring interaction, and evaluating performance, not to mention mastering the relevant computer applications” (p. 201).

In our context, a blog seemed particularly appropriate to support students’ moving from sentential expression to connected discourse at the intermediate level. The overall objective highlighted in the syllabus was “to share your experience with your classmates.” The blogging guidelines included a rationale for the blog called “*Tout le monde en parle*” (“Everyone’s talking about it”), which stressed its communal character (blogging together, sharing with each other), and promoted a supportive environment (sharing victories and difficulties) and an expanded and authentic readership (students vs. professors only), hence turning students into authors. Students’ weekly blog posts started on the second week of class and continued throughout the semester, with students posting every Monday

and responding to two other posts every Thursday. To magnify authentic readership, the visiting French Assistant was invited to act as a respondent to students' comments every week, in an attempt to create a sense of dialogue and validation for students. Two additional key aspects of the rationale have to do with a common quality of blogs: they are centrally about communication and cross between an oral and a written genre. Consequently students' attention was drawn to the fact that with a blog, they are able to focus both on content as well as form, encouraging them to pay attention to language accuracy. Hence, students were encouraged to approach blogging as an open exchange of ideas as opposed to a formal academic essay. In the case of an L2 blog, spontaneity was valued to create an environment where students felt comfortable expressing themselves (fairly) freely. The blog was presented as a "sandbox" where they could try out linguistic forms without fear of failing or of receiving a negative evaluation (grade). Rather, communicating an idea (message) in a paragraph, engaging peers and community at large, and displaying a positive attitude were emphasized. Hence, the blog was conceptualized as an informal peer-to-peer, conversational-like mode of expression, while this written medium offered students the possibility to think through linguistic forms.

Thematically, the blog is deliberately connected to the story "Odette Toulemonde" and to the literacy-centered curriculum. For instance, the initial two topics centered around the reading process. The other topics explicitly connected to the storyline, taking an element of the story and turning it into personal perspectives. By allowing students to choose from a pair of topics, it creates a sense of ownership, and an authentic response seemed more likely. The following are sample prompts that invite students to recount their own experiences similar to Odette's experience with either wanting to meet Balthazar or reading his book in a single sitting:

Odette souhaitait rencontrer Balthazar. Qui voudrais-tu rencontrer? Pourquoi cette personne est-elle importante pour toi?

Odette wished to meet Balthazar. Who would you like to meet? Why is this person important to you? What book have you read without being able to put it down?

Quel livre as-tu lu sans pouvoir t'arrêter? Pourquoi ce livre t'a-t-il plu? Est-ce que tu as lu ce livre plusieurs fois? Est-ce que tu lis un livre passionnant, en ce moment? Lequel?

Why did you like this book? Did you read this book several times? Are you reading a fascinating book right now? Which one?

The audio blog, *Tout le monde écoute*, offers another means of expression directly linking the two communicative skills: speaking and writing. Like the written blog prompts, they are tied thematically to the narrative arc of Odette yet are purposefully designed to be logical tasks associated with speaking. Once again, students had the choice between two topics:

- “You are a friend of Balthazar, and watched Olaf Pim’s deadly review of his latest novel. Call Balthazar and leave him a message on his answering machine. . . Maybe you want to check on him, or perk him up, or tell him how mean and wrong Olaf is . . . It’s up to you. Attention: if you are a close friend of Balthazar, you probably use ‘tu’ to address him!”
- “You are a fan of Balthazar, and you are very angry after watching Olaf’s terrible review of your favorite author’s latest novel. Call Pims and leave him an angry message about how nasty he was to Balthazar. Attention: Since you don’t know Olaf Pims personally, you need to use ‘vous’ when talking to him!”

While there are fewer audio blog assignments, they alternate with the written posts and together foster multiple literacies—employing different types of media, genres, levels of formality—embracing multiple channels of communication, all pointing toward a shared goal of textual interpretation, engagement (both as a creator and consumer), and communication.

Social reading.

Macaro (2003) posits that the lack of relative attention afforded to the L2 reading by researchers is partially due to the “relative invisibility of reading as a skill. . .” (p. 118) since production skills are more readily apparent and assessed. He argues for more substantive dialogue about the reading process since “true/false, multiple choice and other similar task types are all very well for keeping the students busy but they do not get at the processes involved in their reading” (p. 151). Academic reading presents teaching challenges for L1 texts just as much as L2 texts. Hayles (2007) calls attention to a generational shift in cognitive styles, contrasting the traditional deep attention cognitive mode to a rapidly emerging hyper attention mode that is becoming a defining feature of current student generations. During visits at other institutions, she reports faculty members complaining “I can’t get my students to read whole novels anymore” (p. 188). She argues that this shift calls for creative and innovative educational strategies. If there is a sense that students are not able to engage (in-depth) with an L1 text, certainly the challenge to do so with an L2 text can only be more serious. If students approach (L1) reading simply as a task to be completed, how could they approach L2 reading differently and quite possibly with less confidence and more anxiety? Social reading in an L2 environment lets students notice, question, and decipher a text together. It breaks reading as an isolated experience, allows students to gain better understanding of the text by putting individual readings into a “communal pot,” and promotes close reading.

Using digital social reading enables readers to become empowered in a way that is not comparable to book clubs in that readers leave a digital footprint, creating a two-way relationship with the author that could not exist prior to Web 2.0. Hypothes.is (<https://hypothes.is>), an open-source platform for annotating digital

documents, was adopted to support the social reading component of the course. Students received pedagogical and technology-related guidelines. As with the blog, the rationale behind using social reading was shared with students, emphasizing co-construction of knowledge (as opposed to solitary reading) and close reading by commenting on specific parts of the text. Students also received guidance on the content of annotations, with the aim of generating topically broad comments. They were instructed to use annotations to signal lack of understanding, including asking classmates questions; to share personal reactions to the storyline; and to identify key words, themes, and cultural elements. Because social reading is aimed at enhancing textual understanding, students were given the choice to annotate in French or in English. Flexibility on how much to annotate seemed important for two reasons. First, allowing students to write a fragment, a sentence, or more in turn allowed them to focus on meaningful content. Second, social reading constituted an additional assignment for students, and previous research on computer-based communication (Hawisher & Pemberton, 1998; Pena-Shaff, Altman, & Stephenson, 2005) showed that there is a risk for communicative online assignments to be perceived as a burden, losing meaningfulness in the students' eyes, especially when these assignments become "too much," or when the grade reward is not commensurate with the time required. As with the written and audio blogs, students had to post two comments for each reading segment (matching the chapter) and, two days later, address one comment made by another classmate. Suggestions for responding to a comment were meant to help students frame responses. They could offer an answer to a question, mark their agreement/disagreement, and add information or alternative explanations. The grading system (both for initial annotations and for the ensuing response) was defined broadly (highly meaningful/somewhat meaningful/no comment) and shared with students. Since the social reading assignment sought to scaffold the reading process, assessment of correct L2 usage was not relevant. Finally, students were instructed to associate an instructor-defined tag with their comments.

Extramural fans and critics.

Another social approach to teaching and learning involves tapping into the practice of reading, watching, and writing as both students and fans or critics, which relates directly to L2 literacy. Black (2009) defines fan fiction as "a unique form of writing in which fans base their stories on the characters and plotlines of existing media and popular culture" in which fans as authors "extend storylines, create new narrative threads, develop romantic relationships between characters, and focus on the lives of undeveloped characters . . ." (p. 398). She found that English-language learners via their nonclassroom-based fan fiction texts "offered a challenge to conventional notions of 'good' writing as individualistic, author-centric, monolingual, and rigidly adherent to standard genres and conventions" (p. 422). Sauro and Sundmark (2016) in turn observed how fan fiction activities when used as a pedagogical

tool in university foreign language classes “support literacy and language learning” (p. 422). Reading and writing fan fiction in English as foreign language can also be a motivation for improvement (Rossetti, 2014). The *Odette* story, movie, and creator, with their own significant digital footprints, offer avenues of exploration and comparisons and an opportunity to mirror fan reactions on our own site. The social tools and approaches described thus far in this chapter are either closed to the outside community, as in the case of the social reading, or, in the case of the blogs, are public yet not highly trafficked. In contrast, the extramural components are currently of two types. A *Cher Monsieur Schmitt* module scaffolds students-as-fans and critics of the living author. In this space, students are able to explore Schmitt’s footprint and then send him a letter as final meta-reflection on reading the book and the course. The *Fans d’Odette* module (under construction at press time) is in reality a fan page that promotes bookmarking and reacting to the movie and the book. One aspect of it mimics the Rotten Tomatoes genre, in our case called *Oeufs à la neige* as a nod to a scene in the short story, with links to external web pages with relevant information on actors, authors, and critics. At the end of the semester, students rate both the film and short story on the *Oeufs à la neige* module. In further iterations of this produsage module, students will make their own fan-inspired materials, such as fan fiction for the written version and fansubs for the film. While we chose to label these particular social pedagogies as most closely relevant to fans and critics, in many ways, the blog assignments themselves could be viewed as a type of fan fiction since students are essentially rewriting many of the themes of the story with their own stories and perspectives.

Results: Student Data

This section is divided into two types of sample results: student production (examples from blogs, social reading, and the *Cher Monsieur Schmitt* module) and assessment results (surveys, test questions, and overall course performance).

Student-Written Blog

The following blog entries give a snapshot of students’ posts throughout the semester. The posts selected here seek to capture the interaction that it facilitated at two points in the semester.

In her initial post (see Figure 5.1), the student makes effective use of the prompt to elaborate her answer. Her positive outlook is clear while also acknowledging the challenge of the task ahead. The classmate reply connects to the stated anxiety and asserts her viewpoint that while possibly difficult, the act of reading in French may support the overall objective of learning the language. The French Assistant likewise strikes a positive, encouraging tone in her reply.

2 SEPTEMBER 2016 /

/ 2 COMMENTS / EDIT

Je suis un peu anxieuse de commencer à lire Odette parce que je n'ai pas eu beaucoup d'expérience en ce qui concerne la lecture des nouvelles. J'ai également parfois des difficultés à comprendre le sens des text. J'ai eu un experience similaire quand j'ai lu le Petit Prince; pendant ma lecture j'ai eu quelques difficultés mais avec l'aide de ma professeur c'était un très bonne experience pour moi. Je doute de ma capacité de comprendre de longue phrases et comprendre le voix du narrateur. Je me sens préparé pour cette experience car je pense que ça va beaucoup m'aider en ce qui concerne ma grammaire et mon vocabulaire.

Replies (second reply is from French Assistant):



4 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 1:34 PM

,je suis en peu anxieuse de lire Odette aussi. Je ne lis pas en français come ça. Quand j'étudie dans lycée j'ai lu en per, mais jamais lire un historie totalment. Je pense quand je lis Odette, j'aime lire parce qui c'est bonne pour etudie les français.

EDIT REPLAY



7 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 6:01 PM

,je suis certaine que le travail en classe t'aidera à comprendre plus facilement la nouvelle "Odette Toulemonde". Cela sera une expérience intéressante dans ton apprentissage du français, j'en suis sûre! Je te souhaite une bonne lecture!

Figure 5.1. Sample initial post (week two) and replies

In a later post (see Figure 5.2), students wrote a letter to their favorite author, just like Odette does in the story. In this open testimony to the works of Brian Jacques, the student's personal perspective clearly comes across. The reply shows that the classmate has picked up on the highly personal response, in addition to praising the quality of expression (meta-awareness).

Cher Brian Jacques,

J'écris à vous parce que vous êtes une de le plus grands raisons que j'aime lire. En grandissement, quand j'étais très jeune je lisais toutes des votre livres. Ils m'ont inspiré, Ils m'ont captivé, Ils m'ont transporté, Ils m'enseigné aimer lire et beaucoup d'autre chers leçons. Quand je les ai lu, je m'ai senti que j'ai été sur les aventures et dans le monde de Redwall. Aujourd'hui, je n'ai pas lu un autre auteur qui veut décrire les aliments avec votre talent (j'ai devenu très faim quand j'ai lu votre écriture sur aliments). J'aimais assez votre livres qu'ils m'ont inspiré à essayer et écrire quand j'étais un garçon (mais, je n'ai pas le talent pour écrire vous avez). Alors, vraiment, merci pure une vie avec plein des livres et imagination. Je partagerai votre livres avec mes enfants.

Merci,

Student reply:

14 OCTOBER 2016 AT 12:20 PM

Bonjour, ! J'aime lire ton blog parce que ta langue est belle et ton français est très bon! Par exemple, je peux voir ton émotion quand tu dis "ils... ils... ils...". Je les adore!

EDIT REPLY

Figure 5.2. Sample midterm post (week seven) and reply

Student Audio Blog

Toward the end of the semester, students were given the option to call in to a radio show to explain, as Balthazar's literary agent, why Balthazar had dropped out of the public scene. The transcription seeks to adhere to the student expression (content and grammar) as much as possible; hence, audible errors are marked.

AUDIO BLOG TRANSCRIPT

«Bonjour. Premièrement, merci pour permettre-moi faire une déclaration pour mon client Balthazar. Donc tout le monde sait que

Balthazar a disparu mais je sais qu'il est sûr. Je connais mon client : il est très créatif et spontané. Il est probable que Balthazar a voulu une vacation et le temps seul. Il a été très occupé le mois dernier et il a fait face à la critique d'Olaf Pims. Donc il avait besoin de temps pour penser et relaxer. C'est possible qu'il ait une idée pour un nouvelle livre. Et il est parti pour écrire sans les distractions. Chaque auteur a les méthodes différents quand ils vont écrire un roman. Je sais qu'il se sent bien pour tout en ce moment.»

Voicemail conventions are well respected in this student audio blog, which is effective communicatively even if imperfect in terms of language accuracy. The audio blog is also striking in the clear attempt students make in using, successfully or not, new grammar structures and vocabulary. In student replies (e.g., Figure 5.3), the common first sentence signals both the desire to be supportive and possibly the simplest form of positive feedback; message elaboration includes marking agreement, show of support (effectiveness of voicemail), and compliment on oral expression.

Students produced audio blogs that varied in length from about 30 seconds to more than a minute. That range, however, does not necessarily reflect students' ability to communicate orally, given individual differences in words per minute. Variation in length also reflects open-ended directions, which suggested to follow general social conventions for appropriate voicemails. Oral expression, especially on an open platform, is likely perceived as an intimidating activity. Short audio segments are therefore preferable at many levels.

A striking element in listening to audio blogs is that they feel real: it seems as if students were really talking to existing people, as opposed to fictive characters, and replies by classmates echo that sentiment as well. This form of *jeu de role* has students playing the game, as the typical markers of the voicemail genre attest (opening, closing; self-introduction either by name or by role/function). In their production, students are able to express attitudes and show empathy, via the voice of another character. We would argue that such interpersonal expression, encoding third-person empathy, is not often enabled in the typical intermediate-level classroom. The voicemail activity was conceptualized to promote oral expression with consideration for the students' level. Yet, it strikes us how it captures an

29 NOVEMBER 2016 AT 1:59 PM

Je pense tu es un vraiment fan de Balthazar. Vous le soutenez et le comprenez.

EDIT REPLY

Figure 5.3. Student reply to audio blog sample

essential interpersonal genre, one that we all enact daily, but is likely rarely practiced by students.

Social Reading

The social reading annotations offer insight into how students interpret the text in early and later passes. Just like the other social aspects of this course, social reading, to be successful, requires clear expectations, modeling, and guides for interaction. In the first round of annotations, students often explain characters' reactions, make (clever) commentary, point out plot development, or react to the development. In the responses, they most often agree by adding a nuanced take on the original comment or by making further predictions. Annotations make constructive use of both English and French with some responses code-switching from the original. There is some evidence of vocabulary building and even of explicit links made with new vocabulary items presented in chapter units, as, for instance, when students call attention to a particular expression (e.g., *confiance en soi*) even within a comment written in English. This double-coding of words or expression indicates meta-awareness within textual interpretation.



In the following representative example of a student annotation and responses (see Figure 5.4), students make interpretative comments, explain motivations and effects of previous plot developments, and make predictions for what will follow:

Oct 16, 2016

Si mon éditeur passe plusieurs jours avec moi, c'est que ça va très mal, se disait-il.



Balthazar is now thinking the worst about himself and his writing. I agree with the annotation above, this shows how much Olaf's comments affected him.

A Namur

Hide replies (2)  

Oct 18, 2016

I think that this downfall will make Balthazar more inclined to speak to Odette. Balthazar will become more humble and be more aware of individual fans.

Oct 19, 2016

I also noticed how Balthazar let Olaf's opinion completely change his perception of himself. Although he was discouraged and embarrassed by Olaf's opinion it may allow him to open up to his fans and be more open to support.



 

Figure 5.4. Sample social reading student annotation with student replies

Oct 16, 2016

| Bonjour, vous me reconnaissez ?

Cette phrase est tres important. C'est tres interessant voir comment ils ont l'occasion rencontrer encore. Cette monte comment leur recontre va etre tres significant maintenant. Le monde est un place peu.

Hide replies (1)



I agree that it is very important. It is interesting that she says that they haven't met. That way she gets a fresh start!

Oct 17, 2016



Figure 5.5. Sample social reading student annotation with student reply

They also make explicit acknowledgments about other student annotations, most often supporting the original post (see Figure 5.5). On the whole, we observe interpretive and presentational language in the original annotations intermingled with interpersonal in the replies.

Cher Monsieur Schmitt letter.

The *Cher Monsieur Schmitt* letter could be considered the capstone blog assignment for the course. In Figure 5.6, the student reflects on her reading experience and shares her opinions with the author.

Cher Monsieur Schmitt...

9 DECEMBER 2016 /

/ 1 COMMENT / EDIT

Cher Monsieur Schmitt,

Bonjour! Je suis une étudiante Américaine qui étudie français, et cette semestre, nous avons lu votre nouvelle dans le cours. Ce qui était une expérience incroyablement intimidante, mais avec le temps, j'ai appris apprécier le défi. J'aime Odette, parce qu'elle est une protagoniste très sympathique et compatissante, mais je ne suis pas certaine que j'aie aimé les autres personnages. Cependant, ce qui ne m'a pas arrêté d'appréciement l'histoire. J'espère que tu continuera écrire les romans!

Figure 5.6. Sample *Cher Monsieur Schmitt* letter

The student follows genre conventions (greeting, self-introduction and topic sentence, closing sentence) while efficiently assessing her reading experience. The presentation of viewpoint is again evident with attention to interlocutor's face (appreciation of Odette yet nuanced criticism of the other characters).

Survey

The social pedagogy aspects of the course were evaluated via an anonymous survey to provide a more quantitative assessment of its success. The numerical results of this small-scale survey are presented in Appendix A. Overall, students report that the blog supports various aspects of their engagement in the class. In particular, at least half of the students find that the blog supports them “a lot” or “quite a bit,” and there are very few cases (2%) that an outcome was “not at all” supported by the blog. The highly favorable response to the blog's success at both supporting focusing on communicating an idea and trying out new vocabulary and grammar indicates that students embraced the tone of the blog instructions, which primarily encouraged risk taking and communication. The more mixed response to tokens about understanding either the text or grammar/vocabulary served as a reminder that the relationships between these facets need to be more explicit both in the blog prompts and the in-class discussions. Moreover, the positive response to the query about motivation was a welcome result in light of the amount of work that the course requires on the part of all involved.

Answers from Test 1

Connections between the social assignments and the coursework were explicitly reinforced by questions on the exam: one asking (in French) about what they do and don't like about the blog and the other (in English) about what they find they have in common with their peers from reading the posts. Although we cannot dismiss the possibility that students were telling the instructor what they thought she wanted to hear on this graded section of the test, overall student comments were very positive and showed remarkable similarity in content (see Table 5.1).

These responses demonstrate community building and solidarity as well as a certain level of meta-awareness concerning strengths and weaknesses and a clear articulation that it is okay to make mistakes. Students agree that everyone is in the same place and shares nervousness about progress, which could be otherwise prohibitive, especially in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) with high affective filters. While they acknowledge that the blogs are a lot of work and some dislike being forced to make comments, they generally agree that reading their peers' work is not just informative but enjoyable too.

Correlations

What interaction, if any, exists between the students' course performance and their participation in virtual assignments? A quick way to gauge such potential

Table 5.1. Sample Exam 1 Responses Linked to Social Pedagogies

<p>Q1. Ce semestre, vous participez à un blog. Qu'est-ce que vous aimez ou n'aimez pas à ce sujet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Un blog donne un opportunitie pour utilise nouveaux vocabulaire et temps [sic]</i> • <i>J'aime lire ce que l'autres ont écrit [sic]</i> • <i>J'aime comment le blog est informel. Alors nous pouvons parler nos idées vraiment. [sic]</i> • <i>Je l'aime parce qu'il est interactif et différent.</i> • <i>C'est beaucoup de travail.</i>
<p>Q2. What have you found in common with your classmates when posting/responding on the blog?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>I feel more comfortable with making mistakes because I know everyone is just as nervous as me.</i> • <i>Nous sommes plus bons d'écrire le français que parler le. [sic]</i> • <i>I found that when reading their work they have a lot of subject/verb agreement errors and them when i [sic] go back to my blog I notice I make the same type of mistakes.</i> • <i>... we can help each other if someone doesn't understand the story, or just need help in French in general. . .</i>

Table 5.2. Blog Production and Course Performance Comparison: High versus Low Performers

Student	Blogs (average # of words)	Blog Grade (%)	Course Grade	Final Exam Grade
S1	106	97.5	A-	93
S2	105	97.5	A	83
S3	127	97.5	A-	90
S4	105	97.5	B	67
S5	95	87.5	C+	66
S6	99	87.5	C	67

interaction is to contrast blog production of students who had the best overall course performance with those with a low performance.

A cursory glance at Table 5.2 suggests that high performers showed a greater degree of sustained effort and/or engagement on the written blogs than low performers. Anecdotally, students' regular textual production (traditional homework assignments) suggests that they reaped benefit from the weekly blog postings (and blog responses); students' writing appeared to evolve toward paragraph-length, connected discourse, marking an appreciable difference from what students seemed able to produce when the semester started.

Discussion

How social is the student production? While the limited samples in a nascent project such as TLM prevented us from making any broad or definitive claims, we evaluated students' work qualitatively, by examining the content, the types of shared information, the range of topics discussed, the lexical and grammatical choices made, and the comprehensibility. The production varied according to the task, ranging from speech acts and specific genres (such as letters or reviews) to inviting the student into the fictional world. The high degree of comprehensibility is evidenced by reasonable, supportive, and thoughtful peer-to-peer feedback as seen in the student samples earlier. In their comments, students often used the blogger's first name and then empathized or shared a similar story. In other types of responses, students validated the blogger's feelings or offered a different way of seeing a situation in a respectful manner. They often made specific references to the post itself demonstrating they had carefully read the original post. These attributes distinguish this type of online commentary from the real world where the comment section is notorious for decaying into negative discourse. We attribute this high degree of accountability and positivity to visibility. Digital communication proves to be an equalizer for all students, even those who are shy since all are allocated the same space, font, and metaphorical volume; everyone raises their hand on the blog and has the same handwriting and the same accent. "The students saw the blog as a space in which they presented and represented aspects of themselves within a performative context. In this they were taking part in the cultural practices of representation which exist both inside and outside the formal structures of the course" (Potter & Banaji, 2012, p. 88). In the blog posts, student performance naturally oscillated between presentational, interpretive, and interpersonal. The original post is primarily presentational. However, interpersonal elements are arguably visible since the students are aware that they are going to be read by their peers; the responses engage the interpretive and interpersonal modes. The interpersonal mode is incomplete or one-sided since most attempts at clarification on the part of the responder were not often addressed by the original poster. This is of course a facet of social media interaction and course design. We seek to address this imbalance in future iterations of the course with more specific references to blog content in the classroom, to foster follow-up and closure on these topics.

Students' responses indicated that highly personal topics felt inviting to students (ethos) but were also inherently communicative: these were topics about which they had something to say. The interpersonal nature of the blog seemingly created a format in which students felt comfortable sharing (personal) ideas and stories. We posit that how these assignments are described and eventually assessed increases community building and interactive components of communication. For instance, nearly half of the students readily shared embarrassing moments as

early as their second post. In connection to the main character's sudden inability to talk, students were invited to recount a similar experience and how they now felt about this embarrassing moment. It suggests that students felt they were interacting in a protected, supportive environment. If the blogging instructions (be positive) and the first blog topic (do you feel anxious/ready to read a short story in French?) likely played a role in establishing a positive climate, the nature of blogging cannot be ignored. The invitation to talk about personal experiences succeeded because the virtual medium allows for disinhibition and for the expression of true selves (or alternatively the trying out of new identities and personalities). These observations are in line with Gackenback and von Stackelberg (2011, p. 55) who highlighted that the lack of visual clues and judgments of their physical presence accounts for this greater freedom.

The virtual presence/physical absence became particularly evident when the course instructor attempted to play examples of the first audio blog submissions in class after students had commented on each other's audio blog, much in the same way they did for the written blogs, with supportive messages displaying agreement. When the instructor asked who was willing to have their message played, no one volunteered, and the audible silence in the classroom made it clear that the request was received as a face-threatening act. This observation is consistent with Kern's (2015) accounts of the advantages of online writing such as the lack of awkward pauses. It highlights the role of face and affective dimensions and how they play out differently online and in face-to-face interactions.

Despite the clear license to avoid complex or new grammatical structures, many students took advantage of this sandbox to utilize the relevant new concepts being covered in class and in the *Littéralement Parlant* course book. Grammatical and structural risk taking abounded. Students made their own self-directed links between grammar and vocabulary and the communicative goal. For example, many posts included structurally complex and not-yet-mastered grammatical features such as subjunctive, pluperfect, object pronouns, and past tenses. These types of observations are consistent with the changes observed by Yuldashev, Fernandez, and Thorne (2013) in L2 high school Spanish-language production on blog entries.

Nevertheless, from the mundane to the more significant, developing and coordinating the collaborative elements of this program has met significant challenges. While there were very few issues with student compliance as far as submitting the assignments (perhaps thanks to public accountability), getting students to use tags and putting assignments in the right place on the website were challenging. Although the majority of the student population could be considered digital natives, those native skills do not necessarily translate to consistent problem solving or rule abiding in the academic environment. Lack of appropriate tags makes it tedious to find and assess blogs, and it certainly affects how and to what degree students commented on each other's posts. In other words, anecdotal

observations suggest that students often comment on the easiest blogs to find (i.e., the ones at the top of the page). While we pleaded repeatedly for tags on each blog assignment and appealed to students with “if the blog isn’t searchable then it probably isn’t gradable,” there was still relatively low compliance. In addition to finding the blog entries, keeping tabs on multistep assignments (original post and then follow-up comment) in a space that is constantly expanding thanks to student production is no small feat. Along a similar line, we are constantly aware of the risk for student fatigue in this environment. To that end, we abide by our internal checklists: Is this explicitly relevant and integrated? How will the timing of the assignment affect its outcome and the outcome of concurrent assignments? With so many moving and evolving parts in this collaborative program, we remind ourselves that each module, as a dynamic and fully functioning subset, must be considered in light of the course as a whole and the users who are involved.

Expandability, Modularity, and Applicability to Other Language Program Directors

The social pedagogical approaches associated with this particular French course offer anywhere from a blueprint for social pedagogy integration, adaptation, or adoption of certain modules to potential full adoption. At the core of this project lies careful selection of a work that embraces cultural literacy, which in turn increases social pedagogy opportunities. In particular, the story of Odette exemplifies universal emotions packaged in a francophone setting. Our blog tag *je lis Odette* expands beyond the classroom; (francophone) readers throughout the world are discovering this story or have already done so. This situation increases opportunities for potential interaction with native speakers on topics broached in the short story since they are part of the discourse. While social pedagogies are adaptable to all levels of language learning, we find that the approach here is particularly fitting, owing to its pairing with Intermediate Low to Intermediate Mid learners and beyond. It fosters a satisfying capstone experience for lower division language requirement and offers a bridge to reading longer and more complicated texts and doing literary analysis.

The modular nature of the social pedagogy aspects of the course, including blog assignments, social reading, and movie reviews, allow for integration in pieces to a course in need of revitalization. Indeed, this method parallels the approach taken in building the course described in this chapter. The expandable nature of social pedagogies enables a program to be highly functional even when it is a work in progress.

As with any innovative courses, questions arise as to its fit within the program and sequence. The pilot course described in this study is, using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) denotation, a bridge

course situated at the B1/B2 level (Intermediate). Programmatic fit also means that the pilot semesters (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017) were adapted to preexisting parameters for the course, for instance, adjusting to the grade breakdown rather than creating a new one. The new grade breakdown had to make space for the social assignments, as the following table illustrates.

Table 5.3. Grade Breakdown before and with Social Pedagogy Implementation

Grade Breakdown (Fall 2015–pre-social pedagogy)		Grade Breakdown (Fall 2016–social pedagogy)	
Examens (four)	30%	Examens (four)	30%
Examen oral	5%	Examen oral	5%
Examen final	15%	Examen final	15%
Devoirs, participation	15%	Devoirs, participation	15%
Compositions	25%	Compositions	15%
Travaux Pratiques	10%	Blog	20%

Table 5.3 demonstrates the attempt to allocate significant weight to the social component of the course (critical in justifying students' efforts) while maintaining departmental guidelines, a concern that many Language Program Directors may have experienced when making curriculum decisions. It reveals how innovating in (L2) curriculum development may seem easier when adoption standards fit the preexisting curriculum.

We examined whether students' course performance was affected by the pedagogy used by comparing results for the same course before TLM with those obtained with our pilot course. The results (see Table 5.4) are strikingly similar, which is good news: the social pedagogy does not seem to negatively affect students' quantified course performance. In particular, the stability of grades across the final exams is noteworthy because the tests are similar in format and content.

Table 5.4. Course Grades in the Traditional Course and Social Pedagogy Course

	Fall 2015 (14 students)	Fall 2016 (18 students)
Average course grade	84	84
Final exam grade	79	78

We can reasonably hope that the social pedagogy may have increased students' confidence in reading in French and in expressing personal viewpoints while maintaining other domains of language mastery (e.g., accuracy) at overall similar levels.

As the title of the program implies, we propose that instructors at other institutions adopt (the concept of) this course, or some of its components, either in its entirety or in conjunction with an existing curriculum. In this scenario, students would be able to read content generated by students in their section and in other sections (which is the case in the second iteration of this course)—even across universities. While the public is currently able to read content, we seek ways to invite others—whether students of French or not—to comment and contribute. Additionally, a growing twitter presence (@TLMFrench) will increase traffic and visibility.

We conclude this section with a call to extend the social pedagogical approach to instructors who could benefit from its advantages. To this end, we propose an adaptive, semiprivate space “La Salle des Profs” on the TLM site for instructors who look to share strategies and materials. As previously mentioned, Schmitt’s success as an author and the success of this short story in particular offer a media-rich, authentic toolkit upon which to expand. Odette Toulemonde realia—movie critiques, fan discourse, interviews with actors, interviews with Schmitt—abounds and can further enrich the reading, writing, and collaborative experience. For example, social reading could be easily expanded to include tags and links. The fan fiction components of the *Fans d’Odette* module are currently blank slates, which could be integrated by an instructor looking for creative assignments. We also foresee discussions on the creation and implementation of Integrated Performance Assessments. This forum is open to guide the transformation of teaching from an isolated or isolating practice to a communal, co-constructed opportunity.

Conclusion

We have presented a working model-in-progress of social pedagogies aiding the development of multiple literacies “through multiple experiences, in multiple contexts, with multiple text genres (both oral and written) for multiple purposes” (Kern, 2000, p. 37). The hybrid nature of the intermediate French-language program allowed for incremental and adaptive adoption. The early success of the program is apparent in reported and observed student engagement and student production. The digital formats that were often selected for ease of adoption allowed the students to become ready producers of content that sits side by side with instructor-generated content. While Potter and Banaji (2012) offer the possibility that their “blogs [. . .] were revelatory not in the sense that they were fostering inherently new processes so much as rendering them newly visible” (p. 89), we counter that blogs are a great equalizer of meaning-focused written voice, which isn’t possible in face-to-face classroom interactions. Although highly regulated and required, the blogs and the social reading annotations scaffolded authentic, contextually rich encounters. While modular and adaptable, each element involved close attention to design and integration in the course as a whole.

This deliberate approach distinguishes full-functioning modules from haphazard addendums that risk disregarding the goodwill of the student population.

In short, this intermediate French program transforms potentially isolated readers and language learners into authors, fans, and critics in an extramural classroom through scaffolded and mediated reading and textually inspired, real-life activities. A cultural inquiry that is socially inclusive and adaptive, encourages knowledge co-construction, and promotes process over product may be a response to what Hayles (1999) hopes for: a posthuman that “embraces the possibilities of information technologies” and “understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity” (p. 5) as students find the humanity in the text and in each other.

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Appendix A: Survey and *tallied results

How much has the course blog, *Tout le monde en parle/écoute*, supported:

	A lot	Quite a bit	Some	Little	Not at all
1. Your understanding of the short story “Odette Toulemonde”	(3)	(8)	(4)	(1)	(2)
2. Making personal connections (identifying) with the events of the story	(4)	(8)	(5)	(1)	–
3. Your understanding of the course grammar/vocabulary	(3)	(6)	(9)	–	–
4. An opportunity for trying out course grammar/vocabulary	(6)	(9)	(3)	–	–
5. Your sense of who your classmates are and what they like	(4)	(6)	(7)	(1)	–
6. Your sense of what a good blog post looks like	(3)	(8)	(4)	(2)	(1)
7. Your in-class discussions	(4)	(5)	(7)	(2)	–
8. Your focus on <i>communicating an idea (or sharing a message)</i> when writing	(7)	(10)	(1)	–	–
9. Your motivation to improve your French	(5)	(10)	(1)	(2)	–

*The number in parentheses is the raw score.