

Designing Activities that Enhance Student Learning

Please use this form to describe a teaching activity that you have modified or developed (or will modify or develop) in response to the working group sessions.

Name: Seda Chavdarian

Role (*circle one*): Faculty Member Graduate Student/GSI Other _____

Home Department(s): French

Course(s) in which you would use this teaching activity: French 2 but the methodology can be modified and used for any literary text at any level.

Activity Title: “Using Authentic Literary Texts in Second Semester French”

Description:

Please give a short synopsis of the activity and its learning goals, maximum 100 words.

Authentic literary texts are often deemed too difficult for the first-year language students who have insufficient semantic and syntactic proficiency. However, I believe strongly that it is essential to break the traditional barrier too often imposed on the teaching of language and literature. We must discard the notion that teaching literature can only happen after a certain level of proficiency in the language has been achieved. Indeed a literary text can be used in elementary language classes to teach reading, critical thinking, grammar, and culture.

This activity is designed to sharpen the students’ linguistic and analytical skills through the reading of a modern play.

If this is an activity you have used in the past but now will modify in response to the Working Group sessions, please describe the activity as you previously conducted it:

The particular play is Eugène Ionesco's "La Leçon" [*The Lesson*]. Students read a total of 90 pages broken down into approximately 15-20 page segments over a six-week period. Both descriptive and analytical questions are provided to help their reading. In addition to these questions, the students are asked to do the following with every reading segment:

1. Give a summary (assesses general comprehension)
2. Give specific examples of the grammar learned in class (provides an opportunity for close reading and application of grammatical rules)
3. Give the most important idea of the particular scene (assesses a more personal and focused comprehension)
4. Prepare a question to ask the class (provides an opportunity for a more analytical approach to the reading and makes the student more responsible for the ensuing class discussion)

Describe the changes you made or will make to the activity and the reasoning behind these changes.

Generally speaking, all four categories will be elaborated to involve the students in a more active manner and to give them a much more focused participatory role. Specifically, the changes will be more substantial for the last two. Students will be asked to give a short narrative elaborating and explaining the reasoning behind their observation and question. Although the students are asked everyday to reread the pages, this modification will not only make them reread but read more carefully and provide examples to support their observations. The choice of their examples will reveal their own socio-cultural experiences and how these experiences affect their understanding of the text. This in turn will allow for a more trans-cultural approach to the text while sharpening their analytical skills. On the practical level, this exercise will allow the students to organize their thoughts and mentally "write" their composition without having to sit through a tedious lesson on analytical writing. They will learn the lesson in spite of themselves, so to speak. Thus, the activity will prepare them much better for every in-class discussion and eventually the composition that they will write.

Which session(s) of the Working Group influenced the changes you made or will make to this activity? How so?

I learned and took away great ideas from every single speaker of the series, but if I had to choose specific ones, I would say: Professors Kaufer, Lave, Shimamura, Kihlstrom, and Covington. The content of their presentations was more relevant to language teaching, where, due to the nature of the class and the type of learning involved, the factors of attention span, memorization, motivation, and student involvement become even more critical.

How will you assess the effectiveness of this activity in enhancing student learning?

Assessment will be formative rather than summative. Students will be evaluated based on the quality of class discussions of their questions. They will be given a chance to lead either group or entire class discussions and asked to give feedback of the experience in the form of a short narrative. Depending on the reading segment, they may also be asked to devise a short “quiz type” activity for the class.

This type of assessment will be two-fold. It will not only provide the instructor with a better idea of student learning and their thought-processes, but will also be a more self-reflective activity for the students. It will give them an opportunity to be involved in teaching as well as learning.

If this is a new activity developed in response to the Working Group sessions, please describe the activity:

Which session(s) of the Working Group influenced your development of this activity? How so?

Have you used the activity in the classroom yet? If so, please describe its effectiveness. If not, how you will assess its enhancement of student learning.