Multiliteracies in Action at the Art Museum

CHRISTELLE J. L. PALPACUER LEE

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
E-mail: christelle.palpacuer-lee@gse.rutgers.edu

This paper presents a narrative account of teaching-researching-learning processes in practice, in the context of a language teacher development program at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Approaching L2 literacies as the interplay of intersubjective, sensory, and embodied experiences of language users in their situated encounters with symbolic forms at the art museum, the paper explores pedagogical pathways towards multiliteracies through encounters with art at the museum, as teachers walk, talk, learn and design together. It illustrates the implementation of a pedagogy of multiliteracies, as viewers/readers engage deeply with museum texts.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, literacy scholars have called for expanded definitions of and perspectives on literacy that would reflect the multimodal, multilingual and fluid dimensions of communication in a digital age (Gee, 2005; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Kern, 2003, 2008; Kress, 2000, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Locke, 2010; Luke 2003; New London Group, 2000). A growing body of research offers insight into the pedagogy of multiliteracies in the L2 classroom, either as a curricular driving force (Allen & Paesani, 2010; Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Maxim, Höyng, Lancaster, Schaumann, & Aue, 2013) or as instructional strategies for the L2 classroom (Allen, 2009; Crance, 2006; Fukunaga, 2006; Lotherington & Jenson, 2011; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014). Research in the area of digital literacies has been developing a body of innovative practices, highlighting the centrality of texts, meanings, discourses and social worlds in foreign language instruction (Fukunaga, 2006; Thorne & Watters, 2013; Ware & Kessler, 2016). In turn, the work conducted within this expanded paradigm invited reformulations and an expansion of multiliteracies practices in foreign and second language teacher preparation programs (Choi & Yi, 2016; Hall, 2001; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Tanghe & Park, 2016; Yi & Angay-Chowder, 2016). Together, all these curricular and pedagogical innovations have contributed to reinventing the teaching and learning of L2 literacies in the foreign language classroom.

In order to leverage such innovative practices across the curriculum, foreign language teachers need to be apprenticed into pedagogies of multiliteracies. They need to be exposed to the changing and expanding definitions of literacy education, to the dynamic notions of design and meaning, and to “embrace instructional strategies that align with literacy-based learning outcomes” (Allen & Clementi, 2016, p. 23). This agenda is all the more pressing in the United States, where current educational high-stakes policies mandate that all teachers and teacher educators foster academic language proficiency and L2 writing across the K-16 continuum (Gebhard, Demers, & Castillo-Rosenthal, 2008; Hirvela & Belcher, 2007; Palincsar & Schleppegrell, 2014).
Teacher education courses and programs can be ideal, safe, innovative, and privileged spaces where professionals can be socialized into dynamic views of literacy as inquiry, as social practice, and as embodied or living experiences (Rowsell, Kosnick, & Beck, 2008). In teacher education classes, language teachers should be encouraged to collectively engage with multimodal texts, and to make interdisciplinary, embodied, and intertextual connections. In an era of accountability and high-stakes testing, such spaces of possibilities and imagination are sorely needed (Greene, 1995; Kramsch, 2009).

The opportunity to enact a multiliteracies framework arose in a language teacher development program at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Specifically, an encounter with the painting *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (Les Noces de Cana, Caliari, a.k.a. Veronese, 1563) invited readers/viewers to engage with the text, to reflect on the notions of multimodality, meaning and design, and to open pathways for experiencing a multiliteracies framework. These invitations, extended by the museum, the art, and the program participants, were located in talk and text, but also in the physical pathways of the museum space. Two interventions were designed to capitalize on the teachers’ lived encounters with the meaning potentials of *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, and to enrich their learning experiences at the museum. This paper explores pedagogical pathways towards multiliteracies through encounters with art at the museum, as teachers walk, talk, learn, and design together.

First, I situate this project in the current conversations about L2 literacies, and its implementation in language teacher preparation. Next, I describe the program at the museum, as a context for the implementation of a pedagogy of multiliteracies. This is followed by a description of the collective encounter with *The Wedding Feast at Cana* during the inaugural docent-led museum walk in the program. This lived literacy event, fraught with silence and sensory challenges, prompted the design of two pedagogical interventions that would turn this (failed) encounter into an opportunity to implement and experience a pedagogy of multiliteracies. Each intervention is then described separately in the paper. The first intervention focused on the painting as text, and targeted the collective design of meaning, and the development of a metalanguage to co-construct an interpretation of the painting. The second intervention revisited the museum walk as an embodied, discursive, and symbolic performance. Appropriating museum texts and the museum walk as a genre, the participants engaged in the collective design of their own, curated museum walk. Overall, this paper describes what a pedagogy of multiliteracies in action can look and feel like, as viewers/readers engage deeply with museum texts.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

One of the major challenges for L2 educators is to make a multiliteracies framework for L2 instruction relevant and accessible to foreign language teachers. In the United States, this important work has already been accomplished by connecting the goals of literacy education to the World Readiness Standards for Language Learning (ACTFL, 2013) and the framework for 21st century skills (P21) (Allen & Clementi, 2016; Arens, 2008, 2009; Kern, 2000; Kumagai, López-Sánchez, & Wu, 2016; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016; Warner, 2014). Research in literacy education has generated a large body of scholarship to support the integration of a multiliteracies framework in language teacher programs, focusing on the curricular possibilities afforded by multimodality, new literacies studies and digital literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2003; Fukunaga, 2006; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014; New London Group, 1996; Thorne & Watters, 2013; Unsworth, 2001; Ware & Kessler, 2016). Addressing
language teachers, and building on Cope and Kalantzis (2000), Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy (2016) offer a multilayered pedagogical framework that guides teachers in implementing a pedagogy of multiliteracies, and in designing instructional materials that “encourage learners to design meaning from target language texts” (p. 27). In this design-oriented framework, expanded definitions of ‘text’ include any document, material or digital, that conveys meaning, expressed through multiple modes.

Leander and Boldt (2013) expanded on a definition of literacy as engagement with texts, and critiqued the rather static approach to design outlined by Cope and Kalantzis (2009) and The New London Group (1996, 2000). Through the analysis of the embodied literacy practices of Lee, a ten year-old boy who loves Japanese mangas, Leander and Boldt (2013) addressed the fluid and unpredictable expansions of meaning and meaning-making practices as they unfold in the present, and in context. Resisting a static, representational and prescriptive stance that, they argued, transpired from the New London Group’s Pedagogy of Multiliteracies model, they showed how multiliteracies in action were rather emergent and undomesticated. In their view, literacy and literacy practices are alive, “forming relations and connections across signs, objects and bodies in often unexpected ways” (p. 25). This call to go beyond the control and rationalization of meaning and meaning-making practices, and to let desires lead the way towards the proliferation and embodiment of meanings, is an open invitation to educators. They are invited to pay attention to meanings as they emerge in talk and in context—and to movement and emotions as they unfold in the present tense of unpredictable and emerging literacy events.

Such an approach to a pedagogy of multiliteracies would bring teachers to notice, seize, and build upon teachable and powerful moments in their classroom; to ponder how they can harness the materials and resources from the participants in the class and, together, create “a composition of desire” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 399, as cited in Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 44); and to negotiate a curriculum that has a fluid center, around which are attached clusters and networks of multimodal meanings. In turn, this approach would capitalize on creativity, spontaneity, and imagination.

Leander and Boldt (2013) further complicated the notion of design in relation to practice, citing the artist Marion Milner and invoking her creative processes. Milner characterized her painting practices as “painting from uncertainty” (p. 40). For the two scholars, “Milner suggested that grasping after the language and promise of mastery, technical proficiency, and rationality are what prevented her from being able to paint” (p. 40). Their point was that a technical approach to design and art practices misses the emotional, creative, and embodied dimensions of practice. For Milner, painting meant embracing uncertainty and indeterminacy. For Leander and Boldt (2013), literacy does not have to begin with a text or a set of technical approaches, but with emotions as emerging resources. Applied to language teacher education and a specific program at the art museum, the work of Leander and Boldt (2013) suggested the possibility of combining a design-based approach to texts and literacy, while also honoring and exploring the notion of desire and its “unfolding that follows along paths” (p. 44) that had yet to be identified.

This paper illustrates a collaborative engagement with “open textured” (Barton & Baguley, 2014) literacy events by exploring how, in practice, the application of a multiliteracies framework at the art museum can also make space for living texts and imagination. The following section describes the program as the context for the implementation of a pedagogy of multiliteracies that capitalizes on the lived experiences of museum readers/viewers.
CONTEXT

The Program

The “Teachers at the Louvre” program, a joint collaboration between the faculty of a large public university in the United States and the Louvre Museum, is a two-week summer program for U.S. K-16 teachers of French that ran every year from 2008 to 2013. Since 2013, the U.S. institution has offered the program every other summer. In this program, teachers of French are immersed in the collections and the discourses of the French art museum for two weeks in July. The main learning activity in the program, which culminates in a participant-led and curated tour, is the walking tour initially led by museum educators. Over the years, and after multiple iterations and conversations, several curricular changes have been made to reflect the shared interests, goals, and orientations of the museum and the participating teachers. In 2013, these interests were specifically focused on multiple literacies.

2013 Course Design

The two-week intensive summer class, attached to a 3-credit graduate course in a Department of French, was divided into three large thematic units. These three thematic units were built around the Louvre Museum’s vast collection and the rare expertise of the museum staff. The course contents varied each year due to the availability of the art works and of the museum staff in the summer, but generally included genres (e.g., still life, landscape, portrait), techniques (e.g., painting, sculpture, objects), areas of production (e.g., Western Europe, Middle East), and historical periods (from Antiquity to the beginning of the 19th century). The 2013 course overview is presented in Appendix 1. Through a cycle of walking tours, background and content readings, aesthetic experiences in and out of the museum, class reports and discussions, reflections and independent research, the participants were encouraged to develop their own voice, expertise, and authorship as museum visitors/readers and as teachers of French. These experiences would later be reinvested in the design of a multimodal lesson plan that adopts a multiliteracies framework for L2 instruction, another literacy event that is discussed elsewhere (Palpacuer Lee, manuscript in preparation).

Two workshops specifically addressed the pedagogy of multiliteracies. The first workshop took place on the second day of the program, and introduced participants to multimodality and multiliteracies, as well as to situated ways of looking at art and symbolic forms. The second workshop took place on the second and last week of the program, and focused on the collaborative creation of a museum tour. It is during these workshops that the interventions, discussed in the next sections, took place. The mode of delivery that articulated all these aesthetic, experiential, and practical goals was the walking tour. While it was important that participation in the intensive program resulted in the development of instructional tasks, the class emphasized the collaborative processes involved in the co-generation of texts, performances, and materials. The products punctuated the short program, but the learning process articulated the progression and goals of the class. Ultimately, the course aimed to transform the participants’ understanding of multimodality and multiliteracies through the exposure to design-based and art-based literacy teaching.
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practices.

Participants

In 2013, eleven teachers of French from across the United States joined the course. The participants included one male and ten female teachers, and one female course instructor. Ten participants enrolled in the 3-credit graduate course associated with the program. One teacher, who was already retired, participated in the program but did not complete the coursework. Eight participants were high school teachers of French and one worked in a middle school. All participants had been teaching French for more than seven years, and three of them had been teaching for over twenty years. They were either sponsored by their school or were personally funded. All eleven teachers agreed to be part of this research project.

Research Design

This study presents a narrative account of teaching-researching-learning processes in practice (Byrd Clark & Dervin, 2014; Malinowski, 2016). It explores how the notion of design can open transformative pathways in a language teacher education program. Once the course was created, it was developed into a reflective practitioner inquiry study that highlighted the complex workings of the simultaneous learning, teaching, and researching processes (McLean & Rowsell, 2013). As a language teacher and a teacher educator, I took this opportunity to reflect on my own approach to design and meaning, and on my practice using a pedagogy of multiliteracies, in order to model such reflective processes in the program. Noting that “the most important gift we can give our students is to explore with them (not for them) the immense wealth of meanings opened up by the language we teach” (Kramsch, 2009, p. 207), I attempted to find instructional pathways that would build on design and desire. At the museum, I learned alongside the participants as we walked, viewed, and talked together in the galleries. The data for this participatory and collaborative project included the co-generative dialogues and living texts that informed the instructor’s cycle of research and practice (Phillips & Willis, 2014). These living texts were captured as they unfolded, through the authorized audio-recording of the museum walk, the two workshops, as well as the participant-led museum walk on the last day of the program. Additional data, also living texts, included the instructor’s research and teaching journals, field notes, artifacts, and museum texts (e.g., works of art, maps, pamphlets, instructional materials), as well as the multimodal materials co-created by the researcher and the participants during the program (e.g., photographs, sketches, collages, soundscapes, museum walk itineraries, museum texts about the collections at the Louvre, lesson plans). I embraced the uncertainty and creativity attached to these methodological and instructional choices, acknowledging the unpredictability (and the thrill) associated with the process of designing and teaching in the present tense. The following descriptions reflect our collective engagement with texts at the museum.
AN INITIAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA

The Texts

*The Wedding Feast at Cana* (Les Noces de Cana, 1563) is a very large oil painting—measuring 6.6 meters by 9.9 meters—created by Paolo Veronese during the Italian Renaissance. *The Wedding Feast at Cana* initially decorated the refectory of the San Giorgio Maggiore monastery in Venice, Italy. In 1797, Napoleon’s French army reached the monastery, stole, and shipped the painting to Paris where it has remained since, undergoing several major restorations over the years. The painting now hangs in Room 6 at the Louvre Museum, opposite *The Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci, and next to Italian Renaissance paintings. *The Wedding Feast at Cana* is considered one of the masterpieces of the Louvre Museum collections, and as such, it was selected and included by the museum educator in the first museum walk of the program. *The Wedding Feast at Cana* is viewed here as the hypotext (Kramsch & Nolden, 1994), that is the text initially encountered by participants that, in turn, generated hypertexts (see Appendix 2). These hypertexts include the voiced texts (i.e., authorized audio-recorded and transcribed conversations) about *The Wedding Feast at Cana* captured during and after the museum walk, as well as the written texts generated post-museum walk by viewers/readers as they reflected on their encounter with the painting.

*The Wedding, Interrupted*

On a sunny and busy afternoon in mid-July, the program participants joined their first docent-led museum tour, walking, viewing, and reading together the museum’s masterpieces selected by the museum educator. On this initial walk, the group stopped in Room 6 to view *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. Yet, despite its gigantic size, the participants were not able to see the painting that day. Their access was encumbered by the crowds of visitors aggregating around the *Mona Lisa*, arms stretched up to take pictures of the portrait by Leonardo da Vinci. After a few minutes in Room 6 and several attempts to access, view, and read *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, the docent quickly suggested leaving the room and moving on to the next masterpiece. Exiting Room 6, she commented (my translation from French): “The conditions to see the painting are terrible, and it’s getting worse. Actually, it is impossible to see anything. We can’t see anything!” (Hypertext 1, Museum educator, July 15, 2013).

After this first museum walk, all the participants reported on their embodied and emplaced experiences of attempting and failing to view and read *The Wedding Feast at Cana* in their journals. Their journal entries, additional hypertexts, emphasized the material and sensory obstacles they faced in Room 6. One participant commented: “There are too many people in front of the masterpieces. We want to see *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, not the heads of the other visitors!” (Hypertext 2), while another participant compared the museum walk to “a battle” (Hypertext 3). One participant reflected on her embodied awareness of the constraints placed on visitors and educators working in one of the largest art museums in the world: “I realize how you can’t improvise a visit of a large museum!” (Hypertext 4). Another participant, after experiencing such difficulties, began to doubt her abilities to learn at the

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museum, and started to question her legitimacy as a museum visitor, “I felt so small, I know so little about art and about art history” (Hypertext 5). Finally, two participants looked beyond the sensory challenges of the visit and focused their reflections on the text itself and on its potential inclusion in their curriculum. Their comments were very contrasted: while one participant resisted the painting, “I cannot talk about religion in my class. I am a teacher of language, not religion” (Hypertext 7), another one was intrigued by the meaning potentials of the text: “[T]his painting is very rich in symbols, in details and in history. Such a painting would be very great to learn how to ‘read’ paintings” (Hypertext 8).

Analysis

That day, The Wedding Feast at Cana seemed physically and intellectually inaccessible, overshadowed by the Mona Lisa and the multiple imaginations associated with the small portrait. In addition, the meditational tools that were available to scaffold the interpretation of the painting (i.e., headphones, language, the museum educator, the textual, physical and visual resources in Room 6, and other participants’ perspectives) appeared insufficient, inadequate, and inaccessible. The painting was not seen that day and, for some viewers, could not/should not be seen in the L2 classroom. Overall, the lived experiences of interacting with The Wedding Feast at Cana were fraught with disruptions, invisibility, and silences.

However, emerging from the margins of the museum walk, the comments of the participants disrupted the silence and the invisibility of The Wedding Feast at Cana in Room 6 that day. Their reactions reflected interpretive processes at play in this encounter, by highlighting the materiality of museum texts, and by revealing the disruptive dimension of the painting as text, and of the experience of viewing the painting together. As a literacy event, this difficult and exhausting encounter with The Wedding Feast at Cana did generate emotions, reflections, and questions from frustrated readers/visitors. Furthermore, the museum walk did address the situated work of museum educators and visitors, by highlighting its emplaced and embodied challenges. Perhaps ironically, this encounter created opportunities for a collaborative engagement with such an “open textured” (Barton & Baguley, 2014) literacy event, by exploring how, in practice, the application of a multiliteracies framework at the art museum could also make space for living texts and imagination. How could this encounter become an opportunity (1) to further engage in dialogue with the text, the museum, and other viewers, (2) to validate the emotional and embodied responses of the viewers as part of the interpretive processes, and (3) to introduce and model a pedagogy of multiliteracies? Two interventions were developed as a response, and took place during the workshops embedded in the program.

INTERVENTION 1: A FOCUS ON INFORMED TALK

The first intervention was an invitation to collectively revisit the initial encounter with The Wedding Feast at Cana. It aimed at generating three types of engagement among participants: (1) engagement with multimodality; (2) engagement with the metalanguage of design; and (3) engagement in the interpretive processes and the exploration of the meaning potentials of a visual text. The pedagogical approaches used in the workshop to introduce L2 multiliteracies combined a focus on design, using Cope and Kalantzis’ (2000; 2015) model, and a focus on informed talk, using Cloonan’s (2011) model for teacher development, Kress and van
Leeuwen’s (1996) grammar of visual design, as well as Serafini’s (2014) work on visual literacies. To activate informed talk and engagement with the metalanguage of design, while resisting a technical approach to meaning, the emotional responses of participants to *The Wedding Feast* (as hypertexts) were used as a point of departure in the collective interpretive process.

To design meaning, L2 learners rely on a set of resources or “available designs” (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000). These resources are linguistic and discursive (i.e., punctuation, rules of syntax, pragmatics, etc.), but also schematic (i.e., lived experiences, schemata, background knowledge, the understanding of genre conventions, etc.). To teach multiliteracies, teachers need to be aware of the processes involved in meaning design. The workshop aimed at modeling and scaffolding meaning design, and progressed along the four pedagogical acts outlined by Cope and Kalantzis (2000) in their multiliteracies framework: from Experience, to Conceptualization, to Analysis, and Application. These four learning and teaching processes, or “pedagogical acts,” were used in the workshop to support L2 users’ meaning-making practices and to organize the group’s instructional pathways. Within the multiliteracies paradigm implemented in the workshop, revisiting *The Wedding Feast at Cana* invited viewers to play with the proliferation of meanings, and to participate in the dynamic processes of meaning making.

**Experiencing**

*Experiencing:* Language users are immersed in language, discourse and communicative activities that highlight the learners’ “expression of feelings, opinions and thoughts” (Allen & Clementi, 2016, p. 23).

In the workshop, the pedagogical act of *Experiencing* revisited and expanded the connections between the painting and the participants’ emotional and embodied experiences of the text through multiple modes. Through this lens, we collectively approached meaning potentials along representational and social dimensions.

**Multimodality**

The first activity in the workshop aimed at rediscovering and authenticating *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (Veronese, 1594) by revisiting the initial and problematic viewing experience. We did so by exploring multiple modes of meaning, and answering the question ‘what did/do you feel?’ through words, images and embodied memories. To this end, the anonymized hypertexts created by participants in their journals were first read and discussed, and the tensions and emotions they reflected were also shared and analyzed. Second, “semiotic transpositions” were performed (Kramsch, 2009, p. 206). We compared and discussed images we had created in Room 6 through photography, and attached them to the hypertexts from the participants’ journals (Figure 1). Third, we created photo-stories to reflect on our collective and individual experiences during the walking tour. For this task, we added language to photographs taken in Room 6, by creating text in bubbles, reflecting what the participants were thinking and saying during the walking tour, as they attempted to view *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. We discussed sounds and sensations, careful to multiply the possible paths between each mode of communication. One participant reflected on her embodied, emplaced, and perceptual experiences of attempting to view the painting together.
with others in the museum gallery. She commented: “I felt a sort of sensory overload when we were in the museum. Touch, smells, sounds, sight… and taste, since [the characters] are eating delicious food in the painting!” Once the multiplicity of modes of meaning was established and concretely examined through the prism of experience, we proceeded with investigating the meaning potentials of *The Wedding Feast at Cana* along its representational and social dimensions, and its multiple modes.

![Image](Photo credit: C. Palpacuer Lee)

**Figure 1.** We want to see *The Wedding*, not the heads [or feet] of visitors!

Representational and Social Dimensions of Meaning

In light of this multimodal exploration, we then attempted to answer the question: ‘what do we see?’, by connecting our answers to our sensory experiences of viewing the painting. Our perceptual reading was organized around the representation of the five senses in the painting, orienting ways of looking at and describing multimodality. Collectively, we noted how vision was emphasized by the groups of onlookers on the sides of the painting and right above the wedding guests. These peripheral and inquisitive spectators hide behind Roman columns or over a ledge to peer at the guests and get a glimpse of the sensational feast. One participant noted: “[W]e are onlookers too: we are on the side, in the front, actually, and we are trying to see what is going on as well.” In the process, participants addressed the social dimensions of meaning attached to the painting. They acknowledged their position as spectators at the museum, and established a connection between the characters in the painting and themselves as spectators. The perceptual reading of the painting created a first level of intimacy with the text and the museum, and culminated in the acknowledgement of the complicity between characters and viewers through mirrored sensory experiences.

**Conceptualizing**

*Conceptualizing.* Language users “develop […] a metalanguage to be able to identify and use linguistic, symbolic and schematic resources that contribute to meaning-making in the target language through scaffolded learning activities” (Allen & Clementi, 2016. p. 23).

The initial experience of viewing *The Wedding Feast at Cana* was characterized by silence and
silencing (Hypertexts 1–4). At this early stage in the program, participants were not expected to master the discursive and analytical tools to engage with the painting, or with art and museums in general. The pedagogical act of Conceptualizing, therefore, aimed at engaging viewers/readers with the meaning potentials of the text, and at discovering the metalanguage of multimodal design, “a language for talking about language, images, texts, and meaning-making interactions,” (New London Group, 1996). However, in the workshop, this metalanguage was not given in advance; instead, it either emerged in interaction, or was supplied by the instructor, but only when the ideas and notions were in place and only the technical term was needed. The discovery of the metalanguage of multimodal design ultimately aimed at the development of “informed talk” (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 10), that is, “critical talk about art objects, not just as naïve interacters with such objects, but as informed perceivers whose talk is more precise, more imaginative, and more articulate, and which elucidates a deeper perception of particular works of art” (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 10). Accordingly, the Conceptualizing phase of the workshop adopted a participatory approach, where a collective metalanguage of multimodal analysis was co-constructed through inquiry (Cloonan, 2010). Therefore, meanings and interpretations emerged in dialogue, in an organic manner.

**Metalanguage and Design**

Various elements of design in the visual texts were explored, such as lines, shapes, directions, colors, texture, dimension, scale, and movement (Serafini, 2014), in order to amplify and explain the initial impression of confusion and chaos expressed by the viewers. In applying these descriptive and analytical categories to *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, several contrasts were highlighted. First, the canvas is divided between two large horizontal sections: the lower-half section that is colorful and busy with numerous figures in movement, and the upper half of the painting that represents church towers in the blue sky. This led to the deployment of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996)’s notions of ideal and real planes in a painting, where the ideal plane indexes objects and meanings related to the spiritual, and the real plane refers to earthly and concrete notions. Second, the participants initially acknowledged two central figures in the painting: a male figure positioned in the center of the painting, and a female character on the outer left side of the painting. The female character, because her gaze is directed at the viewer, was established as a secondary, and intriguing, center in this painting. Looking at her gazing back at them, the participants wondered, “What is she telling us here?”; while another commented: “It feels like we are accomplices.” The technical term to describe this character is a vector (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), creating a connection between the painting and the viewer. In turn, the direct relationship that this character creates with the viewer/spectator is a demand (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The terms were supplied to the participants only after they had already identified the meaning potentials associated with this female figure. The spectators were expected to provide a response to the demand created by this character and, as noted by a participant, “She [the character looking at the viewer] is extending an invitation to join the party!” This demand created in viewers a desire to participate in the life of the painting, and to further engage with the meaning potentials of the text.
Intertextuality

Engaging further in informed talk and dialogic interaction with the text, the next discursive activity focused on the contextual dimensions of meaning. We collectively negotiated answers to the questions: ‘What do you think?’ and ‘What do you think of?’ This time, engagement with the text took place through time and space, by focusing on intertextuality. The notion of genre in painting was introduced, and the intersections between the religious genre (i.e., peinture religieuse) and the genre scene (i.e., scène de genre) in The Wedding Feast at Cana were acknowledged. The large painting represents a crowd of guests at a banquet but evokes a biblical scene, where Christ performed his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, turning water into wine. The viewers recognized the religious narrative of the painting and its intertextual connection to the Bible early on (Hypertext 7). However, additional meanings complicate this apparently simple connection. The Wedding Feast at Cana is not a straightforward illustration of a text from the Bible; it is a unique interpretation that playfully blurs time, space and genre. Veronese represented a biblical scene in 16th century Venice, thus inviting viewers to consider the syncretism of Venetian art, which is the capacity of Renaissance artists to amalgamate different religions, cultures, times, and aesthetic movements in their work. To highlight the uniqueness of The Wedding Feast at Cana, but also its association with multiple genres, participants conducted a search in the museum’s database, and compared and contrasted The Wedding Feast with other religious paintings that referred to the same biblical scene, and with genre scenes that referred to banquets. The intertextual connections generated during this last activity were further expanded in the next pedagogical act of the workshop, as the viewers engaged with the ideological dimensions of meaning attached to the painting.

Analyzing

Analyzing. Language users “build […] their understanding of the cultural, historical, ideological and social contexts of texts and their awareness of the often implicit rules of language use that are tied to specific contexts of communication” (Allen & Clementi, 2016, p. 23).

Like the two previous pedagogical acts, the Analyzing tasks targeted the participants’ learning experiences, by expanding upon intertextual connections, and affording participants the opportunity to apply the metalanguage of multimodal design to the analysis of another text, The Wedding at Cana: A Vision by Peter Greenaway (2009).

The Wedding Feast at Cana was created in the socio-historical and political realities of the 16th century Italian Renaissance. Our collective interpretations of The Wedding Feast at Cana were framed by the narrative(s) orchestrated by the museum curators around Venetian art (Hypertext 1), and by our prior experiences with (visual) texts and lived experiences of museums and art (Hypertext 5). For the group of teachers of French, the interpretive process was also framed by their views on teaching and learning a foreign language; by their embodied experiences of learning and using French, and by the ways they perceive their roles as language educators (Hypertexts 7 and 8). Therefore, several ideological forces were at play in the construction of the interpretations of The Wedding Feast at Cana, and were collectively discussed to further expand the participants’ learning experiences.

As the teacher-participants further engaged in dialogue with the painting, and with each
other, they were also exposed to additional (hyper)texts that questioned and contested meanings associated with the painting, and/or narratives produced about the painting. Such a text was presented during the 2009 Venice Biennale, at the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore. British filmmaker and visual artist Peter Greenaway created a multimodal performance, the subject of this performance being *The Wedding Feast at Cana* by Veronese. His work, titled *The Wedding at Cana: A Vision by Peter Greenaway* (2009), was a re-production, a re-location, and a re-interpretation of the painting, within the context of the twenty-first century, and using the technical tools available today. Greenaway’s performance was presented as a living text, as an illustration of the potential of intertextuality and multimodality for expanding semiotic repertoires, as a playful take on the power of language and symbolic competence, as the appropriation of a famous text, and as the authoring of a new, multimodal text. Greenaway’s extravagant text became another invitation to critically engage with *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, and with art. Viewing aspects of this performance together, and using the metalanguage of multimodal design to engage in informed talk about Greenaway’s piece further expanded the participants’ reflection on the meaning potentials of *The Wedding Feast at Cana*.

**Applying**

*Applying.* “Learners use new linguistic and schematic resources to reshape existing texts or create new ones” (Allen & Clementi, 2016, p. 23).

The last pedagogical act in the workshop, the *Applying* act, was a first step towards the appropriation of the notion of design for pedagogical purposes. The group of teachers was asked to look at *The Wedding Feast at Cana* as language teachers, and to imagine themselves as authors of classroom materials—as new texts—that would (or would not) use the painting. The initial resistance of some of the teachers to include *The Wedding Feast at Cana* in their curriculum was, therefore, collectively revisited (Hypertext 7–8), and allowed for the emergence of a discourse of ‘oppositional practice’ that identified “the particular voice with which they as ‘authors’ responded to the original [text]” (Kramsch & Nolden, 1994, p. 30).

Two specific projects began to take shape that day. One teacher shared: “The painting is interesting but it would be difficult with the students at my school. So I [could] use it to work on language … I would ask students to imagine the conversations that the characters might be having in the painting like Greenaway did. It would be a fun interpretive activity” (Teacher #5, Workshop 1). For this teacher, a focus on language was her priority in the classroom, and *The Wedding Feast at Cana* represented an opportunity to reflect on language and language use, and to increase her students’ proficiency in French. To this end, the teacher suggested a multimodal and intercultural activity for her novice-level middle school students, where the learners would imagine the conversations between the characters in the painting. For this task, students would work from a reproduction of the painting and insert multimodal comments (voice, text, images). The creation and juxtaposition of images, texts, and dialogues would result in the collective design of multilingual and multimodal interpretations of *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. In a second round of reflection, the students would ask each other questions about their texts and respond to their peers by justifying their choices. In the process, they would reflect on the oppositional dimension of their texts as they identified voices, re-voiced and authored texts and created multimodal, possibly multilingual, choral performances.
Another teacher, keen on finding ways to include the painting but also reluctant to delve into the religious theme, approached the text from an ethnographic perspective. She decided to include the text in a larger unit on food. She explained: “I would treat the painting as an illustration of a cultural practice. It’s a banquet, it’s a family dinner, and eating is a practice across cultures and we can compare with our own practices today” (Teacher #8, Workshop 1). Using an ethnographic lens, this teacher explored the notion of genre with the goal of modifying and amplifying an existing unit on food. To this end, she selected various artworks from the Louvre collection that belong to genre painting, including The Wedding Feast at Cana, as well as Le Déjeuner ([Morning Coffee], Boucher, 1739) and Famille de Paysans dans un Intérieur ([Peasant Family in an Interior], Le Nain, circa 1642). These texts illustrate genre painting across three centuries and two cultural areas. They were tied to the theme of everyday life, unified around the topic of food and the cultural practices associated with eating. To support her vision, this teacher designed a multimodal and intertextual inquiry lesson. She outlined a progression that began with cultural products identified in the paintings (i.e., works of art and their reproductions, forks and utensils) and led to discussions of cultural practices (i.e., eating, table manners) and perspectives (i.e., changing and contrasting attitudes and values associated with food and eating).

The purpose of this last pedagogical act of ‘applying’ was to open up possibilities for instruction and the creation of new texts by engaging with meanings. The teachers were not expected to produce full versions of a lesson or unit plan so early in the program, but rather to show how they framed their interpretations of museum texts. At this stage, however, the participants reflected on how they could shape a text-based inquiry, using the metalanguage of visual grammar and semiotics. These two examples placed texts and L2 literacies at the center of instructional practice. They also acknowledged the fluid and intersubjective experiences associated with language, culture, and meaning, and displayed some sensitivity towards semiotic diversity and complexity. Finally, these two instructional proposals reflected the informed choices of the participants. These choices may not have been the ones other teachers and scholars would have privileged, but they indicated an individual engagement with the texts, the contexts, and multiple literacies. In turn, these lesson prototypes would be revisited during the program, and later revised to reflect a multiliteracies framework for the L2 classroom.

**The Wedding Feast and Multiple Literacies**

During this inaugural intervention in the program, the participants were socialized into dynamic views of literacy as collaborative inquiry, as social practice, as critical engagement, and as living experiences. Together, these four pedagogical acts focused on design, and illustrated multimodality, multiple literacies and intertextuality in action. This was modeled by and illustrated in the present tense of the re-viewing of The Wedding Feast at Cana. In the process, connections were established between texts, between texts and the participants as readers/viewers and learners, and between texts and potential students’ learning in the L2 classroom.

**INTERVENTION 2: FOCUS ON THE WALKING TOUR**

The walking tour is a traditional interactive learning activity at the museum, whether it is led by a museum educator (as was the case in the program at the Louvre Museum), or self-
directed, and partially or fully supported by multiple media (e.g., audioguides, phone apps, virtual visits, etc.). After the first walking tour at the museum that included the encounter with *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, the participants acknowledged the emplaced work of museum educators (Hypertexts 1–4). One viewer/walker commented: “I realize how you can’t improvise a visit of a large museum” (Hypertext 4). Revisiting the walking tour as a text and as a learning activity, the second intervention took place over a two-day workshop, and focused on the collective design and performance of a museum walk.

**Setting Goals**

Examining the museum walk as a learning activity, the participants first uncovered the dimensions of design in the development of a walking tour, based on their two-week experience engaging with walking tours. These elements of design were discussed at the beginning of the second workshop, and are listed below. They included:

(1) The selection of texts to be presented. “You need to know the artwork you are discussing,” and “research the art first”;
(2) The design of a coherent itinerary. “We need to make the stops coherent: we can’t go to the second floor and then to another aisle, and then go back to the second floor. It’s time consuming”;
(3) The presentational mode of the tour: “Some visits were exhausting because we struggled to listen. We should also make the walk more interactive,” and “I do not want to use a microphone but it would be nice to hear”;
(4) The embodied performance of the museum walk: “we have to remember to position ourselves towards the group, with our back to the painting, so that the audience can hear what we are saying,” and “we have to see how we can navigate the crowds and the other visitors.”

In turn, these considerations became the goals for the design of the collective walking tour, which adopted a participatory approach to museum visits (Lenz Kohne, 2016). The design of this intervention was also informed by research on museum learning as participatory engagement (Knutson, 2002; Leinhardt, Crowley, & Knutson, 2002; Paris & Mercer, 2002). In practice, the elaboration of the walking tour included the goals and guidelines designed by the participants, and consisted of three phases: (1) individual participants would first select and research a work of art from the museum collections in order to develop a personal and informed narrative about the selected text; (2) collectively, the participants would design the walk and negotiate the itinerary; and (3) the participants would be individually responsible for their own performance, which included the interactive presentation of their selected text in the galleries, and leading the group to the next stop on the walk. Overall, the elaboration of the walking tour of the museum was another way to engage participants with the museum as living text.

**Designing the Walking Tour**

To design our collective walking tour, the demands of the museum—as invitations and obstacles to participation—had to be collectively negotiated. These obstacles were physical, temporal, and institutional. Answering these demands required the manipulation and
transformation of several documents, reflecting the group’s engagement with museum texts other than works of art (i.e., museum maps, online databases, library resources, online calendars, images, scholarship), and with the museum as text.

**Negotiating Constraints**

First, to address the temporal dimension of the walk, the museum’s online accessibility calendar was consulted. This calendar was updated monthly and listed the rooms opened to the public on specific dates and times, and the availability of the artwork on loan or on site. Since some of the rooms were closed on specific days and their artwork invisible to the public or on loan at other institutions, some participants had to modify their presentations accordingly. Second, to address the physical dimension of the walking tour, the museum’s floor plan was used to map an accessible route for the walk. The Louvre Museum is very large, measuring 652,300 square feet (or 60,600 square meters). Yet, as a protected historic building, it is limited in the number of staircases and passageways it may contain, thus constraining the flow of visitor traffic. Finally, once the walking itinerary was established, permission to conduct the walking tour was required. This institutional obstacle was the ultimate ‘non-invitation’ to be negotiated. At the Louvre Museum, only accredited experts are allowed to talk about the artwork in the museum’s galleries. Professors and teachers, while authorized to lead a group at the museum, must nonetheless obtain a pass, which grants them permission to speak for up to a two-hour block of time. A limited number of these “permission to speak aloud” passes are distributed each day—a time/space and authority constraint that the group had to negotiate well in advance. Such a pass was obtained from the museum’s planning office for an evening visit, and the walking tour was performed through the almost deserted galleries of the museum at night.

**The Itinerary**

Table 3 (see Appendix 3) is a linear and textual representation of the itinerary of the 2013 collective walking tour. It reflects the individual and collective choices made by the participants that year, as they explored the museum as text. In turn, this path represents the “lines of desire” (Lenz Kohte, 2016) of the 2013 program participants, and their pathways towards the appropriation of museum texts. Each participant was responsible for one stop on this walking tour, which included an individual presentation of a work of art as text, and for leading the group towards the next stop. In the next section, the focus is on the ninth stop of the tour, where Billie shared her reading of a self-portrait by the 18th century female painter Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun.

**Performing the Walking Tour**

The museum tour was about creating invitations to engage fully and aesthetically with emplaced texts. The participants’ individual presentations in the collective walking tour were living texts. Transformed into written compositions for this research project, they illustrated

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3 Permission to speak aloud, or “droit de parole” is regulated at the Louvre Museum. More information is available on the museum’s website: [http://www.louvre.fr/groupes-et-scolaires](http://www.louvre.fr/groupes-et-scolaires)
the participants’ creative process of appropriating the museum and art text for their own purposes. For reasons of space, only one example of such a path, that of Billie, is presented here.

Billie introduced her museum talk about the 18th century self-portrait titled Madame Vigée-Le Brun et sa fille [Mrs. Vigée-Lebrun and her daughter] (Vigée-Le Brun, 1786) as follows (my translation from French):

Today, I am going to tell you about this self-portrait by a woman painter, Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun. I chose this painting because, after two weeks at the Louvre, it struck me that all I have seen are works of art by men. I had to look carefully to find the works of women artists exhibited here. So that’s one reason why I chose to examine this self-portrait by Elizabeth Vigée-Le Brun, […] As a woman and a mother, I was also attracted to this painting because the artist represented herself with her daughter. There seems to be a close, tender bond between them, and I think it contrasts with much of the serious portraits of men we’ve seen. Finally, as a teacher, I have many girls and young women in my classes. I’d like to show them what women can do and have done already, to inspire them, because they too can do great things.

Billie’s introduction to the self-portrait and her talk, partially reproduced above, established clear connections between the text and herself as a woman, a museum visitor, a mother, and a teacher. Billie’s presentation was articulated around the notion of disruption: first, that of the status and condition of female artists in 18th century France; and second, that of the exhibition of the works of a female artist at the national museum. Her initial reading of the museum as a space dominated by male artists was a direct challenge to the museum’s politics of collecting and displaying art over time. Her inquiry also drove her to contest the small place allocated to women in the history of art, and to adopt a feminist stance. To Billie, reading the painting was about reading the life of Vigée-Lebrun.

After briefly describing the self-portrait, Billie further established connections with her mostly female audience by introducing additional texts, and weaving together intertextual connections. First, on her phone, she showed other portraits by Vigée-Lebrun and connected them to short passages from the artist’s autobiography that she read aloud. Second, she connected her presentation to a book she had found at the museum library, titled Les Femmes qui lisent sont dangereuses [Women who read are dangerous] (Adler & Bollman, 2005). The book is an illustrated history of the practices of reading among women. Specifically, the authors examine reading as a female practice, and the domestication that women and their books have been subject to over time, in Western cultures. The view of literacy as textual desire, outlined by Laure Adler in her preface to the book, was a revelation to Billie. She ventured: “If women who read are dangerous, then surely women who read, write and paint are dangerous as well … but they are also strong and inspiring, and that’s what I want to convey to my students when I talk about this text” (Billie, Museum Walk, July, 2013).

The walking tour ended at closing time, the Paris lights bouncing off the glass surface of the pyramid. All the participants were very proud of their individual and collective performances. Several participants noted that other visitors had stopped to listen in to their presentations, and a couple of visitors had followed the group in the Sully galleries. Being considered as a person with expertise, and worth listening to, was validating for all.
participants. Others, like Billie, were rewarded in multiple ways. Billie gained a new voice, expertise and legitimacy, and secured a safe public platform to express the meanings she attached to the works of Vigée-Le Brun.

The Walking Tour and Multiple Literacies

The walking tour is a traditional learning activity at the museum. In the program and through the intervention, the walking aspect of the tour was also conceived as “a space of enunciation,” as proposed by Michel de Certeau. Describing the act of walking in the urban public landscape, he wrote:

The act of walking is to the [museum] what the speech act is to language […] At the most elementary level, it has a triple “enunciative” function: it is a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech is an acoustic acting-out of language) and it implies relations amongst differentiated positions (just as verbal enunciation … posits another [person] opposite the speaker). (1984, pp. 97–98)

Applied to the museum context, this definition positioned the museum as a living and complex text, and a unique place where the notions of time and space are forever conflated and re-configured by multiple walking, viewing and reading paths (Boon, 2011). In turn, the museum walking tour was conceived as a linguistic and symbolic performance in the public space. Each tour traced physical lines and symbolic, intellectual pathways towards the appropriation of texts (Lenz Kohte, 2016). The museum was then a site and a resource for embodied and emplaced language and literacies practices. In turn, the work of readers, as consumers and producers of culture in the classroom and at the museum, was not about domesticating language and imagination, but rather about liberating meaning and releasing control (Greene, 1995). These preoccupations about design and desire echo those of Leander and Boldt (2013) for literacy engagement, and that of Kramsch (2009) for L2 instruction. As a result, the living texts that were created and performed during the participant-led museum walk further engaged language teachers with living L2 multiliteracies. Recent classroom projects also capitalize on the museum walk as a pathway towards L2 literacies. For instance, Garcia Puente and Rodriguez Cutillas (2017) reported on the design of a virtual museum tour of the Thyssen Museum in Madrid, Spain, by U.S. students enrolled in an L2 Spanish writing course. In the L2 classroom and other learning environments, works of art and museum texts could be used to implement L2 multiliteracies in action.

OPENINGS

This paper has shown what collective and individual engagement with texts could look and feel like in the context of a professional development program at the art museum. Re-visitng, re-creating, and re-locating invitations to engage with texts at the museum could lead to the proliferation of meanings, the development of voice, expertise, and authorship beyond the museum walls. Translated into instructional terms, the enactment of design-based and art-based multiliteracies teaching practices can empower readers with authority
over meaning, talk, time, and space. Living L2 multiple literacies together at the museum created opportunities to engage fully and aesthetically with situated texts, along ever expanding, and multiple pathways.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: THE 2013 PROGRAM AT THE LOUVRE

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<th>Unit 1: Discovering the Museum</th>
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APPENDIX 2: HYPERTEXTS: JOURNAL ENTRIES ABOUT VIEWING THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA

Hypertext 1. ‘We can’t see anything!’
The conditions to see the painting are terrible, and it’s getting worse. Actually, it is impossible to see anything. We can’t see anything! Everyone is looking at the Mona Lisa, or taking pictures of the Mona Lisa I should say, and they turn their backs to the Wedding Feast, and all the other wonderful pieces in this room. (Museum educator, July 22, 2013).

Hypertext 2. ‘It’s too crowded!’
So many people around us! The museum is gigantic, and it’s difficult to move! We are squeezed. There are too many people in front of the masterpieces … We want to see The Wedding Feast at Cana, not the heads of the other visitors! (Participant #1, journal entry, July
22, 2013).

**Hypertext 3. ‘Like a battle’**
The headphones were not helpful as we tried to listen to the museum educator because of the crowds and the noise in the museum gallery. Like a battle, it was an exhausting visit. (Participant #7, journal entry, July 22, 2013).

**Hypertext 4. ‘You can’t improvise’**
The challenges of a group visit: the difficulty to lead a museum visit among the public, the general feeling of exhaustion of the participants and the floods of information they receive […] I realize how you can’t improvise a visit of a large museum! (Participant #9, journal entry, July 22, 2013).

**Hypertext 5. ‘I felt so small’**
Given the importance of the masterpieces we’ve seen, I felt a sort of panic when trying to capture every bit of information shared by the museum educator. In front of these famous masterpieces, I felt so small, I know so little about art and about art history… (Participant #3, journal entry, July 22, 2013).

**Hypertext 6. ‘When do works become famous?’**
During this visit [walking tour] I was actually wondering to myself how and why specific works of art become famous and invite large unruly crowds. Are people actually appreciating the piece for art’s sake or do they just want to go to be able to say they’ve seen it too? When do works become famous? What is so special about them, that separates them from the other hundreds of thousands pieces of art in the museum? (Participant #8, journal entry, July 22, 2013).

**Hypertext 7. ‘I am a teacher of language, not religion’**
I think it [the painting] could be interesting but not for the students at my school. I cannot talk about religion in my class. I am a teacher of language, not religion. (Participant #2, journal entry, July 22, 2013).

**Hypertext 8. ‘This painting would be great to learn how to ‘read’ paintings’**
This painting is very rich in symbols, in details and in history. This painting is interesting from a scientific point of view given its size and the technique used to create it: it was painted on wood. From the perspective of a French teacher, the painting is interesting to discuss French history, the important artistic themes of that time, and also the masterpieces of the Louvre. […] I would add that such a painting would be very great to learn how to ‘read’ paintings. (Participant #5, journal entry, July 22, 2013)

**APPENDIX 3: THE 2013 WALKING TOUR ITINERARY**

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