

## **IMAGES, DISCOURSES, AND REPRESENTATIONS AT THE ART MUSEUM: INTERCULTURAL OPENINGS**

Christelle Palpacuer-Lee  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
[christelle.palpacuer@gmail.com](mailto:christelle.palpacuer@gmail.com)

This article focuses on the ways world language teachers individually and collectively negotiate intercultural encounters and symbolic competence while abroad, at the art museum. In this empirical study, I locate, describe and analyze emerging third places by examining the teachers' discourse, in interaction at the museum. The data consists of a tape-recorded group discussion, participants' diaries, lesson plans and follow-up interviews. The research methodology adopts an interpretive framework, relying on post-structuralist methods of discourse analysis (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008). This project is also tied to current research in study abroad and intercultural education (Alred & Byram, 2002; Kramsch, 2008, 2010; Kinginger, 2004, 2008, 2010) and in museum education (Knutson, 2002; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004).

### **INTRODUCTION**

World language educators are experiencing new professional demands due to our global needs for increased cultural awareness and intercultural communication. In an age of greater mobility and fast-paced digital information networks, world language teachers must find ways to teach the complexity of culture within the dynamic context of the twenty-first century. More than ever, they must avoid teaching culture through stereotypes and decontextualized information. Instead, world language teaching and learning is increasingly related to the activity of mediation. This notion of mediation poses several theoretical and practical challenges: What is mediation? Where does mediation emerge in practice? How can educators become intercultural mediators in their classrooms? Based on the work of Claire Kramsch (1993, 1998, 2006a, 2006b), 2009, 2010), this article attempts to empirically illustrate possible answers to these questions. The focus of this article is limited to a specific program: a two-week, in-service teacher-training program that takes place in France, at the art museum. Within this setting, I explore the discursive experiences of U.S. teachers of French who negotiate meanings and professional practice at the art museum abroad. This qualitative and exploratory study has three main goals: first, understanding how the art museum can be a zone of possibilities for intercultural learning and teaching; second,

investigating the ways this program can provide access to and participation within the target language and culture communities; and third, examining the immediate impact of one specific encounter with art on teachers and their teaching practices. Overall, I inquire into situations and processes of cultural and intercultural mediation at the art museum, abroad, and in US classrooms. While the data presented here does not necessarily result in clear-cut classroom applications, the findings nonetheless suggest implications for world language teacher training. To begin with, I anchor this research agenda in current discussions about mediation, third place and intercultural competence, relying on the work of Claire Kramsch (2009, 2010). I then proceed with a brief description of the program itself, as well as a literature review on mediation in study abroad and museum settings. This is followed by a description of the research project itself where I present the context and the data for the study. Finally, I offer an analysis and interpretation of the data and conclude with a summary of findings and openings for further research.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In contemporary U.S. legal discourse, mediation refers to conflict resolution. The mediator is considered as the 'neutral' person who brings agreement between two parties through dialogue (Folberg & Taylor, 1984). This meaning, however, necessarily implies a dialectic of conflict and is built on the premise that there are systematic disagreements to be resolved. This interpretation is consistent with traditional approaches to intercultural communicative competence (ICC) that assume a lack of understanding between individuals belonging to different cultural groups. In this view, intercultural competence is "[the ability] to see relationships between different cultures - both internal and external to a society - and to *mediate* [my emphasis], that is interpret each in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people" (Byram, 1997). The teacher, as cultural and intercultural mediator, is then "the person who can construct representations capable of creating a link and creating meaning between unconnected, separate elements" (Zarate, 2004, p. 171). In 1993, Kramsch stressed that in the world language classroom, teachers should provide language students with opportunities to help them define and design for themselves their "third place" or "third culture", "a sphere of interculturality" (p. 205) that enables them to take an insider's view as well as an outsider's view on both their first and second cultures (Kramsch, 1993, p. 207-208). Today, Kramsch (2009, 2010) proposes to expand, redirect, and complicate these definitions.

Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) argue that, in many contemporary situations of communication, "[language users] have to *mediate* [my emphasis] complex encounters

among interlocutors with different language capacities and cultural imaginations, who have different social and political memories, and who don't necessarily share a common understanding of the social reality they are living in" (p. 646). In this view, mediating between languages and cultures means more than negotiating interpretations of the first and second cultures. Memories, imaginings, identities, investments and biographies are also at stake in such global interactions. Mediation therefore also involves a symbolic dimension. In addition, the reality of cultural exchanges is more complex than the previous definitions would lead us to believe. In turn, this observation calls for a reformulation of the concepts of culture, intercultural competence and third place.

The appeal to metaphors to describe intercultural competence may be conceptually useful, but it can also be deceptive. At first glance, mediation calls forth the idea of an interface between a space A and a space B. Third place evokes a location that is neither A nor B but other. However, these metaphorical places are not actual locations occupied by language users in their learning trajectories (Kramsch, 2009). Instead, they are better understood in terms of attitudes and perspectives where third place "is not an actual event but, rather, a state of mind, a positioning of the learner at the intersection of multiple social roles and individual choices" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 234). In addition, these spatial metaphors have further limitations in today's world. As underlined by Kramsch (2010) and the anthropologist Marc Augé (1995), our "supermodernity" is characterized by mobility, fast information networks, complex situations of mediation, and a reconfiguration of traditional notions of space and time. As many individuals spend more and more time in transit – whether physical, intellectual, or digital– the metaphorical locations A, B, and C attached to the notions of third place and mediation become quite obsolete (Kramsch, 2009). Consequently, these rather static spatial metaphors of third place and mediation need to be reformulated and our attention should be redirected towards processes and modes of intercultural mediation, instead of locations. Mediation, third place and intercultural competence are still valid operational constructs, but they have been refined in light of the increasing complexity of our global world. Therefore, intercultural competence and mediation are broadly redefined as the capacity to navigate across languages, cultures, symbols, and discourses in a global world. In turn, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) refer to that capacity as symbolic competence.

Symbolic competence is not just another set of skills to be added to the world language teachers' and students' toolboxes. Instead, symbolic competence is "a mindset that can create 'relationships of possibility' or affordances, but only if the individual learns to see him/herself through his/her own embodied history and subjectivity and through the history and subjectivity of others" (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 668). This definition of symbolic competence stems from a post-structuralist view of culture as discourse (Bhabha, 1995; Kramsch, 2010) and of the symbolic dimension of talk in context. In this

view, culture as discourse is altogether symbolic representation, symbolic action, and symbolic power (Kramsch, 2010). The present study offers additional illustrations of the emergence of symbolic competence in interaction, and during a two-week teacher training program at the art museum, in France. Before delving into the study proper, I contextualize my research agenda in the current literature about cultural and intercultural mediation in study abroad and museum settings.

## **STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS AND MUSEUMS AS CONTEXTS FOR MEDIATION**

Preparing teachers and students to become cultural and intercultural mediators is a formidable but important task. Study Abroad (SA) is a possible strategy to help students and teachers meet these new challenges. SA programs are academic initiatives by U.S. educational institutions that provide the opportunity for students to spend various amounts of time in a different country. One of the primary objectives of such programs is to afford participants with opportunities for language and culture learning through immersion in and personal experience of the target language-and-culture. Recent qualitative scholarship has underlined the complexity of the mediation processes that emerge in such settings. Participants in SA programs navigate more than linguistic and cultural meanings. Issues of identity, including race, gender and nationality are also negotiated (Anderson, 2003; Kinginger, 2004, 2009; Polanyi, 1995; Rodriguez, 2006; Talburt & Stewart, 1999; Twombly, 1995). These studies attempt to locate the way selves are transformed in space (Burnapp, 2006), text (Rodriguez, 2006) and time (Alred and Byram, 2002) and resort to the concept of “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) to describe the fluctuating geography of identity and experience in SA. This scholarship therefore also identifies SA as a site for complex and multi-layered processes of mediation.

Mediation is also one of the many educational responsibilities of museums. As cultural and educational institutions, art museums strive to connect their visitors to works of art (Hein, 1998; Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). They do so in multiple ways through the engineering of exhibitions and the development of educational programs (Knutson, 2002). In addition, docents and museum educators are trained in cultural mediation and interpretation (Caillet, 1995). Museum education scholarship is increasingly concerned with mediation and with interdisciplinary connections. Some researchers focus on the museum learning experience (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Knutson, 2002; Allen, 2004; Leinhardt & Knutson, 2004); others inquire into specific identity issues at the museum (Stainton, 2002; Paris & Mercer, 2002) while other studies examine contextual interactions for learning (Griffin, 2004; Tran, 2007). Bevan (2007) argues that museums are sites for identity formation. In addition, he contends that museums should be considered as “third spaces” where two cultural contexts converge: the official,

educational activity context and the unofficial, where unscripted kinds of activities emerge. This scholarship therefore also acknowledges the emergence of complex processes of mediation at the museum, as well as their connections to learning and third place.

While mediation is central to study abroad and museums, research documenting cultural and intercultural situations of mediation involving world language educators is limited in both contexts. Research in both SA and museum studies have underlined the complexity of the processes of mediation in those settings; however, little is known about what these processes entail and how participants/visitors negotiate them. How do world language educators negotiate interactions in the cultural context of the foreign art museum? An attempt to examine this question calls for interdisciplinary and inter-contextual perspectives. Several studies in both SA and museum education have, however, laid some groundwork for the examination of discursive situations of cultural and intercultural mediation. Some studies have investigated student speech and interactions in SA while museum learning scholars focused their attention on visitors' talk at the museum. In both instances, learning is conceived as a process of socialization into discourses and into their related communities of practice (Block, 2007; Gee, 2004; Kinginger, 2010).

For SA, Wilkinson (2002) used a sociolinguistic approach to investigate the talk of U.S. students in conversation with their French hosts. She found that the classroom discourse model was predominant in SA's out-of-class speech. Thus, her study calls for a re-evaluation of traditional distinctions between formal and informal educational settings and questions the monopoly of classroom discourse across contexts. At the museum, Leinhardt and Knutson (2004) used discourse approaches to investigate learning. The result of this two-year and collaborative effort is the *Model of Museum Learning* (MML) that describes the various factors that positively or negatively impact learning at the museum. In these studies, learning is conceived as a situated activity and language as a mediating tool for learning. Based on this scholarship, the purpose of the research project reported here is to qualitatively examine the emergence of processes of mediation through the analysis of U.S. teachers' discourse at the French art museum.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

The overall context for this study is a specific SA program designed for teachers of French. This program takes place in Paris, at the Louvre museum, for two weeks in the summer. For reasons of confidentiality, I will use a pseudonym for the program and

subsequently refer to it as the Language and Culture at the Louvre program (LCL). The LCL program is an in-service teacher professional development program, co-created in 2005 by the Louvre museum educational services and the Department of French of a large public university in the U.S. The LCL program is a 3-credit class to be applied towards a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree. In terms of coursework, participants are required to complete a reflective learning journal, or diary, during their stay in Paris, and to develop a portfolio of pedagogical activities at the end of the program. Participants were also required to attend a pre-departure workshop in May, as well as a post-program debriefing session in October, both at the U.S. University.

The LCL program embeds a museum experience within a SA experience, and aims at providing educators with a “systematic *apprenticeship of difference*” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 235). While in Paris, the teachers are given access to the French museum and its collections, and they have the possibility to socialize with the art museum community. Second, the teachers attend seminars and workshops led by the Louvre staff to acquire specific literacy skills such as museum visiting, information seeking, art appreciation and interpretation. At the Louvre and in Paris, the teachers of French are immersed in French cultures and discourses. A key goal of the LCL program is to benefit from a stay abroad and at the Louvre, to refine intercultural critical awareness, and to enhance art appreciation. An added objective to the program is a focus on personal and intellectual growth so that the educators become more comfortable and confident with the art museum and with living in Paris. As a consequence, it is hoped that these new and/or refined experiences would impact the educators’ practices, and therefore enhance the intercultural learning experiences of their students back in their U.S. classrooms.

For the past five years, I have been involved with the LCL program, as the assistant to the director of the program and as a program developer. My duties included the development of the professional side of the program, while the Louvre staff focused on the art history and museum aspects. The Louvre, more than a museum, is for me and many others a “*lieu de mémoire*” (Nora, 1992), a place of memories that belong both to the personal and to the collective. For the past five years, I was fortunate enough to revisit these places with U.S. teachers of French, and to observe the many ways they were themselves (re)constructing their personal and professional stories in the program.

The data presented here was collected in the context of my dissertation research, which is a qualitative investigation of the experiences of a group of U.S. teachers of French enrolled in the LCL program. In this article, I limit my investigation to the teachers’ discursive experiences and I report on one specific encounter during the program. Using discourse analysis and ethnographic methods of data collection and analysis, this empirical study attempts to locate mediation processes in teachers’ talk, and to gain

insights into the act of interpreting cultural images, texts, discourses, and representations at the art museum. At the macro-level of analysis, I am concerned with the extent to which the art museum experience can provide affordances for the educators' "systematic *apprenticeship of difference*" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 235). This interdisciplinary and cross-contextual project examines the possibility for U.S. teachers of French to carry on their life-long "apprenticeship of difference" through language use and across art museum, study abroad, and classroom settings.

## **Research Methodologies**

For this study, discourse analysis and ethnographic methods were used to collect, analyze and interpret the interactions that took place at the art museum. A discourse approach to communication, in a general sense, is a tool of inquiry for investigating language-in-use (Gee, 1999, 2004). For this study, I chose discourse analysis as a way to "take into account a situated, contextualized view of language use in social settings" (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 655) and to embrace both the local and global contexts of the interaction. I adopted the methodological framework of mediated discourse analysis, as exemplified by the works of Scollon (2000) in intercultural communication.

In this view, discourse analysis "presupposes that all situations are multi- or poly-discursive and, therefore, it presupposes that any action in the social world is interdiscursive. It is also intertextual and dialogic" (Scollon, 2000, p. 275). At the museum, interpreting symbols and works of art is neither a straightforward nor monolithic discursive activity. Multiple voices, discourses and (his) stories are echoed or silenced in the process. In addition, Scollon (2000) argues that any action, including language use and discourse "is based in practice – the life of the social world(s) within which one lives – and in habitus – one's own history of experience." (Scollon, 2000, p.275). A discourse analysis therefore focuses on the "situated meanings" (Gee, 2004, p.60) and "cultural/Discourse models" (Gee, 2004, p.60) that cross and underlie interactions but also on the various identities and positionings adopted by language users, and on the creation/circulation of symbolic power.

Ethnographic methods were also used in conjunction with discourse analysis. For this study, I resorted to extensive field notes, participant observations, and follow-up interviews. These techniques were used to document the context of the teachers' experiences at the museum, in Paris. Ultimately, using ethnography resulted in "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of the participants' experiences during the program and helped refine the analysis and interpretation of discourse. Discourse analysis and ethnography are both qualitative and interpretive research strategies. As such, they share common goals and criticisms.

The purpose of a qualitative, interpretive research project is to deeply examine a slice of experience, to identify and describe specific motifs and themes, and to offer a holistic picture of the events from the perspective of the participants. The combination of discourse analysis and ethnography reinforces this ultimate goal. However, interpretive research does not seek generalizability or reliability (Creswell, 2003). Instead, the issue of validity is set in different terms, for instance “trustworthiness”, “authenticity” and “credibility” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). There are several strategies used in qualitative, interpretive research to ensure the validity of findings, among which are member-check and triangulation. In this study, I shared my own interpretations with participants and I examined evidence across the verbal and the ethnographic data. Since the researcher is the primary data collection tool and interpreter in such research design, I was also careful to identify and document my own biases in the process.

### **Study Design**

The data for this study was collected during a workshop at the Louvre Museum. That day, the teachers and staff were gathered to discuss the possible integration of some artworks from the museum’s collections into their teaching practices. Six female U.S. teachers of French, a French docent, and two French staff members from the U.S. University took part in the discussion about art works that day at the Louvre. In terms of the professional experience of the U.S. teachers, the distribution of years of teaching experience range from less than five years to more than twenty years. All participants are very involved teachers, fully trained in recent pedagogical methods, and enthusiastic about learning and about French. Each participant had a personal agenda prior to the sojourn abroad: some of the teachers wanted to gain personal knowledge, some enrolled in the program to harvest ideas for their classroom practices, while others planned on enjoying Paris. Although the participants had different personal goals, they all shared an interest in art appreciation and aspired to personal and intellectual growth that summer. There was no pre-selection of participants for this study. Prior to the sojourn in France, I presented my research agenda to the teachers who had enrolled in the program. Six of them agreed to take part in the study. For reasons of confidentiality, I use pseudonyms for each participant.

The conversations that occurred during that ninety-minute session were audio-taped with the participants’ permission, transcribed verbatim and sent to participants for member-check. I was present during the workshop as a participant-observer. On some occasions, I took part in the discussions that unfolded that day, although I tried to limit my interventions. The conversations that day took place in French and served as the basis for my analysis. When quoting participants, I will systematically present both the

French version and its translation into English so as to preserve the quality of the original interaction in French while making the participants' discourse accessible to Anglophone readers. The ethnographic data included in this report consists in my field notes, follow-up interviews, and the teachers' final projects.

In this study, I report on a small section of this data. I focus on a twelve minute verbal interaction that took place that day regarding the interpretation of a single work of art. The ethnographic data was used to identify and trace similar references to the art work in other contexts. I chose this specific interaction because it illustrates the dynamic of the whole workshop, and presents interesting perspectives on the practices of mediation at the museum. Several motifs emerge from the data, including discursive norms, silences, asymmetries, and the negotiation of positionings and identities. In the following analysis, I report on these intertwined motifs and how they highlight teachers' apprenticeship of difference at the museum.

## **A PORTRAIT: DESCRIPTIONS**

On the second floor of the Sully Aisle at the Louvre hangs a stunning and unique portrait. The identification card placed next to it reads "Portrait d'une négresse" ["Portrait of a negress"] while the Louvre database and the docent refer to this painting as "[Portrait d'une femme noire](#)" ["Portrait of a black woman"] (Benoist, 1800). The model, a young black woman, is represented seated, her body turned to the side but her gaze directed at the viewer. She is draped in a white garment that she holds with her left hand under her bare breast. A white headdress is wrapped around her head. She also wears a loose red belt and reclines on a chair, itself covered by a blue cloth. This portrait was painted in 1800 by Marie-Guilhermine Benoist, one of the few French female painters at that time (Doy, 1998). This is about as much as the participants knew about the *Portrait of a Black Woman* (Benoist, 1800) when the docent asked: "So?"

The docent's open invitation to comment on the painting put the group in an uneasy situation of 'thirdness'. How should they look at the painting; should they position themselves as women, teachers, intercultural mediators or as objective viewers? In addition, the painting they are looking at is open to multiple interpretations. Controversy and political implications are also potentially at stake. Should these questions be addressed in the interaction? In this complex cultural encounter, the participants also negotiate discourse and symbolic power. What discursive modes do they rely on, how do they mediate information, the historical context and the museum's discourse about the painting?

At the docent's invitation, the participants begin to co-construct an interpretation of the portrait by sharing their immediate emotional reactions to the painting (See Table 1 below). In empathy with the model, they highlight the sadness that the model evokes for them. In this first excerpt, the museum docent is positioned as both the linguistic and art history reference by the participants who solicit her expertise. The docent's interpretation of the painting, however, runs counter to that of participants (l.15). As Louise attempts to challenge this view (l.20; 24), she encounters linguistic and interpretive issues (l.24-30).

Table 1. First impressions

1	Rachel	la tris:tesse ↓	sadness
2	Jeanne	[la tristesse ↓	sadness
3	Rachel	la tristesse ↓]	sadness
4	Jeanne	elle a les yeux (.) tristes ↓	She has sad eyes
5	Rachel	hum : ↑	hum
6	Jeanne	elle regarde vers nous ↓	She is looking at us
7	Rachel	elle regarde <u>personne</u>	She is not looking at anybody
8	Solène	il y a une tension ( . ) dans les épaules ↑	There is a tension in the shoulders
9	Docent	non : ↓ heu : ↑	No hum
10	Rachel	[une ↑	A ?
11	Solène	non ↑]	No ?
12	Docent	torsion ↑	Torsion ?
13	Agathe	torsion	torsion
14	Rachel	tor-sion ↓	Tor-sion
15	Docent	ouais : moi je trouvais pas , justement (.) qu'elle avait l'air complètement abattue ( . ) pour aller dans ce sens la ↑ ( . ) parce que [voyez	Yeah well I did not think, precisely, that she looks totally dismayed to go in that direction because you see

16	Louise	Oui. ]	yes
20	Louise	oui ↓ ( . ) moi je voulais dire parce que elle a son <u>sein</u> : là mais : ( . ) elle a l'air d' <u>accepter</u> : ( . ) enfin mais :	Yes I wanted to say because she has her breast here but she seems to be accepting I mean but
24	Louise	oui ↑ mais elle retient la robe avec une main ↑ elle est	Yes but she is holding onto her dress with one hand she
25	Docent	oui ↓	
26	Louise	voilà ben voilà ↓	There there
27	Docent	elle est <u>résignée</u>	She is resigned
28	Louise	oui ↑	yes
29	Jeanne	résignée ↓	resigned
30	Louise	oui ( . ) elle est résignée ↑	Yes she is resigned

In the exchange (see Table 2 below), the participants initiate a semiotic reading of the portrait, by focusing on the colors in the painting and their possible symbolism. They note that the model wears a red belt. While Claire focuses on the functional purpose of the belt (l.12), Agathe picks up on the semiotic interpretation of the color red (l.13). Agathe addresses the docent to inquire into the symbolism of that color. To the docent, the juxtaposition of the colors red, white and blue is evident: the three colors signal a reference to the French flag and to the French Empire (l.16; l.18).

Table 2. Colors and Symbols

9	Agathe	oui alo :rs je	Yes so I
10	Claire	le rouge ↑	red
11	Agathe	oui ( . ) j'ai vu	Yes I saw
12	Claire	la ceinture c'est pour pas que la robe tombe	The belt that's to prevent the dress from falling
13	Agathe (to docent)	oui ↑ oui oui (2.0) est-ce que le rouge est important ↑ Est-ce qu'il y a un [symbole ↑	Yes yes yes is the red color important ? Is there a symbol ?

16	Docent	alors le rouge en soi] n'est pas important mais le blanc ( . ) le bleu ( . ) et le rouge ( . ) <u>OUI</u> ↑	So the red color in itself is not very important but white blue and red YES
17	Agathe	AH : ↑	
18	Docent	ben OUI ↓ quand même ↓	Well YES finally
19	Solène	le drapeau ↑	The flag
20	Groupe	AH ↑	

Towards the end of the interaction, the docent finishes her presentation and her interpretation of the painting. I do not reproduce her full account of the “Portrait of the Black Woman” but I briefly summarize it here. To the docent, the painting evokes Antiquity through the draped dress and cloths. She notes a parallel between Antiquity as the origin of culture and Africa as the origin of humanity. In her account, the black woman in the portrait is treated like a goddess and the portrait is read as an allegory of womanhood. While the participants remained silent and took notes during the docent’s talk, the topic of the breast, initiated early in the interaction (see Table 3), re-surfaces. Louise is, once again, puzzled by the bare breast of the model. The end of the monologue of the docent about the painting, Louise’s intervention about the breast, and the docent’s response are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The bare breast of the model

54	Docent	là ↑ Guilhermine elle reprend la ( . ) la musculature les courbes du sein du dos là	Here Guilhermine reuses the muscle structure the curve of the breast of the back here
55	Louise	le sein ( . ) là ce sein ( . ) c’est comme dans les Antiquités grecques ↑ ( . ) on voit toujours les seins	The breast here this breast it’s like with the Greek Antiquities the breasts are always visible
56	Docent	mais vous savez ↑ le sein est dénudé <u>aussi</u> dans <i>La Liberté guidant le Peuple</i> ↑	Yes but you know the breast is also bare in [the painting] Liberty Guiding the People
57	Louise	oui oui: ↑	Yes yes
58	Docent	la représentation d’un sein n’est pas forcément le signe d’une indécence ↑ d’une débauche ↑ qui pourrait penser	the representation of a breast is not necessarily the sign of an indecency of debauchery that

<p>que cette femme est nue parce que c'est la maitresse et : tout ça c'est possible ↑ c'est possible ( . ) m:ais ça peut aussi montrer le côté <u>nourricier</u> ( . ) allaitant ( . ) voilà ↑ en tout cas c'est magnifique ↑ <u>bravo</u></p>	<p>could lead to believe that this woman is naked because she is the mistress and of course it's possible but it can also show the feeding the breast feeding side in any case it's wonderful <u>bravo</u></p>
--	--

## Analysis and Interpretation

The three selected exchanges highlight the chronology of the interaction, also underlining the complex meaning-making processes of the participants who face the difficult task of interpreting the *Portrait of a Black Woman*. Participants negotiate linguistic meanings in French (Table 1) but also visual symbols (Tables 2 and 3) and interpretations (Table 3). In doing so, the teachers adopt various identities in the course of the interaction and negotiate being positioned by the docent. Overall, participants negotiate symbolic representations, symbolic action, and symbolic power.

The *Portrait of a Black Woman* is a cultural and symbolic representation. The painting is carefully organized to re-present a subject, here a black female figure. The portrait, then, is already an interpretation created and staged by the artist and then by the museum. The participants engage in the activity of negotiating the discourses attached to the portrait and attempt to “read” various symbolic meanings in the painting. Here, then, there is a series of embedded symbolic dimensions to be negotiated. The activity of interpreting is also a performance and therefore, symbolic action. Interpreting works of art is a specialized activity of museum docents and the participants are being acculturated into this discursive mode while in training at the Louvre. Finally, the words and silences of the participants also underline the negotiation of symbolic power. The viewers embed emotions, identities and subjectivities in the interaction. The painting also projects historical perspectives and views about identity, culture, gender, and so forth. In effect, there are multiple, unscripted, and layered activities taking place when looking at the painting. Next, I detail these activities and contexts.

### *Two Competing Interpretations*

That day at the Louvre, two competing interpretations of the *Portrait of a Black Woman* are negotiated. The participants emotionally react to the portrait in Table 1. They identify the woman in the painting as a victim of gender and racial oppression. They feel “sadness” in looking at the painting (l.1) and into the model’s eyes (l. 4); Louise and

Jeanne also read “resignation” into the model’s attitude (ll. 27-30). The black woman is exposed to the viewer’s gaze (l. 6) and her vulnerability is underlined by the bare breast that she attempts to cover (l. 24). In contrast, the docent proposes a different interpretation. In her view, the portrait is a celebration of womanhood, where the black female figure proudly embodies the origins. Within this interpretation, the bare breast does not index the model as a victim but rather as the sublimated figure of the feeding mother (Table 3, l. 58).

The bare breast is the pivotal element in those two interpretations. As a symbolic representation, the bare breast of the model also polarized the interaction. In the larger sociocultural and historical context, the breast has a high cultural significance. When examining the cultural history of the breast in the West, Yalom (1998) notes that “as a defining part of the female body, the breast has been coded with both “good” and “bad” connotations since the beginning of recorded time” (p. 4). Both sacred and sexual connotations have been associated with the female breast, and historically constructed by men themselves. This polarization is also reflected in the interaction. The docent’s intervention (Table 3) also underlines the political dimension of the female breast in French’s visual culture. In eighteenth century France, “maternal breast-feeding became part and parcel of the French Revolution [...] A woman’s obligation to breast-feed merged with the collective responsibility of the Nation to ‘nurse’ its citizens” (Yalom, 1997, pp. 5-6). The new political dimension of the female breast was echoed in the visual culture of the time. Yalom (1997) argues that “in France, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the allegorical figure with one or two breasts uncovered continued to represent the Republic” (p. 122). The exposed breast served to promote political aspirations and not necessarily to trigger sexual imaginings. The docent makes this point in Excerpt 3, using an intertextual reference to *La Liberté Guidant le Peuple* [Liberty Guiding the People] (Delacroix, 1831). In doing so, the docent relocates Louise’s intertextual note about the bare breast of antique statues into the historical context of the *Portrait of a Black Woman*.

This example can illustrate the interpretive and theoretical shortcomings of traditional approaches to intercultural communication. In terms of the contents of the verbal exchange, there is a classic instance of interpretive divergence that would require a third, mediating response. Here, there is an interpretation A and an interpretation B of the painting, in a situation where French and American cultures are in contact. Assuming that these differences are culturally motivated, a third place of mediation could attempt to reconcile the two diverging views. This line of reasoning, however, would meet numerous challenges at different levels. First, while this verbal exchange invites cultural mediation, there is no evidence that the diverging interpretations are culturally motivated. The polarized meanings attached to the female breast actually co-

exist in the imagination of the West, across time and space. Instead, it could be argued that each interpretation is anchored in context, history, and individual subjectivities. Symbolic competence is therefore required from the participants in order to locate and use these multiple meanings in context. In this instance, cultural mediation requires a description of the larger contexts of production and reception, as well as the opening of “affordances” to deal with ambiguities and historical meanings. Second, in terms of intercultural learning, the important issue here is not which interpretation is right and which one is wrong. Instead, what matters for the participants’ apprenticeship of difference is that they are exposed to new discursive possibilities. In some instances like this one, cultural or intercultural mediation and third place are not located in a dialectic of compromise, but in the chaotic proliferation of interpretations (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; Rodriguez, 2006). The painting itself opens an interpretive space, where semiotic elements resonate with previous texts, cultural frames, and individuals’ subjectivities. The interaction that takes place therefore bears traces of others. Louise actually comments on this aspect of her learning trajectory at the end of the interaction

There we come here we see her bare breast and we take pity on her because, because, she is a woman and all of a sudden when XXXX [docent] started to talk, her version is completely different, but as we say we don’t know and that that is the lesson for me today (2.0) because your culture, I mean, when you see you see with your own culture (personal communication, July 2009, my translation):.

That day at the Louvre, Louise encountered more than a work of art. She also encountered her own subjectivity while looking at the painting and listening to the docent. Taking a step back to analyze her experience, she became aware of her cultural filters and of the relativity of her own way of looking. Following Rodriguez (2006), I then argue that the portrait “serve[s] as [a] negotiation site from which potentially transformative representations of the world may emerge” (p. 48). In addition, Louise’s reflection on the interaction highlights her personal discovery of symbolic competence. Here, Louise negotiates “a mindset that can create ‘relationships of possibility’ or affordances, but only if the individual learns to see him/herself through his/her own embodied history and subjectivity and through the history and subjectivity of others” (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 668).

## **Performances**

The interaction that takes place at the Louvre that day is also a discursive performance. The actors successively position themselves and position others, while also claiming various identities. During the conversation, the participants grapple with two discursive

formats: The language classroom discourse they are experts in, and the art museum's discourse they are learning to manipulate. While the museum's discourse ultimately surfaces as the most relevant in this situation, the participants still display some forms of resistance. In doing so, the actors adopt or reject specific identities. The museum docent is first positioned as the language expert and then as the art history expert; the participants position themselves as language learners, language teachers, empathetic women, art history learners, and creative discourse users. A fragile discursive ecosystem thus emerges in context, underlining the symbolic dimension of the verbal performance, as well as the negotiation of symbolic power.

The language classroom discourse is present in the participants' talk at the museum. Mehan (1985) identifies teacher talk in the classroom as an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) sequence. When participants individually present works of art at the museum, and position themselves as teachers-at-the-museum, they extensively use this pattern. In Table 4 below, Agathe, one of the participants, leads the discussion about the painting *Bonaparte Visiting the Victims of the Plague at Jaffa* (Gros, 1804).

Table 4. Agathe and classroom discourse at the museum

119	Agathe	Alors maintenant avec tout ca ( . ) quelle est la raison d'être le but de ce message ↑	So now with all we have now what is the goal of this message?
120	Solène	propagande	propaganda
121	Agathe	Exactement ↑ C'est bien voilà la propagande et ( . ) quelle est le message ↑ ( . ) Napoleon a voulu communiquer quoi ↑	Exactly very good there propaganda and what is the message? What did Napoleon want to communicate?
122	Claire	Qu'il va les sauver	That he is going to save them
123	Agathe	Exactement ↑ et qui il va sauver ↑ qui il va sauver ↑	Exactly and who is he going to save? Who is he going to save?
124	Jeanne	Le peuple	The people
125	Agathe	Le peuple quel peuple ↑	The people. Which people?

In the exchange in Table 4, Agathe initiates the topic by asking precise and closed questions (ll. 119; 121; 123; 125). The other participants, acting as the classroom

students, briefly respond to the questions (ll. 120; 122; 124). Each answer is then followed by a positive evaluation (“exactement” ll. 121; 123) and positive reinforcement (“c’est bien”, l. 121). Note also how Agathe repeats the lexical items proposed as answers by the other participants (“propaganda” l.121; “save” l.123; “the people” l.124). In Table 4, the IRE pattern of teacher talk common to the language classroom is transferred to the art museum. During the discussion about the *Portrait of a Black Woman*, the participants try to use a similar discourse pattern. Positioning themselves as language students, they negotiate lexical items, repeat them, and note them down (Table 1 ll. 13-14; 19-20). The docent, in her assigned role of the language teacher, provides corrective feedback and repairs (Table 1, l.9; l.24-29). The docent, as a native speaker of French, is positioned as the language teacher by the other participants. However, she soon resists such a positioning by switching to the museum’s discourse, while still politely maintaining some elements of the language classroom discourse.

At the beginning of the interaction, the docent invites teachers to share their thoughts about the painting, beginning the discussion with “alors?” [“so?”]. This open invitation gives the floor to the teachers but this strategy of asking an open question contrasts with Agathe’s focus on closed questions (Table 4, ll. 121; 123; 125). Rachel and Jeanne nonetheless initiate the topic of sadness (Table 1, ll.1-4), but they receive no immediate response or feedback. As the docent returns to Rachel and Jeanne’s hypothesis after a corrective feedback interlude, she negatively evaluates Rachel and Jeanne’s comments (Table 1, l.9; l.15). The same pattern is enacted again throughout the verbal exchange. Soon, the docent’s avoidance of uptakes, the absence of positive reinforcement and the systematic corrective and negative evaluations of participants’ topic initiations result in the silencing of the teachers. The participants gradually defer the responsibility of talk and interpretation to the museum specialist. Positioned as the art specialist, the docent then initiates a monologue about the painting. Another consequence is that the participants discontinue the classroom discourse pattern in favor of a museum discourse that they are beginning to learn. In the process of transitioning from one discourse to another, the participants appropriate the museum’s discursive practice in a rather playful manner (Table 5).

Table 5. A creative performance

73	Louise	La chaise (.) c’est comme ça ((montre la courbe)) (1.0) et là ((montre le bras)) c’est son bras	The chair is like this ((shows the curve in painting)) and here ((shows the arm)) it’s her arm
74	Groupe	AH ↑	AH
75	Agathe	Magni[fique	Gre[at

76	Groupe	Whoua ↑]	Whoua]
77	Rachel	super↑	super
78	Solène	hhh	hhh
79	Louise	Merci ((salute)) merci hhh	Thank you ((salutes)) thanks hhh

In the exchange in Table 5, Louise stages the museum discourse and positions herself as a museum docent. Her behavior and that of the participants clearly indicate a playful masquerade. Louise presents a simple observation about the painting to the group: the parallel shape of the chair's arm and the model's arm. The participants, acting as her audience, give her positive feedback (l.74) that turns into overt admiration (ll. 75-77). Louise seems to have accomplished a "tour de force" that deserves applause. Of course, there is a layer of irony and playfulness here, as indicated by the laughter of Solène (l. 78) and the physical salute of Louise at the end of her 'show' (l.79). This time, however, the docent is an outsider to this performance and she can only assume the role of the amused but silent spectator.

Since the beginning of their training at the museum, the participants are immersed into French museum discourse. They are exposed to objective methods of formal analysis that follow a description-analysis-interpretation (DAI) script. In this interaction, the museum docent uses and demonstrates this script and how to develop a discourse about works of art. With this agenda, the docent seeks to socialize the participants into the museum discourse, by giving them the opportunity to practice the DAI script and the methods they are learning at the museum. Being positioned by the participants as the expert, the docent is invested with symbolic power. This power affords the native-speaker docent with the legitimacy to orient both the form and the content of the interaction. Given her agenda, the docent can ignore the participants' familiar discursive modes and overlook the emotional reactions and questions of the participants. While the participants are initially concerned with the identity and biography of the woman in the painting, the conversation is soon reoriented towards methodological concerns and the DAI script. This does not mean that the questions of the participants are illegitimate. From an intercultural standpoint, questioning the identity of the woman in the painting is a legitimate point of entry for an intercultural inquiry. However, in the context of the interaction, this interrogation is deemed irrelevant to art history methods of interpretation, and abandoned. I will come back to this notion of relevance in the next section. While the interaction is controlled by the museum expert, this situation does not preclude some forms of resistance from the

participants. Resistance is exemplified in the interaction excerpted in Table 5, where the participants destabilize the docent's symbolic power.

The performance in this exchange (Table 5) highlights the familiarity of the participants with the museum's script, to the extent that they can even parody it. In addition, this comic interlude also underlines the participants' symbolic competence in action. The participants display "the ability to not only approximate or appropriate for oneself someone else's language, but to shape the very context in which the language is learned and used" (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 664). The participants borrowed the museum's discourse, and appropriated it through a creative diversion. In the process, they destabilized relations of symbolic power and asserted their legitimate participation in the discursive performance at the museum. In this situation, humor is a strategy of mediation that avoids direct confrontation while also affirming the legitimacy of multiple discourses and identities (i.e., world language teacher, non-specialist, second language user) for interpreting works of art at the French museum.

### **Professional Echoes**

As an epilogue to this interaction, I examined the extent to which this conversation entered the personal and professional biographies of the participants, as a contribution to their apprenticeship of difference, and to their practice of cultural and intercultural mediation. To do so, I tracked the occurrences of the *Portrait of a Black Woman*, or its absence, in the participants' talk and in their final projects. These immediate reactions at the end of the workshop or the program were completed by the participants' retrospective accounts in the follow-up interviews. In these instances, the participants position themselves as world language teachers in their U.S. classrooms. I was therefore interested in their individual and professional perspectives on the events and on the portrait. The data analyzed here aims at providing possible answers to the following questions: How can educators become intercultural mediators in their classrooms? How can an aesthetic and cultural experience at the museum be transferred to the U.S. classrooms? This section is not intended as a set of guidelines on how to use the *Portrait of the Black Woman* in the world language classroom. I simply examine the reactions of participants following the workshop but I do not provide an evaluation of the teachers or of the program. In light of the teachers' comments, however, some implications for the program can be inferred. Of particular interest here are the issues of relevance, silence, and transfer.

Immediately following the presentation of the *Portrait of a Black Woman* I asked participants if and how they would integrate the painting into their curriculum. Louise reflected on the events in terms of the negotiation of power dynamics in the classroom.

For Louise, the encounter with the painting was transformative and she looked forward to integrating this portrait into her curriculum (Personal communication, July 2009). She commented as follows (my translation):

I want to use this painting to show my students how we look at things through our own filters and also the power of the teacher because if you're a teacher I take my students in one direction [pause] and unconsciously I don't do it to [pause] I am not aware of it but we push in specific directions but they are our directions and I think that with art what is important is give them the possibility to do it themselves and we need to let them ask questions.

For Louise, the interaction at the museum taught her a lesson about herself as a woman and as a teacher. She sees herself as empowered to provide her students with new and different intercultural skills and perspectives through the use of that portrait. In reflecting on her own practice, Louise also realized how power is distributed in classrooms, and how it could also be otherwise. In doing so, she positions herself as a cultural and intercultural mediator in her classroom and as a critical educator in her practice. Louise also highlights a fundamental dimension of intercultural mediation: letting intercultural speakers ask questions. This remark is also a lesson for the program. The encounter with the *Portrait of a Black Woman* was about providing answers: the script of the museum's discourse aimed at producing meaning and knowledge, and the participants were acculturated into this activity. A way to make this encounter more intercultural would be to maintain a discourse-based inquiry, but to redirect the interaction towards participants' questions. For instance, in a follow-up interview, Agathe admitted that she "really wanted to know who this woman in the painting was. Was she French or American? Where did she come from? Because if she is French or American or else, it's a totally different story" (personal communication, January 2010). Agathe's questions about the identity and life story of the model may not constitute legitimate art history questions from the museum expert's standpoint. However, Agathe's questions are legitimate intercultural interrogations. At the museum, the participants learn how to ask art history questions and deliver interpretations. Meanwhile, the museum and coordinating staff are also exposed to the subjective inquiries of participants and to their discursive practices. The learning and training processes therefore go both ways and should be acknowledged as such. Another way to make this program more intercultural would be to prepare the museum and coordinating staff to hear and to scaffold the participants' intercultural inquiries.

Jeanne expressed the absence of relevance of the portrait for her students. For Jeanne, the *Portrait of a Black Woman* is not appropriate for her classroom (Personal

communication, July 2009). She justifies her choice as follows (my translation into English):

I am sorry but the portrait of a black lady hum for me hum it's it's that hum for my students I think it's not [long pause] there's no connection for my students I think [pause] and it's the portrait in general I think it's more the genre of the portrait that is not interesting there are not many it's static and things like that but for I can't for my students it's not very interesting [...] for me it's not working.

Jeanne signals two issues: the absence of relevance of the painting for her students and the limited pedagogical appeal of portraits in general. For Jeanne, the *Portrait of a Black Woman* can not open any personal or imaginary doors for her students nor can it contribute to her students' learning of French languages and cultures. Following her experience at the museum, Jeanne could not project herself in a situation of mediation where she would have to discuss this painting with her students. Intercultural learning is not exempt from ambiguities, misunderstandings, and frustrations. Jeanne recognizes the precariousness of her position as world language educator in her classroom. In this instance, Jeanne would prefer to avoid any ambiguous situations of thirdness where she would have to negotiate her students' reactions to the portrait. In the comfortable and peripheral position of the researcher, I can not help but think that avoiding ambiguities and embarrassments underestimates students and results in the silencing of voices. However, in sharing her perspective on the painting, Jeanne underlined the fundamental importance of relevance for intercultural education. Obviously, the discourse about the painting did not respond to Jeanne's personal and professional expectations. In a follow-up interview, Jeanne notes "if it wasn't relevant for me it is probably not relevant for my students" (personal communication, January 2010). This is another important lesson for the program, as we should strive to make the *Portrait of a Black Woman* relevant to all participants.

The issue of relevance was negotiated at several points during the interaction at the Louvre that day. The participants and the docent evaluated the relevance of symbols (i.e., the red belt, the colors of the French flag, the bare breast) for the interpretation of the painting. Relevance is also at the heart of a discursive power struggle between the museum's discourse and the participants' reactions to the painting. Following Jeanne's comment, relevance was also individually negotiated by participants during the interaction and with respect to classroom practices. I suggested earlier that third places and the practice of mediation may be located in the proliferation of discursive practices and interpretations. To encourage "individual[s] [to] learn to see him/herself through his/her own embodied history and subjectivity and through the history and subjectivity of others" (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 668), first-person narratives can facilitate the

reader/viewer's empathy with the characters and possibly lead to personal relevance (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2000; Pavlenko, 2001). In the case of the *Portrait of a Black Woman*, the painting could be associated with excerpts from the novel *Ourika* (De Duras, 1823), a work of fiction written in 1823 by Claire de Duras. Based on a true story, the novel retraces the life story of a young Senegalese woman, Ourika. 'Rescued' from slavery at a young age, Ourika was brought to post-Revolutionary France to be adopted and educated by an upper-class French family. The novel is written in the first-person and describes the struggles of the main character with issues of identity, gender, and race within the French society of that time. The novel is a portrait of Ourika, but it is also a description and a critique of the French society at that time. Although there is no definitive link between Ourika and the identity of the young woman in the *Portrait of a Black Woman*, both the painting and the novel were created in France, by female artists, in the early nineteenth century. The novel was also edited in French and translated into English by the Modern Language Association (MLA, 1994). For educators, teaching guides are available to help incorporate the novel into the curriculum (Birkett & Rivers, 2009). The juxtaposition of the painting and the novel could anchor both works in the context of French colonialism, French and Haitian revolutions and their relationship to slavery at that time. In addition, the first-person narrative may encourage teachers and students alike to connect with the characters in the painting and in the novel, to discuss and clarify the ambiguity of the paintings' titles, and perhaps, to make the integration of the *Portrait of a Black Woman* culturally relevant to all in the world language classroom.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The above analysis proposes several interpretive paths to account for the teachers' apprenticeship of difference and of mediation during and after a conversation at the French museum. A common theme is the negotiation of ambivalences, as can be seen from the findings:

1. The *Portrait of a Black Woman* (Benoist, 1800) itself is destabilizing;
2. The discursive act of interpretation positions the viewers in a situation of thirdness;
3. The professional discourses of the classroom teachers and that of the museum docent are alternatively privileged;
4. The relevance of this episode in the professional lives of world language teachers is subject to variation. Discourse-based modifications and improvements to the program were suggested to enhance the relevance of this cultural and intercultural encounter.

The *Portrait of a Black Woman* is both unique and complex (Smalls, 2004). In the present tense of the viewing of this painting, time and space collide with the ambivalences of race, gender, identity, and agency but also with discursive norms and symbolic power. Ambivalence, according to Block (2007) is “the uncertainty of feeling a part and feeling apart” (p. 864). The present study gave several examples of the ambiguous processes of participation within the museum’s discursive community. Overall, the negotiation of ambivalences is the core component of the participants’ apprenticeship of difference and their practice of cultural and intercultural mediation. For Kinginger (2010), the negotiation of difference is

a result of active participation and engagement in these [ambivalent] environments. It requires a genuine involvement in learning (Norton, 2000), it can yield discomfort, ambivalence, even anguish, but it can also generate significant insight of the kind that is routinely attributed to programs of education abroad intercultural awareness, empathy, global civic engagement, and language ability. (p. 217).

Approaching intercultural competence as a discursive and symbolic competence does not circumvent ambiguities or discomfort. On the contrary, intercultural competence capitalizes on ambivalences to pave the way towards learning. In some instances, cultural and intercultural mediation are quite precarious, and the participants who experienced moments of discomfort resorted to alternative discursive strategies, such as humor or even silence. Adopting a view of intercultural competence as symbolic competence, however, opens up the possibilities for understanding and investigating cultural and intercultural encounters. In this view, culture is fluid and multi-faceted, anchored in context and in language use. Teaching for intercultural competence, in turn, invites the educators to revisit their own encounters at the museum in light of multiple discourses and subjectivities.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND OPENINGS**

I began this inquiry with a set of questions in mind. First, I wanted to understand how the art museum could be a zone of possibilities for intercultural learning and teaching. Second, I interrogated the ways the program can provide access to the museum’s community. Finally, I examined the impact of one specific encounter with art on the teachers and their practices. My second and third points were illustrated in the analysis of the data collected for this study. The program affords the participants with direct access to the museum’s knowledge and discourse through visits, roundtables, workshops and discussions. In some instances, however, unscripted activities emerge

that require the activation of the participants' symbolic competence. In turn, those unscripted activities open doors for the educators' apprenticeship of difference. An implication of these findings concerns the ways the program could be enhanced. Making the LCL program more intercultural would require museum educators and classroom teachers to familiarize each other with their respective practices of cultural and intercultural mediation. Overall, a discourse-based approach to training could be beneficial to the program and to the participating educators (Gee, 2004). Such an approach would be adapted to future encounters with the *Portrait of a Black Woman*. As underlined in this study, the portrait could open multiple doors in the world language classroom. One way to make this work and its impact on viewers relevant to a culturally diverse audience would be to appeal to the audience's subjectivity and, perhaps, to present the work of art in conjunction with actual or imagined narratives of experience.

The first question that drove my inquiry remains to be answered in detail. Next, I want to discuss the role of the art museum as a zone of possibilities for intercultural learning and teaching. One reason to do so is that museums are not yet part of our research landscape. Museum visiting might be a widespread practice among world language educators, but there are few studies that empirically focus on the museum as a place for intercultural instruction (Monteiro, 2007). As world language and intercultural educators, we have a lot to learn from and with art museums. Although presently absent from the language-and-culture research landscape, art museums have much to offer in terms of cultural and intercultural mediation. In effect, art museums are destabilizing spaces and it is in the interstices of these ambivalences that learning can be located.

Museums are more than preservers of culture (Hein, 1998). Whether conceived as "heterotopias" (Foucault, 1967), "third spaces" (Bevan, 2007), or "Contact Zones" (Clifford, 1997), museums are social spaces "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt, 2002, p. 607). Clifford (1997) contends that museums "epitomize the future of 'cultural difference'" (p. 219) and encourage these institutions to "think of their mission as contact work – decentered and traversed by cultural and political negotiations that are out of any imagined community's control" (p. 213). The present study underlines the transformative and intercultural potential of art museums and promotes a view of the art museum as a zone of possibilities for cultural and intercultural mediation. In practice, several initiatives have already begun to capitalize on this potential and to bridge the contextual gap between classroom and museum settings (Griffin, 2004; Monteiro, 2008). Shauble et al. (2002) argue that is through the professional training of school teachers that the resources of the museum will be exploited, professional conversions and transformations will occur, and boundaries between schools and museums will be

crossed. It is clear from this scholarship that a great deal of collaboration between schools and museums has already developed. However, these studies also report a need for research to follow and to scaffold these growing practices of boundaries crossing. A promising research agenda would investigate these programs and their impact, not in terms of gain, but in the ways they transform individuals, professionals, and communities in the long term. Appealing to the imagination of institutions, researchers and practitioners, Clifford (1997) asks: “what would be different if major regional and national museums loosened their sense of centrality and saw themselves as specific places of transit, intercultural borders, context of struggle and communication between discrepant communities?” (p. 213). We could also ask the same question about schools and about world language classrooms. The responsibility to answer falls on us, educators across languages, cultures, and settings, as we strive to look at the world as if it could be otherwise.

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christelle Palpacuer-Lee is a doctoral student in the Language Education program at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education. Her dissertation examines the experiences of a group of U.S. teachers of French enrolled in a study abroad program at the art museum, in France.

---

## REFERENCES

- Alred, G., & Byram, M. (2002). Becoming an intercultural mediator: A longitudinal study of residence abroad. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 23(5), 339.
- Allen, S. (2004). Designs for learning: Studying science museum exhibits that do more than entertain. *Science Education*, 88(S1), S17-S33.
- Anderson, A. (2003). Women and cultural learning in Costa Rica. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 9(Fall 2003), 21-52.
- Augé, M. (1995). *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*. London, England: Verso.
- Benoist, M.G. (1800). *Portrait d'une négresse (Portrait of a black woman)*. [oil on canvas]. Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Retrieved from [http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car\\_not\\_frame&idNotice=18871](http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=18871)

- Bevan, B. (2007). Transformation and the third space of school-museum collaborations. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 2(2), 429-437.
- Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Birkett, M. E., & Rivers, C. (Eds.). (2009). *Approaches to teaching Duras' Ourika*. New York, NY: Modern Language Association of America.
- Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research, post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(Focus Issue), 863-876.
- Burnapp, D. (2006). Trajectories of adjustment of international students: U - curve, learning curve, or third space. *Intercultural Education*, 17(1), 81-93.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Caillet, E. (1995). *A l'approche du musée: La médiation culturelle*. Lyon, France: Presses Universitaires de Lyon (PUL).
- Clifford, J. (1997). Museums as contact zones. In *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century* (pp. 188-220). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cresswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- de Duras, C. (1994). *Ourika: The original French text [Ourika]*. New York: Modern Language Association of America. (Original work published 1823.)
- Delacroix, E. (1831). *La liberté guidant le peuple [July 28: Liberty guiding the people]. [oil on canvas]*. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.
- Doy, G. (1998). *Women and visual culture in nineteenth century France: 1800- 1852*. London, England: Leicester University Press.
- Falk, J. H., & Dierking, L. D. (2000). *Learning from museums*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Folberg, J., & Taylor, A. (1984). *Mediation: A comprehensive guide to resolving conflicts without litigation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Foucault, M. (1967). Des espaces autres [Of other spaces]. In *Dits et écrits: 1954-1984*. Paris, France: Gallimard.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Gee, J. P. (2004). Learning language as a matter of learning social languages within discourse. In M. Hawkins (Ed.), *Language learning and teacher education: A sociocultural perspective* (pp. 13-30). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures; selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Griffin, J. (2004). Research on students and museums: Looking more closely at the students in school groups. *Science Education*, 88(S1), S59-S70.
- Gros, B. A. (1804). *Napoléon visitant les pestiférés de Jaffa [Napoleon visiting the plague- stricken in Jaffa]*. [Oil on canvas]. Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.
- Hein, G. E. (1998). *Learning in the museum*. London, England: Routledge.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1994). *The educational role of the museum*. London, England: Routledge.
- Jefferson, G. (1984). Transcription notation. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage, J. (Eds.), *Structures of social interaction: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. ix-xvi). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press
- Kinging, C. (2004). Alice doesn't live here anymore: Foreign language learning and identity reconstruction. In A. Pavlenko, & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 219-242). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Kinging, C. (2009). *Language learning and study abroad: A critical reading of research*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kinging, C. (2008). Language Learning in Study Abroad: Case Studies of Americans in France. *The Modern Language Journal Monograph Series*. Volume 1.
- Kinging, C. (2010). American students abroad: Negotiation of difference? *Language Teaching*, 43(1), 216-227.
- Knutson, K. (2002). Creating a space for learning: Curators, educators and the implied audience. In G. Leinhardt, K. Crowley & K. Knutson (Eds.), *Learning conversations in museums* (pp. 5-44). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

- Kramersch, C. (2000). Social discursive constructions of self in L2 learning. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 133-155). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Kramersch, C. (2006a). From communicative competence to symbolic competence. *Modern Language Journal*, 90(2), 249-252.
- Kramersch, C. (2006b). The multilingual subject. *The International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 16(1), 97-110.
- Kramersch, C. (2008). The intercultural yesterday and today: Political perspectives. In R. Schulz & E. Tschirner (Eds.), *Communicating across Borders: Developing Intercultural Competence in German as a Foreign Language* (pp. 5-27). Munich, Germany: iudicium.
- Kramersch, C. (2009). Third culture and language education. In V. Cook, & L. Wei (Eds.), *Contemporary applied linguistics volume 1*. London, England: Continuum.
- Kramersch, C. (2010, January). *The symbolic dimension of intercultural competence*. Keynote speech presented at Second International Conference on the Development and Assessment of Intercultural Competence, Tucson, AZ.
- Kramersch, C., & Whiteside, A. (2008). Language ecology in multilingual settings: Towards a theory of symbolic competence. *Applied Linguistics*, 29(4), 645-671.
- Leinhardt, G., & Knutson, K. (2004). *Listening in on museum conversations*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Mehan, H. (1985). The structure of classroom discourse. In A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Handbook of discourse analysis: Vol. 3. Discourse and Dialogue* (pp. 119-131). London, England: Academic Press.
- Monteiro, L. (2007). Including immigrants: How art museums can bring together old and new Americans. *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 1(4), 139-146.
- Nora, P. (Ed.). (1992). *Les lieux de mémoire. Vol. 3 : Les France*. Paris, France: Gallimard Quarto.
- Paris, S. G., & Mercer, M. J. (2002). Finding self in objects: Identity exploration in museums. In G. Leinhardt, K. Crowley & K. Knutson (Eds.), *Learning conversations in museums* (pp. 401-425). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Pavlenko, A. (2001). "In the world of the tradition I was unimagined": Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural autobiographies. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*, 5(3), 317-344.
- Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re)construction of selves. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 155-179). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Polanyi, L. (1995). Language learning and living abroad. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context* (pp. 271-292). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Pratt, M. L. (2002). Arts of the contact zone. In D. Bartholomae and A. Petrosky, (Eds.), *Ways of reading: An anthology for writers* (pp. 605-618). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's. (Original work published 1991)
- Rodriguez, K. (2006). Re-reading student texts: Intertextuality and constructions of self and other in the contact zone. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 13, 43-63.
- Schauble, L., Gleason, M., Lehrer, R., Bartlett, K., Petrosino, A., & Allen, A. (2002). Supporting science learning in museums. In G. Leinhardt, K. Crowley & K. Knutson (Eds.), *Learning conversations in museums*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Scollon, S. (2000). *Intercultural communication: A discourse approach* (2nd ed.). Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing.
- Smalls, J. (2004). Slavery is a woman: Race, gender, and visibility in Marie Benoist's Portrait d'une négresse. [Electronic version] *The Art History Archive*. Retrieved from <http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arthistory/Slavery-is-a-Woman.html>
- Stainton, C. (2002). Voices and images: Making connections between identity and art. In G. Leinhardt, K. Crowley & K. Knutson (Eds.), *Learning conversations in museums* (pp. 213-258). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.
- Talbur, S., & Stewart, M. A. (1999). What's the subject of study abroad? Race, gender, and 'living culture.' *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(2), 163-175.
- Tran, L. U. (2007). Teaching science in museums: The pedagogy and goals of museum educators. *Science Education*, 91(2), 278-297.
- Twombly, S. B. (1995). *Piropos* and friendships: Gender and culture clash in study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 1, 1-27.

- Wilkinson, S. (2002). The omnipresent classroom during summer study abroad: American students in conversation with their French hosts. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86(2), 157-173.
- Yalom, M. (1997). *A history of the breast* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Random House.
- Zarate, G. (Ed.). (2004). *Cultural mediation in language learning and teaching*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, European Center for Modern Languages.

**APPENDIX A**

Key to the transcription notation

(Adapted from Jefferson, 1984)

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Key</b>
[ ]	Overlapping utterances
(.)	Short pause
( 2.0 )	Pause in length of approximate seconds
<b>Ye:s</b>	Stretching of sound : follows
<b><u>Yes</u></b>	Emphasis
<b>YES</b>	Increased volume
<b>(yes)</b>	Uncertainty of transcription
<b>hhh</b>	Laughter
<b>Yes↑</b>	Upward intonation
<b>Yes↓</b>	Downward intonation
<b>(( ))</b>	Transcriber notes; contextual details