

**Faculty Fellows Project Report 19 – 20**  
**Alina Van Nelson**

**Title and summary / description of your project: *Increasing cultural comprehension through short movies.***

Initially, my intention was to develop PlayPosit tools for all ten movies incorporated in the intermediate French 1 (FREN2110) and Intermediate 2 (FREN2120) classes. However, due to course assignment constraints, I was unable to teach 2110 in both fall 2019 and spring 2020. In addition, my project was implemented at a time at which we were moving to a new edition of the textbook used in these classes, which meant that 2110 was taught with the new edition in fall 2019, while 2120 only moved to this new edition in the spring 2020 semester. This is why my project focused on 2120 exclusively.

The curriculum in intermediate classes focuses heavily on vocabulary and grammar structures, and students also need to complete a variety of other forms of assessment than exams (oral conversations with native speakers, essays). For this reason, the time allotted to the short movies in class is minimal and instructors check movie comprehension mainly. It seemed to me that this comprehension is limited because of students' lack of background cultural knowledge. My project's intent was to see how exposing students to more cultural content on the same topic as the movie would impact the reception of these short movies. This cultural content was explored through cultural differences questions, as students at this level still function at the level of the self and immediate surroundings.

**Describe the challenge you addressed in your department with this project.**

This project was envisioned as a way to increase cultural competency in students at the intermediate level. At this level, students are moving from basic vocabulary and grammar to developing an increased oral and written proficiency at a pace that decreases by 40% from the beginner classes. In addition, students only have one more French grammar classes before starting the content-based classes (either literature or culture). For this reason, it seems that a strictly cultural endeavor would greatly benefit students and enable a deeper understanding of authentic cultural products (short movies). By the same token, such an approach would also increase cultural awareness and allow students to reflect on pertinent cultural differences by going beyond "It is strange".

**Describe desired result.**

As I envisioned the project initially, the main two goals were:

1. to increase students' cultural understanding on topics related to the movies they watched
2. to increase their cultural competency and ability to deal with cultural difference.

## **Describe the project. What did you do?**

I created essay-question instructor-graded activities that students were to complete before watching the movies. For each movie, I created pre and post assessment surveys meant to record the growth in understanding for students. After students watched the movies, they took the post assessment. The questions were identical, but the post assessment included more subjective questions such as "Name one surprising thing you learned".

Among my 3 sections of FREN 2120, section 001 (17 students) served as a pilot, while sections 003 (15 students) and 004 (13 students) watched the movies without the cultural comprehension activity, but still completed the pre and post assessment activities.

## **Describe the outcome. What worked, what didn't work, lessons learned.**

Overall, my project reached its goals. Students in section 001 enjoyed watching the movies after gaining some more cultural background. It was satisfying when, upon the university moving to remote teaching, and having to ask my pilot group to watch the movie prior to the cultural activity, when I asked them how they liked the movie, they said: "I'd wish I knew more about job market in France" (which was exactly the topic of the cultural activity). For the other short movies, students made lots of comments such as:

"I was surprised to learn that gardening is considered by French a fun pastime."

"The HLM's (Habitation à Loyer Modéré = Low Income Housing) are both publicly and privately owned!"

"I found interesting that francophone countries have a system like that in place."

"Each city is required to have a certain amount of HLM housing."

"I thought it was interesting that there is an increasing gap of leisure time between elderly and working people."

"I really enjoyed watching his Ted Talk and also reading over many of his quotes. He is a very inspirational person. I think all of the activities assigned were necessary in understanding who YAB (Yan-Arthus Bertrand) is and what he desires to achieve."

"I thought that the extra research and the ted talk really helped with a deeper understanding about the YAB than just the video on VHL [the textbook online platform]. I think doing the extra research is helpful when a topic is interesting and also very relatable and also very current."

"I think it takes up a lot of time, but it does offer some interesting viewpoints and other information our book doesn't have."

"I liked it! It was super interesting. One of the articles was a little long but other than that the ted talk was cool, I even watched his movie afterwards cause I wanted to know more."

"I liked that the links to articles and videos were provided. It made it easy to access all the information and I found most of the articles and videos helpful."

"I found surprising that France enacted legislature against phones in the classroom. I can't imagine the US ever doing that."

"I didn't know there were so many technology-heavy schools in the US!"

"It is surprising how little emphasis the French put on technology"

In terms what didn't work for me, it was the difference between the envisioned project and the way it actually unfolded.

1. My initial plan was to use PlayPosit for creating these activities and embed the links to articles/blogs/videos in the questionnaire itself. However, I did not expect that I would not have access to the movies as the publisher denied me access to them. That created some turbulence: the first movie, as it was new from the previous edition, I created the cultural activity in VHL (the Vista Higher Learning online platform, that also hosts

students' daily homework). For the second movie, as it was the same as in the previous edition, I worked with PlayPosit and students found the change in format difficult. At that point, the publisher told me that I would have access to the movies so I can upload them in Kaltura and they just needed to figure out how. But after the second movie happened in my curriculum, they ended up by denying me access to the rest of the movies, which forced me to use VHL, and that was not my initial plan.

2. On another hand, I thought it was easier to incorporate the pre and post assessment in class as paper copies, as the non-piloted sections couldn't research the topics. That had to change once we moved to remote teaching. For the last 2 movies, both pre and post assessment happened as quizzes in Canvas, and I incorporated them in the actual class to avoid students not completing them, as they knew they were not part of the grade book.
3. The actual VHL assignment was incorporated in the homework assignments. Although that worked well, I think in retrospect that it would be given a larger portion in the grade book, or simply create a new category in the grade book in Canvas. Probably because of this, some students didn't complete the cultural activity, which affected the post assessments results.
4. I built the pre and post assessments as measuring the cultural understanding separate from the movie reception. In the future, I plan to incorporate more free-answer questions. In my defense, I wanted to come up with some sort of metrics for this project, and measuring cultural competency seems extremely hard to me. So I focused mainly on providing some numbers that could measure students' cultural growth, but these numbers didn't necessarily measure their cultural awareness.
5. I think I underestimated how hard it is to increase a component in a pre-existing curriculum. In the future, I plan to change the way this cultural activity is incorporated in the existing curriculum by creating class activities (either conversations or written responses) to better determine how well the cultural activity contributes to the movie understanding.

### **Reflect on your experience in the Faculty Fellows program and working on your project.**

As a teacher, it is hard for me to find space to work on my ideas. The opportunity to work on such an idea with fellow teachers was tremendous. The hands-on activities on the project itself helped me the most, particularly the one where we needed to listen to our partners ideas and concerns about their projects and provide them with possible solutions. I really admired how well this activity was built.

What made it hard, sometimes, was to try to understand other teachers' concerns, as some departments and programs are radically different. But in the end, this also provided everyone involved with possible transfers in terms of methods, strategies and class activities. Thank you very much, ASSETT, for making such a space of investigation and experimentation possible and available to us!

**If appropriate, please include other artifacts and visuals (data, weblinks, pictures, student work/examples, write-ups)**

I would like to incorporate the metrics from each section for each movie:

| Short movie                     | Pre assessment: 001 / 003 / 004 | Post assessment: 001 / 003 / 004 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Le monde du petit monde         | 6   5.92   5.53                 | 7.81   6.28   5.38               |
| Strict Eternum                  | 7.94   7.48   7.46              | 8.64   7.28   7.5                |
| Le grand bain                   | 5.58   5.36   4.83              | 6.61   4.84   5.44               |
| Bonbons au poivre               | 7.29   6   7                    | 9.13   7.45   7.2                |
| Un héros de la nature gabonaise | 6.4   6.45   6.22               | 7.5   5.17   6.3                 |

Growth in the pilot group (001): overall average: 1.3

1. 1.81
2. 0.7\*
3. 1.03
4. 1.84
5. 1.1

*\*I found very interesting that the lowest number for growth relates to the second movie, the only one I was actually able to use PlayPosit for. This is definitely caused by the sudden change in format that students didn't like.*