



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada



UNDERSTANDING LITERATURE THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE: A CASE STUDY OF SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EVOLVING RESPONSES TO QUEBEC LITERATURE

Amélie Lemieux

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

McGill University, Montreal

August 2013

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts in Education and Society

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RECOGNITION

À ma mère, Francine Hart, (1948-2009).

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Abstract

Francophone Quebec, as a minority culture in North America, needs to pay attention to and celebrate not only what makes it different within the North American context, but also what it shares. Literature, as a branch of the arts, takes the pulse of the society that it represents. In this regard, American novelist Richard Ford (2011) states that literature “realigns conventional wisdom” all the while improving its literacy levels. Apart from functioning as an effective instrument of education (Carroll, 2002), literature is also the means through which language skills are most often taught in Quebec’s French classes. Regrettably, the province of Quebec has more people with low literacy than the national average, which results in a weak foundation for future learning, including formal learning at the post-secondary level. Research points to students’ loss of interest in French classes as a common cause for this alarming phenomenon. In addition to this issue, only approximately half the Quebec student population over 16 years of age (52%) have a literacy level at or above the estimated level for living efficiently (O’Sullivan et al., 2009). This is a serious educational and social challenge that needs to be addressed. In an effort to reduce the weak literacy rate of students, I suggest an alternative teaching of Wajdi Mouawad’s Quebec play *Incendies* in three different secondary 5 classes. I charted patterns of meaning-making responses that provide an understanding of directions a teacher might take to increase interest in reading, specifically within the francophone community. The patterns of responses are meant to help educators by providing them with student responses where it seems advisable. Another objective of this study is to adopt appropriate methods to reinforce an interest in Francophone Quebec literature and develop a further interest in reading.

Résumé

Le Québec francophone, en tant qu'identité culturelle minoritaire en Amérique du Nord, doit se pencher sur ce qu'il partage avec le reste du Canada et sur sa singularité par rapport aux autres cultures. Parallèlement, la littérature en tant que domaine des arts prend le pouls de la société qu'elle représente. En plus d'être un élément clé en éducation (Carroll, 2002), la littérature est le champ d'études qui permet de développer la capacité de lire et d'écrire (la littératie) ainsi que d'élargir l'horizon culturel des étudiants. Malheureusement, la province du Québec démontre des statistiques désastreuses; son rendement en lecture et en écriture est très faible par rapport à la moyenne nationale, ce qui vient nuire à la réussite scolaire, notamment dans les établissements secondaires et même postsecondaires. Des études récentes ont démontré que la cause principale de ces données alarmantes est le manque d'intérêt pour les cours de français au secondaire. En plus de ce problème, seulement la moitié (52 %) de la population étudiante du Québec de plus de 16 ans montre un niveau de littératie égal ou supérieur au niveau estimé nécessaire pour vivre de manière fonctionnelle (O'Sullivan et al., 2009). Le manque d'intérêt envers la littérature québécoise constitue un problème trop important pour en faire fi.

Ainsi, dans un effort de réduire le faible taux de littératie des étudiants, je suggère un enseignement alternatif de la pièce québécoise *Incendies*, de Wajdi Mouawad, dans trois classes de secondaire 5. Pour ce faire, j'ai compilé des types de réponses sémantiques à une scène de la pièce de théâtre *Incendies* qui a été choisie en collaboration avec les enseignantes de français du Collège Sainte-Marcelline. Ces modes de réponses ont pour but d'aider les professeures en leur donnant une idée des réactions de leurs élèves, pour ensuite adopter des méthodes appropriées pour renforcer l'intérêt envers la lecture et l'écriture en français.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To begin with, I acknowledge the support of Dr. Boyd White, my thesis supervisor. He provided me with thoughtful encouragements and constant availability. His patience and determination in this project will stay in my mind as great memories, for they allowed me to believe in myself as a young researcher. I am grateful to have benefited from his guidance in this endeavour. I owe him the most profound respect.

I would like to thank my father for his constant encouragements throughout my Masters studies. He was of great help, and a source of inspiration. *Papa, je te remercie du fond du coeur.*

I would also like to thank professors from the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, specially Dr. Anila Asghar, Dr. Mary Maguire, Dr. Anthony Paré, and Dr. Lisa Trimble for their support. They provided me with constructive criticism and valuable feedback, two elements that were and still are of great value.

I thank Sr. Martine Dalpé and the Marcellines Institution for allowing me to conduct my research with their students. It was an honour for me to return to the Collège to meet new individuals and to share my research with them. I acknowledge the help of teachers Mrs. Kamel and Mrs. Bastard who helped me greatly in the research process and welcomed me in their classes.

I am grateful to my friends and family who were available enough to give me their thoughtful opinions in this journey, you all have a special place in my heart.

Last but not least, I am grateful for the financial support that the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada gave me to conduct this project. Without the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship, this research would have been so much more difficult to undertake.

PREFACE

This study explains my involvement in a qualitative and quantitative study of the ways three different classes of senior high school female students respond to *Incendies*, a Francophone Quebec play written by Wajdi Mouawad in 2003. This research is intended to provide an understanding of patterns of responses, which in turn can inform teachers on pedagogical strategies to more fully engage students in their interactions with literature. In the first chapter, I discuss the purpose of this study for the field of literature education, as well as my personal purposes for engaging in this project. I introduce the study's research questions, significance for the education field, and limitations. I conclude this chapter by explaining ethical considerations that this research involves. The second chapter presents a literature review of traditional approaches to literature education, response-based teaching, as well as current applications and implications of aesthetic experiences in classrooms. Chapter three contains the conceptual framework of this study, linking aesthetic education theory and arts-related research with reader-response theory and its uses in classrooms. The fourth chapter describes the methodology used in this study. It includes an explanation of the setting, participants, design, validity, reliability, data collection and data analysis. I address qualitative research results in chapter five, with an explanation of the pre-experiment and experiment that were conducted in collaboration with secondary 5 social sciences students from class 5A, and secondary 5 science students from class 5B and class 5C. In chapter six, quantitative results are detailed. In particular, I address students' motivation to read, their perception, interest in and knowledge of Francophone Quebec literature. Finally, I point out in chapter seven areas for further research in literature and aesthetics education.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is the result of two years of full-time investigation into the question: “What possible methods exist to raise francophone high school students’ interest in Quebec literature?” In my high school years, I often found that my peers were not as motivated as I was to discover this literature. As I remember staying up late at night, devouring every page of Nelly Arcan’s Femina-nominated best-seller *Folle*. My peers did not even know of her writings. My mother would call me from downstairs; reminding me that supper was ready. I was urged to finish reading my paragraph, as my plate would get cold on the kitchen table. Through this novel, I expanded my knowledge on the significance of autofiction¹ and introspective writing² in the Quebec context, and wanted to know more about these kinds of literature. Arcan’s words were filled with rawness, truth, and wildness—all values I identified with in my adolescence. My reading habits were different from those of my peers, at least as far as I gathered in my school’s hallways. I would ask my friends: “What did you do yesterday?” and their answer would be: “Oh, I studied for next Friday’s math exam,” or “I chatted with Jason on MSN,” or “I watched *One Tree Hill*”. Was it because I was read bedtime stories as a child? Was it because my mother was a high school French teacher? Perhaps it was a way to explore personal issues while reading narratives with which I could identify? I tend to think that all of these questions are legitimate, as I experienced literature by questioning the reasons for my interest. Another problem related to my peers’ lack of interest in Quebec literature could be that I rarely heard them explode with joy

¹ The word “autofiction” was introduced in 1977 by Serge Doubrovsky as an attempt to describe the style of his book, *Fils*. Autofiction is a genre in which fiction and autobiography blend together: the identity of the author, protagonist, and narrator are intertwined. The difference between autofiction and autobiography is often contested by critics and authors. In response to these comments, Doubrovsky argues that autobiography is “reserved for important people of this world” (p. 10).

² Introspective writing is the process and result of writing one’s thoughts on oneself. Introspective writing varies in form. For examples, it may take the form of a journal entry, a daily reflection, or a post.

when discussing this topic or feel fulfilled after attending French literature classes. I see this as a two-dimensional problem. One reason might be that the books were often chosen without students' consent, according to a teacher's familiarization with a literary work, especially if the teacher was used to teaching it every year, without innovation or imagination. The result is that a gap formed between what teachers wanted to teach and what students wanted to read. I speak from personal experience and from the data I gathered throughout this study. Interestingly, this impression is shared by others and proven by research. For example, Reeves (2004) conducted interviews with high school students who were discouraged about reading in school, mainly because the works "were not about one of [their] particular interests" (p. 47). If this is so, then it follows that, in teacher-led institutions, students may ask themselves questions: Why is it that my teacher's analysis dominates today's lesson? Isn't my opinion worthy of discussion? My investigation into the reader responses in three different high school classes addresses these questions, among others.

This study explores my investigation of students' responses to Quebec literature, and whether the charting of these responses leads to a greater interest in literacy skills, including reading. I base my inquiry mainly on response-based teaching, which is itself based on Dewey's progressive theories of education and Rosenblatt's transactional theory of teaching literature. According to Beach et al. (2011), educators who value student-oriented practices like these "adopt a constructivist approach to learning that emphasizes fostering students' expression of their responses through discussion, writing, drama artwork, and digital media" (p. 43). This illustrates part of my research goals.

I chose Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies (Scorched)* for three distinct reasons. The first is the play's use of multicultural cast and setting; it involves French-speaking Lebanese Quebecers as

the main characters. Native Arabic-speaking Lebanese and native French-speaking Quebecers are also involved, which augments the probability of the play being acclaimed by my participants, who are of all of different cultural backgrounds, but mainly from Lebanon. As renowned American author Katherine Patterson (1995) wrote,

It is not enough to simply teach children to read; we have to give them something worth reading. Something that will stretch their imaginations—something that will help them make sense of their own lives and encourage them to reach out toward people whose lives are quite different from their own. (p. 300-301)

This quotation serves as a starting point for an understanding of the reasons why I chose to work on responses to *Incendies*. I knew it would force students out of their comfort zone all the while making them want to expand their knowledge of their peers' opinions. This leads to a possibility to explore peers' opinions through subsequent in-class discussions, which allow for meaning-making constructions and a possibility to open students' minds on what they (dis)like. As Probst (2004) argues, we should “choose literature for its potential to interest students” (p. 67), and this was one of my aims in this research project. It was also important for me to use drama as a tool to facilitate learning, mainly because it engages students in a more active education. Indeed, Beach et al. (2011) suggest that when engaging in drama, students are learning to “infuse their knowledge with feelings—that facts, ideas, beliefs, and understandings are shaped by the emotions as shaping actions” (p. 172).

The second reason is the play's conciseness; I needed a succinct piece, considering the limited time I had with my participants (approximately three hours per class). The third is my appreciation for this work, for it addresses a family's struggle in dealing with death and testimonies, a delicate situation I experienced three years ago, when my mother passed away. In other words, this play resonates with me on both academic and personal levels, a core capacity to make an inquiry relevant for its researcher. I believe the play resonated with my participants as

well. Two teachers of the Collège Sainte-Marcelline accepted my project, claiming the play affected them positively. They told me this piece could be part of the curriculum because of its compelling theme. This may contribute to building a new element of the curriculum according to Certo and Brinda (2011): “when the play’s theme and characters are relevant to students, teachers can build curriculum and instruction around novel study” (p. 35).

Incendies allowed me to discover and revisit emotions I had to deal with when I lost my mother, and the learning process it set in motion helped me overcome this life challenge. I am sure that addressing the spectrums of emotional and analytical responses in a research context with students can contribute to educational practice. As Freire (1998) notes, “Why not discuss with students the concrete reality of their lives and that aggressive reality in which violence is permanent and where people are much more familiar with death than life?” (p. 36). Since *Incendies* underlines issues of gender-based violence, my hope was that these female students would have the opportunity to explore their own responses and be able to express their critical thinking at any time in the research process. Another hope of mine was to deconstruct the stereotypical notion that “Quebec literature is boring,” and generate a more appreciative perception of this topic.

To facilitate the connection between the student and the text, I suggest a few measures to be taken. First, the environmental setting should embody a right balance between conviviality and academia, in order to show students that aesthetic experiences are as accessible as they are academic. Second, the technological equipment should be available and functioning properly so that the educator makes the most of it during a limited period of time, since the classes often last between 45 minutes and an hour. Third, I recommend that an educator pilots an activity where students aesthetically engage with an image, a painting or a photograph. This exercise can be a

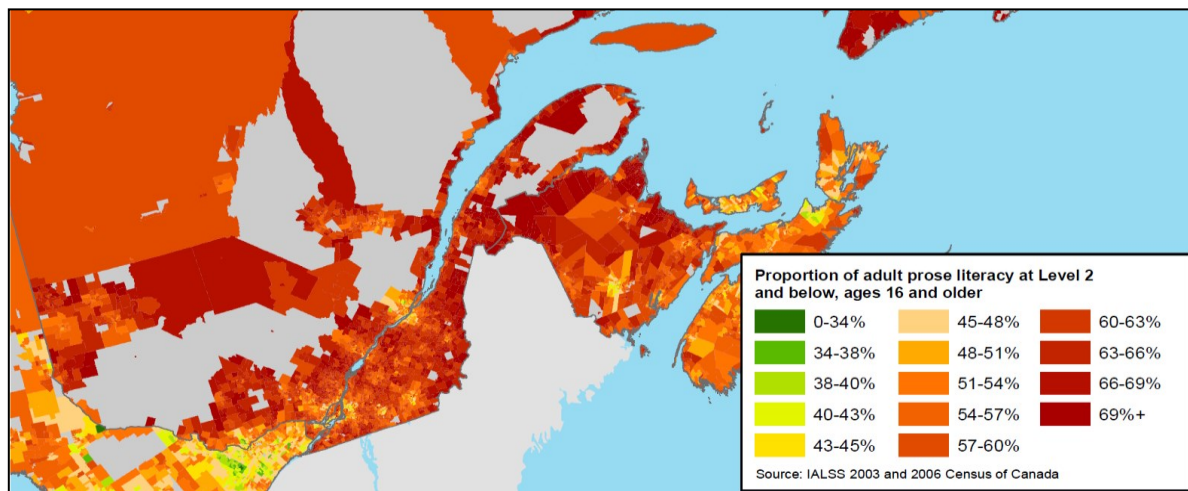
preliminary step to a larger aesthetic endeavour involving responses to more complex literature, i.e. poems, plays, novels, and the like. All of these recommendations are based on my personal experiences as a graduate student in education and as a future educator who will certainly advocate for aesthetic experiences through my research and beyond, for they enrich and inspire both students and teachers.

As an alumna, it was logical for me to ask the all-girl Marcelline Institution if I could conduct my research at their Pierrefonds location. The Collège's academic mission is to provide a sense of Catholic unity within its institutions as well as to give its 25,000 students (worldwide) exceptional education. Having completed a B.A. in French literature and translation at McGill University, I chose to conduct research on responses to Quebec literature. Faced with a research question that required an in-class inquiry, I felt ready to return and pursue my educational journey at the Marcellines. I consider myself a well-experienced alumna with some insight into what can be changed in the school's curriculum in order to instill greater interest in Quebec literature.

Purpose for Research in Education within the Province of Quebec

I explore the different ways in which female high school students aged 16-17 respond to Francophone Quebec drama within three different multicultural classrooms of Collège Sainte-Marcelline, a French Catholic school located in Pierrefonds, Montreal. This research project is of potential significance for education in Quebec because it investigates a strategy to address the problem of low prose literacy rates. The statistics are shocking. For example, the province of Quebec has an enormous proportion of individuals over 16 years of age who have a prose literacy level at or below 2 (Map 1), which is equivalent to the capacity to deal only with simple, clear material involving uncomplicated tasks. People at this level may develop everyday coping

skills, but their poor literacy make it hard to conquer challenges such as learning new job skills (Barr-Telford, L., Nault, F., & Pignal, J., 2005).



Map 1: Proportion of Adult Prose Literacy

at Level 2 and Below, Ages 16 and Older

According to the International Adult Literacy Survey, Statistics Canada, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2000), prose literacy is best defined as “the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures and instruction manuals” (p. x). According to Statistics Canada, prose literacy is one of the four determinant factors needed to evaluate literacy. The other factors are numeracy literacy, defined as the knowledge or skills necessary to manage mathematical demands in different circumstances, document literacy, which measures one’s ability to extract information from non-continuous texts, and problem-solving literacy, which involves goal-directed thinking and action outside of routine solutions (Zubrow et al., 2008). I focus on prose literacy because of my own interest in reading and writing literary works. The aforementioned statistics may point to a relationship between mediocre prose literacy skills and the need to educate the Quebec population, starting with its students, through its own literature.

While I acknowledge that the high percentage of adults who score low on literacy tests in Quebec does not offer direct proof of adolescents' low level of interest in Quebec literature, there is certainly a correlation to be made between the two issues. That is, there is a strong probability that the lack of efficiency in reading and writing of adults aged 16 years and older is linked to their performance and level of interest in high school literature classes, as these represent the final years of mandatory study for adolescents. Indeed, the Federal Government of Canada stipulates that all Canadian students must stay in school until they reach age 16. As of that point, they have the liberty to drop out of school. Low levels of interest in any subject during senior high school years may be a catalyst for uninterest in pursuing post-secondary studies. In comparison to other Canadian provinces, Quebec ranks second from the bottom in terms of university attendance, with only 20% of young adults aged 18-24 going to university and colleges (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2006). These general questions, tied in with my personal experience as an educator in a Quebec high school setting, are at the core of my inquiry. My research questions were therefore developed as a result of my general preoccupation, as an educator and researcher, in the literacy levels of Quebec students.

To address the matter, one of the purposes of this research is to increase interest in Quebec drama, a branch of Quebec literature, and focus on the aesthetic responses to Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*. Apart from the personal reasons stated earlier, I chose to use popular drama because learning experiences through this may contribute considerably to students' engagement in their learning (Upitis & Smithrim, 2003). Other researchers (Swartz, 2003) further emphasize that drama allows teachers and students to determine and identify with several identities, all the while "learning to develop their responses, learn about the responses of others, explore their interests and learn about the interests of others" (p. 206). I chose to work with high

school students because adolescence is an opportune time to read and discover narratives that foster critical thinking. A key focus for adolescents is identity development. They achieve this through the building of narratives of the self (Alsup, 2010). As a hypothesis, I expected that the interest in Quebec drama would increase among the participants of my research and that, ultimately, their prose literacy skills or, at the very least, the ability to read and write, would increase as well. In other words, if students develop increased interest in Quebec literature, there is a probability that they desire to improve their own expressive skills in speech and writing. In turn, this would lead to improved literacy skills like reading and writing.

Significance of the Study

My work with senior high-school students of varying ethnic backgrounds reflects the Quebec multicultural reality. Students were encouraged to listen to, cope with, experience and, importantly, acknowledge the aesthetic responses of their peers during in-class discussions. My research project is of importance to education because “motivating students to engage in reading by teaching them with the use of new strategies is a crucial factor in raising literacy levels” (O’Sullivan et al., 2009). With the innovative use of aesthetigrams, which are participant-generated maps that illustrate students’ responses, and subsequent discussions with students, this research project provides educators with a means to understand students’ aesthetic, emotional and intellectual responses to Quebec literature in an effort to develop a deeper interest in, and a first step towards retuning Quebec’s consciousness of its culture.

Research Questions

This study outlines an investigation of the following questions:

How can Quebec literature be taught using a reader-response approach involving aesthetigrams? In particular, how do secondary school girls, in a private and multicultural setting, respond to artworks such as a Quebec play? What patterns of responses, ranging from analytical to emotional, lead to increased interest in a particular contemporary play of Quebec literature?

I chose to address the following analytical questions:

What is the percentage of female students who chart entirely analytical, partly analytical, neutral, partly emotional, or entirely emotional responses for a scene of the play *Incendies* within the classroom I chose as a sample? In the case where a student presents only entirely analytical responses to every chosen scene, what types of pedagogical approaches might a teacher use to redirect this response towards a more holistic and therefore inclusive of an emotional component (and vice versa)? How can students, when exploring different responses to a play, develop a deeper interest in Quebec literature?

Definitions

Aesthetics: In the twentieth century, two branches of aesthetics were defined: analytic aesthetics, which is based on analytic philosophy and pragmatism; and pragmatist aesthetics, an American philosophy based on the integration of the arts into one's natural needs and activities, as exemplified in John Dewey's *Art as Exploration* (1934). The second wave of pragmatist aesthetics was rejuvenated by scholars like Richard Shusterman and Richard Rorty. Inspired by Dewey, Shusterman (1992) wrote *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, one of the most influential books in the field of contemporary pragmatist aesthetics. It outlines art and aesthetics as culturally and philosophically central elements of education. More recently, White (2009) has described

research into aesthetics as “the study of sensory or sensori-emotional values” (p. 1). This thesis explores that very possibility.

Aesthetic experience: For the purpose of this study, I define an aesthetic experience as a form of emotional, analytical, interpretative or self-related engagement with an artwork, such as a play.

Aesthetigram: The word is a conflation of the terms ‘aesthetics’ and ‘diagram’ and stand for a participant-generated, autobiographical visual map that records moment-by-moment, individual responses to aesthetic encounters one may have with artworks such as plays. The mapping procedure provides a researcher with concrete data with which to study students’ aesthetic responses, which otherwise remain evanescent (White & Tompkins, 2005; White, 2007, 2009, 2011).

Response-based teaching: This concept was first introduced by Louise Rosenblatt’s *Literature as Exploration* (1938), a work indubitably inspired by Dewey’s 1934 *Art as Experience*. As Robert Probst (1981) states, it builds on “the reader’s primary response to any literary work” (p. 44). The responses can be intellectual, emotional or visceral.

Arts-related research: Research oriented towards an analysis of the impacts of an art form. In this case study, the focus is on responses to drama.

Gestalt: White (2009) summarizes this concept as “the whole greater than its parts” (p. 47). In other words, it is a spontaneous synthesis of impressions of an artwork.

Limitations

This study was time-restricted, as I conducted it over four periods of 75 minutes, distributed on two Fridays. I did not use a control group, and this choice led to another limitation,

that of the consequences on internal validity. In other words, it is uncertain that the changes (an increased or decreased interest in Francophone Quebec literature) are due to students' aesthetigram experiences or to other factors. However, the pre-test and post-test are valuable tools that provide a before-and-after overview of aesthetigrams' influence on students. Furthermore, the sample size was quite large (71), thereby strengthening the external validity of this study. I explain this in further detail in the "validity of aesthetigrams" section. For a concrete explanation and definition of an aesthetigram, please refer to the "definitions" section above.

Ethical Considerations

Because the line is often blurred between participation in research activities and daily classroom activities (Maguire, 2005), there is high importance accorded to my ethics and assent forms in my inquiry. In accordance with the McGill Research Ethics Board's (REB) ethical policies and regulations, I developed a consent form for parents and an assent letter for the students who participated in my study. I had the forms approved by my supervisor, Dr. Boyd White, and submitted them to the McGill REB Coordinator. Once approved, I presented them to Sr. Dalpé, the high school principal, and to the teachers, Mrs. Kamel and Mrs. Bastard, who are in charge of the French classes where I conducted my study. A relevant ethical approach in my study was to always consult my participants at any stage of the research, for they are entitled to be in full possession of the information they divulge. I understood that since I was going to be working with multicultural adolescents, I would also have to be careful with language issues. As Maguire outlines (2005), "absent is the ethics of language use among researchers themselves in negotiating even the basics in research activities such as access to children, rapport and informed consent" (p. 317). To provide an effective solution to this urgent matter, I decided to make the most of my B.A. in Translation to provide students and parents with both French and English

versions of the consent and assent forms. Unfortunately, only the French versions of these forms were considered by the school, as it was part of the school's language policy to communicate with parents and students exclusively in French. I was respectful of that by-law. Throughout my research, I was nonetheless open to answering questions in both languages. I also consider publishing my research in both languages, a prospect which I have expressed to my participants and their parents in the consent forms. I hope this openness to languages contributed to respecting my participants' voices and their language of choice, as well as empowering them in a research context conducted by a bilingual researcher. This capability ties in with my constructivist stance because we are shaped by our lived experiences, and these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and in the data generated by our subjects (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There may be any number of reasons why one should study art. My reason for teaching aesthetics and art criticism is that they address directly questions of human values – Boyd White (2007, p. 5)

Two main elements are involved when elaborating a literature review on the ways literature is approached in aesthetic and literature education. One has to do with articles that address the traditional ways with which literature has historically been taught in North America, as well as the educational reforms that have unfolded. The other evokes studies that advocate aesthetic experience as a mandatory criterion for learning the arts, including literature. The bridge between these two orientations represents the passage from the traditional methods to a more contemporary approach to teaching literature that incorporates students' aesthetics

responses. In other words, integrating aesthetic education into a standard curriculum can be an effective strategy for invigorating students' interest in literature and helping them connect meaningfully with literary texts, such as plays.

Dismantling Traditional Approaches to Literature

Bolhuis and Voeten (2001) define traditional teaching as exclusively focused on “knowledge transmission” (p. 840). This practice entails a teacher spending most of the time explaining the subject matter. Students usually listen and are not encouraged to communicate their ideas in response to what is being taught. When it comes to literature, traditional approaches are text-centered, rather than focused on the students' interpretations of the text. The learner's passivity in traditional teaching remains a problem for learning, since learning requires active participation (De Jong & Van Hout-Wolters, 1994; Simons, 1997).

Inspired by John Dewey, Louise Rosenblatt (1938) is the pioneer of response-based teaching of literature. She tackles the important issue of the gap between the content to be taught and the students' perceptions of that same content. Perceptions may differ drastically: “There is an unabridged gulf between anything that the student might feel about the book, and what the teacher, from the point of view of accepted critical attitudes and his adult sense of life, thinks the pupil should notice” (p. 61). Rosenblatt thinks that this lacuna results in a lack of interest, which is most likely due to the categorization of literature as an entity detached from the self, and therefore irrelevant. “This often leads the student to consider literature something academic, remote from his own present concerns and needs” (p. 61-62). To address this *problématique*, the

following literature serves as an understanding of the reasons why aesthetic approaches to literature are relevant to today's high school curricula.

Although dated, Applebee's (1974) *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* is relevant to this literature review because it addresses contemporary issues about traditional ways of teaching literature. In a chapter titled "The Problems Remaining," the author was avant-garde in admitting that "teachers of literature have never successfully resisted the pressure to formulate their subject as a body of knowledge to be imparted" (p. 245). I find teachers still struggle with ways to communicate the knowledge, namely through alternative practices like informal settings, class discussions, or workshops that stress aesthetic experiences. Applebee points out that the educational goals that teachers pursue are, in essence, a stronghold of humanism rather than a storehouse for a body of knowledge:

the uneasiness which teachers have felt with attempts to define their subject matter as a body of knowledge results from an awareness that the goals which they seek to accomplish [...] are not defined by such knowledge, but rather are questions of values and perspective—goals summed up as those of a 'humanistic' education. (p. 246)

In his text, Applebee explains several foci on pedagogical emphasis in relation to the eras during which they were taught. These fields of knowledge were implemented in the high school curricula through traditional teaching ways. I have charted these foci in the following table:

Era/Decade	Subject
18th Century	Grammar and rhetoric
19th Century	Philology
1930's	Sociology
1940's	Semantics

1960's	New Criticism
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Table 1: Evolution of Literature Education Emphasis

The 1960's New Criticism prescribed "close reading", which was designed to identify an empirically supportable interpretation and was oblivious to the contributions of aesthetic experiences, which stress one's personal response to an artwork. The traditional methods of teaching English were detrimental to one's learning, as Bolhuis and Voeten (2001) argue. Likewise, New Criticism's textual approach was not student-centered. Applebee's work invites us to consider another possibility: the importance of teacher-student relationships in enhancing one's learning of English. Indeed, the emphasis should be put not on the subject matter, or "body of knowledge," but rather on the levels of communication with, and between, students, as well as on their responses to artworks: "There must be some level of response to literature that intervenes between that of the novice and that of the scholar, and it is with those intervening levels that a secondary school teacher should be concerned" (p. 246-247).

Like Louise Rosenblatt, Applebee believes that teachers should give students a "full experience of literature," meaning a context in which they would be at ease with responding to works of art. I expand on Rosenblatt's theory in the following section by presenting a short review of her influential *Literature as Experience*, originally published before World War II, in 1938.

Contemporary Approaches Inspired by Louise Rosenblatt

A work that makes a substantial contribution to my research is Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1938). In short, her text outlines a literary theory that focuses on one's

response to a work of literature and addresses implications for changing curricula and teaching literary works.

Rosenblatt had several goals when she wrote her book. One of these was to first counterattack both the limited literary theories of the 19th Century, which advocated attention to literary history and the author's life, and New Criticism, which is, as discussed earlier, a text-based literary theory that was becoming popular in the 1960s. The second goal was to emphasize the epistemological perspective she presented, namely the importance of the reader's experience with the text. She explained: "There is no such thing as a generic literary work [...] there are only innumerable separate responses to individual works of art" (p. 33). The third goal was to enhance educational and instructional opportunities: "Once the unobstructed impact between reader and text has been made possible, extraordinary opportunities for a real educational process are open to the teacher" (p. 74).

Last, Rosenblatt provides educators with concrete strategies for their approach to literature, so that aesthetic experiences would be highlighted when teaching and reading literature. She elaborates: "Instead of trying to superimpose routine patterns, the teacher will help the student develop these understandings in the context of his own emotions and his own curiosity about life and literature" (p. 66). Through such practice, discussions regarding aesthetic responses in the classroom are more likely to create a certain level of respect amongst students, and moderate the teacher-oriented methods of communicating literature.

As stated, Rosenblatt lobbies for aesthetic experiences, which she sees as having a double feature, because they "can be enjoyed in [themselves] – and at the same time have a social origin and a social effect" (p. 272). Nevertheless, Rosenblatt cautions that aesthetic responses are not

easily attainable given as they require an approach that is more complex than what method educators are accustomed to exercising. The main elements emerging from her work are related to the transition of mature responses to progressively more complex writings, the lively expression of opinion, and the excitement of freedom from conventional methods.

Rosenblatt's progressive approach is essential to aesthetic experiences with literature, especially in classroom contexts. According to Connell (2000), "when teachers apply Rosenblatt's theory to the study of literature, literature becomes a mode of personal life experience that involves a potentially powerful combination of intellect and emotions" (p. 27). As Applebee (1976) points out, Rosenblatt concludes that none of the then popular ways of using literature in the classroom, "whether to increase social awareness, broaden the range of information, or develop sensitivity to literary form" (p. 70), were likely to lead to an intimate personal response. Personal experiences are necessary to authentic aesthetic engagements, which, according to aesthetic education theorists (Dewey, 1934; Rosenblatt, 1938; Probst, 1981, 2004; Johnson, 2007; White 2007, 2009), fully stimulate students in their learning.

Another work of Rosenblatt's that contributes to my research is her 1978 success *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, in which she explains the importance of readers' experiences with texts, notably because they were not considered in the past: "Although the reader is sometimes glimpsed [reference to Aristotle's notion of catharsis within the audience and to the reader's involvement in *art qua art* in the Victorian era], the spotlight does not focus on him as an active role" (p. 3). Rosenblatt's concern partly justifies my own involvement in this study: the reader-response theory has its place in our educational system and it should be integrated as fully as possible. Even if Rosenblatt suggests that literary history, proclaimed and defended by New Critics and currently implemented in our classrooms, is to be left behind, she notes its

importance as it “aids the reader to limit himself” (p. 125). That is, there should be an established acknowledgement of the potential benefits of conventional methods involving literary history, but we should foster a wider emphasis on reader-response theory, the current pedagogy that I suggest in this research. A reason for this is that, as Rosenblatt (1978) suggests, “Each reader brings to the transaction not only a specific past life and literary history, but also a very active present, with all its preoccupations, anxieties, questions, and aspirations” (p. 144). In other words, after having reflected on their own values, readers are specifically prone to in-class discussions, considering their involvement in a transaction with the text. My study illustrates this process as well. Ultimately, I agree with Rosenblatt’s standpoint that New Criticism hindered aesthetic lived-through experiences, especially when she argues: “No more than any reader, however, can the critic read the text for us. Nor should we turn to him as an authority decreeing what we should live through in the reading” (p. 147). As teachers, we should always remember that any student, or reader for that matter, deserves to be heard: “Readers may bring to the text experiences, awarenesses, and needs that have been ignored in traditional criticism” (p. 142). These encounters are the starting point of meaning-making in literature education, as I demonstrate in this thesis.

Accounting for Concrete Aesthetic Experiences when Approaching Literature

This last section aspires to clarify concrete applications of aesthetic experiences in the classroom. I first introduce a recent article by Professors Janine Certo and Wayne Brinda (2011). Then, I introduce an *aperçu* of White’s (2007) *Aesthetic Encounters: Contributions to Generalist Teacher Education*. The latter provided me with methodological themes, structural inspiration, and evidence of success with the implementation of aesthetic experience within an educational context. I finish by explaining Patrick Dias’ inquiries in literature education as well as Mark

Pike's (2003) *From Personal to Social Transaction: A Model of Aesthetic Reading in the Classroom*. This last article is relevant to my study as it defines the types of readers that emerge when it comes to aesthetic encounters with literary works. This is relevant because it serves as a basis to understand the diversity of participants, as well as the individuality of their responses, in this study.

Certo & Brinda's (2011) article *Bringing Literature to Life for Urban Adolescents: Artistic, Dramatic Instruction and Live Theatre* presents students' engagement with artistic instruction, as well as their responses to theatrical adaptations of literature. The authors claimed that drama, amongst all types of art, scientifically serves as a means to stimulate pupils: "Research shows how theatre environments stimulate active, immediate, emotional, and intellectual responses to literature" (p. 24). Drama represents a source of vivid connection with life, which, in return, is a source of motivation:

Theatre provides experiences for students to tap their prior knowledge, connect the story to their lives and interests, and respond to textual, visual, and multisensory stimuli continually presented around them. By witnessing events as if they were happening for the first time, reluctant readers become engaged in the behaviour, thoughts, and words of the characters, the conflicts, and the resolutions. (p. 25)

Cathartic experiences thus reflect the need for implementing drama in classrooms, for it compels students to develop interest in reading. The authors have also built on Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, which stipulates that reading can be understood according to two perspectives: "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading. The former focuses on getting information from the content, and the latter "involves concentrating upon the images, associations, and feelings the text invokes and how the writer crafts words to bring those reactions about" (p. 24). Certo and Brinda concluded that their study was helpful in triggering an interest in unfamiliar vocabulary, which subsequently became comprehensible and meaningful.

In acknowledgement of Rosenblatt's theory of "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading, they advocated theatre as the ultimate solution: "The important balance between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reading became reinforced by using theatre" (p. 33).

Despite Rosenblatt's advocacy for reading as an aesthetic practice, the authors remarked that teachers think they have limited or no time to go beyond understanding texts to explore a story's aesthetics. Nor have teachers the time or patience to allow students to respond to those moments. A solution to tackle this issue might be to first educate the teachers on educational rewards to be gained from attention to aesthetic engagement.

For example, in White's (2007) *Aesthetic Encounters: Contributions to Generalist Teacher Education* he presented a discussion on the meaning-making that emerges from aesthetic encounters with three pre-service teachers, in the context of an undergraduate class that covers aesthetics and art criticism. With the use of aesthetigrams to track responses to an artwork, White investigated the degree to which students were able to interact with an artwork. The implications of the study suggest how educators and students can benefit from aesthetic encounters, and what methods pre-service teachers might ultimately apply in their own classrooms. The results from his study are related to my own, as I also give recommendations to teachers in terms of the ways to address alternative aesthetic responses in their classrooms.

The theoretical framework in which this research was established stems from the notion of aesthetic education as an exposure to values awareness. As White (2007) argued: "aesthetic encounters bring to initial awareness the values—personal, cultural and societal—prompted by the encounter" (p. 5). In other words, experiencing an artwork such as a movie or a play has to

do with expressing, through a response, our values as well as the artist's, and those represented in the artwork.

Amongst other relevant theories like Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) dimensions of aesthetic responses, White built on Jones's (1979) emphasis on aesthetic balance. Jones explained that balance is acquired between two main dimensions; the cognitive and the affective, and between the intrinsic and the extrinsic. White's aesthetigrams track specific experiential moments, whether aesthetically balanced or not. Jones's model provides an ideal towards which students can aspire. Their aesthetigrams indicate where they are in terms of that ideal and suggest possible directions for future encounters.

My research ties in with several concepts described by White in his 2007 article. These topics include: explaining and constructing aesthetigrams, charting the moments in several categories, implementing this process in a research setting, and discussing the educational implications of this implementation. In brief, White's article provided a model for my own research, which focuses on how female high school students respond to current popular drama in a multicultural setting.

There are two other articles by White that inform my inquiry: *Private Perceptions, Public Reflections: Aesthetic Encounters as Vehicles for Shared Meaning-Making* (2011); *Doing Aesthetics to Facilitate Meaning-Making* (2005). The former study addressed students' self-confidence in their capacities to interact with artworks and to reflect on those interactions. White provided an example of a tracked encounter with an artwork, followed by examples of the reflective writings of participants' responses. He concluded with implications for wider practice, which informed my research on the possible ways to analyze aesthetic experiences.

The latter article described the efficiency of a teaching and learning strategy used with university students to promote active participation in and reflection on aesthetic encounters. It involved the use of aesthetigrams and informed my research on the various approaches to this pedagogical strategy with my participants.

Drafting this literature review on the effects and outcomes of aesthetic education to literature enabled me to better seize the implications of aesthetic responses in this research thesis. Aesthetic experiences should be encouraged, as Rosenblatt explained 73 years ago. Yet, to this day, educators are still showing students literature disconnected from their lives, without providing them with the tools to respond personally and affectively to the work. Instead, students are often given a questionnaire based on the facts of the reading.

Students' lack of motivation stimulated my own interest in aesthetic education and its implications for familiarity with Quebec plays. As Certo and Brinda (2011) stated: "Artistic activities along with continual exposure to theatre [serve] as pathways to reading enjoyment, engagement, and comprehension" (p. 33). This finding supports my research purpose, which is to ultimately raise interest in Quebec literature through an initial introduction to *Incendies*. I also think that this interest can ultimately ameliorate students' literacy skills, which ties in with Certo and Brinda's (2011) epigraph:

The abilities to read, to write, and to compute are of critical importance. Students who cannot read, write, or compute are in deep trouble. But important though these skills are, they do not encompass all of what people know or the ways in which they know. – Elliot Eisner, (In Certo and Brinda, p. 23)

Patrick Dias' works also inform the purpose of this thesis. Indeed, in *Researching Response to Poetry – Part I: A case for responding-aloud protocols*, Dias (1985) notes that approaches to the study of reader-response "[have] yet to make a noticeable impact on the

classroom teaching of literature” (p. 104). The use of aesthetigrams in classroom settings certainly contributes to reader-response theories, as students are required to actively take part in their learning of Francophone Quebec literature.

Dias’ (1985; 1986) impressive research work in literature education lead to the development of Reading-Aloud-Protocols (RAPs), which allow readers to respond verbally and immediately to a literary artwork. However, this protocol does not take into consideration students’ written responses to artworks, which create permanent, concrete data that can help students, educators, and researchers to expand on the knowledge that is created. I argue that written responses, tracked in aesthetigrams and organized into categories, are efficient tools for learning in classroom contexts because they allow for tangible results that can be explored by others in class discussions.

In an article titled *From Personal to Social Transaction: A Model of Aesthetic Reading in the Classroom*, Mark Pike (2003) explained that adolescents’ aesthetic experiences with regard to reading literature depend on their own perspectives. He called into question Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading because it does not address readers’ individuality (Pike, 2003). This is why, according to Pike (2003), “the value of identifying a particular reader’s individual style or theme is that it allows the interpretation of reading to be informed by the way a particular reader reads” (p. 64-65). The article ties in well with my research, as participants do not necessarily share the same values. Their life experiences vary. The individuality and uniqueness of their aesthetic responses cannot be generalized. Accordingly, he classified readers into six categories: associative, investigative, speculative, affective, cognitive, and passive. An associative reader associates the literary work to his own life, “seeing his task as the connecting of personally significant past experience with that depicted in the [literary work]” (p. 66). The

affective reader depends rather on instant emotional impact (Pike, 2003). Pike (2003) describes the investigative reader as a detective, trying to solve problems by “generating tentative hypotheses which are then discarded or given greater credence as more information comes into light” (*ibid*). In contrast, speculative readers react like philosophers, i.e. they are able to “cope with unresolved questions” (*ibid*). Cognitive readers appreciate when they are asked to decode the meaning of literary works (Pike, 2003). Finally, passive readers find the process of reading literary works frustrating and do not engage with it. In general, that reader has negative opinions toward the literary work (Pike, 2003).

My study exemplifies Pike’s categorization of readers, as depicted in the selected participants’ aesthetigrams. The results can be seen in the qualitative results section of the thesis. Again, each aesthetigrams testifies the student’s individual aesthetic response to scene 37 of *Incendies*. The section should be read according Pike’s categorization of readers.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

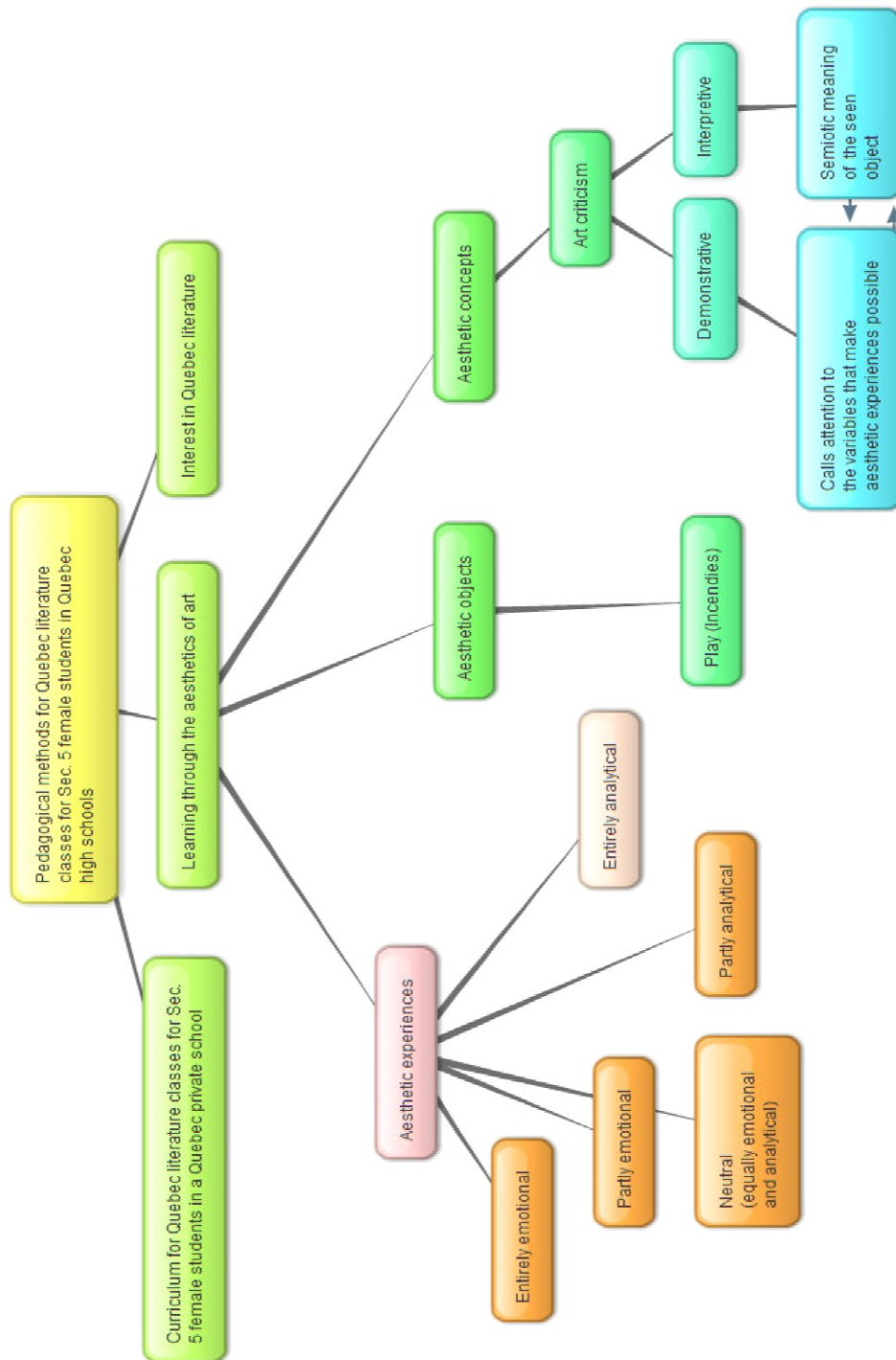
A diversified body of literature suggests a strong interest in aesthetic responses within educational settings (Duncum, 2001; Carroll, 2000, 2002, 2006; White, 2000, 2007, 2009, 2011). Researchers emphasize that aesthetics and engagement with artworks remain a focus in art education. These studies are relevant to my inquiry study—an analysis of aesthetic engagement with one example of French Quebec literature, and the implications of that engagement for an increased interest in Francophone Quebec literature. A goal beyond the scope of the current study is to increase prose literacy skills among Francophone Quebec youth.

There are several approaches to the study of aesthetics: 1) aesthetic concepts, 2) aesthetic experience, and 3) aesthetic objects. My research focuses on the second focus, namely the aesthetic experiences within classrooms. More specifically, my study takes place within a multicultural classroom of private high school female students aged 16-17 in the demographical context of Pierrefonds, in Montreal. In this research, my aim is to chart responses to drama, which will vary within the following categories: emotions, stylistic analysis, interpretation, and personal meaning. The goal is to make students realize the importance of their responses in their learning processes within their French class. From there, teachers can explore possibilities to guide them into exploring further responses so as to increase their aesthetic engagement.

Carroll (2000, 2002, 2006) has extensively explored the field of aesthetics and arts education, as well as literature education. His view, which stems from the fact that not all experiences are considered to be aesthetic, helped me in establishing the difference between aesthetic and analytical responses. His article titled *Aesthetics and the Educative Powers of Art* (2006) emphasizes the importance of art and aesthetics in education. In summary, Carroll defended the arguments in favour of art and aesthetics education and refuted the arguments that stipulate that art has only one purpose, i.e. *art qua art*. In another article written in 2002 titled *The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge*, Carroll refuted the epistemic arguments against the possibility of art and literature serving as vehicles of moral education and knowledge. He did not, however, dismantle the aesthetic arguments in this article, as he had already done so in *Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions in Research* (2000). He built his case by focusing on the manners in which literature and art can impart knowledge of virtues and vices to prove that some literature can function as a source of moral knowledge. This theory informs my research by increasing the arguments in favour of literature

as being morally instructive. By stating that the study of aesthetics is not confined to the theories of visual arts, Carroll enlarges the field of investigation. In my case, the alternative form of art is drama. I classified five types of responses as well as the main concepts of my study in a conceptual framework map (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Visual Representation of Conceptual Framework

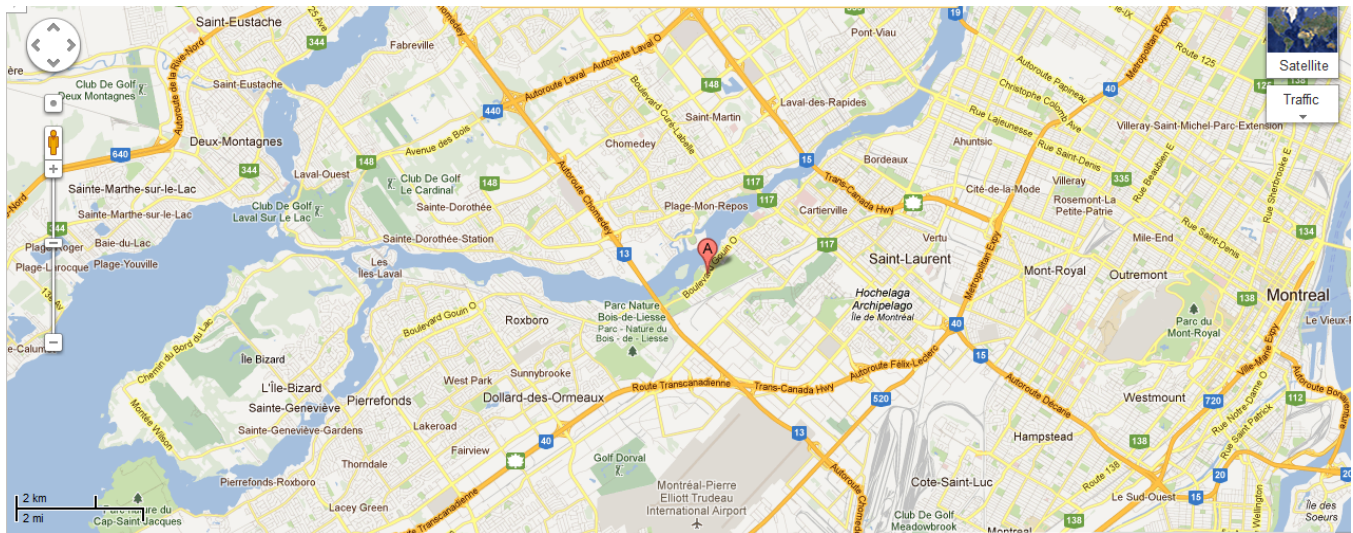


CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Setting

The study took place in a classroom of the private high school I attended when I was an adolescent, Collège Sainte-Marcelline, in Pierrefonds, Quebec (see Map 2). Collège Sainte-Marcelline is located in the middle of Bois-de-Liesse Provincial Park. It is bounded by Laval to the North, Cartierville to the East, Roxboro to the West and Saint-Laurent/Dorval to the South. Population-wise, the institution welcomes a great number of Greek students from Chomedey, Lebanese students from Saint-Laurent, Dorval, Dollard-des-Ormeaux and Laval, Italian students from the West Island and Cartierville, and a few French Canadian students from other parts of Montreal and Laval.

Map 2: Location of Collège Sainte-Marcelline in Pierrefonds, QC, Canada



Source: Google Maps

Participants

A total of 71 female participants aged 16 to 17 years old were involved in my study. They were grouped according to their respective classrooms, which are also indicative of their academic specializations in secondary five. Specifically, there were 24 social science students in 5A, 18 science students in 5B, and 29 science students in 5C. One teacher is responsible for teaching French to classes 5A and 5C, while another is in charge of teaching that same subject to 5B. When I conducted my research, I felt that the social sciences students were very verbal, enthusiastic, but less disciplined than the participants from the other two classes. The 5B class was the most disciplined and interested, for they asked relevant questions and were cooperative. The 5C class was disciplined, not so talkative, and seemed more or less interested. Although I acknowledge that my perception can be biased by my limited amount of time spent with them, I nonetheless built part of my research according to these guidelines.

The students come from varying cultural backgrounds of Greek, Italian, Egyptian, Iranian, Haitian, Lebanese, Franco- and Anglo-Canadian descent. This spectrum of individuals is instilled with middle-class Western values. The classes' heterogeneity made room for rich exchanges between them and me, and enabled distinctive responses in the pre-tests, post-tests, and aesthetigrams.

Design

I charted patterns of meaning-making responses that may provide an understanding of directions a teacher might take to suggest additional responses. These responses also guide the participants in order for them to discover additional responses that did not initially emerge.

I conducted a qualitative case study because my research applies to a specific multicultural classroom in which I wanted to raise interest in Quebec literature. Since I used a

pre-test and a post-test to gather the participants' own evaluation of their interest in literature and reading habits, I built charts to illustrate my data. Thus, this project also has a quantitative component. I collected data from 71 participants and the results are indicative of trends that I have to take into account for the purpose of further research.

It would be difficult to generalize my research because I am looking at aesthetic responses, which are specific to each participant's values and perceptive capabilities (White, 2007). Therefore, my case study is partly of an illustrative nature, which means, according to Anderson & Arseneault (1998), that it is "descriptive in character and intended to add realism and in-depth examples to other information about a program or policy" (p. 155). The "program or policy" is the use of aesthetigrams, and the examples are provided with the analysis of the aesthetic experiences through the charting of responses in the aesthetigrams. Students' written responses within the aesthetigrams were extremely helpful in my research and, as Richardson (2000) has noted, writing is not merely the transcribing of some reality. Rather, writing—of all the texts, notes, presentations, and possibilities—is also a process of discovery—discovery of the subject and of the self. However, the trends noted in the post-test can be generalizable, as a significant number of participants were involved and as the multicultural setting is not exclusive to Collège Sainte-Marcelline in Montreal.

I felt confident asking my participants qualitatively-oriented questions as they provided me with in-depth data and allowed them to express their own voices. I understood the importance of respecting students' voices as they had strong opinions, enriched my research, and were respectful of my inquiry. The best way for me to be professionally and epistemologically responsible in this research is to respect students' voices and allow them to express themselves freely. As Maguire (2005) puts it: "[participants] can be competent and valuable 'informants';

they have the capacity to express in various ways what is important to them and [...] have different views than adults who have power over them” (p. 313).

Allowing space for class discussions during the pre-experiment and the experiment significantly enriched my research and my participants’ experiences of it. I realized that discussions would benefit my research, namely because they “reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011). Though I acknowledge the relevance of students’ voices, I did not exclude aesthetigram-making from my inquiry, as it is the other variable that kept track of students’ individual expressions. The combination of these methods provided me with a more complete research design. As Maguire (1999) points out, her combination of the use of participants’ texts and classroom discussions allows to

not only notice what children are doing but to listen to their voices as they explain, from their perspectives, how they find their own expressions of meaning and inquiry in different contexts [...] As I revisit children’s texts, I sense a rich mixture of personal values, lifestyles that resonate and that sometimes emerges in the children’s textual representations and voices in subtle and complex ways. (p. 142)

I felt strongly about giving participants the chance to express their voices verbally through class discussions, and on paper through aesthetigrams, for this amalgam of methods allowed me to generate several types of meaning-making structures.

Validity of Aesthetigrams

Aesthetigrams are efficient and relevant to my case study as they aim to locate and categorize individuals’ responses with each encounter. Nevertheless, the choice of using aesthetigrams in my study differs from its justification as a valid tool. Taking empirical validation and concurrent validity into account (Sarantakos, 2005), the results shown by the use of aesthetigrams have already proven to be valid in other studies (White, 2005, 2007, 2011). For

instance, White (2005, 2007, 2011) has stated on various occasions that aesthetigrams are valid tools: a) in 2007, “the aesthetigram provides issues for further reflection, as a self-learning tool for the student and as a guide for the teacher” (p. 20), b) in 2011, “[with aesthetigrams], it is possible to analyze aesthetic experience. The routines that the participants followed to arrive at their particular meanings show that the protocol works, even in an informal setting; there is a self-teaching element to the process insofar as the aesthetigrams encourage reflection and analysis” (p. 22-23), and c) in 2005, “we have found that the effort to construct an aesthetigram helps highlight the contributing factors to the encounter” (p. 20). These arguments tie in with the validity of aesthetigrams, especially since validity is assumed if the findings are supported by already existing empirical evidence (Sarantakos, 2005).

My study’s level of external validity is reasonable; however I cannot anticipate that my findings can be generalized to a larger public. As shown in White and Tompkins’ article (2005), aesthetic responses are always unpredictable: “another student would undoubtedly proceed in a somewhat different fashion” (p. 20). Nevertheless, it can be said that the conversations emerging from an activity involving aesthetigrams may be somewhat generalized, as the resulting commentaries provide an invitation to dialogue across age levels and educational settings (White, 2011). Thus, aesthetic experiences cannot be generalized, but the process itself may be.

Reliability

Anderson and Arsenault (1998) addressed reliability by specifying the links between threats and methods. For instance, they stated that, for questionnaires, straightforward multiple-choice questions are to be answered in a consistent way. In my case study, the point is to collect qualitative data through the aesthetigrams, namely students’ reactions, in order to track their stance towards a Quebec play. A multiple-choice alternative, although limiting freedom of

speech, allowed space for more generalizable data. While opting for multiple-choice questions in the pre-test and post-test, I added reflective questions as well. I also reserved time for an in-class discussion on the activity, which enabled students to express their views on the artwork and the activity in general.

Data Collection

The data were collected informally, through the pre-experiment, and more formally, through the experiment involving the aesthetigrams. I began by conducting a pre-experiment, namely a pilot activity, to familiarize the participants with the concept of aesthetigrams. The participants' observations were collected in response to a painting (Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*) in their respective classrooms. I was a participant observer, as I hosted the experiments. The teachers asked me if they could stay in class during the experiments, which I accepted. The data collection process took place over a two-week period. Observations took place once per week for a 105 minute period during the first week, and a 50 minute period during the second week. The total observation time was two hours and 40 minutes. The in-class discussions for the pre-experiment were not recorded, but I took written notes of them during class and over the few hours following the encounters. The class discussions following the aesthetigram activity were recorded on my computer, with the participants' and teachers' consents.

My procedure for data collection relied primarily on the students' construction of their aesthetigrams. The point of constructing an aesthetigram in relation to the *Letter to the Son* scene from *Incendies* is to ultimately raise interest in Quebec literature. If students enjoyed making the aesthetigram, this enjoyment may lead to increased interest in the literature they were engaging with. To evaluate students' interest in Francophone Quebec literature, I distributed a pre-test and a post-test in which I asked questions regarding students' reading habits pertaining to

Francophone Quebec literature as well as other literatures, and general interest in reading at home and at school. The following table describes how the study was conducted. The process was the same for all three classes.

Table 2: Timetable

	October 5, 2012 (105 minutes)	October 12, 2012 (50 minutes)
Explanation of aesthetigrams	X	
Manet's <i>Bar at the Folies-Bergère</i>	X	
Discussion of students' responses	X	
Pre-test	X	
Aesthetigram construction	X	
Discussion on the activity		X
Post-test		X
Final discussion		X

Data Analysis

I processed all the aesthetigrams created by students during the French classes. This entails one map per student in each of the three different classes, composed of 24, 18, and 29 students, for a total of 71 aesthetigrams. The aesthetigrams were already “categorized”, since students had to place their responses in the categories I devised (emotions, style analysis, interpretation, and personal meaning), strategies that Maxwell (2005) has referred to as categorizing strategies, which aim to “rearrange data into categories that facilitate comparison between things” (p. 96). White (2005, 2007) has also suggested that the listing of organizational categories function as clusters for charting the data for further analysis. .

I wrote down my observations, which first consisted in charting the written responses into a table to track patterns of meaning-making. I then elaborated suggestions in terms of possible alternatives, such as adopting a more affective or intrinsic perspective towards the play's scene. Exploring other reactions helped students enter into a more intense learning process. Finally, the in-class discussion helped me dialogue with the participants' ideas, suggest alternative responses, and ask whether the activity was generally optimal for students' learning. Was the study motivating and compelling? Did they have suggestions for alternatives? The idea was to see if the mapping exercise, discussions, tests, and reading/enacting of the scene prompted increased interest in Quebec literature. I read the 71 completed pre-tests and post-tests and verified whether the activity was generally optimal for the students' learning and whether the responses reflected an accrued interest for Francophone Quebec literature. These tests provided me with supplemental quantitative and qualitative details that would not have otherwise been disclosed as readily by students.

CHAPTER FIVE: QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Pre-Experiment

At the beginning of the introductory session held on October 5th, 2012, I used a projector to show each class Édouard Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Fig. 2). This 1882 painting was first presented to me in my adolescent years in an art history class. The teacher had discussed elements of perspective, color, point of view, history, as well as the overall impressionist style. I considered this a relevant exercise to get a sense of the students' interest, participation, openness, and knowledge on this artwork. I hoped that introducing Manet, whose works are unpredictable, difficult, and always foster a quiet sense of unease, would spark an interest, or at least pique the curiosity of my participants.

When the image appeared on the screen, the reactions were unanimous, but for a different reason. They had already seen this painting in their previous school year as part of an art class. In other words, they were revisiting this artwork and were able to articulate their thoughts a year later, with new knowledge and life experiences influencing their ideas. This second viewing allowed for a deeper understanding and, more importantly, a potential evolution of the students' responses. I asked the students to write down six elements that were compelling or thought-provoking in Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. I took notes of the comments that were expressed in the three classes.

In 5A, social sciences students felt that the woman could be some bar prostitute, looking aimlessly at a *bourgeois* in front of her and not knowing what to tell him. Some said the flowers on her chest were indicative of something she wanted to hide, an element that could imply a

sexual nature. Others said that Manet's style was imprecise, yet it could convey the sadness that was suggested in her eyes. Overall, the remarks were based on interpretation and style.

In 5B, the science students' comments were more oriented toward the painting's composition, than the interpretation. For example, one student was astonished by the number of liquor bottles present in the first plane of the painting. I explained that these components put the viewer in the context of a Parisian bar and were a clear indication of a gala or party taking place in the picture. A student added that there was a man dressed in white in the background, while another noted a dancer's feet supported by a trapeze, in the top left corner of the picture. There were very few comments regarding interpretation (e.g. the meaning of the woman's stare) and emotions (whether or not they liked what they saw).

In contrast, science students from the 5C class spoke solely in terms of interpretation. "It seems like she is uncomfortable" or "she looks depressed" were recurring comments. A few students added that the mirror deformed her appearance, her behind looked "bigger", and she looked like her job made her unhappy. Perhaps, her working conditions were not the ones she expected them to be. Overall, the observations gravitated towards interpretation because the students perceived that the waitress seemed unhappy and they were trying to find a reason for this.

My conclusions for the pre-experiment are partial for two reasons. First, it was meant as an introductory session to present the aesthetigrams as participant-generated maps that would help the students track their own response patterns. Second, I had a limited amount of time—20 minutes—to discuss the painting with the students. I jotted down their comments in a little notebook I took with me. The reflections gathered were collected as part of a warm-up

aesthetigram construction activity, and are momentary ideas that served as a bridge to the main aesthetigram activity. These are guidelines in terms of their reaction to visual art. As part of my hypothesis, I wondered whether the same tendencies would be met in the participants' aesthetigrams for scene 37 of *Incendies*.

Figure 2 Édouard Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882)



The objective of this in-class discussion was to assist the participants in understanding and constructing aesthetigrams. This exercise was meant to help them grasp the analytical, emotional, interpretative, and structural components of Manet's painting. As I explained to each class, the elements the participants came up with could be charted in an aesthetigram because they allowed for a visual representation of one's perceptions, emotions, interpretations and how the artwork might echo one's life experiences (White, 2007, 2009, 2011). Upon reflection, one

can realize that the manner of seeing and interpreting hinges on one's values. The participants could then repeat a similar experiential process when encountering one of the scenes from *Incendies*.

The Experiment

Students had a month to read the play in its entirety, as established in collaboration with the French teachers. I had 105 minutes per session, for a total of 210 minutes over two sessions. The first occurred on Friday, October 5th, 2012, and the final session took place on Friday, October 12th, 2012. All 71 participants were required to complete a pre-test indicating their level of interest in Quebec literature as well as their reading habits at school and at home. Following the pre-experiment and its subsequent twenty-minute discussion on Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, I chose a student at random, and asked her to read the scene 37, *Letter to the Son*. After thanking her for reading, I asked the participants to close their eyes, and I reread the scene with a more peaceful, soothing voice. Revisiting the scene with two different voices allows for different perspectives thus increasing the participants' chances of being captivated or interested in the narrative. I chose this scene because it was particularly filled with emotions and style, and would allow for a wide span of responses. The scene is not lengthy, which makes it relatively easy for students to remain attentive to the reading. The scene is described below in French and in English. The text was read to the girls in French, as the study was conducted in that language due to the school's language policies.

Lettre au fils (Scène 37)

Simon donne son enveloppe à Nihad, qui l'ouvre.

NAWAL. Je t'ai cherché partout. Là-bas, ici, n'importe où. Je t'ai cherché sous la pluie, je t'ai cherché au soleil, au fond des bois, au creux des vallées, en haut des montagnes, dans les villes les plus sombres, dans les rues les plus sombres. Je t'ai cherché au sud, au nord, à l'est, à l'ouest. Je t'ai cherché en creusant sous la terre pour y enterrer mes amis morts. Je t'ai cherché en regardant le ciel. Je t'ai cherché au milieu des nuées d'oiseaux, car tu étais un oiseau. Et qu'y a-t-il de plus beau qu'un oiseau, qu'un oiseau plein d'une inflation solaire? Qu'y a-t-il de plus seul qu'un oiseau, qu'un oiseau seul au milieu des tempêtes portant aux confins du jour son étrange destin? À l'instant, tu étais l'horreur. À l'instant tu es devenu le bonheur. Horreur et bonheur. Le silence dans ma gorge. Tu doutes? Laisse-moi te dire. Tu t'es levé et tu as sorti ce petit nez de clown. Et ma mémoire a explosé. Ne tremble pas. Ne prends pas froid. Ce sont des mots anciens qui viennent du plus loin de mes souvenirs. Des mots que je t'ai si souvent murmurés. Dans ma cellule, je te racontais ton père. Je te racontais son visage, je te racontais ma promesse faite au jour de ta naissance. Quoi qu'il arrive je t'aimerai toujours, quoi qu'il arrive je t'aimerai toujours, sans savoir qu'au même instant, nous étions toi et moi dans notre défaite puisque je te haïssais de toute mon âme. Mais là où il y a de l'amour, il ne peut y avoir de haine. Et pour préserver l'amour, aveuglément j'ai choisi de me taire. Une louve défend toujours ses petits. Tu as devant toi Jeanne et Simon. Tous deux tes frère et sœur et puisque tu es né de l'amour, ils sont frère et sœur de l'amour. Écoute, cette lettre je l'écris avec la fraîcheur du soir. Elle t'apprendra que la femme qui chante était ta mère. Peut-être que toi aussi te tairas-tu. Alors sois patient. Je parle au fils, car je ne parle pas au bourreau. Sois patient. Au-delà du silence, il y a le bonheur d'être ensemble. Rien n'est plus beau que d'être ensemble. Car telles étaient les dernières paroles de ton père. Ta mère.

Nihad finit de lire la lettre. Il se lève.

Jeanne et Simon se lèvent et lui font face.

Jeanne déchire toutes les pages de son carnet de notes.

Letter to the Son (Scene 37)

Simon hands his envelope to Nihad, who opens it.

NAWAL. I looked for you everywhere. Here, there, everywhere. I searched for you in the rain. I searched for you in the sun. In the forest, in the valleys, on the mountaintops, in the darkest of cities, in the darkest of streets. I searched for you in the south, in the north, in the east, in the west. I searched for you while digging in the earth to bury my friends. I searched for you while looking at the sky. I searched for you amidst a flock of birds, for you were a bird. And what is more beautiful than a bird, than a bird alone amidst the storm clouds, winging its strange destiny to the end of day? For an instant, you were horror. For an instant, you have become happiness. Horror and happiness. The silence in my throat. Do you doubt? Let me tell you. You stood up and you took out that little clown nose. And my memory exploded. Don't be afraid. Don't catch cold. These are ancient words that come from my

deepest memories. Words I often whispered to you. In my cell, I told you about your father. I told you about his face, I told you about the promise I made the day of your birth: no matter what happens, I will always love you. No matter what happens, I will always love you. Without realizing that in that very instant, you and I were sharing our defeat. Because I hated you with all my being. But where there is love, there can be no hatred. And to preserve love, I blindly chose not to speak. A she-wolf always defends her young. You are facing Janine and Simon, your sister and your brother, and since you are a child of love, they are the brother and sister of love. Listen. I am writing this letter in the cool evening air. This letter will tell you that the woman who sings was your mother. Perhaps you too will stop talking. So be patient. I am speaking to the son, I am not speaking to the torturer. Be patient. Beyond silence, there is the happiness of being together. Nothing is more beautiful than being together. Those were your father's last words. Your mother.

Nihad finishes reading the letter. He stands.

Janine and Simon stand and face him.

Janine tears up every page in her notebook.

After reading the scene in French, I distributed two documents, one that would chart the participants' individual, moment-by-moment, aesthetic responses to the scene, and another where students had space to draw their aesthetigrams, which included the moment-by-moment elements previously written in the first document. The following sections, grouped by classes, describe each class's general thoughts on the activity. In particular, I selected one or two aesthetigrams from each class to describe participants' responses. These responses indicate directions a teacher could take to address the absence of responses in each category (emotions, stylistic analysis, interpretation, and personal meaning). All the names used in the following examples are fictional, as participants were solely identified with a randomly attributed number.

Four aesthetigrams are illustrated in the following results section. I provided students with a form (see below) and asked them to write down one to three elements (i, ii, iii) in one to four categories (category A: emotions, B: stylistic analysis, C: interpretation, and D: personal meaning). They then had to grade each element's

importance from 1 to 5. This grading scale is indicative of the circles' dimension in the aesthetigrams.

My response

Please rate, from 1 to 5, the importance of each element (1 = unimportant, and 5 = very important).

- A. **Emotions:** Name up to three (3) elements of the scene that did (or did not) touch you, explain your response (optional). Ex. This event was one of my favourites because ____.

Elem. #	Description	Imp. (1 to 5)
I		
Ii		
Iii		

- B. **Stylistic Analysis:** Name up to three (3) elements of stylistic analysis (figures of speech, metaphors, comparisons, rhymes, vocabulary) of the scene that are relevant in your eyes. You may justify your choice.

Elem. #	Description	Imp. (1 to 5)
I		
Ii		
Iii		

- C. **Interpretation:** Choose up to three (3) elements of the scene and interpret them. Ex. I think that this character reacted this way because ____.

Elem. #	Description	Imp. (1 to 5)
I		
Ii		
Iii		

- D. **Personal Meaning:** Name up to three (3) elements to which you may, or may not, link to your life experience, or that you identify with. Ex. This event reminds me of when ____.

Elem. #	Description	Imp. (1 to 5)
I		
Ii		
Iii		

Social Sciences Students (5A)

Sandra's Responses

Sandra wrote in her pre-test that she did not like Francophone Quebec literature because she thought it was “not inspiring enough”. She considered her interest in Francophone Quebec literature to be very weak. She added that she read more in English, but also in Italian. She felt she read considerably in her leisure time, be it novels, poetry, and news articles. She did not seem confident in her answer to the question ‘Name a Quebec playwright’, as she wrote Marcel Dubé, followed by a question mark. Overall, her pre-test reflects a satisfactory interest in reading, but a poor interest in reading Francophone Quebec literature.

Sandra's aesthetigram (Fig. 3) showed that her responses were equally oriented towards the categories of emotion, stylistic analysis and interpretation as she noted three elements in each section. She wrote no comments in the ‘personal meaning’ section. Possible reasons for this omission are that she either did not understand the category or that she experienced a distance between herself and the text. The latter can be justified given that, according to Beach et al. (2011), students' responses are “shaped by differences in their knowledge, beliefs, and purposes” (p. 42). This leaves space for in-class discussions on how to address personal meaning in a classroom where the majority of students (see also Miko's aesthetigram) felt “disconnected” from the play.

Figure 3: Sandra's Aesthetigram



Sandra responded positively in her post-test: “I really liked the idea of the aesthetigram, not only because it allowed me to appreciate the little details of the play, but because it allowed me to reflect on and compare my own values”³. Her comment is revealing as it proves the need for investigation into students’ values. When this process occurs, it gives them space to think and appreciate the artwork more. This can lead to an increased interest in literature, as seen in her and her peers’ post-tests. Indeed, before the activity, Sandra evaluated her interest in Francophone Quebec literature as being “very weak”. After the activity, she felt it was “moderate”. An accrued interest on two points can thus be observed. Sandra also noted: “The aesthetigram helps make things more concrete in

³ “J’ai beaucoup aimé l’idée de l’esthétigramme car ça m’a permis non seulement d’apprécier les petits détails dans (*sic*) l’œuvre, mais de réfléchir en comparant mes valeurs”.

my opinion. It's a small way of bridging ideas, understand elements we did not understand before, appreciate the things that we did not necessarily see when first reading the text"⁴. She felt that constructing an aesthetigram helped her appreciate, analyze, and reflect on the play's elements and recommended their use in other contexts, such as in French classes, for novels and poetry. Sandra's post-test reveals positive responses to almost every question. She feels more motivated to read at home, more inclined to discover other Francophone Quebec literary works, and more knowledgeable on Francophone Quebec literature in general. She also feels that her perception of Francophone Quebec literature has changed, mainly because it "made [her] discover a new analytical perspective that was unknown [to her] until then". The only negative response was that she did not feel more motivated to read in the context of her French class. Since Sandra provided no explanation, my hypothesis is that, perhaps, she does not like reading for school or in an academic context. In the words of Pike (2003), she is a passive reader. Nevertheless, her learning experience with the aesthetigram activity seems beneficial and leads to an increased interest in Francophone Quebec literature.

Miko's Responses

Miko's pre-test showed that she did not appreciate Francophone Quebec literature because she "was not interested". When asked why she considered her interest to be "very weak", her answer was: "I am not interested in reading in French"⁵. Although filled with orthographic and syntax errors, Miko's response was honest and consistent in her other

⁴ "L'esthétigramme aide à concrétiser les choses à mon avis. C'est une petite manière de faire les liens, comprendre les éléments qu'on ne comprenait pas, apprécier des choses que nous n'avons (*sic*) pas nécessairement remarqué (*sic*) à la première lecture".

⁵ "Je ne suis pas intéressée (*sic*) dans (*sic*) la lecture en Français (*sic*)".

pre-test responses. She answered that she did not read any books at home, nor she could name any Quebec playwrights, and that her leisure time was very limited. The type of literature she would read at home was American Internet gossip sites like *PerezHilton.com* and English quotes she would find on the internet. In contrast, when asked how many books she had to read at school, she answered “more than ten”. This pattern of contrasted responses was constant in her class. Students who, in all legitimacy, did not read at home or in their leisure time answered that the number of novels which were mandatory readings at school was high. The gap between the type of literature read at home (American websites, mangas, quotes) and at school (novels, poetry) was another constant element in all the responses of the seemingly unmotivated members in this class.

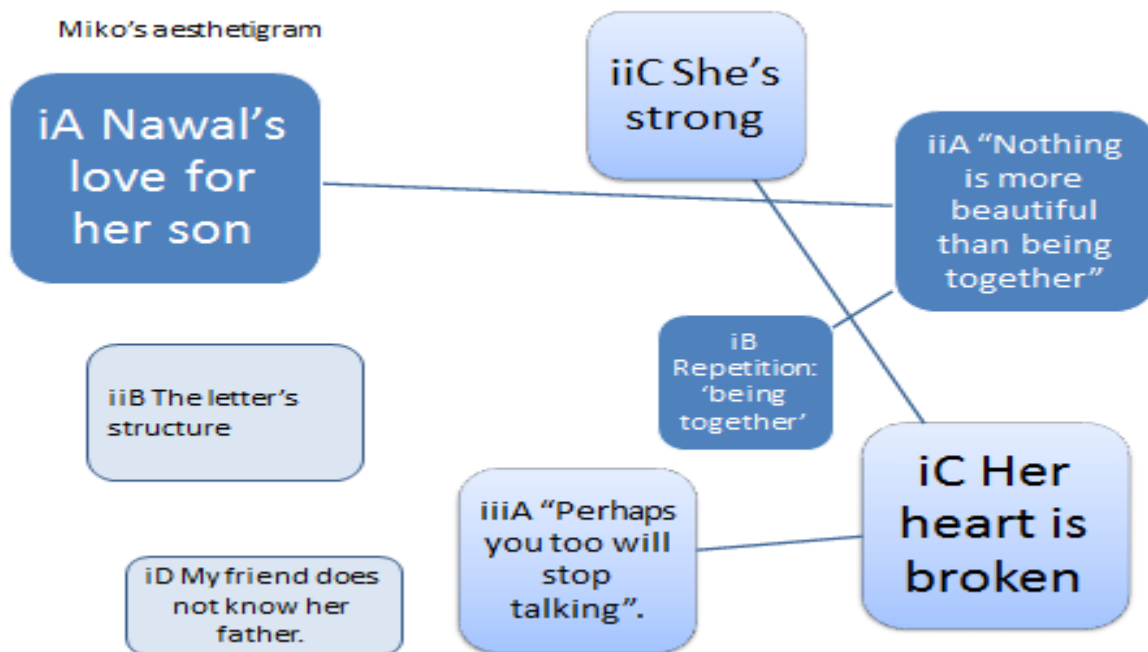


Figure 4: Miko's Aesthetigram

Despite her negative responses towards Francophone Quebec literature in the pre-test, Miko's aesthetigram (Fig. 4) was very detailed and thoughtfully articulated. For

example, she chose not link the letter's structure (iiB) to either emotional or interpretative elements of the scene, in comparison to other aesthetigrams I observed in this study. However, she did see a connection between a mother's love for her young and some stylistic elements, i.e. 'being together'. This shows that some stylistic elements were relevant enough to be connected to emotional elements, whereas the letter's general structure seemed too distant from other elements. An explanation for this might be that individual elements of style are easier to discern and be linked to that particular emotion for this participant. Miko's aesthetigram contained the maximum number of emotional elements (three), a fair number of stylistic and interpretative elements (two, respectively), and only one element related to personal meaning. To broaden her range of responses and introduce her to other elements of that category, an educator and other students might suggest that the "personal meaning" category might be viewed in a more liberal manner, i.e. 'what did the content, Jeanne, Nawal, or Simon's story make you think of?' Miko's response reflected the fact that *her friend* did not have a father, and that was the extent to which she could identify with the play. Her response is simplistic, yet beneficial, for it creates an opportunity for in-class discussion. According to Probst (2004), "the students' comments may seem simple—a few questions, a few remarks about [...] the feelings the [literary work] has aroused. But despite their brevity, they provide an excellent starting point for the discussion" (p. 62). Additionally, a researcher's analysis of an aesthetigram gives directions to educators who wish to address the lack of understanding in the weakest categories. In Miko's case, a discussion oriented towards the significance of the personal meaning category, as well as the exploration of her peers' responses in that matter, would seem advisable.

Her post-test indicated mixed results. For example, she noted that her perception of Francophone Quebec literature did not change, and that the aesthetigram exercise did not motivate her to read more at school or at home. She would not recommend using aesthetigrams in other contexts or classes. She did however acknowledge that the play and mapping exercise made her react in a new way and that she now knows more about Francophone Quebec literature than she did prior to the activity. Increased interest in Quebec literature can also be noted, as in the pre-test she answered it was ‘very weak’ while in the post-test it was ‘weak’. This measure may seem irrelevant, but it nevertheless consists in an increased interest, no matter the level.

I can suggest a few explanations for Miko’s results. First, the span of time over which the study was conducted was limited. It was to be expected that the data could not be composed solely of positive responses due to the time that is required to observe an significantly increased (or decreased) interest in, say, literature. For that reason, it would be foolish to expect a revolutionary change of perspective over a two-hour and forty-minute time span. Second, it is possible that the aesthetigram activity was not fully understood by all students, as I often read comments that the aesthetigrams did not help them in analyzing the play, but it did help them discover new perspectives. On another note, perhaps students’ expectations towards the activity were too high, meaning that they might have been expecting more direct answers that would allow for teacher-led analysis of the play, because that is the type of teaching they are used to. However, the aesthetigram activity is all about the contrary, i.e. it is student-led and is meant to promote diversity in *student* responses. As Probst (2004) stated “different readers may see different themes in a work or state the same theme differently” (p. 146). This is precisely

one of the objectives of aesthetigram construction and its subsequent in-class discussion. It is therefore possible that students who are not used to expressing their opinion in front of their classmates, or who are seeking their educator's approval for a given opinion, may react negatively to the use of aesthetigrams in the classroom.

I also question the positive receptiveness of the class to the project. From the comments I gathered in class, one student objected that she would have liked to talk more about the play itself, rather than being "assessed through pre-tests, post-tests, and aesthetigrams". Although I explained that the point of the study, on the contrary, was to arrive at an understanding of their values through their responses and to open discussion on the possible ways to interpret the play, her intervention somewhat set the tone on how the class would react to the activity. This unpredictable event resulted in an observed pattern in the students' pre-test, aesthetigrams, and post-test responses: they were often forced to read at school; they did not read at home; they did not care about Francophone Quebec literature; they were unlikely to show interest in my study. This is why I believe the study was not as successful in 5A as it was in 5B and 5C, the science classes. This is called resentful demoralization (Onghena, 2009), not only because of the aforementioned factors, but because 5A was the last group to do the experiment. In other words, their peers probably told them over the lunch break what they would be doing, and this potentially impacted the experiment negatively. The overall observation that I got from the 5A class was that they were discouraged, and angry, a typical characteristic of resentful demoralisation.

Science Students (5B)

Rachel's Responses

Rachel is a science student from 5B. In her pre-test, she wrote she was moderately interested in Quebec literature because, though it was part of her culture, she admitted some writing styles were boring, e.g. Germaine Guèvremont's *Le Survenant*. Though she noted that she had read six to ten Quebec literature books in school and four to five at home, she considered her leisure time reading very rare.

In her post-test, Rachel wrote positive responses. She acknowledged that her perception of Francophone Quebec literature had changed for four main reasons, she had: 1) explored various new emotions, 2) discovered an analytic perspective that was new to her, 3) discovered a new playwright and 4) explored a new play. She felt she was more motivated to read at home and at school, knew more about Francophone Quebec drama and was more motivated to discover other Quebec plays. Consistent with these responses, I observed an accrued interest for Quebec literature, as in her pre-test she evaluated it as "moderate" and in her post-test it was "high".

As for her aesthetigram (Fig. 5), the emotions and interpretation categories were predominant. The elements of her aesthetigram were well distributed. More precisely, she had three elements in each of these categories, as well as two in the stylistic analysis and two in the personal meaning sections. As a justification for her choice, she argued she was a “very emotional person” and that she liked “drawing connections between ideas”. In comparison to Sandra’s, Miko’s, and Chanel’s respective aesthetigrams (you will see the latter in the next section), she constructed one that was the most well-balanced of all, as elements were present in all categories in a fairly evenly distributed fashion.

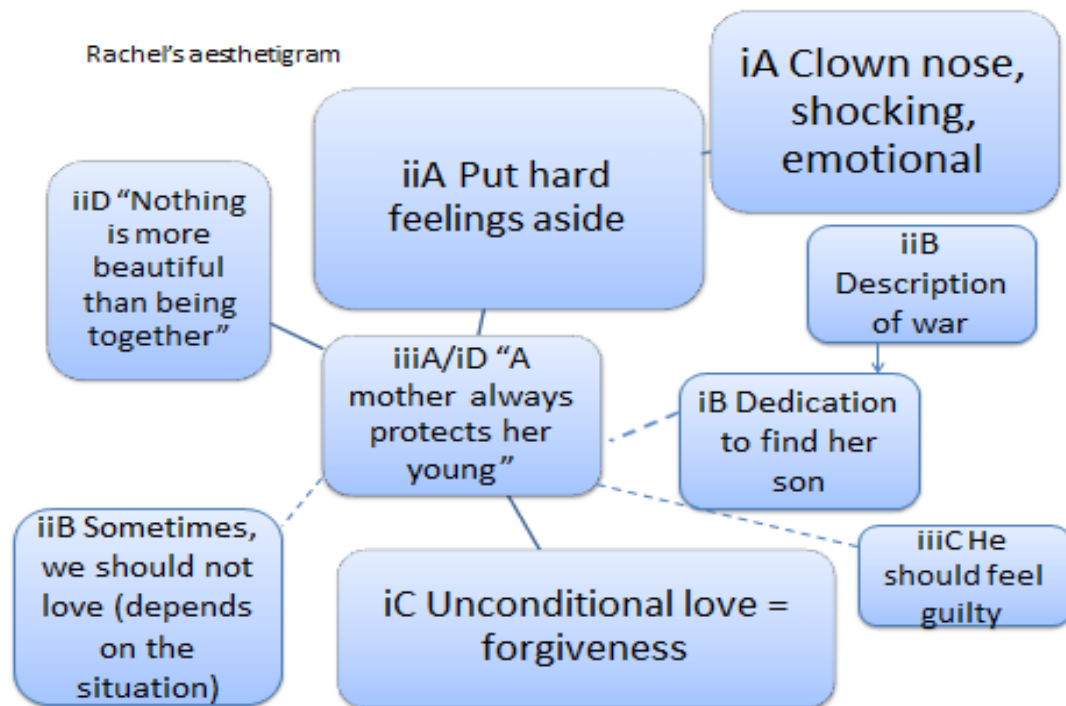


Figure 5: Rachel’s Aesthetigram

In a class discussion, Rachel could offer valuable and open-minded input regarding her own categories. This process is beneficial to the class for two reasons: it helps Rachel as it values her thoughts and empowers her in that regard, and it aids her

peers because her responses can help others complete their aesthetigrams and broaden their perspectives.

She added that the aesthetigram allowed her to focus on the aspects and key points that were important to her, as well as helping her appreciate, reflect (on), interpret, and analyze scene 37. She recommended that aesthetigrams be used in other contexts, such as in French classes, for literary works like novels, short stories, articles, and essays. Overall, Rachel's experience and her classmates' experience demonstrate that a number of science students' interest towards Francophone Quebec literature increased throughout the study. For quantitative observations of the increased (or decreased) interest of each class, please refer to the quantitative results section.

Science Students (5C)

Chanel's Responses

Chanel is a science student from 5C, the class with the largest number of students. She noted in her pre-test that the time she attributed to reading in her spare time was really sparse, and that she considered her interest for Francophone Quebec literature to be weak. She justified this self-evaluation by arguing:

I think there aren't enough advertisements that value Francophone literature. That's why my interest in it is low. Nowadays, the only people who read are those who have nothing else to do. I think we should introduce relevant books to students in order for them to be interested in reading⁶.

⁶ "Je trouve qu'il n'y a pas assez de publicités qui valorisent la littérature francophone. Je n'ai donc pas l'intérêt. De nos jours, les seules personnes qui lisent sont ceux (*sic*) qui n'ont rien à faire. Je trouve qu'on devrait inciter les jeunes à lire plus souvent en leur présentant des livres pertinents".

Her remarks are pejorative, as she states that people who dedicate part of their time to reading are wasting their time doing so. At home, Chanel reads fashion magazines, and considers that she rarely reads as one of her hobbies. In fact, she admits she has never read a Quebec book in French at home before doing this activity.

Chanel's aesthetigram (Fig. 6) is oriented towards the emotional and stylistic analysis categories.

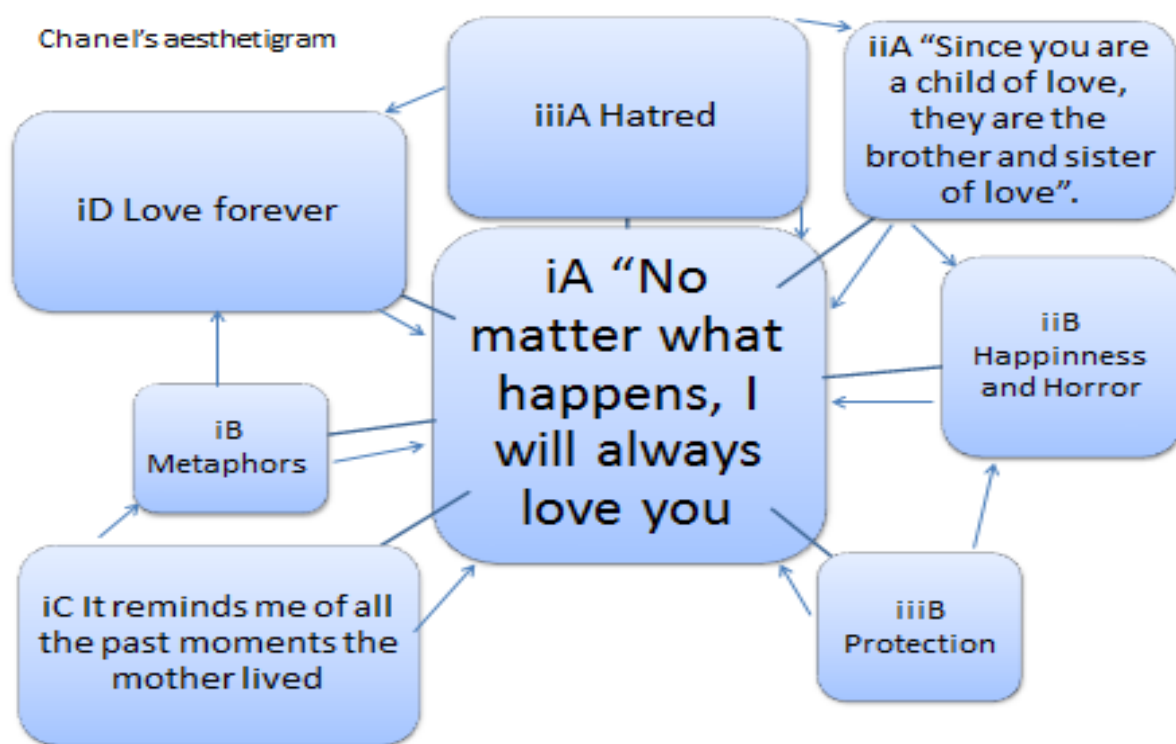


Figure 6: Chanel's Aesthetigram

She noted three elements for each of these categories. She only wrote one element for each of the interpretation and personal meaning categories.

These results show that Chanel should be introduced to more elements, maybe those of her peers or her teacher, in the latter categories. In her words, Chanel explains

that the emotional category was important for her, as she is a sensitive person who easily gets emotionally attached to people in real life and to fictional characters in narratives. This seems logical because participants' responses converge towards certain values that are imbedded in their own personalities (White, 2011). Chanel's post-test indicates positive results. In her observations, she wrote: "The aesthetigram is a good way to discover several aspects of the play, but not necessarily to understand it. We should integrate aesthetigrams in French classes"⁷. In other words, Chanel felt the aesthetigrams were beneficial in terms of discovering new perspectives, but did not feel that they provided her with a better understanding of the play. Her remark justifies the exercise's nature. It was meant to, first, note points of view, and second, provide alternative perspectives to broaden students' spectrum of responses and understanding. Perhaps Chanel did not arrive at the second step, an objective that should be fostered by the educator. Nevertheless, she recommended their use in French courses, particularly for the study of novels, plays, and poetry. Arguably, she felt it was beneficial to her learning.

Regardless of these observations, Chanel still demonstrated an increased interest in Francophone Quebec literature after the aesthetigram activity. In her pre-test, she evaluated her interest as "weak", and in her post-test, she noted it was "moderate". She also stated that her perception of Francophone Quebec literature had changed, that the plot and characters were interesting, and that the play made her react "in a new way". After the mapping exercise, she acknowledged she was more motivated to read in school, especially novels and plays of both traditional French literature (i.e. European) and Francophone Quebec literature. However, she admitted that she did not feel more

⁷ "Un esthétigramme est un bon moyen pour découvrir plusieurs aspects de la pièce, mais pas nécessairement pour la comprendre. On devrait intégrer l'esthétigramme dans les cours de français".

motivated to read at home. An explanation for this would perhaps be that Chanel conceived that the aesthetigram activity was a curriculum activity, and therefore could not relate it to leisure time reading. Indeed, she noted that her leisure time reading was “very rare”. Chanel also answered that she did not feel she was more knowledgeable about Francophone Quebec literature now compared to before, but she did feel more motivated to discover other Quebec plays.

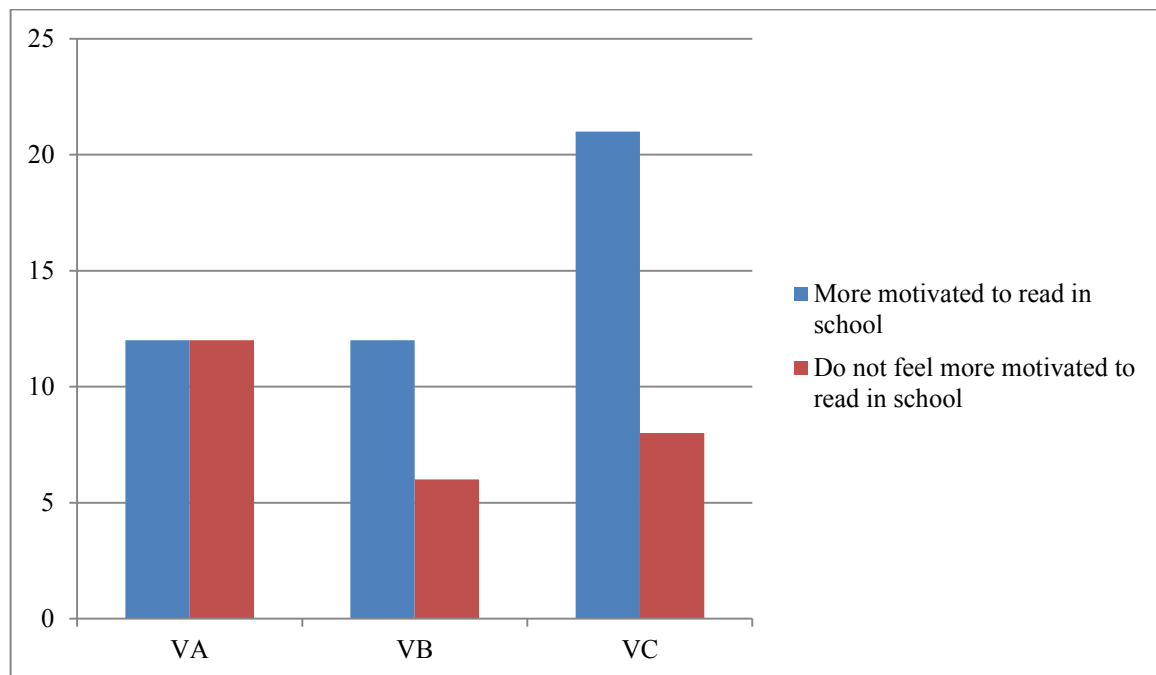
CHAPTER SIX: CHARTS, QUANTITATIVE RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION

Motivation to read

a) Reading in School

In 5A, half (50%) of the participants felt that they were more motivated to read in school after completing their aesthetigram. A reason for this might be that, as explained in the descriptive results of the social sciences students, the study was affected by an internal validity factor named resentful demoralization. In 5B, the results were more probing: 66% of the class felt that they were more motivated to read in school than they were before the aesthetigram activity. In 5C, the results came up to 21 participants (73%), vs. 8 participants that did not feel more motivated to read in school. In these last two classes, the results were more conclusive. The following graphic (Graph 1) illustrates this repartition and indicates that the aesthetigram activity was somewhat successful in terms of increasing motivation to read in school. In total, 63% of the participants felt more motivated to read in school after the aesthetigram activity.

Graph 1: Motivation to Read in School

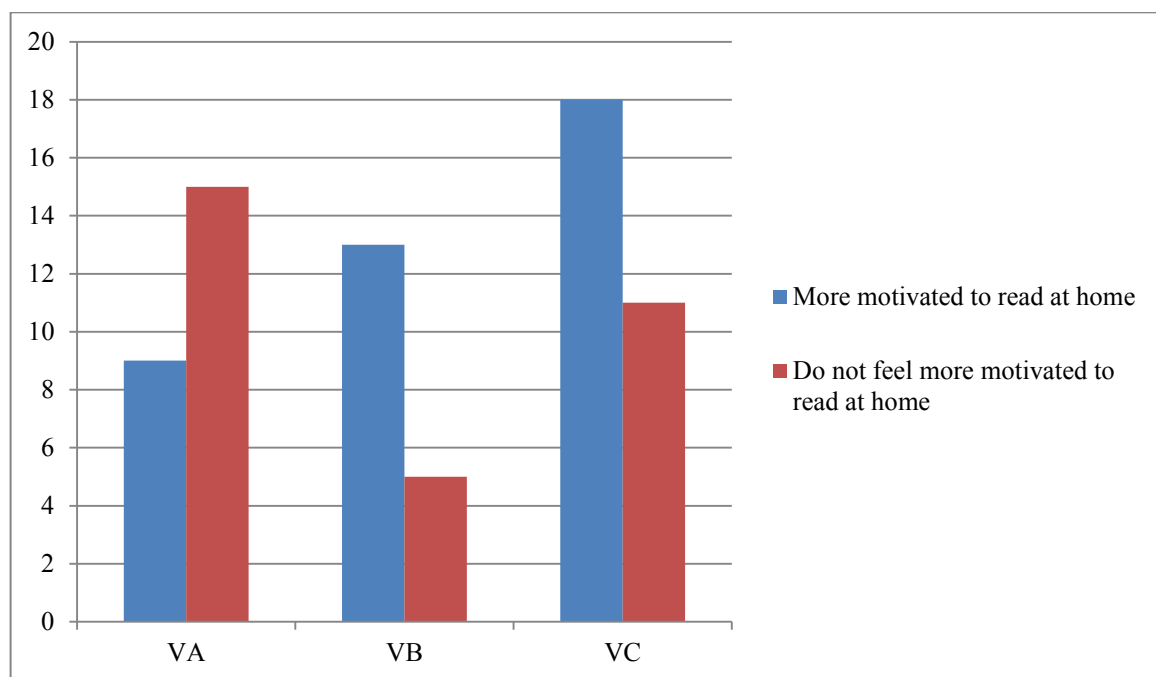


b) Reading at Home

I also wanted to see if the results led to increased (or decreased) motivation to read at home. A reason for this is that assessing only the motivation to read in school is misleading if the goal is to properly evaluate one's likeliness to read in any circumstance. Charting the motivation to read at home, before and after the activity, leads to a better visual understanding of the impacts of the aesthetigram activity on the participants. Again, the results are less striking in 5A than they were in the two science classes (5B and 5C). In the social sciences class (5A), evidence shows that 15 out of 24 students do not feel more motivated to read at home. This confirms the hypothesis I advanced in the previous section, i.e. 5A social sciences students were influenced by an internal validity thread, resentful demoralization. In the two sciences classes, however, the results show otherwise. In 5B, approximately 72%, or 13 participants, demonstrated that they were now more inclined to read a book at home than before the aesthetigram activity. In 5C,

the percentage was approximately 62.5%, or 18 participants, who felt the same. Graph 2 shows that repartition and the activity's success in that regard.

Graph 2: Motivation to Read at Home



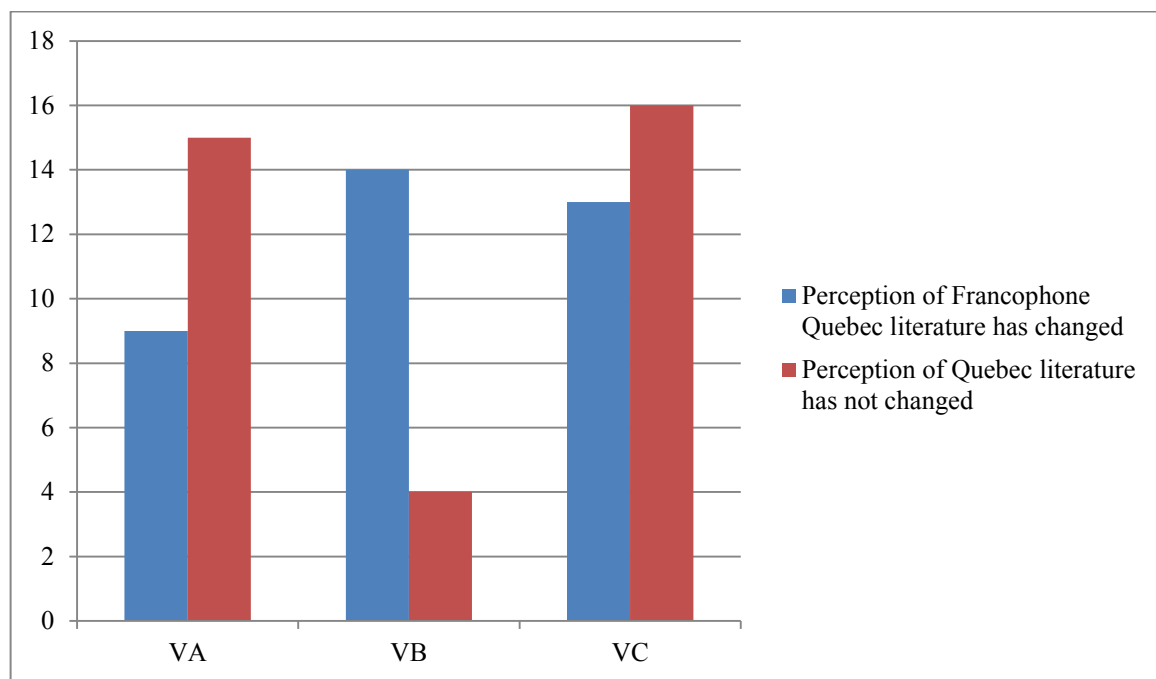
Perception of, Knowledge of, and Interest in Quebec Literature

a) Perception of Quebec Literature

I asked this question in the pre-test and post-test in order to see if there was a difference, after the aesthetigram activity, in students' perception of Quebec literature. In pre-tests and class discussions, the participants of all classes almost systematically told me that Quebec literature was "boring and uninteresting" because it reminded them of Germaine Guèvremont's *Le Survenant*, a novel of Quebec's *terroir* era. I also learned that the girls studied this book in the preceding year, leaving them "unsatisfied and not stimulated". As seen in the chart, the results vary from one class to another. In 5A and 5C, the participants' perception of Quebec literature remained the same, meaning that they

still felt it was boring. Nevertheless, the results for 5B show that 14 students (77.7% of the class) now adopt a different view, perhaps a more positive view, on Quebec literature. The questions asked in the pre-test and post-test were designed to evaluate if the perception had changed, and was not focused on whether it changed positively or negatively. The purpose of this was to see if making an aesthetigram affected students' perception of Francophone Quebec literature, as illustrated in Graph 3.

Graph 3: Students' Perception of Francophone Quebec Literature after the Aesthetigram activity

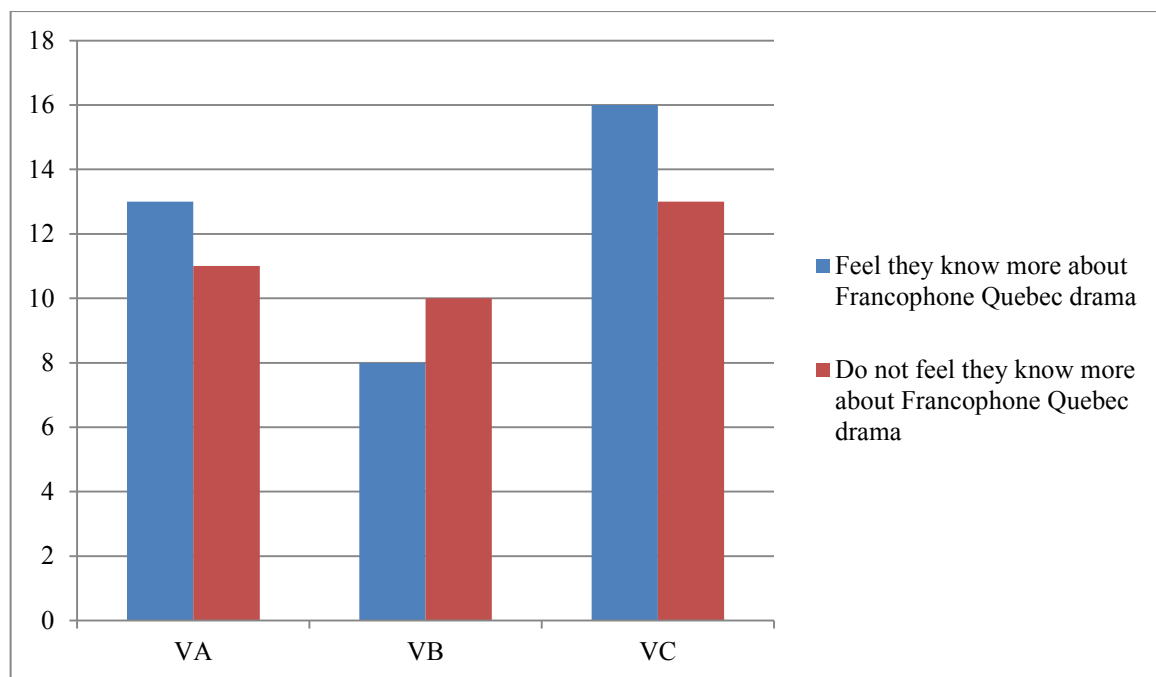


b) Knowledge of Quebec Literature

The results regarding students' evaluation of their knowledge of Quebec literature are paradoxical. As shown previously in Graph 3, students from 5A and 5C felt their perception of Quebec literature had not changed. In Graph 4, results demonstrate that students from 5A and 5C felt they knew more about Quebec literature than before participating in the aesthetigram activity. This reveals that 54% of students in 5A, 44% of

students in 5B, and 55% of students in 5C felt they expanded their knowledge of that branch of Quebec culture, as demonstrated in Graph 4. In total, approximately half (52%) of students felt that they learned more about Francophone Quebec literature after the activity than before doing it. It may have expanded their knowledge in terms of the discovery of new perceptions (emotional, interpretative, stylistic analysis, personal meaning), the exploration of a new play of Francophone Quebec culture, or even knowledge of a new style of writing.

Graph 4: Students' Evaluation of their Knowledge of Francophone Quebec Literature, after the Aesthetigram Activity



c) *Interest in Quebec Literature*

Results shown in Table 3 demonstrate that students' interest in Francophone Quebec literature increased for the most part. As noted in the post-tests, the percentage of students whose interest remained the same comes to 46.48%. Half (50.71%) of the 71 students showed an increased interest of one to two points. The levels were ranked as

very low, low, moderate, high and very high. An increased interest of one point can mean a difference from low to moderate, whereas an increased interest of two points can mean an increased interest from low to high. The decreased interest is insignificant, as it only represents 2.82% of the total number of students. Considering that half of the students demonstrated an increased interest, and approximately 46% of students whose interest did not change, I consider the aesthetigram activity a success in terms of my fixed objectives: raising interest in Quebec literature.

Table 3: Students' Interest in Francophone Quebec Literature, after the Aesthetigram Activity

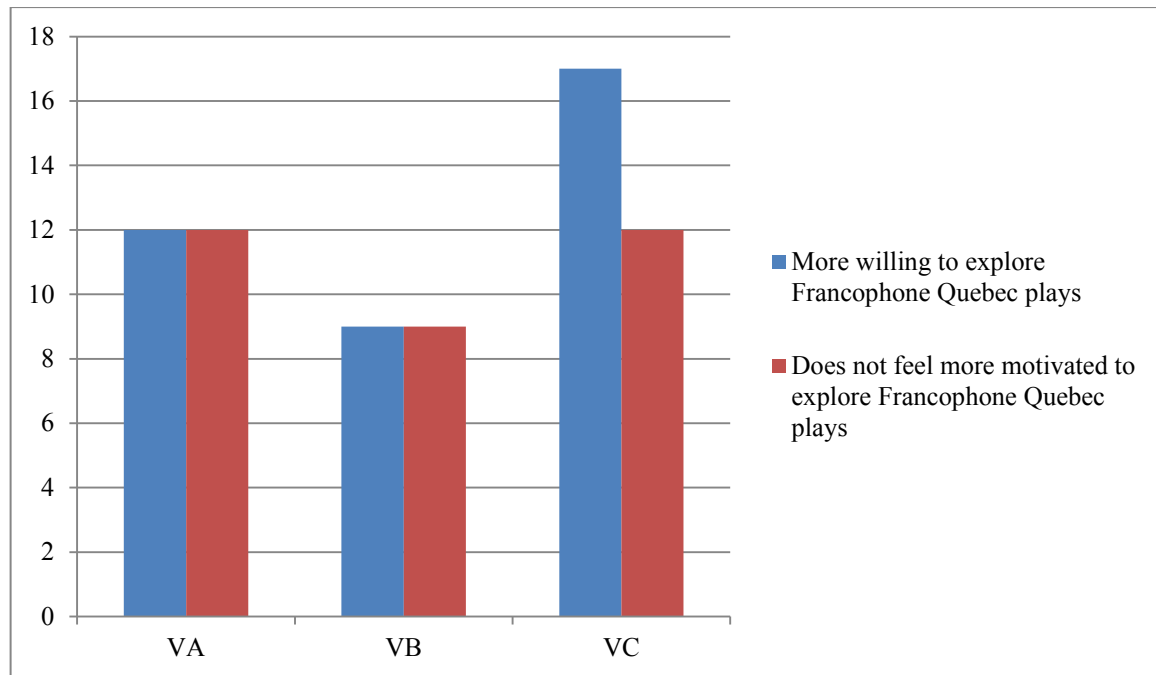
	5A	5B	5C	Number of Students	Total %	Overall %
Constant Interest	10	10	13	33	46.48	46.48
Increased +1	8	8	13	29	40.85	50.71
Increased +2	5	0	2	7	9.86	
Decreased - 1	1	0	1	2	2.82	2.82
Decreased - 2	0	0	0	0	0	

d) Willingness to Further Explore Quebec Literature

Graph 5 shows students' willingness to explore Francophone Quebec literature in other contexts, whether at school or at home. The results in this graph show that, in 5A and 5B, half of the students were more willing to do so, while in 5C, results indicate that approximately 59% of students were more eager than prior to the aesthetigram activity to expand their knowledge on Francophone Quebec literature. The results in 5A and 5B are not surprising considering students' opinions on and past negative experience with *Le*

Survenant and other works from Quebec's *terroir* era. In 5C, 17 students answered positively, implying that the aesthetigram activity benefited them in that regard.

Graph 5: Students' Willingness to Explore Francophone Quebec Literature on other Occasions, after the Aesthetigram Activity

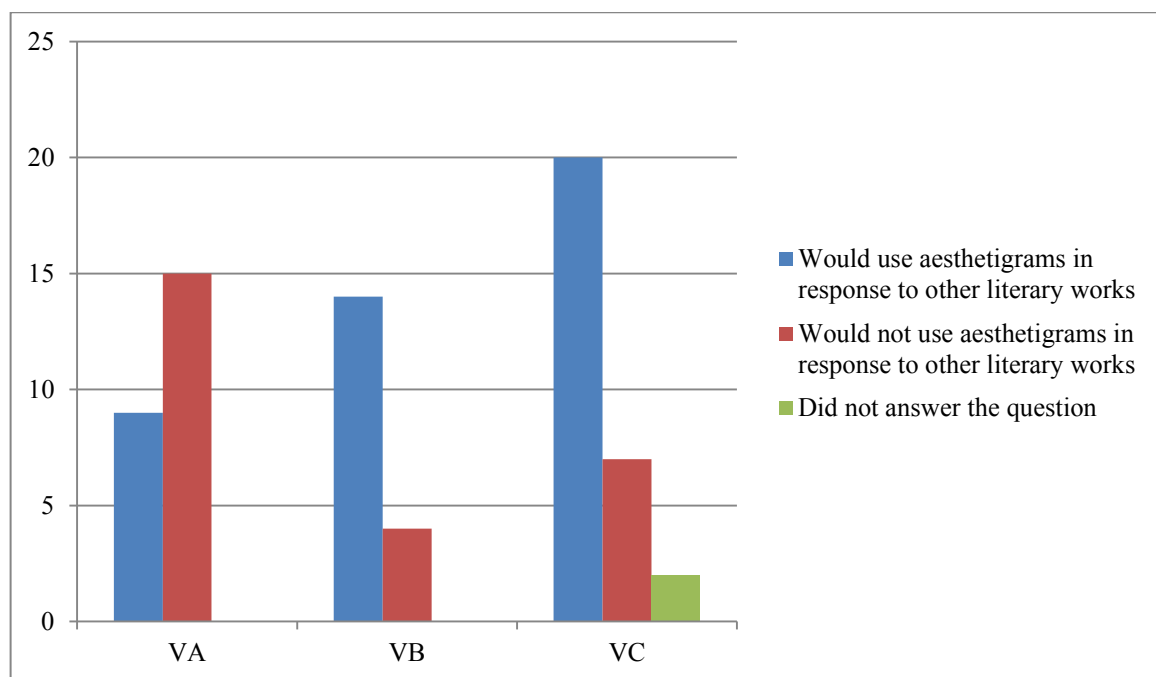


Aesthetigrams

a) *Using Aesthetigrams for Other Literary Works*

I charted in Graph 6 students' answers to the question: "Would you construct aesthetigrams for other literary works?" The responses were highly positive in two classes, 5B (78% of students) and 5C (69% of students). In the social sciences class (5A), results show that 15 students on 24 would not use aesthetigrams in response to other literary works. Their commitment to Francophone Quebec literature seemed low in the first place, as the collected data and poor comments towards the subject show. Resentful demoralization illustrated by the girl's comment in class is perhaps another justification of these responses in 5A.

Graph 6: Students' Willingness to Construct Aesthetigrams for other Literary Works

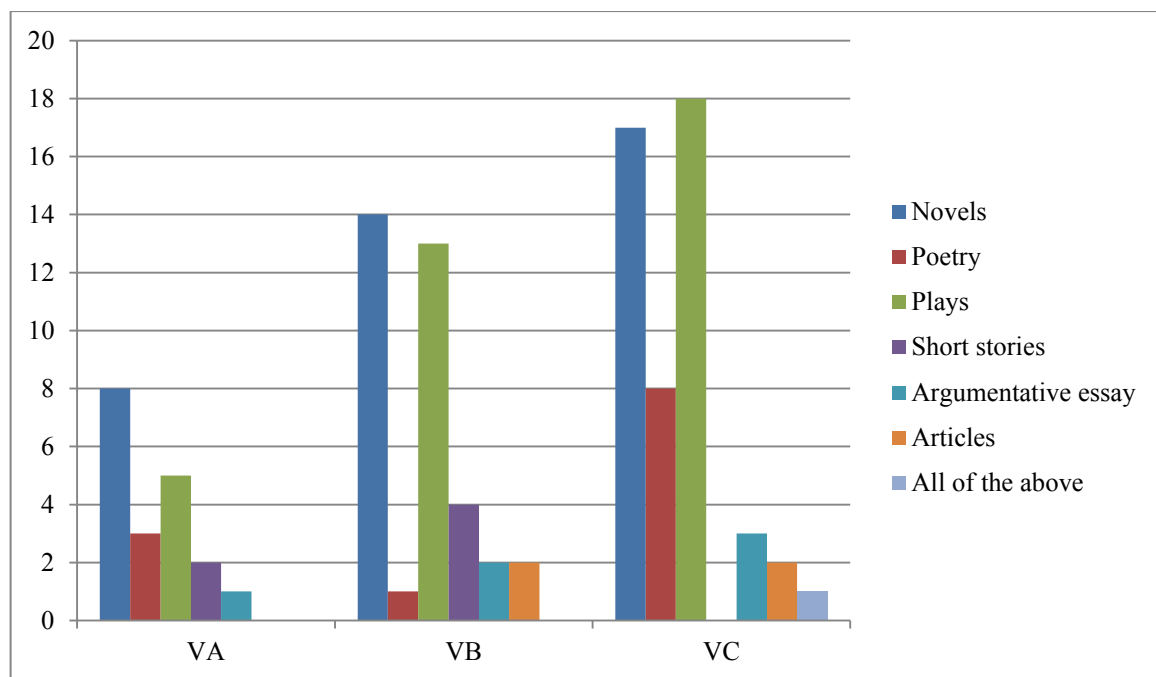


b) Types of Literary Works

When students answered positively to the question: “Would you construct aesthetigrams for other literary works?” I asked them to specify the type of literary work for which they would be willing to construct an aesthetigram. The most popular answer in 5A and 5B was novels, followed by plays. Students from 5A selected poetry in third place and short stories in fourth place, while participants from 5B preferred short stories in third place and poetry in fourth place. In 5C, results show a tight competition between plays and novels, but plays prevailed in first place. Poetry comes in third place. Short stories were not selected at all in this class. Overall, the responses depicted in the graph show the spectrum of possible genres to explore with aesthetigrams, according to the most popular genres in the eyes of students. Novels and plays remain the genres for which students would be likely to construct an aesthetigram. A possible explanation for this is that the

study I conducted in the classes was with a play. Perhaps they would have been inclined to choose another genre, had the study been conducted with a poem, for example.

Graph 7: Types of Literary Works for which Students Would be Willing to Construct Aesthetigrams

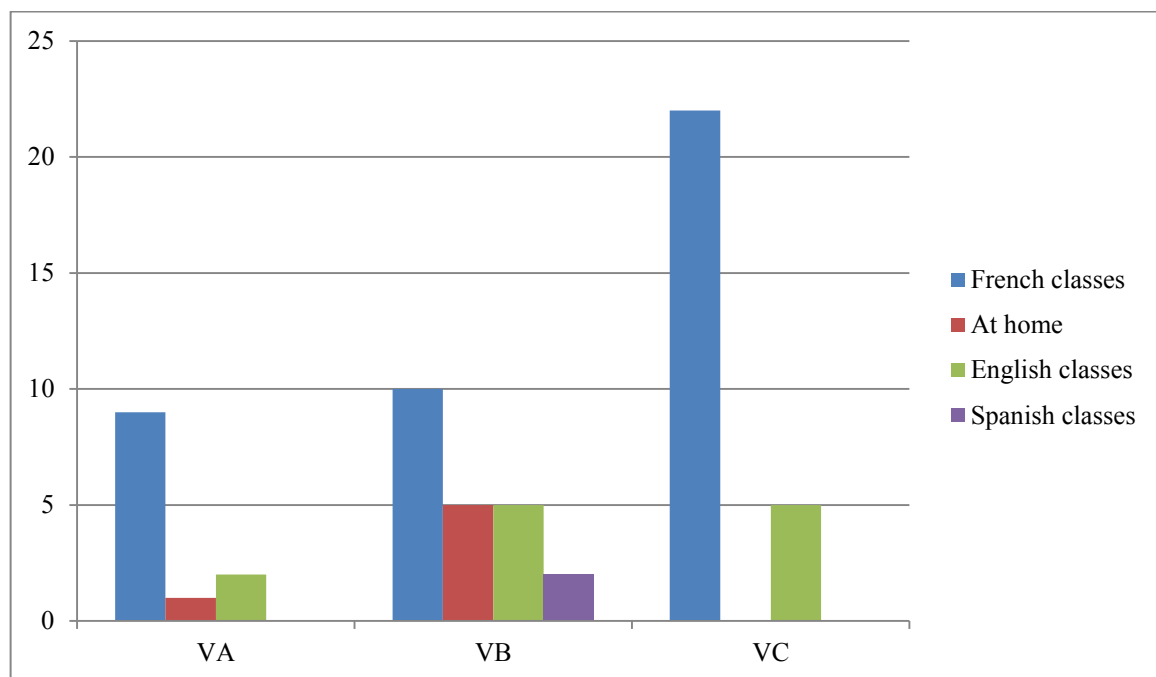


c) Context

I also asked students who responded positively to the question “Would you construct aesthetigrams for other literary works?” the context in which they would be most comfortable using aesthetigrams. A large proportion of students responded that they would use them in French classes, as illustrated in Graph 8. The second most popular response was in English classes, perhaps because many students enjoy reading in that language, according to their written responses in the post-test comments section. In 5B, five students responded they would construct an aesthetigram at home. One student even wrote in the post-test comments section that she would use aesthetigrams for exam preparations because they allowed her to better understand which elements were

important to her, and which ones she would need to focus on extensively. Spanish classes came last, and only in 5B. The results show that aesthetigrams would work predominantly in French classes (or first language literature classes), according to students who think the activity was useful for their learning of and awareness of Francophone Quebec literature.

Graph 8: Context in which Students Would be Willing to Use Aesthetigrams



One-tailed Paired T Test Results: Interest in Francophone Quebec Literature

I used a one-tailed paired t test to see if the aesthetigram activity had a positive impact on, or led to an increase of, students' interest in Francophone Quebec literature. Given that I am interested in assessing the results in one direction, i.e. if the interest in Francophone Quebec literature has increased (or decreased) in the post-test only, I used a one-tailed t test. The gathered data was categorized according to the Likert scale: very low interest = 1, low interest = 2, moderate interest = 3, high interest = 4, very high interest = 5. The paired t test compares the means of two paired groups. Since the

environment in which I conducted the study changed from one class to another, I established a one-tailed paired t test per class, for a total of three one-tailed paired t tests.

5A Students

The first group is referred as 5A students who did the pre-test (N=24), while the other is the 5A students who did the post-test (N=24). The first mean corresponds to the mean level of students' interest in the pre-test, while the second mean is the mean level of students' interest in the post-test. In all classes, I expected the first mean to be lower than the second. This is another justification for the use of a one-tailed t test. In 5A, the pre-test means is 2.125, while the post-test means is 2.833. The difference between the two means is 0.708, which means that the interest in Francophone Quebec literature rose by 0.708 points after the aesthetigram activity. This is approximately equivalent to an increase of one level (e.g. low interest to moderate interest).

The p value asks if the difference between the pre-test and post-test means is likely to be due to chance. In other words, it answers the following: if the pre-test results were the same as the post-test results, what is the chance that random sampling would result in means as far apart as observed in this study? The p value is quite small ($p = 0.00025$), which means that it is statistically significant, and that there is a small probability that the outcome is due to chance. Overall, it means that the activity in 5A was successful, raising the interest by approximately one (1) point. The reason for this is that there was a statistically meaningful difference between the pre-test results ($M=2.125$, $SD=1.15$) and the post-test results ($M=2.833$, $SD=0.92$) conditions; $N=24$, $p=0.00025$. In this case, M stands for the means, while SD represents the standard deviation, for which the calculation involves averaging the squares distances between scores and the mean.

5B Students

In 5B, the pre-test means is 2.388, while the post-test means is 2.833. The difference between the two means is 0.445, which denotes that the interest in Francophone Quebec literature rose by 0.445 points after the aesthetigram activity. This is approximately equivalent to an increase of half a level, which cannot be translated into the categories I already established.

The p value is quite small ($p= 0.00091$), which means that it is statistically significant, and that there is a small probability that the outcome is due to chance. Overall, it implies that the activity in 5B was somewhat successful, raising the interest by approximately half a point. This can be explained by the statistical difference between the pre-test results ($M=2.388$, $SD=0.69$) and post-test results ($M=2.833$, $SD=0.61$) conditions; $N=18$, $p=0.00091$.

5C Students

In 5C, the pre-test means is 2.551, while the post-test means is 3.103. The difference between the two means is 0.552, which means that the interest in Francophone Quebec literature rose by 0.552 points after the aesthetigram activity. This is approximately equivalent to an increase of half a level, which cannot be translated into the categories I already established, as in the previous example.

The p value is quite large ($p= 8.582431E-5$), which means that it is not statistically significant, and that there is a fair probability that the outcome is due to chance. Although the interest rose by approximately half a point, the positive impacts of the aesthetigram activity on students' interest in Francophone Quebec literature cannot be generalized as the p is not conclusive in 5C. The reason for this is that there was a statistical difference

between the pre-test results ($M=2.551$, $SD=1.06$) and the post-test results ($M=3.103$, $SD=0.98$) conditions; $N=29$, $p= 8.582431E-5$.

Quantitative Results: Number of Aesthetigram Elements per Category

Among the data I gathered, I charted the number of elements present in each student's aesthetigram. Students were grouped according to their respective class. I chose to use a chart to represent the different means because there was more than one category involved in each aesthetigram, which is a determinant factor seizing the elements to be explored, or discussed in class, between teachers and students. Here are the results of the means of each category charted in the aesthetigrams:

Table 4: Means of Elements Present in Each Category

Class/Mean per Category	5A (N=24)	5B (N=18)	5C (N=29)
Emotions	2.375	2.388	2.448
Stylistic Analysis	2.333	2.444	2.103
Interpretation	1.959	1.666	1.689
Personal Meaning	0.875	0.277	1.000

Results show a significant lack of elements in the personal meaning section. With the objective of helping educators with potential directions, I think they should address ways in which that category was understood, then suggest possible solutions. In other words, they should first ask a question like: "How did you understand the personal meaning category?" After listening to, and discussing with, students, educators might address their own meaning of the category that was less popular. Perhaps students felt less attached to the play because the character was not their age. I also read a few responses in which students said they had trouble identifying with the play because they never lost a parent nor were they confronted with death. This awareness can certainly contribute to

adopting appropriate methods to reinforce interest in Francophone Quebec literature and develop further interest in reading.

According to the means results, the most popular category was the emotions in 5A and 5C. The emotions category came second in 5B, but was very close to the first position. This indicates that the emotional responses of students were predominant within the three classes, and that students responded well to that aspect. The stylistic analysis category was the second most popular category in 5A and 5C, and the means were significantly close to the emotions category. In other words, the emotions and stylistic categories, which contain approximately more than 2 elements per aesthetigram, were the most common. The category of interpretation came third in all classes, meaning that educators should focus on students' voices when it comes to opening their perspectives on the meaning of a scene or a play.

CHAPTER SEVEN: POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Recommendations for Future Research

In a 2006 *New York Times* article titled *CanLit*, Douglas Coupland wrote: "One could say that Canadian Literature is the literary equivalent of representational landscape painting, with small forays into waterfowl depiction and still life. It is not a modern art form, nor does it want to be" (p. 1). Coupland's opinion is not needed when attempting to prove that the interest in Canadian literature has declined steadily throughout the past decade. While the adult's population's interest in the Giller Prize, one of the most well-known cultural events of the year, suggests that there still is a healthy interest in literature, younger adults and adolescents' concern for that domain is still declining. The

difference between interest (adult) and uninterest (adolescent) suggests a possibility for a future investigation into the influences of age difference in regard to appreciation of literature.

Coupland's statement on Canadian literature as "not modern" partly justifies that, in order to motivate students, I had to have recourse to a contemporary play published in 2003. Other Quebec newspapers (Le Devoir, 2011) even declare that literature has difficulty motivating students, and that an ethic for care and interest is needed: "There has to be something in the book that interests them, without lowering the level. Often, books are of poor interest compared to other attractive gadgets"⁸ (p. 2). This is one of the reasons I wanted to pursue this project.

It is my hope that this study will benefit educators and students in raising interest in and care for Quebec literature, a type of art often misrepresented by the endless narrations and xenophobia portrayed in the *terroir* era. My favourite example of this is Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* (1913):

Autour de nous des étrangers sont venus, qu'il nous plaît d'appeler des barbares; ils ont pris presque tout le pouvoir; ils ont acquis presque tout l'argent; mais au pays de Québec rien n'a changé. Rien ne changera, parce que nous sommes un témoignage. De nous-mêmes et de nos destinées, nous n'avons compris clairement que ce devoir-là : persister... nous maintenir... Et nous nous sommes maintenus, peut-être afin que dans plusieurs siècles encore le monde se tourne et dise : ces gens sont d'une race qui ne sait pas mourir... Nous sommes un témoignage (p. 166).

Deconstructing xenophobia in such narratives implies, in part, introducing *Incendies* to my participants, as the play also touches on the acceptance of others in Quebec society. Aesthetigram making, a practice that has hardly been used in the field of aesthetic education in a context involving plays, is an effective way to address prose

⁸ "Il faut qu'il y ait quelque part, quelque chose dans le livre qui les intéresse sans niveler par le bas. Il est parfois difficile pour le livre de rivaliser avec tous les gadgets et les bidules attrayants pour l'élève".

literacy and interest in Quebec literature. Because of its notions of multiculturalism, its novelty and fashion, I believe *Incendies* is an excellent source of motivation for students in their reading, writing, and understanding of Quebec literature. Furthermore, studying and reacting to drama allow for further individual development as well as capacities for interpretation. According to Beach et al. (2011):

In participating in drama activities over time, students face the consequences of their actions and decisions, which challenge their status quo beliefs and attitudes [...] when interpreting literature, students are continually drawing on their values in explaining characters' actions. (p. 171)

My work with senior high-school students of varying ethnic backgrounds reflects the Quebec multicultural reality. With the innovative use of aesthetigrams, this research project provides educators with a means to understand students' aesthetic, emotional and intellectual responses to Quebec literature in an effort to develop a deeper interest in Francophone Quebec literature. A follow-up study involving male students would be feasible, as other genres of responses would be taken into account, and as studies show that male students' motivation towards literature differs from that of female students'.

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