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Numéro 11, 2018

Second Language Pedagogies: From Theory to Practice Vol. II  
La didactique des langues secondes : de la théorie à la pratique, Vol. II

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1089112ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.21083/nrsc.v0i11.3996>

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Éditeur(s)

University of Guelph, School of Languages and Literatures

ISSN

2292-2261 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Liakina, N. & Michaud, G. (2018). Needs analyses for Task-Based curriculum design: How useful can it be for general purpose L2 courses? *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada*, (11), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.21083/nrsc.v0i11.3996>

Résumé de l'article

When designing a task-based language curriculum, it is essential to conduct a needs analysis (NA) to gain insight into the needs and goals of the student population (Long SLA and TBLT 6). This article illustrates the steps of the process by which an NA was designed and implemented in two university-level B2 level oral communication French as a Second Language courses to investigate students' perceptions of the TBLT approach, students' motivations, needs and desired outcomes in order to develop task-based syllabi. This article also addresses the challenges of responding to the needs of a diverse student population in order to determine thematic content and to design the authentic real-life tasks that would appeal to different individual students while taking into account the sociolinguistic and cultural context of the Francophone province of Quebec.

The NA consisted of an analysis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), an online questionnaire given to both students (n = 48) and teachers (n = 8), and semi-structured interviews with students (n = 8). Despite the apparent heterogeneity of the participants in the two general purpose oral communication language classes, results suggest common, domain-independent goals and themes that would sufficiently cater to the needs and objectives of each individual in the group while also meeting the academic requirements of a university-level course.

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## **Needs analysis for Task-Based curriculum design: How useful can it be for general purpose L2 courses?**

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### **1. Introduction**

The French Language Centre (FLC), located in a large anglophone university in Montreal in the French-speaking province of Quebec (Canada), welcomes approximately 2000 students annually, ranging in proficiency from complete beginners to highly advanced, all of whom wish to learn French as a Second Language (FSL) over the course of their studies. Following a program review in 2014, the FLC decided to adopt a task-based approach as its guiding teaching philosophy, and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a general framework for course levels and competencies. However, students learning French at the university come from diverse backgrounds and often have different language learning goals. The FLC therefore strives to build a curriculum that takes the communicative aspirations of its students into consideration while also achieving the academic requirements of a university-level language course through adoption of a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach.

This article describes the needs analysis (NA) conducted to identify both the content and teaching methodology needed to build a task-based syllabus for courses offered by the FLC. It illustrates the steps of the process by which the NA was designed and implemented in two B2 level oral communication courses to investigate students' perceptions of the TBLT approach, as well as students' motivations, wants, needs, objectives and desired outcomes, in order to inform the development of task-based syllabi.

### **2. Background: Task-Based Language Teaching and Curriculum Development**

TBLT is a language teaching approach that has been gaining more and more attention in the field of second language acquisition since the late 1980s (Long, *SLA and TBLT*; Ellis, *Task-Based*). Essentially, the "task" structure is implemented as an organizing principle of teaching and learning. While tasks have been defined in a number of ways by field experts, a "task" is essentially an activity that people are likely to do in their daily lives (Long, "A Role for Instruction" 89). Ellis states that, in a pedagogical context, a language learning task must respect four criteria:

1. The primary focus should be on 'meaning' [...]
2. There should be some kind of 'gap' [...]
3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources [...] in order to complete the activity.
4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language [...] ("Misunderstandings" 223)

Long insists that TBLT should use "tasks" as the progressive unit of learning rather than specific linguistic notions, as is the case in traditional syllabi (*SLA and TBLT* 305). Furthermore, Long maintains that, in order to determine tasks for a specific program, a needs analysis (NA) of the target student population must be conducted prior to implementation (*SLA and TBLT* 6). Although conducting a NA for specific-purpose courses seems obvious due to the common goals shared by learners, doing so for a general purpose course is not necessarily as straightforward. In a general-purpose course, there are typically disparities among students regarding their goals, needs, and learning objectives. In TBLT literature, most NA have indeed targeted specific-purpose courses, such as Spanish for Border Patrol Agents (González-Lloret and Nielson) and English for Journalists (Gilabert), but some studies have shown that conducting a NA for general-purpose courses is still possible (Lambert; Watanabe). The goal of this study is to conduct a NA for an advanced (B2), university-level general-purpose FSL oral communication course to build a task-based syllabus. In doing so, we address the following three questions:

- 1) What is the feasibility and usefulness of a NA for building a task-based curriculum for a university-level, general-purpose FSL course?
- 2) What are students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the task-based approach?

- 3) What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the importance of "place" and "context" in the development of tasks? Specifically, from the students' and the teachers' point of view, what is the importance of the local setting of Quebec in course design?

### **3. Methods**

As Long points out, a NA must rely on several different methods of data collection, including, for example, questionnaires, surveys, interviews, text analysis, and other relevant sources to ensure a triangulation of data (*Needs Analysis* 30). The NA should target the various groups involved with the target population, such as current students, teachers, administrators, alumni, and domain experts.

For the creation of the present NA, the CEFR was first examined to identify the oral competencies required at the B2 level. An online questionnaire using Likert-scale questions was then conducted to assess the motivations, needs, topics of interest, and preferred methods of learning of the target group of students in the context of Quebec. The questionnaire was distributed to students ( $n = 48$ ) who were enrolled in advanced oral communication courses—all with a B2-level proficiency in French—as well as teachers and teaching assistants who had previously facilitated the course ( $n = 8$ ). Contrasting the student-identified learning objectives with those expressed by teachers forced a reconciliation of views resulting in a broader understanding of the needs of both parties.

Lastly, in order to gain further insight into the quantitative data gathered via surveys and learners' self-reported perceptions regarding the TBLT approach and the role of context in course design, students enrolled in the two courses were invited to participate in semi-structured oral interviews. Eight students (M = 2, F = 6) consented to participate in this phase of the study. Participants ranged between 18 and 22 years old (M = 19.4) and came from a mixture of educational backgrounds for the French language, including: Quebec's secondary school Core French program, elementary and high school immersion programs, the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and general-purpose, university-level French courses. Three participants were international students and five were from Canada.

The research questions were addressed via content analysis of the open-ended, semi-structured oral interviews with participants. The interviews were transcribed and analysed according to the protocols and procedures described in Mackey and Gass (179), and Plonsky and Gurzynski-Weiss (45). First, participant responses were categorized based on the research questions that guided this study. Second, pattern coding was used to create thematic categories and subcategories according to the main themes adopted in this study: participant needs and motivations, participant perceptions of TBLT, the importance of context in task design, and the challenges and constraints of building a task-based syllabus. These thematic categories are presented and discussed in the following section.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Common European Framework of Reference**

An analysis of the CEFR revealed that at the B2 level, students should be capable of "understanding a native speaker interlocutor," engaging in a conversation and informal discussion, conducting formal discussions, participating in meetings, taking part in "transactions to obtain goods and services," and "interviewing and being interviewed" (CEFR 73-82). These general competencies, specifically the need to conduct informal conversations, acted as the general framework of the FLC's curriculum development and helped orient the creation of the questionnaire to contextualize the specific needs of the target population.

### **4.2 Questionnaires**

The online questionnaire was divided into several sections: motivations for taking a French course, needs, topics, skills, learning method, and teaching approach.

#### 4.2.1 Motivations

The online questionnaire revealed that the majority of students were enrolled in the FSL course for professional purposes (81%). Learning French simply for the pleasure associated with language learning also resonated highly among participants (64%). Interestingly, although the participants were enrolled in an anglophone university, almost half (48%) expressed that they would like to live in a French-speaking country.

Table 1. Reasons to study French

Motivations	<i>n</i> = 47	
Professional	38	81%
Pleasure	30	64%
Communicate in French in Montreal	28	60%
Live in a French-speaking country	21	45%
Live in Quebec	20	43%
Communicate with friends and family	17	36%
Immigration	6	13%
Program requirements	4	9%

#### 4.2.2 Needs

Following the general motivations for taking an FSL course, specific needs were identified and assessed. Results indicate that "Interactions in daily life" was highly rated both by students (4.83/5) and teachers (4.29/5); being able to follow a conversation between native speakers was also important for students (4.74/5). Working in French was the third most highly ranked need by students (4.51/5), confirming their professional goals.

Table 2. Needs of students as perceived by students and by teachers

Needs	Students ( <i>n</i> = 48)			Teachers ( <i>n</i> = 8)		
	Mean (1-5)	SD	Rank	Mean (1-5)	SD	Rank
Interact spontaneously in daily life	4.83	0.43	1	4.29	0.95	1
Follow a conversation between NSs	4.74	0.57	2	3.86	1.07	6
Work in French	4.51	0.75	3	4.13	1.13	2
Understand movies and TV episodes	4.37	0.88	4	4.13	0.99	2
Talk about personal experiences	4.35	0.90	5	3.88	1.25	5
Debates	4.06	0.96	6	4.00	1.31	4
Give a presentation	3.62	0.99	7	3.00	1.00	7

#### 4.2.3 Topics

While the most important need identified was "Interactions in daily life," it is important to narrow down the topics of interest to students. The questionnaire revealed that "Current affairs" is the subject most highly ranked by both students (5.85/7) and teachers (5.63/7). Interestingly, "Literature" was also highly rated by students (5.61/7), but teachers did not believe this was the case (4/7). Conversely, cultural and sociolinguistic aspects of Quebec society was thought to be important by teachers (2/7) while students ranked it as much lower (5/7).

Table 3. Topics of interest

Topics	Students (n = 48)			Teachers (n = 8)		
	Mean (1-7)	SD	Rank	Mean (1-7)	SD	Rank
Current affairs	5.85	1.27	1	5.63	2.26	1
Literature	5.61	1.36	2	4.00	1.69	7
Business	5.19	1.58	3	5.38	2.20	3
Cinema	5.17	1.48	4	4.88	1.46	4
Culture and sociolinguistic aspects of QC	5.14	1.50	5	5.50	1.77	2
Education	4.87	1.68	6	4.13	2.17	6
Health	4.51	1.71	7	3.75	1.49	9
IT	4.34	1.67	8	4.63	1.85	5
Sciences	4.23	1.59	9	3.88	2.23	8

#### 4.2.4 Skills

With respect to the skills targeted in FSL courses, both students and teachers believed oral fluency was the most important competency to develop; this is not surprising for an oral communication class. In terms of other competencies, vocabulary was highly prioritised by students (ranked third) and teachers (ranked second). Students also said that they wanted to develop a near-native oral proficiency of the language (4.8/5), but teachers did not think that this was as important (3.38/5). This discrepancy might be explained by the fact that, from experience, teachers know that attaining a very high command of a language takes considerable time, which is not possible in a 39-hour course. Another difference observed between the perspectives of students and teachers related to the importance of being able to understand spoken French in Quebec. Students ranked this skill as the lowest, whereas teachers ranked this as third. This disparity is interesting as teachers know that if students want to be able to "Interact spontaneously in daily life" (the need ranked the highest among students), they would certainly need to understand spoken French in Quebec.

Table 4. Skills to develop

Skills	Students (n = 48)			Teachers (n = 8)		
	Mean	SD	Rate	Mean	SD	Rate
Fluency	4.83	0.43	1	4.63	0.74	1
Near-native proficiency – Oral	4.80	0.40	2	3.38	0.74	8
Vocabulary	4.51	0.66	3	4.63	0.74	1
Accuracy	4.33	0.76	4	3.88	1.13	4
Pronunciation	4.30	0.98	5	3.63	1.06	6
Varieties of spoken French	4.24	0.79	6	3.88	1.25	4
Idiomatic expression	4.11	0.74	7	3.38	0.92	8
Near-native proficiency – Written	4.02	0.83	8	3.43	0.53	7
Terminology – Education	3.71	1.11	9	3.25	1.28	10
Spoken French – Quebec	3.22	1.07	10	4.13	0.99	3

#### 4.2.5 Learning and teaching approach

Lastly, tables 5 and 6 present students' and teachers' preferred learning method(s) and teaching approach. "Small group conversation" is the preferred learning methodology by both students and teachers. Once again, given the fact that this was an oral communication course, this is logical. However, students seem to think that grammatical drills are useful (3.75/5), whereas teachers thought that it was the least useful activity (2.25/5). As for the preferred teaching approach, task-based was ranked the highest, which confirms the position that the FLC took in 2014.

Table 5. Preferred learning method

Learning method	Students (n = 48)			Teachers (n = 8)		
	Mean	SD	Rate	Mean	SD	Rate
Small group conversation	4.49	0.73	1	4.63	0.74	1
Grammar activities in context	4.18	0.84	2	3.75	1.16	4
Debate	3.96	0.98	3	4.25	1.04	2
Grammatical drills	3.75	0.87	4	2.25	0.89	12
Individual lab work	3.64	1.18	5	3.14	1.46	7
Oral presentation	3.49	1.22	6	3.75	1.04	4
Online exercises	3.44	0.87	7	2.63	1.06	9
Lecture	3.42	0.94	8	2.63	1.19	9
Group projects	3.24	1.13	9	4.13	1.13	3
Class conversation	3.22	1.08	10	3.13	0.99	8
Role play	3.18	1.11	11	3.50	1.07	6
Multimedia presentation	2.76	1.07	12	2.88	1.36	11

Table 6. Preferred teaching approach

Preferred teaching approach	Students (n = 48)			Teachers (n = 8)		
	Mean	SD	Rate	Mean	SD	Rate
Task-based	4.72	0.50	1	4.38	1.19	1
Cooperative learning	3.70	0.89	2	3.75	1.49	2
Lecture	3.46	0.94	3	2.75	1.16	4
Flipped classroom	3.39	1.11	4	3.38	1.41	3

The online questionnaire revealed that students want to acquire professional skills in French while also being able to take part in conversations with native speakers. This latter need was also acknowledged by teachers who recognised the importance of developing listening comprehension of spoken French in Quebec, an objective which students had not articulated. Conversely, the high interest expressed by students in literature (table 3) could also guide the choice of topics to be included in the course.

### 4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Given the disparities revealed in the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with eight students to gain a deeper understanding of their needs and motivations.

#### 4.3.1 Needs and motivations

The interviews primarily provided insight into the nature of participants' needs and goals. Interview responses revealed that students' needs are constantly changing and evolving, as illustrated here by one participant: "Everything is possible. [...] I might go to a graduate school here. I might find a job at some point, so I might need French for that. And I have French-speaking friends around. So for pleasure, for work. I might do some research in French as well. And I also read French newspapers." This is further echoed in other participants' responses which reveal that immediate needs, or short-term goals, are related to the participants' personal life, while long-term goals and needs are concerned with their future professional careers and academic life.

Participants indicated three main reasons for taking a French course that were related to their personal lives. The first was the pleasure and enjoyment of learning the language and doing their favourite activities in French; one participant said that for them, "learning French is very interesting because it's a very beautiful language" while another indicated personal goals for using the language: "I want to make sure that after a few years of study, I am comfortable doing things like watching French films or reading French books." A second reason was the willingness to use French in their daily lives in order to feel a part of Montreal and its culture: "I just feel if I can speak French I can be more part of the city." The final reason was to be able to interact with francophone friends and family: "I have made some francophone friends, so it's easier to keep in touch in French," and "In my family, most people speak French, so it's important for me." All participants felt that the ability to use French in their everyday lives would improve their experience living in Montreal and Quebec.

All participants also highlighted the importance of learning French for professional purposes. The majority ( $n = 5$ ) consider the possibility of finding a job in Montreal to be impossible without being able to speak French: one participant admitted that *"If I want a job off-campus here, I do not think I can do it without French."* Half of the participants ( $n = 4$ ) also see French as an asset for their future career, with one participant stating that *"it is always good to have another language, like professionally, it gives you more flexibility."* Participants indicated that French is also essential for academic purposes and planning for their future lives in Quebec; one participant commented, *"I am also looking into going to a graduate school. And if that goes well, maybe living in Quebec longer."* Here, learning French is essential for this participant's successful integration and future life in Quebec. However, as mentioned above, each individual's needs and goals could change over time as they encounter novel situations in their personal, professional, and academic lives; it is therefore impossible to identify domain-specific target tasks.

#### **4.3.2 Students' perceptions of the TBLT approach**

During informal discussions with teachers, concerns arose regarding students' anticipated negative attitudes towards TBLT. The instructors feared that students who were accustomed to grammar-based syllabi would not respond positively to the task-based approach. In our analysis, we will first determine whether the students have a correct understanding of TBLT and then focus on their perceptions of the approach.

#### **4.3.3 Learner understanding of the TBLT approach**

Based on previous learning experiences, participants' definitions of TBLT typically included comparisons to the traditional teaching methods they were exposed to in the past, such as *"doing grammar and exercises," "someone standing and lecturing on how to conjugate verbs,"* and *"working on individual skills."* Overall, however, participants demonstrated a good understanding of TBLT, describing it as (1) learning through real-life tasks: *"Instead of just doing grammar and exercises, it's learning the language through different tasks, like doing a presentation or writing a CV, writing a poem"* with *"lots of applications to real world situations";* (2) learning by doing - less theory, more practice, more real-life experiences: *"it's basically assigning us something to do. Like the interview project: go out, talk to someone and bring back a report on it. It's not just a bunch of tests, it's not a bunch of essays you have to write, it's actually using French in your life... Or using French in a classroom in ways you might use it in your life";* and (3) learning by applying, learning in context: *"... it's rather than working on individual skills, we are integrating all the things we are learning into a specific task."*

#### **4.3.4 Perceived advantages of the TBLT approach**

All eight participants expressed that they enjoyed the TBLT approach and pointed out its advantages compared to approaches they have previously experienced in other language classes. All participants found TBLT to be useful, as they believed that it allowed them to develop practical skills: *"After I have been learning French for a while, maybe I could conjugate verbs in a lot of tenses, but I couldn't ask for a coffee. And by doing this (TBLT), by teaching practical skills, it will help you to do things that you might need to do in French at some point."* Participants also noted that TBLT was more engaging, motivating, and interactive than traditional lectures because *"you see the purpose of it and understand why we need to have all the smaller components,"* and so the learning becomes more meaningful. As one participant pointed out, *"with a lecture, you are just being told, you are not practicing, you are not using it yourself."* Finally, all participants mentioned the "fun factor" that they associated with TBLT (e.g., *"there are more fun assignments we are asked to do"*), which reportedly increased their motivation and enjoyment in the learning process, as suggested by Warschauer and Healey (59-60). According to Dörnyei and Kormos, "affective (motivational) and sociodynamic factors have a significant impact on the learners' language output" (297); therefore, by increasing learner motivation, learners will, in theory, produce more output, a requirement of language development (Swain 97-114).

#### **4.3.5 Task appreciation and wish list**

Participants gave many examples of tasks that, in their opinion, have responded to or would respond to their needs, and have helped or would help them to achieve their learning goals. In terms of needs related to the use of French in their personal lives, the most common responses were related to tasks with cultural components, such as watching movies in French or attending cultural events, both of which students had the opportunity to experience in one of the classes. They also mentioned other activities such as seeing a play and

participating in an excursion, field trip, or tour with a French-speaker. Participants whose main motivation for learning French was for the pleasure of learning a new language appreciated creative tasks such as composing a poem, or "slam," which also allowed them to participate in a creative writing contest to have their texts published in a francophone newspaper: *"It was nice to be pushed to do something that you would not normally do," "I think the competitions outside of the classroom are very encouraging. They push us to be creative."* Intercultural interviews with Francophones were appreciated as well, as *"it was great to overcome boundaries between speaking in class with other students and speaking with a francophone born and raised in this language."*

As for tasks related to participants' professional and academic goals, they most appreciated the task of writing a CV and cover letter as part of a simulated creation of an enterprise: *"it was very relevant in terms of the goals we want to achieve."* One participant suggested integrating a mock job interview in French to enhance the oral aspect of the project. Tasks such as conducting a social issue survey and presenting the data, attending a conference, and participating in a discussion led by a guest speaker (e.g., a movie director, a field expert) were also seen as being useful. This positive reaction could be explained by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the participants came from a background in the social sciences and therefore found the above-mentioned tasks to be relevant as they could be applied to any context in their field, regardless of the specializations of individual students.

It is important to note that participants stressed the importance of a comfortable and low-stakes environment to facilitate discussion and interaction, such as informal discussions in small groups with peers, a guest speaker, conversation partners, or interacting with small children: *"I would prefer to have more environments where I wouldn't be judged, where I would feel more comfortable."* For example, for most participants, attending a conference or a class led by a field expert was an interesting experience from a cultural point of view, but was also seen as *"very formal, so in a sense, it discouraged a lot of people, it was a lot of pressure."* A more comfortable, informal environment may therefore encourage students to participate more as "learners often find their informal learning activities more motivating than learning in formal settings ... where there is much less freedom to define tasks and relate activities to their own goals" (Jones et al. 252). Although the authors here refer to formal learning as traditional classroom learning and informal as external learning, the informal task types described by participants in the current study resemble the external learning.

#### 4.3.6 Importance of "place" and "context" in task design

All participants agreed that, in general, integrating the cultural and linguistic context of Quebec into tasks and syllabus design was important. However, their opinions differed in regard to the degree of importance of these components, how they should be integrated, and the task types that should be included in the syllabus. Most participants ( $n = 5$ ) pointed out the importance of exposure to the variations of Quebec French because *"they are in Montreal and this is French they will be interacting with,"* and *"it will really help with everyday exchanges."* Some participants ( $n = 3$ ) also recognized that learning French in Quebec provides a great opportunity to explore its culture and history: *"maybe it's not necessary to understand all the nuances, but it's a very good opportunity to explore this culture, it's very unique how the language and the culture are integrated together."* Grasping these *"nuances of Quebec culture and the language and how these two are tight together"* was *"very pertinent"* for two students who were interested in staying in Quebec after finishing their studies.

Participants also stated that Quebec French should not be the only focus of the French courses taught at the university. Four students suggested that *"there are international students who are interested in living, traveling, studying in other places,"* so they need to learn *"general [international] French to be able to talk in other contexts, not only in Quebec."* Other participants ( $n = 2$ ) also stressed the importance of exposure to other accents and variations of French: *"It should also be other different francophone countries because maybe some people [...] want to learn France French. It is important to incorporate Quebec and local setting, although you need to incorporate other settings as well."* In addition, one participant pointed out the stereotypes associated with Quebec French: *"a lot of people when they first start learning French, they have objectively a certain aversion to the Quebecois accent. I think this is unjustified."* The issue of accent should therefore be carefully considered in such courses as well in order to, in the words of one of the participants, *"[legitimize] more the Quebecois accent."* To encourage students to develop a better understanding of Quebec French and its variations, tasks were incorporated into the program that allowed the students to discover different aspects of the language, history, and culture of Quebec through interactions with native speakers and authentic materials. In these tasks, students were invited to compare and contrast the target language and culture to their own, an exercise "which is fundamental for the development of intercultural competence" (Lee 103).



Tasks such as conducting intercultural interviews on different aspects of francophone cultures, interacting with a sociolinguist, and defending a particular point of view during a round-table discussion on the use of the formal and informal "you" in world languages, cultures and in different social contexts provided the students with the opportunity to acquire intercultural competence. This was facilitated through the development of different skills, knowledge, and attitudes identified by Byram (49-55), such as interpreting and relating curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures as well as one's own, and knowledge of social groups, products, and practices, among others. According to participants, this method "*was very useful*," and "*it was also made in a way that it was not imposing*." They also appreciated the fact that "*it gives a lot of students the opportunity to talk about their cultures*."

#### **4.4 Task-based syllabus design – obstacles, challenges and constraints**

In addition to the responses related to the three main research questions, additional thematic categories emerged from the interview analysis. These categories are presented and discussed below.

##### **4.4.1 Diversity of learner backgrounds in heterogeneous groups**

While teachers saw diversity as an obstacle to the creation of a task-based syllabus that would respond to the needs of the whole group, students considered it to be an advantage: "*I think it's pretty diverse... but it's fine. [...] it's definitely helpful to have different opinions and to work not only with different perspectives, but also with different backgrounds*." Given the diversity of backgrounds and heterogeneity of the group, it is impossible to identify specific target tasks that would respond to specific needs and learning goals of each individual student in the group. However, as Lambert states (108-109), we were able to identify similarities in student profiles (given that the majority was in social sciences) which led to the establishment of an inventory of domain-independent task types. Task types related to this approach are interviews, surveys, interactive presentations, debates, roundtables, conferences, reports, job search-related tasks, and professional communication related tasks. By bringing in different perspectives and engaging advanced learners in contrastive analysis tasks on social issues and current affairs, students may become closer to their ultimate goal of learning a language; this goal "extends beyond high-level foreign language proficiency to include intercultural and symbolic competence as part of an increasingly plurilingual, multiliterate global citizenry" (Thorne and Reinhardt 62; see also Kramsch 249-252; Thorne 16).

To cater to individual needs, we propose focusing on global issues when selecting tasks, themes, and teaching materials and to offer open-ended topics that give learners the opportunity to explore ideas related to individual interests. This approach appears to be very motivating and may inspire creativity. As one participant expressed: "*We are motivated because we are asked to come up with what we want to do rather than being asked like 'This is your topic, do a presentation on it.' It requires more creativity*." By allowing learners to select topics, they are given more control over their learning experience and may therefore tailor the tasks to their individual needs and interests.

##### **4.4.2 Content and teaching materials**

Interviews also allowed us to shed light on students' preferences in terms of content and teaching materials. After identifying varying themes and topics of interest to students, it is also important to vary teaching materials and expose students to different genres. When discussing her course, one participant commented that: "*[in other classes] we also learned some literature and now we are focusing more on society side and political side... It is very interesting, but before, we studied some poems, literature... I feel it could be included in this level as well. We don't have to cover only contemporary, we could do both*." Indeed, a social issue could be introduced not only through the task of reading an article or watching a documentary, but could also be brought into the classroom through the analysis of a painting, a movie, an image posted on social media, a song, or an advertisement.

Exposing learners to variations of different registers and accents can aid in the development of pronunciation skills (Hwang and Lee 4; Thomson 747), and prepare learners to interact efficiently with native speakers from different countries and/or regions. All eight participants reported a lack of exposure to spoken French, and recognized the importance of exposure when learning: "*...it is important to be aware of different ways of speaking, because some accents are difficult to understand, it's more difficult to communicate with people with*

*different accents*" and *"a lot more of informal communication. [...] at the end of the day, people of our age will be communicating with other people of our age, so 90% of the time we will be exposed to this, and if we had no knowledge of that, it would be very frustrating."* While teachers should integrate listening tasks based on authentic materials from different francophone countries and/or regions, they should also find ways to extend the classroom by engaging learners in conversation exchanges and partnerships with francophone students, in-person or via telecollaboration, or by organizing extra-curricular activities, such as volunteer opportunities. Such activities ensure that students are not limited to being passive listeners when exposed to native speech, but that they also have the opportunity to engage in authentic interactions. Of course, in order to facilitate real-world exchanges, teachers should establish partnerships with community members and organizations to guide their students and scaffold interactions in real-life situations.

#### 4.4.3 Time

Another challenge reported by participants was related to the heavy workload they face as university students. This workload often becomes an obstacle, preventing them from fully engaging in task-based learning as these tasks are typically more time consuming than traditional exercises. One participant stated: *"Some problems with the projects are not related to the project nature itself. It relates more to our schedules. Some people just rush through them instead of enjoying the process."* Regardless of the time needed to complete a task, however, students are more likely to stay motivated if the task is meaningful: *"...it could be so much work [...] but in general, the authentic tasks, it's worth investing time. [...] And when you have a product at the end, like a CV, you just hand it to your employer. You wouldn't show your grammar exercise to anyone."* In order to maximize learners' experience with TBLT, teachers must carefully plan complex tasks, taking into consideration peak periods in the academic calendar, finding a balance between individual and collaborative tasks, and being realistic when assigning tasks that involve interactions with native speakers outside of the classroom.

As illustrated above, when the task provides students with opportunities to create a final product that they will be able to use, share, and be proud of, they are more motivated and more engaged in their learning. Some examples of tasks completed by students in the program were writing a CV and cover letter, a poem to be submitted for a creative writing contest, an article to be published in a student newspaper, or a movie critique to be sent to a contest organized during a movie festival.

#### 4.4.4 Linguistic skills and competencies

While students pointed out the limitations of grammar-based approaches and lecturing, citing the lack of application, practice, and interaction, four participants acknowledged the importance of the grammatical, lexical, and phonological knowledge they acquired in previous French classes. They particularly stressed that they would not be able to be fully engaged in or successfully complete a task *"without having all building blocks,"* as the tasks *"require an advanced understanding of the language."* Two participants mentioned the importance of having an active vocabulary for efficient communication and interaction: *"An obstacle, I guess having a smaller vocabulary. It's hard to spontaneously participate in the conversation."*

Half of the participants ( $n = 4$ ) expressed their appreciation of pronunciation tasks and individualized corrective feedback, both of which had been lacking or non-existent in their previous learning experiences: *"When I learnt French in Ontario, the profs didn't correct the pronunciation, so if I had to give a presentation, if everything was grammatically correct, the profs would say nothing. I had close to zero actual interaction with my profs in terms of them coming and saying to me "Oh you should say this, you should say that, this is how we say it in French."*

Participants also appreciated the technology-mediated oral practice, as it prepared them for and facilitated their participation in classroom and real-life interactions. This technology-mediated oral practice consisted of: (1) individual lab practice (based on Celce-Murcia et al. 45); (2) use of different speech technologies to practice thematic vocabulary with immediate feedback provided; and (3) oral compositions, such as summarizing a class discussion on a social issue, expressing an opinion, or recording a movie critique. These tasks helped students to build confidence and improve pronunciation: *"helpful to become confident with speaking French, with my pronunciation."* The lab practice also offered opportunities to develop pronunciation skills individually, removing the pressure of performing in front of peers: *"I can practice speaking before doing it in class with my peers."* Indeed, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been shown to decrease learner anxiety as it removes the pressures of face-to-face communication (Arnold 482; Bradley and Lomicka 359).

## **Conclusion**

Through the implementation of the needs analysis in this project, we have gained a deeper insight into the needs and short- and long-term goals of French language learners residing in Montreal, Quebec. The NA has confirmed that there is a general appreciation of the TBLT approach by both students and teachers, even though teachers initially anticipated resistance from learners. It has allowed us to reach a consensus for establishing a set of domain-independent task types in line with students' and teachers' needs and objectives, as well as with the task-oriented framework of the CEFR for advanced learners. The NA has also identified specific linguistic and communicative needs that will facilitate learning in a second language context, and will serve to guide us in the selection of teaching methods and materials for future programs. Although learner needs and goals evolve over time, the NA reveals that developing a single task-based syllabus to meet the needs of a heterogeneous group of university students appears to be feasible, and will be put into practice for the next stages of this project.

Liakina, Natallia and Gabriel Michaud. "Needs analysis for Task-Based curriculum design: How useful can it be for general purpose L2 courses?" *Nouvelle Revue Synergies Canada*, N°11 (2018)

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### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank Jennica Grimshaw for her invaluable support as a research assistant. We are grateful to two anonymous reviewers and the editors of this issue of NRSC, Denise Mohan and Rosa Hong, for their helpful and insightful comments.