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Reader Response as a Focal Practice
in Foreign Language Acquisition

by

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach (Sumara, 1995) in a third year, Spanish as a foreign language class in a university setting, the nature of engagement and response experienced by the students, the ways that the reader response approach as a focal practice influences students' oral language proficiency, comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of a text and the implications this approach has in the foreign language curriculum at the university level. The design of the study was qualitative and emergent. Methods included participant and non-participant observation, taped responses, a taped focus group meeting, and analysis of documents. Six themes emerged from the data analysis: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom; patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*; students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach; students' reading practices and priorities; response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, and pre- and post-unit language assessments. This study found that students' oral proficiency, comprehension, interpretation and re-interpretation of the novel were positively affected by the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature. In addition, this approach allowed for social construction of meaning. The final culminating response to the novel allowed the participants to respond to it through a variety of symbol system such as drama, poetry, music and multi-media.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The viewpoints on the teaching of foreign language literature in this thesis have evolved over the last two years. They arose out of my own attempts to understand how language works in a fully integrated way as simultaneously a social and cultural phenomenon.

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CHAPTER I

Overview of the Study

This study describes the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach (Sumara, 1995) in a third year, Spanish as a foreign language class in a university setting and the ways that the reader response approach as a focal practice influences students' oral language proficiency, comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of a text, and the implications this approach has for the foreign language curriculum at the university level. The sample chosen for this study was a group of ten third-year Spanish Language and Culture students. The sample included seven females, and three males.

The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Creswell, 2003). Methods included taped responses of the students to two texts, participant observations, a taped focus group meeting, and analysis of documents such as observation fieldnotes and a journal written by the researcher, individual and group presentations and the products generated from these presentations.

The study took place within the context of a unit which was implemented over a five-week period. During this unit, students had the opportunity to read and respond privately to a novel, and to share their personal interpretations in response groups and whole class discussions. During the first meeting in week 1, I invited students to participate in the study and assessed their oral proficiency in Spanish before the study began. Data collected during the first meeting were analyzed to determine how proficient participants were in expressing themselves orally and their comprehension of the text they had read. At the second meeting in week 1 and during weeks 2, 3, and 4, the reader response as a focal practice within the context of a novel study was implemented. Week 5 focused on the participants' final responses to the novel, assessing their

oral proficiency in Spanish after experiencing the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature and to obtain their input on the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature. This study describes the nature of engagement and response experienced by the students.

Rationale

Researchers in second and foreign language instruction have criticized the traditional approach of teaching foreign language literature for a number of reasons. In such an approach, comprehension of literary works is assessed by comprehension questions which require the reader to give literal answers from the text. In a study conducted in Taiwan, Chi (1999) investigated how ten advanced college students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) comprehended and interpreted two English short stories. Chi identified four main themes:

- Reading as sense-making, which dealt with how participants made sense of the texts by searching meaning flexibly or inflexibly;
- Reading as communication, which dealt with how participants dealt with dissatisfaction and suspense;
- Reflexivity, which dealt with situations where students stood back to see and reflected upon themselves in the roles of readers, thinkers, and learners.
- Re-contextualization, which dealt with how the participants changed their interpretations, previous understandings, and reading stances when they re-read the texts.

Chi's study showed how the reader response approach gave the students the chance to engage in a contextual, meaning-making process, and how it embodied the potential to engage readers' interest and stimulate their critical thinking. Chi contends:

Meaning negotiation made my participants take into account their varying perspectives – what they knew and did not know. (...) These activities can support readers by freeing them from the constraints of looking for the “right way” and the “correct answer”, so that they ultimately see language as a tool to manage their own words and worlds. (p. 17)

Chi suggests that the findings of this study should be considered in future research with students who have different levels of ESL/EFL. Chi concluded that teachers should re-evaluate their perspectives towards reading instruction and provide the students with a positive environment in which to make meaning personal through the transactional process. For instance, Chi explains that, because literary texts in foreign language classes have traditionally been looked upon as resources for the detailed study of structures and form and not as the departure point for language use, foreign-language learners have long been encouraged and taught to read a text only from the author’s or the instructor’s perspective. Therefore, as long as the students’ interpretation and comprehension of a text are consistent with their instructor’s, the latter will validate the students’ understanding of the texts. As a result, foreign language classes have traditionally failed to encourage readers’ personal constructions of meaning in favour of their instructors’ interpretations of texts.

Similarly, Haynes and Carr (1990, in Chi, 1999) assert that students’ reading skills are still evaluated by their linguistic performance as readers, and that their comprehension in reading is still assessed by how much they can remember of the literal meanings of texts. Further, Chi (1999) cites an argument articulated by Davis (1989) and Cairney (1990), who have suggested that literary texts should not be considered avenues for the analysis of usage (grammar and form), but should be used to encourage authentic communication. Cook (1994 in Chi, 1999)

notes that, when instructors use this latter approach, texts become resources which provide the readers with “opportunities for critical reading, questioning, negotiating, and the expression of meaning, as well as communication, interpretation and the exchange of meaning” (p. 2).

One of the purposes of this study was to provide students with opportunities to construct their own interpretations of what they read. I assume that, by applying approaches such as the one proposed in this study, students might be more willing to take risks and less worried about making grammatical errors when expressing themselves.

Finally, in analyzing how to develop the inner voice (i.e., conversations that we establish with ourselves when reading a text) in a foreign language, Tomlinson (2000) expresses the need to find out more about how a foreign language inner voice develops in an authentic context. He proposes that instructors of foreign languages research ways to help students develop an effective foreign language inner voice as a preamble to oral proficiency: “Helping learners to talk to themselves during L2 learning and communication can certainly help them reduce anxiety and gain confidence and control. And there is a good chance that it can contribute to increased communicative competence too” (p. 31).

Reader response seems to be a promising vehicle to achieve the goal of oral proficiency and understanding of the culture through reading. If instructors enable their students to read a text and experience it in an aesthetic manner, they will be able to develop the inner voice in the foreign language (Tomlinson, 2000), which will, in turn, lead to richer class discussions in which students will learn from one another and will have the opportunity to reflect on what they are reading without the traditional pressure to match their views of a text to those of the author or instructor.

Vande Berg (1990, 1993) contends that foreign language instructors should incorporate into their courses innovations in language pedagogy:

The creative instructor can use a literary selection as the springboard for the enthusiastic exchange of ideas in which learners focus on message rather than form, using the target language to argue, to justify their opinions, or, while playing the role of a character, to engage in conversational exchanges (...) a well conceived discussion of a literary passage can be an excellent means of fostering authentic oral communication. (p. 669)

Personal Ground

As an instructor, I have always been interested in investigating ways in which to help students of foreign languages to develop their oral skills as they develop an understanding of the Hispanic culture. In describing the study of a foreign language, Morgan (1998) observes: “Students are not just entering a new culture of holidays, sports and food. They are also entering a new culture of politics, employment, education, and family life. (...) Students enter a social world where sophisticated forms of exclusion persist” (p. 13).

In a recent graduate language arts course, which I had the opportunity to take at Lakehead University, the main topic of study was the reader response approach to literature as a way to develop the passion for reading in students of language. An instructor may communicate such a passion by shifting from the conventional relation between text and author to the relation between text and reader. Thus, the focus for readers shifts from the conventional efferent reading (reading for information) to an aesthetic reading (reading for pleasure).

As my colleagues and I experienced the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature ourselves during the previously mentioned course, I started to wonder about the

benefits that this method might bring to a foreign language class in terms of developing students' oral proficiency and comprehension in a foreign language.

After 11 years of being a foreign language instructor, I have noticed that the major problem faced by students of foreign languages is their lack of vocabulary in the target language. The verbal paucity makes it difficult for them to express themselves in the target language; this lack of vocabulary also makes it difficult for them to guess the meanings of words in context. Therefore, students tend to refer to dictionaries for the meanings of words, making reading tiring and time-consuming. Language instructors should recognize the importance of dictionaries in aiding their students to understand a new or difficult word, but it is also detrimental to students' learning to have to refer to the dictionary and interferes with the pleasure of reading. In addition, students lack the tools to study and learn a foreign language before they become university students despite many years of French language instruction in Canada, for example. Students tend to approach a text in a very efferent way and, therefore, their responses to these texts are primarily literal. Besides, this efferent approach to a text does not allow them to focus on those elements in the reading which are more engaging such as the cultural elements. Moreover, as noted above, texts in foreign language textbooks usually prescribe what the students should understand in such reading, thus preventing them from engaging in a more aesthetic reading.

My observations as an instructor have led me to hold values about foreign language teaching and learning. I believe that university students have poor reading habits and have been taught to say what their instructor expects them to say when reading a book or an article. Therefore, instructors rarely encourage students to give a personal response to or interpretation of what they read and, as a consequence, students find it very difficult when faced with these tasks.

Although my beliefs and assumptions shaped the way I viewed and understood the data I collected and the way I interpreted my experiences, I made every effort to ensure greater objectivity. As a researcher, I acknowledged my preconceptions and theoretical beliefs as much as possible in order to better understand the participants' experiences. In this particular study, my relationship with participants was that of an instructor. I started this research with the perspective that university students were diverse and that their perceptions had been shaped by their own lived experiences towards literature and foreign language learning, and that they would need scaffolding when they were required to respond, reflect, and debate during the course of the unit. Regardless, I firmly believed that an instructor has the power to promote change and provide a new vision for his/her students. Like many experienced teachers whom I have had the privilege to work with or read about, my pedagogy is founded upon principles of a student-centered environment which focuses on aesthetic education.

My students have been the main reason why I have continued being an instructor of foreign languages. I have learned and continue learning from them about the processes of learning and teaching a foreign language. By directly observing my own teaching style and its effect on my students, I realize how my past experiences and my interactions with the students have helped me come to this moment in my life in which I feel compelled to study more in depth an approach which may help them to learn Spanish in a different and more meaningful way.

My perceptions of foreign language teaching and learning have been shaped by my personal experiences. From 1989 to 1994, I was an Education student, majoring in English as a foreign language. From 1994 to 1996, I worked as an instructor of English as a second language at a technical college in Cuba, at which the students ranged in age from 15 to 22 years. From 1996 to 1998, I also worked as an instructor of English as a second language at the Ministry of

Construction of Cuba, at which the students ranged in age from 30 to 50 years. Most recently, from 1999 to present, I have been an instructor of Spanish as a foreign language at Lakehead University and Confederation College, both in Thunder Bay, Ontario, institutions at which the students have ranged in age from 16 to 40 years. I believe this understanding of the context and ages enhanced my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity to many of the challenges that I encountered and assisted me in working with the participants in this study. I brought knowledge of foreign language from both learning and teaching perspectives.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the nature of readers' engagement with and response to *La Casa en Mango Street (The House on Mango Street)*, a novel by Sandra Cisneros (1984)?
2. In what ways does the reader response approach as a focal practice influence students' oral language proficiency, comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of the text?
3. What are the implications of the reader response approach as a focal practice in the foreign language curriculum at the university level?

Definition of Terms

In this study the following definitions are employed:

Aesthetic Reading and Efferent Reading

These two terms were developed by Rosenblatt (1978) when she was analyzing the stances a reader may assume when reading a literary text. "Efferent reading" refers to the conventional way in which literary texts have been approached in literature classes. In this

conventional way, the reader looks for specific information and analyzes the literary text in relation to information about the author. In short, Rosenblatt (1978) explains that in this type of reading the attention of the reader is “directed outward, toward concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading” (p.24). “Aesthetic reading”, however, refers to reading for pleasure and the analysis of a literary text in relation to the reader. Rosenblatt (1978) states that when an individual is reading a literary text aesthetically his/her attention “is centred directly on what he/she is living through during his/her relationship with that particular text” (p. 25).

Reading as a Focal Practice

Sumara (1995) combined the phrases “focal reality” and “holistic practice” earlier introduced by Franklin (1990) and Borgmann (1992) into the term “focal practice.” Sumara (1995) explains that, for him,

a focal practice is a particular activity which functions to render visible usually-invisible interpersonal and intertextual relations. As well, a focal practice announces a location for an inquiry into personal and cultural histories that have preceded our involvement in any focal practice. (p. 23)

Sumara (1995) then describes focal practice as the reading of a text in sections to allow the students to read a text privately, respond to it, and share their responses at different meetings in the course of a unit in a “book club” setting. Afterwards, the students re-read the text with the objective to discover if their original views and opinions have changed in any way after they have shared their responses with others in the class. In short, he explains that “only reading experiences which are subject to interpretation and reinterpretation create the experience of a

focal practice. (...) reading and response experiences become focal practices when the response to fiction is considered *in relation to* other readings and/or experiences” (p. 23).

Research Design and Methodology

This study describes the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach (Sumara, 1995) in a third year, Spanish as a foreign language class in a university setting, the nature of engagement and response experienced by the students, the ways that the reader response approach as a focal practice influences students’ oral language proficiency, comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of a text, and the implications this approach has for the foreign language curriculum at the university level.

The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Creswell, 2003). Methods included participant observation; taped responses; a taped focus group meeting; and analysis of documents such as observation fieldnotes and a journal written by the researcher; individual and group presentations, and the products generated from these presentations. The focus group meeting involved open-ended questions allowing for probes to explore the responses further.

During this unit, students had the opportunity to read and respond privately to a novel, and to share their personal interpretations and re-interpretations in response groups and whole class discussions.

The study took place within the context of a unit which was implemented over a five-week period. During this unit, students had the opportunity to read and respond privately to a novel, and to share their personal interpretations in response groups and whole class discussions. During the first meeting in week 1, I invited students to participate in the study and assessed their oral proficiency in Spanish before the study began. Data collected during the first meeting were analyzed to determine how proficient participants were in expressing themselves orally and their

comprehension of the text they had read. At the second meeting in week 1 and during weeks 2, 3, and 4, the reader response as a focal practice approach within the context of a novel study was implemented. Week 5 focused on the participants' final responses to the novel, assessing their oral proficiency in Spanish after experiencing the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature and to obtain their input on the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature. This study describes the nature of engagement and response experienced by the students. The sample included seven females, and three males.

Prior to the beginning of the study, I obtained ethical approval from the university Research Ethics Board to conduct the study. The students were then briefed on the purpose of the study as well as the rationale for implementing it, and were invited to participate. Appendices 1 and 2 contain the verbal explanation given to the participants and consent form.

The study was carried out twice a week for 2 ½ hours each day for five weeks, and this timetable was consistently followed. Extensive fieldnotes were recorded and reflected upon in a journal. The use of multiple sources such as taped responses and focus group meeting, observation fieldnotes, journal, and the products generated by the students' presentations allowed for triangulation. Data analysis was informed by measures of *language use* (see Tables 9 & 10). This part of data analysis strategy was based on the study conducted by Asraf and Ahmad (2003). This study aimed at motivating students to read extensively in English and helping them overcome their problems understanding English texts as a means towards increasing their proficiency in the language. The rest of the data analysis was constant comparative (Creswell, 2003). The research design and methodology are described in Chapter III.

Limitations

One of the limitations of being an instructor-participant-observer is that instructors are not foreign to the setting they are observing. Much of what instructors do each day is done so automatically that perhaps they are intellectually almost unaware of it. Thus, they can form an inaccurate interpretation of observed events or not recognize that an event or a response is taking place. However, an instructor acting as participant-observer can reduce the problem of reactivity of the class being observed and increase his/her own reflexivity. Instructors in this position can facilitate collecting field data on-site in the classroom.

Similarly, being the instructor and researcher prevented me from observing as extensively as an observer with no teaching responsibilities. However, as the instructor I had the advantage in that I made curriculum decisions which scaffolded students' learning.

Finally, the small number of participants in this study does not allow for generalization of the results. Thus, the findings of this study are not generalizable, but may be transferable to other settings.

Significance of this Study

This study offers supportive evidence that contributes to the academic literature in foreign language pedagogy on the benefits of the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature to the development of oral language proficiency and comprehension of texts in foreign languages. Moreover, the findings of this research illuminate not only the nature of foreign language teaching and learning in particular, but also teaching and learning in general and, thus, are of great value to instructors of foreign languages and other disciplines. Finally, the unit provides a model for other instructors in the development and implementation of reader response as a focal practice approach in the foreign language class.

Summary

This chapter described an overview of the research problem, personal ground, rationale, research design and methodology, definitions of key terms, limitations and significance. Chapter II reviews the literature on reader response theory in general and on reader response theory in foreign language acquisition in particular. The research design and methodology are discussed in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents the findings and interpretation. Chapter V discusses the conclusions, implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Reader Response Theory

Hunsberger and Labercane (2002) explain that the reader response approach to teaching literature was conceptualized by theorists such as Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), Iser (1978), and Fish (1980), whose works have focused on the reading process and on the relationship between the reader and the text.

Reader response, as an approach to teaching literature, differs from the New Critics' approach to teaching literature (Ali, 1994; Courtland & Gambell, 2000; Leggo, 2001). Whereas the New Critics assumed determined positions toward literature, reader response views the act of reading as a transaction between readers and texts, a transaction in which the readers use their lived experiences, convictions, personal opinions, and assumptions to interact with the ideas in the text and create personal meaning as a result of this transaction (Iser, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). Ali (1994), states that in this approach

reading becomes a dynamic process in which readers are constantly reflecting on their response to the text. (...) The satisfaction gained through reader response is a result of an awareness that the form affects the reader's experience of reading, and how this awareness throws a new light on his or her idiosyncratic understanding of the text. (p. 290)

As stated previously, the reader response approach consists of the development of an aesthetic relationship with a text. In this approach, literature is presented as "an experience rather than as an object, and readers as active participants rather than passive consumers" (Thomson, 1984, in Davis, 1989, p. 421).

Numerous researchers have found inspiration in the works of Rosenblatt (1938) and Iser (1978) and have explored reader response theory and its impact in the language classroom (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2000; Beach, 2002; Boyd-Batstone, 2002; Cherniwshan, 2002; Canterford, 1991; Courtland et al., 1998; Courtland & Campbell, 2000; Cox, 2002; Dias, 2002; Golden, 2002; Labercane, 2002; Luce-Kapler, 2002; Ramsden, 2002; Smagorinsky, 2002; Sumara, 1994, 1995; Wat, 2002).

Reader response theory has served as a foundation for new ways to teach literature in language classes. Sumara (1995) used this approach to develop a procedure called “reading as a focal practice” to encourage the aesthetic relationship between the students and a text. Sumara’s (1995) theory of comprehension lies on the foundations that

“literariness” is not something which is contained in the text; rather it is a quality which emerges from the unique relation that the reader has with a text which is culturally *announced* as literary and, most importantly, which leaves enough space or indeterminacy for the reader to participate in the shaping of meaning. It is the process of anticipating, reading, and interpreting the text that announces what I am calling ‘commonplace location’ - an opening which functions to help the reader to shift perspective and understand her or his life differently because of the relation established with the text. (p. 20)

Sumara (1995) describes focal practice as the reading of a text in sections to allow the students to read a text privately and respond to it as they are reading it in a journal or in the margins of the book. By writing in a journal or in the margins of the book, and reviewing these reflections, the students have the opportunity to develop a relationship with a book which, in turn, allows them to experience reading as a place where memories of lived experiences are

found (pp. 25-26). The students then share their responses at different meetings in the course of a unit in a “book club” setting. Afterwards, the students re-read such text and reflect with the objective to discover if their original views and opinions have changed in any way after they have shared their responses with others in the class. In short, Sumara (1995) explains that

Only reading experiences which are subject to interpretation and reinterpretation create the experience of a focal practice. (...) reading and response experiences become focal practices when the response to fiction is considered *in relation to* other readings and/or experiences. Furthermore, like the poet who continually devises his or her own poem while in the process of living a life that includes the writing of it, a focal reading and response practice *depends* upon some form of re-reading. (p. 23)

In addition, reading as a focal practice can also be looked upon as a relationship between the reader and a community of readers in which, every time an interpretation of a text is articulated, it may create, among the community of readers, new meanings, new signs, and new contexts. For instance, Sumara (1995) argues that, instead of encouraging a highly individualized response, teachers should work towards creating an environment in which responses enrich the classroom and arise from the shared work of that classroom.

Sumara (1995), Bainbridge and Malicky (2000), and Smagorinsky (2002) describe the development of multiliteracies as one of the teaching implications of the reader response approach. Sumara (1995) mentions the importance of encouraging students to represent their interpretations to literary texts in new forms “which represent the complexity of their intertextual readings and responses” (p. 25). Moreover, he affirms that “it is through this process of re-symbolizing of horizontal reading practices that students are better able to interpret the significance of their involvement with literary texts” (p.25). For example, Sumara used this

approach in a grade 5/6 class in which the students, at the end of the unit, wrote essays which connected their responses to the novel, to other classroom readings, and to lived experiences (p.25). Thus, focal practice was the means of the re-symbolizing process that the students were able to connect their interpretations of the text to a whole set of topics and personal experiences (p.25).

Similarly, Smagorinsky (2002) explains that, in the reader response context, students bring to discussions previous experiences that provide them knowledge on the topic being analyzed. In turn, these experiences inform these discussions and offer new perspectives on that topic (p. 25). He contends that, through this consideration of the lived experience, the students “develop a relationship with literature and classmates that potentially enriches their understanding of themselves, the literature and one another” (p. 25). This approach, as a result, will allow the students to show their learning differently and, thus, to find an imaginative way to respond to a text (p. 27). Furthermore, he stresses the importance of designing activities in which students have the opportunity to produce art, music, drama, or multimedia through which the students express “how their lives have changed in relation to the changes they have seen in literary characters” (p. 100).

Bainbridge and Malicky (2000) suggest that, aside from reflective essays, a whole set of activities would also aid the students in the construction of meaning. These activities can include creating a timeline (p. 311), drama (pp. 330-361), and the use of technology (362-395). These authors contend that such activities allow students to construct new meanings, and state that the nature of reading and response motivates students to bring their knowledge together, “make sense of it, and express it through movement, the visual arts, music, drama, writing, and dialogue” (p. 302).

Courtland et al. (1998) conducted a study that describes the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature in a graduate seminar. The participants in this study read the novel *The Giver* (Lowry, 1993) in sections and shared their responses at different meetings. Then they re-read the novel. Courtland et al. (1998) explain that reader response as a focal practice proved to be very effective since it showed that, by having these social interactions with a text and others in class, the participants understood the text at a deeper level and they make further connections to their lived experiences. They cite Rosenblatt (1982, in Courtland et al., 1998), who explains that “to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts” (p. 331).

A number of authors (Canterford, 1991; Courtland et al., 1998; Smagorinsky, 2002; Sumara, 1995) also note that an important factor when one is using reader response in a classroom is the role of the instructor. They note that the role of the instructor is that of another reader and participant and facilitator in the reading activity. To illustrate, Sumara (1995) explains that instructors should not exclude their responses to literary texts from the students’ responses (p. 25). He goes on to explain that, since instructors are involved in the “ecology of the curricular experience” (p. 25), they cannot look at the commonplace location (the space created by the relations among reader, text, and the contexts of reading) as outsiders (p. 25). Rather, he suggests that instructors should become part of that location as interpreters:

teaching literature, then, is an act of interpretation where the teacher works with the students to understand the ever-evolving complex set of relations that includes literary readings. (...) the teacher must be prepared to reveal some of her or himself to the

students, for it is impossible to talk about one's relation to the text without talking about oneself. (p. 25)

Similarly, Courtland et al. (1998) explain that "teachers should be readers and writers who engage in the reading of literary texts and shared response. If they are to implement reading as focal practice, they need to experience the strategy themselves" (p. 340). The philosophy behind this statement is that instructors need to go through this process of engagement themselves in order to get their students motivated to go through it also. Courtland et al. (1998) explain:

Teachers should redefine their role in the classroom to be that of a member of a reading community engaged in literature. As such, they become partners engaged in genuine enquiry with their students, discovering commonplace locations that connect readers to each other, readers of texts, and texts to students' own lived experiences. They assist students in negotiating the relations between the experience and the reflection on experience in ways that enable the students to develop their understanding of the processes involved in comprehension and interpretation, private and public reading, and the resymbolizing of texts in new forms. (p. 340)

Smagorinsky (2002) suggests the important role instructors play in scaffolding students' learning. He defines scaffolding as "the way in which experienced and capable people assist others in learning new knowledge and skills" (p. 19). He explains that this scaffolding should be planned in such a way that in the end "students can understand the complexity of the theme and construct their own understanding of the role it plays in their lives" (p. 21). Consistent with Sumara (1995), Canterford (1991) and Courtland et al. (1998), Smagorinsky (2002) considers that teachers should learn while they are teaching and that their "notion of building" can possibly

change by means of engaging with students and “their ideas of what needs to be constructed” (p. 21).

In another study, Boyd-Batstone (2002) explored how a fifth grade bilingual student connected reader response and culture as an aesthetic experience. In this study, he explains how this participant expressed her culture aesthetically in the context of a reader response learning environment. The results of this study demonstrated that reader response and culture connected in three ways: (a) plugging into another’s story, (b) telling one’s own story, and (c) connecting to a family story (p. 132). In addition, this study also demonstrated and affirmed the role of the instructor explained above. Boyd-Batstone contends that, in the classroom context, it is the instructor’s responsibility to foster an environment of reader response and the positions the students will adopt in their responses to the text. To illustrate, he explains:

when a teacher establishes an efferent stance, the classroom environment becomes a place for accommodation to the culture of the teacher and for subordination of the culture of the students. However, if the teacher is predominantly interested in connecting the text to the students’ lives, aesthetic reading comes to the forefront. (p. 133)

Boyd-Batstone takes this role further by explaining that, when an instructor does not share the same cultural background as that of the students, then reader response requires the instructor to negotiate culture with the students continually (p. 133). The implication of this cultural negotiation requires the instructor to listen actively for the ways in which the culture of the students influences their understanding of what they are reading. This cultural negotiation results in the role of the instructor shifting from that of instructor to that of colearner while students share their responses (pp. 133-134). He explains:

in culturally diverse classrooms, the teacher and the students can function as cultural mediators of meanings as these meanings are expressed by the students of differing backgrounds. Essentially, reader response invites cultural negotiation as a way of affirming how each one thinks and comes to an understanding of a text. (p. 134)

Reader Response Theory in Foreign Language Literature

A number of writers contend that reader response has considerable potential for foreign language teaching (Ali, 1994; Boyd-Batstone, 2002; Cairney, 1990; Cook, 1994; Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 1997; Davis, 1989, 1992;). However, although extensive research has been conducted to date to determine how reading in the foreign language class affects the students' attitudes towards it or how it affects students' reading and writing proficiency in a foreign language (Ali, 1994; Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Bretz & Persin, 1987; Davis, 1989, 1992; Swafar, 1998; Yamashita, 2004), very little has been done to investigate how reading might influence the attainment of oral proficiency in a foreign language by responding to text.

In his review of the literature, Davis (1989) presents compelling arguments to present literature as an important element in foreign language teaching. He cites Iser (1978), who views "literature as an experience rather than an object, and readers as active participants rather than passive consumers" (p. 421). Iser (1978, in Davis, 1989) describes this relationship with the literary work being two-fold: artistic and aesthetic. The artistic aspect is represented by the author's text, and the aesthetic aspect is represented by the "realization accomplished by the reader" (p. 21).

Davis (1989) suggests "the need of a pedagogical theory that takes into account cultural and linguistic factors and also encourages students to produce their own individualized meaning from the text" (p. 421). Therefore, in order to determine how foreign language readers

reconstructed a foreign language text, Davis (1989) asked five students from an intermediate-level French class to read a passage from *Cette année-là* (Deharme, 1945). The students had to read the passage without prior knowledge or scaffolding on the book's background and vocabulary. After the students had finished reading, they had to write, in English, all they recalled from the passage without referring back to the text.

The results from this study showed that the students had misconstrued the passage or lacked the tools to develop an aesthetic relationship with the text they were reading. These results led Davis to develop a lesson plan that attempted to teach students how to interact with a text by showing them how to monitor their responses while reading. In this lesson plan, he suggested a self-questioning strategy through reinforcement based on Iser's theory (1978) and consistent with reading as a focal practice approach proposed by Sumara (1995). Davis (1989) suggests instructors start by reading a text in segments and asking questions to the class after a segment has been read. The students, in turn, gradually learn to apply the same strategy on their own while reading a text. Davis suggested that this strategy would lead to a closer reading of the text "which is guided by textual instructions as well as by the reader's reactions to these instructions" (p. 425). Furthermore, Davis affirms that this reinforcement strategy would lead to the acquisition of metacognitive skills (p. 426), and contends that "teacher-mediated reading guides students to understand instructions explicitly given in the text as well as provide opportunities for individual interpretations" (p. 366).

Finally, Davis notes that the reader response approach offers a comprehensive stance for interpreting and teaching narrative in a foreign language class. He concludes that, if teaching is guided by using such an approach "understanding in terms of schemata is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of understanding in the broadest sense" (McCormick, 1988 in Davis, 1989,

p. 426). Furthermore, he suggests that different texts may be taught by using self-questioning. He explains that

integrating reading into foreign languages curriculum entails multiple dialogues: between reader and text, between teaching-mediating reader and not-yet-competent reader, and amongst student readers. This dialogic process ought to make the foreign language more meaningful and, thus, make acquisition more natural. (p. 426)

In a similar study, Asraf and Ahmad (2003) investigated the use of an extensive reading program in the foreign language class. The main focus of their study was how to motivate EFL students to read English texts and help them overcome their problems of understanding such texts as a means towards increasing their proficiency in the language. The participants in their study did not speak English as their first language and only used it in the class, primarily, to reply to their teacher's questions. They did not communicate with each other in English either. Therefore, in order to motivate the students to read English books, the participants in this study were encouraged to re-tell the stories in their own words and were allowed to use their first language whenever they could not find the right words in English to respond. The researchers placed an emphasis on the participants' understanding of the story and on their sharing stories with their classmates. At the end of the study, the researchers found that the students experienced a shift in their attitudes towards reading and, while oral proficiency attainment was not the primary focus of this study, they argue that, if students are motivated to read in the foreign language, their proficiency in it may increase over time if such programs are kept in place.

The notion of using the first language while learning a second language considered in the study above is consistent with Tomlinson's (2000) theory of developing proficiency in a foreign

language while using our first language internally. To illustrate, Tomlinson (2000) conducted experiments at Kobe University and the University of Luton with native speakers and second language learners. In these experiments, Tomlinson asked the participants to read short texts and then to reflect on their reading process. The results of these experiments showed that the native speakers spoke to themselves and saw mental images. However, only a small number of the second language learners reported either speaking to themselves or seeing mental images. Tomlinson contends these results are consistent with Masuhara's (1998, in Tomlinson, 2000) study. In her study, Masuhara asked her participants to think aloud as they were reading the beginning of a novel. The native speakers reported to have used their inner voice and their sensory images as opposed to the second language participants, who attempted decoding and translating the words of the text.

Finally, Tomlinson (2000) considers that foreign language instructors should give the opportunity to learners to talk to themselves privately or in what he defines as "egocentric speech" (p. 131). He explains: "The inner voice is egocentric and idiosyncratic. It is used by us, to us and for us and it does not have to consider anybody else" (p. 131). Moreover, he affirms that, even prior to this stage, instructors should allow students privacy and silence to develop an inner voice by creating the opportunities for them to listen to the second language, respond mentally, physically or even in the first language (p. 28). He concludes that the students "must be given time to think, and they must not be forced to perform in a public voice without having an inner voice available to help them prepare" (p. 25).

Reader response as a focal practice, then, should be considered an essential component in foreign language acquisition not only to develop reading proficiency in a foreign language, but also to develop oral proficiency in a foreign language. To illustrate, Ali (1994) suggests that

since self-concept and motivation are important ingredients in the foreign language class, reader response offers a meaningful framework for the study of literature, for it develops students as “independent makers of meaning” (pp. 295-296).

In a study conducted by Ali (1994) with a group of second-year engineering students in Malaysia enrolled in an advanced English as a foreign language class, the reader response approach was implemented to teach short stories. The results of this study revealed that the students benefited from the class discussions and learned to accept each other’s opinions and interpretations. In addition, at the end of the study, the students had a sense of pride when they presented the products of their interpretations and explained them. The level of maturity and creativity in these projects was high and “brought them [the students] closer to the aesthetic values of the text and an understanding of themselves as active readers” (p. 294).

In the study described in this research project, the reading unit titled “An aesthetic response to Sandra Cisneros’s *La Casa en Mango Street*”, developed by the instructor/researcher provided the participants with a context in which to respond aesthetically and artistically to literature in a foreign language. As part of their activities, the students read the book independently, discussed orally their interpretations and re-interpretations of the book and supporting reading materials in small groups and with the entire class.

Summary

This chapter has provided the review of the literature related to reader response theory in general and reader response theory in foreign language literature. Chapter III discusses the research design and methodology and the data analysis process.

CHAPTER III

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the research design, the unit on reader response as a focal practice in foreign language acquisition, and the methods used to examine and describe the nature of readers' engagement with and response to *La Casa en Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984). The sample chosen for this study was a group of 10 third-year Spanish Language and Culture students who participated in the five-week unit on reader response as focal practice in foreign language acquisition.

Design

The design of the study was qualitative and emergent (Creswell, 2003). The book unit in this study provided third year students of Spanish Language and Culture with opportunities to respond to a book in different ways. Their responses offered the context to observe aesthetic responses to the book, intertextual relationships, and the positive impact of shared responses in the comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of the book and articles, short stories, and poems used to support the book. These responses evolved as the participants read the book, wrote their impressions in the margins of the book when they finished reading a chapter, shared their thoughts with group members, and prepared for their individual and group projects at the end of the study. Any grammatical errors in the translations of the transcripts appearing in Chapter IV have been intentionally left intact to demonstrate the grammatical errors the participants made in Spanish.

While the participants in this study shared their points of view and made intertextual connections to other books and made connections with personal experiences, themes and

categories arose as the research progressed over the five weeks. Relevant findings were connected to the research questions and connections were made to the existing literature.

During the first meeting in week 1, I invited students to participate in the study and informed them that they would not be graded during the study the study. I also assessed their oral proficiency in Spanish through a taped response of the students to a text before the study began. Data collected during this first meeting were analyzed to determine how proficient participants were in expressing themselves orally and their comprehension of the text they had read. At the second meeting during week 1 and during weeks 2, 3, and 4, the reader response as a focal practice within the context of a novel study was implemented. Week 5 focused on the participants' final responses to the novel, assessing their oral proficiency in Spanish after experiencing the reader response as a focal approach to foreign language literature and on obtaining their input on the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature. The sample consisted of ten third-year Spanish Language and Culture students, seven females and three males.

The Setting

Creswell (2003) articulates four criteria for choosing the research site. These are summarized below:

- (a) entry is possible;
- (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present;
- (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; and
- (d) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.

For this study, the research site chosen adequately addressed all four criteria. The research was conducted on the campus of a small comprehensive university in a city in Ontario. The university had a student population of approximately 6,400 at the time of the study. The participants in this study had classes at different times of the day, and they had all attended the same university since first year. This study describes the development of the participants' oral proficiency in Spanish by interacting in small groups and whole class discussions, by responding to the novel and other reading materials.

The Participants

The sample chosen for this study was a group of 10 third-year Spanish Language and Culture students. These participants were selected for this study because they had been enrolled in the program for three consecutive years and, therefore, had a demonstrated knowledge of the Spanish language.

The following is a profile of the individuals that agreed on participating in the study. The names used are pseudonyms, and were chosen by the researcher to protect the students' anonymity and confidentiality. Olivia was in the 4th year of her French Major. She was very excited about the study, and was always prompt to contribute to class discussions. Leonor was also in the 4th year of her French Major. She always expressed interest in the approach being used in the study since she was planning to apply for the Faculty of Education in the following year and was eager to know how it would work. Vera was in her 3rd year of a Bachelor of Arts. She was one of the participants who always shared insights on her previous experiences with immigrants during whole class discussions. Elena was in the 2nd year of her French Major. She explained she was not used to reading and, therefore, sometimes she forgot she had to read for the study. However, when it came to the whole class discussions, she participated and made

connections with other literary works she had read for school previously or simply with her life experiences. Amanda, a part-time political sciences student, was an avid reader. Marta, a 3rd year psychology student, did not attend class regularly. She was hesitant to speak Spanish in front of the class. Liliana was a 4th year psychology student. She had limited vocabulary in Spanish and, like Marta, was reluctant to speak Spanish in front of the class. At the beginning of the study she decided to change to another response group because she did not feel comfortable being in a group she considered above her level. Octavio was a 4th year history student and was an avid reader who wrote several columns for the university newspaper. He had an extensive knowledge of literature. Pedro was a Spanish speaker who had been living in Canada since he was a child. He was a 4th year biology student. He was taking this advanced class because he would soon be travelling to a Spanish-speaking country and wanted to “brush up” his Spanish and learn more than what he already knew about the language. Even though he already spoke Spanish, I decided to include him as a participant because of the contributions he could make to his response group and to the whole class discussions. Javier also spoke Spanish and was a 3rd year business student. I also decided to keep him in the study for the same reasons that I kept Pedro. At the end of the study, Javier got to showcase his musical abilities through his response to the novel.

Methodology

Methods used in this study included taping students' responses to two texts, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the study, participant observations, a taped focus group meeting, and analysis of documents. These documents consisted of observer's fieldnotes and journal, participants' final responses to the novel and verbatim transcription of the taped responses and the focus group meeting. All observations during response activities were

described and reflected upon in a journal. Data analysis was constant-comparative (Creswell, 2003).

Role of the researcher

Qualitative methodology utilizes the researcher as an instrument. Creswell (2003) suggests that "data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines" (p. 145). I kept a log of my observations and interpretations of the processes as I investigated. In this study, I, as the researcher, was an instructor, a participant and an observer. This approach allowed for descriptive information to arise and, therefore, guided the emerging of a descriptive picture of the participants.

To facilitate the data collection stage, I kept fieldnotes on what I observed and used a journal in which I kept my reflections about the experiences taking place in the classroom. My approach to this journal was to record information related to the research questions, but I also recorded other information that I thought emerged as important data. In addition to keeping a journal, I also kept a log as I went about experiencing the setting and described my research journey, methodological and theoretical notes of patterns I saw emerging, and/or questions I had or might have asked in the focus group meeting.

Participant observations

The process of observation requires the observer to participate actively in a research study and at the same time separate him/herself from the setting in such a way that he/she can describe the setting as an outsider. Patton (2002) explains that, ideally, the observer will combine participation and observation in such a way that they will allow him/her to describe the processes taking place as an insider while describing such processes for outsiders.

This study provided the context for participant observations. I entered the world of 10 participants. I kept a record of my observations and interventions as students responded to the novel and various reading materials. At the beginning of the study I was a participant observer as I observed the participants read a short text and taped their answers.

At the second meeting in week 1 and during weeks 2, 3, and 4, I was a participant observer as I participated in the reading and response activities. During this stage, observations, sometimes in the form of interventions and sharing responses with the participants occurred constantly. Through these observations I was able to collect information on the participants' perceptions and feelings towards reading and reading in a foreign language, the development of their oral proficiency as we implemented this approach to reading in a foreign language and how their responses shifted from efferent to aesthetic.

During week 5, I was again a participant observer as I observed the students read a second text and also received their input on the study through a focus group meeting.

Document analysis

Documents collected during this study included the following: observation fieldnotes and a journal written by me, individual and group presentations, and the products generated from these presentations. The information from these documents was analyzed on the basis of emerging themes and patterns. As mentioned above, the students had the choice of doing their final responses/projects individually or in groups.

The participants responded to the novel orally as part of their activities for the unit. Their behaviour was also observed when they were interacting in the small group discussions. Their responses and observations provided opportunities to explore the difficulties they were

experiencing during the reading and responding processes. In addition, the observations provided opportunities for me to make interventions and inform my teaching and teaching reading in the second language.

Research Process

Entry

The research proposal was developed by me, the course instructor. A five-week unit entitled “An Aesthetic Response to Sandra Cisneros’s *La Casa en Mango Street*” was developed based on a literary study earlier developed by Courtland et al. (2002) for grades 7 and 8. The proposal was submitted to the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board to obtain permission to conduct the research at the university, and the Chair of the Department of Languages was informed of the study. My role in this investigation was that of researcher, instructor of the participants, and another participant in the study.

Informed consent

I explained the study verbally to the participants before it began, and distributed informed consent letters that needed to be signed by the participants (see the verbal explanation to the participants and letter of consent included in Appendices 1 & 2). The letter articulated ethics considerations: (a) the benefits of participating in the study; (b) that there were no risks involved; (c) their right to withdraw at any time; (d) that their course evaluations would not be affected by their participation in the study; (e) confidentiality and anonymity of all information; (f) storage of data for seven years by the supervisor; and (g) dissemination of findings.

Eleven students agreed to participate. However, one participant had to be excluded from the study because he stopped attending classes after the second week into the study and did not return until the last week of the study.

Data collection

Key elements were purposive sampling and taped responses. This advanced Spanish Language and Culture class was selected based on the following criteria: (a) students who decide to obtain a minor degree in Spanish (the only one available at the university presently) have a genuine and expressed interest in the language and the culture; and, (b) they have a demonstrated knowledge of the Spanish language to have been able to progress to the third year.

After their consenting to participate in the study, the students were invited to read an excerpt of a text, retell in their own words what they had read, and express their own personal opinion of the excerpt they had read. This procedure was followed in order to determine the following: (1) their oral proficiency in Spanish; (2) their comprehension of a written text for which they were not provided with a background on the vocabulary and a dictionary; and, (3) how they would respond to a text without following guided questions.

During the implementation of the unit, participant observations were recorded as the unit unfolded. Taped responses and a focus group meeting occurred when the participants had finished reading and re-reading the novel, and had offered their final responses to the novel. They were asked to read a short story and follow the same procedure as in the beginning of the study. In addition, a focus group meeting was held in order to elicit the participants' perceptions about the book unit, the strategy and their suggestions to improve the unit in the future (see Appendix 3).

Data triangulation

The use of multiple sources such as taped responses and focus group meeting, observation fieldnotes, and keeping a journal allowed for triangulation. This strategy was used to build a coherent justification of themes (Creswell, 2003).

Data analysis

During this process, a constant-comparative approach (Creswell, 2003) was adopted and completed upon conclusion of the data collection phase. Data were organized categorically and chronologically, reviewed repeatedly, and continually coded. The following codes were used to identify the sources of data:

- Observation log = O.L.
- Researcher's journal = R.J.
- Individual Reflection = I.R.
- Individual Final Presentation = I.P.
- Group Final Presentation = G.P.
- Taped Response 1 and 2 = T1, T2
- Focus Group Meeting = F.M.

A list of major ideas that arose was chronicled (Creswell, 2003). Taped responses of the participants during pre- and post-tests and the focus group meeting were transcribed verbatim. Fieldnotes were regularly reviewed. Six themes emerged from the data: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom; patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach; students' reading practices and priorities; response to *La Casa en Mango Street*; and pre- and post-unit language assessments (see tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7).

In addition, the data analysis was informed by measures of *language use* (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003), which assessed oral language and reading comprehension. Participants' responses at the beginning and end of the study were assessed by these measures. These measures of language use included two rubrics which described students' achievement levels in

oral response-based tasks and reading response-based tasks (see Tables 8 and 9). These rubrics were used to provide a general description of performance and were not used to assess particular levels of performance. The achievement levels were divided into the following categories:

- **Basic.** Students at this level demonstrate a partial mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to participate in simple discussions in Spanish in oral response-based tasks, or to comprehend ideas in written Spanish texts in reading response-based tasks.
- **Proficient.** Students at this level demonstrate a solid mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to participate in simple discussions in Spanish in oral response-based tasks, or to comprehend ideas in written Spanish texts in reading response-based tasks.
- **Advanced.** Students at this level demonstrate superior performance in participating in many kinds of discussions in Spanish in oral response-based tasks, or in interpreting the ideas in written Spanish texts in reading response-based tasks.

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
Shifting in the roles in the foreign language classroom	a) A shift in the role of the students b) A shift in the role of the instructor	
Patterns of shared response to <i>La Casa en Mango Street</i> .	a) Comprehension strategies	- Using the dictionary - Group collaboration
	b) Developing an interpretive community	- Negotiating meaning - Negotiating culture
Students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach		
Students' reading practices and priorities	a) Inside and outside of school b) Setting priorities	

Response to <i>La Casa en Mango Street</i>	a) From efferent to aesthetic reading b) Intertextuality c) Re-interpretation d) Long term vs. short term e) Multiliteracies	
Pre- and post-unit language assessments	a) Response before the unit b) Response after the unit	

Table 1: Summary of Themes, Subthemes and Categories

<u>Theme: Shifting roles in the foreign language classroom</u>
<p><u>Subtheme: A shift in the role of the students</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I thought it [this approach] was different altogether. I was used to reading for content so I was panicking when I didn’t know who was who and what was going on. It was out of the norm to read a book like that, which is a good thing because it’s chance to learn different things.” (Elena, FM, p. 7) • “I enjoyed the discussions because I felt I “had a lot to contribute to a topic and people could then contribute.” (Vera, FM, p.8) • “I think this approach was good because I had to discover things on my own.” (Liliana, FM, p. 8)
<p><u>Subtheme: A shift in the role of the instructor</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The fact that the students see that I do not come to class with a set of questions prepared to test their comprehension of the novel and instead, have them express their opinions of the novel, has given them the freedom to read the novel and what the novel means to them”. (RJ, p. 9) • “This approach gave people more of a chance to participate because sometimes a book doesn’t affect everyone in the same way. We talked about the themes and we could get a good conversation going”. (Elena, FM, p.8) • “This was a refreshing way to do a reading because you could automatically just relate it to yourself and you didn’t have to worry about interpreting things the wrong way. Because in literature I’ve found that in my class you do have to interpret things a certain way and you’re supposed to get a certain meaning out of a certain text and if you don’t get it, you learn it and then you know it for the test.” (Olivia, FM, p.9)

Table 2: Summary Statements

Theme: Patterns of shared response to <i>La Casa en Mango Street</i>
Subtheme: Comprehension Strategies
<i>Category: Group Collaboration</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When anyone in the group had difficulty understanding a chapter or a word, another member would attempt to explain his/her interpretation of that chapter or give the meaning of the word if they knew it.” (R.J., p. 5) • “What was good about being in a group was that if you didn’t know what the themes were or didn’t understand what happened in the chapters; another person in the group would explain it to you.” (Octavio, FM. p. 8)
<i>Category: Using the dictionary</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They start the small group discussions clarifying the meanings of words and spend quite some time doing it.” (O.L., p. 7) • “They seem to be struggling with the meaning of every word. They still have the mind set that, in order for them to be able to understand a reading; they have to understand every word in it. As a result, they lose interest in the reading and, when in the group discussions, they look for and ask for the meaning of words instead of discussing the reading.” (R.J., p. 3)
Subtheme: Developing an interpretive community
<i>Category: Negotiating meaning</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We were discussing one chapter in the novel in which Sally, one of the characters, has gotten married, but her husband, who could be violent sometimes, did not allow her to go out of the house without him. Olivia thought that, even though Sally’s husband did not let her go out without him and could be violent sometimes, he had not beaten her up as her father used to do. I asked her if that was not abuse anyway, to which she responded that it was, but not as bad as when she lived with her parents.” (RJ, p. 5) • “Pedro entered the discussion and stated that he thought that women who stayed in abusive relationships did it because they wanted to. This statement sparked a discussion in which reasons as to why women stayed in these relationships.” (R.J., p. 5)
<i>Category: Negotiating culture</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You know, professor, this Esperanza is weird and nosy. Sometimes she makes these comments about people that a regular child wouldn’t make. Besides, she knows about everybody’s lives. It seems that she spends all of her days sticking her nose in everybody’s homes. It would make me very uncomfortable if I had a neighbor like that’. I then proceeded to tell her that maybe she thought that way because she was not from Latin America where it was the norm that not only a child, but many adults were like that and maybe that was why I did not find that being as bad as she was seeing it.” (RJ, p. 10) • “I used this conversation with Olivia as a starting point for a discussion in the next class. The participants stated that there were children like that in Canada and that it also depended on where you lived, meaning social status. To this effect, Leonor commented she knew everybody in her apartment building and she even knew that one neighbor was physically abusing his spouse.” (RJ, p. 10)

Table 3: Summary statements

<u>Theme: Students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “As I expected, they had read the five chapters of <i>La Casa en Mango Street</i> and, even though I had asked them to write their thoughts about what they were reading on the margins of the pages or on post-it notes, they did not know what to do. Maybe another factor that influenced them on not knowing what to do with the reading was that I did not give them prompts to take home or to guide the reading.” (RJ, p. 3) • “After two weeks into the investigation, I am still playing the main role in the discussions and the participants expected me to.” (RJ, p. 3) • “the students seemed much more involved in the discussions. This time, even a student started the discussions. It looks like the more students are in contact with this type of work with a book, the more they understand that the discussions are not about giving an expected answer, but what they interpret from the novel.” (RJ, p. 8) • “Amanda and Liliana are two participants who, at the beginning of the study, were reluctant to speak during the discussions and as the study has progressed they have become more active and involved in the discussions and have started to make connections between the novel and their own lives. They have so much to say. You can see the satisfaction in their faces at the end of the class because they have been able to cross that bridge.” (RJ, p. 8) • “Leonor expressed that she now realizes how her reading routine had shifted since she is already reflecting every time a chapter finishes as opposed to reading without making any connections or reflections.” (RJ, p. 9)

Table 4: Summary statements

<u>Theme: Students' reading practices and priorities</u>
<p>Subtheme: Inside and outside of school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I used to read for pleasure before coming to university, but, since then I don't have time to read for pleasure.” (Liliana, FM, p. 2) • “I don't do a lot of personal reading unless it's magazines and it's flipping through non-sense stuff basically. Yeah, mostly school reading. The only literature reading I've ever done has been for my French-Canadian Literature class.” (Elena, FM, p. 2) • “Reading for school is kind of like a job. You have to read.” (Javier, FM, p. 2) • “I enjoy reading but I find that for university I don't read for pleasure, it's more for school. Actually, the book we did in class was the first non-English book I've ever looked at.” (Vera, FM, p. 2) • “reading is more of a chore for me sometimes and if I don't enjoy it, I don't understand it, then I don't pay attention, I sleep over the class.” (Leonor, FM, p. 2). • “if you're doing it outside of school for pleasure you are going to pick ten books on that subject and read them all fast and just absorb it 'cause you're so in love with it.” (Olivia, FM, p. 2).
<p>Subtheme: Setting priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...the participants do not have a solid habit of reading in general. Whatever they read is because they have to and know they would be penalized if they do not do it. Besides, they know that whether they read the novel or not, they will not be penalized for it. It is hard for me to understand that students have to be penalized in order to help them learn.” (RJ, p. 6) • “I did find that you put your priorities, you know, in an order and, you know, I wasn't getting marked on this and that made it easier for me. I had to do the work I had deadlines for, the work that was worth a mark and then I would do the reading after. Everything else that got done was, I don't want to say, was more important. That was one of the things that made it harder for me to read all the chapters.” (Leonor, FM, p. 7) • “when I was in high school I had weekly testing in my French class and this procedure made me read for the class.” (Javier, FM, p. 6) • “That's the thing with me and Olivia in our French class. You have to read these articles every week and she has surprise tests, but you know when there is an article she is going to give a surprise test. So you read that article and know what it's about because if you knew there wasn't a surprise test; either you wouldn't read the article or wouldn't be paying attention as much. So, testing makes you understand more.” (Leonor, FM, p. 6) • “That's how we've been trained. Always reading and questions. Like, you read it, know the content and you'll be tested. Whether it is a basic multiple choice or... That's what happens.” (Elena, FM, 6)

Table 5 : Summary statements

Theme: Response to <i>La Casa en Mango Street</i>
<p>Subtheme: From efferent to aesthetic reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is the beginning of the study and the participants show patterns that demonstrated the way they had been instructed to respond to a text. They have an efferent approach to reading and, in turn, their responses lack the personal interpretations characteristic to an aesthetic response.” (RJ, p. 3) • “I was expecting you to give us guiding questions or themes we could develop.” (Javier, FM, p. 8) • “After reading and re-reading the novel, Amanda responded poetically connecting the immigration issues described in the novel with her travel experiences in the Dominican Republic where she witnessed the life of immigrants from Haiti in this country.” (O.L, p. 12) • “Javier composed a theme song for the book entitled <i>Unica</i> (Unique). In his song, every stanza reflected a chapter of the book which was of relevance to him. In addition, the music he composed for the lyrics reflected the Hispanic world and even included a rap section, which reflected the merger of two identities: the Hispanic identity and the North American identity.” (O.L, p. 12)
<p>Subtheme: Intertextuality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is the third week of the study. I have noticed the first signs of the participants’ efforts to make intertextual and personal connections.” (O.L, p. 7) • “Vera is one participant who always finds a connection between the events in the novel and experiences she has had in her personal life with an immigrant family she knows and feels very close to. She is always prompt to offer her insights using her lived experiences to support her position.” (R.J, p. 6) • “This chapter reminded me of the movie <i>Napoleon Dynamite</i> because in that movie there is Mexican family who own a Cadillac as the one described in the novel and that, as in the novel, was a acquired by its owner in suspicious ways.” (Amanda, O.L, p. 9) • “Amanda also found a parallel between one chapter in the novel and her lived experiences. She found that the chapter <i>No Speak English</i> was an example of what had happened to someone she knew and who was from Somalia. This person did not like Canada due to the big differences in culture and language, like it had happened to a character in the novel.” (O.L, p. 10)
<p>Subtheme: Re-interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I overheard Leonor share with her response group that she now noticed that the main character only talked about people who had problems and that it seemed that, to her, people with problems were the only interesting people.” (OL, p. 10) • “Octavio, who was also in this response group, added that he thought that the main character wanted to talk about people who were not role models.” (OL, p.10) • “Marta made an interesting observation regarding the main character’s parents. She noticed that the main character only mentioned her parents sporadically in the book and that maybe this was because her parents did not have enough problems or their problems were not interesting enough for her to talk about.” (OL, p. 10) • “Vera interpreted the story of the main character as “the story of butterfly”: at the beginning a child and at the end a girl with new points of views and all the reasons to leave Mango Street.” (OL, p.10)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Vera’s statement was supported by Pedro who stated that, even though there was no sequence of events in the novel, he now realized that the main character had grown up all along the novel. He went on to say that at the beginning of the novel the main character told very naïve stories or that her comments were proper of a child, but, after reading the whole novel, he noticed that these stories became less naïve and more critical of her surroundings towards the end of the novel.” (OL, p. 10)
<p><u>Subtheme: Long term vs. Short term</u></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have noticed that should this approach be implemented in the regular curriculum of a foreign language program, it should be implemented for a longer period of time due to the scaffolding these participants needed while in the study.” (RJ, p. 12) • “the students need enough scaffolding before venturing into this type of activity. This scaffolding would require some time before the novel study begins.” (RJ, p. 7) • “I suggest to start reading the book earlier in the semester. Whether it is January or September. Even if you’re doing two books. Even an easier at the beginning and one more elaborate towards the end. So that there can be more time for discussions. Not that we didn’t have enough time to read the book, but more time to read really see what’s happening.” (Liliana, FM, p. 12)
<p><u>Subtheme: Multiliteracies</u></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vera, Leonor and Olivia, Elena and Pedro used a Power Point to represent their responses to the novel. Amanda and Liliana used poetry and drama to present a conversation between Esperanza and a friend many years after the novel ended.” (OL, p. 11) • “Octavio presented a conversation between ‘Sandro’ Cisneros and a movie director who wants to adapt the book to the big screen. He used this as a pretext to re-tell the novel and talk about the main themes in it and explain the meaning behind the novel.” (OL, p. 11) • “Javier had the opportunity to showcase his skills as a singer, musician and song-writer through the song <i>Única</i>. Javier even used the help of a friend for the chorus of a song.” (OL, p. 12). • “Marta created a board game in which all participants had to answer comprehension questions of the novel. The board consisted of a painting of Mango Street with Esperanza’s house (The House on Mango Street) at the end of the street. All participants had chips in the shape of girls (Esperanza). In order for them to advance in the board they had to answer correctly the questions Marta was asking.” (OL, 12).

Table 6: Summary of statements

<u>Theme: Pre and post unit language assessments</u>
<p><u>Subtheme: Response before the unit</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Octavio commented on familiar topics, but needed restatements in order to understand the message. In addition, he expressed himself in short phrases or in simple sentences. (T1) • As in Octavio's case, Olivia commented on familiar topics, but needed restatements in order to understand the message. She also expressed herself in short phrases or in simple sentences. (T1) • Liliana expressed herself in single words, short phrases; or simple sentences. (T1) • Octavio, Olivia; and Liliana identified basic topics of the text. They did not show any evidence of making inference and predicting. They did not draw any conclusions from information from the text. They did not use their own culture to comprehend the text, nor did they identify products and practices of the cultures of the Hispanic world. They did not recognize any differences in the products and practices on the cultures of the Hispanic world and his own. (T1)
<p><u>Subtheme: Response after the unit</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Octavio, Olivia, and Liliana understood and responded to familiar topics and asked for clarification when necessary. They expressed themselves, amply and comfortably, with elaboration as needed to make a point. In addition, they showed resourcefulness in successfully expressing something they did not know how to say. They used words, phrases, and structures (in a limited number of tenses) that were appropriate to the topic and to the conversational situation. Finally, they asked questions to get information and clarify something that they did not clearly understand. (T2) • Octavio, Olivia, and Liliana demonstrated a solid mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to comprehend ideas in written Spanish texts after experiencing the unit. They identified main ideas and some specific details on familiar topics. They described more abstract themes and ideas of the overall text. They made inferences and logical predictions, as well as identified meaningful messages in the text. Finally, they analyzed and supported their analyses with examples from the text. (T2)

Table 7: Summary of statements

Achievement Levels		
BASIC	PROFICIENT	ADVANCED
<i>Students at this level demonstrate a partial mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to participate in simple discussions in Spanish</i>	<i>Students at this level demonstrate a solid mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to participate in simple discussions in Spanish</i>	<i>Students at this level demonstrate superior performance in participating in many kinds of discussions in Spanish</i>
Students functioning at this <i>basic</i> level should be able to:	Students functioning at this <i>proficient</i> level should be able to:	Students functioning at this <i>advanced</i> level should be able to:
Understand very simple questions and comments on familiar topics; may need restatements or gestures in order to understand a message.	Understand and respond to what others say to them or the group on familiar topics, asking clarification when necessary.	Understand and respond to what others say to them or the group on a range of topics.
Express themselves in single words, short phrases, or a simple sentence.	Express themselves in several consecutive sentences.	Express themselves, amply and comfortably, with elaboration as needed to make a point.
Use words and phrases produced by others in the group to express themselves.	Make an effort, sometimes successful, to express something for which the needed vocabulary and/or structures are not known.	Show resourcefulness to successfully express something they do not know how to say.
	Use words, phrases, and structures (in a limited number of tenses) that are appropriate to the topic and to the conversational situation.	Show accuracy and fluency when narrating and describing in a variety of tenses. Shows some accuracy in tenses not studied at the moment of the present study.
	When asked to clarify something they said, sometimes offer an alternative way of expressing a thought.	Easily clarify and expand upon something they have said when asked to do so.
	Ask questions to get information.	Ask questions to get information and clarify something that been not clearly understood.

Table 8: Assessment Rubric for Oral Based Tasks. Adapted from Kenyon, D., Fair, B. Mitchel, J., Armengol, R. (2004). Framework for the 2004 foreign language national assessment in educational progress. Pre-publication edition, 1-81.

Achievement Levels		
BASIC	PROFICIENT	ADVANCED
<i>Students at this level demonstrate a partial mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to comprehend ideas in written Spanish texts</i>	<i>Students at this level demonstrate a solid mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to comprehend ideas in written Spanish texts</i>	<i>Students at this level demonstrate superior performance in interpreting the ideas in written Spanish texts</i>
Students functioning at this <i>basic</i> level should be able to do the following:	Students functioning at this <i>proficient</i> level should be able to do the following:	Students functioning at this <i>advanced</i> level should be able to do the following:
Identify basic topics of the text	Identify main ideas and some specific details on familiar topics	Describe more abstract themes and ideas of the overall text
Show some evidence of making inference and predicting	Make inferences and logical predictions, as well as identify meaningful messages in the text	Evaluate effectiveness of how the text delivers meaningful messages
Draw some conclusions and occasionally support them with information from the text	Draw conclusions and support them with information from the text	Analyze and support their analyses with examples from the text
Use own culture to comprehend the text	Use knowledge of both own culture and cultures of the Hispanic world to interpret text	Use knowledge of both own culture and cultures of the Hispanic world to develop perspectives on the text
Identify some products and practices of the cultures of the Hispanic world	Identify the interrelationships among the perspectives, practices, and products of cultures of the Hispanic world	Explain interrelationships among the perspectives, practices, and products of cultures of the Hispanic world
Recognize some differences in the products and practices on the cultures of the Hispanic world and their own	Recognize differences and similarities in the perspectives of cultures of the Hispanic world and their own	Compare and contrast the perspectives of the cultures of the Hispanic world and their own

Table 9: Assessment Rubric for Response-Based Tasks. Adapted from Kenyon, D., Fair, B. Mitchel, J., Armengol, R. (2004). Framework for the 2004 foreign language national assessment in educational progress. Pre-publication edition, 1-81.

Summary

This chapter described the research design, qualitative methods used in the data collection and analysis of these data, and a summary of the themes, subthemes and categories that emerged from the data collection. Chapter IV presents the description of the unit, the findings, and interpretation.

CHAPTER IV

Findings and Interpretation

Chapter IV presents a description of the unit, as well as the findings and interpretation of the study. The first section presents a description of the unit. The second section presents the findings of the study. The third section presents the interpretation of these findings. Six themes emerged from the data: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom; patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*; students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach; students' reading practices and priorities; response to *La Casa en Mango Street*; and pre- and post-unit language assessments. Each will be discussed below.

An aesthetic response to Sandra Cisneros' *La Casa en Mango Street*: A Unit Plan

Overview of the unit

Sumara (1995) suggests that reading a book with others in the classroom “means becoming involved in a complex system of interaction and interrelation called *intertextuality*” (p. 26). The theoretical framework behind the planning, development, and implementation of the unit “An Aesthetic Response to Sandra Cisneros's *La Casa en Mango Street*, was based on the reader response as a focal practice framework (Sumara, 1995). This five-week unit was intended to provide participants with opportunities to read and respond orally to a book and various complementary materials. One main book was read and approximately 10 complementary materials were read and discussed during the unit. The book and complementary materials included a range of themes such as immigration issues, poverty issues, identity issues, gender issues, and children and women abuse.

The unit was implemented twice a week for periods of one hundred and thirty five minutes. During each class the students engaged in the following activities:

- **Motivation (10 minutes)**

I started the class with a conversation with the participants that introduced them to the prominent theme in the complementary material to be read independently during the first hour of class.

- **Read aloud/Independent reading/Independent response to complementary material (10 minutes)**

I read poems and short stories aloud that called for an evocation. Otherwise, participants read the complementary material independently and were encouraged to think of the theme.

- **Small group discussions of complementary material (20 minutes)**

Participants met in groups of three or four to discuss the complementary material they had just read.

- **Whole class discussion of complementary material (20 minutes)**

Participants shared their thoughts/ideas with the rest of the class.

- **Short break (5-10 minutes)**

- **Small group discussions of the novel (25 minutes)**

Participants met in groups of three or four to discuss the chapters of the novel they had read independently before coming to class.

- **Whole class discussions of the novel (40 minutes)**

Participants shared their responses with the rest of the class.

Implementation of the unit

The unit was designed to take place over two days per week over five weeks. The second day of the first week was spent on activities so that students would understand the expectations and each aspect of the unit. Time was provided during each meeting for the following activities:

- read aloud/independent reading
- small group discussions
- whole class discussions

Week 1

I guided the participants through each of the above activities. On the first day of the study, I proceeded to present the novel to the participants. I instructed the participants to read five chapters and to write their thoughts/impressions in the margins of the novel as they were reading it. As well, I instructed the participants to keep a journal of their responses so that they would know what they wanted to talk about and what questions to bring to the next meeting. Unfortunately, no participants kept a journal, but did write in the margins and/or the end of each chapter key ideas of what the chapter was about and what their thoughts were.

The typical schedule started on the second day of the first week. During the small group discussions, I spent time with each response group sharing and modelling my own opinions on the chapters, what the highlights of those chapters had been for me and my lived-through experience of the text. In addition, as the response groups discussed the novel or the complementary materials, I circulated to observe the language used by the students and ideas expressed during these discussions. This is consistent with Tomlinson's (2000) views on the development of the inner voice in a foreign language in a context so that students are able to read a text and experience it in an aesthetic manner.

Whole class discussions were held after the small group discussions. The participants provided insights and opinions they had about the book and reading materials. This procedure allowed for open debates on the issues raised and the building of a community of readers.

Week 2

During the second week of the unit the class was asked to reflect on the prominent themes in the novel up to that point and to reflect more on them. They were to bring the results of their reflections on the following week.

Week 3

Week 3 focused on the oral presentation of the participants' reflections on the prominent themes in the novel up to that point. The week also focused on small group and whole class response activities to the novel and complementary materials.

Week 4

Week 4 focused on small group and whole class response activities as the students re-read of the novel and complementary materials. During the first meeting in this week, the participants were assigned the final response/project to the novel. At their request, participants were given the choice to do their final responses/projects individually or in groups due to the different work and school schedules they had.

Week 5

Week 5 focused on the presentation of final responses/projects. (See Appendix 4 for a detailed copy of the unit plan.)

Findings

Six themes emerged from the data analysis: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom, patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach, students' reading practices and priorities, response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, and pre- and post-unit language assessment. Each will be discussed through different subthemes and categories.

Shifting Roles in the Foreign Language Classroom

The findings related to this theme suggest that reading as a focal practice led to the shifting of roles for instructors and students. In contrast to the traditional roles of instructors and students in the foreign language class where the students' interpretation of literary texts should match those of their instructors', new roles began to emerge. These are discussed below.

A shift in the role of the instructor. In this study I adopted the positions of facilitator, participant, co-author and co-learner in the response activities. To illustrate, I read the novel and complementary materials along with the students and actively participated in the small and whole class discussions modelling appropriate responses. I was mainly interested in having the students establish intertextual connections and connect the texts to their lived experiences, and when these connections were established, there took place an inclusive process that invited a variety of understandings and different thinking. For instance, the following is an excerpt from my journal:

The fact that the students see that I do not come to class with a set of questions prepared to test their comprehension of the novel and instead, have them express their opinions of the novel, has given them the freedom to read the novel and what the novel means to them. (R.J., p. 9)

Similarly, the roles of co-author and co-learner in the response activities were evident when I and students came to share power in the classroom. For instance, when the whole class

discussion of the poem, *Bilingual Blues* (Pérez, 1994), started, I explained to the students that in this poem the author had used a very famous character from the Cuban vernacular theatre such as Pototo and had combined this character with elements from the American pop culture such as the song “Let’s call the whole thing off”. This explanation made the students analyze the poem more in detail, and Octavio stated that the same had occurred with another verse in the poem in which the author had used a segment from the musical *Oliver* (Bart, 1953). By making this connection, Octavio helped the rest of the class and me, as another participant, to find a new meaning to the poem and helped them relate to it at a more personal level (R.J., p. 3).

The participants in this study had the opportunity to take centre stage in the discussions and lead by articulating a position and learning from one another. As stated by Elena, “it [this approach] gave people more of a chance to participate because sometimes a book doesn’t affect everyone in the same way. We talked about the themes and we could get a good conversation going” (F.M., p. 8). Olivia thought

this was a refreshing way to do a reading because you could automatically just relate it to yourself and you didn’t have to worry about interpreting things the wrong way. Because in literature I’ve found that in my class you do have to interpret things a certain way and you’re supposed to get a certain meaning out of a certain text and if you don’t get it, you learn it and then you know it for the test. (F.M., p. 9)

This statement suggests that Olivia has been taught with a New Critics approach. Olivia’s and Elena’s statements confirm the environment of fairness and freedom these new instructors roles bring to the foreign language classroom.

As a new approach to reading in a foreign language, reading as a focal practice posed some challenges for the participants, as well as for me. Therefore, the participants needed scaffolding to help them connect with the readings at a deeper level. This scaffolding included modelling and providing complementary texts to promote comprehension. In addition, I

promoted metacognitive skills by increasing awareness of strategies the participants might use to increase their comprehension and understanding of vocabulary. For example, at the beginning of the study I noticed that the participants had the tendency to produce literal answers from the readings. I then encouraged the students to make an effort to paraphrase or produce answers in their own words. Moreover, I suggested using the small group discussion context to come up with an answer in which everyone in that group had cooperated (O.L., p. 3).

In response to Elena's reading habits I recommended that she try not to look for the meaning of the words until she finished reading the chapter and, then, determine if she really needed to know the meaning of the words in order to understand what the chapter was about. If she still considered she needed to know the meaning of the words in order to comprehend the chapter, then she could look for those meanings in the dictionary. I also recommended discussing the meaning of words with the members of her response group (O.L., p. 5).

Elena took into consideration my recommendations and, at the end of the study, during the focus group meeting, described the benefits of this approach to literature:

I agree that I am finding I just have to think of what I want to say and then I say it, Spanish the words are not a problem, you have to think of the words you want to say and I don't want to say I talk faster, but I have a better vocabulary, I think. Just more to say in class because of the reading, there's more of an understanding of the Spanish culture as well. (F.M., p. 8)

On the first day of the study, I read aloud Valdés's (1994) *Where you from?* and Perez's (1994) *Bilingual Blues*. In these two poems the issue of immigrants' loss of identity is discussed from two different perspectives: anger and humour. Participants were encouraged to provide their own views on the poems and to share their background knowledge of the topic. I also participated in the discussions and shared my responses aloud in order to model the type of discussions that were expected during the course of the unit.

I used the cultural elements of *Bilingual Blues* with the class to model the type of connections I was expecting them to make and that, in turn, would help them enjoy the novel they were to read and re-read for the next four weeks. The class discussed how the author had created an ambiguous feeling by writing the poem in Spanish and English: *Name your tema, I'll hedge; name your cerca, I'll straddle it like a cubano* (Pérez, 1994) and mixing aspects from his Cuban cultural background and aspects of American culture:

*“You say tomato
I say tu madre
You say potato
I say Pototo”*

This activity helped students to broaden their understanding of ways they could connect what they were reading with their personal, lived experiences and/or other books they had previously read. Furthermore, the participants were provided with stem starters to the discussions as opposed to comprehension questions (see Appendix 5). However, the students seemed to have preferred to have been provided with comprehension questions or questions that guided the reading. For instance, Liliana agreed with others in the group that this new approach gave everyone in the class a chance to participate and that we could discuss different topics in class (F.M., p. 8). However, she thought that

sometimes it was difficult to keep a discussion going ‘cause it was like: O.K., What did you get from it? What did you understand? And then you say it, and then that’s it. There wasn’t as much flow as could be as if there was a structured question like I want you to talk about this, this, and this. (...) it would’ve been easier to kind of pick things out of the novel, which is why this form was different from what we are normally used to because you usually get: this is what you’re looking for, find it. (F.M., p. 8)

Similarly, Javier felt that maybe there was not such a need for guiding questions as much as the need for themes (F.M., p. 8). He explains: “Throw us something big so that after the

reading we can already identify. Say, under that theme I recognize there were these things happening in the chapters” (F.M., p. 8).

As part of the scaffolding I carried out, in week 2 I asked the participants to reflect on the most prominent themes in the book so far. For this task, they were provided with the Research Quest Model (BCTLA, 2001) (see Table 10). The Research Quest Model is a framework that brings together information and communication technology (ICT) skills and knowledge into the research process. For the purpose of this study, this model allowed the participants to be actively engaged and interpret the information. Moreover, this task required them to make judgments, compare and contrast, synthesize an issue, solve a problem, argue a position and arrive at personal interpretations. All of these are main components of the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature. During the course of this week, I circulated through response groups and met with individuals to address questions and clarify points. The results of these reflections will be presented in the theme “Response to *La Casa en Mango Street*.”

The participants were also provided with complementary materials that supported the novel. These materials helped them build on the different issues being analyzed in the novel and expand on them. The addition of these cultural materials for greater cultural intertextuality proved effective in that they aided the participants’ understanding of the issues being discussed in the small group and whole class discussions. For example, Liliana thought that, because we were reading a book that dealt with immigrants in the United States, the complementary material helped her understand the issues and cultural background of these immigrants (F.M., p. 12).

Elena agreed with Liliana, and added:

The articles gave you a background before reading the book (...) Say, for example, you didn’t know about the living conditions of the Mexicans in the United States, you just didn’t know. Reading back the material gives you a better idea of what the actual situation for them is. (F.M., p. 12)

In week 4, I instructed the participants to prepare a final response to the novel. As stated above, the participants were given the option of doing their presentations in groups or on their own due to their different schedules. I provided them with suggestions on how to respond to the book based on the *Reader Response to Literature: Response Activities* developed by Courtland (2001) (see Appendices 6 & 7). Some of these suggestions included dramatizing a certain episode, devising a poster to “advertise” the novel, or writing and performing a song to accompany the book. I then distributed the evaluation rubrics mentioned in Chapter III for their responses.

Focus your task	What is the purpose of my research? What are the critical questions? Who is my audience? What do I know? What do I need to know? What will my finished product be? How will I plan my time?
Find and filter information	Locate different types of resources. Decide which resources might be suitable. Select the most appropriate resources. Revise research questions if necessary.
Work with information	Read, view, listen. Interpret, record, organize. Look for patterns, make connections. Check for understanding. Review, revise, reorganize and edit.
Communicate your findings	Prepare final results. Share ideas, knowledge and product. Act on findings.
Reflect on your work	What did I learn about the topic? What worked well? What would I do differently next time?

Table 10 : Research Quest Model (BCTLA, 2001)

A shift in the role of the students. The students adopted a new stance as the study progressed. They started to share power with the instructor, acquired a voice in the classroom, took responsibility for their learning and became leaders of their own learning. At the beginning

of the study the participants did not fully understand what their new role would be during this unit. They were so accustomed to reading texts in an efferent way that they found it awkward when they were not being provided with comprehension questions that prescribed what I wanted them to say. Instead, in this unit they were being asked to express their opinions or thoughts on what they had read. As the unit progressed the participants started to understand this approach, and this increased understanding led to richer discussions in which they voiced their interpretations on the novel and reading material and they validated these opinions by themselves. During the focus group meeting, Elena stated:

I thought it (this approach) was different altogether. I was used to reading for content so I was panicking when I didn't know who was who and what was going on. It was out of the norm to read a book like that, which is a good thing because it's chance to learn different things. (F.M., p. 7)

Similarly, the participants started to notice the value of their lived experiences and imaginations, and became “authoritative with their own story” (Boyd-Bastone, 2002, p. 134). Vera noted that she had enjoyed the discussions because she felt she “had a lot to contribute to a topic and people could then contribute” (F.M., p.8). Liliana thought this approach was good because she “had to discover things on her own” (F.M., p. 8).

Patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*

The patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street* are described in two subthemes: comprehension strategies and developing an interpretive community.

Comprehension Strategies. The comprehension strategies demonstrated by participants included group collaboration and using the dictionary.

Group collaboration. At the beginning of the study, some participants perceived the work in small groups as a way to write down answers or ideas others in their groups would provide. I also noticed that these participants did not collaborate because they could not express themselves

as well as the others in their group. As a result, these students were limited to the answers they had annotated from others in their groups and were reluctant to speak during the whole class discussions (R.J., p. 2).

However, as the study progressed, participants in the study started to help each other to understand the novel and complementary texts. When anyone in the group had difficulty understanding a chapter or a word, another member would attempt to explain his/her interpretation of that chapter or provide the meaning of the word if they knew it (R.J., p. 5). This assistance was also present when the whole class discussions took place. For instance, Octavio explains that “what was good about being in a group was that if you didn’t know what the themes were or didn’t understand what happened in the chapters another person in the group would explain it to you” (F.M. p. 8). Leonor looked at group work as a “safety net” because “if you’re on your own there are things you may not understand or, this is my opinion, but I might be wrong. Then you can discuss with other people and see what they think and if there is a consensus, they can help you or you can help them” (F.M., p. 8).

Using the dictionary. The students had the tendency to use the dictionary to aid them with the meaning of new words. During my observations, I noticed the following behaviour: “They start the small group discussions clarifying the meanings of words and spend quite some time doing it” (O.L., p. 7). Later I reflected on the same behaviour:

they seem to be struggling with the meaning of every word. They still have the mind set that, in order for them to be able to understand a reading; they have to understand every word in it. As a result, they lose interest in the reading and, when in the group discussions, they look for and ask for the meaning of words instead of discussing the reading. (R.J., p. 4)

I noticed that, on one occasion in which most participants had not done their independent reading of the novel before the class and were asked to do so in class, Elena was spending much

time using the dictionary looking for the meaning of every single new word she would find as she was reading and would not make an attempt to understand the chapter without looking for the meaning of words. Therefore, she was already looking tired and frustrated. I decided to talk to her privately and asked her first why she had not read the chapter for that session (R.J., p. 4). She answered:

I don't have the habit of reading and tend to forget I have to read. Besides, the fact that I don't understand all the words in this book makes it more difficult for me to remember I have to read it. What I like the most is the oral part where we all get to speak and express our opinions. (O.L., p. 5)

She indeed enjoyed this part of the class, as she demonstrated whenever she made connections during small group and whole class discussions.

Developing an interpretive community. Labercane (2002) explains that “the interpretive community is a reading public that shares a strategy or approach for interpretation.” (p. 104). The development of an interpretive community occurred in two ways: negotiating meaning and negotiating culture.

Negotiating meaning. The participants in this study learnt that the meaning of the novel was to be constructed by them in the context of an interpretive community. Every one of them had an equal voice in deciding what themes the novel was presenting. The following is an entry in my journal which illustrates the development:

We were discussing one chapter in the novel in which Sally, one of the characters has gotten married, but her husband, who could be violent sometimes, did not allow her to go out of the house without him. Olivia thought that, even though Sally's husband did not let her go out without him and could be violent sometimes; he had not beaten her up as her father used to do. I asked her if that was not abuse anyway, to which she responded that it was, but not as bad a when she lived with her parents. (R.J., p. 8)

After this exchange, Pedro entered the discussion, stating that he thought that women who stayed in abusive relationships did so because they wanted to. This statement sparked a discussion of reasons why women stay in these relationships (R.J., p. 8).

The importance of this exchange lies in how students managed to validate their points and negotiated their opinions by discussing options to one single problem. This process, in turn, led Pedro to make the connection necessary to make his point a valid one. He disclosed that he thought the way he did because his mother had that kind of relationship with his father and she opted to end the marriage (R.J., p. 8).

Similarly, as the participants started to become familiar with this approach to reading, they started to feel more comfortable about speculating on different aspects of the novel that were not mentioned explicitly. During one class, the participants started to speculate about the age of the main character who, at times, seemed to be a nine- or ten-year-old girl; however, at other times, she seemed to be older. Pedro stated that, because of her attitude towards life, as well as contradictions in her opinions and behaviour, he had concluded that the main character was a teenager of about thirteen or fourteen years of age. When asked to explain, he noted that she usually brought out the topic of being liked by men; she would wear high heels, and would walk a certain way to get more attention from men. He added that some of the conversations she had with her friends were about how wide hips became when women matured sexually and even more when they had children. To this comment, Octavio added that women at this age were full of conflicts and were extremely self-conscious. These comments promoted a discussion in which the whole class became involved, and everyone offered his or her own perspectives on this subject (R.J., p. 5).

Negotiating culture. On one occasion, when I met Olivia on campus she seemed so eager to make a comment on the novel that she could not wait until the class time:

I saw Olivia on campus yesterday and after exchanging greetings she said to me: "You know, professor, this Esperanza is weird and nosy. Sometimes she makes these comments about people that a regular child wouldn't make. Besides, she knows about everybody's lives. It seems that she spends all of her days sticking her nose in everybody's homes. It would make me very uncomfortable if I had a neighbor like that. " I then proceeded to tell her that maybe she thought that way because she was not from Latin America where it was the norm that not only a child, but many adults were like that and maybe that was why I did not find that being as bad as she was seeing it." (R.J., p. 10)

I used this conversation with Olivia as a starting point for a discussion in the next class. The participants noted that there were children like that in Canada, and that it also depended on where you lived, meaning social status. It seemed that, to these participants, privacy norms with neighbors varied the higher the status of neighborhoods. To this effect, Leonor commented she knew everybody in her apartment building, and she even knew that one neighbor physically abused his spouse (R.J., p. 10). This discussion showed how everyone's perceptions of his or her surroundings were different and how these perceptions were shaped by their lived experiences. Moreover, since I did not share the same cultural background as most of the students, this discussion gave me the opportunity to share my opinions and allow the participants to discuss the issue at hand more deeply, and to find out that what Olivia and I thought was part of the Hispanic culture was also present in the English speaking culture as well.

Students' Attitudes Towards A New Pedagogical Approach.

Students' stances towards the approach evolved over the course of the unit. Initially, the participants were unsure what they were expected to do during the reading of the novel. This was the first time that they were being presented with an approach to reading in which they were not provided with comprehension questions and the author's intended meanings were not discussed.

Instead, they were being asked to provide their own interpretations as they were reading and discuss those interpretations with others in the group. Therefore, I encountered some resistance from the students. For instance, in the first week of the study, I wrote in my journal:

As I expected, they had read the five chapters of *La Casa en Mango Street* and, even though I had asked them to write their thoughts about what they were reading on the margins of the pages or on post-it notes, they did not know what to do. (...) Maybe another factor that influenced them on not knowing what to do with the reading was that I did not give them prompts to take home or to guide the reading. (R.J., p. 3)

Similarly, as I observed the participants during the reading of the complementary texts, I realized that the students lacked reading strategies. I proceeded to demonstrate for the participants exactly what the notes in the margins looked like. I also reminded the participants of the journal as an alternative to write down their thoughts/reflections when they had finished reading, and encouraged them to bring the journal to class so that it would serve as a reminder during the small group and whole class discussions (R.J., p. 4). They decided not to keep a journal, and opted to write in the margins of the pages of the novel.

Another aspect the participants had difficulty accepting was the new role of the instructor as another participant and facilitator of the learning activity. Two weeks into the investigation, I was still playing the main role in the discussions, as the participants expected me to (R.J., p. 5). I later reflected in my journal:

Maybe what is happening is that the students at the university level resist to be given the responsibility for their own learning, have difficulty accepting a position of the instructor as a facilitator of the activity and not the power figure who come to class to pour knowledge into their brains. Besides, specifically regarding foreign languages, after taking Spanish for three years, they still think that studying a foreign language is like studying psychology or history. They know they want to learn, but have difficulty accepting that they need to work harder or approach the subject in a different manner. (R.J., p. 7)

As the study progressed and the participants received the scaffolding they needed in order to appreciate this new approach to reading in a foreign language, signs of acceptance started to emerge and by the third week of the study “the students seemed much more involved in the discussions. This time, even a student started the discussions. It looks like the more students are in contact with this type of work with a book, the more they understand that the discussions are not about giving an expected answer, but what they interpret from the novel” (R.J., p. 7). In addition, I noticed that the less often that the participants were corrected during the discussions, the less afraid they were to offer their views. They still made mistakes, but their oral proficiency had improved (R.J., p. 8).

To illustrate, Amanda and Liliana were two participants who, at the beginning of the study, were reluctant to speak during the discussions; however, as the study progressed, they became more active and involved in the discussions, and started to make connections between the novel and their own lives. “They had so much to say. (...)You could see the satisfaction in their faces at the end of the class because they had been able to cross that bridge” (R.J., p. 8). Similarly, when Leonor was re-reading the novel, she observed that she then realized how her reading routine had shifted since she was already reflecting every time a chapter finished as opposed to reading without making any connections or reflections (R.J., p. 9).

Finally, I realized how much the participants had come to accept and enjoy this new approach to reading when I saw the participants trying to finish the reading in the halls before they came into class because they wanted to say something during the discussions and did not want to be “left out” without having anything to say (R.J., p. 10). This observation was supported during the focus group meeting when Leonor and Olivia stated:

I find it kind of funny that I’m in a French-Canadian Literature class and I haven’t really read any of the books and I’m being marked on those books, but I’m not

being marked on this one. And this is the one I read the most. I think 'cause it was Spanish and it was something different and I wanted to learn more. So, it was fun. (Leonor, F.M., pp. 10).

I was just going to say that it is something I've taken with me. The personal approach to looking at a chapter and saying how it relates to your life. Or does it bring any memories to you? Did you do this when you were a kid? Did this ever happen to you? And that personal approach to reading a book, I've never actually done for a school book. Like for a book you read for university and I do find myself doing that for other classes. I read things and think about things, which before it would be the last thing on my mind 'cause you're just trying to get what's the point of this and what do I need to know type of thing. (Olivia, F.M., p. 11)

Amanda explained that she had never read a book in this way either and felt she just wanted to read more and that she would even try another book in Spanish. Octavio added that, after reading this book, his "appetite" for reading fiction had returned (F.M., p. 11).

Students' Reading Practices and Priorities

The participants' reading practices were varied. This diversity was demonstrated during the study. They all looked at reading in a foreign language as a challenging, difficult, and frustrating activity; at the same time, they also thought of it as an activity that helped them improve their skills in a foreign language and considered it a learning experience (F.M., p. 3). This theme describes these practices from two perspectives: inside and outside of school, and setting priorities.

Inside and Outside of School. Students perceived reading for a course as different from reading for personal interest. They commented that they liked reading, but that, since they had been in university, they did not read for pleasure very often (F.M., p.2). Octavio stated that for him reading outside of school was "an escape and when things are written down you don't have to ask: What is that that you just said? Did you say Hate or Ate? It's all written down" (F.M., p. 2). Liliana observed that she used to read for pleasure before coming to university, but since then

she does not have time to read for pleasure (F.M., p. 2). Marta agreed that reading was “a lot better than sitting there watching T.V. commercials” (F.M., p. 2). Only Elena stated she did not do “a lot of personal reading unless it is magazines and it’s flipping through nonsense stuff basically. Yeah, mostly school reading” and indicated that the only literature reading she had ever done had been for her French-Canadian Literature class (F.M., p. 2).

The previous statements demonstrate, that for these participants, reading for pleasure did not mean reading for school. Javier thought that reading for school “it’s kind of like a job. You have to read” (F.M., p. 2). Vera enjoyed reading but she “found that for university I don’t read for pleasure, it’s more for school. Actually, the book we did in class was the first non-English book I’ve ever looked at” (F.M., p. 2). Leonor stated that “reading is more of a chore for me sometimes and if I don’t enjoy it, I don’t understand it, then I don’t pay attention, I sleep over the class” (F.M., p. 2). Olivia felt that if “if you’re doing it (reading) outside of school for pleasure you are going to pick ten books on that subject and read them all fast and just absorb it ‘cause you’re so in love with it” (F.M., p. 7).

Liliana, who considered herself an avid reader, was the only one who stated she had read six books for pleasure since she had entered at the university. She summarized what it meant for students to read a book or an article in an efferent manner, and reflected on the meaning of reading for school for these participants:

Especially where we are right now, like undergraduate program. It’s broad and everything you learn you won’t use it anyways. You are learning it because you have to until you go onto the next step. Like for example psych. then I was going to go on my masters. Everything I am learning now it’s just the building box and the basics and it’s just, o.k., memorize this and regurgitate it, memorize this and regurgitate it. You don’t actually remember half of the stuff that you learn. (F.M., p. 7)

Setting Priorities. Early in the study, I noticed that participants were not reading all the chapters assigned all the time. To this effect, I wrote in my journal:

(...) the participants do not have a solid habit of reading in general. Whatever they read is because they have to and know they would be penalized if they do not do it. Besides, they know that whether they read the novel or not, they will not be penalized for it. It is hard for me to understand that students have to be penalized in order to help them learn. (R.J., pp. 5, 6)

Later in the focus meeting, the participants admitted not reading all the chapters all the time and using the small group discussions to “catch up with what was going on in the book” (F.M., p. 7). When asked why they did not read all the chapters all the time all the participants agreed with what Leonor stated:

I did find that you put your priorities, you know, in an order and, you know, I wasn't getting marked on this and that made it easier for me. I had to do the work I had deadlines for, the work that was worth a mark and then I would do the reading after. Everything else that got done was, I don't want to say, was more important. That was one of the things that made it harder for me to read all the chapters. (F.M., p. 7)

The setting of priorities seemed to be determined by evaluations and the participants seemed to have accepted these evaluations as a form of “repression” that forced them to read for school even before they came to university. For example, Javier recalled that when he was in high school he had weekly testing in his French class, and that this procedure made him read for the class (F.M., p. 6). When asked if he would have read had not there been the weekly testing, he stated that he “would have probably done the reading the night before the big test” (F.M., p. 2). Leonor felt the same way, adding that, in her case, one of her instructors at the university used “surprise tests” as a way to have them do the readings for the class. The following exchange among Leonor, Elena and me during the focus meeting offers a clearer picture as to why reading has become a chore for them rather than a pleasurable activity:

Leonor: That's the thing with me and Olivia in our French class. You have to read these articles every week and she has surprise tests, but you know when there is an article she is going to give a surprise test. So you read that article and know what it's about because if you knew there wasn't a surprise test; either you wouldn't read the article or wouldn't be paying attention as much. So, testing makes you understand more.

Researcher: So, it's like being in kind of a repression system. If you're not penalized, you don't read it.

Elena: That's how we've been trained. Always reading and questions. Like, you read it, know the content and you'll be tested. Whether it is a basic multiple choice or... That's what happens" (F.M., 6).

The participants' opinions illuminate why they resisted this new approach to reading at the beginning of the study. In addition, this exchange suggests that motivation for these participants is external rather than internal.

Response to *La Casa en Mango Street*

The theme, "Response to *La Casa en Mango Street*", is organized into five sub-themes: from efferent to aesthetic reading; intertextuality; re-interpretation; long term versus short term and multiliteracies.

From efferent to aesthetic response. As the study progressed, the participants' responses evolved from literal answers to personal, interpretive responses to the novel. From the beginning of the study, the participants showed behaviours that demonstrated the way they had been instructed to respond to texts. They took an efferent approach to reading and, in turn, their responses lacked the personal interpretations characteristic of aesthetic responses. As Javier stated, they were expecting me to give them guiding questions or themes they could develop (F.M., p. 8).

Participants' opinions demonstrated that their previous experiences with reading in school had shaped the way they approached reading and, in turn, the way they perceived the

development of a personal relationship with the text as a way to go beyond the message of the text or the author's intended meaning. For example, when asked about what strategies their foreign language instructors used to promote their learning of a foreign language, they offered the following responses:

- **Elena:** We had a special class of lexicography. We would take a word and find all the related words. That really got us a chance to elaborate. My group picked the barn theme. Then we found every word in French that had to do with the barn because no one knew all those words.
- **Leonor:** I've found that all of my French professors have told us that the best way actually see any results in the language is to go to the country where it is spoken and stay there and then you'll become fluent almost instantly.
- **Vera:** My teacher used to use skits. In French we did lots of skits. We did some projects that included written parts of it.
- **Javier:** My French teacher in high school made us do a lot of videos. And she would give us a broad theme like something about the movies or part of the book. And then we had to make a video. It would teach us because we had to write our own lines basing it on the story or something like that.
- **Octavio:** (...) he [his French teacher] would always make us copy passages from the textbooks in the assumption that we would understand. We didn't learn anything; we were just copying without knowing what it was. We were like monks in monasteries copying out Latin texts they don't understand.

Vera's and Javier's previous experiences demonstrate the use of two strategies that would be effective to promote comprehension, but that might not address explicitly how to negotiate the meanings of texts. The only participant who seemed to have had some previous experience with reading to develop skills in a foreign language was Liliana. She recalled that, when she was in high school, she had to write weekly book reports for her French class that included a written report and an oral presentation (F.M., p. 5). However, although these activities would provide practice, they would not promote metacognitive awareness or an aesthetic response.

In this unit, the participants had the opportunity to respond to the novel in a variety of ways. After reading and re-reading the novel, Amanda responded poetically connecting the immigration issues described in the novel with her travel experiences in the Dominican Republic, where she had witnessed the life of immigrants from Haiti (I.P.) (see Figure 1).

Javier composed a theme song for the book entitled “Única” (“Unique”) (see figure 2). In his song, every stanza reflected a chapter of the book which was of relevance to him. In addition, the music he composed for the lyrics reflected the Hispanic world and even included a rap section, which reflected the merger of two identities: the Hispanic identity and the North American identity (I.P.).

Allí él está en el sol, descansa En el sol descansa después de un día muy largo Se pregunta por qué esto era lo pone Ser tan cansado después de trabajar La mirada en sus ojos parece tan esperanzado	<i>There he is under the sun, resting He is resting under the sun after a long day. He wonders why things are this way. To be so tired after work The look in his eyes seems so hopeful</i>
Los niños juegan Y toman mi mano Soy una nueva amiga Para verlos Para escucharlos Para estar con ellos	<i>The children are playing And take my hand I am a new friend To match them To listen to them To be with them</i>
Veo la manera en que ellos viven En esta tierra, esta tierra duro Y como ellos sobreviven	<i>I see the way they live On this land, this tough land And how they survive</i>
Ellos viven sus vidas el mejor que ellos pueden Ellos comparten su amor con el otro Y ellos lo compartieron conmigo.	<i>They live their lives the best they can They share their love with each other And they shared it with me</i>

Figure 1: Amanda’s poem

Única/Unique

Cuatro árboles flaquitos, yo parezco uno de ellos
Alta, delgada, creciendo, a pesar de los ladrillos
Su fuerza es secreta, con raíces bajo tierra
Aunque escoges tu propio camino, lo que fue
era lo que era.

*Four thin trees, I look like one of them
Tall, thin, growing, in spite of the bricks
Her strength is secret, with roots underneath
the earth. No matter what road you take,
what will, will be*

Nene niño no te vayas por ahí
Canta en español conmigo

*Baby boy don't go that way
Sing in Spanish with me*

Lo único que falta, que tengas la razón
Es una casa nueva, hecha de corazón

What you need to be right
Is a brand new house, made out of love

Papá porque despiertas, cansado en la oscuridad
Ahora me toca a mí pasar la noticia a los demás
Aunque no soy bella tampoco seré cruel,
Yo seré muy fuerte, quiero ser como tú

*Father, because you wake up tired in the
darkness. Now it is my turn to pass the news
to everyone else. Even though I'm not pretty
I will not be cruel Esther. I will be very
strong, I want to be like you.*

Lisandra, o Maritza, o Zeze la décima
Tu fuiste bautizada con un nombre de esperanza
Tu vieja te grita que fuiste mal nacida,
Que tú irás al infierno por impersonar a tu tía

*Lisandra, or Maritza, or Zeze the tenth one
You were baptized with a name of hope
Your mother yells at you and tell you were
born cursed and that you will go to hell for
impersonating your aunt*

Hogar es una casa en una fotografía
Yo me las veía donde trabajo todo el día
Por el vecindario, escuincles huelen a escoba
Aquí es donde viven los pobres y los que roban

*Home is a place in a picture
I used to see them where I work all day
Around the neighborhood, there are kids who
smell like broom. Here's where the poor and
those who steal live.*

Lo único que falta, que tengas la razón
Es una casa nueva, hecha de corazón

What you need to be right
Is a brand new house, made out of love

Pobre Sally a su papi, no le hizo caso
Cuando vuelva a su casa, le da puñetazos
Por hablarse con los niños, quizás los del
carnaval

*Poor Sally, she didn't obey her dad
When she returns home, will beat her up
because she talked to the boys, maybe those
from the carnival*

Lo único que falta, que tengas la razón
Es una casa nueva, hecha de corazón

What you need to be right
Is a brand new house, made out of love

Figure 2: Javier's song *Única*

Olivia and Leonor decided to concentrate on Sally, one of the characters in the novel because she “was the most interesting character in the book. We could relate to her and the difficulties that women face” (G.P.). They created a new cover for the book, a newspaper article

which they entitled *El Chicago Chicano, su periódico latinoamericano (Chicano Chicago, Your Latin American Newspaper)*. Here is an excerpt from the article they wrote:

CHICAGO- En el barrio Mango Street hoy ocurrió una tragedia para una mujer y su hija. Después de una pelea muy violenta, la mujer y la niña están en el hospital.

Los nombres no pueden ser publicados para proteger la identidad de la niña.

... Ella dice que ahora se va divorciar de su marido para empezar un futuro seguro y su hija. Ella desea una orden de restricción también. No pudimos contactar al marido para comentarios. Un refugio de mujeres ofrece sus servicios para ayudarles en este momento difícil. (GP)

In this article they described an event that took place after the book finished. As they stated in their presentation, they were interested in this character and decided to develop a story that included the abuse Sally and her daughter endured at her husband's hands. It all ends in a tragedy that sends them to the hospital, but this incident also means a new beginning for Sally without the abuse. Olivia and Leonor also developed an end of the story for Sally in which she studied social services and starts working at the same refuge for women that helped her in the past (G.P.).

Similarly, Vera developed a Power Point presentation entitled *La vida de las mujeres inmigrantes y refugiadas en Canadá* (The life of immigrant and refugee women in Canada) in response to two of the main themes in the book: immigration and the role of women in society. In her presentation, Vera mentioned the different countries many women who come to Canada are from and what their role in their countries of origin was. In addition, she explained the different obstacles these women experience when they immigrate to Canada. At the end of her presentation, Vera proposed a solution to the problems immigrant women face in Canada by stating that we need to develop a culture that really supports and helps immigrants and that we need to create a place that offers security and peace for everyone (I.P.). She explains:

En Canadá necesitamos desarrollar una cultura que verdaderament apoye y ayude a los inmigrantes de nuestro país. Nadie debe ser excluido.

Canadá es un gran país y necesitamos hacer un lugar que ofrezca seguridad y tranquilidad para toda la gente del mundo. (I.P.)

Intertextuality. As noted earlier, the participants needed scaffolding to understand what was meant by making intertextual and personal connections with the novel they were reading. In the second week of the study, the participants were instructed to reflect on the most prominent themes in the novel up to that moment and present their reflections orally in class and discuss them with the rest of the class in the following week. At the end of their presentations and discussions, I asked them to give me their written reflections. For this assignment, the participants were provided with the The Research Quest Model (BCTLA, 2001) ealier mentioned.

The following are the excerpts of Elena and Vera’s reflections followed by their translations. They talked about issues surrounding Latin American immigrants when they arrive in the United States, which was one of the themes described in the novel. They both chose to support their arguments with one of the complemetary materials read in class, *La Cara Hispana de los Estados Unidos* (Tuten, Caycedo Garner, Esterrich, 2005) (*The Hispanic Face of the United States*). Their reflections, although on the same issue and supported by the same complementary material, are different and demonstrate that, by the third week of the study, the participants were starting to make attempts to establish intertextual connections between the novel and other texts:

- ... En primera lugar, Esperanza estuvo contenta con su nueva casa, pero ella quiere una más bonita, una de verdad. Ella vive en el barrio latino de Chicago con otros inmigrantes. “La mayor parte de ellos ha llegado de Latinoamérica y el Caribe, y de éstos, la gran mayoría habla español” (Tuten, Caycedo Garner & Esterrich, 2005). La situación en los barrios no son buenos, por este razón Esperanza quiere salir de Mango Street. Es el mismo por mucho latinos

cuando ellos llegan a los Estados Unidos. Los latinos son una población de minoría y tiene problemas de integración con la población inglesa. En el barrio latino no es solamente los latinos. Es muchas familias que son pobres. “(...) es erróneo verlos a todos de un solo bloque monolítico, ya que su país de origen no es siempre el mismo, no todos son inmigrantes, no todos hablan español y no todos se identifican de la misma manera” (Tuten, Caycedo Garner & Esterrich, 2005). (Elena, I.R.)

(In the first place, Esperanza was very happy with her new house, but she wants a prettier one, a real one. She lives in the latin neighborhood of Chicago with other immigrants. “Most of them have arrived from Latin America and the Caribbean, and of these, most of them speak Spanish” (Tuten, Caycedo Garner, Esterrich, 2005). The situation in the neighborhoods are not good, and for this reason Esperanza wants to leave Mango Street. It is the same for many Latinos when they arrive in the United States. The Latino population are a minority population and they have problems of integration with the English population. In the Latino neighborhood there are not only Latinos. There are many families that are poor. “(...) it is wrong to see them all as members of a single block, because their country of origin is not always the same, not all of them are immigrants, not all of them speak Spanish and not all of them identify each other in the same way.” (Tuten, Caycedo Garner & Esterrich, 2005)

- El fragmento dijo que el gran desafío es que los inmigrantes hispanos pierden su lengua y son asimilado pronto. En el libro por Cisneros, el contrario es verdad. La gente, especialmente las mujeres, quedan atrapado en sus casa por su lengua. La mujer que llega de México es un buen ejemplo porque ella le falta confianza y entonces queda atrapado. Ella pudo decir frases como: No speak English y He not here, pero estas frases no son suficiente por comunicar cada día. Ella no quiere salir a contestar el teléfono. Hoy en día, es la realidad por muchas mujeres inmigrantes en nuestra sociedad. Ellas dependen en sus hijos para sobrevivir en la vida. Sin la ayuda de los hijos, el mundo es muy aterrador. Aquí en Thunder Bay, yo conozco un familia de Chechnya. El hijo y uno de los dos hijas saben inglés y ellos traducen para su madre. La madre no quiere salir mucho sin sus hijos porque ella tiene miedo que ella no sería capaz comunicar apropiadamente. Es fácil para los jóvenes de aprender una otra lengua pero es difícil para los adultos. (Vera, I.R.)

(The segment said that the greatest challenge that immigrants lose their mother tongue and are assimilated soon. In the book by Cisneros, the contrary is true. The people, especially women, end up trapped in their houses because of their mother tongue. The woman who arrives from Mexico is a good example because she lacks confidence and ends up trapped. She could say phrases such as No speak English and He not here, but these phrases are not enough to communicate each day. She doesn't want to answer the telephone. Nowadays, it is the reality for many women in our society. They depend in their children to survive in life. Without the help of their children, the world is terrifying. Here in

Thunder Bay, I know family from Chechnya. The son and one of the two daughters know English and they translate for their mother. The mother doesn't want to go out a lot without her children because she is afraid she wouldn't be able to communicate properly. It's easy for the young people of learning an another language, but it's difficult for the adults.)

During the discussions carried out in the third week of the study, Amanda also made a connection between one of the events in the novel with a movie she had watched. "This chapter reminded me of the movie *Napoleon Dynamite* because in that movie there is a Mexican family who own a Cadillac as the one described in the novel and that, as in the novel, was acquired by its owner in suspicious ways" (O.L., p. 9). On another occasion, Amanda also found a parallel between one chapter in the novel and her lived experiences. She found that the chapter *No Speak English* was an example of what had happened to someone she knew who was from Somalia. This person did not like Canada because of the big differences in culture and language, a phenomenon experienced by a character in the novel (O.L., p. 10).

Elena also made a connection of the chapter *Las Tres Hermanas* with the three witches or three sisters of Greek Mythology, who determined fate. The three sisters in the chapter were fortune tellers and told Esperanza what her life would be in the future (O.L., p. 10).

Re-interpretation. During the re-reading of the novel the participants were asked to reflect on how their initial responses to the novel had changed after they had re-read the novel. When they were discussing in small groups, I overheard Leonor share with her response group that she now noticed that the main character only talked about people who had problems and that it seemed that, to her, people with problems were the only interesting people (O.L., p. 9). Octavio, who was also in this response group, added that he thought that the main character wanted to talk about people who were not role models (O.L., p. 8). During the same discussion, Marta made an interesting observation regarding the main character's parents in another response

group. She noticed that the main character only mentioned her parents sporadically in the book, and perhaps because her parents did not have enough problems or their problems were not interesting enough for her to talk about (O.L., p. 9).

In the whole class discussion, Vera interpreted the story of the main character as “the story of butterfly”: at the beginning a child and at the end a girl with new points of views and all the reasons to leave Mango Street (O.L., p. 10). Vera’s statement was supported by Pedro who commented that, even though there was no sequence of events in the novel, he now realized that the main character had grown up through the novel. He went on to say that at the beginning of the novel the main character told very naïve stories or that perhaps her comments were typical for a child of her age; however, after reading the whole novel, he noticed that these stories became less naïve and that she became more critical of her surroundings towards the end of the novel (O.L., p. 10)

Long term vs. Short Term. As the study progressed, I noticed that should this approach be implemented in the regular curriculum of a foreign language program, it should be implemented for a longer period of time (O.L., p. 8) because of the scaffolding these participants needed during the implementation of the unit. In my journal, I state that “the students need enough scaffolding before venturing into this type of activity. This scaffolding would require some time before the novel study begins, or concurrently as the unit progresses” (R.J., p. 7).

The participants felt the same way I did in terms of having this approach implemented earlier in the semester. Liliana suggested that students should start reading the book

earlier in the semester. Whether it is January or September. Even if you’re doing two books. Even an easier at the beginning and one more elaborate towards the end. So that there can be more time for discussions, not that we didn’t have enough time to read the book, but more time to read and really see what’s happening. (F.M., p. 12)

Multiliteracies. As illustrated in the previous examples of responses to the novel, the participants had the opportunity to respond to the novel using a variety of media they were familiar with and which allowed them to respond to the novel creatively (Sumara, 1995). Vera, Leonor, Olivia, Elena, and Pedro used a Power Point to represent their responses to the novel. Amanda and Liliana used poetry and drama to present a conversation between Esperanza and a friend many years after the novel ended. Likewise, Octavio used drama to present his response to the novel playing as if he were the author of *La Casa en Mango Street*:

Octavio presented a conversation between ‘Sandro’ Cisneros and a movie director who wants to adapt the book to the big screen. He used this as a pretext to re-tell the novel and talk about the main themes in it and explain the meaning behind the novel. (O.L., pp. 12, 13)

Similarly, as mentioned above, Javier had the opportunity to showcase his skills as a singer, musician, and song-writer through the song “*Única*”. Javier even used the help of a friend for the chorus of a song (O.L., p. 12).

In both of their individual presentations, Vera and Marta tried to involve the whole class by asking their classmates questions and their opinions on the issues they were presenting. For example, Marta created a board game in which all participants had to answer comprehension questions of the novel. The board consisted of a painting of Mango Street with Esperanza’s house (The House on Mango Street) at the end of the street. All participants had chips in the shape of girls (Esperanza). In order for them to advance in the board they had to answer correctly the questions Marta was asking (O.L., p. 12).

Pre- and post-unit language assessments

The students’ oral proficiency in Spanish and comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation skills of a text were assessed at the beginning and at the end of the study. These pre and post unit language assessments are described as follows.

Response before the unit. During the first meeting in week 1, I assessed the participants' oral proficiency in Spanish, as well as their skills in comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of a text before the study began. This procedure included one taped response with the participants. For this activity, the participants were asked to read a passage from the chronicle *Dejando atrás el infierno* (Gutiérrez, 1998). Set in present-day Cuba, the passage is a pessimistic narration in the first person of a man who is coming out of the movies after watching *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The narrator starts to reflect on his life and the lives of others. As he is entering his own neighborhood, he notices that a dead man is being carried out of his apartment building. He describes the scene very graphically, mentioning that the cause of death of the man was tongue cancer. He then remembers that he has nothing to eat at home and that he only has seven pesos left in his pocket. He resolves to buy a small pizza from a street vendor and not to worry about the next day until it comes. He concludes the passage by reflecting on life and how everyone lived "by pieces, tying each of these pieces, every hour, every day, matching the people from here and there inside of us. That's how we put our lives together, like a puzzle." (Gutiérrez, 1998)

Much of the vocabulary and grammar of *Dejando atrás el infierno* was familiar to the students at this instructional level. The difficulty of the passage lies in that the author jumps from one event to the other, sometimes leaving the reader wanting to know more about the scene being described.

Three student readings and comprehension of Gutiérrez's Dejando atrás el infierno

In order to determine how orally proficient the participants were at the beginning of the study and to determine if they had comprehended the passage previously mentioned, I asked the participants in this study to read the passage, without any assistance on background and

vocabulary. They were given fifteen minutes to read the passage silently, and then fifteen minutes to think of what they had read and to be prepared to report back to me everything they remembered from the passage and what they thought about it. Three typical examples follow:

Octavio

En Cuba vi al cine y vi la película La puente sobre el Río Kwai y a través de este cine y a través de este película, no sabe, es un incidente con una ambulancia con un hombre que es muerto de cáncer, dos negros, una mujer con una botella de ron, no sabe el gran no sabe exactamente el gran events (T1).

(In Cuba, I saw to the movies and I saw the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and through this movie theater and through this movie, I don't know, an event with an ambulance occurs in which there is a man who dies of cancer, two black people, a woman with a bottle of rum, I don't know the great events.)

Olivia

Olivia: Es interesante, pero es un poco difícil
(It's interesting, but it's a little difficult.)

Researcher: ¿Por qué? ¿De qué se trata?
(Why? What is it about?)

Olivia: No entiendo todo, siento que es jumpy.
(I don't understand everything. I feel it's jumpy)

Researcher: ¿Que es qué? ¿Jumpy? ¿Sientes que salta mucho?
(That is what? Jumpy? Do you feel it jumps a lot?)

Olivia: Sí, porque ellos están en el cine.
(Yes. Because they are at the movies)

Researcher: ¿Quiénes son ellos? A ver, tú dices que ellos están en el cine. ¿Quiénes son ellos?
(Who are they? Let's see, you say that they are at the movies. Who are they?)

Olivia: Quizás un hombre y su amigo, pienso
(Maybe a man and his friend. I think.)

Researcher: ¿Para quién tú piensas que escribe el autor? Tú piensas que el autor escribe para una audiencia específica o escribe para todo el mundo?
(Who do you think the author write for? Do you think that the author writes for a specific audience o that he write for everybody?)

Olivia: Probablemente por todo el mundo.
(Probably for everyone)

Researcher: O.k. ¿De qué se trata ese pedazo del cuento? Tú dices que alguien va al cine y qué más pasa?
(O.K. What is this excerpt of the store about? You say that someone goes to the movies. What else happens?)

Olivia: Después el cine, ellos están en la calle y hay una ambulancia y pienso que Lili piensa de su experiencia 7 meses atrás.
(After the movies, they are on the street and there is an ambulance and I think Lili thinks of her experience seven months ago)

Researcher: OK. Lili piensa en su experiencia
(O.K. Lili thinks of her experience)

Olivia: Si, en una experiencia ella tiene.
(Yes, of an experience she has)

Researcher: Ok , gracias (T1)
(O.K. thank you)

Liliana

Liliana: Se trata de un marinero que tiene cáncer pienso y es un poco se trata de la muerte y no sé, es interesante porque habla de muchas cosas, negros, no sé, es todo pienso.
(It's about a sailor who has cancer, I think. And it is a little about death, I don't know. It's interesting because it talks about many things, blacks, I don't know. I think that's all.)

Researcher: ¿Qué te parece? ¿Te gustó o no te gustó?
(What do you think of it? Did you like it or not?)

Liliana: No me gusta porque es difícil al leer porque no es estúpido, es hay, es difícil al leer porque no sé.
(I don't like it because it's difficult to read. It's not stupid, it's difficult to read. I don't know.)

Researcher: Es difícil para ti, ok, perfecto, gracias (T1)
(It's difficult to read. O.K. perfect. Thank you)

According to the rubric used to assess the participants' oral proficiency, comprehension and interpretation of the text, Octavio understood very little of the language of the passage and

only commented on familiar topics. In addition, he expressed himself in short phrases or in simple sentences.

As in Octavio's case, Olivia commented on familiar topics, but needed paraphrasing by the instructor in order to understand the message. She also expressed herself in short phrases or in simple sentences. Similarly, Liliana expressed herself in single words, short phrases or simple sentences.

Octavio, Olivia and Liliana identified basic topics of the text. They did not show evidence of making inferences and predicting. They did not draw any conclusions from information from the text. They did not use their own culture to comprehend the text, nor did they identify products and practices of the cultures of the Hispanic world. They did not recognize any differences in the products and practices on the cultures of the Hispanic world and their own.

Because the participants were not fully able to understand the story, they were limited to recalling few elements from it. Two of the participants stated that the reading was difficult, and one of them stated that "it was difficult because it was hard to read." As demonstrated during the implementation of the unit, from the moment they did not have access to a dictionary and were asked to retell the passage and give a personal opinion about it, they found it very difficult to understand it.

Response after the study. During the last meeting in week 5, I assessed the participants' oral proficiency in Spanish; and comprehension and interpretation of a text skills after experiencing the reader response as focal practice approach. This procedure included one taped response with the participants. For this activity, the participants were asked to read the short story *El Telegrama* (Clarasó, 1980). This is the story about a misunderstanding when a mailman delivers a telegram to the wrong person. The narrator comes back from work at night and finds

the mailman standing at the door of the narrator's neighbour, Mr. Agapito, trying to deliver a telegram. The mailman had already spent ten minutes knocking at the door without any success. Therefore, the narrator felt compelled to help the mailman, and starts knocking at the door, banging at the door in the second place and lastly, using a walking stick provided by another neighbour, who had already been waken up as a result of all the noise. Mr. Agapito finally wakes up and opens the door angrily only, to find that the telegram was not for him, but for the narrator, who never thought of looking at the addressee's name during all this time he had spent trying to deliver the telegram to his neighbour. In the end, they all realize that, even though the telegram was not for Mr. Agapito, the house number in the telegram is Mr. Agapito's and, thus, the cause of the confusion.

Three students readings and comprehension of Clarasó's El telegrama

In order to determine how orally proficient the participants were after experiencing the reader response as focal practice approach to determine if they had comprehended the passage previously mentioned, I asked the participants to read the short story without any assistance on background and vocabulary. They were given fifteen minutes to read the passage, and then fifteen minutes to think of what they had read and to be prepared to report back to the me everything they remembered from the passage and what they thought about it. Three examples of the same participants used in the previous theme follow:

Octavio

Octavio: Este historia es sobre... no... es sobre el sujeto de una conflic (*referring to the reasearcher*) ¿Es una palabra "conflicto"?

(This store is about... no... is about the subject of a conflict. Is conflicto a word?)

Researcher: Un conflicto, ajá.

(A conflict, yes.)

Octavio: Un conflicto, discúlpame, entre el protagonist o la protagonista. No soy enteramente cierto cuál es el sexo de la protagonist. Es un conflicto entre el protagonist y un hombre muy antiguo de nombre don Agapito el cual es un gruñero (*he meant gruñón*). Y don Agapito no es llevado al tiempo y antes de más, antes de muchos golpes sobre el puerto de don Agapito se descubrió que el telegrama no es por, no es para don Agapito y eso es la historia. Es muy divertido porque antiguos gruñeros son muy divertido.

(A conflict, sorry, between the [male] protagonist or the [female] protagonist. I'm not entirely certain of the gender of the protagonist. It is a conflict between the protagonist and an old fashioned man, Mr. Agapito, who is grouch. Mr. Agapito does not wake up on time and, before [he meant after] banging at the door, it is discovered that the telegram is not for Mr. Agapito, and that's the story. It's funny because old grouch men are fun.)

Researcher: Tú piensas que las personas mayores son divertidas.
(You think that elderly people are fun.)

Octavio: Ah, sí. Si las personas mayores son gruñeros o...
(Ah, yes! If elderly people are grouch or...)

Researcher: Gruñones?
(Grouchy?)

Octavio: Gruñones, discúlpeme, o excéntricos creo que es una buena fórmula para comedia.
(Grouchy, excuse me, or excentric. I think that it's a good formula for a comedy.)

Researcher: ¿Y por qué, a ver?
(And why? Let's see.)

Octavio: ¿Y por qué? Porque personas mayores, niños, animales, personas con difi
(studders)
(And why? Because elderly people, children, animals, people with diffi...)

Researcher: ¿Dificultades?
(Difficulties?)

Octavio: Dificultades con sus ah, ah, ah, cerebros, eso es una tierra (*he meant argumento*) buena para los... ¿Cómo se dice *seeds*?
(Difficulties with their ah...., brains, that is a good earth (*he meant ground*) for the... How do you say *seeds*?)

Researcher: Semillas

Octavio: Como las semillas de comedias.
(Like seeds for comedies.)

Researcher: O.K. O sea que te gustó.
(O.K. It means you liked it.)

Octavio: Sí.
(Yes.)

Researcher: ¿Te gustó el cuento?
(You liked the story)

Octavio: Sí.
(Yes.)

Researcher: Porque es cómico.
(Because it's funny.)

Octavio: Porque es cómico. Porque también el hombre, el antagonista es, no es amable, es un gruñero y por esta razón cuando este gruñero es irritante, es divertido. Porque él es un víctima perfecto.
(Because it's funny. Also because the man, the antagonist, is not kind, he's grouchy and because of this, when this grouchy is irritable, he's funny. Because he is the perfect victim.)

Researcher: O.K.

Octavio: Porque él es un víctima perfecto. Porque nuestros simpatías, (*addressing the researcher*) ¿Es la palabra?
(Because he is the perfect victim. Because our sympathies... is that the word?)

Researcher: Sí.
(Yes)

Octavio: Porque nuestros simpatías están con el protagonista y no con el antagonista.
(Because our sympathies are with the protagonist and not with the antagonist)

Researcher: O.K. Perfecto. Gracias.
(O.K. Perfect. Thank you.)

Octavio: Gracias. (T2)
(Thank you)

Olivia

Olivia: O.K. Am, primero hay un hombre que dice que los telegramas son solamente noticias y tienen mucha prisa y todo eso y él dice que él prefiere que los telegramas tiene solamente las noticias buenas. Y si es una mala noticia él prefiere darla de palabra. Y am, después de todo eso él dice que um, un día hay un hombre que está enfrente de el puerto de su vecino y el vive en el número 16, es el otro puerto, y el hombre está llamando el vecino que está muy viejo dentro del apartamento, pero él no está allá o él no oír y después de llamar al timbre y con un bastón y el otro vecino también, el vecino viejo dice que él está allá y que me lo pagará. Pienso que él pensó que la persona a su puerta es una persona que quiere dinero para algo que no pagué y ahora el dice: O.K. me lo pagará. Pero después otro vecino, el primero hombre dice que él es un hombre en el telegrama y ahora él sabe que todo eso es para nada porque am, el telegrama es para él.

(First, there is man who says that telegrams are only news which are in rush. And he says that he prefers telegrams which have only good news. And if it is bad news, he prefers to give it verbally. And, um, after all that he says that, um, one day, there is man who is in front of the door of his neighbor and he lives at number 16, which is the other door, and the man is calling the neighbor who is very old and who is inside the apartment, but he isn't there or can't hear and after ringing the bell and with a walking stick, an the other neighbour too, the old neighbor says he is there and then he says that the narrator will pay for it. I think that he [referring to Mr. Agapito] thought that the person knocking at the door is a person who wanted money for something he didn't pay and now he said: O.K. you will pay for it. But afterwards, another neighbor, the first man [referring to the narrator] says he is the man in the telegram and now he knows that all that is in vain because, um, the telegram is for him)

Researcher: O.K. ¿Te gustó o no el cuento?
(O.K. Did you like the story?)

Olivia: Sí.
(Yes)

Researcher: ¿Por qué?
(Why?)

Olivia: Porque no es algo que nosotros tenemos ahora porque no usamos los telegramas.
(Because it's something we don't have nowadays. Because we don't use telegrams)

Researcher: Pero pueden ser otras cosas.
(But it can be because of other things too)

Olivia: Sí. Es un poco ah... amusante...
(Yes. It's a little amusing [uses the word in English with an ending in Spanish])

Researcher: ¿Un poco qué?
(A little what?)

Olivia: Amusante (*laughs*).
(Amusing [*uses the word again and laughs because she knows that she's using Spanglish*])

Researcher: ¿Entretenido?
(Entertaining?)

Olivia: No, funny.

Researcher: ¿Gracioso?

Cristina: Gracioso. (T2)

Liliana

Liliana: Es el cuento de un telegrama y que la mujer recibir los telegramas para la mayoría. Um, (*I cannot understand what she says*)... los telegramas de mal noticias porque se antes de abrir un telegrama ella tiene miedo porque ella no sé si es un noticia mala o un bueno o qué. Y la hombre que tiene la telegrama van a la casa... es un ...
(It's the story of a telegram and that the who to receive the telegrams for the most part... um, ... the telegrams with bad news because before she opens a telegram, she is afraid because she don't know if it's bad news or good news, or what. And the man who has the telegram go to the house... is a...)

Researcher: ¿Vecino?
(Neighbour?)

Liliana: Vecino. Porque tiene propio nombre, pero no el propio número de casa. Y el vecino no es contento porque se molestan por la presión. El es muy, muy furioso. Se dice “me lo pagará”. Y ahora no recibo los telegramas, pero se siente similar cuando yo recibo un carta en el carrero.
(Neighbor. Because he has the proper name, but not the proper number of the house. And the neighbour is not happy because they get bothered for the pressure. He is very, very furious. He says: You will pay for this! And now I don't receive telegrams, but it feels similar when I receive a letter on the mail [*uses the wrong word in Spanish*])

Researcher: en el correo

(on the mail)

Liliana: Sí, porque no recibo correo frecuentemente. Por los vacaciones, los compañeros, y ya...eso es todo.

(Yes, because I don't receive mail frequently. During vacation, school friends, and that's it)

Researcher: ¿Te gustó el cuento?

(Did you like the story?)

Liliana: Por la mayoría sí. Pero...

(For the most part, yes. But...)

Researcher: ¿Qué no te gusto?

(What didn't you like?)

Liliana: Yo leo dos veces porque el primero no entiende mucho, pero cuando yo lo leí por segunda vez...

(I read twice because at first, I don't understand much, but when I read it for the second time...)

Researcher: ¿Qué pasó?

Liliana: Cuando lo leí por segunda vez es muy, muy, muy fácil. Muy más fácil.

(When I read it for the second time it's very, very, very easy. Very easier)

Researcher: O.k. Fue más fácil cuando lo leíste por segunda vez. O.k. Gracias. (T2)

(O.K. It was easier when you read it for the second time. O.K. thank you)

The results of this second taped response are quite encouraging and confirm the positive effect of the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature. Octavio, Olivia, and Liliana understood and responded to familiar topics and asked for clarification when necessary. They expressed themselves comfortably, with elaboration as needed to make a point. In addition, they showed resourcefulness in successfully expressing something they did not know how to say. They used words, phrases, and structures (in a limited number of tenses) that were appropriate to the topic and to the conversational situation. Finally, they asked questions to get information and clarify something that they did not clearly understand.

Octavio, Olivia, and Liliana demonstrated a solid mastery of the knowledge and skills needed to comprehend ideas in written Spanish texts after experiencing the unit. They identified the main ideas and some specific details on familiar topics. They described more abstract themes and ideas of the overall text. They made inferences and logical predictions, as well as identified meaningful messages in the text. Finally, they analyzed and supported their analyses with examples from the text.

These examples demonstrate how readers of literature in a foreign language who are already establishing a personal connection with the text, and are willing to go beyond the story and speculate on certain aspects of the story. Another gain demonstrated by these participants is that, despite not having access to a dictionary to aid them in the comprehension, they nevertheless understood the short story. The mistakes they made in terms of construing content could have been easily avoided through either the small group or whole class discussions that took place during the implementation of the unit.

Interpretation

The study took place within the context of a novel study in a Spanish as foreign language class. The organization of the unit, as well as the activities conducted allowed participants to engage with and respond aesthetically to *La Casa en Mango Street*. In addition, the participants in this study were given the opportunity to represent their final responses to the novel in different modes of response: oral, drama, music, and multimedia. The discussion was organized around the six themes that emerged from the data analysis: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom, patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach, students' reading practices and priorities, response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, and pre- and post-unit language assessments.

Shifting Roles in the Foreign Language Class

This study provided insights regarding the shift in roles that the instructor and the students experienced when the instructor attempted to give the students the responsibility for their own learning of a foreign language and when the instructor became another participant in the learning process. This theme explained how the participants had difficulty accepting these new roles at the beginning of the study, but came to appreciate and value them towards the end of the study. This finding supports previous research findings obtained by Canterford (1991), Courtland et al. (1998), Smagorinsky (2002), and Sumara (1995). As demonstrated by the findings of this study, I was another participant in the learning activity and a facilitator of this activity. Sumara (1995) suggests that instructors should not exclude their responses to texts from those of the students' (p. 25). Courtland et al. (1998) explain that instructors need to go through the process of engaging themselves in order to get students motivated to read (p. 340).

Similarly, another role I had during this study was that of scaffolding students' learning by modelling responses and fostering an environment of reader response (Boyd-Batstone, 2002, p. 133). I also provided participants with complementary texts that promoted their comprehension of the novel and promoted metacognitive skills by increasing the participants' awareness of strategies they might use to increase their comprehension and understanding of vocabulary of the novel. This practice is consistent with Smagorinsky's (2002) idea that an instructor is also learning while he/she teaches and engages with students (p. 21). This finding illuminates research on the role of foreign language instructors and students in a classroom setting.

Patterns of Shared Response to *La Casa en Mango Street*

The patterns of shared response showed the strategies the participants used to comprehend the novel and the interventions I made to assist participants in this process. One of these strategies was using the dictionary, which made reading for many participants tiring and time-consuming. However, this pattern changed when the participants established a balance between using the dictionary, obtaining assistance from me and other members of their response groups, and from the complementary material used to support the comprehension of the novel. This finding offers insights into strategies foreign instructors may use in their classrooms in order to promote comprehension of literary texts. Therefore, this finding supports Asraf and Ahmad's (2003) recommendation that teachers "strike a balance between teaching students to use the dictionary and helping them to guess the meanings of words in context" (p. 98).

This theme also described how an interpretive community developed when the participants made the novel their own and negotiated meaning to arrive at a consensus while discussing it. This finding is consistent with Chi's (1999) study, in that "reading became a process of transaction, during which my participants owned and negotiated meaning, and, in turn, inquired and grew" (p. 16). In addition, this finding is consistent with Boyd-Batstone's (2002) notion on the relationship that exists between reader response and culture. In this study, an interpretive community also developed as the participants negotiated their culture with mine, as I did not share their cultural background. Similar to Boyd-Batstone's findings, I became a co-learner while the students shared their responses (pp. 133-134). Boyd-Batstone (2002) affirms:

Sharing knowledge and action, especially in classrooms in which the teacher may not necessarily share the cultural background of the students, requires significant degree of cultural negotiation. (...) Essentially, reader response invites cultural

negotiation as a way of affirming how each one thinks and comes to an understanding of a text. (p. 134)

In the same way, group collaboration and my role-modelling allowed the participants to share their personal experiences, cultural knowledge, and experiences with other cultures. For example, Vera always found a connection between different events in the novel concerning the lives of immigrants in the United States described in the novel and an immigrant family she knew personally in Canada.

Members of the response groups also assisted each other in comprehending the novel. This finding supports Sumara's (1995), and Bainbridge and Malicky's (2000) notions that meanings are socially constructed since each member of the response groups had something to contribute to the discussions. These contributions, in turn, helped to clarify meanings of words and negotiate interpretations of the novel. This finding corresponds with Sumara's findings in which the students made "connections among the text, their own layers of comments, and topics that were being generated and were unfolding in class discussions" (p. 21).

Students' Attitudes Towards a New Pedagogical Approach

The students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach correspond with one of the findings in the study conducted by Asraf and Ahmad (2003). In this study, I placed an emphasis on the participants' understanding of the story and requested that they share their stories with their classmates. As a result, the participants were motivated to read, and their attitudes towards reading was positively affected. Moreover, the students experienced a shift in their attitudes towards reading from the moment they understood that grammatical correctness was not the main focus of the approach and that the emphasis was being placed on their personal and collective interpretations of the novel. This attitudinal shift resulted in an increased motivation to

read and speak in class. As in Ali's (1994) study, the participants in my study benefited from discussions and learned to value each other's opinions.

Students' Reading Practices and Priorities

The participants' reading practices and priorities justified their different stances at the beginning of the study, what they thought about reading for school and for personal interest and how evaluations come to play an important role in their learning activity. The participants in this study viewed reading for school as a chore or job which had to be done, and initially believed that there was no pleasure involved while doing these school readings. These views had shaped by their previous experiences with texts. These views had been characterized by the lack of choice they had had of what they read and the external pressure of evaluation schemes that made them "memorize and regurgitate." The influences made them perceive the learning process as one in which, in the end, "you won't remember half of the stuff" (as Liliana stated during the focus group meeting). These prior experiences may be one of the reasons why the participants tended to refer to the dictionary for the meanings of words and why they were so concerned about not having questions that tested their comprehension of the novel.

Response to *La Casa en Mango Street*

The response to *La Casa en Mango Street* theme revealed how the participants in this study changed their reading patterns from reading for specific, prescribed information (efferent) to reading for pleasure (aesthetic). By reading the novel aesthetically, the students were able to make personal and intertextual connections which helped them comprehend the novel beyond what was written in it. The participants were then able to make speculations on the characters and better comprehend the novel when they re-read it. As Ali (1994) found earlier, this strategy provided the participants with the tools to think critically and creatively because there were no

“threats nor any compulsion to learn the correct answer or to compete for the best interpretation” (p. 294). Therefore, ideas and thoughts flowed naturally as a result of the small and whole class discussions, and the re-reading of the novel.

Similarly, this finding is consistent with Chi’s (1999) who found that among other themes, reading as reflexivity and reading as re-contextualization were two themes that emerged from his investigation. He described reading as reflexivity as “the action that allowed participants to be able to turn their experiences into learning or to apply their experiences in new contexts” (p. 12) and reading as re-contextualization as the process that “assists participants to take their knowledge or what they know about a topic and transform and recast that knowledge onto another particular context” (p. 14). Like the participants in Chi’s study, the participants in the present study shared their feelings as well as values, beliefs and judgments. As a result, their final responses involved reinterpretation and representation and led to a unique interpretation of the novel. To this effect, Chi concludes that “As a result, meaning gathers meaning and so does interpretation. Meaning and interpretation begin to snowball through the act of re-contextualization” (p. 16).

This finding is also consistent with Sumara’s (1995) findings in that the participants in this study also represented their interpretations in new forms (p. 25). For instance, Amanda’s reading and response to *La Casa en Mango Street* became resymbolized in a poem. Similarly, Javier’s interpretations and re-interpretations of the same novel were summarized in a song that referred to chapters in the book and the music he composed for the song not only reflected part of musical diversity of the Hispanic world, but also reflected a determined mood that, to him, characterized that specific chapter.

Independent reading provided the setting for focal practice described by Sumara (1995) as a “particular activity which functions to render visible the usually invisible interpersonal and intertextual relations” (p. 10). The individual and group presentations required the participants to re-read the novel before they could create their personal texts. These forms of response support focal practice (Sumara, 1995; p. 10). Javier’s song *Única* was an interpretation of the novel which “transformed the act of reading and response to a focal practice” (Sumara, 1995; p. 11)

As suggested by Samgorinsky (2002), and Bainbridge and Malicky (2000), each participant in this study had the opportunity to create their own aesthetic response which was different from those of their classmates. The focus of their presentations varied and was enriched through transmediation of sign systems such as poetry, drama, music and digital literacy. In other words, the participants in this study found a way in which they could represent “the complexity of their intertextual reading and response activities” (Sumara, 1995, p. 25) and allowed them to show their learning in different ways and, thus, a suitable way to respond to the novel (Smagorinsky, 2002, p. 27). Furthermore, as suggested by Bainbridge and Malicky (2000), these activities allowed the participants in this study to construct new meanings, bring their knowledge together and express it through various modes of response such as the visual arts, music, drama, writing and dialogue (p. 302).

This finding poses an important contribution to research in foreign language literature for it demonstrates how the participants came to comprehend the novel and understand the issues that were presented in it. The comprehension, interpretation and re-interpretation of the novel were never assessed by comprehension questions. Instead, they were achieved through group work and constant negotiation of meaning among each member of the response groups.

Furthermore, students had the opportunity to showcase their outside of school skills, which, in the end, added to their motivation to respond to the novel.

To conclude, all the discussions and presentations were carried out in Spanish. This constitutes one major step for the participants who were reluctant to speak in Spanish in front of the class at the beginning of the study. As the study progressed, they started to lose this fear and started to share their ideas with the rest of the class. In going beyond the novel, the participants recreated the story in their minds and experienced other ways of interpretation. In doing so, they came in contact with aesthetic values of the novel and came to understand themselves as active readers (Ali, 1993, p. 294). As demonstrated by their final responses, the “activities and the discussions created a kind of dialogue between the students and the text” (Ali, 1993; p. 294). Moreover, as Vande Berg (1990, 1993) suggests, the novel and complementary materials served as the basis for the exchange of ideas in which participants focused on message rather than form and used the target language to present and to justify their opinions. This, in turn, fostered authentic oral communication (p. 669).

Pre- and Post-unit Language Assessment

Pre and post unit results offer insights into the of the participants’ performance in comprehension, interpretation and re-interpretation skills in the target language before and after they had experienced the reader response as a focal practice. The results obtained from the first taped response were consistent with the results obtained by Davis (1989). The participants misunderstood the excerpt or lacked the tools to develop an aesthetic relationship with the text they had read. In addition, like the participants in Chi’s (1999) study, the participants in the present study tried to look for a specific answer or an answer they thought was the correct one (p. 7). Therefore, their responses to the first text were brief, lacked in detail and showed no

engagement of the students with what they had read. Their responses demonstrated their tendency to literal answers as opposed to interpretive, critical and creative ones.

The second taped response, however, shows the improvement demonstrated by these participants after experiencing the reader response as a focal practice. Consistent with Asraf and Ahmad's (2003) findings, these participants felt more comfortable responding to the text. Their responses were more detailed and illustrated their efforts to engage with the text. This development was supported by the discussions in small groups and the whole class that took place during reading the novel and the complementary material. This finding also supports Smagorinsky's (2002) notion of scaffolded learning and the need for instructors to promote opportunities for students to assist each other's learning.

To conclude, this finding also suggests that reader response as a focal practice addresses the need for a pedagogical theory that takes into account cultural and linguistic factors and that also promotes students' personal constructions of meaning of texts (Davis, 1989). Furthermore, this finding also supports Vande Berg's (1990, 1993) notion of foreign language instructors incorporating into their courses innovations in language pedagogy which promote the development of oral proficiency in foreign language students (p. 669).

This study supports and illuminates research on the relevance of readers responding to texts in groups in a foreign language class (Ali, 1993; Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Cairney, 1990; Chi, 1999; Davis, 1989 & 1992, Vande Berg, 1990 & 1993). A number of writers have contended that reader response has considerable potential for foreign language teaching (Ali, 1994; Cairney, 1990; Cook, 1994; Davis, 1989, 1992;). Extensive research has been conducted to date to determine how reading in the foreign language class affects the students' attitudes towards it or how it affects students' reading proficiency in a foreign language (Ali, 1994; Asraf

& Ahmad, 2003; Bretz & Persin, 1987; Chi, 1999; Davis, 1989, 1992; Swafar, 1998; Yamashita, 2004). However, prior to this research, few studies have investigated how reading might influence the attainment of oral proficiency through a reader response approach in which students engage with and respond aesthetically to texts. In addition, these studies do not explore the development of multiliteracies in the foreign language classroom by making use of students' own creative and artistic skills to respond to a reading such as the ones described in this study. Thus, this study not only supports results from previous findings, but also moves beyond them.

Summary

Chapter IV presented a description of the book unit, as well as the findings and interpretation of the findings. Chapter V presents the conclusions, implications and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This study described the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach (Sumara, 1995) in a third year, Spanish as a foreign language class in a university setting, the nature of engagement and response experienced by the students, the ways that the reader response approach as a focal practice influenced students' oral language proficiency, comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of a text. The participants were 10 third-year Spanish language and culture students, engaged in a unit on Cisneros's *La Casa en Mango Street*. The study took place over a period of five weeks.

Six themes emerged from the data analysis: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom, patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, students' attitudes on a new pedagogical approach, students' reading practices and priorities, response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, and pre- and post-unit language assessments. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of reader response as a focal practice as a new approach to teaching literature in the foreign language curriculum. The conclusions and implications are described below.

Conclusions

The study took place within the context of a thematic unit in a Spanish as a foreign language class. The organization of the unit, as well as the activities conducted, allowed participants to engage critically with and respond orally to *La Casa en Mango Street* aesthetically. Reader response as a focal practice was an effective approach for the implementation of the unit.

Scaffolding provided participants with the necessary support so that they could conceptualize the concepts and Spanish culture and generate a personal understanding of the

novel. My modeling of answers and guidance of students influenced their development of comprehension. The strategies that enhanced their creative skills and that promoted comprehension and metacognitive awareness were these: complementary materials that supported and expanded on the issues raised by the novel; small group and whole class discussions; the Research Quest Model; and the preparation of a final response to the novel.

Small group and whole class discussions provided the forum for the students to comprehend the issues and concepts related to immigration, discrimination, women and children abuse, and gender issues. The gaps in the text allowed the participants to negotiate meaning with each other and resulted in an enhanced awareness of the previously mentioned issues.

The results of this study suggest that the reader response as a focal practice to literature may support students' oral language proficiency in a foreign language. Motivation to learn Spanish and about the Hispanic culture was high among these participants. However, initially, participants did not possess the vocabulary in Spanish that would enable them to express their ideas. This lack of vocabulary affected some of the participants' self-concepts negatively and this perception, in turn, prevented them from participating in the discussions. However, these students and the rest of the participants developed positive attitudes towards reading and speaking in a foreign language classroom as the study progressed. The changes in these attitudes were related to the new roles for both students and instructor.

As stated in Chapter IV, because the focus of the unit was on comprehension rather than grammar and vocabulary, students became more comfortable expressing their interpretations of the novel in the target language as the study progressed. Group collaboration was also a relevant factor that led to this increase in motivational levels towards reading and speaking in a foreign

language. The patterns of shared response opened a window into the processes in which the participants became involved in order to respond to the novel.

The participants made an effort to communicate in Spanish when they were in small groups, in their responses, in their interpretations and re-interpretations to the novel. In addition, they not only established intertextual connections, but they also established interpersonal connections between the novel and their lived experiences.

The students' reading practices and priorities offer insights into the tensions they experienced between reading inside and outside of school. It is significant but unfortunate that the participants were only motivated to read for university classes when there was an evaluation involved and that their priorities were dictated by external factors. This attitude may explain the initial challenges that the participants experienced at the beginning of the study. As the study progressed, the students changed their attitudes towards reading from the moment they understood that grammatical correctness was not the main focus of the approach, that the emphasis was being placed on their personal and collective interpretations of the novel and that they were not being graded on this activity.

Implications

The results of this study pose several research and pedagogical implications for the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach to foreign language literature and the teaching practice in general at the university level.

Firstly, taking into consideration that reading is a transactional process, reader response as a focal practice offers a very effective framework to develop critical thinking and in-depth/critical analysis of texts while using the target language. This approach also invites students to engage with literature in ways that will increase their motivation to read and speak in

class. Further, this approach offers students the opportunity to bring to the classroom lived experiences and expertise they would not have opportunities to share in a traditional literature class. This approach promotes social learning and fosters a new-found appreciation of others in the classroom. Furthermore, the intertextuality of cultural materials became devices for greater socio-cultural engagement. In this study, language and culture were less distinguished, instead, one enriched the engagement of the other for the students.

Secondly, instructors of language and foreign language must revisit their assumptions about literature teaching at the university level. Traditionally, the emphasis has been placed on the author's intended meanings and the repetition of these meanings by the students through comprehension questions that prescribe the answers. The present study demonstrated that the New Critics' approach to language teaching and learning, as well as current practices of teaching/assessment at the university, have led students to view what they read for our classes as an obligation which renders neither pleasure nor satisfaction. As a result, the students only read a text whenever there was an evaluation attached; otherwise, they did not read it at all. Therefore, foreign language literature classes should encourage focal practice by providing the students opportunities to engage with texts and respond to them in ways that would bring out the best of themselves.

Thirdly, the success of the implementation of the reader response approach to foreign language literature depends, in part, on how we are able to motivate the students to read, and how the program is organized and implemented. It depends as well on how instructors reconceptualize their traditional roles in the classroom to that of facilitators, participants in the learning activity, coauthors and colearners. Moreover, a significant contribution of this study is

the role of the instructor as a cultural mediator/interpreter and how my modelling was emulated/extended by the students.

The unit plan developed for this study offers a model for the development of a curriculum that supports readers' engagement and response in a foreign language. The factors that promoted the types of responses obtained in this study were as follows: organization of the unit; the time the students had to read independently and respond in small group and whole class discussions; the time the participants had to engage in focal practices, re-read and re-interpret the novel and complementary materials; sufficient scaffolding provided by the instructor; and presentations that enhanced personal choice.

The findings of this study suggest that further research is necessary to continue to explore the effects of the use of the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature in the foreign language classroom. However, these findings may be used to inform future research studies on the benefits of this approach in the foreign language students' comprehension, interpretation and re-interpretation of foreign language literature.

Recommendations

Future Research

The following questions might inform future research studies on the reader response as a focal practice approach, and the planning and development of response-based approaches to foreign language teaching and learning:

1. What are the long-term effects of the reader response as a focal practice approach in the development of students' oral proficiency and comprehension in the target language?
2. What are the perceptions of foreign language instructors towards new pedagogical approaches to foreign language teaching like the one described in this study?

3. What are the ways in which reader response as a focal practice can help students to develop an inner voice in a foreign language?

Curricular and Instructional

Similarly, the following recommendations will aid foreign language instructors in the planning, development, and implementation of a unit using the reader response as a focal practice approach to literature with university students:

Planning

1. The unit should be based on the reader response framework. In this study, reading as a focal practice was effective.
2. The unit should support the conceptual framework through the use of texts, experiences and assignments that are conceptually related. This, in turn, will promote social construction of meaning. Therefore, it will support the reader response model and reading as a focal practice.
3. The unit should include teaching strategies/opportunities for learning which scaffold students' understanding of concepts and context and which support the conceptual framework.
4. The unit should be implemented over a sustained period of time such as a semester or the full academic year. Students should understand what responding to a text entails; they may well need scaffolding during their first attempts at interpreting a literary piece. As well, they need time to be introduced to new roles as speakers and readers.

Development

1. Lessons should be scheduled so that students have enough planned time to read independently, and to respond in groups and in whole class discussions.

2. Other texts (i.e., film, poetry, etc.) to be read independently in class should be incorporated. These texts complement the book being read, and broaden and deepen students' understanding of the thematic and cultural context of the central book being studied.
3. Assignments should encourage students to investigate, reflect and present their results to the class. The Research Quest Model (BCTLA, 2003) provides an excellent framework to have students develop media literacy skills in a foreign language.
4. Encourage the use of a journal in which the students write their evocations and reflections after they finish reading a chapter. These reflections will help them reconnect with the reading while in the small group and whole class discussions. Further, the journal may aid them in the final presentations.
5. Select a book that is not only appropriate to the age group, but it is also at the language level of the students so that they can read independently without the assistance from others (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2000). However, consider that the students will also need activities that challenge them in order to learn at their full potential (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2000). Consistent with Vigotsky's (1978, in Bainbridge & Malicky, 2000) concept of the zone of proximal development, the level of difficulty of the texts should be such that it encourages students to seek support or guidance from each other and the instructor in order to achieve success in the reading activity (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2000).

Implementation

1. Students should be advised of the expectations of the unit, methods of evaluation, and the types of activities that will be used.

2. Model responses and presentations prior to their introduction. Students need to know what to do and, as this study showed, they may need this modeling to know precisely what is expected of them.
3. Do not discourage the use of the first language during small group and whole class discussions. Many students do not possess many of the skills required to respond to a book aesthetically. Therefore, they will always try to find support in their first language to aid them in their oral responses.
4. Pay attention to students at the same time you are participating in the discussions. This procedure may prove to be a difficult task, but it will help in addressing problems or concerns students might have.
5. Build in student-instructor conferences to address particular questions.

Evaluation

1. Allow students to decide whether they wish to do their final responses in a group or individually. As demonstrated by this study, since university students have different schedules, sometimes arranging meetings will prove a challenge for them.
2. Allow students freedom in the way they respond to the literary pieces through multiple symbolic systems.

Summary

To conclude, this study described the implementation of the reader response as a focal practice approach (Sumara, 1995) in a third year, Spanish as a foreign language class in a university setting; the nature of engagement and response experienced by the students; and the ways that the reader response approach as a focal practice influenced students' oral language

proficiency, comprehension, interpretation, and re-interpretation of *La Casa en Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984).

Six themes emerged from the data analysis: shifting roles in the foreign language classroom, patterns of shared response to *La Casa en Mango Street*, students' attitudes towards a new pedagogical approach, students' reading practices and priorities, response to *La Casa en Mango Street* and pre and post unit. Students' oral proficiency, comprehension, interpretation and re-interpretation of the novel were influenced by the distribution of the unit, opportunities to share responses which allowed for social construction of meaning through meaning negotiation and cultural negotiation; opportunities to re-interpret the novel by making connections across the novel, with other texts and their lived experiences; and a final response that allowed the participants to respond to the novel through a system of symbols that included drama, poetry, music and multi-media.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Informed Consent Cover Letter

Dear undergraduate,

My name is Ismel González and I am an instructor for the Languages Department. I am currently completing my Master of Education degree and would like to invite you to participate in the study which I am conducting for my thesis. The title of the study is *Reader Response as a Focal Practice and Foreign Language Acquisition*.

The purpose of the study is to explore a new approach to foreign language teaching and learning called reading response as a focal practice in which your language activities would focus on a novel study. I am interested in learning how this approach promotes students' oral language proficiency and comprehension.

There are no risks involved in your participation. You would have the opportunity to participate in an enjoyable novel study which should increase your understanding of Spanish culture and language. This study may provide insights into the development of foreign language curriculum.

Your participation would involve reading the novel, participation in group discussions and keeping a journal. For those who agree to participate, I would like to interview you individually at the beginning and end of the unit to assess your oral proficiency in Spanish and conduct a focus group interview at the end of the unit. These interviews would be taped. Students who do not consent to participate in the study will do the unit. However, no data will be collected on your work in the unit. Your evaluations in class will not be affected.

Should you agree to participate in the study, you should be aware of the following ethical guidelines:

- Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time.
- **Choosing to participate or not to participate in this research project will not affect the mark that you receive in this class.**
- There are no apparent risks of physical or psychological harm to you as a result of your involvement.
- You will not be identified in the study (anonymity).
- The data you provide will be confidential (confidentiality).
- The data will be stored securely at Lakehead University by my supervisor for seven years.
- The findings will be published as a thesis which will be available through the University library. As well, the findings will be reported at educational conferences and in journals.

Appendix 2

Participant Informed Consent Form

My signature on this sheet indicates that I have received an explanation about the nature of the study, its purpose and procedures, and agree to participate in a study conducted by Ismel González, entitled *Reader Response as a Focal Practice and Foreign Language Acquisition* and that

- My participation is voluntary. Therefore, I may withdraw at any time.
- **Choosing to participate or not to participate in this research project will not affect the mark that you receive in this class.**
- There are no apparent risks of physical or psychological harm to me as a result of my involvement in the study.
- I will not be identified in the study (anonymity).
- The data I provide will be confidential (confidentiality) and will be stored securely at Lakehead University by the researcher's supervisor for seven years.
- The findings will be published as a thesis which will be available through the University library. As well, the findings will be reported at educational conferences and in journals.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed name

Appendix 3

Focus Group Questions

“This focus group is being conducted to get your input about the use of the reader response as a focal practice in the foreign language class”.

“If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentative conversation with all of you. I assure that all your comments will be kept confidential.”

1. Why did you decide to study Spanish?
2. What is your perception on reading?
3. What is your perception of reading in a foreign language?
4. What strategies/activities do your instructors use to promote your language learning?
5. What do you think about the unit we just finished?
6. Did you read all the chapters when they were assigned?
7. If not, why not?
8. How is this novel study different from/similar to other approaches you have experienced in your classes?
9. What are the strengths/weaknesses of this strategy to read in a foreign language?
10. How did this strategy promote your oral and reading proficiency of Spanish a foreign language?
11. How did this strategy promote a reading habit in you?
12. What did you like most about the novel study?”
13. What would you advise me to keep and/or change if I were to use the unit (or develop another) for an advanced class again?
14. What impact did this approach had in the way you read?

Appendix 4

An Aesthetic Response to Cisneros's *La Casa en Mango Street*: A Unit Plan

Description of the Literary Study

The purpose of this literary study is to provide university Spanish as foreign language students opportunities to develop oral proficiency in Spanish and gain knowledge on the Hispanic culture, and emigration and life for Hispanics in the United States. These opportunities will be provided through the reading, re-reading and discussion of the novel *La Casa en Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984). The student will also read and discuss various complementary material such as articles, short stories and poems, which will support the reading and discussions in general. Students will also have the opportunity to develop comprehension and critical thinking skills as they engage in reading, re-reading, interpreting, reinterpreting and representing their responses through a multiple system of symbols. There are four foci for the literary study:

- developing background knowledge on Mexican emigration to the United States
 - understanding of patterns in human geography, influences on migration and the ways in which cultures are affected by migration.
- developing background knowledge on racial and gender issues in the Hispanic culture
 - understanding the role of women and men in the Hispanic society and its origins.
- participating in a novel study.
- interpreting, reinterpreting and representing responses to the novel

Expectations

Reading

Overall Expectations

- explain their interpretation of a written work, supporting it with evidence from the work and their own knowledge and experience;
- understand the vocabulary and language structures appropriate for this level in the program.

Specific Expectations

- identify the main ideas in information materials, explain how the details support the main ideas, and question and evaluate the ideas in the material.

Oral*Overall Expectations*

- listen attentively to organize and classify information and to clarify thinking;
- listen to and communicate connected ideas and relate carefully constructed narratives about real and fictional events;
- express and respond to a range of ideas and opinions concisely, clearly and appropriately;
- contribute and work constructively in groups;

Specific Expectations

- evaluate the effectiveness of various informational media works;
- contribute collaboratively in group situations by asking questions and building on the ideas of others.

Individual/Response Group Expectations

Each *student* is expected to:

- read *La Casa en Mango Street* independently;
- write his/her thoughts in the margins of the novel or on post-it notes;
- discuss his/her interpretation of the novel with his/her response group;
- create a project which interprets the novel in a socio-cultural context;

Each *response group* is expected to:

- participate in response group discussions;

Organization of the Literary Study

The literary study took place over a five-week period with project presentations included. Students participated for 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) per day, twice a week.

The structure of the unit was the following:

- **Week 1**
- ✓ Initial meeting with class to introduce the unit.
 - Explain unit

- Discuss expectations
- ✓ Assignment of independent reading of novel – 5 to 7 chapters between classes.
 - Reading time (independent/students will be asked to write their thoughts in margins of novel or post-it notes).
 - Introduce *Possible Stem Starters* as part of the scaffolding students may need.
 - Response group discussions on second day.
- ✓ Read aloud *Where you from?* (Valdés, 1994) and *Bilingual Blues* (Pérez, 1994)
- ✓ Small group and whole class discussion of the two poems.
- ✓ Small group and whole class discussion of first five chapters of *La Casa en Mango Street* on second day.
 - Assignment of next 7 chapters.
- **Week 2**
 - ✓ Small group and whole class discussion of chapters assigned on previous week.
 - ✓ Independent reading of novel – 5 to 7 chapters between classes
 - reading time (independent/students will be asked to write their thoughts in margins of novel or post-it notes)
 - response group discussions on second day.
 - ✓ Independent reading *La cara hispana de los Estados Unidos* and *Hombre y mujer en el mundo hispano contemporáneo* (Tuten, Caycedo Garner & Esterrich, 2005).
 - Small group and whole class discussion
 - ✓ Assign students to reflect on the prominent themes in the novel so far and research on them. Instruct them to come prepared to discuss them the next class.
 - ✓ Introduce *Research Quest Model* as a guide for the students in their research.
- **Week 3**
 - ✓ Small group and whole class discussion of most prominent themes in the novel up to this moment.
 - ✓ Small group discussion of the novel.
 - ✓ Independent reading of novel

- reading time (independent/students will be asked to write their thoughts in margins of novel or post-it notes)
- response group discussions on second day.
- ✓ Read *La dificultad de llamarse hispano* (Tuten, Caycedo Garner & Esterrich,2005) and *Una educación intercultural* (Aparicio,1996).
- ✓ Assignment of independent reading of novel.
 - reading time(independent/students will be asked to write their thoughts in margins of novel or post-it notes)
 - response group discussions in the following week.
- **Week 4**
- ✓ Small group and whole class discussions of the novel.
- ✓ Independent re-reading of first half of novel
 - reading time
 - response group discussions on second day.
- ✓ Assignment of independent re-reading of second half of novel.
 - reading time
 - response group discussions on the following week.
- ✓ Assignment of Final Responses to the novel on first day.
- ✓ Introduce *Reader Response to Literature: Response Activities* (Courtland, 2001)
- ✓ Model a final response for students.
- ✓ Small group and whole class discussion.
- **Week 5**
- ✓ Small group and whole class discussions of the novel.
- ✓ Presentation of final responses to the novel.
- ✓ Post unit taped response.
- ✓ Focus group meeting.

Appendix 5

Complementary Materials Used

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Appendix 6

Stem Starters for Discussions/Presentations

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Mi personaje favorito es/fue... | <i>My favourite character is/was...</i> |
| 2. El personaje que menos me gusta/gustó... | <i>My least favourite character is/was...</i> |
| 3. Pienso que fue muy gracioso cuando... | <i>I thought it was pretty funny when...</i> |
| 4. Me entristeció cuando... | <i>I was sad when...</i> |
| 5. Puedo identificarme con... | <i>I can relate to...</i> |
| 6. Mi capítulo favorito es/fue... | <i>My favourite chapter is/was...</i> |
| 7. Yo cambiaría... | <i>I would change...</i> |
| 8. Yo predigo que... | <i>I predict...</i> |
| 9. El lugar de la trama es/era... | <i>The setting is/was...</i> |
| 10. Lo que no me gusta/gustó es/fue... | <i>What I do/did not like is/ was...</i> |
| 11. Este cuento me hace sentir... | <i>The story makes/made me feel...</i> |
| 12. La parte que más me gusta/gustó es/fue... | <i>The part I like the best is/was...</i> |
| 13. La parte que no me gusta/gustó es/fue... | <i>The part I do/did not like is/was...</i> |
| 14. La parte que más me da/dió miedo es/fue... | <i>The scariest part is/was...</i> |
| 15. Un final alternativo puede ser... | <i>An alternative ending could be...</i> |
| 16. El climax fue... | <i>The climax was...</i> |
| 17. El tema de este cuento es/fue... | <i>The theme of the story is/was...</i> |
| 18. Lo que el autor quiso/quiere decir es/fue... | <i>What the author means/meant is/was...</i> |
| 19. Me pregunto si... | <i>I wonder if...</i> |
| 20. La evidencia que apoya mi idea es... | <i>The evidence that supports my thinking is...</i> |
| 21. En mi opinión... | <i>In my opinion...</i> |
| 22. Me siento como el villano cuando... | <i>I feel like the villain when...</i> |

Appendix 7

Spanish version of response activities given to the participants

Based on Reader Response to Literature: Response Activities by Dr. Mary Clare Courtland (2001)

Existen muchas formas posibles para que un lector responda a un libro. La siguiente lista puede ser usada en conjunción con un programa independiente de lectura. Puedes usar cualquiera de estas actividades, una combinación de ellas u otras ideas que sean originalmente tuyas.

1. Describe lo que te gustó o no te gustó de algunos de los personajes.
2. Dramatiza un episodio determinado.
3. Demuestra algo que aprendiste.
4. Crea un pórtigo de una parte importante del libro.
5. Crea una cubierta protectora para esta novela
6. Construye un modelo a escala de un objeto importante del libro.
7. Dibuja un reloj mostrando la hora en la que un evento importante de la novela ocurrió.
8. Escribe otro final para la novela.
9. Crea un anuncio de artículos perdidos para una persona u objeto que se menciona en el libro.
10. Ilustra escenas importantes del libro.
11. Pinta un mural de la novela o de partes importantes de la novela.
12. Crea una acuarela de una escena específica.
13. Dibuja o pinta a los personajes principales o escenas del libro.
14. Compara esta novela con otra que hayas leído y que haya tenido el mismo tema.
15. Produce un video de la novela.
16. Recolecta objetos que se describen en la novela.
17. Crea un collage.
18. Crea un show de títeres.
19. Crea un afiche para “anunciar” la novela.
20. Crea una pantomima de una parte importante de la novela.
21. Lee escenas de la novela oralmente, mientras otros escenifican la acción con una pantomima.
22. Crea una representación de tamaño natural de uno de los personajes del libro.
23. Ofrece una charla sobre el/la autor/a de la novela.
24. Escribe una breve biografía de el/la autor/a.

25. Crea personajes para usar en un franelógrafo y narrar la novela.
26. Construye un móvil para ilustrar la novela.
27. Realiza un experimento asociado con la novela.
28. Compara las ilustraciones (si hay algunas) de esta novela con las de otra novela y que pertenezcan al/a la mismo/a o diferente ilustrador/a.
29. Crea un diorama (cuadro o conjunto de vistas pintadas en un lienzo grande y bien iluminado).
30. Haz una talla en madera.
31. Escribe un poema acerca de la novela.
32. Escribe y canta una canción para acompañar la novela.
33. Escribe y actúa un teatro de lectores.
34. Narra la novela con acompañamiento musical.
35. Mándale una carta a un amigo para correr la voz sobre la novela que acabas de leer.
36. Diseña el vestuario que uno o más personajes hayan usado. Representa a los personajes.
37. Escribe las cartas que dos personajes se hayan escrito.
38. Escríbele una carta a uno de los personajes.
39. Escribe un recuento de lo que hubieras hecho si hubieras sido uno de los personajes en las mismas condiciones.
40. Inventa una conversación entre dos personajes de la novela.
41. Escoge a dos personajes de la novela y actúa una conversación entre ellos.
42. Escribe una obra de teatro presentando a unos de los personajes.
43. Prepara artículos para el periódico sobre las actividades de un personaje. Incluye titulares, etc.
44. Lee un libro sobre otro país. Finge que estás viajando en ese país. Trata de llevar un diario de viaje donde cuentes tus experiencias en ese país en la medida que lees el libro.
45. Planea una discusión en la cual panelistas discuten sus vidas como personajes en la novela.
46. Lee sobre la vida un/a compositor/a famoso/a. Trae a la clase una grabación de una de las composiciones más famosas de este/a artista. Reproduce la grabación y explícala.
47. Escribe una entrevista:
 - a) entre un personaje de la novela y el/la autor/a.
 - b) entre el/la autor/a y tú.
 - c) entre dos personajes de la novela.

- d) entre un personaje del libro y tú.
 - e) entre un/a amigo/a y tú discutiendo la novela.
48. Cuando cuatro o cinco personas lean diferentes libros del/de la mismo/a autor/a, coordina un discusión por paneles que cubran preguntas como:
- a) ¿En qué se parecen los libros?
 - b) ¿Cuáles son los puntos fuertes del/de la autor/a? ¿Cuáles son sus puntos flacos?
 - c) ¿Qué piensas de este/a autor/a después de leer la novela?
 - d) ¿Te interesaría leer más cuentos/novelas de este/a autor/a?
- Cada panelista debe delinear brevemente su respuesta antes del comenzar la discusión.
49. Después de leer un libro con información sobre un tema determinado, escribe un cuento basado en los hechos que se describen en el libro.
50. Después de leer una biografía o libro de ficción, describe a los personajes principales y sus problemas individuales comunes. Cuenta cómo se resolvieron o no estos problemas.
51. Después de leer un libro de información, inventa un juego para repasar el contenido del libro.
52. Crea un crucigrama a partir de un tema del libro. Haz suficiente copias para cada miembro de la clase.
53. Crea un afiche (lo mismo plano que tridimensional) que ilustre una escena o promueva el interés en el libro.
54. Construye un escenario en miniatura para una escena del libro.
55. Prepara un monólogo para el cuento.
56. Si estás leyendo un libro de viajes, ofrece una conferencia ilustrada usando mapas y fotos.
57. Después de leer un libro histórico, haz un mapa grande y colorido, o una línea de tiempo que muestre el período que se cubre en el libro y los eventos interesantes que se cubren en el libro.
58. Crea un “libro vivo” haciendo una estructura grande para representar el libro y presentar un cuadro al vivo.
59. Crea un libro de referencias original de materiales reales que hayas leído.
60. Compone una lectura coral.
61. Lee un libro del que se haya hecho una película para la televisión o para el cine y que hayas visto. Haz un informe oral o escrito comparando o contrastando el libro con la película.
62. Crea una respuesta que elabore en el tema del libro. Por ejemplo, puedes crear:

- a) una apología a uno de los personajes que haya muerto (la apología puede ser decorada con flores secas o pinturas a acuarela).
 - b) un libro de hechizos (por ejemplo, en respuesta a una de las novelas de Isabel Allende)
 - c) una colección de artefactos (por ejemplo, un poema o mapa en la corteza de un árbol o en piel; entradas en un diario en la corteza de un árbol encerradas en una harpillera).
63. Crea un informe investigativo de un crimen o eventos misteriosos en la novela (el informe estará basado en entrevistas con testigos oculares).
64. Escribe un diario desde el punto de vista de uno de los personajes. Incluye dibujos/pinturas, los cuales describan los eventos o el escenario.
65. Escribe un ensayo comparativo donde compares la vida de un/a artista ficticio/a con un/a artista de la vida real.
66. Escribe una narración personal que describa tus conexiones personales con un personaje o la trama de la novela.
67. Crea una sala de conversación donde los personajes se reúnan para conversar sobre los acontecimientos de la novela.
68. Crea una presentación en PowerPoint (puedes incluir citas, fotos, música de fondo, etc.).
69. Escribe un ensayo que examine un problema o conflicto en la novela (por ejemplo, el racismo, el sexismo, la guerra, la esclavitud, etc.).
70. Crea una biografía corporal. Dibuja una silueta de tamaño natural. Inserta símbolos, palabras, y frases que describan a un personaje.

Appendix 8

Original version in English of response activities

Based on Reader Response to Literature: Response Activities by Dr. Mary Clare Courtland (2001)

Response to Literature. There are many possible ways for a reader to respond to a book. the following list may be used in conjunction with an independent reading program. Students are encouraged to use these activities, a combination of them or other ideas completely their own.

1. Describe what you liked or disliked about the characters.
2. Dramatize a certain episode.
3. Demonstrate something you learned.
4. Make a peep box of an important part.
5. Design a book jacket.
6. Build a scale model of an important object of the book.
7. Draw a clock showing the time an important event occurred.
8. Write another ending for the story.
9. Make up a lost and found advertisement for a person or object mentioned in the story.
10. Illustrate key scenes from the text.
11. Paint a mural of the story or parts of it.
12. Do a watercolour of a scene.
13. Draw or paint main characters of scenes from the book.
14. Compare this book with another you have read on a similar subject.
15. Produce a video of the story.
16. Gather a collection of objects described in the book.
17. Make a collage.
18. Create a puppet show.
19. Devise a poster to “advertise” the book.
20. Pantomime an important part of the book.
21. Read scenes from the book orally, while others pantomime the action (Nature Theater).
22. Make a lie-size figure of a character.

23. Give a talk about the author or illustrator.
24. Write a brief biography of the author.
25. Make characters to use in a flannelboard retelling the story.
26. Construct a mobile to illustrate your book.
27. Conduct a scientific experiment associated with the reading.
28. Compare illustrations in tow books of the same illustrator or different illustrators.
29. Make a diorama.
30. Do a soap or wood carving.
31. Compose a poem about the story.
32. Write and perform a song to accompany the book.
33. Write and perform a readers' theatre.
34. Tell the story with musical accompaniment.
35. Send a letter to a friend to spread the word about your book.
36. Design a costume one o more of the characters might have worn. Role play the character(s).
37. Write letters which show the correspondence between two characters.
38. Give an account of what you would have done had you been one of the characters in the same situation.
39. Make up a conversation between two characters in your story.
40. Choose two characters and role play a meeting between them.
41. Write a play featuring one of the characters.
42. Prepare newspaper articles about the characters' activities. Include headlines ans so on.
43. Read a book about another country. Pretend that you are travelling in that country. Keep a travel diary telling of your experiences in that country as you read about it.
44. Plan a panel discussion in which panelists discuss their lives as the characters in the novel.
45. Write an interview:
 - a) between a character in a book and the author
 - b) between you and the author
 - c) between two characters in the book
 - d) between you and a friend discussing the book
46. When four or five people have read different books by the same author, arrange a panel discussion covering questions such as:

- a) How are the books alike?
- b) What are the writer's greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- c) How do you feel about this author from reading one book?
- d) Are you interested in reading more stories by this author?

Each panelist should briefly outline his/her story before the actual discussion.

- 47. After reading an information book about a topic, write a story based on the facts.
- 48. After reading a biography or book of fiction, describe the main characters and their individual common problems. Tell how these problems were or were not solved.
- 49. After reading an information book, create a game to review items covered.
- 50. Make a crossword puzzle on a theme derived from the book. Duplicate enough to give each member of the class.
- 51. Make a poster (either flat or three-dimensional) which shows a scene or stimulates interest in the book.
- 52. Construct a miniature stage setting for a scene in the book.
- 53. Prepare a monologue from the story.
- 54. If a travel book is read, give an illustrated lecture using maps and pictures.
- 55. After reading a historical book, make a large, colourful map or time line showing the time covered and the interesting events in the book.
- 56. Create a "living book" by making a large frame to represent a book and presenting a tableau.
- 57. Make an original reference book from actual materials read.
- 58. Compose a choral reading.
- 59. Read a book that has been made into a movie or television show which you have seen. Make an oral or written report comparing or contrasting the book with the movie or television show.
- 60. Create a response that builds on the theme in the text:
 - a) a eulogy to a character who had died (eulogy may be decorated with dried flowers or watercolour paintings).
 - b) a collection of artifacts (i.e. a poem or map on birch bark and leather; diary entries on birch bark encased in burlap)
- 61. Create an investigative report of a crime/mysterious events in the novel (Report would be based on interviews with eye-witnesses).

62. Write a journal from the point of view of one of the characters. Include drawings/paintings which depict events or setting.
63. Write a comparative essay comparing the life of an artist in fiction with a “real life” artist.
64. Write a personal narrative which describes your personal connections/evocations with a character or the plot.
65. Create a PowerPoint presentation (may include quotes, photos, background music, etc.)
66. Create a chat-room wherein the characters meet to talk about the events in the story.
67. Write an essay which examines an issue or conflict explored in the text (i.e. race, gender, war, slavery, etc.)
68. Create a body biography. Trace a life size silhouette. Put symbols, words, and phrases on the outline to depict a character.