The Dissertation Committee for María de la Paz García certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

INTEGRATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE INTO A COLLEGE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS: A TEACHER-RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

Committee:

David Schwarzer, Co-Supervisor

Orlando R. Kelm, Co-Supervisor

Elaine K. Horwitz

M. Jo Worthy

Malia M. LeMond

INTEGRATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE INTO A
COLLEGE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS:
A TEACHER-RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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María de la Paz García, B.A.; M.A.

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Dedication

Dedicated to my mother,

Who always encouraged me to study

And inspired me with her example.

To her daily sacrifices;

To her achievements;

To her dreams.

R.I.P.

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Integrating Children's Literature into a College Foreign Language Class: A Teacher-Researcher's Perspective

María de la Paz García, Ph.D.

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Supervisors: David Schwarzer and Orlando R. Kelm

Authentic texts, especially literary texts, are typically absent from beginning- and intermediate-level foreign language (FL) curricula because students at these levels of proficiency seem to lack the grammar, lexicon and cultural knowledge necessary to understand the complex nature of literary texts. When presented with canonical literature, many students feel overwhelmed, frustrated, discouraged and anxious.

In search of other forms of authentic texts that did not cause so much challenge for students in the first two years of college, children's literature has been examined since the early 1990s. In the very few existing studies, children's literary texts were found to be accepted by students, who praised their interesting topics, simple grammar and vocabulary, colorful illustrations, and short length, among other characteristics that facilitated comprehension.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to investigate the integration of children's literature into an intermediate Spanish-as-a-foreign-language class at the university level in order to broaden the knowledge in this field. The research questions that lead the study investigated (a) the processes of text selection, integration and implementation; (b) students' linguistic, cultural, and affective responses to these texts; and (c) the lessons learned during the investigation, as a teacher and as a researcher.

The participants of this semester-long qualitative research case study are the teacher-researcher and twenty-two students (five of which were selected for more in-depth case studies) of a fourth semester Spanish class at a large southwestern university. Data included several types of documents, interviews and observations. Content analysis was used to arrive at interpretations.

Findings indicated that students' proficiency level was directly related to comprehension. Therefore children's literature must be selected carefully in order to be beneficial. Students enjoyed reading children's literature in this course, believed their Spanish improved, and appreciated the presence of Hispanic/Latino culture in the texts. Low-proficiency students were found to have difficulties with most texts, especially with the vocabulary. These students selected familiar, simpler texts for their assignments instead. Only one student did not find the texts cognitively challenging. The teacher-researcher's lessons learned, implications for research and pedagogy, and limitations are included.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study was conceived based on the hypothesis that children's literature is a linguistically, culturally, and affectively adequate tool for beginning- and intermediate-level college foreign language (FL) learners. The purpose of this study is to investigate the integration of children's literature into a fourth semester Spanish FL class at the university level. A "thick, rich description" (Patton, 2002, p. 437) of this integration will cover different stages of the teaching process (before, during and after implementation) as well as students' linguistic, cultural and affective responses to this integration. In this chapter, I describe the situation that led me to research this issue and the rationale behind it.

1. 1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

During the past decades, a more integrated view of foreign language learning has shown that communicating in a foreign language involves not only the learning of vocabulary and grammar, but also sociolinguistics and cultural factors. In the 1980s, applied linguists and educators developed an approach that acknowledged the importance of communication within a cultural context, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach. To date, the importance of integrating linguistic and cultural knowledge is still highlighted (*Standards for foreign language learning*, 1996). Other issues, such as negotiation of meaning, early production, errors as part of the learning process, individual needs and interest, and fluency have also received special attention (Omaggio Hadley, 2001).

To accompany this communicative approach, experts strongly recommend authentic oral and written texts as a source of genuine FL input, interest, and authentic cultural information (Bernhardt & Berkemeyer, 1988; Fountain, 2001; Ramirez, 1995; Vigil, 1987). Authentic texts can be defined as "unsimplified oral or written text[s]… written in natural, unstilted language" (Vigil, 1987, p. 8), or, most commonly, as texts created by and for native speakers. A wide body of research supports the idea of using authentic written texts, based on the notion that authentic texts are more comprehensible than simplified texts and that reading comprehension leads to language learning (Barnett, 1989; Elley, 1991; Elley, Cutting, Mangubhai, & Hugo, 1996; Krashen, 1993; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985; Tse, 1996). Some examples of authentic texts are newspapers, magazines, brochures, maps, menus, street signs, radio broadcasts, and literary texts.

A) Literary Texts

Literary texts are generally those "imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the excellence of their execution" (*Literature*, 2005). Despite the fact that this term encompasses all genres (i.e., folktales, biographies), all formats (i.e., bilingual, chapter books), and all ages (i.e., adults, young adults, children), when dealing with adults, the term *literary texts* typically refers to 'classical' or 'canonical' writings intended for an adult audience. For instance, in a Spanish FL college class, it would refer to works by Cervantes, Neruda, or García Márquez. Children's literary texts share some of the characteristics of canonical literary texts for adult audiences, but also have their own particular characteristics that set this

type of literature apart. First, we need to understand the role of literary texts in the FL class.

The idea of using literary texts to promote the integration of language and culture and to promote interest and motivation in FL learners has been widely defended (Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Fountain, 2001; Lazar, 1993; McCloskey, 1998; Muyskens, 1983; Widdowson, 1982, 1983). Experts believe that, in the FL class, literature provides abundant input, helps develop linguistic and cognitive skills, provides authentic cultural knowledge, is motivating, and offers opportunities for students to respond (Henning, 1993; Kramsch, 1985; Lazar, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1982). In addition, literary texts in general are said to promote interaction between the reader and the text and to encourage the FL learner to actively create meaning (Bernhardt, 1986; Coady, 1979; Goodman, 1968; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998), which could be the key to acquire a FL (Young, 1999). Currently, experts in the field of FL education recommend a complete articulation of the entire FL curriculum from kindergarten to graduate courses, so that literature is incorporated at all levels of instruction (Barnett, 1991; Byrnes, 2001; Hoffmann & James, 1986; Kern, 2002). But, if literature is so beneficial for college-level FL learners, why is there a lack of literary texts at beginning and intermediate levels of FL instruction?[1]

a) Challenges Faced with Canonical Literature

Despite the benefits of literature and experts' recommendations, actual use of literary texts in beginning- and intermediate-level FL college courses is scarce. Apparently, the challenges that many FL students and teachers face when canonical

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[1] Although there is no statistical study showing that literary texts are generally missing from the curricula of first- and second-year FL courses in the United States, this phenomenon is frequently mentioned in the literature as a common observable fact (see Birckbichler & Muyskens, 1980; Bressan, 2001; Davis, Gorell, Kline & Hsieh, 1992; Hoffman & James, 1986; or Kramsch, 1985).

literature is integrated into the curriculum are a constant source of frustration (Ho, 2000). Some of these challenges are linguistic, cultural, or affective, and others are more related to approach or pedagogical methodology. A proposal to address these challenges follows after these descriptions.

1. The linguistic challenge: FL learners have been found to lack the linguistic preparation necessary to manage canonical literary texts (Friedman, 1992; Martin & Laurie, 1993). There are several different explanations for this phenomenon: (a) a competency threshold has not been reached, (b) the input is incomprehensible, and (c) the tasks required are overwhelming.

    Some Second Language Acquisition (SLA) experts hypothesize that there is a competency threshold that must be reached in order to understand written texts. In other words, that limited linguistic proficiency hinders or 'short circuits' reading comprehension (Clarke, 1980; Macaro, 2003; Ulijn, 1978; Yorio, 1971). If the lexicon and grammar structures of the reader are not extensive, reading comprehension is very difficult or impossible (Baker, 1998).

    Others argue that students might face a linguistic challenge when the input received is not comprehensible (Krashen, 1982, 1997). Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis states that FL acquisition depends largely on the presence of abundant, interesting, and non-sequenced comprehensible input provided in a non-threatening environment. *Comprehensible input* has been defined as "that bit of language that is heard / read and that is slightly ahead of a learner's current state of grammatical knowledge" (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 200), which seems to be a similar concept to that of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). To me, the language found in canonical literary texts seems

abundant and non-sequenced, but it might not be interesting to many students, and it is usually beyond beginning- and intermediate-level FL learners' proficiency.

Finally, other experts believe that FL learners face challenges when they are required to attend to two overwhelming tasks at the same time, such as focusing on form and on meaning (VanPatten, 1990). Memory research studies seem to confirm that memory is related to attention, noticing, and awareness, which are believed to be essential for learning (Schmidt, 1993). Therefore, it makes sense to predict that beginning-level FL learners, who usually have to pay more attention to form (because of the high number of unknown vocabulary) will have more problems with canonical literature than intermediate-level learners, for example.

2. The cultural challenge: Students have also been found to lack the cultural preparation necessary to manage literary texts (Friedman, 1992; Martin & Laurie, 1993). They seem to have trouble understanding certain cultural issues or concepts, even if they recognize all the words. Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932) provides an explanation to this phenomenon arguing that understanding will occur when new knowledge is linked to previously acquired knowledge, that is, when new information is interpreted according to already learned patterns –also called scripts or schemata. If the input received does not fit a reader's schemata, comprehension and recall suffer. Canonical literature is plagued with 'big c culture' or 'high culture' (Meloni, 2007) (e.g., culturally based knowledge, history, politics, fine arts, etc), which is considered very complex for a person that is encountering the foreign culture for the first time.

3. The affective challenge: Some identified challenges are related to affective factors, such as motivation, attitude, interest, self-esteem, and anxiety (Cho & Krashen, 1994). Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis claims that when the affective filter is up (e.g., negative attitude toward the FL), acquisition will not happen. It has also been found that students' mere perception of difficulty when facing literary texts can cause frustration and anxiety (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000) as well as loss of interest (Young, 1999). The high recognition given to canonical literary texts might reduce lower-division students' confidence to fully understand them. Also, canonical literary texts are quite extensive in length, which tends to decrease attention span and interest.

4. The pedagogical challenge: Some FL experts believe that teachers also face pedagogical challenges when they are to integrate canonical literary texts in the FL curriculum (*Chile. English Teaching Profile*, 1985; Christensen, 1994; Evans, 1993; Lewis, 1978; Richards, 1998; Shiozawa & Simmons, 1993). This challenge might be related to the students' proficiency level, but also to the teacher's ability to introduce literature into a language class. Adopting an appropriate approach to scaffold the process of integration, such as the pre-reading / reading / post-reading technique, has been identified as a very important issue in FL education (Arens & Swaffar, 1987; Davis, 1989; Frantzen, 2001; Lazar, 1993; Martin & Laurie, 1993; Rivers & Temperley, 1978; Shook, 1997; Swaffar, 1988).

1. 2. RATIONALE

In view of the challenges that both FL teachers and beginning- and intermediate-level FL students face when canonical literary texts are incorporated into the FL curriculum, I decided to use children's literature to address some of these challenges, along with a pre-reading / reading / post-reading technique to approach these texts. In order to investigate whether these texts and this technique address some of the previously described challenges that canonical literature creates, I conducted an investigation on the integration of children's literature in a fourth semester Spanish FL class. The investigation examined this issue from a teacher-researcher's perspective and it also included students' linguistic, cultural, and affective responses, which are essential in a study of this nature.

A) Children's Literature

Children's literature has been defined as "literature that appeals to the interests, needs, and reading preferences of children and captivates children as its major audience" (Hancock, 2000, p. 5). However, this definition falls short, especially when we know that many books originally written for children are read and enjoyed by adults, and vice versa. In addition, children's literature encompasses several genres (i.e., biographies, science fiction) and formats (i.e., picture books, illustrated books), making a single definition even harder to create. Nevertheless, when talking about children's literature, certain common elements tend to appear, such as children as main characters, themes appropriate for children, interesting topics, short length, colorful illustrations, simple language, didactic purposes, and resolution of conflict in a happy ending (*Children's Literature*, 2005).

Children's literature is not only considered an adequate means to teach a FL and a foreign culture, but also literary analysis and appreciation (Bloem & Padak, 1996; Fountain, 2001; Moffit, 2003; Price, 2000; Smallwood, 1992, 1998; Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997). According to Ho (2000), children's literature "works well with adult students because it is intellectually stimulating, encouragingly readable, linguistically challenging, literarily fulfilling, and educationally rewarding" (p. 269). For some of these experts, children's literature appears to be a valid alternative to canonical literature, especially for beginning and intermediate FL learners, because it seems to address some of the challenges of canonical literature. In the next section, I describe how children's literature addresses each of the previously mentioned challenges.

a) Addressing the Linguistic Challenge

Comparing the language found in children's literature with the language found in canonical literature, Anderson (1984) found that the language in children's literature is more colloquial and concrete, and has shorter paragraphs, shorter sentences, more repetition, fewer abstractions, and more dialogue –although the syntactical complexity might be similar. This basic and concrete language stays below the linguistic threshold that is allegedly needed to understand authentic texts (Clarke, 1980), therefore, students do not face too much of a linguistic challenge when they use children's literature in the FL class.

The Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982, 1985) also supports the use of children's literature with beginning- and intermediate-level FL learners, because the language in these texts fits the profile of what we understand as 'comprehensible input' (Flickinger, 1984; Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993; Schon, 1999). The language found in children's

literature is typically slightly ahead of the learners' knowledge but not far beyond. In addition, the wide spectrum of texts written at different levels of complexity (covering ages 4-16) offers the possibility of using these texts with FL students of various proficiency levels. In addition, most children's literary texts are illustrated. These illustrations help students guess the meaning of some words or clarify a concept described in written (Phillips, 1992).

Finally, the basic, concrete language and the straightforward ideas conveyed in children's literature reduce the amount of cognitive load for beginning- and intermediate-level FL students. This reduction in cognitive load probably allows FL students to better attend to form and meaning simultaneously, which could facilitate not only reading comprehension but also FL acquisition.

b) Addressing the Cultural Challenge

Children's literature is a great vehicle through which to teach a foreign culture (Hancock, 2000; McConochie, 1994; Obergfell, 1983; Schon, 2001; Smolen & Ortiz-Castro, 2000), because it illustrates some of the most basic cultural elements of a society –what the literature calls 'small c culture' (Steele, 1989), such as food, music, and famous people, for example. Most FL learners are either familiar with many of these concepts before studying a FL or learn them quickly during the first semesters. If meaning resides in the schematic knowledge of the reader (Carrell, 1984), the cultural preparation necessary to understand children's literature should be minimal; children's literature should present no or little challenge to beginning- and intermediate-level FL learners. In addition, many children's literary texts have literary characteristics that activate the readers' schemata or mental frameworks (Freeman & Freeman, 2000;

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Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; Hall, 2001; Hancock, 2000; Rings, 2002), such as stereotypical characters (i.e., the hero), recognizable patterns (i.e., once upon a time), and predictable outcomes (i.e., happy endings).

c) Addressing the Affective Challenge

Affective and motivation theories also recognize the advantages of children's literature for beginning- and intermediate-level FL learners, because of its simple appearance, short length, familiar schemata, engaging characters, and strong visual and emotional appeal. These characteristics help lower students' affective filter (Smallwood, 1992), reduce stress (Phillips, 1992), increase their sense of self-efficacy (Robbins, 1992), increase recall and engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997), and provoke emotions and personal interpretations (Egan, 1999). Those who used children's literature with adults found that it is both appropriate and interesting to adult FL learners (Briscoe, 2001; Moffit, 2003; Phillips, 1992; Sullivan, 1994), despite isolated reported initial reluctance (Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997).

d) Addressing the Pedagogical Challenge

Children's literature, because of its simplicity, straightforward pattern, and clear ideas, appears not to offer a great challenge in terms of implementation. Several techniques have been suggested to approach children's literature, but one that has worked well on repeated occasions is the pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence. Several experts recommend this reading technique because it paces learning and allows for a great variety of strategies to be used (Arcuri, 1990; Gajdusek, 1988; Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; Melendez & Pritchard, 1985; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Young, 1991). In

the pre-reading phase, students' schemata and background knowledge can be activated with the help of illustrations and genre knowledge; during the reading phase, complete stories can be read during a single class session; and during the post-reading phase, students can focus their attention on textual features or respond to the texts orally or in writing, emphasizing communication at this stage. This technique provides teachers with some guidance regarding how to approach children's literature.

B) The Role of the Teacher

Having promising texts and a recommended technique to approach them may not be sufficient to successfully integrate these texts into the FL curriculum. A very important variable is always present –the teacher. The teacher is typically the responsible party for the selection of texts, for the development of the curriculum, for class instruction, and for future actions based on previous experiences. Teachers' decisions and actions influence integration greatly. Teacher's decisions could very well be responsible for the success or failure of integrating any tool into a FL curriculum (Muyskens, 1977), and, therefore, must be taken into consideration when assessing the general value of a tool. What good is a tool that teachers find extremely difficult to implement?

The decisions that teachers make regarding the tools to be used in the FL class affect other areas of the teaching process (Clark & Peterson, 1986), and, consequently, the outcome of the course (Shavelson, 1983). This *teaching process* typically includes planning (selection of materials and curriculum development), implementation (classroom instruction and students' responses), and evaluation (assessment and reflection). In order to understand the actual benefits of a specific tool, it is very important to study a teacher's *decision-making process*, that is, the totality of a teacher's

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decisions, including the factors affecting these decisions, the reasons behind these decisions, and the consequences of these decisions. According to Bowles (1973), decision making is a "critical skill in instruction" (p. 40). By analyzing a teacher's decision-making process, we can better understand the benefits and challenges of using children's literature in the FL college curriculum.

1. 3. SUMMARY OF THIS CHAPTER

Children's literature appears to be a great vehicle through which to teach a FL and a foreign culture, two of the main goals of beginning- and intermediate-level FL courses at the university level. In addition, it also serves as an initiation to literary analysis and literary appreciation. The use of children's literature has been investigated in the FL class with children (i.e., Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Ghosn, 1996; Glass, 1994) and adolescents (i.e., Kim, 2002; Robertson & Karagiozis, 2004; Sullivan, 1994; Wang, 1999). However, there are very few studies with university students (i.e., Goh, 1996; Randolph, 2000; Schwarzer, 2001), and apparently only one of these studies was in the Spanish FL class (i.e., Yanes, 1992). The high number of college-level students enrolled in Spanish FL classes and the fact that Spanish is the second most spoken language in the United States[2] are two significant factors in favor of conducting a research study with this population, because the findings might be applicable to a large number of students.

In addition, previous studies focused almost exclusively on how children's literature was implemented in the classroom (i.e., type of activities, students' responses), leaving a gap in the knowledge on the role of the teacher in the integration process during the first stages (e.g., text selection and curriculum development). There is a need to

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[2] According to the U.S. Census Bureau, statistics for the year 2000 (p. 2, figure 2), http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf

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explore the entire integration process all the way through in order to obtain more information on these neglected areas.

Due to this gap in the current body of knowledge, this qualitative case study investigates the entire process of integrating children's literature in a fourth semester, college-level Spanish FL class. The investigation aims to provide a more complete picture of the integration process as well as further information on the benefits and challenges of children's literature in FL education. The specific research questions are:

1. What is the teacher-researcher's decision-making process when using children's literature in a college Spanish FL class?
    a. What is the process when selecting texts?
    b. What is the process when integrating these texts into the curriculum?
    c. What is the process when implementing these texts in the classroom?

2. How do students respond to the use of children's literature in the class?
    a. How do they respond in terms of language learning?
    b. How do they respond in terms of cultural learning?
    c. How do they respond affectively?

3. What did the teacher-researcher learn during this experience, both as a teacher and as a researcher?

The next chapter provides readers with a brief review of the literature related to the use of literary texts in FL education as well as to the importance of decision-making and teacher-research. This chapter will have a section dedicated to specific findings from

previous research studies done in this area. In Chapter 3 we look at the methodology used in the present study, including participants, data collection, analysis, and related issues. In Chapter 4, I address the first research question on the selection, integration and implementation of these texts. Chapter 5 reports on students' responses to the use of children's literature in this class, focusing more in detail on five students' experiences. In Chapter 6, I reflect on my experience as a teacher and as a researcher after teaching this class and conducting this study. These three chapters will be followed by a chapter with conclusions and limitations of this qualitative study, various appendices, a bibliography of works cited, and the author's vita.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I expand on some of the issues described in the first chapter regarding pedagogical approaches and the use of authentic texts in FL education to explain the theoretical framework that supports the use of children's literature in the FL class. I also comment on some of the findings of previous research studies in this area. A summary of the entire chapter is found at the end.

2. 1. THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH

With the rise of sociolinguistics in the late 1960s and the subsequent search for new teaching methods or approaches that viewed language learning in an integrated and more natural manner, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach was born. Considered an approach and not a method (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), this philosophy of teaching "concentrates on the purposes for which language is used" (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 13) and focuses on meaning and activities that recreate real-world communicative conditions (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Sociolinguists like Dell Hymes contributed greatly by renaming Noam Chomsky's concept of *competence* –"one's implicit or explicit knowledge of the system of the language" (Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 3)— as *grammatical competence*, and by introducing the concept of *communicative competence* as that knowledge of the system of the language that also takes into consideration sociocultural issues, such as appropriateness. In the 1980s, other experts would expand the concept of communicative competence to involve grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence (sociocultural competence and discourse competence), and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). This new view of language brought about two very important elements related to the present study:

(a) the notional-functional syllabus and (b) the importance of culture in language learning.

A) The Notional-Functional Syllabus

A syllabus is "a statement of a programme's aims and content" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 312), or a document that organizes content ordering items for pedagogical presentation, and specifies other information necessary for the student, such as evaluation methods, departmental policies, information about the teacher, grading system, and so on. There are several types of syllabi, such as the grammatical syllabus, the situational syllabus, or the notional-functional syllabus. In the notional-functional syllabus, also called the 'communicative syllabus,' teaching items are arranged according to the notions (concepts) and/or functions (uses) thought to be required by the learner" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 231). Wilkins (1976), one of the creators of this syllabus, identified certain functions (i.e., agreeing, persuading, requesting, apologizing) as the elements that should organize instruction. The *Standards for foreign language learning* (1996) also recognize the importance of practicing a range of functions (i.e., request, convince, explain), but always "taking into account the age, background, education, and familiarity of the individuals with whom they are engaged in conversation" (p. 36). Since children's literature offers non-grammatically sequenced input, it can probably fit better into a notional-functional syllabus than into a grammatical syllabus –which is always sequenced. In the present research study, children's literature was integrated into the notional-functional syllabus pre-established by the Spanish department of this university.

B) Culture in the Foreign Language Curriculum

One of the basic principles of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach is the need to take into consideration sociocultural factors in communication. Danesi (2000) explains from a semiotic perspective that in addition to learning the literal meaning of words, individuals "must also face the task of learning the connotations associated with them" (p. 34), which are mostly dependent on cultural factors. The integration of cultural issues into the FL curriculum is, thus, essential for students in order to achieve effective communication. *Curriculum* is understood as the totality of content and goals prescribed for a specific course or a series of courses (Johnson & Johnson, 1999), and *culture* "is generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products… of a society" (*Standards*, 1996, p. 43). The *Standards* (1996) clearly recommend American students to 'develop an awareness of other people's world views, of their unique way of life, and of the patterns of behavior which order their world" (p. 43), which can be done through language learning. In the present study, children's literature will be used not only for language learning, but also for the learning of the foreign culture.

In FL classes, cultural issues are typically divided into 'big c culture' (history, sociopolitical issues, economy, etc) and 'little c culture' (famous people, foods, traditions, etc) (Arens & Swaffar, 1987; Bresslau, 1996; Cotham, 1982; *Standards*, 1996). Both types of culture are recommended in FL education to enhance students' factual knowledge, and promote understanding, cooperation, appreciation, and respect for other peoples (Lalande, 1998). However, children's literature has only been used to teach 'little c culture' in previous studies. Whether this is sufficient for the present FL course or not remains to be seen. One way to transmit culture is through writing samples, thus, the importance of reading authentic materials.

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2. 2. READING

To better understand the benefits of children's literature in FL education, we need to review the benefits of reading and the role of authentic texts in the FL classroom. Since the 1960s, the process of reading is viewed as a psycholinguistic or cognitive-constructive process that promotes an interaction between the reader and the text, making the reader an active participant in the creation of meaning (Coady, 1979; Goodman, 1968; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998; Kramsch, 1985; Rumelhart, 1977; Smith, 1971). Tse (1996) claims, "reading is the most effective and efficient way to learn a second language" (p. 27). According to Schultz (1983), "reading is probably the most useful skill" (p. 127), since most upper-level courses are based on the study of literary texts. In the first and second language, reading not only expands a student's vocabulary, spelling, and grammar knowledge (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Huckin & Coady, 1999; Krashen, 1982, 1989, 1993), but it also serves as a model for writing (Godev, 1997) and speaking (Elliott, 1990), increases students' cultural knowledge (Gajdusek, 1988), and promotes critical thinking and different interpretations (Davis, 1989).

Extensive reading, which is done often for pleasure, "requires speed, skill in getting the gist, and reading for specific information" (Phillips, 1984, p. 287) is said to promote incidental vocabulary learning and motivation (Huckin & Coady, 1999; Krashen, 1989). On the other hand, intensive reading "demands closer attention to detail and to text, and it continues to be the focus of most second language instruction" (Phillips, 1984, p. 288). Even though both types of reading have shown positive results in the FL class (i.e., Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Laufer-Dvorkin, 1981), intensive reading is practiced in this study because of the need to attend to form as well as meaning, and because testing –which defeats the purpose of extensive reading— is an imperative

requirement of this course. Intensive reading allows students to work with a small number of books and to focus more deeply on linguistic and cultural issues.

Since reading can be a difficult task for some FL students, mainly for those unaccustomed to reading for meaning, it is recommended that students receive instruction on reading strategies (Byrnes, 1998; Moffit, 1998), such as making inferences, skimming, guessing unknown vocabulary, and so on. In addition, it is recommended that reading be provided within an appropriate methodology or approach that systematically prepares and guides FL students' development of the skills necessary to interact with texts (Adair-Hauck, 2000; Harper, 1988; Liaw, 2001). In this study, both teaching of reading strategies and a sequenced approach were provided to facilitate learning.

A) Pre-reading / Reading / Post-reading Technique

Several experts have developed techniques or models to approach written texts (especially authentic texts) from the early stages of language learning, highlighting the importance of progression (Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1987; Davis, 1989; Goodman, 1968; Rice, 1991; Shook, 1997; Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991; Vogely, 1997). One of these suggested techniques is the pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; Melendez & Pritchard, 1985; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), which divides the reading process into three stages, allowing different processes and activities at each stage.

The pre-reading phase involves skimming, scanning, predicting, anticipating, and hypothesizing –all top-down processing techniques that focus on meaning. During this phase, FL learners activate background knowledge, strengthen necessary vocabulary, and identify text genre (Phillips, 1984; Schulz, 1983). The illustrations of children's

literature, the repetitive language, and the recognizable patterns of many of these texts are great assets. In the reading phase, silent reading is recommended (Bernhardt, 1983), although not much practiced with adult FL learners because of time constraints. Teacher's read-aloud is also recommended (Schwarzer, 2001), especially alternating with higher-level questions (Schulz, 1983) in order to check comprehension and diminish the cognitive load. Higher-level questions aim at high cognitive skills, such as application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, 1956). Since children's texts are typically short, they are suitable for silent reading and teacher's read-aloud. Also, children's literature typically comes illustrated, which could facilitate student comprehension while the teacher reads aloud. And finally, the post-reading phase focuses students' attention on specific passages, vocabulary, or content, encouraging attention, interpretation, creative responses, and dialogue. Testing is also conducted at this stage or shortly after through several methods, such as cloze tests, multiple-choice items, ordering tasks, book reports, true/false questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, recall activities, matching exercises, higher-level questions, and illustrating a story (Kitao & Kitao, 1996; McQuillan & Tse, 1998). Reading in a FL is important, because "second cultures are naturally reflected in reading materials" (Phillips, 1984).

2. 3. AUTHENTIC TEXTS

Typically there are two types of reading materials in the FL class: authentic texts and simplified texts. *Authentic texts,* oral or written, are typically defined as texts created by native speakers for native speakers, whereas, *simplified texts,* oral or written, are basically texts manufactured with restricted syntax and vocabulary depending on the proficiency level of FL learners (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984; Carrell, 1984). Which type

of written text is more suitable for FL education –simplified texts or authentic texts— has been long debated and even the concept of 'authentic' versus 'simplified' has been questioned. Krashen (1997), for example, redefines authentic texts as texts that are "interesting and comprehensible" (p. 34), because this latter definition is more appropriate for FL education than the former. He claims that there is nothing wrong with texts that are created for FL learning, as long as they are interesting and comprehensible, because some of these texts can be of good quality and could be a helpful initiation to more complex authentic texts. Other experts, on the other hand, do not agree with this position and have even found that simplified texts may impede comprehension (Brumfit & Carter, 1986; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998; Vigil, 1987; Young, 1999).

In the past few decades, language learning has changed in approach and materials in order to emulate real-world learning situations –a essential element of the communicative language teaching approach. Therefore, authentic texts have gained more popularity than simplified texts, because they are real, meaningful, interesting, culturally appropriate, and available. Some examples of authentic written texts include brochures, menus, maps, and literary texts. Children's literary texts are found within this last category.

A) Literary Texts

Literary texts are generally those "imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the excellence of their execution" (*Literature*, 2005, p. 1). Despite the fact that the term *literary text* also encompasses children's literature, most people usually think of it as a canonical or a classical writing that has been recognized in the field as significant and whose audience is adult. In a

Spanish FL class, canonical literary texts would include works by Galdós, Bécquer, Paz, Allende, and other recognized authors of literature for adults.

Literary texts are believed to promote interaction between the reader and the text (Davis, 1989; Kramsch, 1985; Rumelhart, 1977; Smith, 1971), cultural tolerance (McKay, 1982), language learning at an advanced level (Brumfit & Carter, 1986), critical thinking (Davis, 1989), understanding of the world (Bruner, 1986; Egan, 1993), interest and motivation (Liaw, 2001), and to introduce students to the main content of upper-division and graduate FL courses –literary analysis and appreciation. This interaction between the reader and the text is very important, not only because students focus on meaning, but also because it encourages aesthetic interpretations and creative uses of language (Rosenblatt, 1982). Literary texts are said to promote this interaction and provoke a response from readers, which is manifested in form of written or oral output.

According to Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis, *output,* the student's oral or written production, "may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing" (p. 249), and therefore can cause the learner to pay attention to form after paying attention to meaning. Attention, noticing, and awareness are central concepts in FL learning (Izumi, Bigelow, Fujiwara, & Fearnow, 1999; Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1993; Truscott, 1998), even though the Input Hypothesis does not recognize output as a requirement of FL acquisition. In this study, output will be essential not only for communication (the central tenet of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach), but also because it will serve as a means to check students' progress.

Literary texts are not only great tools to learn a FL and to learn to appreciate literature, but also a great means to disseminate cultural information. According to some experts, literary texts are the perfect means to convey language and culture at the same time, because these three disciplines are intrinsically related to each other (Tesser, 1995).

These experts suggest that language and culture be integrated through literature in a continuum, following natural progressive stages of language and cognitive development (Arens & Swaffar, 1987; Barnett, 1991; Byrnes, 2001; Byrnes & Kord, 2001; Fountain, 2001; Friedman, 1992; Gutsche, 1996; Henning, 1993, 2001; Lazar, 1993; Maxim, 2000; Rice, 1991; Tesser, 1995). The close relationship between language, literature, and culture makes literary texts excellent tools for the FL class. Without one of these three disciplines, a curriculum is viewed as incomplete (Tesser, 1995). According to Barnett (1991), "without the key of language, we cannot understand a civilization and its literature" (p. 9). Inversely, "language can be incomprehensible without the context provided by culture and literature" (p. 9). With the integration of language, literature, and culture, students will learn to value and appreciate others' literature and cultures (Frantzen, 2001), a major goal in FL learning, according to the *Standards* (1996). For Kramsch and Kramsch (2000), literature is an "authentic window on a foreign culture and society" (p. 568).

Although, literary texts are strongly recommended for FL learners, many teachers feel reluctant to use them in their lower-division courses. They have found that many students are not linguistically or culturally ready to approach literary texts, or that implementation of these texts would require a lot of scaffolding that they do not have time or skills to implement. Some experts –like Krashen, for example— have found other forms of literature that might be more adequate for beginning- and intermediate-level FL students, such as young adult literature, comics, children's literature, and so on. Other experts prefer using canonical literature and just focus on developing appropriate methods or approaches to implement it, such as Maxim did in his 2002 study. My study sympathizes with the former ideology, believing that simpler tools –like children's

literature— can serve as a first step to move toward more complex tools –like canonical literature.

a) Children's Literature

Children's literature has been defined as "literature that appeals to the interests, needs, and reading preferences of children and captivates children as its major audience" (Hancock, 2000, p. 5), even though adults are sometimes part of that audience. I need to clarify that the term *children's literature* encompasses several formats and genres, not just picture books –as many people generally think. A *picture book* is a text that tells a story "through a combination of text and illustration, each dependent on the other for full interpretation and meaning" (Moffit, 2005, p. 17). This format usually subdivides into toy books, board books, wordless books, and picture storybooks, depending on the presence and amount of texts and illustrations. Other formats are classified according to language, such as monolingual texts (English only or Spanish only) and bilingual texts (English/Spanish).

In terms of genre, children's literature probably covers as many genres as canonical literature for adults. Glazer (1997) and Stewig (1988) offered possible classifications of the genres within children's literature, confessing upfront that different classifications exist in this field. Typically, children's literature is divided into prose and poetry. Genres in prose include Nonfiction (i.e., informational texts, biographies, autobiographies) and Fiction, which subdivides into Realism (i.e., mysteries, humorous stories, and other), Fantasy (i.e., science fiction, contemporary fiction, and other), and Traditional Literature (i.e., proverbs, folktales, fables, epics, myths, legends, religious,

and other). In poetry, we have genres in narrative (i.e, ballads), in lyric (i.e., haikus, raps, nursery rhymes, and other), and then free verse.

In the first chapter, we read about the challenges that canonical literature posits to FL students, namely, in the linguistic, cultural, affective and pedagogical domains. In the next section, I will provide a rationale for the use of children's literature in the college FL class by addressing those same four challenges.

How children's literature addresses the linguistic challenge

Krashen's (1982, 1985) Input Hypothesis, one of the five hypotheses in his Monitor Model, claims that acquisition of a FL happens when one is exposed to comprehensible input provided under certain conditions. *Input*, in general, has been defined as "that language (in both spoken and written forms) to which the learner is exposed" (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 260). *Comprehensible input* is input that contains structures that are a little beyond the student's current level of competence –what Krashen called i + 1 and Vygotsky called Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Anything beyond i + 1 would not be comprehensible for this specific student and therefore will not help in acquisition of the FL. According to Krashen, comprehensible input must be abundant, interesting, not grammatically sequenced, and must be provided in a non-threatening environment. Under these conditions, he claims, the student can focus on meaning, and form will come along as a result. "The teacher's main role, then, is to ensure that students receive comprehensible input" (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 201). "Comprehensible input is believed to be the key element in the success of all language teaching methods" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 77), and, according to Krashen (1989), comprehensible input in the form of reading can improve students' competence in spelling and vocabulary.

Children's literature is believed to be a type of literature that provides comprehensible input in different ways. First, it is written in a simple discourse (Flickinger, 1984), which is said to aid comprehension better than texts with simplified grammar (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Second, it has specific linguistic characteristics that are more appropriate for beginning- and intermediate-level FL students, such as concrete and repetitive vocabulary, short paragraphs, short sentences, few abstractions, and presence of dialogue (Anderson, 1984). Day and Bamford (1998) claim, "students should realize that it is better to read more material that is easier than less material that is harder" (p. 92). And third, it offers illustrations, which can serve as a learning tool to confirm a hypothesis about the meaning of a word or to clarify confusing information, mainly to beginners (Baker, 1998). Hancock (2000) claims, "picture books provide an exceptional means of cultivating visual literacy and artistic appreciation in an increasingly visual world" (p. 49).

Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932) claims that a reader's personal schemata must interact with that of a text (Swaffar, 1988). Thus, Schema Theory supports that children's literature is comprehensible, because it has characteristics that can activate FL readers' schemata (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; Hall, 2001; Hancock, 2000; Rings, 2002), such as stereotypical characters (i.e., the damsel in distress), recognizable patterns (i.e., and they lived happily ever after), and predictable outcomes (i.e., good acts are rewarded and bad acts are punished). By recognizing these characteristics, students' comprehension increases as the new information fits into the schemata that they already possess. A *schema* or script is a "mental framework based on past experience developed as a means of accommodating new facts, and hence making sense of them" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 282). In addition, recall is better achieved with "longer, conceptually complete texts" (Carrell, 1984, p. 339) that have familiar schemata. Children's stories are

conceptually complete texts from beginning to end, compared to isolated sentences or even excerpts from novels taken from a textbook, for example.

How children's literature addresses the cultural challenge

Children's literature portraying the cultures of Hispanics and Latinos was scarce in the United States until recently (Ada, 2003; Barrera, Liguori, & Salas, 1992), and the existing texts were stereotypical and of questionable quality (Nieto, 1992). The term *Latino* here refers to its most common use in the United States, that is, a person of Hispanic origin who is born and/or mostly raised in the United States. The term *Hispanic* here refers to a person born and raised in a country or land whose main language is Spanish, such as Spain, Chile, Colombia, etc. Children's literature more recently available in the United States portrays the Hispanic and Latino cultures in a more authentic and non-stereotypical way than in the past (Ada, 2003; Hancock, 2000; Kibler, 1996; Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Schon, 1995, 2001; Short & Fox, 2003). This fact could be due to several factors, including that literary audiences are now more conscious about issues of discrimination and prejudice. As a consequence, more Latino authors are being published in the United States and their work is finally being recognized by different means, such as with the Pura Belpré Award, the Tomás Rivera Award, and the Americas Award (Battle & Menchaca, 1998; Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002). These merits provide some guidance to teachers who are looking for quality literature to use in their classes.

Latino children's literature is widely available in the United States and celebrates the richness of the Latino and Hispanic cultures, which are extraordinarily varied (Ada, 2003). The current tendency is for Latino writers to "share their own stories and experiences in a combination of English and Spanish" (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young,

2002, p. 171), reflecting the bilingual / bicultural nature of their lives and also providing cultural authenticity to the audience. Texts that are culturally authentic are those recognized by readers of that culture as true representatives of the culture, because they reflect those values, facts, and attitudes shared by the members of that culture (Short & Fox, 2003). Some experts prefer that members of the culture portrayed in the texts are the ones writing those texts in order to assure cultural authenticity (Bishop, 1992; Kibler, 1996), so that teachers will "learn to recognize recurring themes, topics, values, attitudes, language features, social mores –those elements that characterize the body of literature the group claims as its own" (Bishop, 1992, p. 46).

The type of cultural information conveyed in children's literature is adapted to its audience, that is, it is simple and basic –what we call 'small c culture,' such as traditions, foods, clothes, famous people, religious icons, etc. Even though adult FL learners might be interested in more sophisticated cultural issues (i.e., politics, economics, social values), it is logical to start with 'small c culture' first and then move onto 'big c culture' when students are linguistically capable to handle more sophisticated vocabulary and grammar, and when they have acquired the more basic cultural issues. Cultural issues are great conversation topics and encourage participation, expression of ideas, critical thinking, and tolerance.

How children's literature addresses the affective challenge

In general, interest has been identified as one of the most important criteria in the selection of texts (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). The more interesting and non-threatening a book appears to FL students, the more willing to read it they will be (Yanes, 1992). Ormrod (2004) defines *interest* as a form of intrinsic motivation with positive feelings, such as pleasure, excitement, and liking. She claims, "reading material is more interesting

when it is concrete and easy to understand and when relationships among ideas are clear" (p. 464), which are characteristics of children's literature. She also states that interest promotes effective information processing, which increases attention, recall, and engagement. Tomlinson and McGraw (1997) clearly recognize the initial opposition than many teachers may feel when considering children's literature for adult audiences, "anyone interested in using children's and young adult books [with adult FL learners] … must be prepared to confront initial prejudices that learners might have against reading literature meant for children" (p. 7). Despite this initial reluctance, most teachers who implemented children's literature in the adult FL curriculum found that it was an interesting tool for learning, because of the colorful illustrations, engaging characters, enticing plots, and imaginative settings (Rings, 2002). Affective factors are important in FL learning. For instance, the simple appearance, the presence of illustrations, the interesting themes, and the familiar content of some children's literary texts seem to help reduce anxiety (Blickle, 1998; Briscoe, 2001), and lower students' affective filter (Smallwood, 1992). The affective filter –according to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis— needs to be low for FL acquisition to occur. A familiar content, interesting illustrations, memorable characters, and emotional appeal would increase recall and engagement (Bartlett, 1932; Egan, 1999; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Ho, 2000; Moffit, 2003; Ormrod, 2004), would awake emotions, and would provoke personal interpretations (Bruner, 1986; Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Egan, 1999; Metcalf, 1998; Rosenblatt, 1982).

These mentioned characteristics promote students' comprehension in general (Carrell, 1984) and, as a consequence, their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Brophy, 1987; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Robbins, 1992) and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In turn, increased self-efficacy and competence would logically result in increased

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motivation, which has been identified as a very important factor in FL learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Skehan, 1989). Ormrod (2004) defines *motivation* as "an internal state that arouses us to action, pushes us in particular directions, and keeps us engaged in certain activities" (p. 425) and also claims that motivation –either intrinsic or extrinsic— promotes initiation and persistence of certain activities and affects learning strategies and cognitive processes. It has been found that positive attitude and motivation are associated with high achievement in FL learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In general, FL learners' ability beliefs, attitudes, interest, expectations about success, and the value they place on reading and classroom tasks strongly influence their motivation. Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) claim, "individuals' engagement in reading will be greatly facilitated when they are intrinsically motivated to read and find personal meaning in the reading that they do" (p. 18), highlighting the importance of using interesting materials and applying the understanding from the text to real-life situations and students' personal lives.

How children's literature addresses the pedagogical challenge

Although there is a certain level of difficulty in integrating literature in beginning- and intermediate-level FL classes, the integration of children's literature posits a small challenge (Garcia, 2004) due to its everyday themes, simplicity of cultural issues, short length of stories, and other special characteristics. The success or failure of implementing any tool in the FL class not only depends on the quality of the tool itself, but also on the teacher's decisions regarding how to select this tool, integrate it into the curriculum, implement it in the classroom, and evaluate the entire experience for future classes. Muyskens (1977) found that the teacher, rather than the teaching method, was the factor that significantly influenced students' achievement and attitudes in her investigation.

Thus, it is important to examine the teacher's decision-making process when selecting, integrating and implementing children's literature in the FL classroom. In the next section, I write about this topic.

2. 4. TEACHERS' DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Due to the influence that teachers' decisions exert on the outcomes of a course, the teacher's decision-making process in the integration of children's literature into a college-level FL class must be examined to better understand not only the teaching process itself, but also the advantages and disadvantages of children's literature for foreign language learning. The term *decision-making process* refers to the totality of a teacher's decisions, including the factors affecting these decisions, the reasons behind these decisions, and the consequences of these decisions.

The importance of teachers' decision-making rests on the relationship between decisions, actions, and outcomes. Shavelson (1983) claims, "teachers' behavior is guided by their thoughts, judgments, and decisions" (p. 393), and adds, "decisions made during planning have a profound influence on teachers' classroom behavior and on the nature and outcomes of the education children receive" (p. 401). These assertions highlight the connection among the decisions made before instruction, instruction itself, and outcomes. This connection, under a constructivist perspective[3], is viewed as a cyclical relationship between the different areas, phases, or stages of the teaching process (Cochran, DeRuiter, & King, 1993). The teaching process has three main phases:

1. preactive phase or planning (text selection, curriculum development)

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[3] Constructivism, also known as 'information processing theory', is a theory of learning that refers to the process of learning by constructing knowledge from the information received rather than directly receiving that information from the outside world (Ormrod, 2004).

2. interactive phase or implementation (classroom instruction, students' responses)

3. postactive phase (evaluation and reflection).

Constructivism explains how decisions made during one phase affect subsequent phases and also how decisions made during the entire experience will affect future experiences. In figure 1, we can see the cyclical relationship between the three phases –which the literature calls preactive, interactive, and postactive (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Jackson, 1968).
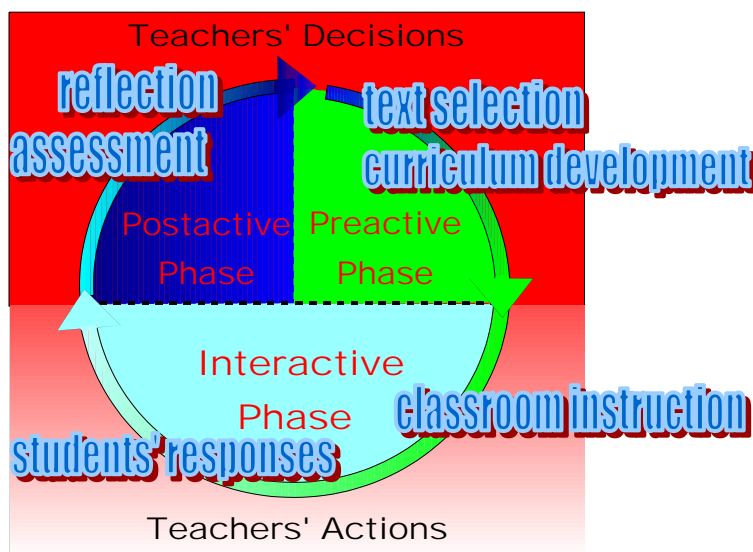
Figure 1: Different phases of the teaching process

In order to understand teaching and to understand how children's literature affects each phase of the teaching process, "we must find out how thoughts are carried out into actions" (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, p. 457). Cumming (1993) claims, "little information is available to understand the relationship between teachers' thoughts and actions" (p. 31), even though decision-making has been identified as the most important teaching skill

(Bowles, 1973; Shavelson, 1973; Yinger, 1980). The process of teaching can be better understood when thoughts and actions "are brought together and examined in relation to one another" (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 258), not only at the classroom level but also in relation to those courses that come before and after the present one.

Decision-making has been investigated in several educational fields not only to promote better teacher training, but also to find out how cognitive processes are linked to outcomes. In the field of FL education, both students' decision-making and teachers' decision-making have been investigated. Some of the studies that investigated FL students' decision-making processes focused on writing (i.e., Vignola, 1995), speaking (i.e., Suh, 1999), translation (i.e., Eckert, 1996), class activities (i.e., Yildiz, 1978), or language acquisition (i.e., Birdsong, 1994). These studies used several methods to investigate students' decision-making processes, including concurrent verbal reports, such as think-aloud protocols, and retrospective verbal reports, such as interviews. By investigating students' decision-making processes, researchers can provide practitioners with information about how students think and therefore learn, so practitioners can improve their practices.

Teachers' decision-making processes have also been investigated specifically in FL education, including teacher assistants' decision-making processes (i.e., Burnett, 1999). Theory suggests that teachers observe classroom interaction and interpret behavior patterns in order to increase their skills in decision-making (Gebhard, 1990). Brumfit and Rossner (1982) even proposed a 'decision hierarchy' developed as a consequence of analyzing the needs behind decisions, and Nunan and Lamb (1996) provide a guide that addresses essential practical and methodological concerns in classroom management and decision-making. Some of the research studies that investigated teachers' decision-making processes focused on diverse areas, such as teachers' sense of autonomy (i.e.,

Fleming, 1998), text selection criteria (i.e., Schneider, 1994), assessment (i.e., Rea-Dickins, 2001), and curriculum planning (i.e., Tai, 1999). In these studies researchers made use of concurrent and retrospective verbal reports to obtain their data. In this study, I investigated the teacher-researcher's decision-making process during text selection, text integration (curriculum development) and text implementation (classroom instruction), and I also reflect on the experience, covering all three phases of the teaching process.

A) Decisions on Text Selection

Similar to canonical literature, text selection has been found to be very important, especially when the audience and the purpose are not the intended ones (Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993; McKay, 1982; Meloni, 1994; Moffit, 1998). Difficulties arise not only because of the age difference between the intended reader and the actual reader, but also because of the linguistic and cultural proficiency of the reader, and the different interests of each reader.

Since interest is many times the dominant text-selection criterion when selecting children's literature for the adult FL class, many authors advocate for self-selection, that is, that students select their own texts to read –either freely or from a pool selected by the teacher (Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997). According to the experts, when learners select their own reading materials, they become more motivated and active in the learning process (Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Krashen, 1997). The advocates for self-selection argue that it is almost impossible for a teacher to select an appropriate and interesting material for each student, since each person responds differently to each text (Moffit, 1998). On the other hand, opponents to this practice argue that students' text-selection criteria are arbitrary, superficial, and not informed.

Thus, there is a risk of a mismatch between reader and text with even possible negative consequences for FL acquisition.

Some of the text selection criteria suggested by the literature include type of program, type of student, type of books, availability of texts, affordability of texts, accessibility of texts, text length, interest, identifiable characters, text relevance to students' lives (Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996), topic, external features, language, literary importance, historical relevance, cultural importance (Baker, 1998; Moffit, 1998), characterization achieved through action, predictability, authentic portrayals of thinking and behavior, genre, content, imaginative themes (Silverman, 1990) and cultural authenticity (Bishop, 1992; Kibler, 1996; Short & Fox, 2003). Both defendants of self-selection and defendants of teacher-selection do agree on the fact that reading or attempting to read extremely difficult texts will not benefit FL learners, whereas practicing extensive reading of easy texts will be more beneficial for FL acquisition and motivation (Day & Bamford, 1998; Gardner, 2004).

B) Decisions on Text Integration

Children's literature has been integrated into FL curricula from primary school to college level not only for FL learning but also for literacy purposes and learning of other content areas (e.g., history). Garcia (2004) claims that integrating children's literature is not as challenging as it might seem due to its everyday themes, simplicity of cultural issues, shortness of stories, and other special features. In this study, the process of integration is explored to better understand all steps involved in the incorporation of children's literature into a pre-established FL curriculum.

C) Decisions on Text Implementation

Children's literature has been used with both children and adults in the FL and second language (L2) class. The term *second language* refers here to a language that a person learns in addition to his or her first language in either a country where that language is the official language or in a setting where that language is mostly spoken, such as at home. Most previous research studies investigate the implementation of children's literature, that is, the use of children's literature in the classroom, which provides useful information about its benefits and challenges. Here are some studies.

a) Children's Literature Used with Children

In the United States, due to the high number of immigrants, children's literature written in English is commonly used with recently schooled children who still do not speak English well and do not know much about the American culture. For those children, English is their L2. Children's literature is recommended for this type of English-as-a-second-language (ESL) population because of its simple language, predictable patterns, brevity, universal themes, contextualization of information, and interesting illustrations (Galeano, 1983; Smallwood, 1998, 2002).

There are several studies that investigate the use of children's literature in the L2 class at the elementary and secondary level, both in the United States and in other countries. For instance, Hadaway and Mundy (1999) found that their ESL high school students were very engaged with children's literature, understood the concepts explained, learned more vocabulary, and connected the information explained to other areas of the curriculum. Elley and Mangubhai (1983) carried out a study in Fiji –where English is the L2— and found that children exposed to many interesting stories written in English progressed in reading and listening comprehension at twice the normal rate, concluding

that both abundant reading and reading of interesting materials were key factors in this achievement. In a different environment, Robertson and Karagiozis (2004) carried out a study in Canada with 22 Greek-descent, English-speaking preadolescents. The teachers used fairy tales written in Greek –the L2 for this particular population— to explore students' sense of identity and abilities to "make meanings of and for themselves" (p. 413). The findings of these studies show that children's literature used with children, preadolescents, and adolescents in the L2 class has been successful in keeping students interested, in increasing vocabulary, in improving their reading and listening skills, in promoting cross-curricular learning, and in exploring their role in the world.

In the FL class, children's literature has also been used in elementary and secondary school settings. Glass (1994), for instance, claims that children's literature not only introduced contextualized Spanish vocabulary to her first grade students, but it was also fun and interesting. Sullivan (1994) found remarkable academic and affective benefits in children's literature written in French when used with U.S. high school students. Outside of the United States, in English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classes, children's books have also been used successfully with adolescents in places such as Korea (i.e., Kim, 2002) or Taiwan (i.e., Wang, 1999), and even with children at the kindergarten level (i.e., Ghosn, 1996). These studies again show that children's literature can be successfully implemented with children and adolescents resulting in both linguistic and affective benefits. These results may not be so surprising since there is a small distance between the readers' age and the intended readers' age. In the next section, we will examine how children's literature was implemented with adults.

b) Children's Literature Used with Adults

Based on the idea that adult FL / L2 learners are similar to children when learning a foreign or second language (Blickle, 1998), some teachers have used children's literature with adults for different purposes. The two adult populations that I cover in this review are immigrant workers and college students.

1. **With Immigrants.** Many adult foreigners who enter the United States for reasons other than vacation, school, or business are immigrants in search of employment or refugees. This population, referred here as 'immigrants' in general, varies enormously in their degrees of literacy with respect to their first language as well as their L2, but they all need to learn English and the American culture in order to survive and improve their quality of life.

   For many of these adult L2 learners, a strong motivator to learn the L2 is the need to communicate with their now-Americanized children –who sometimes prefer to speak in English— or to help them with school homework. Silverman (1990), for example, used children's literature to help adult immigrants in Philadelphia to learn English and be more involved in their children's academic lives. Students, researchers, teachers, and librarians were happily surprised with the findings. Likewise, Lanteigne and Schwarzer (1997) used children's literature with one adult Mexican immigrant living in the U.S. and found improvement in the participant's English knowledge as well as an increase in motivation.

   Other immigrants are more interested in learning English for their own personal reasons, including improving their own self-esteem, which is often damaged by the inability to communicate properly in the L2. Cho and Krashen (1994) carried out a study with four Korean women who wanted to improve their

English while in the United States. These women were given pleasure reading intended for young adults –the Sweet Valley Kids series— as an attempt to improve their language skills. All four participants became enthusiastic readers and increased their vocabulary knowledge. Although, technically, young adult literature is not the same as children's literature, these texts were still appealing to these participants. This specific study is important, because it shows that learners' ages do not need to fully match the age of the intended readers for learners to find the texts engaging and learn vocabulary in the FL. This study also shows that affective factors, such as self-esteem and interest, need to be considered.

In general, these studies show that children's literature can be successfully implemented with adult learners for other reasons than grades and passing courses. These studies also show that learners do not need to have high literacy skills or an advanced literary knowledge in order to learn, enjoy, and appreciate what they read.

2. **With College Students.** Although it is not an extended practice, children's literature has been already used in college FL classes, and a few formal research studies have been conducted in this field. Most studies have a specific focus of attention. I start with those studies first.

Some researchers were interested in investigating whether familiar texts were easier to understand than stories for which participants had no previous schemata, as Schema Theory claims. The findings of a few studies in this area (i.e., Randolph, 2000; Sullivan, 1994; Yanes, 1992) were indeed congruent with previous literature on prior knowledge and reading comprehension, showing that being familiar with the type of text or being familiar with the story helped

students comprehend the texts. These studies concluded that guessing abilities became more productive because of the existent schemata, and that prior knowledge was a strong predictor of reading comprehension. These findings suggest that, by starting instruction with known genres or stories, students' self-esteem, confidence, and motivation is promoted, hence, facilitating the integration of other genres and stories that are unknown.

Other researchers investigated the effects that teachers' read-aloud of children's literature had in college FL / L2 learners. For example, Khodabakhshi and Lagos (1993) investigated the relationship between students' responses to children's literature (as a form of output) and teachers' read-aloud in college ESL classes. They found "reading such material aloud to be extremely useful and productive, and equally enjoyable for instructors and students" (p. 56). Schwarzer (2001) investigated the affective effects of the teacher-researcher's read-aloud of children's literature with his Hebrew FL students, noting, "reading children's literature aloud was one of the most successful activities at the beginning of the year" (p. 56). His modeling of this activity became useful when students were later assigned to read children's literature in Hebrew to Jewish children in the community. Even though teachers' read-aloud is not a common practice in college settings (usually because of time constraints, among other issues), these studies indicate that maybe the short length of children's literary texts might be adequate to attempt this activity and benefit from the positive effects on the affective and linguistic domains.

Most studies that investigated the use of children's literature in the college FL class focused on affective issues, namely, students' levels of motivation and interest when exposed to children's literature (i.e., Goh, 1996; Ho, 2000; Kim,

2002; Moffit, 1998; Randolph, 2000; Rings, 2002; Sullivan, 1994; Wang, 1999; Wu, 2001). These studies found that children's literature was generally interesting and a strong motivator to adult FL learners, refuting the common belief that adult learners would have negative attitudes against literature written for children. A couple of negative findings in the affective domain need to be highlighted. Ho (2000), for instance, reported a lack of empathy for young characters that resulted from a mismatch between the character's age and the reader's age. This finding has not been confirmed by other studies. Another negative finding is that students lost interest in certain activities when they were done repeatedly, such as when the teacher read aloud (Schwarzer, 2001) or when students were asked to revise their writing assignments constantly (Phillips, 1992). However, in general, college FL learners welcome the use of children's literature and the activities associated with these texts.

Other researchers that investigated the use of children's literature in the college FL class focused on the influence that these texts had on students' linguistic abilities (i.e., fluency, spelling, vocabulary knowledge, etc), concluding, in general, that indeed students' linguistic abilities improved. For instance, Sullivan (1994) observed that although her adolescent students' spelling and understanding "was not always accurate, they had developed the ability to present a narrative discourse" (p. 133). Ho (2000) observed that children's literature provided students with the opportunity to write creatively, another manifestation of output. I only found one study that measured linguistic growth with quantitative instruments, Wu (2001). Wu found that although students' positive attitude towards children's literature increased, FL linguistic abilities did not, concluding that there is no significant relationship between FL reading attitude

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and language growth. These quantitative findings do not confirm other studies' qualitative findings, but are significant nevertheless for coming from the only quantitative research study found. More studies are needed in the area of assessing linguistic growth in order to determine whether children's literature is beneficial for acquisition of vocabulary and grammar, for example.

Some studies that explored the use of children's literature in the college FL class had broader purposes, such as how these texts were used to teach language, literature, or culture, or how they were integrated into the curriculum. For example, Dykstra-Pruim (1998) found that her college participants appreciated reading German children's books for entertainment, linguistic gains, and cultural gains. Price (2001) reported using folktales (fairy tales, myths, legends, and proverbs) in her college ESL class to examine the use of allusions to literature in everyday speech, a way to connect literature and language. My own pilot study, García (2004), examined the general possibilities of children's literature in the FL class, concluding that students enjoyed children's literature and became interested in reading in the FL, that children's literature could be easily integrated into the curriculum, that assessment was difficult to create, and that teachers had difficulties changing their bottom-up approaches to top-down approaches. Finally, Phillips (1992) browsed several genres (nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and folktales) and used diverse activities to teach vocabulary, reinforce reading and oral skills, teach culture, promote oral output, and increase motivation. All findings were very positive.

In content-based instruction, the use of children's literature with college FL students has been investigated in the literature class (i.e., Blickle, 1998) and also in the social studies class (i.e., Metcalf, 1998). Both of these studies found

that children's literature was an ideal tool to convey culture, language, and content knowledge in one package. Even though students in these two studies often did not fully understand the texts, they were able to hold literary discussions in class and understand complex concepts.

Children's literature has also been implemented with college FL learners in order to investigate their improvement in reading skills. Moffit (1998) investigated the use of German children's literature in a college FL class, focusing on practicing reading strategies (i.e., skimming, scanning, hypothesizing, guessing, not using dictionaries, etc). Her participants enjoyed the texts, gained vocabulary and grammar, and improved reading and speaking skills. In a later study, Moffit (2003), these findings were confirmed. Payne (1998) also concluded that legends and folktales improved reading skills in an ESL community college class. Finally, Rings (2002), using German children's literature through online resources for extensive reading practice, concluded that children's literary texts were ideal tools for extensive reading, because they were comprehensible and interesting to her students. From these studies, we can learn that some of the benefits of children's literature include improvement of reading skills, which is believed to promote FL acquisition.

In summary, all these research studies show that children's literature was implemented successfully in the classroom with adult FL learners. In general, children's literature has been found to benefit students' affective and linguistic domains.

2. 5. TEACHER-RESEARCH

In order to observe classroom phenomena, the role of the researcher is primary, but in order to observe a teacher's decision-making process, the role of teacher-researcher might provide a better standpoint, since one's own thoughts are more available and easier to interpret than somebody else's thoughts. *Teacher-research*, which is usually framed within the qualitative paradigm (Bell, 1997), is defined as an investigation "done *by*, not just *on*, teachers in classrooms" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 319). This role, even though harder than the role of researcher because of the double load of work, typically provides a privileged position from which one can observe the phenomena both as a participant and as a researcher. The teacher-researcher, just like any researcher, becomes "the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data" (Merriam, 2001, p. 20). The importance of this role should not be overlooked, since many inconsistencies between theory and practice in the field of second language acquisition seem to originate from the distance between researchers' findings and teachers' practical applications. The role of teacher-researcher allows being "close to the matter at hand, but also to develop the perspective that comes from a degree of distance" (Hobson, 2001, p. 8). According to van Lier (1989), this is the best way to obtain "significant and lasting improvements in classroom second language learning" (p. 174), since teachers and learners are the ones involved in classroom experiences, and know more about this than anybody else.

The teacher-researcher is continuously engaged in a cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand his or her own actions and reactions (Florez, 2001). In the present study, a third research question was created with the purpose of describing this teacher-researcher's process of observation and evaluation. The role of teacher-researcher will provide a unique standpoint from which to investigate non-observable cognitive processes, such as the ones involved in decision-making. This role also reduces

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the amount of uncertainty that is always present when interpreting another person's thoughts and meanings. The interpretations of these thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and practices will be the basis for critical reflection (Schleppegrell, 1997). *Reflection* has been described as a "process of making sense of one's experience and telling the story of one's journey" (Hobson, 2001, p. 8), and as a "continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand" actions and reactions (Florez, 2001, ¶ 2). Reflection is not only an integral part of the teaching process, but it is essential in any qualitative investigation. Reflection will help the teacher as a reflective practitioner (Allwright, 2003), and also the researcher as an extractor and analyzer of meaning, connecting theory and practice (Nunan, 1997) and promoting the development of both improved practices (van Lier, 1994). This reflection will be a source of knowledge about the teacher-researcher's own inquiries, decisions, methodologies, backgrounds, perspectives, biases, strengths, and weaknesses, both as a teacher and as a researcher. This knowledge will also help future practitioners at the time of integrating children's literature into their own FL classes.

2. 6. SUMMARY OF THIS CHAPTER

A review of the literature pertaining to the use of children's literature with children and adults shows that children's literature adapts to different curricula, is somewhat adaptable to many types of learners with different goals, generally improves students' language skills, and promotes interest and motivation, among other benefits. However, the studies dealing with adult populations are limited in two ways. First, most of these studies are qualitative in nature. It would be advisable that more quantitative studies also investigate how children's literature affects students' outcomes, especially in

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the linguistic domain. The present study cannot fill this gap completely, because it is set in a class with a pre-established curriculum that requires other sources of input, thus, preventing any cause-effect conclusions regarding the use of children's literature. A second limitation –and a more important one for the present study— is that these studies mainly focused on one specific phase of the teaching process, namely, classroom implementation (i.e., class activities, students' responses). Previous studies do not provide an accurate description of other phases of the teaching process or the teacher's decision-making process, both important issues when assessing the integration of a tool into a FL curriculum. And a third limitation would be the scarcity of studies done in the college Spanish FL class.

An investigation that includes a more complete description of the entire process of integrating children's literature into the adult FL class could provide a better idea of how this integration is done from beginning to end, both from the teacher's and the students' perspectives. In addition, it could provide more information about the benefits of children's literature in the FL class.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, we read about the design and methods of this study, including the purpose of the study; the questions that guided the research; and information about the participants (including the teacher-researcher), setting, data collection, data analysis, validity, and reliability.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of children's literature in a fourth-semester college Spanish FL class. The investigation covers the teacher-researcher's perspective –my perspective— on this integration by examining the decisions made before, during and after implementation. The investigation also covers students' responses to the use of children's literature, since they are directly and indirectly related to my decisions and actions. To better reflect the experience of conducting a teacher-researcher study communicating the "inquirer's self-aware role in the inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 65), this study is written in the first person.

By investigating the integration process from beginning to end, it is my goal to offer a more complete picture of the challenges and benefits that children's literature can offer to college FL education not only from the implementation point of view, but also at all stages. It is not the intention of this study to conclude whether children's literature is better than canonical literature for adult FL education, nor measure students' linguistic growth. Those objectives are outside the scope of the present study.

3. 1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions that led this study, which were first introduced in Chapter 1, are listed next. The terms in italics will be further described in the next section.

1. What is the teacher-researcher's *decision-making process* when using children's literature in a college Spanish FL class?

    a. What is the process when selecting texts?

    b. What is the process when integrating these texts into the curriculum?

    c. What is the process when implementing these texts in the classroom?

2. How do students *respond* to the use of children's literature in the class?

    a. How do they respond in terms of language learning?

    b. How do they respond in terms of cultural learning?

    c. How do they respond affectively?

3. What did the teacher-researcher *learn* during this experience, both as a teacher and as a researcher?

A) Operationalization of Terms

In this section, I describe some of the terms that appear in these research questions, so that the reader may get a better understanding of how these issues will be reported in this study. For a more detailed description of the issues related to these terms, please refer to Chapter 2.

a) Decision-Making Process

Due to the influence that teachers' decisions exert on the outcomes of a course, the teacher's decision-making process must be examined to better understand not only the teaching process itself, but also the advantages and disadvantages of any tool introduced into the curriculum. *Decision* has been defined as a conscious act or choice that occurs at any phase of the teaching process when at least two alternatives are available (Shavelson,

1976). Clark and Peterson (1986) have refined this definition: a "deliberate choice to implement a specific action rather than a choice of actions from several possible alternatives" (p. 277). Using both Clark and Peterson's and Shavelson's definitions, in this study, *making a decision* refers to the deliberate act of reaching a conclusion on a specific issue, whether or not there were different choices involved. The *decision-making process* is the procedure of reaching a conclusion regarding the implementation of a specific action after the factors involved have been taken into consideration, the reasons behind the decision have been identified, and some of the consequences of that decision have been predicted. Sometimes, the consequences of a decision involve further decisions, and this stream of decisions will also be shown in this study to illustrate the constructive nature of the teaching process.

In this study, I focus on the teacher-researcher's decisions that are directly or indirectly related to the use of children's literature in this specific Spanish fourth semester course. The decisions are classified into the different areas addressed in the research questions, namely, 1) text selection, 2) text integration, and 3) text implementation.

Decisions on text selection address issues such as who selects the texts, what text-selection criteria are used, what type of texts are selected, for what purposes, how problems are addressed or solved, and others that may appear. *Decisions on text integration* address issues such as where and when in the curriculum these texts can be integrated, for what purposes, how often, how they fit with other curriculum components, how problems are addressed or solved, and others. And finally, *decisions on text implementation* address issues directly related to classroom instruction, such as last-minute modification of plans, type of activities for class, time constraints, use of technology, classroom setting, how problems are addressed or solved, and so on.

b) Students' Responses

The term *students' responses* in this study refers to both students' oral and written reactions as well as observed behaviors regarding the use of children's literature in this class. These reactions and behaviors are obtained from the data and are classified into: a) linguistic responses, b) cultural responses, and c) affective responses, in order to better describe the different aspects involved in these responses. If students' responses are also related to a specific teacher-researcher's decision, the connection will be pointed out and examined to better understand the relationship between decisions, actions, and outcomes, as Shavelson (1983) suggests.

The term *linguistic response* refers here to a student's oral or written reaction, comment or specific behavior that includes issues related to the linguistic domain (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, fluency, etc) as well as the cognitive domain (e.g., memorization, reading comprehension, literary analysis, etc). The purpose of the present study is not to measure students' linguistic gains (since students have other sources of input), but to examine the role of linguistics in this experience (e.g., how difficult students find the texts, whether students think they are learning Spanish, etc).

The term *cultural response* here refers to a student's oral or written reaction, comment or specific behavior that includes issues related to the cultural domain (e.g., traditions, politics, values, etc). The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of culture in this experience (e.g., whether students think they are learning culture, etc).

And finally, the term *affective response* refers to a student's oral or written reaction, comment or specific behavior that includes issues related to the affective domain (e.g., interest, motivation, engagement, etc). The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of affect in this experience (e.g., whether students find the texts interesting, whether they are motivated to read or to learn Spanish, etc).

c) Learn

In the last research question, '*learn*' refers to the knowledge acquired as a result of reflecting on the integration of children's literature in this course (what did I learn as a teacher) and also as a result of conducting this investigation (what did I learn as a researcher). According to Patton (2002), reflexivity comes as a "way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (p. 64). This reflection, an essential element in the teaching process, evaluates decisions, actions and outcomes and provides guidance to those teachers who are interested in integrating children's literature into the undergraduate FL class. In addition, this reflection reminds the inquirer to be "attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins" (Patton, 2002, p. 65) of her own perspective and voice. This process of reflection could represent a source of knowledge about the teacher-researcher's own inquiries, methods, biases, strengths, and weaknesses as a researcher.

3. 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A) Qualitative Case Study

Because of the exploratory nature of this investigation and the specific focus of this study, qualitative research methodology seems appropriate to address the research questions posted. In *qualitative* studies, phenomena are studied in their natural settings as the researcher interprets the events observed and the information reported (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) claim that "qualitative research plays a discovery role" (p. 29), which is the main approach of the present study. Merriam (2001) describes qualitative research as that which has an inside perspective, the researcher as

primary instrument for data collection, fieldwork, inductive strategies to arrive at conclusions, flexibility, and description. In addition, Shavelson (1983) believes that decision-making processes should be investigated using qualitative methodology:

> The assumptions of qualitative research are quite consistent with a major premise of research on teachers' decision making: in order to understand teaching, one must understand teachers' goals, judgments, and decisions, especially in relation to teacher behavior and classroom context. (p. 394)

One of the approaches or designs most commonly used to study teachers' mental processes as well as phenomena occurring in small settings with few participants is the case study (Shavelson, 1983). A *case study* is defined as an "in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 754). A case study involves systematic gathering of data "about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions" (Berg, 2001, p. 225). The present case study is *descriptive* in nature, according to Gall, Borg, and Gall's classification, since it offers a "thick, rich description" (Patton, 2002, p. 437) of the phenomenon under investigation, including recreations of actual situations and also interpretations of the meanings inherent in those situations.

B) The Teacher-Researcher

My role in this qualitative case study is that of a teacher-researcher, that is, a researcher who investigates her own class. This 'inside' understanding is key in understanding the purpose of qualitative inquiry. As suggested by the literature, teacher-researchers should disclose any information that might be relevant in the study, as well as

bias, assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses. Therefore, I feel it necessary to provide a little background on myself as a teacher and as a researcher. I am a female native Spanish speaker in my 30s, and I have been teaching Spanish at U.S. universities and colleges for about twelve years. My degrees, an English B.A. obtained in Spain and a Spanish M.A. obtained in the United States show that I have always been academically interested in literature and languages, hence my optimistic predisposition to integrate literature in the FL class. At this institution, I have taught the fourth semester Spanish course for 3 years and I am quite familiar with the curriculum components and the textbook. I have used children's literature informally with college students in a few occasions, and also during my pilot study (Garcia, 2004). Thus, I felt confident about my abilities to carry out the project.

As a teacher, I am interested in investigating the benefits of children's literature but I am also willing to accept the shortcomings that might arise during this investigation, as any good professional should. All findings are used to enhance academic knowledge and to improve teaching practices, materials and curricula, as well as to know myself better as a teacher and as a researcher. Although this intention to improve teaching practices, materials and curricula might classify this research as action research, I do not consider this study as such, because this is not "an attempt to address a social problem or to remedy a problem in the classroom" (Luke, 2004, p. 45), but an attempt to describe the integration of a component into a FL classroom and evaluate its benefits and limitations.

I am aware that my personal enthusiasm for literature as well as my previous experiences implementing children's literature with adult FL learners may influence the findings of the present study and the subsequent interpretations –as in any qualitative research study. A certain level of subjectivity is always intrinsically involved in qualitative studies and therefore expected. Qualitative research involves the study of

meanings and interpretations, and requires the researcher to "become personally involved with research participants, to the point of sharing perspectives and assuming a caring attitude" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 30), which will always be influenced by humanistic factors not involved in quantitative research. However, certain level of validity and reliability is also expected from a professional investigation. In order to enhance the validity and reliability of this study, I will take certain measures suggested by the literature (e.g., triangulation, members' check, etc) and will report biases, ethical dilemmas, personal beliefs, and other possible sources of data contamination, so that the readers understand the extent of this subjectivity and decide whether or not the interpretations are trustworthy.

3. 3. RESEARCH METHODS

A) Original Setting

This investigation takes place at a U.S. southwestern public university located in a medium-size city of less than a million inhabitants, a third of which are Spanish speaking[4]. This university offers several FL courses for those students who need to fulfill their FL requirements. According to this university 2003-2004 statistics, the undergraduate student body –excluding foreigners (3.5%)— is predominantly white (60.6%) with two major minorities, Asian American (17.0%) and Hispanic (14.3%).

The present study is conducted in a fourth-semester Spanish-as-a-foreign-language class during the fall semester of 2005 (August 2005 – December 2005). During

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[4] Data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2003 American Community Survey. This survey excludes population living in institutions, college dormitories, and other group quarters. http://www.census.gov/

this 15-week semester, this Spanish class meets three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) for one hour each day. I was the sole instructor of this class.

The Spanish department of this institution has already selected the textbook and developed the curriculum of the fourth semester Spanish class. The basic pillars of this curriculum, that is, the rules, content, and evaluative methods remained in place in order not to disturb the consistency that the Spanish department desires across sections. Verbal permission was obtained from the lower-division coordinator and the Institutional Review Board (IRB#: 2003-05-0030) of this university to carry out this study.

The syllabus of this course is notional-functional in nature and therefore different chapters focus on different functions of language, namely, (D) describing, (C) comparing, (R/R) recommending / reacting, (G) expressing likes and dislikes, (P), narrating in the past, (F) narrating in the future, and (H) hypothesizing. These functions are called the 7 Puntos Clave in the textbook for this course –Foerster, Lambright, and Alfonso-Pinto's (2003) *Punto y Aparte*. This textbook and this syllabus aim at promoting communication and therefore grammar is located at the back of the book, as a separate consultation section.

Punto y Aparte is organized thematically into chapters that cover universal topics, such as relationships, family, world problems, and so on, contextualized within the story about the lives of five college-aged friends who live and work in the United States. Although the textbook has several chapters, the Spanish department has established that only the first five chapters need to be covered in the fourth semester course. Each chapter starts with a dialogue that introduces part of the vocabulary for the chapter, followed by a bilingual list of vocabulary. Communicative-oriented activities that apply vocabulary and grammar follow afterwards. There are no explicit grammatical expalantions. Even though all functions are used in the activities of every chapter, each chapter focuses on one or

two specific functions at a time. The textbook also includes small capsules of cultural information as well as a couple of written texts per chapter –most of which are not literary. These texts cover different information, such as lives of famous artists, music, food, traditions, tourism, etc –what the literature identifies as 'small c culture.'

B) Modified Setting

In order to be able to integrate children's literature into the pre-established curriculum, other components had to be eliminated. The vocabulary and functions could not be eliminated because they were the central tenets of instruction and were present in all forms of assessment, which had to be standardized across sections. However, the readings were found to be dispensable, because they were not included in assessment methods and most teachers only used them when time allowed. Therefore, the textbook readings were replaced by children's literature. When addressing the first research question, more information will be provided regarding the selection of the texts that replaced these textbook readings, how they were integrated into the curriculum and how they were implemented in the course.

C) Participants

Each section of the fourth semester Spanish class at this institution has a maximum enrollment of 24 students. Generally, students are between the ages of 20 and 25, with a fairly equal number of males and females. Students must have passed the previous course with a grade of C or better (or an equivalent in a placement test) and most of them, if not all of them, are usually taking the course to fulfill a FL requirement. The fourth semester class was purposefully sampled because students at this level of

proficiency are supposed to have the linguistic and cultural knowledge necessary to appreciate and understand literary texts and because the content of this course included readings in a greater proportion than in other courses. The teacher of this course, myself, was also purposefully sampled for being an 'information-rich case' (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002) due to previous experiences with children's literature and with this level of instruction. Students in this class registered without knowing that children's literature would be implemented, so that a more realistic range in student responses could be obtained. Information about the study and the option to participate voluntarily was provided on the first week of class, emphasizing the fact that non-participation would not affect course grades or the relationship between teacher and student. Twenty-three students enrolled in the class and one dropped after a couple of weeks, as is typical. All of the twenty-two remaining students decided to participate in the study (N=22), and signed a consent form that described the study and their rights in detail.

Due to the nature of the research questions, this study had two different sets of participants. The first set included myself, the teacher-researcher, who was the focus of investigation to address the first and the third research questions. The second set of participants was the students. This set of participants was subdivided into two units: students as a class, and five independent case studies (n=5). I deemed it appropriate to describe students' responses as a bounded system, the class, to provide a general picture of the integration process and to help the reader generalize findings to similar contexts. In addition, I also considered it important to highlight a few individual students for a more in-depth description of the integration process.

The sampling of these individual students followed the strategy of maximum variation, defined by Merriam (2001) as "those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study" (p. 63). This strategy involves the selection

of information-rich cases whose characteristics show great differences in several dimensions (or criteria) and then the description of central themes that cut across these individuals (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998). For the selection of these individuals, a matrix was created with a profile of the twenty two participants based on the information obtained from the initial interview (see Appendix A) and a second matrix was created for the selected participants as additional data were available from classroom observations and initial grades (see Appendix B). The criteria that stood out as the most helpful in the selection of these five participants were: initial grades (from quizzes, homework, and short essays), motivation to learn Spanish and observed or reported interest in Spanish in general (from initial interview and classroom observations).

Eventually, I selected two A-students, one with high interest and motivation (Marcos) and another with little interest and poor motivation (Brian); one B-student with medium motivation and interest (Felicia); and two C-students, one with questionable motivation and interest (Karl) and another with some interest but very poor motivation (John).

Throughout the study I use some terms to refer to these students (and also to the rest of the class) that need some explanation. For example, the term *high-proficiency student* refers to student who in the initial interview (in the Spanish part) used a wide range of vocabulary terms (appropriate for a fourth-semester student at this university), mastered the basic structures and tenses (including imperfect and preterit) and had certain command of more complex structures (such as the subjunctive) and tenses that are used for abstract thinking (such as conditional and future). This student's understanding was very good and did not need repetition or rephrasing. These findings were confirmed during class instruction. The term *medium-proficiency student* refers to a student who showed an acceptable range of vocabulary and appropriate knowledge of basic grammar

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(including the preterit and the imperfect), but did not master higher structures or advanced tenses at all. This student's understanding was acceptable but needed some help during the interview and direct questions in class. The term *low-proficiency student* refers to a student who, during the interview and also in class, had basic to poor vocabulary, had problems with the past tense and sometimes even with the present tense, used simple sentences, and needed constant repetition and rephrasing.

Criteria that were not found relevant for the study or helpful in the selection for maximum variation were dismissed but kept for records (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, major). In previous research studies, it was also found that these criteria were not relevant regarding students' responses to children's literature (see Sullivan, 1994). A short description of the five participants follows. Please note that throughout the study, all names are pseudonyms.

a) Marcos

Marcos was a non-Hispanic, white male with a double major in History and Government. He had taken three years of Spanish in high school, three semesters in college, and recently spent three weeks in Mexico in a study abroad program. He claimed to have always earned As in his Spanish classes. His Spanish proficiency level was very good (including past tense, conditional and subjunctive). His fluency was also good (see second page of Appendix B for a definition of 'very good', 'good', etc). I considered him a high-proficiency student. He smiled a lot, seemed very enthusiastic, interested in Spanish and motivated to learn more. He said he would love to live in Spain, because he did not agree with the politics of the United States. He was planning to take upper-division courses and maybe get a minor in Spanish. He was very excited about using

children's literature in order to learn vocabulary and grammar. He believed these texts were at his current level of proficiency.

b) Brian

Brian was a non-Hispanic, white male with a major in American Studies. He took Spanish in middle and high school, as well as three semesters in college. He received an A in his last class. His Spanish proficiency level was very good, but he did not master consistently advanced tasks that required conditional, subjunctive and future. I considered him a high-proficiency / medium-proficiency student. He admitted that he hated Spanish classes for several reasons, such as because "students are treated like children", the syllabus was "crammed," certain activities were useless (such as lab exercises) and his proficiency would never be good enough to actually interact with a native speaker. He came across as an intelligent person, but also as a skeptical faultfinder. He admitted that he just wanted to do well enough to pass the class and graduate that semester. He believed children's literature was a good way to start in terms of language acquisition and interest (since textbook readings were so boring), but he mentioned that he would like to read more complex literature as the semester advanced.

c) Felicia

Felicia was a half Latino female (Mexican-American mother and non-Hispanic father). She did not grow up speaking Spanish at home. Her major was sociology. She took two years of Spanish in high school and two semesters in college. She received a B in her previous class. Whereas her understanding was good, her advanced forms were not always correct. Her fluency was medium and paused often looking for the right

conjugation of verbs. I considered her a medium-proficiency student. She said she would like to make Spanish her minor, so that she would be able to talk to that part of her family someday. She also wanted to study abroad in Spain. She believed she could children's literature and also young adult literature, but admitted that canonical literature was too hard. She liked the idea of using children's literature because it was more interesting than textbook readings and would help her learn vocabulary and grammar.

d) Karl

Karl was an Asian-American male with a major in Economics. He never took Spanish in school or high school, but he took one class at a community college prior to coming to this university. He received a B. His Spanish proficiency level was very poor, showing little understanding (requiring a lot of rephrasing and repetition), poor grammatical and lexical knowledge, and slow fluency. I classified him as a low-proficiency student. He claimed that he had already read children's literature in his previous course, so he thought he was ready for more complex literature. He appeared to be unaware of his great linguistic limitations and had an unrealistic perception of his skills. He believed reading children's literature was not going to help him much, except maybe for "sentence construction," because his main goal in this class was to improve speaking and listening skills.

e) John

John was a non-Hispanic, white male with a major in Mathematics. He took Spanish in middle school, two years in high school and a couple of semesters in college. He received a B in his previous course. His Spanish proficiency level was good, showing

good understanding and fluency, but he was unable to perform at higher levels (mainly conditional and subjunctive). His high confidence and risk-taking behavior, when communicating in Spanish, were quite evident. I classified him as a medium-proficiency student. He claimed that he never liked Spanish by the book, but he enjoyed classes that were more relaxed, fun, and interesting. He admitted openly that he was not the best student because of his dislike for homework, attendance or other rules, but he also mentioned that he always enjoyed participating in class. He used his Spanish with some co-workers and saw its usefulness. He just wanted to graduate that semester. He liked the idea of using children's literature, although he believed he could probably read at a higher level, such as young adult literature.

D) Data Collection

The main methods used to collect data for this research study comprised Documents, Observations and Interviews, which are common elements in qualitative research.

Documents included a teacher-researcher's journal (excerpts of this journal are abbreviated as TL), midterm evaluations (Eva), final course evaluations or course-instructor surveys (CIS), midterm evaluation of children's literature (MECL), course-related documents (e.g., syllabus, etc), and students' written and oral samples (e.g., exams, homework, etc).

Observations included anecdotal records of class observations (CO), video-recorded class sessions, stimulated recall notes from these video-recorded sessions (SR), and one observation from an outside observer.

I also conducted two semi-structured interviews, one at the beginning (Interview1) and one after the semester was over (Interview2). Both interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed for analysis.

The most useful data to address the first research question included the teacher's log, classroom observations and some class-related documents (e.g., the syllabus, lesson plans, etc); for the second question, students' interviews and evaluations, classroom observations, and students' assignments; and for the third research question, mainly the teacher's log and classroom observations.

Data collection methods will be fully described in the next section. All information related to this study was securely kept in a locked cabinet at my home. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured to participants by giving them pseudonyms and by not releasing any information that may reveal their identities.

a) Documents

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) define *documents* as oral or written communications that are prepared for personal reasons, such as letters and diaries. They distinguish documents from records in that *records* are oral or written communications that are prepared for official reasons, such as contracts, syllabi, reports, radio broadcasts, and newspaper articles. On the other hand, Merriam (2001) defines *documents* as an umbrella term to refer "to a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (p. 112). In this study, I used Merriam's (2001) more general definition. The documents collected in this study included: (a) the teacher-researcher's journal, (b) anonymous midterm and final course evaluations, (c) midterm evaluation of children's

literature, (d) course-related documents, and (e) students' assignments and assessments. In the next section, I will describe each.

The teacher-researcher's journal (TL) was a researcher-generated document, that is, a document prepared by the researcher with the purpose of learning more "about the situation, person, or event being investigated" (Merriam, 2001, p. 119). The data from this journal was essential to address the first and the third research questions. The journal was a collection of daily, or almost daily, annotated comments regarding the teacher-researcher's decisions and actions on text selection, integration, and implementation, the factors influencing decisions, the reasons behind those decisions, and some observable consequences. This journal was reflective in nature. In total, it contained an average of 37 one- or two-page entries.

Two months after classes started, an anonymous midterm course evaluation (Eva) was distributed among students for them to evaluate the course in general. This course evaluation was very open-ended in nature, asking students to write three things that they liked so far in this class and three things that they did not like and would like me to change. All 22 students provided feedback.

The anonymous final course evaluation (also called course instructor survey) (CIS), a public record required by the university, was distributed to the students during the last week of class. This evaluation contained specific questions about the teacher and the course, as well as an open-ended section at the bottom where students could write anything they wanted to add. A total of 16 final course evaluations were collected. Since this was handed out during the last week of classes on a day in which we were just reviewing the aural part of the final exam, many students missed class and did not provide feedback.

The midterm evaluation of children's literature (MECL) (see Appendix C) was created with the purpose of evaluating the integration process in the middle of the semester as well as of providing information that would help select individual case studies. Because of this last reason, it was not anonymous. However, students were repeatedly reminded that their contrary views towards children's literature would not affect their grade or my opinion of them. All 22 students provided feedback.

Some course-related documents were also collected, such as the syllabus, lesson plans, exercises created for the class and so on. The syllabus (see Appendix D) helped visualize the incorporation of children's literature into the pre-established curriculum. The lesson plans helped track the day-by-day integration process and also helped establish how much I actually diverted from this plan when implementing the texts.

Participants' assignments that involved children's literature and assessments (quizzes, tests) were photocopied and collected in order to record not only their grades (which were a variable in the selection of case studies) but also their development.

b) Observations

In qualitative research, "the focus of observation generally is much wider" than in quantitative research (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 343), providing a holistic perspective of the observed phenomenon. In this study, the focus of my observations was my students' responses to the use of children's literature in the class, being these responses linguistic, cultural, and affective in nature. Special attention was paid to the responses of those selected individual case studies. Another focus of my observations was interactive decisions, that is, unplanned decisions made at the very moment of instruction. Because

of their spontaneous nature, they could only be recorded during observations, not in the teacher-researcher's journal.

Since I was both the teacher and the researcher in this study, I could not be a complete observer, and therefore, the term 'observation' as a data collection method was used in this study in reference to two main observational methods combined: (a) anecdotal records and (b) video recordings.

Anecdotal records (CO for class observations) are brief and focused written notes pertaining to an observable phenomenon. In this study, anecdotal records were compiled during class and expanded shortly after, as recommended by Merriam (2001) in order to remember events more accurately and reduce contamination (Burnaford, 2001; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Merriam, 2001). The learner-centered nature of the fourth semester Spanish class somewhat helped in freeing my time to write up these anecdotal records occasionally. The total number of observation notes added to an average of 21 two- or three-page entries. These entries recorded not only my observations, but also my feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations and working hypotheses, as suggested by the literature.

Another observational data collection method was videotaping those class sessions related to children's literature. A total of 14 sessions were video-recorded (35% of all class sessions). The camera, running automatically and set on a tripod was sometimes set at the back of the classroom and sometimes at the front, depending on who was the focus of attention on a given day. Students were informed about the presence and the purpose of the camera. Because this presence had been an issue in previous studies (see Garcia, 2004), anonymity, confidentiality and professionalism were assured several times throughout the study in order to minimize students' doubts or fears.

The main purpose of videotaping classroom events was having a second observational method on site, since the role of teacher-researcher impeded obtaining detailed observations. Videotaping also provided the possibility of extracting verbatim evidence. These videotaped sessions were later watched, and, via an introspective technique called 'stimulated recall', 14 written interpretations of classroom events (SR) were produced for further analysis. *Stimulated recall* is defined as a "means of eliciting data about thought processes involved in carrying out a task or activity" (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 1). One of its pedagogical advantages is that the teacher sees himself or herself from the students' perspective, as an outside observer, and, thus, might be able to improve his or her teaching skills. This technique allows the researcher to act as a complete observer and maybe obtain different data than the one obtained from field notes. Since stimulated recall is retrospective in nature, meaning, "verbalization is given after the completion of the task-redirected processes...[involving] retrieval of information from long-term memory" (Matsumoto, 1993, p. 33), the literature suggests that little time pass between the videotaped session and the watching. For that reason, these sessions were watched between two and 4 weeks after they were taped.

In addition to field notes and videotaping, a professor was invited to the class in one occasion to act as an outside observer. His comments and suggestions were also included in this study.

c) Interviews

According to Merriam (2001), "interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies in education" (p. 70). Seidman (1998) recommends three interviews: focus life history, details of experience, and reflection. In

this study, only two interviews were deemed necessary because of the presence of similar data collection methods, such as the midterm and the final course evaluations. The initial interview was done during the first weeks of classes and the final interview was conducted after the semester was over and final grades were submitted. These two interviews were carried out in English on an individual basis at the teacher's office.

The initial interview (Interview 1) (see Appendix A) provided the opportunity to meet with each participant and establish a rapport. I sought information related to their past experiences, as well as their attitudes and motivations towards Spanish and towards the use of children's literature. I also had the chance to clarify the purpose and methods of the research study. Even though Seidman (1998) recommends not interviewing your own students, I think this one-to-one interview provided a closer relationship between teacher and student and eventually benefited class dynamics. The initial interview was semi-structured in nature, which involved "asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply using open-form questions to obtain additional information" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 310). In Burnaford's (2001) terms, these questions were "improvisational, yet focused" (p. 62). In the construction of the interview questions, I took into consideration suggestions made by Seidman (1998) and by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), such as avoiding jargon, asking pertinent information, being sensitive to nonverbal information, predicting possible technical difficulties, staying focused, and so on. All students were interviewed but only 15 interviews survived (see Limitations on Chapter 7 for an explanation). Each interview lasted between 10 and 15 minutes approximately and was audio-recorded for further analysis. Transcriptions of these interviews took place between one and two weeks after they were recorded.

The purpose of the final interview (Interview 2) (see Appendix E) was obtaining students' holistic feedback when looking at the experience in retrospective. This semi-

structured interview took place at the beginning of the following semester (Spring 2006). An advantage of conducting the interview then was that students could provide more truthful answers, since there was no fear of repercussions. On the other hand, a major disadvantage was attrition, since many students had graduated and left campus. Indeed, only four students (all A-students) agreed to do this final interview (see Limitations in Chapter 7). Each interview lasted about 10 minutes, was audio-recorded and fully transcribed.

E) Data Analysis

For the analysis of the data, *content analysis* was chosen, since this method "involves identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in the data… to determine what's significant" (Patton, 2002, p. 463). The meanings found through content analysis are called themes or patterns (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002) and they usually reveal key issues of the phenomenon under investigation. Content analysis is also used for the exploration of "mental models, and their linguistic, affective, cognitive, social, cultural and historical significance" (Busch, De Maret, Flynn, et al., 2005, p. brief history), which fits well with the exploration of the teacher-researcher's decision-making process. This type of analysis requires an immersion in the details of the data to discover these patterns, themes and interrelationships inductively, what others call 'grounded theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In other words, findings must emerge from the data directly.

Although preliminary data analysis started with the collection of data, full data analysis did not really start until the end of the semester, because of my demanding dual role as a teacher and as a researcher.

The procedure that I followed for data analysis started with the identification of the documents that would provide useful data and the removal of those that would not (procedure known as reduction of data). I re-read all the data and started to write memos with ideas, patterns, and tentative findings. Some tentative categories emerged and were revised several times throughout their development –what is known as constant comparison. A *category* is a "construct that is used to classify a certain type of phenomenon in the database" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 754). For example, some of the categories that I used for the second research question - part A (students' linguistic responses) included 'presence of Spanish in the classroom', 'comments on linguistic difficulty', and 'competence/performance'. A total of 39 categories were created. Once categories relevant to the research purpose were defined –they needed to be independent, exhaustive, and mutually exclusive—, all data were coded in the same way. *Coding* is "nothing more than assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (Merriam, 2001, p. 164). As suggested by Patton (2002), shorthand-type codes were written directly on the relevant data passages (on the margins) and were redefined occasionally to fit the data. In the present study, coding was found to be an exhausting task, since I decided to do it by hand and not with the use of software. All data (TL, CO, Eva, CIS, interviews, etc) were coded in the same way using the same categories. With the help of a colleague, inter-rater reliability of the category-coding procedure was established at 93% (Kappa at 81%) based on a sample of the data collected (see Dependability in the next section).

F) Validity and Reliability

To enhance the validity and reliability of this study (also called *trustworthiness* by Lincoln & Guba, 1985), several measures where taken. Lincoln and Guba prefer the term *trustworthiness* to set naturalistic inquiry apart from positivist inquiry. For them, trustworthiness refers to credibility, transferability, dependability, and comfirmability (which in positivist inquiry equal internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity).

Credibility is preferred to 'internal validity' under the assumption that findings cannot reflect reality because there are multiple realities in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that credibility of a qualitative study can be enhanced by triangulation and members checks, for example. Triangulation refers to the "process of using multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to check the validity of case study findings" (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996, p. 574). In this study, data was obtained from multiple sources to help corroborate findings. Regarding member checks, Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) define it as the process of having the participants "review statements made in the researcher's report for accuracy and completeness" (p. 575). In this research study, member checking took place during the final interview, where the researcher confirmed with the participants certain observed behaviors and opinions provided in previous interviews or evaluations. For example, in the final interview, students were asked "In your first interview, you mentioned that when you first heard we would be using children's literature in this class, you felt…….. What do you think now?" as a way to corroborate data already collected.

Transferability refers to the ability to generalize results across settings. Since qualitative research depends too much on local conditions, generalizability is reduced. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability can be enhanced by providing

enough information in the study so that the reader can decide whether transfer of findings can be made to similar contexts. In this study, long-term observation (one entire 15-week semester) of the phenomenon and a rich description (audit trail) were provided to help readers do so.

Dependability refers to how reliable the data and the methods to analyze the data are. In this study, inter-rater reliability was calculated to show the reliability of the coding method. The agreement between two raters in a set of 50 randomly selected units of analysis (which happened to belong to 12 different categories) showed to be significant by two different analyses: Intraclass Correlation yielded a value of 0.93 (93%) and Cohen's Kappa yielded a value of 0.81 (81%) ($p<0.05$). Intra-rater reliability was also run, providing a high and significant value of 95%. Also, content analysis –a system that has proved valid and reliable in previous studies— was used in this study in a manner suggested by the literature.

Confirmability refers to the influence of subjectivity on the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest reporting bias, assumptions, weaknesses, limitations and examples of data collection and data analysis so that the reader can decide whether subjectivity affected findings too much to the point that interpretations cannot be confirmed with the data obtained in the study. According to Maxwell (1996), the researcher's "theories, preconceptions, or values" (p. 91) cannot be eliminated, but they must be reported in order to understand how they influence interpretations and conclusions. Reactivity, or the influence of the researcher onto the setting and participants, is also impossible to eliminate. Thus, this influence must be understood and used productively (Maxwell, 1996), mainly in cases in which the teacher and the researcher are the same person. In this study, direct evidence from students' evaluations and tape-recorded sessions was

provided to enhance confirmability. Also, bias and other negative influences (such as discrepant data) were reported consistently (see the case of Marcos).

3. 4. SUMMARY OF THIS CHAPTER

In this chapter, I described this study –a teacher-researcher qualitative case study that was descriptive in nature. The original setting of the class and syllabus were described as well as the changes that I applied to accommodate children's literature. Participants include myself –the teacher-researcher— and my 22 fourth-semester Spanish FL college students, five of which were selected for in-depth case studies. The criteria to select these individuals mainly included grades, motivation and interest in Spanish. Two A-, one B- and two C- students (4 male and 1 female) were selected.

Data collection included documents (teacher-researcher journal, midterm evaluation, final course evaluation, midterm evaluation of children's literature, course-related documents and students' assignments), observations (anecdotal records, video-recorded sessions, stimulated recall notes, and one outside observation) and interviews (initial and final).

Data analysis was performed via content analysis with assignation of categories and hand coding of the data. The measures taken to enhance validity and reliability in this study were also detailed.

In the next chapters, I address each of the three research questions, one per chapter. In Chapter 7, I discuss the conclusions and implications of all findings as well as report the limitations of this study.

Chapter 4: Text Selection, Integration and Implementation

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings related to the first research question:

What is the teacher-researcher's decision-making process when using children's literature in a college Spanish FL class?

a. What is the process when selecting texts?

b. What is the process when integrating these texts into the curriculum?

c. What is the process when implementing these texts in the classroom?

To address this question, the chapter is divided into three sections: 1) decisions on text selection, 2) decisions on text integration and 3) decisions on text implementation. In each section, I write about certain issues that arose from the data, a discussion of these issues, and a summary for that particular section. Conclusions for the entire chapter are found at the end of the chapter.

Before I start with the first set of decisions, I must confess that watching myself (the teacher) through my own eyes (the researcher) was hard sometimes, because it forced me not only to examine the rationale behind all my decisions and actions and support them with data, but also because I was finding flaws that no teacher wants to admit he or she has. However, by being as honest as possible and reporting everything that needed to be reported (including discrepancies and unexplained phenomena), I think I was able to describe well the processes involved in the selection, integration and implementation of children's literature in this course, as well as those lessons learned as a teacher and as a researcher (these last two issues are included in Chapter 6).

4. 1. DECISIONS ON TEXT SELECTION

Examining the data, I noticed that I justified my text-selection decisions (e.g., criteria, etc) with pedagogical beliefs[5], past experiences, course goals, and suggestions from the literature. During the investigation, availability of texts stood out as a challenging issue. Next, I discuss the most important issues: pedagogical beliefs and past experiences, criteria, and availability.

A) Pedagogical Beliefs and Past Experiences

My pedagogical beliefs about how and for what purposes these children's literary texts should be used in this course, as well as my previous experiences with different types of children's texts, greatly determined text-selection decisions.

Years ago, I introduced children's literature in my Spanish classes occasionally and informally to see how it worked for specific purposes. During those years, I focused on selecting texts that would be familiar to students, based on the hypothesis that a person is more willing to read a text than he or she recognizes. In Middlebury College Language School, for example, FL students are reading *Harry Potter* in Arabic based on the same premise (Leubsdorf, 2006), and previous studies have also found that students preferred familiar texts (Sullivan, 1994). In terms of linguistic and affective goals, fairy tales worked somewhat successfully in my previous classes. However, the lack of explicit Hispanic cultural presence was found to be a disadvantage, since it was necessary to use additional cultural texts to meet cultural course requirements. This situation also created unnecessary time constraints. Due to these previous experiences, I was determined to

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[5] Richards (1998b) defines 'belief' as "the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them to the classroom" (p. 66). He actually makes a distinction between beliefs based on subject matter knowledge and beliefs based on the teacher's implicit theories of teaching. Such fine distinction is not made in the present study, in which the term 'pedagogical belief' would include both of Richards' concepts.

select texts that contained explicit Hispanic culture for this course, even though that decision implied leaving behind familiar texts, imposing more obstacles in the selection process, and having fewer options to select.

A few months before the class started, I began an investigation on the quality and quantity of available children's texts with explicit Hispanic cultural presence. Online research and several visits to local bookstores and libraries showed that the publication of such texts was extensive in number and varied in content, format, level of difficulty, and genre. These texts were visually appealing, recently published, and affordable:

> Yesterday I went to the [Latin American] library to see whether their Spanish Youth Collection is large enough for my students to use it as a resource –together with the [main] library collection. (TL.5.26.05, p. 1)

The text-selection process was basically created by answering many different basic questions, such as, *Who* would select the books?, *what* type of books do we need in this class?, *for what purposes* will the books would be used?, *where* could students get them?, and *how many* books are necessary?, for example. Also, there was a weighing of advantages and disadvantages of the options given before making a decision on a specific issue. Alternatives and solutions to upcoming challenges were also part of this text-selection process.

One of the very first questions that I asked myself before starting the project was "*for what purposes* am I going to use children's literature in this class?" The answer was clear to me: to teach the Spanish language and the Hispanic culture within the contexts of these stories (thus, the use of cultural texts).

Another question that needed to be answered right away was "*who* would select the texts?" Influenced by the literature in favor of self-selection (student selection), I strongly considered letting students decide which texts to use in the class:

> I still think that students should have the power of choosing their own books, because this way they are exposed to a great variety of books, and because there can be a better text/reader match in terms of interests. (TL.5.26.05 p. 2)

However, a very important challenge appeared immediately:

> Unfortunately, if all reading materials are student-selected, I will not be able to create exercises or assignments based on one specific point or passage of a book, because every student will be reading a different book. (TL.5.26.05, p. 2)

This need to match materials and implementation procedures became a very important factor in text selection and drove me to conclude that I would have to be the one selecting the texts. On the other hand, I was convinced that self-selection would probably boost students' interest and motivation, which, in turn, could enhance their language and cultural learning. The dilemma was then resolved with a split decision: both teacher and students would select texts, which would be used for different purposes. Therefore, I selected the texts to be used for in-class work, so that we could achieve course goals, and students selected other texts that were used to fulfill more individual assignments.

> The books that students will select for their own reading will be 4 […] These books will be the base of assignments that are already established for this course (Escritos Breves, compositions, cultural presentations, and the oral assessment), thus, having a motivation / purpose for reading –even if it is instrumental. (TL.5.26.05, p.2)

The next questions were "*how many* texts do we need?" and "*what type* of texts?" For student-selected materials, I already knew that we needed 4 individual texts, but for

the texts to be used in class, I was not sure whether it was better to have four individual texts or to have a collection of texts in one packet (such an anthology). The anthology option seemed to be more appealing not only for economic reasons, but also because it would be easier for students to obtain one book than four. My previous visits to local bookstores had given me some ideas in terms of available texts, so that I could make an informed decision about which text would match better the goals of the course and students' characteristics. However, when I sat down to select the texts, I realized that more specific criteria were necessary in order to be able to narrow the available options.

B) Text-Selection Criteria

Thanks to the literature, many criteria were set a priori. These criteria, however, had to be refined several times during the text-selection process and again after students used the texts to fulfill certain assignments.

a) Criteria for the in-class text

For the texts to be used in class, I decided to use illustrated children's books with explicit Hispanic cultural presence, interesting, "not expensive, available in bookstores" and with "a few stories to offer variety" (TL.5.26.05, p. 2). These were the basic criteria. An in-depth physical comparison of different texts brought up certain issues that helped develop more criteria, such as:

1. Complexity of language: some books had short independent clauses in the present tense with concrete, basic vocabulary that my students already knew well. I needed a wider range of grammar, main and dependent clauses, and slightly more sophisticated vocabulary (without being too abstract or literary).

2. Complexity of ideas conveyed: some books were too simplistic, just retelling what was obvious from the illustration, or stating concepts that did not require critical thinking or that did not evoke imagery. I needed ideas explained at a cognitive level that would match a young adult audience with certain vocabulary limitations.

3. Amount of language per story: some books only had one to four lines per page and illustrations were occupying most of the space. Although I chose a few of these because of their important cultural content (e.g., Winter's *Frida*), I mainly selected texts that had more than six lines per page. I wanted the stories to be long enough to create a context with which we could work, but short enough to retain students' attention and to be implemented easily in class.

4. Monolingual / bilingual format: some books were written in Spanish only and some were bilingual English – Spanish (side by side, usually). Thinking about the possibilities that each format could offer to my Spanish students, I decided that texts written in Spanish only (preferably in the original version and written by a Hispanic or Latino author) would be a better choice, especially to develop the skill of learning vocabulary by context.

The publishers of some of the texts that I selected had written on the cover the targeted audience, which mainly ranged from ages four to eight[6]. These texts had certain factors in common, such as approximate amount of print, complexity of ideas, complexity of language, etc. Texts that did not meet these characteristics were either discarded or offered to students as a 'personal choice book' (explained later in this chapter).

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[6] According to Barbara Johnson, Marketing & Sales Manager of Lectorum Publications (Scholastic, Inc), text audience is determined by readability formulas (e.g., Lexile, Guided Reading, etc) and/or age-appropriateness (e.g. content = reader's interest).

Of all the books that I browsed in search of the in-class texts, only one seemed to meet all of the desired criteria, *De Oro y Esmeraldas* (Delacre, 1996), a $6.99 collection of myths, legends and folktales written and illustrated by Lulu Delacre, a Puerto Rican author. I examined the complexity of language in the stories, how interesting the plots were, the illustrations, the culture portrayed, and even read the author's notes located at the back of the book. One of the aspects that caught my attention in particular was the author's perspective regarding culture:

> I delight in creating books that portray my own culture with authenticity in both words and pictures. And if painting the people and the places of Latin America true to their own beauty, fosters respect; or if sharing some of their golden tales builds bridges among children, I want to keep on doing it. Because for me, that is the true measure of success. *¡Viva nuestra herencia!*
> (http://www.luludelacre.com/bio.htm)

The language of these stories was slightly more difficult than I wanted, but the fact that this book contained so many other desired criteria made me overlooked this problem. At the time of implementation, I noticed how problematic this vocabulary actually was for many students, especially for low-proficiency students. This will be discussed in Chapter 5. As an example, I reproduced here the beginning of *Guanina*, our first story:

> Los reflejos vespertinos dorados y carmesíes del sol del Caribe centelleaban sobre la oscura piel de Guanina. Mas ni los juegos de luces sobre su rostro, podían ocultar el temor en sus ojos. Había escondido las nuevas demasiado tiempo, desgarrada como estaba entre la lealtad a su gente y el profundo amor que sentía por don Cristóbal de Sotomayor, el conquistador español. (p. 7)[7]

> [The evening golds and reds of the Caribbean sun glittered against Guanina's dark skin. But even the light's beautiful reflections that fell across her face could not hide the fear in her eyes. She had hidden the news for too long now, as she was

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[7] Text reproduced by permission of the publisher, Scholastic Inc.

torn between loyalty to her people and the deep love she felt for Don Cristóbal de Sotomayor, the Spanish *conquistador.*][8] (p. 7)

De Oro y Esmeraldas (*Golden Tales: Myths, Legends and Folktales from Latin America*, in the English version) contained different myths, legends and folktales that were subdivided by the regions from where they were taken: the Caribbean, Mexico northern South America and western South America. Coincidentally, these regions matched "almost perfectly the chapters in the textbook" (TL.5.29.05. p. 3). This finding was very welcomed, because I believed that this parallelism would facilitate integration and implementation. Of the twelve stories in the book, I chose three legends and one myth because of their applicability to real-life issues (e.g., in history, social studies, etc):

> Of the five myths and legends offered in the first section (Caribbean), I selected [Guanina] because it deals with an interesting topic –the conquest and the relationship between conquerors and indigenous people. This is a theme with which US students can related because of their history. Also, the other stories were not as appealing […and] I cannot relate [them] to anything concrete from real life. (TL.9.15.05, p. 1)

From the Caribbean region, the legend of *Guanina* was selected. This is a story about a Taino girl who fell in love with a Spanish conquistador despite the opposition of her tribe. This legend had potential to be linked to historical events (e.g., the settlement of Spaniards in America), socio-cultural issues (e.g., native/non-native relationships, male/female roles) and even other literary texts (e.g., *Pocahontas*, *Romeo and Juliet*). I noticed right away that this story was very long and its language was highly literary. I suspected from the beginning that this would be a problem, and, indeed, students

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[8] This translation comes from the English version of this book, *Golden Tales*. However, the complexity of vocabulary and syntax in the Spanish version is very superior to that on the English version, as seen in uncommon words such as 'vespertinos', 'carmesíes, 'rostro', 'ocultar', and 'nuevas', the structure 'mas ni' or the fact that 'oscura' comes before 'piel' rather than after.

complained a lot about these two aspects. This issue will be further discussed in Chapter 5, in the section on students' responses. Illustration 1 shows the two main characters.
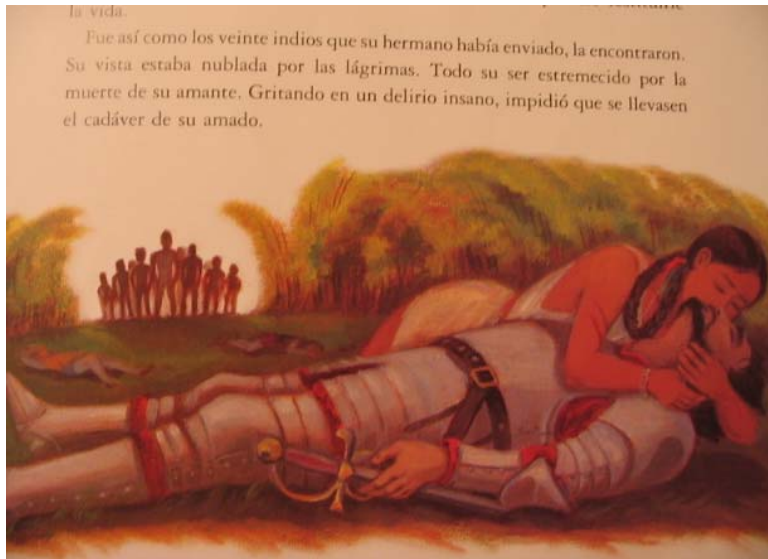

Illustration 1: Guanina and don Cristóbal (Delacre, 1996, p. 11)[9]

The second story selected from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* was *El Milagro de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe,* a Mexican legend about the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to a young native. Even though this story had a strong religious content, I considered that the great importance of this icon of Mexican culture was more significant than any issues of religion. I knew I had to approach the subject carefully, mainly for those students who were not Christian. This story could be linked to discussions about historical events (e.g., the arrival of Spaniards to America), religious issues (e.g., the transformation of a 'pagan' religion into Catholicism), and socio-cultural issues (e.g., the birth of a new 'race'), among others. Eventually, this became one of the most popular readings in the

[9] All illustrations reproduced by permission of the publisher, Scholastic Inc.

course. This issue will also be further discussed in Chapter 5, in the section of students' responses. Illustration 2 shows the main character of this story.


Illustration 2: Juan Diego (Delacre, 1996, p. 40)

The third story selected from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* was the legend of *El Dorado*, which was the only choice in the section of northern South America. This is a story surrounding a ceremony in which the cacique of a town throws large amounts of gold to the Guatavita Lake to honor the Serpent God. Even though this story also contained religious themes, albeit at a smaller scale than the previous story, I considered its historical importance a more significant factor. This story had the potential to be linked to historical events (e.g., the massive European search for a city build in gold), religious issues (e.g., the transformation of a 'pagan' ceremony), and socio-cultural issues (e.g., adultery, suicide, guilt), among others. Illustration 3 shows the cacique during the ceremony.
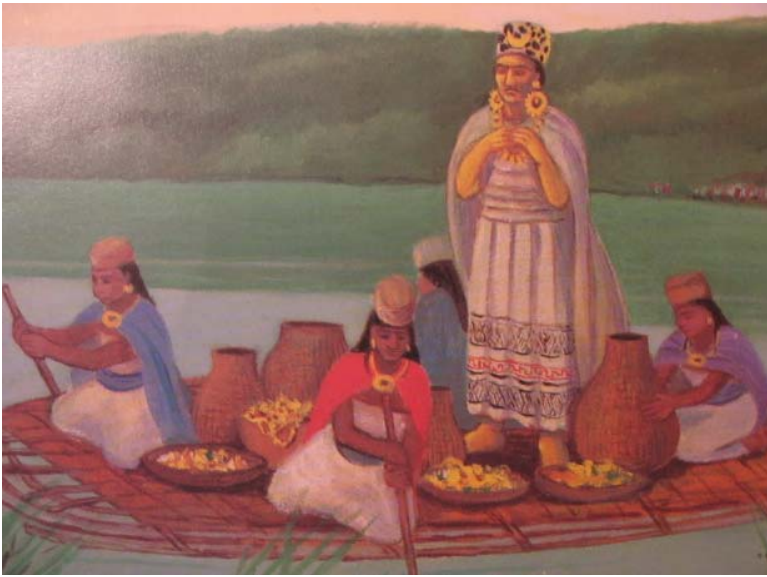
Illustration 3: The ceremony of El Dorado (Delacre, 1996, p. 51)

The fourth story selected from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* was a myth titled *Manco Cápac y la vara de oro*, but it was never used in class due to time restrictions. This will be further discussed in the sections on text integration and implementation.

After the semester was over, the majority of students praised *De Oro y Esmeraldas* for being interesting, comprehensible, and well illustrated, even though they did admit that many stories were challenging, especially the first one, *Guanina*. I was also very satisfied with the way it helped us achieve our curriculum goals, despite a few failures.

b) Criteria for students' self-selected texts

Most of the criteria for students' self-selected texts were established a priori, but the constant comparison among available texts refined the basic criteria. Criteria for their self-selected texts finally included:

1. Illustrated children's text
2. Written in Spanish only (original version and Latino/Hispanic author preferred)
3. Explicit presence of Hispanic culture
4. Interesting
5. Medium complexity of language
6. Medium length (500-1,000 words)

To make sure that students understood the criteria established (since medium complexity of language and medium length were difficult to determine), I spent time in class demonstrating appropriate and inappropriate texts, so that students could understand criteria in a more contextualized and practical manner. The day that I presented the books, students browsed the books and passed them back and forth, looking at the illustrations and the titles, and talking animatedly about them. They even "laughed at some books (too childish non-acceptable books)" (SR.9.14.05, p.2). I was very happy to find such a positive first reaction to children's literature.

Once criteria were explained this way, I provided students with a list of library books (and my own personal collection) that already met the criteria desired, so that students did not have to spend too much time searching for an acceptable text. The compilation of this list (Appendix F –library call numbers have been deleted from this document) was lengthy yet rewarding, not only because it probably saved students a lot of time, but also because it familiarized me with the texts students were reading and

presenting. In order to increase students' interest, I told them that one out of the four mandatory self-selected texts could be a 'personal choice book', that is, a text they really wanted to read even though it did not meet all of the criteria (e.g., fairy tales, bilingual books, texts from the Internet, magazines, etc). Therefore, texts were separated into List A (books that met most of the criteria) and List B (books that met some of the criteria). Data showed that many students liked the idea of selecting one personal book that did not have to follow criteria. However, there were students who only read List-A books and were happy about it.

After a month or so of using these texts to fulfill assignments, we encountered certain problems that required a revision of the criteria established. For example, one of the criteria set for List-A books ('written in Spanish, by Hispanic/Latino author preferred') was conflicting, because some Hispanic/Latino authors did not include any overt cultural issues in their stories –and culture was one of the criteria. Likewise, some books on List B had to be moved to List A "because their cultural content overpowers their shortness / simplicity or their bilingual format" (TL.10.11.05, p. 1 & 2).

> What I should be doing too is updating my List of Approved Books, now that students presented and I have a better idea of where to place certain texts –list A or list B. (CO.10.7.05, p. 1)

By classifying texts into these lists, I realized that criteria were tightly connected with course goals and, therefore, it was not possible to decide all criteria a priori; some had to be decided a posteriori according to the characteristics of the course and the students and how these texts were fulfilling the goals established.

C) Availability

Going back to the moment when I was deciding about teacher-selection and/or student-selection, I needed to see whether appropriate texts were available to students. The question I needed to answer was, "*where* could they get these books?" Getting the texts online had the advantage of saving time and effort in browsing, but it was difficult to determine whether the texts had been linguistically and culturally manipulated. In addition, major known authors do not have their work online for free. Purchasing the books at a local bookstore could be costly, since they had to buy one book for class and probably four books for their own reading. My preference was the library, so that students did not have to be economically penalized for my conducting this research. But, was the library well equipped for this task?

A few visits to the campus libraries –the main general library and one library specialized in Latin American literature— yielded very positive results in terms of quality and quantity, facilitating my decision on student selection. Both libraries were found to have "a great variety of genres and formats, which offer a wide selection for students to choose from" (TL.5.26.05, p. 1), although the Latin American library had two inconveniences: it was located on the opposite side of campus and most books were protected with a brown cover that made browsing very difficult. Even with these inconveniences, the collection was splendid and my decision about student selection was made.

Regardless of my findings about quality and quantity of available materials, at the beginning of the semester, some students complained about availability of texts:

> At the beginning of the class, some students were complaining abut not being able to find books at the library and asked if mine were available […]. They also stated that it was difficult to find a book with all the criteria needed. (SR.9.16.05, p. 1)

This discrepant finding was totally unexpected: I had checked the amount of materials myself before classes started and considered this quantity more than sufficient. I thought about the possibility that students in bilingual education could also be using these texts at the same time, so I visited the library during the semester to check availability for myself. It was true that many of the texts from the lists were not present, but there were still some texts available that met the criteria required. I did not visit the Latin American library, but I imagined there would be many more there, since it is a less frequently visited library in general.

During the semester, I asked different students about availability problems. Some students replied that they did not have a problem; other stated that they did:

> The main problem, which was voiced by three or four students, was that they couldn't find any book that matched the criteria in the main, closest library. When I asked whether they went to the other library, they answered 'no.' (CO.9.16.05, p. 1)

Many of the students who complained about availability confessed that they only visited the main library. When I asked them why they did not visit the other library, they stated that it was too far and they did not have the time required to go there. I concluded that the problem was not related to availability but rather to students' time and effort. It seems that the inconvenience of having the second library 'far' turned self-selection into a burden for some students, who eventually found other ways to solve their problem without going to the second library, such as coming to my office to get books from my personal collection or borrowing texts from other students.

> When I got to my office, C. was there and asked me if she could borrow a book. She took one. I noticed that when students pick books from my office, they look at them, inside and out, pick different ones, even put one under the arm (preselected) and keep on looking for a better one. (CO.11.7.05, p. 2)

When J. was leaving, she asked me for directions to the [Latin American] library. She only has one more book to read and now she is asking me for directions?! (CO.11.7.05, p. 2)

The [Latin American] library is on the other side of campus, thus requiring a good hour to make the trip to and from. (Eva.17)

I get most of my books from the professor. (Se.MECL)

During the last interview, I brought up the subject of availability to see whether my impression about time and effort was confirmed. This is a student's comment:

Teacher-R: … you wrote "it was hard to find List-A books because there are more requirements for them to be considered appropriate", so what did you do when you didn't find a List-A book?

Student: Yeah… Well, I would just ask the people in class what List-A books they used and counted as List A… I guess it was just harder because you had to make sure they had culture and other things, but I mean, they were at the library, so you could find them.

Teacher-R: OK, did you ever go to [the Latin American Library]?

Student: No, I always went to [the main library].

Teacher-R: And did you find them…?

Student: Yeah, they have a lot of them.

Teacher-R: Because there were a lot of people saying "I have to go to [the Latin American library] …"

Student: *[negating with her head]* There were A LOT *[emphasis given by student].*

(Mal.Interview2)

Even though this specific student complained at the beginning of the semester about availability of acceptable texts, we can see that she admitted not only that she never went to the Latin American library, but also that there were enough books at the main library.

D) Summary of Decisions on Text Selection

After analyzing the data collected, I concluded that my decisions about text selection were strongly guided by a) my own pedagogical beliefs, b) previous experiences, c) course goals, and d) suggestions from literature. These influences shaped the nature of the course in a very unique and personal way that would be hard to replicate. The decision-making process on text selection was based on weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the different choices available as well as addressing upcoming challenges. Text selection required a thorough investigation and became an essential part of the project, as other experts have also found (Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993; McKay, 1982; Meloni, 1994; Moffit, 1998). Some of the decisions on text selection were very much related to text integration and/or text implementation, showing the close relationship between the different areas of the teaching process and the need to match materials with course goals to facilitate instruction.

A surprising finding was related to availability, which turned out to be a problem for many students who openly complained about the scarcity of appropriate texts. When complaints were investigated, it turned out that students who complained could not or did not want to take the time and effort required to check the second library for available materials. The issue of availability, thus, turned into an issue of effort and time. Despite the fact that self-selection is always encouraged in the literature as a method that promotes interest and motivation (Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Krashen, 1997; Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997), in this study, self-selection was found to be a burden. I suppose we should take into consideration students' work load, which is usually between 12 and 15 credits per semester, plus possibly part-time jobs, before deciding on a method of self-selection that takes too much of their time.

Finally, I also found that criteria for text selection were established a priori following suggestions from the literature (Baker, 1998; Bishop, 1992; Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Kibler, 1996; Moffit, 1998; Short & Fox, 2003) and influenced by pedagogical beliefs and previous experiences. However, as the semester passed, criteria had to be refined and revised a few times to accommodate certain problems that were arising among students' selections. This revision of criteria entailed valuing certain criteria more than others. This value scale was strongly related to course goals. Therefore, because of students' characteristics and the need to match course goals with materials, criteria could not be established a priori entirely.

The literature has already pointed out that decisions on text selection are very important in the process of integrating children's literature in the adult FL class, not only because the mismatch between the readers' intended age and actual age may warn some caution, but also because of the readers' linguistic and cultural limitations to understand these authentic texts. In this study, I found that text selection was a very important and complex part of the teaching process for those reasons and also because it determined subsequent decisions on text integration and text implementation.

In the next section, I write about the decisions that I took about integrating children's literature into the fourth semester curriculum.

4. 2. DECISIONS ON TEXT INTEGRATION

In this section, I describe how I made decisions on text integration, that is, how children's literature was incorporated into the curriculum of our course to fulfill the goals

established, and what influenced those decisions. Also, I explain how challenging or helpful it was maintaining the pre-established curriculum.

A) The Integration Procedure

The act of integrating children's literature into the pre-established curriculum of this fourth semester class was "not an overwhelming task" (TL.8.30.05, p. 5), as I had imagined. Once I analyzed the steps that I took to develop the curriculum, I noticed that they were the same steps that I had taken on previous occasions when I was integrating other components into the curriculum (e.g., service learning, movies and readings, native/non-native interactions). The procedure involved doing certain tasks in a specific order and manner:

> The first task I have to do in order to integrate children's literature into the pre-established curriculum of my class is to know what this curriculum has, so I summarized the major points of the textbook, *Punto y Aparte*, which we must cover this semester. (TL.5.29.05, p. 1)

> To create my Calendario, I decided to place every important component (quiz, test, escrito breve, composition, etc) on the same dates than the original, and then just fill out the empty days with my project. (TL.8.30.05, p. 4)

I basically outlined the different components of the pre-established curriculum, then I deleted 'unwanted' elements (in this case, textbook readings), and replaced them with children's literature. In the process, assessment components (e.g., quizzes, exams, essays, etc) were left "on the same dates than the original" (TL.8.30.05, p.4), so that there would be few discrepancies between our course and other sections at this level. After the changes, the outline of a typical textbook chapter looked like this:

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1. Vocabulary (textbook only)

2. Practice of vocabulary and grammar

3. Pre-reading (a story from *De Oro y Esmeraldas*)

4. Reading

5. Post-reading

6. Practice for Escrito Breve (short essay on children's literature). Quiz of vocabulary (textbook only) and grammar

7. Presentations (on children's literature). Escrito Breve (on children's literature).

After setting up this outline, I distributed the four selected stories from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* among the five chapters of the textbook. The unexpected parallelism between the textbook cultural sections (e.g., Caribbean, Mexico, etc) and the stories from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* facilitated the distribution. The first textbook chapter, which is about Spain, did not have a matching legend (*De Oro y Esmeraldas* only has stories about Latin America), so, after debating for a while, I decided to use this time to introduce children's literature to the class and let students browse different books at their leisure.

When attempting to incorporate the stories from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* into the pre-established curriculum, I realized that sometimes I only had two days for pre-reading, reading and post-reading, because there were other components that interfered with the 3-day model arrangement (e.g., exams, compositions, etc). This situation forced me to "squeeze" (TL.10.4.05, p. 1) the content scheduled into the available time. Eventually, as discussed in the next section, the shortness of most stories facilitated implementation and, indeed, there were some days in which I found that "there was some free time to use as I pleased" (SR.10.24.05, p. 1). Time was really not much of an issue during the integration process.

Curriculum development involved not only deleting certain components and replacing them with new children's literature, but also involved the creation of new assessment tools and the re-distribution of points. Here are some of the existing assessment tools and the changes that I introduced (in parenthesis):

1. Final exam (kept content and 200 points)

2. Two tests (kept content and 300 pts.)

3. Five quizzes (kept content and 80 pts.)

4. Two compositions (kept content about movies and 100 pts.)

5. Four Escritos Breves (changed content to children's literature and kept 100 pts.)

6. Oral interview (changed content to children's literature and changed 40 pts. to 60)

7. Class grade (changed 70 pts. to 100)

8. Hablando del Tema (oral activity eliminated and replaced by one brief 60-point presentation of a children's text)

9. Cultural presentation (eliminated)

Since the new curriculum had to be approved by the Spanish department, curriculum development took place a couple of months before classes started, at the same time that text selection decisions were taking place. The changes applied were minor and we kept on schedule at all times until the last weeks of the course. A couple of minor adjustments had to be done during the school semester, such as changing the content of some questions in a test because "our readings are different than theirs" (CO.10.5.05, p. 2). I was surprised to find out that all my work in re-arranging the curriculum was noticed and appreciated. One student in particular said, "I like how structured all the assignments are and how much work you have clearly put into writing your own curriculum for this

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course" (Eva.27). This comment made me believe I did an acceptable job at developing a curriculum that integrated children's literature into a pre-established curriculum.

B) A Fair Course

When this study was proposed to the Spanish department of the university where it was conducted, one of the requirements imposed was that children's literature could be integrated to the pre-established curriculum as long as the course remained as similar as possible to other sections of this level in content and grading. Standardization and consistency were two issues with which they were concerned, hence the requirement of retaining the pre-established curriculum.

This requirement was always in my mind when developing the curriculum. I wanted to create a 'fair' course, that is, a course that would prepare my students as well – or better— than other students at this level, so that they could safely take upper-division courses without feeling they were at a disadvantage:

> I arranged the distribution of points so that students are more or less graded similarly to students from other sections. (TL.8.30.05, p. 2)

> The rest will be based on the textbook and movies, like other sections of 312L. (8.30.05, p. 2)

Eventually, according to their final course grades and their general performance during the semester, I felt that my students were as prepared as any other student of this level. During the final interview, I raised this issue with one student who was taking the next course in the Spanish sequence:

Student: Right now I feel prepared. I feel like the vocabulary I learned in your class prepared me for this class. I even know even more vocabulary than one of my friends who took all of his Spanish in

High School. The vocabulary we learned … I felt that we learned enough vocabulary from the books that we read… I mean there are hard vocabulary words, but they are words that all other people in my class are also struggling with. Do you know what I mean? So it is not like I am missing out because…

Teacher-R: So you don't think you are in disadvantage?

Student: No, I am not in disadvantage at all.

(El.Interview2)

This student was satisfied with the knowledge she received and did not feel at a disadvantage. However, another student who was also interviewed confessed that he had to drop the same advanced course because "the reading was at a higher level and there were just too many words that I didn't understand" (Marcos.Interview2). When I asked him if he felt at a disadvantage for having taken my class, he claimed he did not. He stated that his problems were probably more related to taking too many credits on that semester. His explanation sounded convincing, since this student was probably the best student in my class and I seriously doubted that he could not handle any readings beyond children's literature. Just in case, I visited the professor of that advanced class and reviewed the textbook and the readings he was using. We both agreed that the vocabulary and grammar of the texts were at an intermediate level, definitely comprehensible for a regular fourth semester student. Furthermore, the accompanying exercises were extremely helpful for reading comprehension. Therefore, this student's excuse that the readings were too difficult was not confirmed by my investigation. On the other hand, his possible explanation of having too many credits seemed more plausible to me.

My efforts to maintain a similar course can be seen in different areas, such as in the distribution of points, "so that students are more or less graded similarly to students

from other sections" (TL.5.30.05. p. 2); in the maintenance of certain 'fun' components, such as movies and compositions about movies; in the maintenance of the same pedagogical content, so that they did not "feel inadequate to take the quiz […] on grammar and textbook vocabulary" (TL.10.2.05, p. 1); in the preservation of almost the same assessment tools; and in the assignment of a similar load of homework. Once the curriculum was arranged and modified, my impression was that it resembled "very much the original" (TL.8.30.05, p. 4). Since homework turned out to be a common source of complaints (in terms of quantity), I reviewed this load and found it on the heavy side, so I reduced it during the second half of the semester. Complaints stopped. On the second interview, one student commented on this issue:

Teacher-R: What do you think about the homework? Was it too much?

Student: Actually, at the time …I kind of thought… I thought it was average on the heavier side of average. The class I am in now, we have homework assignments every day and a lot of time it is more than one application. So it will be like page 88, aplicación A and page 89 aplicación B. So it is a lot of them. Yours was better than that.

(El.Interview2)

Even though her comments made me feel good about the amount of homework provided, I came to realize that indeed homework was slightly heavier than in other courses, just because it required reading short- or medium-length passages before answering certain questions, which regular homework usually does not.

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C) Summary of Decisions on Text Integration

The decisions made to integrate children's literature into the fourth semester Spanish pre-established curriculum followed a systematic procedure clearly influenced by previous experiences with curriculum development. For the most part, the integration procedure was done quickly and easily, and we kept on schedule until the end of the semester. I believe that the thematic parallelism found between *De Oro y Esmeraldas* and the textbook cultural readings helped somehow this integration process by keeping students focused on one geographical region per chapter.

The Spanish department imposed the condition of making minor changes to the pre-established curriculum, so that consistency and standardization was maintained among sections. On one hand, this condition probably limited creativity and innovation in testing, since we were forced to follow certain parameters and testing tools. On the other hand, this condition facilitated the task of creating assessment tools from scratch and placing them in the curriculum. After analyzing the data, I believe I created a course as 'fair' as possible, similar in content and load as other sections of this level, so that students did not feel at a disadvantage when taking tests or when moving on to more advanced courses. A couple of students who moved up and were interviewed confirmed this belief. However, it must be noted that these students were both A-students. On the other hand, A-students are the typical students who take upper-division courses.

In the next section, I describe the decisions that I took regarding the implementation of children's literature in this fourth-semester Spanish college class.

4. 3. DECISIONS ON TEXT IMPLEMENTATION

In this section, I describe my decisions on text implementation, that is, how children's literature was actually used in the classroom, as well as the factors that influenced those decisions, such as a) my pedagogical beliefs, past experiences, students' responses, and instinct; b) time management; and c) the pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence.

A) Beliefs, Experiences, Students' Responses and Instinct

Pedagogical beliefs and past experiences seemed to play, again, an important role in the decision-making process during text implementation. For example, because I believe calling for volunteers "creates a safer, calmer environment" (CO.9.16.05, p. 3), this practice was a common element in my class. Because I believe that "collaborative work is always for the best, since it involves critical thinking and camaraderie" (SR.10.3.05, p. 1), and because it has worked in the past, I also allowed and encouraged students to work with their classmates:

> "I spotted S. and F. discussing whether they needed past subjunctive or not in a specific sentence. Even though they were discussing this in English, it was very good to see that students reason their way to the correct solution with others. That's why I like when they work in pairs" (CO.11.18.05, p. 1)

However, I noticed often that students' responses to certain activities also shaped the nature of my decision-making process, despite my beliefs. For example, when I had no volunteers or when I noticed that specific students had not volunteered in a long time, I did call students by name "to prevent further problems later on in the semester" (CO.10.7.05, p. 1). The literature (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Shavelson & Stern, 1981) has

already pointed out that interactive decision-making is often based on students' responses to the lesson.

Other beliefs included strategy instruction to facilitate reading comprehension, use of higher-level questions to promote critical thinking, demonstrations by role models (either by me or by high-proficiency students selected by me), and limited use of error correction to encourage participation. A number of studies have "found that teachers' instructional decisions were highly consistent with expressed beliefs" (Richards, 1998b, p. 70), unless teachers were limited by certain factors, such as a prescribed curriculum, lack of resources, and students' ability levels (Richards, 1998b).

I also noticed that some of my decisions were determined by instinct or feelings that could not be explained rationally. For example, although literature praises teacher read-aloud (Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993; Schulz, 1983; Schwarzer, 2001) and I know why it is recommended, I quickly abandoned this practice because "it did not sound like a good idea" (CO.9.28.05, p. 1) since it was then who needed practice, not me. Also, it made me feel uncomfortable. A possible explanation for this type of decision could be that I was scared of trying something new for the first time. However, in this course I tried many other things for the first time and carried them out until the end of the semester. Furthermore, literature on teacher intuition (Claxton, 2000; Senior, 2006) claims that experienced teachers often make classroom decisions based on accumulated classroom experience "without accompanying justification" (Senior, 2006, p. 167), which could also explain this particular decision.

B) Time Management

During implementation, time was found to be under control during pre-reading, but not so much during reading or post-reading. Sometimes, I found that I did not have enough time to do everything I had planned, and some other times, on the contrary, I had plenty of time left:

> This exercise took all the class session, which means it needs to be reviewed and modified. Because of that, I didn't have any time to do some translation, as I wanted. (CO.10.3.05 p. 2)

> After talking about the peoples and the letter 'x' that I had prepared in the lesson plan, I had plenty of time left, so I decided to start reading the story –even though that was not in the lesson plan. (CO.10.17.05, p. 1)

After considering the circumstances involved in this time management, I found two factors responsible: miscalculations in terms of how long certain activities would take and the problems that low-proficiency students were experiencing. Miscalculations are somehow understandable, since I had never used before most of the activities that I created for this class. The problems that low-proficiency students faced with children's literature (which will be explained in the next chapter) were somewhat unexpected and therefore their performance and my explanation of certain issues took longer than initially calculated. Analyzing this situation, I can see that my own naïve belief that children's literature would be easy for all students proved to be wrong and made me encounter certain challenges in implementation. Most time management problems appeared during post-reading, which is when students provided output and showed their degree of comprehension.

The end of the semester was an especially difficult time, because of the quantity of assessment components scheduled for those last weeks and the Thanksgiving holidays. When these weeks were approaching, the Spanish department announced that teachers

needed to distribute final course evaluations (which last approximately 20 minutes) on a specific day in which I was scheduled to use children's literature. I realized that I would only have one day to do pre-reading, reading and post-reading of the last story from *De Oro y Esmeraldas*. The mere thought of having one hour to work on all of this was very stressful for me, so I finally decided to eliminate this story and use the time for something else. This last-minute decision turned out to be a wise one when another class day was canceled due to inclement weather. Afterwards, I was really "happy with my decision" (TL.11.29.05, p. 1) to cancel that fourth reading, thinking that "having extra time is always safer" (TL.12.7.05, p. 1).

C) The Pre-reading / Reading / Post-reading Sequence

In general, the pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence proved to work well with children's literature in this course. The most challenging phase was the post-reading phase, which was when students had to perform and where I needed to integrate children's literature into the content of the textbook.

a) Pre-reading

Suggestions from different textbooks and from the literature (Moffit, 1998, 2003; Smallwood, 1998) helped me create pre-reading activities and exercises based on *De Oro y Esmeraldas*. Some of these activities covered the author (for the first reading only), the external features of the book (e.g., illustrations, maps, structure), students' background knowledge (e.g., social issues, history, politics), context of the stories (e.g., history, geography), and content (e.g., plots, characters, etc).

Most of the times, pre-reading turned out "almost exactly as I had planned it" (CO.10.17.05, p. 1), with the exception of a few minor changes. During pre-reading, I presented the different sections of the book as the author had arranged them:

> I talked about the … four different regions and we looked at the map at the beginning of the book […] Next, I pointed at the different tribes (muiscas, incas, zapotecas, etc) that appear in the Prólogo and in the stories. (SR.9.28.05, p. 1).

I also read the introductory paragraphs and asked lower-level questions to "make sure students understood what we were reading" (SR.9.28.05, p.1). Sometimes I expanded on their answers. After a while, I included higher-level questions for more complicated issues that required collaboration with other classmates and time to do some critical thinking.

During pre-reading, we also practiced the strategies of skimming, scanning, guessing, and "I reminded students not to use the dictionary on the fist reading. I also suggested they read the story a couple of times" (SR.9.28.05, p. 2), emphasizing that it was not important to know the meaning for every single word.

In general, the decisions taken during pre-reading seemed to work well. I was happy with the wide variety of activities that I was able to create and also with students' responses to these activities.

b) Reading

Reading was done in class after students did a first reading at home. Basic reading strategies were provided so that their home reading was as successful as possible. Reading in class was done on a voluntary basis. Most students read well enough for their level. Low-proficiency students hardly volunteered to read and when they were called by

name, they read slower and paused at places where they should not be pausing –a clear sign of not comprehending what they were reading. Sometimes, when the story was too long to read in one class session, I asked students to summarize each paragraph instead. "It was then when I realized that some students did not understand the story well enough to retell it… and that some students have not even read it" (TL.10.1.05, p. 1). Asking students to summarize or to provide opinions about the readings became a good assessment tool in this course, not only in terms of reading comprehension but also with regard to vocabulary acquisition.

Following suggestions from literature (Schulz, 1983), I alternated reading with lower- and higher-level reading comprehension questions to promote critical thinking. I also "encouraged students to expand on their answers" (SR.9.30.05, p.2) in order to promote discussion and fluency. I believe reading in class was facilitated by the shortness of most stories. Teacher read-aloud, as explained previously, was soon abandoned.

c) Post-reading

The integration of children's literature into the content of our textbook was done during the post-reading phase. Therefore, during post-reading we had to cover vocabulary (from the textbook and children's books), grammar (from the textbook), culture (from the children's books), discussions in pairs and groups, presentations (on children's books) and a writing component (on children's books). During post-reading, I asked lower-level questions to check comprehension, and higher-level questions to promote discussion and critical thinking. For example, for the reading of *El Dorado*, I asked students if they knew about other world-famous searches for gold and how different they were from this one. I also asked questions for students to connect their lives with the readings a more personal

way. For example, for the reading of *The Virgin of Guadalupe*, I asked students about their religions and how different or similar they were to Christianity.

Students' opinions about the stories were very important to me to ascertain whether they enjoyed these texts or not. Therefore, I spent quite some time asking them whether they liked the story and why (or why not). I enjoyed this activity because "I received unexpected answers […], which was interesting" (TL.10.1.05, p.2). However, I soon realized that when students wanted to say "something deep, they revert[ed] to English" (CO.11.4.05, p. 2). I also noticed that low-proficiency students were unable to express themselves appropriately despite the simplicity of the texts they were reading. These issues will be further discussed in Chapter 5, in the section of students' linguistic responses.

For homework, "I created exercises that focus[ed] on the textbook vocabulary and Puntos Clave (describe the character, retell the story in past, etc) so that students [were] ready for the exam" (TL.10.1.05, p. 2).

For presentations, I let students form groups to practice their presentation –when time allowed— and then asked them to present individually in front of the class. On the first weeks of classes I had already instructed students how to present their books. The protocol included holding the book outwards, so other students could see the illustrations; summarize the story including using memorized patterns for the presentation, such as "Mi libro se titula X y fue escrito por Y. Se trata de…." [The title of my book is X and was written by Y. It is about…..]; stating whether he or she liked the story and why; and stating whether he or she recommended the story and why. An outside observer came to class one day in which we had presentations and he noticed this protocol or patterned activity. He liked it very much because he believed "patterns help students predict and prepare for their performances" (TL.10.24.05, p. 2). Even though I prepared students to

present their books, I soon realized that I forgot to provide them with the basic vocabulary to do so. Consequently, on the first day of presentations, the students were using words in English or improvising and saying words like '*caractors' instead of 'personajes' [characters]. Despite that, presentations were one of the most successful activities of the course in the sense that they turned out as planned, students enjoyed them, and they became good tools to assess students speaking and comprehension skills.

The outside observer also had a few suggestions to improve presentations, such as having students write what they liked or disliked about the story being presented by another student, having students write on the blackboard difficult vocabulary before they were using these words in their presentations, or providing feedback after each student's presentation. Some of his suggestions were followed and some were not due to fear of changing protocols in the middle of the semester. This made me reflect on how important it is to plan things right from the beginning.

D) Summary of Decisions on Text Implementation

My pedagogical beliefs, previous experiences, and even my instinct played a role during text implementation in determining how the activities based on children's literature were going to be done in the classroom. Without undermining teacher intuition, this finding highlights the importance of teacher training in the acquisition of appropriate classroom-related habits and the strengthening of pedagogical beliefs to back up classroom behavior.

Time seemed to be under control in all areas except during post-reading. In this phase, I noticed that sometimes we needed more time to finish certain activities and sometimes we had extra time to kill. Numerous changes to the initial plan were necessary

due to miscalculations on my part or to students' unexpected performance. The end of the semester was especially difficult, because of the high amount of other assignments due at this time of the semester and also because of external factors that I could not control (such as cancellation of classes due to bad weather). Despite the apparently poor management of time during this phase, we met deadlines and covered most of the content as planned.

The pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence worked well during text implementation, where we had opportunities for using background knowledge, analyzing grammar and vocabulary, and discussing cultural issues. The phase that turned out to be more challenging was post-reading, because it required the combination of children's literature with the textbook grammar and vocabulary. Also, this was the phase where students' performance was required, providing information about problematic areas that needed review. The pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence allowed for both lower- and higher-level questions to be integrated, which helped check students' reading comprehension, understanding of cultural issues, and linguistic skill development.

4. 4. CONCLUSIONS TO THIS CHAPTER

The selection of children's literature was found to be as important as the literature claims (Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993; McKay, 1982; Meloni, 1994; Moffit, 1998). It was an arduous job, yet rewarding and informative. Decisions on text selection were found to be strongly influenced by my pedagogical beliefs and my previous experiences using children's literature in the classroom.

De Oro y Esmeraldas turned out to be a good text in the sense that it helped us achieve course goals, was comprehensible yet challenging for most students, was interesting, and it allowed us to make connections with different content areas. Findings suggest that the matching of text, course goals, and students' characteristics provides benefits in the FL class.

On the other hand, self-selection, which is usually recommended by the literature (Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Krashen, 1997; Moffit, 1998; Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997), turned out to be a discouraging factor for many students due to the time and effort that required from them. This finding suggests that this type of elements that cause unnecessary strains to students should be reconsidered, despite their possible benefits.

In terms of criteria, the findings showed that criteria established a priori and suggested by the literature (Baker, 1998; Bishop, 1992; Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Kibler, 1996; Moffit, 1998; Short & Fox, 2003; Silverman, 1990) worked well but proved insufficient. Criteria had to be refined and revised a posteriori as well in order to match course objectives.

The integration of children's literature followed a systematic procedure influenced by my previous experiences with curriculum development. The Spanish department requirement of creating a course as similar as possible to other sections of this level was found to be limiting in certain areas but also helpful in others. The maintenance of a similar curriculum was achieved successfully without major problems and we kept on schedule throughout the semester.

The implementation of children's literature was found to be the hardest of the three processes, not only because I had to manage to integrate the content of the stories we were reading with the vocabulary and grammar found in the textbook, but also

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because I had to create every activity from scratch, which took time and effort. Decisions appeared to be influenced by pedagogical beliefs, past experiences, students' responses and instinct or habit. According to the literature on teacher training (Claxon, 2000; Senior, 2006), instinct is an acceptable rationale for decision-making in experienced teachers.

Time was quite under control in all areas except in the post-reading phase because of miscalculations of students' performance and needs (this will be discussed in Chapter 5).

The pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence suggested by literature (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; Melendez & Pritchard, 1985; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001), proved to work well in this course, especially during the pre-reading and reading stages, which hardly deviated from the plan outlined. The post-reading phase required numerous changes and was found to be the most difficult one to manage.

In conclusion, in addressing the first research question, I found that my decision-making process in the selection, integration, and implementation of children's literature into this fourth semester Spanish FL class was mostly a systematic, step-by-step procedure. Decisions were based on pedagogical beliefs, suggestions from the literature, previous experiences, students' responses, and instinct or habit. These characteristics made the nature of the course unique and difficult to replicate even by myself. In addition, decisions in one phase of the teaching process were clearly influenced by, and had influence on, decisions in other phases, showing a multi-directional relationship. Findings show the important relationship between materials, course goals, students' characteristics, and classroom practices.

Next, I address the second research question, describing students' responses to the use of children's literature in this study.

Chapter 5: Students' Responses

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings related to the second research question:

How do students respond to the use of children's literature in the class?

a. How do they respond in terms of language learning?

b. How do they respond in terms of cultural learning?

c. How do they respond affectively?

To start this chapter, I write about how the three aforementioned research questions are addressed having all participants in mind, as a class. Afterwards, these three research questions are addressed as they pertain to five selected individual case studies (see Chapter 3 for the selection of these five participants). A cross-case discussion follows. Conclusions for the entire chapter are found at the end.

5. 1. STUDENTS' RESPONSES IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

In this section, I report on students' opinions about issues related to the learning of Spanish with the use of children's literature. Two main concepts appeared to stand out from the data: comprehensibility and helpfulness. In this section, I also comment on students' performance[10] in terms of language learning.

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[10] The term *performance* is used here in the Chomskyan sense, that is, as the external manifestation of competence.

A) Comprehensibility

When I selected texts for this course, I specifically looked for texts that would be easy to understand for a typical fourth semester student, yet with a certain degree of challenge (i + 1, as Krashen calls it). My hope was that language learning would take place within this zone of proximal development (Vygotsky's term). In the final-course survey or evaluation (CIS), 75% of students reported that the texts' difficulty was "about right", 18.75% found them too difficult, and 6.25% (1 student) found them too easy. In their oral and written comments throughout the semester, most students reported that the texts were comprehensible yet slightly challenging:

> He thought it wasn't too difficult or too easy. (SR.10.24.05, p. 2)

> She recommended the book and said it wasn't difficult. However, she admitted that there were many words she didn't understand and used the dictionary. (SR.9.21.05, p. 1)

> Some of the words were a little difficult, but once I looked them up, the stories flowed just fine. (Ch.MECL)

> They are difficult, but not so difficult that they go over my head. I usually have a pretty good understanding of what's going on after my first read, before I go to my dictionary. (Ni.MECL)

> I liked reading the children's lit in class because it helped me learn new vocabulary, but it wasn't too hard to understand. (CIS)

My observations also confirmed that most students comprehended the plot of the stories and were able to answer my questions correctly. Sometimes, the comprehensibility of some texts seemed to be directly related to the text characteristics. For example, *Guanina* had too much unknown vocabulary and students found it very difficult. Students noticed that "some [texts] were more difficult than others" (Se.MECL) and that "difficulty varies

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depending on the story" (Brian.MECL). Children's literature was found to offer a wide selection of difficulty levels:

> The Delacre book is actually sort of difficult. Not exactly what I expected from children's lit. Most of the books I have read from the lists were easier. (Mt.MECL)

Besides text characteristics, comprehensibility also appeared to depend on students' proficiency (which I assessed throughout the semester via observations, assignments, and assessment tools). For example, high-proficiency students[11] seemed to have few problems with the texts selected, medium-proficiency students were struggling only with the most complex texts, and low-proficiency students found most texts too difficult. The latter, who were also having trouble with other aspects of the course, were unable to understand the main events of certain stories or answer lower-level questions correctly. The literature has found that being familiar with the text facilitates comprehension (Randolph, 2000; Sullivan, 1994; Yanes, 1992), which is confirmed in this study by my observations and students' self-reports:

> I found the reading difficult and challenging. (…) Vocabulary is so difficult and so is the grammar that you have to read it twice. (Felicia.MECL)

> I like the stories [from *De Oro y Esmeraldas*] but the vocabulary is difficult to understand. I feel like I have to look up a word almost every other sentence. (Ja.MECL)

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[11] I define high-proficiency students as those whose skills meet or surpass the expectations for a fourth-semester student at this university. In other words, as a student whose fluency is good to very good, who masters (although not always) advances structures that require subjunctive, future or conditional, and whose vocabulary is ample and appropriate. I define medium-proficiency as those whose fluency is medium (need to pause often), who do not master those advanced structures, or whose vocabulary is basic but appropriate. Low-proficiency students are those whose fluency is poor (need to pause continuously and use short, isolated sentences), who do not even master the past tense, and whose vocabulary is extremely poor.

She said she didn't like it because it was too difficult [referring to *Guanina*]. (SR.9.30.05, p. 2)

He admitted it was difficult [referring to *El aullido de los monos*]. (SR.11.21.05, p.1)

Gestalt psychologists "proposed that people can pay attention to only one thing at a time" (Ormrod, 2004, p. 195). Therefore, as VanPatten (1990) also claimed, it is logical to assume that the need to identify so many words in the texts (or attention to form) impeded low-proficiency students' successful comprehension (or attention to meaning). Students blamed their difficulties to lack of vocabulary, not to other issues such as lack of cultural knowledge or grammatical knowledge. This concept, along with the findings about low-proficiency students' difficulties, suggests that a competency threshold must be reached in order to understand certain texts, as the literature has claimed (Baker, 1998; Clarke, 1980; Macaro, 2003; Ulijn, 1978; Yorio, 1971). In other words, limited linguistic proficiency –apparently, lack of vocabulary— seemed to hinder or 'short circuit' reading comprehension.

According to this finding, I infer that two conditions must be met for a student to comprehend a text: a) that the text characteristics promote comprehensibility (e.g., lack of highly literary language, repetition, use of basic vocabulary, familiar content, visual aids, etc); and b) that the student reaches certain level in proficiency (or at least in vocabulary knowledge) to understand a particular text. Reflecting on the concept of *comprehensible input,* I conclude that general statements such as 'children's literature offers comprehensible input' are too ambiguous, since 'comprehensible input' is obviously associated with the reader's skills and text characteristics. I assume that there are some texts within children's literature that indeed offer comprehensible input to many FL learners; however, there are some that do not. Shook (1997) claims that a mismatch

between the reader's linguistic and cultural knowledge and the level of understanding assumed in the text can be responsible for the problems encountered by some students. My study seems to confirm this statement at least in the linguistic area: those texts selected for typical fourth semester students were only comprehensible to those students who had the proficiency level expected (A- and B-students). For those students who seemed to be below the fourth semester level, my text selections did not seem to offer comprehensible input and actually made them feel "frustrated" (St.MECL). Thus, it is logical to assume that their learning was somewhat truncated. The fact that some students were experiencing trouble was not totally unexpected, but it was more exacerbated than I had imagined.

Data also revealed that two factors appeared to be facilitators of comprehension: text deconstruction and illustrations. Text deconstruction has already been pointed out as a helping technique (Yanes, 1992). In this study, the pre-reading / reading / post-reading technique worked well in the sense that it helped break up the information and present it in small chunks at a time. Apparently, when working together in deconstructing the texts, students were able to construct meaningful interpretations and confirm or refute hypotheses. These are some student comments to open questions such as "How difficult or easy do you find the stories?" or "Name three things that you like about this class":

> Discussing them as a class is very helpful for my comprehension. (…) When I read my own book, I'm sometimes afraid that I didn't really fully comprehend it, but when we all read the same thing and discuss it, I can be sure of my understanding. (Eva.20)

> If we did read more complex texts later, we should probably all read the same thing together, so that we could discuss the texts in class and make sure we understand them. (El.MECL)

I like it when we break down the text, go through it and talk about the vocabulary and the tenses used. I like it when you point out context clues that would help you figure out what was going on if you didn't understand the words. (Co.MECL)

I found them to be difficult at first; however after we discussed them in class, I found them much easier to understand. (Ms.MECL)

The other factor, illustrations, has already been pointed out by numerous memory studies that investigated the role of visual images in recall (Ormrod, 2004). The literature on the role of illustrations in children's literature also claims that illustrations are a helping tool for students (Baker, 1998; Hancock, 2000; Moffit, 1998; 2003; Phillips, 1992; Schwarzer, 2001; Smallwood, 1998). In this study, students were not specifically asked about illustrations, but they brought up the subject and claimed that illustrations were helpful in "figuring out the context of the story" (Ml.MECL) as well as "with words that I do not understand" (Karl.MECL):

When I'm looking for a book at the library I look for books with detailed pictures because it helps me when I'm reading to better understand the flow of the story. (Jf.MECL)

Another interesting issue found in the data is also worth mentioning. A student noticed that children's literature differed from textbook readings in one important element: "it forces us students to understand a longer, continuous train of thought, as opposed to shorter and often simpler readings from the textbook" (Cl.MECL). It is interesting to see how this particular student was able to notice how differently he was learning by using literary texts instead of textbook readings. This concept was already raised in the literature by Carrell (1984), who stated that "longer, conceptually complete texts" (p. 339) help recall and, therefore, help learning. Maxim (2002) claims that "longer texts may also allow students to develop a greater sense of context" (p. 21). According to

how students in my study used vocabulary found in the children's texts that they read (not in the textbook) in essays and presentations, I must agree that children's literature seems to help learn vocabulary. How much vocabulary and for how long is this vocabulary remembered are issues worth investigating in some other study. Novels have also been used successfully with beginners in the FL class (Maxim, 2002), but we should remember that students' attention span is limited (Moffit, 2003 citing Sousa, 2000) and reading texts that are too long might be overwhelming. I felt quite comfortable with the length of the stories we read in this course.

B) Helpfulness

As found in previous studies (Maxim, 2002), students believed that their linguistic skills improved thanks to children's literature. They stated that learning was facilitated because vocabulary and grammar were contextualized in these stories. Practical application of the grammar they already knew was mainly what they appreciated the most, specifically, practicing the preterit and imperfect tenses:

> The readings are good because they tie up all of the grammar we have learned so we can apply what we know. […] I have learned a lot of new vocabulary and paid closer attention to tenses. (Cai.MECL)

> Since we are reading legends that often are narrated in [past tense] it has made me somewhat more comfortable with these tenses. (Mt.MECL)

> The readings help show how these tenses are used in an understandable way […] I am getting a sense of how Spanish is used in the reading sense instead of like word by word translation. (Se.MECL)

> Just knowing the definition of words doesn't mean much if you don't know how to put them together, and the children's literature shows me how to put them together in a way that I can understand. (El.MECL)

It is very possible that students would have claimed the same if we had used some other innovative source of FL input besides the 'boring textbook' (e.g., newspapers, movies, etc), so the important aspect of this comment is rather *how* or *in what aspects* they think these texts helped their Spanish. The comments above show that students believed that they learned vocabulary and grammar because it was presented contextualized.

Another important issue about believing that a specific tool is helpful is correlating those beliefs with actual gains. For example, even though all students claimed that children's literature helped their Spanish skills, not all students showed noticeable gains in their assignments. Although the literature usually supports a strong correlation between positive beliefs and actual gains in FL/L2 learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Lao & Krashen, 2000), there are also research studies that did not find such correlation (Graham, 2006; Wu, 2001) and there are even theories about the danger of implying such a correlation [see concepts such as 'illusion of knowing' or 'secondary ignorance' (Ormrod, 2004)]. Since actual measurements of linguistic gains are not part of the design of this study, I cannot conclusively assert whether students' Spanish skills improved or not thanks to the use of children's literature; I can only state that all students (including low-proficiency students) found that children's literature helped their Spanish, and that students' final grades were comparable to other sections of this level, ranging from As to Ds.

According to the results from the final course evaluation (CIS) –which evaluated the course in general, not only children's literature—, all students believed that their reading and their listening comprehension skills had improved. All students (except one) believed that their writing skills had also improved. And all students (except one who disagreed and one who remained neutral) believed that their speaking skills had

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improved. Most students found the course valuable and intellectually stimulating. In Table 1, we can see this information in percentages.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Reading skill in language improved	50%	50%			
Listening comprehension improved	31.2%	68.7%			
Writing skill in language improved	25%	68.7%		6.2%	
Speaking skill in language improved	31.2%	56.2%	6.2%	6.2%	
Course was made educationally valuable	68.7%	25%	6.2%		
Course intellectually stimulating	31.2%	56.2%	12.5%		

Table 1: CIS results of students' beliefs about their language skills

C) Performance

In this study, students' linguistic performance (speaking, writing, and understanding[12]) varied from excellent to poor, not differing much from other students in different sections or students of mine from previous semesters. In general, A-students comprehended texts without a problem and did well on their oral and written assignments; B-students had some trouble with comprehension and made common errors in their oral and written assignments; and C- and D-students struggled in all areas at all times:

> He is doing fine […] in terms of fluency, although his grammar is somewhat inaccurate, as expected at this level. (SR.10.7.05, p.1)

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[12] Agreeing with Brown (2000), I consider *understanding* a reflection of performance (involving the skill of listening), not a reflection of competence.

> We had interesting topics of discussion, although I realized that when they really wanted to say something deep, they reverted to English. (CO.11.4.05, p. 2)

> Students answered the questions well, but sometimes not so well. When I looked at their homework assignments later, they didn't do so well. (CO.10.5.05, p. 1)

An activity that clearly showed the great range of performance quality was the oral presentation. Every other week or so, four to five students volunteered to present a children's book of their choice in front of the class. The protocol for presentations included holding the book outwards showing the illustrations to the class and retelling the plot in approximately three to five minutes. Students also had to report whether they liked it or not and why, and whether they recommended it or not and why. Students were doing amazingly well in this activity until the end of the semester, when I noticed that all the presentations were quite poor in grammar, vocabulary and general quality, as shown in the rubric that I was using to grade this assignment. Furthermore, students were,

> not only reading lines from the book, which they even faced toward themselves, but also reading from their notebooks a summary that they had written at home (CO.11.21.05, p 1)

First, I thought that exams and requirements from other classes were taking a toll on students' time to study and prepare. However, if they had time to write a summary at home, they should have had enough time to prepare better. After reflecting on this issue for a while, I realized that all students who were presenting at the end of the semester happened to be low-proficiency students. Apparently, they had delayed their presentation until the last moment. I also noticed that some of them were using their 'personal choice books' for their presentations, such as books on the Berenstain Bears. These students' presentations took more minutes than the average and had numerous grammatical errors. Also, students' fluency was very slow, and they used simple structures and very basic

vocabulary. It was evident that these students were not ready to produce at the level expected.

Another assignment that showed varied performance levels was students' use of Spanish in the class. As the semester advanced, students used Spanish more and more for class discussions, questions, and even questions that "were not related to exercises" (TL.10.24.05, p.2), showing their effort to use the FL as much as possible. High- and medium-proficiency students spoke frequently, even though most of the time they used "simple and easy sentences" (SR.11.2.05, p. 2) as well as basic vocabulary. This was acceptable, taking into consideration that this was the first course in which they were discussing literary texts. On the other hand, low-proficiency students hardly volunteered and sometimes even refused to participate when called on, alleging lack of understanding. When our discussions in Spanish were reaching deep levels of analysis and complicated vocabulary or ideas, students in general were observed to revert to English, showing their linguistic limitations at this fourth semester level. I believe this limited speaking proficiency also impeded a more complex literary analysis of the texts. It is also possible that many students were not familiar with analyzing texts in general, since many of them had majors in non literature-related areas, such as economics or mathematics. The pedagogical implication of this finding is that using children's literature in just one semester might not be enough to get students prepared for upper-division courses.

D) Summary of Students' Responses in Terms of Language Learning

My interpretation of the data is that indeed children's literature offered comprehensible input to most students in my class, who found the texts comprehensible yet slightly challenging, just in the area identified by the literature as a learning ground

(Krashen, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). Two factors that contributed to comprehension were the presence of illustrations and text deconstruction, as previous literature has found. I also found that there were some students who did not find the texts comprehensible and only felt comfortable with texts written for younger audiences, bilingual texts, or texts with familiar topics. This finding supports the claim that familiar texts facilitate comprehension probably because of the lack of need of background knowledge (Randolph, 2000; Sullivan, 1994; Yanes, 1992). Findings seem to support the claim that a threshold is needed to understand literary texts, because limited linguistic proficiency interferes with comprehension (Baker, 1998; Clarke, 1980; Macaro, 2003; Ulijn, 1978; Yorio, 1971). These findings also support the idea that text selection is critical.

In this study, I also found that all students believed that children's literature helped their Spanish skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, fluency, reading comprehension), as previous studies have found (Tse, 1996). Students thought that these texts showed them how to use vocabulary and grammar because these appeared contextualized.

Finally, I also found that students' performance varied greatly, similarly to other students in traditional classes. High- and medium-proficiency students performed at the level expected with obvious limitations in oral output (e.g., when discussing deeper thoughts, they reverted to English). Low-proficiency students struggled with the texts selected and the activities based on these texts. Their limited linguistic proficiency obviously interfered with understanding and production (especially oral production). It is possible that their need to attend to form and meaning at the same time was overwhelming, as the literature claims (Ormrod, 2004; VanPatten, 1990). Literary analysis only reached very basic levels, possibly because of students' linguistic and cultural shortcomings and/or because of students' general lack of knowledge or interest with regard to literature-related issues.

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5. 2. STUDENTS' RESPONSES IN TERMS OF CULTURAL LEARNING

In this section, I address students' responses regarding the learning of the Hispanic / Latino[13] culture portrayed in the children's books we read in this course. Two important issues stood out from the data: students' beliefs about cultural learning and intercultural connections.

A) Learning

Most students, regardless of heritage, believed that the children's literary texts used in class provided Hispanic / Latino cultural knowledge that either improved the knowledge they already had or filled a gap in their education. The final course evaluation showed that 18.75% of students strongly agreed and 68.75% agreed with the statement "Increased understanding of other culture" (12.5% remained neutral). These are some of their comments about the cultural element in these texts:

> Most of them are interesting because they are about Spanish culture which is something I do not know very much about, so it's nice to learn more. (Ml.MECL)

> These stories contain so much cultural value that I think anyone can benefit from them. […] these stories have taught me a lot of things about Hispanic culture. For instance, the origin behind the importance of the Virgen de Guadalupe. […] I enjoy reading about the different cultures of Latin America because it's very interesting and it also shows outsiders that Latin Americans aren't one monolithic group. We're very diverse and each country has a unique set of customs and culture that is specific to itself. (Ch.MECL)

Students not only appreciated reading literary texts alleging that "it is better to get a writer's perspective than a textbook's" (Brian.MECL), but they also enjoyed the

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[13] The term *Hispanic culture* here refers to the perspectives, practices and products coming from a country or land whose official language is Spanish (e.g., Venezuela, Costa Rica, Spain, etc). The term *Latino culture* here refers to the perspectives, practices and products of people of Hispanic origin who were born and/or mainly raised in the United States (e.g., Nuyorican, Chicano, etc).

cultural information that they received. They mentioned that they learned about "figures in Spanish culture, such as José Martí and Sor Juana" (Ca.MECL), César Chávez, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera. The texts selected also helped us review historical events (e.g., the Spanish conquest, the expansion of Christianity, the civil rights movement in the U.S., etc), traditions (e.g., Las Posadas, piñatas, tamales, etc), values (e.g., family, etc), and vocabulary pertaining to all these issues. In general, students realized that reading texts with explicit Hispanic / Latino cultural presence was interesting, important, enriching, and motivating:

> Hispanics are becoming such a part of the US culture that it is important for students to learn something about it. (St.MECL):

> Being directed to books that contain Hispanic culture it exposes the student to newer ideas and ways of thinking and forces him to view things from a different perspective, something that is always enriching. (Mt.MECL)

> I [like reading about culture] because they sum up complex cultural events into short overviews that may spark an interest to delve deeper into the subject. (Ca.MECL)

> After we learned about [la Virgen de Guadalupe] in class, I heard someone else talking about it, and I knew what they were talking about. (Mg.MECL)

Some students valued the authenticity of the culture portrayed: "the texts painted a very accurate portrait of culture" (Ni.MECL), supporting previous literature claiming that recent publications are more authentic than those in the past (Ada, 2003; Hancock, 2000; Kibler, 1996; Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Schon, 1995, 2001; Short & Fox, 2003). Short and Fox (2003) claim that authentic texts are recognized by readers as true representatives of the culture. In this study, Latino students recognized the culture portrayed as authentic.

Students also believed that this Hispanic / Latino cultural information "added a new dimension in reading" (Marcos.MECL), made the stories more "interesting"

(Ed.MECL), and made the readers "more accepting of beliefs that you don't have" (Mg.MECL):

> Even for me (a Hispanic), I am not 100% knowledgeable about many Hispanic cultural practices, issues, and customs. This makes reading the literature interesting. […] I have learned a little bit more about Hispanic culture. […] I [like reading about culture] because it provides a better knowledge about Hispanics from other countries. I may be Hispanic but there is more to learn for everyone. (Jf.MECL)

> I find them to be very interesting, filled with important cultural references. […] These stories provide the background for Hispanic culture today. You need to understand the past before you can look into the future. (Ms.MECL)

From the beginning of the semester I made an effort to review the geography of Spanish-speaking countries, so that students could better understand some of the issues that we would be discussing in class and could visualize these countries with respect to others. On the first day of class, to check students' background knowledge, I gave them a surprise geography quiz where they had to name all Spanish-speaking countries in a blank map of North, Central and South America. They did quite poorly (81% of students knew less than half of the countries in South America). During the course, we never had another quiz, but we quickly reviewed geography when we read the stories from *De Oro y Esmeraldas*. At the end of the semester, attached to the final exam, I gave students another surprise geography quiz of South America. They did much better (the 81% decreased to 52.4%). When comparing the first and the final quizzes, I noticed that two thirds (66.6%)[14] of students improved in geography knowledge (9.5% did worse and 23.9% remained the same). Whereas at the beginning of the semester only two students named all the countries in South America correctly, at the end of the semester this

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[14] This number is actually higher (about 70%) if we consider that 2 students could not possibly improve their knowledge since they already knew all the countries in the first quiz.

number changed to eight. I think this improvement was remarkable, considering that learning of geography was not emphasized with any type of assessment or assignment during the semester –it was rather incidental— and that students did not know in advance that they would be quizzed on geography again at the end of the course. Although learning geography does not necessarily imply learning culture, I believe it could be an indicator that incidental cultural learning occurred, since geography was associated exclusively with cultural learning. Incidental learning has already been mentioned in the FL/L2 literature, such as incidental learning of vocabulary from oral input (Ellis, 1994) and from reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Horst, Cobb, & Meara 1998; Huckin & Coady, 1999; Rings, 2002).

In this study, there were also a few students who claimed that they did not learn any culture from the readings. Their reasons included: "I happened to read books about cultural practices that I am pretty familiar with" (Cl.MECL), "I already knew a lot about the culture" (St.MECL), or because "I have learned about Hispanic culture in a previous class so I already know the basics" (Co.MECL). None of these students was a Latino student. These students had varied levels of proficiency. There was only one truly negative comment about children's literature in terms of cultural learning:

> One specific student wrote: "Even though we have studied Mexico, the Caribbean and Puerto Rico, what fascinating thing can we actually tell you about those countries?" (TL.11.7.05, p. 6-7)

These comments, although rare, are interesting, because they might be related to the possibility that children's literature offers 'small c culture', but maybe not 'big c culture'. 'Small c culture' (e.g., famous people, food, traditions, etc) offers minimal challenge to students of limited background knowledge, who are usually satisfied with this type of

basic knowledge: "little things in each story about day-to-day life have helped me better understand Hispanic culture" (Ml.MECL). However, we must consider that there might be students whose background knowledge is greater than average or who need more complex type of cultural learning (e.g., 'big c culture', such as political issues, discussion of current events, etc). Apparently, my efforts to expand the 'small c culture' of the texts to 'big c culture' did not satisfy these particular students' needs. It is also possible that these students were referring to their individual library books and not to *De Oro y Esmeraldas*.

B) Connections

In an effort to increase learning, I often made an effort to activate students' background knowledge (also called prior knowledge), as suggested by Schema Theory (Bartlett, 1932) and encouraged by the *Standards for foreign language learning* (1996). For example, when I introduced the story of *El Dorado*, I asked how many students knew the expression only, how many knew what it referred to, and how many had never heard of the expression at all, so that I could have a basic idea of students' knowledge of the subject. After we read the story, I asked students if they knew of a similar event in their culture, hoping that they would connect this knowledge with their own California Gold Rush. They did. And finally, we explored the consequences of this gold search not only for Hispanics but also for the entire world (e.g., 'discovery' of new territories, expansion of religion, expansion of diseases, empowering of certain countries, discrimination against natives, etc). Many of the texts we read allowed for this type of connections.

In the previous examples, I was the main actor in probing for this type of intercultural connections. However, students (both Latino and no Latino) were also capable of creating their own cultural connections at a more personal level:

> I was already familiar with La Virgen de Guadalupe from being Catholic and having numerous plays about the story. (Ml.MECL)

> I like reading about culture from these stories because I enjoy relating it to my upbringing in Albuquerque and to my dad's upbringing. (El.MECL)

> Sí, me gustó mucho porque este libro me recuerda muchas cosas de mi niñez en S. G. Su familia es como mi familia. Mi abuela es como su abuela y yo tenía piñatas y hacía cascarones. [Yes, I liked it very much because this book reminds me of many things in my childhood in S. G. Her family is like my family. My grandmother is like her grandmother and I had piñatas and made confetti-filled eggs]. (SR.11.9.05, p. 1)

> She liked it because her mom used to read it to her when she was young. (SR.11.9.05, p.1)

Even one of my most 'lazy' students made a surprising connection between his struggles and those of César Chávez, a text he was reading at the moment. As we see in these comments, students made connections with their general upbringing, religious upbringing, traditions and childhood events. These connections are said to promote meaningful learning (Ausubel, 1968; McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986)..

C) Summary of Students' Responses in Terms of Cultural Learning

Most students responded positively in terms of cultural learning. They claimed that they learned new information, stated that culture made these texts more interesting, thought the culture portrayed was authentic, and appreciated the cultural knowledge they were receiving. A surprise geography test showed that more than two thirds of the

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students improved geography learning incidentally. In my opinion and based on my experience of previous courses, the texts that we read allowed for 'small c culture' to be expanded into 'big c culture' covering social, historical, economic and political issues not necessarily limited to Spanish-speaking countries. It is also possible that the genre most exploited in class, legends, promoted this type of expansion.

Only a few students claimed that they did not learn anything new from these texts. It is possible that the cultural issues discussed in children's literature and my attempts to expand them did not completely satisfy those students who needed 'new' or more complex information. It is also possible that they were referring to their library texts and not to our in-class text.

Students also responded well when probed to connect and compare their background knowledge with the new cultural knowledge, as suggested by the *Standards for foreign language learning* (1996). Furthermore, some students made connections at a personal level, recognizing the culture portrayed in the texts as authentic. It is possible that this type of connections enhanced their learning in a meaningful way, as the literature claims (Bartlett, 1932; Carrell, 1984; McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986). This finding suggests the importance of selecting texts that portray authentic cultural practices, perspectives and products and also texts that portray everyday themes with which students can identify.

5. 3. STUDENTS' AFFECTIVE RESPONSES

In this section, I describe students' responses or reactions related to their affect (e.g., interest, motivation, engagement, anxiety, feelings and emotions in general) towards the children's texts we used in this fourth semester Spanish course. Students' positive and negative responses are described next.

A) What They Liked and Disliked

To find out whether students enjoyed or not the children's literary texts that we were using, I included general questions (such as "How do you feel about reading children's literature in this course?") and also specific ones (such as "Do you like *De Oro y Esmeraldas*?") in evaluations and interviews. Also, their responses were taken from classroom observations and from other written reports, such as evaluations.

Most students reported liking or enjoying children's literature for several reasons. For example, they enjoyed the texts because they were "easy to understand" (SR.11.9.05, p. 1), "entertaining" (Ct.MECL), they felt "identified in the stories" (SR.11.9.05, p. 1), or the stories reminded them of "when [they were] younger" (SR.11.9.05, p. 1). Students liked the "illustrations and culture depicted" (SR.11.21.05, p. 1). Sometimes they just liked the plot or the descriptions of the characters and places depicted:

> I like the De Oro y Esmeraldas book we use in class because it has great illustrations, the stories are interesting, and the vocabulary and grammar aren't too difficult. (El.MECL)

> I like using children's literature. I'm more likely to read a child's book in Spanish 2-3 times than read my Spanish book. (Eva.25)

> I find myself reading children's book written in Spanish just for pleasure now. (Ja.MECL)

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She liked it because it looks like Pocahontas and Romeo and Juliet. (SR.9.30.05, p. 2)

There were also a few comments about disliking children's literature. A few students did not like specific texts because they were "too difficult" (SR.9.30.05, p. 2), were "not terribly interesting" (SR.9.21.05, p. 1), or the story was "sad" (SR.9.16.05, p. 2). In their midterm evaluations of the course, a student stated that it would be "better to concentrate on reading a few stories, rather than reading so many" (Eva.26). Another believed that we were spending "so much time on them" (Eva.21) and another student thought that we should be focusing on "writing and speaking" (Eva.16). Many others just did not like having to go "to the library to find a book" (Eva.15). There are no comments regarding whether students got discouraged or not after realizing that the texts were more difficult than expected.

There was also a great variety of opinions about the activities based on children's literature that I created. Students liked some activities and disliked others, just as usually happens in any course.

The general opinion about children's literature, however, was positive and students showed their enthusiasm towards some of the plots, characters, illustrations, or cultural content. Often, we discussed certain issues so intensely that students felt compelled to revert to English to express everything they wanted to communicate. Although this shows their linguistic limitations, this can also be interpreted as a sign of enthusiasm and interest in the subject matter.

B) Interest and Engagement

One of the risks of teacher-selection is that students may not find the selected texts interesting. I was concerned about this issue, thus, I purposely selected a highly-attractive, enticing book for in-class use and included many interesting-looking texts in their library list. In one way or another I wanted to reach out to every student's needs as much as I could. According to students' comments, variety helped me in my purpose:

> I find the stories interesting in De Oro y Esmeraldas, but not so interesting in the books I find in the library. […] the books we can borrow from you are great. (Ca.MECL)

> I love reading children's literature, especially the books that I get to pick out myself. Reading a book written in Spanish isn't like doing Spanish homework, it is more interesting; therefore, I am more eager to read than I usually would be to study. […] So far I've found all the stories I've read fairly interesting […] but if the context of the book isn't interesting, I won't pay attention to the context or the grammar of the book. (Ja.MECL)

On the first day that I introduced the books to the class, I was happy to see that most students were "getting interested in some of the books and were asking whether they belonged to list A or B" (SR.9.14.05, p. 2). Sometimes they were so "engaged in their books and their classmates' books" (SR.9.16.05, p. 1) that they did not even pay attention to my repositioning of the camera. In many occasions, especially at the beginning of the semester, students paid a lot of attention to those students presenting their books and were observed engaged in their work, according to the outside observer and my own observations. They were "attentive" (SR.11.4.05, p. 1), seemed "pretty engaged" (SR.10.24.05, p. 2), "interested" (SR.10.17.05, p. 2), "willing to work" (SR.9.30.05, p. 2), and "looking at the speaker" (SR.9.30.05, p. 1), all signs of interest and engagement:

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I really enjoy reading children's literature in this class because it is engaging. […] I find the stories very interesting. Myths and legends are more interesting to me than made-up scenarios between 'modern' characters that are usually found in Spanish textbooks. The stories we read are imaginative and informative at the same time. (El.MECL)

The subject matter covered in most of the stories is more interesting than articles found in textbooks. […] On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being very boring and 10 being super interesting, I would say that they're about an 8. […] I tend to find the problem with most of my learning is motivation and interest in subject matter. I know that I can't always just learn about something I'm interested in, but when I'm trying to learn and become comfortable with a language, it would really grease the wheels, so to speak. (Mt.MECL)

The stories are actually interesting, because List-A books give you insight to the Spanish culture. (Ed.MECL)

A few times, however, students were also observed not paying attention and getting restless, especially when they "could not see the illustrations from their seats" (SR.10.7.05, p. 1), when we were spending too much time on one specific activity, when they were "supposed to present" later that day (CO.11.9.05, p. 2), or at the end of the semester. The outside observer also noticed this phenomenon and suggested certain activities to help maintain students' attention. This finding is important in terms of implementation, suggesting frequent changes in activities (especially at the end of the semester) and having a seating arrangement that facilitates participation, for example.

In general, students thought that children's literature was "interesting and refreshing" (Eva.28), "informative" (SR.9.21.05, p. 1), "entertaining" (Karl.MECL), and a "nice change from the boring textbooks" (Brian.MECL), although results also showed that this interest was not maintained all the time by all students. In the final course evaluation, all students except one (who remained neutral) strongly agreed (31.25%) or agreed (62.50%) with the statement "readings in course were interesting."

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C) Appropriateness and Preferences

The literature has raised the issue of appropriateness in several occasions (Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997), because many practitioners seem reluctant to use texts written for children with adult learners (Nollendorfs, 1983; Sullivan, 1994). They can see how FL learners might have the linguistic proficiency of children, but they know that they are cognitively and conceptually more mature than children (Metcalf, 1998). However, with exception of a couple of minor concerns (see Chapter 2), all research studies done with children's literature in adult settings have shown that learners have reacted very positively to children's texts and have not found them inappropriate or childish (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Rings, 2002; Silverman, 1990). Of course, in these studies, texts were selected appropriately to match students' interests to "not insult the intelligence of high school or college students" (Metcalf, 1998). To see what my students thought about this issue, I brought up the subject in the interviews before and after using children's literature. Data showed that my students did not have any type of opposition (neither before nor after the study) regarding the use of children's literature. On the contrary, they were very enthusiastic and supportive from the beginning, alleging that it was "a really good idea" (Marcos.Interview1) since their level of understanding was just "like children" (John.Interview1), as Blickle (1998) has previously mentioned:

> Most of the students in [this course] read at about the same level as would a child in a Spanish-speaking country. (Ni.MECL)

At the beginning, some students thought that it would be fairly easy to understand children's texts; one student even said, "I hope it is not too easy" (Cl.Interview1). Some students stated that they could probably read more complex literature (such as young adult literature). After using children's literature in the class, many students admitted that

children's literature was already quite challenging and that maybe they were not ready for something more complex, as they had previously thought:

> I think [De Oro y Esmeraldas] was harder than I thought it was going to be. Some of the stories I thought they were not that bad, but then others… I guess it depends on the vocabulary. (Ml.Interview2)

> I like children's books because I don't think I could get the young adult or adult. (Ma.Interview1)

Many students thought that children's literature was the right type of reading to start with before moving on to more complex readings:

> I'd rather start out with children's literature, because it is an easier grasp, but I think it would be nice to have the challenge also of young adult literature, eventually, once you got the flow of reading. (Mt.Interview1)

Students also liked the idea of using children's literature because these texts "were more interesting than just cultural readings out of the book" (Ca.Interview2). Indeed, many students commented that textbook readings were "boring" (Brian.Interview1), showing their preference of children's literature to textbooks. But, it is possible that they would state the same about any tool that is not the textbook.

Students also found that the "storyline and the message" (Cl.MECL) of children's texts were appropriate for anyone, even though they acknowledged that there are children's books in the market that might be "childish and inappropriate" (Ch.MECL) for adults. One student claimed that "once you actually read a children's book written in Spanish, your perspective changes. It's not inappropriate; it's rather challenging actually" (Ja.MECL). These comments seem to confirm what previous research studies have

found: children's literature is not inappropriate for adult readers, as long as text selection is done carefully.

D) Participation and Atmosphere

Student participation seemed to be slightly higher than in other courses that I have taught. When I asked questions to the class, many students volunteered and they seemed willing "to participate, even thought they did not know all this vocabulary in Spanish" (CO.10.17.05, p. 2). According to the outside observer,

> there was a "very good relaxing atmosphere. Students were moving freely and volunteered for the activity in question –a sign of enjoying the class and feeling comfortable" (TL.10.24.05, p. 1).

We also joked at appropriate times and I often asked students how their weekend was, trying to lower their affective filter, as suggested by the literature (Krashen, 1982; Smallwood, 1992). For example, one constant source of laughter was my ignorance about American football:

> John asked me in Spanish "¿Puedo tener el libro sobre la mesa?" [Can I have the book on the table?]. I nodded. Then, Brian asked me in Spanish "¿Puedo tener el libro para el Escrito Breve?" [Can I have the book when I do the escrito breve?] and laughed. I laughed too, because they know it is not allowed. (SR.10.24.05, p. 2)

> When I asked "¿quién ganó el partido?" [Who won de game?] John puffed and told me that they were going to take me to a game one day. We all laughed. I confessed I was not interested in football. Ml, Ca, and Sa. also spoke up. We were laughing at little things here and there. (SR.10.17.05, p. 1)

Even though there was three to four students who did not volunteer much during the semester (all of them were low-proficiency students), my feeling, which was also

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corroborated by the outside observer, was that "students were attentive and participating" (SR.9.28.05, p. 2), even though the grade dedicated to participation was low (60 points out of 1,000). For example, when students read stories that were funny, other students reacted appropriately, such as "when E. told us that ratoncito Pérez fell into the soup and died, they all laughed" (SR.9.16.05, p. 1). Even in those activities in which I "corrected grammar, students were laughing and in a pretty good mood during the activity" (SR.9.30.05, p. 2). When we were working on activities that engaged the entire class, such as retelling a story one sentence per student, "students were laughing when other students said sentences that were out of the plot chronologically" (SR.9.30.05, p. 2). I believe this laughter was healthy, since all students were involved, including the ones who made the errors.

I suppose that a factor that influenced the general relaxed feeling of the class was probably my own contagious enthusiasm for children's literature and, of course, my efforts to lower students' affective filter. It is possible, though, as the literature has pointed out (Blickle, 1998; Briscoe, 2001) that the characteristics of the texts also contributed to reduce students' anxiety and lower their affective filter (Smallwood, 1992). Another probable factor that improved classroom dynamics and general atmosphere was the re-arranging of students' chairs in a circular shape, so that "students could present books and everybody could see their book and hear them well" (SR.9.21.05, p. 1). After we arranged the chairs, I realized how much better classroom dynamics were.

E) Summary of Students' Affective Responses

Students in general reported enjoying children's literature because it was interesting, engaging, and easy to understand, just like the literature has noted (Clickley, 1998; Briscoe, 2001; Dupuy, Tse & Cook, 1996; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Ho, 2000; Krashen, 1982; Metcalf, 1998; Moffit, 2003; Rings, 2002; Smallwood, 1992). They liked the illustrations, the plots and the culture portrayed.

A few students reported not enjoying specific texts because they were too difficult, the plots were sad, or the story was not very interesting. Time spent reading, amount of texts to read, and trips to the library were also sources of complaints. Like in any class, some students liked certain activities and some other students did not. I also found that some of the activities that I created were not really good.

In general, the feeling was that most students liked children's literature, especially when compared to textbook readings, which many of them described as 'boring.' They also saw children's literature as the first step in getting used to reading in Spanish, as a stepping stone to more complex literature. None of the students thought that children's literature was inappropriate or childish for students of their age; on the contrary, they were very enthusiastic and supportive, just as all previous studies have shown. Students were observed engaged and interested in their readings. Sometimes, students were observed tuning out, especially when the illustrations of their classmates' texts were not visible from afar, when we were spending too much time in one particular activity, when they were too nervous preparing their own presentations, or at the end of the semester. Drifting off after 20 minutes has already been observed and it is believed to be related to attention span, not to lack of interest (Moffit, 2003).

Participation and engagement were also high, telling jokes and laughing in many occasions. The relaxed nature of classroom dynamics permeated clearly. This is believed

to be a critical feature for the elimination of affective barriers (Tse, 1996). This setting was probably influenced by my own enthusiasm for the subject, the rearrangement of the chairs in a circular shape, the nature of the texts we were reading, and my constant effort to create a low threatening environment.

5. 4. CASE STUDIES

To illustrate in more detail how students responded to children's literature in this course in terms of language learning, cultural learning and also affectively, in this second section I describe the case of five participants, Marcos, Brian, Felicia, Karl and John (all pseudonyms). A cross-case discussion follows the case studies. Conclusions for the entire chapter can be found at the end.

These five individuals were selected for being information-rich cases whose characteristics show great differences in several dimensions, as suggested by the literature (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002). At first, I did not know well what these dimensions would be, but I imagined that interest in reading children's literature would be an important one. However, in the initial interview, most students reported liking the idea of reading children's literature. This made this criterion invalid for selection purposes. By examining other data from the initial interview and grades obtained in initial assignments, I came up with three dimensions that differentiated students one from another: *grades* (which usually reflects level of proficiency entering the course), *interest* in Spanish (which usually reflects attitude in the class), and *motivation* for learning in this course.

Ormrod (2004) defines *interest* as a type of intrinsic motivation that makes people find a topic or activity intriguing and enticing. It causes pleasure, excitement, and liking. She defines *motivation* as an "internal state that arouses us to action, pushes us in particular directions, and keeps us engaged in certain activities" (p. 425). In Table 2 we can see how the five selected participants differed from each other.

	Initial grades	Interest in Spanish	Motivation in this course
Marcos	Quiz 1= A+ Quiz 2= A+ Quiz 3= A Essay 1= A+ Essay 2= A	Very interested in Spanish. Previous grades were As. Seeks opportunities to use it.	Maybe take upper-division courses and get a minor. Wants to travel and live abroad.
Brian	Quiz 1= A Quiz 2= A Quiz 3= B Essay 1= A Essay 2= A	Not interested because teachers treat students like children and syllabi are not well done. Thinks he will never be proficient enough to speak with natives.	Zero motivation. Just wants to graduate and get out of college.
Felicia	Quiz 1=B Quiz 2= D Quiz 3= C Essay 1= A Essay 2= B	Interested because of partial heritage. Previous grades were Bs.	Wants to talk to other side of family. Wants to study abroad. Maybe minor in Spanish.
Karl	Quiz 1= F Quiz 2= C Quiz 3= F Essay 1=C Essay 2= B+	Not interested in children's literature because he already read some. Never took Spanish in high-school.	Wants to improve listening and speaking skills.
John	Quiz 1= missed Quiz 2= F Quiz 3= missed Essay 1= missed Essay 2= F	Not interested in serious classes. Interested in Spanish, because it is useful at work. Likes to participate.Does not like rules or homework.	Zero motivation: he already knows enough to communicate with natives at work. Just wants to graduate and leave the state.

Table 2: Comparison of selected participants in three dimensions

In the next section, I describe each participant's background, his or her observed behavior in the classroom, and also how he or she experienced children's literature from my perspective and also from the student's.

A) Marcos

a) Background

Marcos was a non-Hispanic, white male with a double major in history and government. He had taken three years of Spanish in high school, three semesters in college, and had just returned from a three-week study abroad program in Mexico. In his initial interview I noticed how fluent he was, despite his overt nervousness. His grammar was quite accurate too (including past tense, conditional, and present subjunctive). His last grade in Spanish was an A. He stated that he did not like high school Spanish classes because he did not learn anything, but he enjoyed college classes even though they were difficult. He clearly claimed not liking the current Bush administration and therefore hoped to live in a different country some day soon, hopefully Spain. He admitted trying to use his Spanish with his Latino friends, but felt awkward and quit. He wanted to minor in Spanish, so he was planning to take more Spanish classes after this fourth semester course. I noticed that he smiled a lot, seemed eager and enthusiastic, interested in Spanish and motivated to learn more. On the first day of classes, he even asked me to call him by the Spanish version of his name. He was hoping to learn how to speak more fluently in this class: "the more you talk, the more you learn" (Marcos.Interview1).

Marcos' reading habits included newspapers and history books in English, from time to time. However, he did not read anything in Spanish beyond class requirements.

He admitted he had tried to read canonical literature in Spanish "without success", so he immediately liked the idea of using children's literature. He stated that children's literature was at his "level of Spanish. Even a 6-year-old can do better than us. This will help sentence structure and vocabulary, more than textbook readings" (Marcos.Interview1).

b) In the classroom

In class, Marcos always tried to use his Spanish to ask questions and, at the end of the class, he would always say, "tenga un buen día" [have a good day]. He always showed a positive attitude, which he kept until the end of the semester. He participated frequently on a volunteer basis, seemed to get along well with his surrounding classmates, always turned homework in on time, attended classes regularly, volunteered frequently, and asked appropriate questions for this level of proficiency. When we reviewed homework or quizzes, he paid attention and nodded "with his head when he got the answers correctly" (CO.12.2.05, p. 1). At the beginning of the following semester, he was one of the few who came to do the final interview.

Marcos' grades were clearly on the A side from the beginning. I noticed "his eagerness to speak Spanish" (CO.9.1.05, p. 1) right away. In the middle of the semester, he wanted to "review his composition and understand better his errors" (CO.11.2.05, p. 1), so we walked together to my office. He even offered to carry my video equipment. I let him carry the tripod. On the way to the office, we talked about Día de los Muertos and the difference between that celebration and Día de Todos los Santos in Spain. He was in a very good mood, as always, and even apologized several times for his "preguntas estúpidas" [stupid questions], which I assured him they were not. When he left the office,

a co-worker who was sitting next to my cubicle looked at me in approval and she admitted he was very nice, unlike the other student who came to see me a few days before (referring to John, who will be discussed later on).

c) Children's literature

The children's books that Marcos selected to read that semester included two descriptions of Native American civilizations (*Así es mi mundo: Los incas*[15]; *Así es mi mundo: México*[16]), a fairy tale (*Blanca Nieves*[17]), and a fictional story about a boy who lived on Easter Island (*El pequeño Manu*[18]). Marcos was one of the first students to volunteer to present his book in front of the class. He followed protocol perfectly, including mentioning the author's name and showing the illustrations to his classmates. He clearly prepared his presentation well, because he could remember years and the number of soldiers that Pizarro brought to the Americas. He found his book "interesting and informative" (SR.9.21.05, p. 1), because it showed the history, daily life and government of the Inca people.

In his mid-term evaluation, Marcos commented that he found the stories from *De Oro y Esmeraldas* "fairly interesting", especially the one of the Virgin of Guadalupe. To the question referring whether the student felt ready or able to read more complex literature at the end of the semester, Marcos responded that he could not read more complex literature (not even young adult literature); it would be "too overwhelming" (Marcos.MECL). He thought that children's literature would help his vocabulary and oral

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[15] McKissack, P. (1985). *Así es mi mundo: Los incas.* Chicago: Children's Press.
[16] Jacobsen, K. (1984). *Así es mi mundo: México*. Chicago: Children's Press.
[17] Coughran, M. H. (1987). *Horas encantadas: delightful stories to read and enact*. Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co.
[18] Carvajal, V. (2002). *El pequeño Manu*. Santiago, Chile: Sol y luna libros.

proficiency. To the question, how difficult or easy the stories were, he responded that "the vocabulary was fair, the grammar somewhat difficult, but the general understanding of the story was easy." (Marcos.MECL). His strategy, when encountering a word he did not know, was to "highlight the item and then look it up at the end of the sentence" (Marcos.MECL). Marcos believed that he was learning culture through these readings and gave me the example of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a story whose origin and plot did not know until now. He confessed he liked reading about culture because "it added a new dimension in reading" (Marcos.MECL). I also asked him about his book-searching techniques. He said he would browse around looking for a visually-appealing and culturally interesting text. He liked *De Oro y Esmeraldas* because it had "advanced grammar and vocabulary to learn while incorporating cultural themes" (Marcos.MECL).

Both his oral and written capabilities were appropriate for the level of the class. This is one of his essays on *El pequeño Manu*:

> Manu vivía en un isla en el medio del Océano Pacífico. Un día la abuela de Manu preguntó para su ayuda. Por eso Manu fue con su abuela alrededor la aldea para coleccionar gallinas. Ellos conocieron muchas diferentes personajes durante el viaje. La abuela de Manu le dijo sobre el Dios Atun Hiva y Rapahongo, el duende de la generosidad en la isla. Además, la abuela explicó la historia de ambos para que Manu entendiera quien ellos eran. Eventualmente Manu y su abuela recibieron todas las gallinas y las dieron al alma gemela afuera de la aldea. El Dios Atun Hiva y Rapahongo tomaron los regalos y hubo no resentimiento entre los dos. Para concluir Manu regresó a su casa y la dio a su mamá muchas gallinas. La mamá estuvo halagada y Manu se sentió feliz. (Marcos.EB3)[19]

> [Manu lived in an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. One day Manu's grandmother asked for his help. That's why Manu went with his grandmother around the village to collect hens. They met a lot of different characters during the trip. Manu's grandmother told him about the gods Atun Hiva and Rapahongo, the elves of generosity in the island. Besides, the grandmother explained the story of both so that Manu could understand who they were. Eventually, Manu and his

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[19] All work by students is reproduced here as they wrote it, with errors included. Translations are mine and do not reflect students' grammatical errors.

grandmother received all the hens and gave them to the kindred spirit outside the village. The gods Atun Hiva and Rapahongo took the presents and there was no resentment between the two. To conclude, Manu returned home and gave his mother many hens. The mother was very flattered and Manu felt happy]

As we can see in this sample of his writing, Marcos was perfectly capable of writing the plot of a story in a manner that was comprehensible and logical. His grammar had minor flaws (agreement, por / para, some pronouns, etc) but major successes, such as the clear distinction between the two simple past tenses (imperfect and preterit), the use of appropriate vocabulary from the story (e.g., duende, aldea, Dios, gallinas, etc), coordinating and subordinating sentences, and even a correct past subjunctive (e.g., entendiera). Although a little forced, he also incorporated vocabulary from the textbook chapter (e.g., resentimiento, alma gemela, halagada, etc) and added a few transition connectors (e.g., por eso, para concluir, etc), as requested in the instructions of the essay.

Once the course was over, Marcos was still convinced that children's literature was the type of literature he could read successfully, and, "maybe, maybe, chapter books" (Marcos.Interview2). He thought *De Oro y Esmeraldas* was exactly at his level. To justify his answer, he told me that he had enrolled in a conversation and grammar class (the next class in the sequence of Spanish) and had to drop it after two weeks. When I asked him if he felt at a disadvantage because we had spent our semester reading children's literature, he replied he did not and added that everybody in that class seemed overwhelmed. He later said that he was taking too many credits that semester and felt right dropping that class. In this class, they were reading from a collection of literary excerpts from different writers and periods and he thought that "there were just too many words I didn't understand. It is difficult when every third word you have to look up or just make sure" (Marcos.Interview2).

Honestly, I was surprised to hear that my best student in the class struggled so much in his new Spanish class. It was quite unbelievable. Therefore, I visited the teacher of that class and asked him to see the textbook, which was called *Revista: Conversación sin barreras*[20]. We examined it and both agreed that the readings were not that difficult (e.g., modern language, current authors, everyday life themes, basic pre- and post-reading activities, etc). This finding made me believe that Marcos' busy schedule was probably the factor that influenced the most in his dropping the class, because his level of understanding and his high proficiency were definitely enough to keep up with the requirements of this new course.

d) Conclusion

At the end of the course, Marcos received an A, as expected. He did excellently throughout the semester in both oral and written assignments, quizzes, tests, and in every aspect of the course. He showed interest, motivation, and initiative. He also made an effort to select texts that were related to his history and government majors. He enjoyed the class and found the readings interesting, visually appealing, comprehensible, and slightly challenging. His initial opinion about his abilities to read more complex literature did not change throughout the semester: he felt comfortable with children's literature and did not think he could read anything more complex. He thought children's literature was helping him learn vocabulary and improve fluency. He also thought that he learned about certain cultural issues, such as how the Inca lived their every day lives. He enjoyed children's literature and would recommend this class to any student who entered the

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[20] Blanco, J. A.; Garcia, M. I.; Aparisi, M. C. (2004). *Revista: Conversación sin barreras*. Boston: Vista Higher Learning.

fourth semester course. He also suggested that students in the third semester course start with children's literature, so that chapter books can be read in the fourth semester course.

B) Brian

a) Background

Brian was a non-Hispanic, white male with a major in American studies. He wanted to become a lawyer or a professor. He took Spanish in middle and high school, as well as three semesters in college. He received an A in his last class. During the initial interview, I noticed that he had very good comprehension skills, good grammar and vocabulary, although his subjunctive and advanced tenses (conditional, future) were not consistently correct, as is expected for students entering the fourth semester at this university. What struck me from the beginning was his honesty and lack of motivation in school. He admitted that he just wanted to graduate. He hated college Spanish classes, because they were being treated "like children, doing skits" (Brian.Interview1). He did not like the fact that the syllabus was "crammed" and the lab sessions were unfruitful. He was pretty sure his Spanish would never be good enough to actually have conversations with native speakers. As a matter of fact, he was not willing to use his Spanish with a native speaker because that would be "patronizing" (Brian.Interview1). He admitted that he missed his chance to study abroad and now that he was graduating it was too late. This lack of motivation and general apathy seemed to be a combination of bad experiences, lack of real needs to use Spanish, and eagerness to graduate.

Brian's reading habits included newspapers and magazines in Spanish, although he confessed the vocabulary was hard. His first impression of children's literature was very positive. He thought it was a good way to start in terms of language acquisition and

interest, since textbook readings are so "boring," (Brian.Interview1) but he mentioned that he would like to read more complex literature later in the semester.

b) In the classroom

In the classroom, Brian kept a medium profile. He did not participate as much as Marcos, but he did participate quite a bit and asked appropriate questions, both in English and in Spanish. He asked and answered questions frequently and seemed interested in the class, despite his initial comments about his interest and motivation in Spanish college classes. He did many homework assignments (although not all of them). He also offered comments about our curriculum, such as our faulty grading system for compositions. Once, he turned to the camera and with a funny attitude said that "having a quiz on Wednesday, a Escrito Breve on Friday and another assignment on Monday sucks!" (SR.10.3.05, p. 2) and then he continued his pair exercise.

Brian appeared to be good at Spanish, and from the beginning I knew he would get an A (maybe a B if he did not put forth much effort). The type of questions that he asked in class showed he had a good knowledge of grammar. For example, one day he asked about the ending of the past subjunctive used in the story ('pidiese'), which apparently he was not familiar with. Indeed, the textbook shows the form 'pidiera.' I explained that there were two forms for every verb ('pidiese' and 'pidiera' for the verb 'pedir') and that the author preferred to use the one that we did not see in class.

In several occasions, Brian looked "restless, not paying attention and re-positioning his chair several times" (SR.9.21.05, p. 1). At the end of the semester he seemed mentally absent, "not making eye contact" (CO.11.28.05, p. 1). For example, he forgot to bring his book a few times, did not do homework, forgot that there was a quiz

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one day, sat at the back of the room, did not participate, and responded 'I don't know' when I called on him. Since this behavior stood out from his general behavior until that moment and also from the general positive and active behavior of the rest of the students, I noticed it right away. I even wrote him an e-mail asking what was going on. He replied that his job was taking too much of his time and energy.

c) Children's literature

Even though from the beginning Brian thought children's literature was a good idea, I was concerned about his response once we used the books in class, since he had complained about doing "childish things" in previous Spanish classes. His cognitive demands were clearly higher than those of other students in the class, maybe influenced by his major, American studies, which is an amalgam of social issues, history, politics and culture.

The four texts that he selected to read included a fictional story about two friends visiting Chile (*Cuentos cortos de la tierra larga*[21]), an excerpt of a novel about two orphans in Spain (*La sombra del ciprés es alargada*[22]), one more about a girl who lost her mom's ring in the tamales dough *(¡Qué montón de tamales!*[23]), and the same fairy tale that Marcos read (*Blanca Nieves*). About the first story, he wrote,

> No me gusta esta texto. El autor describe mucho pero no da una cuenta muy interesante. Los amigos caminan y caminan y nada mucho ocurre. Sin embargo, los ilustraciones son bellas. No recomiendo que tú leas esta historia. (Brian.Ficha1)

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[21] Gevert, L. (Ed.). *Cuentos cortos de la tierra larga.* Santiago, Chile: Andrés Bello.
[22] Delibes, M. (1960). *Mi mundo y el mundo: Selección antológica de obras del autor para niños de 11 a 14 años.* Valladolid, España: Miñón.
[23] Soto, G. (1996). *¡Qué montón de tamales!* New York: Penguin Putnam Books.

[I don't like this text. The author describes a lot but does not tell anything interesting. The friends walk and walk but no much happens. Nevertheless, the illustrations are beautiful. I do not recommend you to read this story.]

As we can see, Brian was looking for a text that kept him interested, but got disappointed with most of the texts he read (except for those stories in *De Oro y Esmeraldas)*. However, he was still able to appreciate certain aspects of the texts. For example, he did not find the second story –written by the famous Spanish novelist Miguel Delibes— interesting, but he liked the language very much even though he had to use a dictionary. Of Delibes, he said, "he writes for adults and it's great, whereas the tamales book is so simple and flat" (Brian.SpanishOralInterview) and "sugiero que tú encontres otras novelas de Delibes porque él puede contar historias interesantes sobre niños y relaciones estrechas" (Brian.EB2) [I suggest your find other novels of Delibes because he can tell interesting stories about children and close relationships]. Brian did not dare to evaluate the fairy tale, because "es una parte importante de mi cultura" (Brian.Ficha4) [it is an important part of my culture], but he admitted that he should be reading something with Hispanic culture, instead of Disney stories.

Brian never submitted his midterm evaluation of children's literature, so, after he finished his Spanish Oral Interview (at the end of the semester), I asked him to fill it out, if he could. In this evaluation, he reported that children's literature was slightly below his level and would have liked more challenging literature to read, which it is something I had already noticed. He preferred *De Oro y Esmeraldas* to the books he selected from the library, because he found myths very interesting and the language in this book was at his level. To the question that some people think that children's literature is childish and adults should not read it, he wrote: "that argument never made sense to me. Children shouldn't read childish stuff either" (Brian.MECL). He believed that readings allow

students to encounter the language in its natural environment and that is how they help improve fluency. He thought that his overall comprehension improved thanks to the readings. Even though he said he liked reading about culture, he did not think he learned anything specific from the stories he read. Brian enjoyed literary texts because he could appreciate a "writer's perspective" (Brian.MECL), which you could not do with "boring" textbook readings (Brian.Interview1).

d) Conclusion

Brian received an A in this course. His participation and achievement was good from the beginning but gradually decreased as the semester advanced and his professional work (as newspaper editor, I believe) demanded more of his time. Despite his lack of enthusiasm and his hatred of the Spanish college curriculum, his competence and performance seemed to be adequate. I was very surprised to find that he appreciated children's literature and did not find it childish or inappropriate, having taken into consideration his negative experiences in previous Spanish classes. He thought that these texts presented the language in its natural environment and therefore would benefit students' fluency more than textbook readings. However, he did not think he learned any culture from the texts. He was not very satisfied with his own text selections, but he liked *De Oro y Esmeraldas* very much, because myths were interesting and the language was complex. Brian believed that he could understand more complex literature, and so do I, not only because of his educational background but also for his constant need for challenges.

C) Felicia

a) Background

Felicia was a bi-cultural female (her father was a white American and her mother was Mexican) whose major was sociology. She confessed that she did not grow up speaking or listening to Spanish, despite her heritage, and she resented that. She had taken two years of Spanish in high school and two semesters in college before this class. She received a B in her last class. Felicia was interested in making Spanish her minor, and wanted to study abroad in Spain, because some friends had told her that immersion was a great experience. She did not find Spanish difficult, but she admitted she got nervous when trying to speak to native speakers. She was hoping to get over her nervousness and increase her fluency in my class. Her degree of understanding was very good, but her general performance was average towards poor. After her interview, I wrote in my notes, "she needs to raise her level a little if she wants an A in my class" (Felicia.Interview1).

In English, Felicia loved to read suspense stories and bestsellers. In Spanish, she only read newspapers occasionally. When I asked her what she thought about using children's literature in this class, she said:

> I am excited. It will help my vocabulary and grammar. Now we can finally speak and discuss the books. These books are interesting, not like textbooks, which are so boring. (Felicia.Interview1)

When I asked what she felt comfortable reading –the choices included children's literature, young adult literature, textbook readings, and adult literature— she responded that children's literature and young adult literature.

b) In the classroom

Felicia kept a low profile and participated only occasionally, compared to the rest of the class. She got along well with her classmates and collaborated willingly in class activities. She hardly volunteered to answer questions, never asked questions, and did not make cultural comments of any kind. She received low grades in many of her homework assignments, although she received a B in her first test. This is a sample of her writing about the movie *Amores Perros* (González Iñárritu, 2000):

> Octavio se amó a Susanna. Susanna estaba bonita pero ella se casaba a hermano de Octavio. Octavio necesitaba dinero y quería Susana. Octavio ganó dinero porque su perro se peleó otro perro. Cuando Octavio manejó su coche, no vió la luz roja. Hube un accidente de tráfico. La mujer en la coche estaba bonita y modelo. Ella pierdó su pierna y no puedó trabajar. Un chico salvó el perro en la coche de Octavio y el cuidó por el pero. (Felicia.Compo2)

> [Octavio was in love with Susana. Susana was beautiful but she was married to Octavio's brother. Octavio needed money and loved Susanna. Octavio earned money because his dog fought with another dog. When Octavio drove his car, he did not see the red light. There was a traffic accident. The woman in the car was beautiful and a model. She lost her leg and could not work. A boy saved the dog in Octavio's car and took care of the dog]

As we can see, Felicia's writing is quite basic. She was able to retell events in a comprehensible manner, but with effort from the reader because of her numerous grammatical errors. She was unable to distinguish the preterit from the imperfect and confused 'ser' with 'estar.' She wrote simple sentences, sometimes coordinated but hardly ever subordinated. She had problems with agreement, with the endings of the verbs, and with word choice. According to my experience, these are errors more commonly found in a second semester student. Also, her English interfered greatly with her Spanish. Throughout the semester, "she fluctuated between B and C" (TL.12.17.05, p. 1), finally receiving a low B. Her final oral interview was quite poor, comparable to C

students. I even wrote "I hope she reconsiders having Spanish as a minor" (TL.12.5.05, p. 1).

c) Children's literature

The four texts that Felicia selected to read included a fictional story about two sisters and their family life (*Las hermanas*[24]), a biography of César Chávez (*César Chávez y la causa*[25]), a bilingual autobiographical account of certain cultural traditions (*In my family / En mi familia*[26]), and a fairy tale (*La sirenita*[27]). Felicia found the first book "dificil leer" (Felicia.Ficha1) and had to re-read it. She liked the illustrations, because they helped comprehension.

Felicia did not return her midterm evaluation of children's literature until the end of the semester. Then, she confessed that children's books were "extremely interesting" and they "challenged" her (Felicia.MECL). She thought these texts would help her gain knowledge of vocabulary words and would prepare her for quizzes. However, her writing did not always reflect the use of vocabulary taken directly from the stories[28]. She also thought that children's books were helping her speaking skills because she had to present a book in front of others. She admitted that she had to read some texts twice and use the dictionary. To the question about being ready for more complex literature, she responded that children's literature was "difficult enough" (Felicia.MECL), which shows a change from her initial stand, when she thought she would be ready for young adult literature. She also mentioned that she learned culture from these stories, although she was not very

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[24] Paz, Senel (1996). *Las hermanas*. Mexico: CIDCLI: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.
[25] Roberts, N. (1986). *César Chávez y la causa*. Chicago: Children's Press.
[26] Lomas Garza, C. (1996). *In my family / En mi familia*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
[27] Teitelbaum, M. (1997). *La sirenita*. Bogotá, Colombia: Grupo Editorial Norma / Disney Enterprises, Inc.
[28] Even though the literature points out that recalling of vocabulary does not necessarily mean learning vocabulary (Ormrod, 2004), the opposite might be true: not recalling might be evidence of lack of learning.

specific on this topic "recomiendo que tu leas el libro porque hay mucha cultura" (Felicia.Ficha3) [I recommend you to read this book because there is a lot of culture]. This is what she wrote about César Chávez:

> Me gusta el libro porque Cesar Chavez es muy facinar. La lengua es muy facil y las photographias son muy interesante. Yo recommiendo que lea el libro porque Cesar Chavez es muy interesante. (Felicia.Ficha2).

> [I like the book because César Chávez is very fascinating. The language is very easy and the photographs are very interesting. I recommend you to read the book because César Chávez is very interesting]

d) Conclusion

Felicia fluctuated between B and C all semester. Finally, she received a very low B. Even though she attempted to do well and seemed interested in Spanish and in the stories we were reading, her language skills were low and did not seem to improve much over the semester. She used simple sentences and basic vocabulary, showed many grammatical errors in speaking and writing, and had difficulties comprehending certain texts. She thought children's literature was helping her Spanish skills and taught her culture, such as "the golden city, and the virgin of Guadalupe" (Felicia.MECL). She did not seem to connect personally with the culture portrayed, probably due to the fact that she was not raised as a Latina. Despite her difficulties, she claimed that her "favorite part of the class was reading the books" (Felicia.MECL).

D) Karl

a) Background

Karl was an Asian-American male with a major in economics. He never took Spanish in school or high school, but he took one course at a community college recently, where he received a B. He mentioned he was expecting a B in my class too. He liked that course he took previously, but he admitted it was difficult to speak. During his initial interview, I noticed that his Spanish proficiency level was extremely poor, showing little understanding that required a lot of rephrasing and repetition, poor grammatical and lexical knowledge, and extremely slow fluency. Because of this unusual background, his short responses, and how slow and formally he spoke in English, I immediately assumed that he was an international student from Asia. It was not until the middle of the semester that I discover that he was American. He clearly stated from the beginning that he was exclusively interested in gaining fluency. When I asked him whether he already tried to speak with a native speaker, he confessed he did not. He asked me to be flexible with office hours, so that he could come to my office to practice speaking. He never came, though.

Karl did not talk about his reading habits in English, but he did mention that he did not read anything in Spanish. When I asked him how he felt about using children's literature in the class, he said he had done that in his previous community college course, thus, children's literature was "below his level" (Karl.Interview1). He was ready for more complex type of literature. When he said that, I immediately realized how unaware he was of his limitations. He obviously had a very unrealistic perception of his actual skills. Although he could not see how reading was going to help his fluency, he thought it would help with "sentence structure" (Karl.Interview1).

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b) In the classroom

In the classroom, Karl was attentive and always came to class. I observed that from the beginning he was having a lot of difficulties speaking and understanding the stories or understanding my questions. His writing skills were better, although he lacked a lot of basic vocabulary. In his first test, which is usually a good indicator of final grade, he received a C. He struggled with out of class assignments as well. Karl never volunteered answers or participated actively in class. In the middle of the semester, I wrote him an e-mail concerned about his lack of participation and his refusal to answer when I called on him. He confessed that he "didn't understand my questions all the time. He assured me that he was not negligent or indifferent, and he promised to participate more" (CO.11.2.05, p. 1). The next day of class, he "raised his hand and volunteered to answer two of my questions" (CO.11.4.05, p. 1), but after that, he returned to his usual self. When students practiced speaking in pairs or when they had to retell a story, Karl was unable to do his tenses correctly, spoke very slowly, used "simple sentences in broken Spanish" (SR.10.7.05, p. 2), and showed a great interference from English. His performance was comparable to a first or second semester student. This is part of his oral retelling of one of his stories:

> …y muerte… y Martina es triste… y Martina canta y llora. (SR.10.7.05, p. 2)

> [… and dies… and Martina is sad… and Martina sings and cries]

c) Children's literature

Karl's self-selected texts from the library included a fictional story about a boy celebrating Christmas in Los Angeles (*Pedro, el ángel de la calle Olvera*[29]), a folktale

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[29] Politi, L. (1961). *Pedro, el ángel de la calle Olvera*. New York: Scribner.

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(*Pérez y Martina*[30]), a popular folktale from the 17th century (*El gato con botas*[31]), and a fictional story of a girl in the Nazi Germany (*Rosa Blanca*[32]). Karl chose *Pérez y Martina* for his class presentation and found it,

> fácil de leer. Los ilustraciones son simple pero descriptivo. El cuento es muy raro y triste pero es un libro folklorico, tan el es interesa" (Karl.Ficha2)

> [easy to read. The illustrations are simple but descriptive. The story is very weird and sad but it is a folk book, so it is interesting].

He claimed he did not like the stories with sad plots, such as *Pérez y Martina* and *Rosa Blanca*, but he liked those which were easy to understand. This is an in-class writing sample about *El gato con botas*:

> El hijo de un molinero heredó un gato quien quiere llevar las botas. El gato era muy listo, pero el hijo del molinero no lo conocía y no le gusta el gato. El gato cayó los animales y traen los animales al rey. El gato dicho que los animales era de su maestro. El gato enganía muchas personas a piensar que el hijo de un molinero era un maestro. Un dia el rey viajaba con su hija y encontrían el molinero y la hija del rey se enamoraba con él. El rey quería él se casaba con su hija. (Kart.EB1)

> [The son of a miller inherited a cat who liked to wear boots. The cat was very smart, but the miller's son did not know that and didn't like the cat. The cat hunted the animals and brought the animals to the king. The cat said that the animals were of his master's. The cat deceived many people into thinking that the miller's son was a master. One day the king was traveling with his daughter and found the miller, and the king's daughter felt in love with him. The king wanted him to marry his daughter]

In this sample, we can see that his past tenses were sometimes correct and sometimes not; the same happened with verb-subject agreement and noun-adjective agreement, and

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[30] Belpré, P. (1966). *Pérez y Martina: un cuento folklórico puertorriqueño*. New York: F. Wayne.

[31] Perrault, C. (1991). *El gato con botas*. New York: Mirasol, libros juveniles, Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

[32] Innocenti, R. (1987). *Rosa Blanca*. Salamanca, España: Loguez.

choice of words (conocer vs. saber). He confused preterit and imperfect and mixed present and past, which is not that uncommon at this level. When attempting a sentence that required subjunctive and we had practiced in class, he failed (El rey quería él se casaba con su hija). A few successes include the use of vocabulary from the story (e.g., molinero, rey, maestro, etc) and the introduction of one time marker to show chronological development of the plot (un día). However, he did not use vocabulary from the textbook chapter, as required in the instructions.

Karl believed that children's literature helped him in terms of grammar and sentence structure because the books were easy to read and the illustrations helped clarify "words that I do not understand" (Karl.MECL). He found the stories entertaining (except those that were sad). At the beginning of the semester, he thought he was able to read more complex literature, but that opinion changed by the middle of the semester due to the difficulties he was experiencing. He thought reading children's literature was a nice way to "build a foundation for future reading because you start at the bottom and work your way up" (Karl.MECL). He also admitted that he learned culture with these stories, specifically about Christmas traditions and religion, which he did not know much about.

d) Conclusion

Karl received a C in this course. Even though he was a disciplined student and cared about his grades, he struggled from the beginning in all areas, especially in listening and speaking and was very unaware of his great limitations. He had a positive attitude towards children's literature in the sense that he thought it helped his grammar and cultural knowledge and most texts were interesting (except for those that were sad or too difficult). His initial opinion about how difficult children's literature was and his

presumed abilities to read more complex literature changed after he used the texts selected for this course. Even though he was not participating, he did not want me to think that he was negligent or indifferent. I believe his lack of participation was a sign of his struggle, just like other low-proficiency students were showing. He tried and did his best.

E) John

a) Background

John was a non-Hispanic, white male with a major in mathematics (a recent change from engineering). He took Spanish in middle school, two years in high school and a couple of semesters in college. He received a B in his previous course. His Spanish proficiency level was good, showing good understanding and fluency, but he was unable to perform at higher levels (mainly conditional and subjunctive). His high confidence and risk-taking behavior when communicating in Spanish were quite evident. He claimed that he never liked Spanish by the book, but he enjoyed classes that were more relaxed, fun and interesting. He specially mentioned Steve, his previous instructor, who used to be very relaxed and even played his guitar in class. He admitted openly that he would not be the best student in the class, because he did not like doing homework or care about attendance and other rules, but he would participate. He said he was interested in learning Spanish because he needed it sometimes at work (construction). His goal at this point was just graduating and moving to New York, where his fiancée lived. When I asked him what suggestion he had for the class, he said that he hated dead silences, so if people did not volunteer, he told me to call on them.

John did not comment on his reading habits, but when I asked him what he thought about using children's literature in this class he liked the idea because those texts looked "more interesting than textbooks" (John.Interview1). He also mentioned that he could read pretty much anything at any level, "such as young adult literature" (John.Interview1).

b) In the classroom

Just as promised, John showed a high level of participation from beginning to end. He volunteered answers often, he volunteered to read, and he even explained to other students certain cultural topics with which he was familiar. At the beginning of the semester, he was cordial to me and even helped me with my camera equipment. Sometimes, he just wanted some attention, like the day he was humming a song and I asked him why he was humming. He said "he was happy" (SR.10.7.05, p. 2). When responding to my questions, most of "his answers were incorrect" (CO.121.2.05, p. 1), but he did not seem to care much. He was also quite loud in everything he did or said. John hardly turned in any homework assignment and he never apologized for it or tried to figure out how to make it up. His behavior left much to be desired (e.g., came unprepared to class, sometimes forgot his book, did not know when quizzes were, asked very basic questions, entered the class talking loudly on his phone, and tried to have informal conversations that would take our attention off the lesson). Almost every day he stood up in the middle of the lesson and went to the restroom. When I asked for something via e-mail, he would bring it to class. When I asked for an anonymous evaluation, he would write his name on it. When I asked him to watch a movie from a list, he chose any movie he wanted. Sometimes I just did not know whether he was doing these things on purpose.

John was one of the two students that asked me to call him by his Spanish name. However, the translation of his name was not very common in Spanish (it is probably not even of Spanish origin). Therefore, I called him 'John' most of the time. He used his Spanish both for class-related and non-class related conversations, like the day he asked me whether I had seen the football game. When he received a C on his first test, I knew that would be his final grade just because he did not want to put the effort necessary for a better grade. Because of his constant absences and tardiness, John's grades suffered. When he received a zero in two assignments for missing one specific day, he complained a lot, and argued that he stayed late and fell asleep that morning. We exchanged many e-mails about this subject. He did not like the strictness of the Spanish department regarding absences, make-up rules, my suspicious adherence to these unfair policies, and even my "negative attitude against me or the class as a whole" (John.Email). Although I could perfectly let him make up those assignments and put this fuss behind, I refused because of his general apathy and attitude. After my supervisor told him that rules were rules, he still kept on writing e-mails asking for my personal view on the subject, in other words, if I was just following rules or I actually agreed with the rules. I told him that I was following rules even though I did not agree with them. He thanked me for my honesty and stopped e-mailing about this topic.

After that, I noticed that John had a negative effect on me and made me feel uncomfortable. I even noticed that I was avoiding making eye contact with him because he seemed "to be the only student who challenged my responses and asked why" (CO.10.24.05, p. 2). Once, he protested loudly because I graded something that he thought was correct. I told him that he could come to my office to discuss it, and I continued with the class. He insisted and I repeated my suggestion and kept on teaching. He did come to my office hours and we went through his homework step by step. I

realized that he did not know well the endings of the past tenses and sometimes confused them with the endings of the subjunctive. After he left, a co-worker seating nearby told me that his attitude was very defensive and negative. I started to feel that his defiant attitude was taking away my enthusiasm and general good attitude in the classroom, and that worried me.

For his final exam, it was obvious that John made an extra effort: he sat on the first row and even used a scratch paper to write everything down before writing in on the exam. He received a B+ and this gave him a final grade of C in the course.

c) Children's literature

The three texts that John selected (he missed the first one) included a fictional story (*¡Qué montón de tamales!*) and two biographies of César Chávez (*Cosechando esperanza*[33] and *César Chávez y la causa*). This is what he wrote about the first biography:

> Me gustó el libro porque era sobre una persona importante en la historia de derechos humanos. Me gustó el parte cuando los campesinos marcharon a Sacramento para La Causa. Me gustó que César Chávez era muy cariñoso y cuidadoso. Le interesó ayudando otras personas y peleando los patrones de los viñedos. César quería a aumentar los salarios de los campesinos. Le gustó cantar y bailar cuando se relajaron. (John.EB4)

> [I liked the book because it was about an important person in the history of human rights. I liked the part when the farmers marched to Sacramento for the cause. I liked that César Chávez was very loving and careful. He was interested in helping other people and fighting the landlords of the vineyards. César wanted to raise the farmers' salaries. I liked to sing and dance when we wasn't working]

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[33] Krull, K. (2003). *Cosechando esperanza: La historia de César Chávez.* Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc.

This writing sample shows that he was able to distinguish the preterit and the imperfect for the most part and knew the endings right. English showed to interfere (e.g., ayudando, peleando), which is not unusual at this level. He was able to summarize the important points of the story in a few sentences and he obviously used vocabulary from the story (e.g., campesinos, patrones, marcharon, salarios). He also included vocabulary from the textbook chapter, as requested (e.g., cariñoso, cuidadoso).

John's midterm evaluation was extremely brief, with a few words per question. He thought children's literature was "interesting" and "good to start with" (John.MECL). He believed that children's literature was helping his Spanish skills because he had to use context clues, although he also admitted he used the dictionary when encountering an unknown word. He mentioned that the vocabulary was sometimes difficult. For example, after reading *Guanina*, which we all found very difficult, he suggested we start with *The three little pigs*. He wrote that he liked reading about culture, because he did not know much about certain cultural topics. I was somewhat surprised to see that he compared himself with "César Chávez fighting for a just cause" (TL.10.30.05, p. 1) when he was fighting to make up those two assignments he missed for oversleeping.

Even though I knew John was not reading some of the stories from *De Oro y Esmeraldas*, he participated when we discussed issues raised by those stories. For example, the day we discussed why the story of *El Dorado* spread so quickly throughout the world, he answered that spreading the story,

> could get more funds from the kingdom of Spain to finance more trips. He answered in English, though. I have never thought of this possibility and I accepted as valid. (SR.11.2.05, p. 2)

Despite enjoying children's literature, he often "showed signs of boredom" (SR.9.28.05, p. 1), especially when others were presenting. It was then that he moved a lot in his seat, did not want to work with his classmates, did not look at the student presenting, and even read a book from another class. He "didn't even care whether I saw him or not" (CO.11.21.05, p. 2). He was overtly bored when he was not actively doing something.

d) Conclusion

John was an interesting case study. He was able to speak with acceptable fluency even though his accuracy was so-so. He finally received a C in this class. He could have done well in this class, but his lack of motivation and effort reflected negatively on his grades. Even though he participated and showed understanding of the texts that we read, his urge to graduate and quit being a student was very strong and evident. His defiant attitude was a constant source of discomfort for me and made me realize how much certain students can influence us, teachers, and direct classroom dynamics in certain unwanted directions.

One of the very surprising events that happened around this specific student was how he identified himself with a character in one of our books when events made their lives similar in certain aspects. Even though a previous study (Ho, 2000) reported readers' lack of empathy for certain characters who are distant in age, in this case, there was a connection between a Hispanic, middle-age character and a non-Hispanic college-student that took me by surprise.

5. 5. CROSS-CASE DISCUSSION

When comparing the cases of the five selected participants, a couple of interesting patterns appeared. One of them was how all participants agreed that children's literature was a logical and interesting way to start reading literature in Spanish. Even though some of them thought they were ready for more complex literature, they all appreciated the fact that we were starting with something simple, interesting and different. This finding agrees with previous research findings claiming that college-age students do not reject the idea of using children's literature and are indeed motivated and interested (Goh, 1996; Ho, 2000; Kim, 2002; Moffit, 1998; Randolph, 2000; Rings, 2002; Sullivan, 1994; Wang, 1999; Wu, 2001).

An interesting observation found in these cases is related to how participants perceived illustrations. Whereas high- and medium-proficiency participants[34] mentioned how beautiful and appealing illustrations were, low-proficiency students talked about how helpful they were in clarifying the story or the vocabulary. Rings (2002) claims that illustrations increase students' interest and Baker (1998) found that illustrations serve to confirm hypotheses about the meaning of words or clarify content, especially to beginners. In this study, both statements were found to be true.

Another interesting pattern is that those participants who liked being challenged despite difficulties –which would only include Brian— found children's literature not sufficiently challenging or even interesting. Brian only appreciated the stories that were written with complexity and literariness, such as those by Delibes or some stories in *De Oro y Esmeraldas*. For the rest of participants, the texts ranged from comprehensible to

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[34] Even though John received a C in the class, I believe he was a B student who just received a bad grade because of laziness and lack of motivation. On the opposite, I consider Felicia a C student (even though she received a B in the class) because she never really achieved the level of proficiency expected for this course.

challenging, and they definitely did not want to read anything more difficult. High-proficiency participants found the texts slightly challenging, whereas low-proficiency participants found them difficult and confessed they had to read them more than once, use a dictionary often, and use the illustrations for help. Comprehensible input was then related to both the students' and the texts' characteristics. It was interesting to see how, at the beginning of the semester, those students who thought that they could read more complex literature then changed their minds at the end of the semester (with exception of Brian).

A common element in all participants is that they thought these texts were helping their Spanish skills in one way of another (e.g., vocabulary, fluency, grammar, etc). All students, some more than others, used the vocabulary present in their stories when they retold them orally or in writing.

In terms of cultural learning, all participants –except Brian— thought that they were also learning culture from these readings. Many of them claimed that they did not know much about culture before taking this class and that is why they appreciated this aspect of the stories. They also praised the authenticity of these stories.

None of the participants found the stories selected childish or inappropriate for college FL learners like them. They all praised the fact that we were starting reading with the simplest type of literature, so that later we could move on to more complex literature.

All participants –except Brian— found the stories interesting, engaging, and entertaining. They liked the characters, the events, and the illustrations. Only one low-proficiency student, Karl, equated interest with difficulty (the more difficult, the less interesting) and with happy endings (the sadder the story, the less interesting).

Although some students in class found special connections with the Hispanic / Latino culture portrayed in the books, none of these five participants did. That could be

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due to the fact that none of them was Latino and the only student half Latina was not raised as such. However, one participant –John— identified himself with one character (César Chávez) when he was going through some struggle during the semester. Another participant, Marcos, selected books that were connected to his majors (history and government). This was difficult for the others, because their majors were mathematics, sociology, and economics.

5. 6. CONCLUSIONS TO THIS CHAPTER

Children's literature was found to offer comprehensible input to most students in this course, who found the texts challenging but manageable and who also found illustrations and text deconstruction to be helping factors. Only a few students found the text selected for the class too difficult. These were low-proficiency students who were struggling with other aspects of the course. However, these students were able to find other children's texts with which they felt more comfortable, even though they did not meet the criteria established for this course. These texts were texts of familiar topics, just as previous researchers have found (Randolph, 2000; Sullivan, 1994; Yanes, 1992). Findings suggest the importance of matching students' skills with text difficulty, implying that a competency threshold is needed to understand certain literary texts, as the literature claims (Baker, 1998; Clarke, 1980; Macaro, 2003; Ulijn, 1978; Yorio, 1971). All students in this course thought that children's literature helped their Spanish skills by showing vocabulary and grammar in context. From a qualitative standpoint, not all students, however, showed noticeable gains. Levels of performance varied from excellent to poor, just like in other regular courses that I have taught. Children's literature showed

to offer a wide variety of genres, formats and also difficulty levels and adapted well to my students' varied proficiency levels, a quality that might not be as easily found in canonical literature.

Students reported that children's literature helped them learn Hispanic / Latino culture in this course. They found these cultural issues interesting, enriching, authentic, important and motivating. Data showed that there was incidental learning of geography, which was always linked to the cultural issues discussed in class. Intercultural connections, both induced and student-generated, were possible due to the themes explored and the fact that students recognized the authentic culture portrayed in the texts. These connections, which are strongly encouraged by the *Standards for foreign language learning* (1986), apparently helped comprehension and, subsequently, learning, according to the literature (Bartlett, 1932; Carrell, 1984; McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986). A few students alleged not learning anything that they did not know previously. Although most students were comfortable with the cultural issues discussed, one student was clearly not satisfied with the depth of knowledge conveyed in this course. It is possible that my attempts to expand 'small c culture' into 'big c culture' were not sufficient for this particular student. Findings indicate the importance of exploring the culture portrayed in children's literature to enhance students' interest and general learning. Also, it is essential to expand 'small c culture' into a type of culture that is cognitively rewarding for adult learners.

Students' affective responses were very positive towards the use of children's literature, which they did not find inappropriate or childish, but interesting, appropriate for their level of proficiency, visually appealing, and entertaining for the most part. Sometimes they did not like specific texts for being too difficult or not very interesting. A couple of students thought that the time spent in reading and children's literature was

excessive. The classroom atmosphere and dynamics were also positive, evidenced by students' continuous good humor and level of participation. Some factors that contributed to this relaxed atmosphere probably included my own enthusiasm, the rearranging of chairs in a circular shape, and my efforts to low students' affective filter. It is possible that the simple appearance of texts, the presence of illustrations, and the familiar themes helped students reduce anxiety (Blickle, 1998; Briscoe, 2001) and lowered their affective filter (Smallwood, 1992).

Chapter 6: Lessons Learned as a Teacher and as a Researcher

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings related to the third and last research question:

What did the teacher-researcher learn during this experience, both as a teacher and as a researcher?

During the entire semester, I made the effort to record daily any feelings, ideas, and thoughts about this project, so that I could have a more tangible basis to explore myself and get to know myself better as a teacher and as a researcher. Most of these writings were collected in my journal (TL), but some were also product of stimulated recall sessions (SR) and classroom observations (anecdotal notes) (CO). As Florez (2001) states, a teacher-researcher should be continuously engaged in a cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand his or her own actions and reactions. Reflection is not only an integral part of the teaching process, but it is essential in any qualitative investigation. This reflection will help the teacher as a reflective practitioner (Allwright, 2003), and also the researcher as an extractor and analyzer of meaning, connecting theory and practice (Nunan, 1997) and promoting the development of both improved practices (van Lier, 1994). Many of these self-observations occurred during the stimulated recall sessions that followed videotaped class sessions. Watching those videotaped sessions turned to be a very valuable tool for self-observation and self-evaluation.

To address this third research question, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will discuss the lessons learned as a teacher and the second section will discuss the lessons learned as a researcher. Conclusions are found at the end of the chapter.

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6. 1. LESSONS LEARNED AS A TEACHER

In this first section, I write about the doubts and fears that I experienced as a teacher as well as some observations more directly related to teaching, such as my style, homework, assessment, and so on.

A) Doubts and Fears about Myself

Two aspects that called my attention from the data were the fear and level of doubt that I was experiencing, especially at the beginning of the semester. One of the doubts that I experienced was related to my teaching style and my ability to create appropriate homework exercises or class activities that enhanced students' knowledge:

> Now that I see the tape, I think all this could have been easily done with a simple written exercise (multiple choice, true/false, matching, etc). My style is too auditory, which is OK for students' listening, but… (SR.9.30.05, p. 1)

> I realize now that this simple (and probably useless) exercise takes too long to finish in terms of a students' tight schedule. My choice of homework and class assignments doesn't seem to be very good so far. (SR.10.3.05, p. 2)

> I wish students were more participative. That might be my fault, in part, because of the kind of activities that I created, which were not very active in nature or promoted group work. (SR.11.4.05, p. 2)

After eleven years of teaching Spanish college classes, I was not expecting to find this level of doubt about myself, since self-doubt is a typical feeling of novice teachers (Krasnow, 1993). However, it is possible that I reverted to this state temporarily just because I was using a new tool practically for the first time. As a matter of fact, no more comments of this nature appeared during the second half of the semester, possibly indicating that I was becoming more comfortable with myself or I was learning from the mistakes made during the first half. As the famous Irish poet James Joyce stated,

"mistakes are the portals of discoveries." I also noticed that "my second class ran smoother than the first one because I knew what mistakes I made in the first one" (TL.9.14.05, p. 2)

Besides my own doubts, I also experienced fear about how students perceived me as a teacher:

> I thought what my students might say when they find out that the lists have changed. Are they going to think that I don't do things right the first time? Am I going to 'lose points' with this movement? Maybe, but I'd rather do things right while I can than live with mistakes for the rest of the semester. Hopefully, they will understand. (TL.10.11.05, p. 2)

> I am not sure how I will handle bad criticism, though. One never likes being told that he or she is not doing a good job, and then having to face those people who criticized you for the rest of the semester. (TL10.31.05, p. 2)

A possible explanation for this fear could be that I was asking for feedback in the middle of the semester, which I usually do not do. This action, per se, could put any teacher in an uncomfortable situation. It is also possible that I was experiencing fear of failure, since many of the activities used had not been tested previously. According to Barnes (1992), these fears and doubts concerned with my persona are typical of what she calls 'Wave one' and 'Wave two,' the first two stages of teacher development, where teachers are mostly focused on themselves, their style, and covering the material.

B) Doubts and Fears about Children's Literature

Throughout the semester I also experienced some moments of doubt regarding the effectiveness of children's literature as a tool in this course:

> On the other hand, a cultural presentation on a current piece of news might be more informative to the student than an interview about a book. Since most lower-

division students do not go to upper-division, talking about a book might not be as beneficial as taking about current news. I don't know. (TL.8.30.05, p. 3)

And if we are not analyzing texts for their literariness, is it important that we use literary texts? Could a non-literary text still be sufficient for the purposes at hand? […] And if interest and fashion are predominant to literariness, should we give students books such as the DaVinci Code in Spanish in order to get them to read? If that's the case, bestsellers, magazines and fairy tales would probably be at the top of their reading choices. (TL.10.9.05, p. 1&2)

At this point, I am not sure students know more about those areas than they did before they entered the class. I know culture is not the core of the course, but they should be able to tell me something about those countries that it is important or significant. At this point, I don't think they can. What am I doing wrong? Are these materials just not suited for that kind of knowledge? (TL.11.7.05, p. 7)

Most of the doubts dissipated as the semester progressed and I had the chance to reflect about all these issues. The issue that concerned me the most was the value of the cultural information portrayed in children's literature when used with college students. It was not until recently that I came to accept the fact that children's literature is not designed for the purpose of updating students on the most current historical and political developments of different Spanish-speaking countries –newspapers already serve that purpose. Children's literature provides cultural information of another nature and the teacher must make use of it accordingly. Whether 'small c culture' can be turned into 'big c culture' seems to be related to the characteristics of the texts selected and to the teacher's abilities to do so. As Obergfell (1983) states:

> Certainly it is true that reading a Perrault fairy tale will not instruct our students about contemporary socio-economic conditions in France. But reading this fairy tale with proper direction and guidance may lead to an understanding of some facets of the French national character that are constant and have not greatly changed since the seventeenth century. (p 441)

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This concern about whether or not students were learning useful cultural information from the materials used in class would be categorized as 'Wave three' in Barnes' (1992) teacher development classification, showing a progression towards expertise as the semester advanced and there were opportunities for reflection.

Despite my previous positive experiences using children's literature, data also revealed that I was still scared of criticism and negative reactions from students:

> I am a little bit scared [speaking about the midterm survey evaluations]. (CO.11.4.05, p. 4)

> I was afraid that there would be no students volunteering and I would have to call on them, which is never a comfortable solution. I was also a little bit afraid that the volunteers would happen to hate their books and then everybody else would have this impression in mind when reading theirs, causing maybe some negative vibes. (CO.9.21.05, p. 1)

After we read the first story from *De Oro y Esmeraldas, Guanina*, my fears increased because the story was more difficult than I had predicted, and students did not seem very happy either. However, this fear resolved after we finished the "second, easier story" (TL.10.4.05, p. 1) and students responded better. Also, the outside observer made good comments and told me that "students were engaged" (TL.10.24.05, p. 1). This interest and good disposition was confirmed on their midterm evaluations.

C) Pedagogical Issues

Some pedagogical issues of different nature arose during the semester and made me reflect on certain aspects of the teaching process. Some of these issues include literary analysis, assessment, classroom setting, homework, feelings, and my teaching style.

a) Literary analysis

One of the reasons for introducing literature into this fourth semester class was minimizing the gap between lower-division courses (which usually focus on language) and upper-division courses (which usually focus on literature), a constant source of frustration for students (Ho, 2000). However, data revealed that literary analysis in this course was severely truncated due to students' linguistic and cultural limitations:

> Unfortunately, the linguistic and cultural analysis takes all of the time available in class, leaving no time to do literary analysis (author's intentions or perspective, literary devices employed, implicit criticism, genre structure, literary movements, etc). (TL.10.9.05, p. 1)

The literature has already pointed out that literary analysis is very difficult to achieve when students lack the linguistic and cultural preparation necessary (Friedman, 1992; Martin & Laurie, 1993). I thought that by introducing children's literature, I would be able to prepare students for some literary analysis. However, the texts that I selected for in-class work were so difficult that class time was spent mostly in deciphering the meaning of these texts. The extraction of meaning necessary for literary analysis seems to be very difficult to achieve when students are focusing on form. According to VanPatten (1990), students can only focus on one task at a time. This could explain why most textbooks for beginning and intermediate students do not contain literary excerpts. Even though the rationale for the absence of literature during the first two years of FL instruction is strong based on these grounds, it is also true that literary texts have many other benefits for FL learners that we should not dismiss (e.g., promotion of interest and motivation, cultural authenticity, opportunities to respond aesthetically and create meaning, etc).

b) Assessment

Another issue that I noticed was related to assessment. In many occasions I noticed that the assessment methods that I was using for different assignments did not align well with the goals of those assignments:

> The grading sheet that I prepared for the presentations is working OK, but I know now that it is not perfect: I am supposed to give them 10 points (out of 60) for a comparison, but, honestly, who is going to remember to do a comparison in the middle of retelling a plot? It is so unnatural. (CO.9.21.05, p. 1)

> The rubric must be revised. (CO.10.7.05, p. 1)

> Brian pointed out that the grading system is faulty because it give 30 points for the first draft and 20 for the second, but what if you only had one or two errors in the first draft (meaning an almost perfect composition) but correct those errors wrongly? You will lose 20 points […] The system is not good […] Sometimes our students are our teachers. We need to listen to them more often. This grading system needs to be revised. (CO.10.21.05, p. 1)

Besides the fact that certain assessment methods were faulty per se, the mismatch found between assessment and goals was probably due to the fact that assessment was based on assignments from the pre-established curriculum and not on assignments from my children's literature curriculum. Assessment needed to be revised and adapted to the new assignments and goals. For example, for presentations, I finally decided to ignore whether or not students were attending to the Puntos Clave (e.g., recommendation, future, hypothesis, comparison, etc) and just give them points for retelling the story logically with appropriate vocabulary from the story, in a fluent, comprehensible manner. This adaptation of the rubric, in my opinion, assessed more accurately students' performance.

c) Classroom setting

Other issues that came up during the semester were related to classroom settings, such as the disposition of students' chairs or the access to technology. The chairs, which were initially facing forward and arranged in columns and rows (traditional setting), were soon re-arranged into a circular shape, so that all students could see each other. This was not my idea: we just came to class one day and found the chairs arranged like that. We tried the new setting and liked it immediately. This happened before we started using children's literature in the class. This new arrangement was especially valuable during presentations of children's books. In terms of technology, the fact that our class lacked a tech console was seen as a disadvantage:

> Some students cannot see the book and therefore are forced to listen only. If we had had technology in the classroom, I could have students show the book on the camera viewer for everyone to see and we could have avoided this problem. (SR.11.9.05, p. 1)

I suppose the classroom setting is modifiable to a certain degree and therefore it impedes or facilitates the carrying out of certain activities. I was happy to discover that I was willing to take risks and try out new things.

d) Homework

Homework was a problematic issue at the beginning of the semester. Students soon started to complain about the high amount of homework that they were receiving. It was, without a doubt, the most criticized element of the course. One of my errors regarding homework was assigning homework about our readings in addition to homework about textbook contents. Thus, students felt overwhelmed with homework. During the second half of the semester I lightened up a little on the amount of homework

assignments and complaints stopped. Another error was assigning "homework that required reading long passages" (TL.11.12.05, p. 1 & 2). Students complained about their inability to find the time necessary to read those extra texts on top of the ones they already had to read. I did notice the overload and changed the nature of assignments during the second half of the semester by avoiding repetitive exercises and exercises that required additional reading.

e) Feelings

Data also revealed that at the beginning of the semester I felt all alone for carrying out a project like this by myself and not having other colleagues with whom to discuss certain issues or on whom to lean in case there was a problem:

> I am nervous and excited at the same time. I also feel lonely because nobody might be able to replace me and teach my class if I get sick, or vice-versa. (TL.8.30.05, p. 5)

> In a way, I kind of regret working on these lesson plans and exercises all by myself because I could have done a better job if I had had a colleague. (SR.10.3.05, p. 1)

This feeling of loneliness never went away. Comparing the present experience with my pilot, where I had the chance to work with a colleague, made me feel isolated and lonely. I missed that interaction and expert counsel.

f) Teaching style

Watching videotaped sessions became an important manner in which to observe myself, my mannerism, my speech rate, the frequency I used the target language or the

native language, and so on. I noticed aspects of my teaching that I liked and also disliked. Two things that I disliked included that I was "speaking English too much" (TL.9.17.05, p. 2) and that my style seemed "more auditory than visual" (SR.9.14.05, p. 2). After noticing these issues, I made the extra effort to correct them, although not having a tech console was my excuse at that time for the lack of visuals.

The anonymous midterm course evaluation also provided valuable information about how my students perceived me as a teacher and felt about the course in general. Some comments "were surprising and made me think or reconsider what I was doing as a teacher" (TL.11.7.05, p. 3). For example, a student mentioned that between the day we first saw vocabulary and the day of the quiz, we really did not review this vocabulary much because we were reading stories. This comment made think about better ways to mix the contents of the textbook with children's literature.

I was happy to see that my hunches about students' skills and progress were confirmed at the end of the semester when they received their final grades. I believe this shows that I am an intuitive teacher who is aware of students' development from the beginning.

Another thing that I observed and liked was my 'wait time' between my question and a student's answer. It seems that I was "not scared of silent moments" (SR.9.16.05, p. 2) and gave students a chance to think before speaking. The outside observer also noticed my error-correction technique. He mentioned that "I was correcting students sometimes, but only to clarify meaning" (TL.10.24.05, p. 6). I believe these two classroom techniques are beneficial for students.

Also, I observed in the videotapes how I expanded on students' answers, how I asked follow-up questions, and how "I provided feedback" (SR.10.24.05, p. 3). I noticed that I challenged their answers many times and asked them for the reasons behind their

statements –a technique aiming at promoting discussion and critical thinking. In the following example I asked students why there are no more full-blooded Taino left, whereas there are still full-blooded Aztec and Inca people:

> Some students talked about diseases, fights… I replied that those were reasons not to have many indigenous people around, but that wasn't what I was asking. E. mentioned that maybe the Taino were not fighting so much because they were tamer. I said "es posible" [it is possible], even though I wasn't sure that was a reason. Another student said that there were more Inca people than Taino people. I accepted this option too. […] John said maybe more land gave them more places to hide, which I also accepted. I also told students that another reason could be that the Caribbean was the center of the conquest and that a lot of white people were coming constantly, thus, 'whitening' the native population. (SR.9.28.05, p. 2)

> E. pointed out that white people didn't want to mix with the natives here [meaning in what is now the United States]. I asked why. (SR.9.28.05, p. 2)

My homework assignments and class activities were the object of a lot of criticism from myself. Sometimes, I was very disappointed with the results, but it was only after students worked on these activities that I really noticed the flaws:

> It was a poorly designed exercise, and it also encourages what I am not suggesting to do (using the dictionary and looking for the meaning of every word). I am very disappointed with myself and wish I had done a better job. (SR.10.3.05, p. 2)

> Without a clear progression from section to section and without giving students a chance to ask questions or to comment on anything we just did –something I need to learn how to manage better--, I quickly moved to a grammar point. (SR.10.21.05, p. 1)

On the other hand, I also found assignments with which I was happy (see Appendix G):

> The homework that I collected that day, I liked it. It asked questions about the story, but in a communicative way, emphasizing the Puntos Clave. (SR.10.3.05, p. 2)

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D) Summary of Lesson Learned as a Teacher

With the information that I recorded about my thoughts and feelings as a teacher, the outside observer's comments, and the videotaped class sessions, I was able to build a corpus of varied information that served as basis for pedagogical constructive criticism. I was very glad to learn that, after realizing of a few mistakes during the first part of the semester, I made an effort to ameliorate the situation in order to improve my teaching and my students' learning. At the beginning of the semester, I also experienced certain doubts and fears, including doubts about my own skills to carry out this 'new' course and students' responses to children's literature. Once I became more comfortable in my role and with the materials at hand these doubts and fears dissolved and the course developed smoothly. Hopefully, the lessons learned as a teacher during this course will help shape future courses more successfully from the very beginning. Ur (1996) represents well this model of learning by adding external sources of input to Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning. Applying Kolb's basic model to my particular case, my cycle would include my concrete experiences with children's literature (this course), my reflective observations on those experiences, my conceptualization of those experiences, and finally further actions that reflect previous processes and require more future concrete experiences (future courses). Ur added external sources such as learning from others' experiences, having outside observers, learning from previous research and from others' practices/experiments. In Figure 2 we can see the original model plus the external sources (*in italics*) in this learning cycle:

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Vicarious
Experience

Other
people's
observations

Concrete experience

Active
experimentation

Reflective
observation

Other
people's
experiments

Abstract
conceptualization

Input from theory
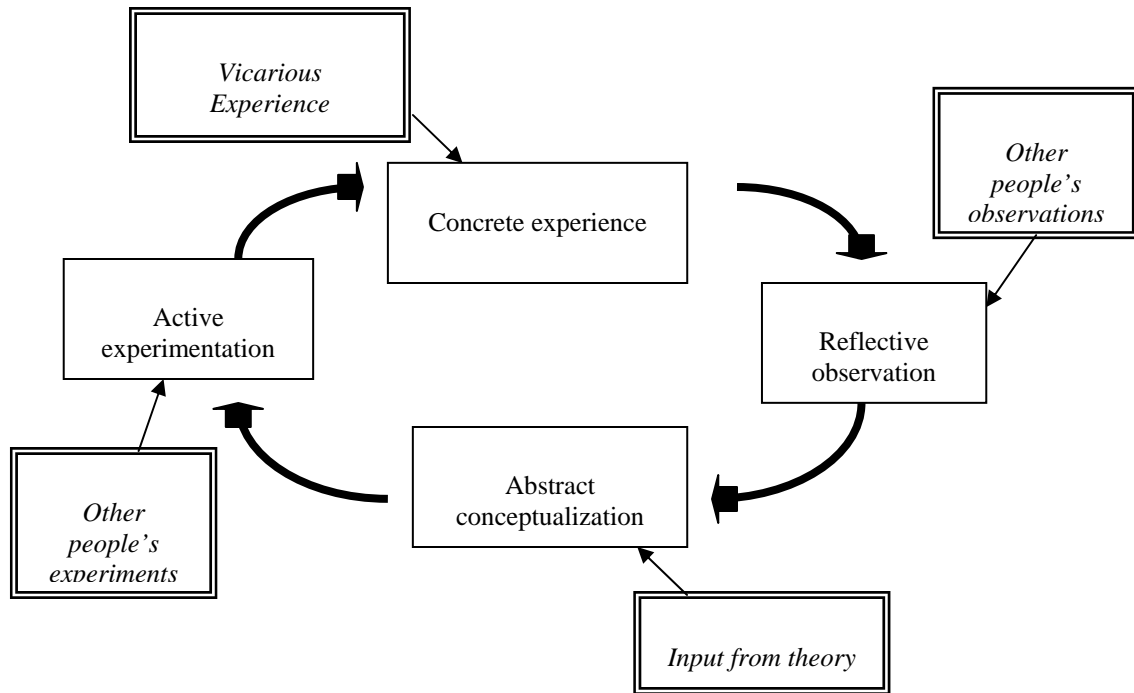
Figure 2: Enriched reflection model (Ur, 1996, p. 7).

In general, I had a very positive experience implementing children's literature in this fourth semester class. It was challenging at times, but what tool is not when you implement it for the first time? The benefits and challenges of children's literature became more real and concrete after using these materials, and I believe I developed a more accurate sense of the limitations and possibilities of children's literature for the FL college class –an understanding that only experience can provide. If I had to do it all over again, I would probably carry out a similar course using the very same texts that I used in this course (maybe with the exception of the *Guanina* story in *De Oro y Esmeraldas*), although it would be preferable not to follow a pre-established curriculum that includes certain specific assessment methods. The implications of these observations can be found in Chapter 7.

6. 2. LESSONS LEARNED AS A RESEARCHER

In this second section, I comment on two important aspects of this investigation that provided lessons to be learned for future studies: organization and problems.

A) Organization

The literature on carrying out qualitative research emphasizes that success depends a lot on how well organized you are. For that reason, I made some organizational decisions from the very beginning:

> I created a binder with different sections for all the documents I plan to collect, my students' assignments photocopies, and so on. Every time I write an entry in my teacher log, for example, I will print it and put it in the binder." (TL.9.17.05, p. 1)

> I have to go to the store and buy tapes to videotape the classes and get ready to collect data. (TL.8.31.05, p. 1)

> After I am done with interviews, I will start with transcriptions. […] Transcription will also help determine the initial criteria for participant selection. (TL.9.10.05, p. 2)

Some of the decisions that I had to make in order to keep myself organized included buying tapes, labeling them, and storing them after being used; checking the sound of recorded sessions before starting to collect data; transcribing these sessions myself; creating matrixes and advanced organizers with data from students in order to be able to select participants for case studies; expanding anecdotal records as soon as possible; keeping a hard copy and a computer copy of everything I have; and so on. I believe these measures provided an organized support system that made my job as a researcher easier to carry out. Another helpful tool, although not done on purpose, was the fact that I had one hour free between my two classes. During this time, I was able to put the video

equipment away, organize and label tapes, gather my notes, expand them, and get ready for the next session. Reading the literature about how to get organized before starting a research study was also very helpful.

B) Problems

Despite my effort to keep myself organized and ahead of the game, I experienced some problems during the investigation. One of the problems was finding time to start analysis when I was still collecting data, as the literature suggests (Merriam, 2001). Due to my double role as a teacher and researcher and also due to the demands of my second job, analysis did not fully start until the following semester:

> If I didn't have to go to the hospital to work, I could make longer interviews and extend the hours that I am available… but that's not possible. (TL.9.3.05, p. 1)

> Research suggests that we watch the videotaped sessions soon after they are done, but this was impossible for me. Maybe, if I had not had my other job, I could have done a better job regarding this. I definitely have to do it over Christmas, though, because I do not want to forget my students' voices or other details that I may need in order to understand what's going on in the tape. (TL.11.29.05, p. 1)

These impediments delayed somehow the progress of the study. However, a possible advantage of not starting analysis until all data are collected is that initial hunches and interpretations may not influence data collection. For example, even though I made comments here and there about fears and doubts, I was not fully aware of the extent of my doubts until I analyzed the data. If I had analyzed the data during the semester that I was teaching, it is possible that this finding could have made me self conscious and even more fearful.

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Other problems that I encountered during the investigation were related to the interviews. Some problems were minor and some were important. Among the minor problems was the lack of time to interview every student in a timely manner. For example, after creating the sign-up sheet for the first interview, I "realized that there was not enough time for everybody to have this interview during office hours on the three days that I thought it would take me to do it" (TL.9.3.05, p. 1). And even though I extended office hours, I realized that I could only talk to each student for 10 minutes, which was not possible a couple of times and "I had to re-schedule a few students" (TL.9.10.05, p. 1). Another minor problem was that some students' words were not clearly audible on the tape because of background noise or because they spoke "lower than normal" (TL.9.23.05, p. 1). Consequently, I had a few gaps in the transcriptions. In retrospect, I wish I had bought a clip-on microphone.

Among the major problems with interviews I include the fact that I lost a few of the first interviews. Apparently, I taped over them. It is possible that these data could have provided interesting information or revealed additional findings.

Another major problem was the high attrition for the final interview. In order to decrease students' fears of repercussions if they provided information that they thought would influence their grades negatively, the final interview took place at the beginning of the next semester. Since some students graduated and left, and others were too busy or did not care to come, only four students showed up (all A-students). This is probably the decision that I regret the most regarding this investigation, because during this final interview I could have done more member checks to confirm my interpretations and I would have had the opportunity to interview B- and C-students as well.

One more problem that I faced during this investigation involved the video camera. The set up did not take long, but soon I realized that the entire class "did not fit

on screen" (TL.9.14.05, p. 1). Also, if the camera was set in the back of the classroom, the blackboard was not legible, and if it was set in the front, students would be more aware of its presence. Eventually, I alternated positions and a couple of times I even placed the camera (without tripod) on my desk and simply directed it toward different places in the classroom depending on the activity. However, there were times in which I forgot to direct the camera, so I did not have the chance to see or hear well the students who participated in different events. Something that I did notice during the investigation is that students, in general, "didn't seem to pay attention to the camera" (SR.9.16.05, p. 2), which was a great relief.

Loneliness was also mentioned as a feeling experienced as a researcher. Another colleague was complaining that she could not get enough participants for her research study because of the "high amount of work required from them (interviews, e-mail reports, class observations, etc)" (TL.9.14.05, p. 2). I mentioned in my notes that I wanted to help her, but my own amount of work was already overwhelming, so I did not. For the same reason, I tried not to ask for much help from other colleagues. Thus, I felt lonely during data collection, especially on those days when I had to carry my regular school materials plus the camera and the tripod. I also felt lonely during data analysis and now during the writing of this dissertation, even though I am aware that there are many other students in the same circumstances. When I was carrying out my pilot, I did not experience loneliness, maybe because I did have other colleagues with whom to discuss the project and the methods. For the future, I hope to have this support group around or the courage to ask other colleagues for help regardless of their busy schedules.

Other problems that I experienced were related to the actual writing of this thesis, which had to be done in my second language and therefore constantly checked and revised by native speakers. I also found trouble writing the inter-rater reliability

paragraph (which is very quantitative in nature) within my qualitative narrative. It sounded disjoined and out of place, but its inclusion is necessary.

C) Summary of Lessons Learned as a Researcher

After carrying out this research study, I learned that being organized from beginning to end made my life easier and gave me a sense of security. Reading about research methodology was very helpful to get me prepared for the job. However, despite my organization and preparation, I had a few problems. Some were easily solved but others were unsolvable. The moment in which I encountered each problem was crucial for my study. At that moment, it was important to weight the advantages and disadvantages of the possible options before deciding on a specific one, because that decision would affect data collection, analysis, interpretations and conclusions. Unfortunately, sometimes we do not see the rightness or wrongness of our decisions until it is too late. To this moment, I only regret one decision made during this investigation – doing the final interview at the beginning of the following semester. My only consolation was having anonymous final course evaluations from which I could obtain some of students' final opinions. Taping over some students' initial interviews was a problem what I could not resolve, since by the time I realized of my error, it was too late to re-interview these students about their first impressions and opinions. Because of that missing information, these students were directly eliminated from the pool of participants for possible case studies, reducing the possibility of obtaining different or additional information.

In general, I feel good about the data collection and analysis of this study, especially taking into consideration that it is my first major research study. One lesson

that I learned is the importance of time, such as freeing yourself from other obligations so that you can use that time for the study, especially if you are a teacher-researcher. Another lesson would be the importance of having a support group or a colleague with whom to discuss research-related issues and even learn from his or her experience. Implications for these findings can be found in Chapter 7.

6. 3. CONCLUSIONS TO THIS CHAPTER

In this investigation, being a teacher-researcher had its advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is that I did not have any doubts regarding how to interpret the data collected regarding my feelings, thoughts, actions and decisions. The distance between the teacher and the researcher, which might be a cause for misinterpretations in qualitative studies, was minimized. One disadvantage is that it was difficult to find the time to be a teacher and also a researcher on top of my other obligations.

Some of the lessons that I learned as a teacher include how important it is to observe and evaluate yourself as a teacher in order to identify your strengths and your weaknesses. The ultimate purpose is improving not only your teaching style but also assessment, activities, materials, and other aspects related to teaching for your own and your students' benefit. I also learned that, despite my years of experience as a Spanish teacher, I felt and acted very much like a novice teacher before becoming progressively more comfortable with myself and my environment. I also learned that children's literature, in spite of its multiple benefits, has also limitations, and it can even be problematic to low-proficiency students or not intellectually challenging to other type of

students. Certain findings like these were difficult to accept because of my own enthusiasm for the topic.

Some of the lessons that I learned as a researcher include how important it is to be organized in order to minimize the possibility of error. Despite this organization, it is expected that certain problems will occur during the investigation. One must be extra careful, because if these are major problems, they will undoubtedly affect data collection, analysis, and interpretations. Other lessons learned concern the need for extra time to carry out an investigation in your classroom, the need for a support group or a colleague who can help with the project or give advice on certain issues, and the need for a native speaker of English to edit your writing.

In the next chapter, I include my conclusions and mention the possible implications for future research and for pedagogy. The limitations of the study are also included in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, Implications and Limitations

This chapter presents the conclusions of the findings and the implications, both for pedagogy and for research, as well as the limitations of this research study.

7. 1. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION

One of the purposes of this study was to describe how a teacher-researcher selected, integrated and implemented children's literature in a fourth-semester Spanish college class. The purpose of having this question in this study was to examine the role of the teacher in this project, so that other instructors interested in integrating children's literature into their own classes know about this important aspect. Hopefully, this information will guide and inspire them, as well as make them aware of possible upcoming challenges.

A) Text selection

Text selection required a thorough investigation and became an essential part of the project, as other experts have also found (Khodabakhshi & Lagos, 1993; McKay, 1982; Meloni, 1994; Moffit, 1998). Findings showed that decisions on text selection were mostly based on a combination of pedagogical beliefs, past experiences, course goals, and suggestions from the literature. These aspects are so specific to this situation (this teacher, this course, these students) that readers must be careful when selecting texts for their own courses, because even though some of the same procedures might apply, many will be different, depending on the characteristics of the students and the goals of the course.

a) Criteria

Findings showed that criteria established a priori and suggested by the literature (Baker, 1998; Bishop, 1992; Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Kibler, 1996; Moffit, 1998; Short & Fox, 2003; Silverman, 1990) worked well but proved insufficient. Criteria had to be refined and revised a posteriori in order to better meet the objectives of the course. There were varied criteria involved in text selection (e.g., difficulty of language, length of story, presence and size of illustrations, etc). Children's literature was found to encompass a huge variety of texts, which helps match readers and texts when designing a course.

An obvious implication for pedagogy is that children's literature can be used at different levels of proficiency as long as selection is done appropriately. This means that even students in the first year (probably second semester better than first semester) could be exposed to the benefits of literary texts. If this exposure is continuous for two or three semesters, it might be possible to achieve a comfortable level of literary analysis, so that students in lower-division have the chance to appreciate literature and get a better preparation for upper division courses. Of course, this might imply a re-articulation of the lower-division curriculum.

This finding also opens several venues for research, such as examining the relationship between text-selection criteria and students' characteristics to find the most suitable texts for students at different levels of proficiency, as well as identifying the most important criteria for certain course goals.

b) Self-selection

Another finding regarding text selection concerns self-selection (student selection of texts), which has always been encouraged in the literature as a method that promotes

interest and motivation (Dupuy, Tse, & Cook, 1996; Guthrie, Wigfield, Metsala, & Cox, 1999; Krashen, 1997; Moffit, 1998; Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997). In this study, however, self-selection was found to be a burden, because it required extra time and effort that students were not willing to invest. Because of these negative circumstances, I was really unable to determine whether students enjoyed having the freedom of selecting their own texts.

In future projects, it is recommended that the process of self-selection is facilitated by reserving texts for students of a given course, by using an anthology from which students can select, or by offering more opportunities to read some texts online.

B) Text integration

Text integration was found to be a simple procedure, probably because of the teacher's previous experience using children's literature and integrating other elements into the curriculum. The procedure that I followed included elimination of unwanted elements, replacing those by wanted elements (children's literature), creating new elements (e.g., assignments, activities), and adapting assessments methods and the grading system appropriately. It might be worth studying how experienced and novice teachers proceed differently at this stage.

a) Pre-established curriculum

Having a pre-established curriculum was found to be helpful in facilitating the job of creating a syllabus, but it was also found to constrict content and pedagogical possibilities. I recommend that future studies examine the use of children's literature in a

course where there is no pre-established curriculum in order to determine advantages and disadvantages within that context.

C) Text Implementation

Decisions on text implementation were found to be based on pedagogical beliefs, past experiences, students' responses, and instinct, all of which the literature has also mentioned (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Claxton, 2000; Richards, 1998b; Senior, 2006; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). This finding implies that experienced teachers will probably create very different courses than novice teachers when incorporating children's literature in their language courses, which, in turn, reiterates the reduced generalizability of findings. Research in this area is needed to determine in what aspects courses taught by experienced teachers are different to those taught by novice teachers and how these differences influence the results of research studies.

a) Pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence

The pre-reading, reading, post-reading sequence suggested by the literature (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002; Melendez & Pritchard, 1985; Moffit, 1998, 2003; Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Smallwood, 1998) proved to work well in this course. The pre-reading phase was used to activate students' schemata, to review vocabulary, to pick their curiosity and to integrate culture using top-down approaches. Activities in this phase were found to be easy to implement and achieved the goal expected.

The reading phase included student read-aloud and lower- and higher-level questioning. These questions helped expand 'small c culture' into 'big c culture', promoted critical thinking, and facilitated checking for reading comprehension. I found

the short length of stories a facilitating factor in terms of implementation. Unlike other research studies (Schwarzer, 2001), teacher read-aloud was not found useful or even a comfortable activity, so it was soon abandoned. This finding may just reflect a personal preference, although it might be related to the type of audience. Future studies on teacher read-aloud could look into determining that.

The post-reading phase was the most difficult phase of all three, because it required mixing children's literature with textbook content, and its development depended very much on the students' performance level and understanding. It was during this phase that I encouraged discussion, created most of the class activities from scratch, used bottom-up approaches that focused on language learning, and assessed students' comprehension and production abilities. Some activities took longer than predicted and some shorter, but in general time was managed appropriately. I strongly recommend this pre-reading / reading / post-reading sequence at this level of instruction. The post-reading phase showed to require a lot of work and time, but it revealed students' progress and helped the teacher assess outcomes. Teachers should be prepared to spend much time and effort during this phase, especially in the creation of activities.

7. 2. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION

Another purpose of this study was to describe students' linguistic, cultural and affective responses to children's literature in this course, so that we also have the perspective of the other participants in this project. These three aspects were focused because of their importance in FL learning.

A) Students' Linguistic Responses

a) Comprehensible input

Most students found the texts selected for this course comprehensible yet slightly challenging, exactly the place where input should be located, according to Krashen (1985) and Vygotsky (1978). Students confessed that they needed to read some texts more than once in order to understand them, and that they used the dictionary often with the most difficult stories. However, most students showed comprehension and were able to retell and answer questions appropriately at the level expected for a fourth semester student at this university. The few low-proficiency students that I had in the class found most texts too difficult, especially the stories in *De Oro y Esmeraldas*. They struggled understanding the stories and also performing (orally and in writing) at the level expected. These students found simpler, familiar texts more comprehensible and selected those for their class presentations and other assignments. However, when we were dealing with the in-class texts, they felt quite lost and frustrated.

These results imply the existence of a threshold level that students need to reach before being able to understand certain literary texts, as the literature has previously claimed (Baker, 1998; Clarke, 1980; Macaro, 2003; Ulijn, 1978; Yorio, 1971). Therefore, texts must be carefully selected and matched with students' proficiency level. Regarding familiar texts, I must agree with previous studies which found that familiar texts facilitate comprehension (Randolph, 2000; Sullivan, 1994; Yanes, 1992). According to some students' comments related to self-efficacy, I should add that familiar texts might even promote self-esteem, although further research is necessary to ascertain this. I recommend that students in the first and second semesters of FL instruction start with familiar children's literary texts, such as fairy tales, and then move to unfamiliar texts, such as those with explicit Hispanic cultural information. Although informal observations

in this study lead me to believe that unknown vocabulary was the main source of difficulty, more research is needed to find out exactly what aspects make certain texts difficult (e.g., unknown vocabulary, complex syntax, lack of illustrations, complex plots, etc). A very important implication for pedagogy is that children's literature encompasses a great variety of texts of different difficulty levels and, therefore, statements such as "children's literature offers comprehensible input to beginning- and intermediate-level FL learners' are too abstract and do not accuracy reflect the problem encountered by low-proficiency students with certain texts. Text selection is crucial in the design of any course and must take into consideration issues like this mismatch.

b) Cognitive challenge

A new finding in this study, compared to previous research studies, is that one student thought that the texts he read were not as cognitively challenging as he had wished. His negative response was not associated with simplicity of language –he actually admitted having to use the dictionary frequently— but rather with depth of knowledge or intellectual satisfaction. The only stories that he enjoyed were those found in *De Oro y Esmeraldas,* and the writing style that he preferred was that of Miguel Delibes (a canonical writer who authored one of the books he selected from the library). His rejection was not linked to age appropriateness either, since he did not find the stories childish or inappropriate for college students. This finding, although isolated (one student out of 22), shows that for some students who are looking for in-depth intellectual knowledge, children's literature might not meet their expectations. It is my guess that young adult literature might not be satisfactory either.

This finding makes me believe that the simplicity of concepts, straightforwardness of ideas, and basic plot of children's literature do not really satisfy those students who look for intellectual stimulation when they read. It is also possible that 'small c culture' is not sufficiently inspiring. Further studies need to be done in this area to determine why certain children's literary texts meet these particular students' expectations while others do not.

c) Factors that helped comprehension

Students found that both illustrations and text deconstruction helped comprehension, supporting previous findings (Baker, 1998; Hancock, 2000; Moffit, 1998; 2003; Phillips, 1992; Schwarzer, 2001; Smallwood, 1998; Yanes 1992). One student also pointed out that reading a longer text (vs. random sentences found in textbooks) also facilitated comprehension. These findings show the advantage of illustrated texts (e.g., children's literature, some young adult literature) versus non-illustrated texts (e.g., most canonical texts, textbook readings) for foreign language learners. I would recommend textbook publishers to gradually include illustrated texts into their textbooks, so that students are exposed to the benefits of literary texts without having to acquire extra materials.

Researchers are encouraged to examine exactly how illustrations help comprehension (e.g., do they clarify vocabulary or plot or….?), or compare comprehension level between students who read an illustrated story and those who read the same story without illustrations. It would also be worth examining how the length of a text relates to a student's proficiency level, and determining how long is *too long*. In this course, I felt comfortable with the length of our texts.

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d) Helpfulness

As found in previous studies (Maxim, 2002; Tse, 1996), participants in this study found children's literature helpful for their linguistic skills, because it presented grammar and vocabulary in context. They thought that it was helpful to see how theoretical knowledge about the Spanish language was applied in practice to tell a story. Even though all students thought these texts were helpful, not all students performed well. Performance varied just as in any other course: low-proficiency students were having difficulties in all areas, medium-proficiency students had difficulties with the most complex texts, and higher-proficiency students faced isolated challenges.

For pedagogy, this finding means that appealing, fun tools might encourage self-esteem, interest and motivation, but do not necessarily promote language learning, as Wu (2001) found. More studies of this type are needed, especially quantitative studies.

B) Students' Cultural Responses

a) Learning culture

Most students believed that they learned culture from these texts and they appreciated the fact that most texts had explicit Hispanic cultural information. Some students claimed that they liked learning about these issues, because they did not know much about Hispanic culture. Even incidental learning of geography was recorded. Only a few students claimed not learning anything new. It is possible that the culture portrayed in children's literature (usually 'small c culture') was so basic that college students who already had this background knowledge did not learn anything new. However, my multiple attempts to expand 'small c culture' to 'big c culture' did not change these students' mind regarding learning new cultural information. In that case, children's

literature would not be the most appropriate tool for students who are quite familiar with the basic Hispanic culture.

b) Authenticity

Children's literature seemed to be perceived by students as a reliable source of cultural information, agreeing with the literature claiming that recent publications are authentic (Ada, 2003; Hancock, 2000; Kibler, 1996; Ruiz-Funes, 1999; Schon, 1995, 2001; Short & Fox, 2003). It is imperative that publishing houses do not overlook issues such as unauthentic portrayals of language or culture, cultural generalizations about Hispanics or Latinos, stereotypical depictions of immigrants, and other similar controversial issues.

c) Connections and comparisons

Children's literature was found to facilitate connections and comparisons in areas such as history and literature, as well as connections at a personal level, which is said to be conducive to meaningful learning (Ausubel, 1968; McClelland & Rumelhart, 1986). This characteristic is a great advantage of children's literature, because students' learning can be more profound and significant when they identify themselves with characters or situations, or when they examine the similarities and differences between their lives and those of others. Researchers are encouraged to investigate the relationship between text characteristics (e.g., genre, content, etc) and the type of connections that they promote, in order to find the best suitable texts for specific course goals.

C) Students' Affective Responses

a) Enjoyment

Most students enjoyed the texts selected for this course and found them interesting, informative, and entertaining. They also liked the idea of using children's literature at this level of proficiency, because they believed these texts were written at a level they could understand. Students did not show any kind of rejection or feeling of inappropriateness before or after the study, just as other research studies have shown (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Goh, 1996; Kim, 2002; Moffit, 1998; 2003; Obergfell, 1983; Phillips, 1992; Randolph, 2000; Rings, 2002; Schwarzer, 2001; Silverman, 1990; Sullivan 1994; Tomlinson & McGraw, 1997; Tse, 1996; Wang, 1999; Wu, 2001; Yanes, 1992). Negative feelings were rare: a couple of low-proficiency students did not like certain texts that were too difficult to understand, other students claimed not to like certain texts that were sad, and a couple of students thought that we were spending too much time reading stories instead of focusing on something else. It is possible that I did not incorporate enough variety of creative activities to keep students interested and attentive at all times, or that students believed that they needed more in-class review of grammar and vocabulary. Despite these few negative comments, students were mostly engaged and participated frequently, especially when compared to other courses that I have taught. Some students even claimed to feel motivated to read more in Spanish and even admitted reading children's literature for pleasure. Students stated that textbook readings were not only boring, but also not as conducive to learning.

The implications of these findings for pedagogy are important. Children's literature seems to be a very acceptable tool for college students, who find these texts interesting, engaging and motivating. It is possible that if students are relaxed and more willing to read in Spanish (with the affective filter down), they will participate more

frequently and therefore learn language and culture in a faster and more meaningful way. Although it is still somewhat debatable, the relationship between positive beliefs / attitudes and actual gains in FL/L2 learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Huang & Tsai, 2003; Lao & Krashen, 2000) is generally supported by the SLA community. I would even go as far as recommending the use of children's literature at the fourth-semester level without the company of a textbook.

b) Participation

The level of participation found during this course seemed elevated. Students frequently raised their hands to answer questions and contributed to each others' comments. They often asked questions and seemed engaged. This could have been due to students' low affective filter, to their engagement with the stories and the themes discussed, to my own contagious enthusiasm for these texts, or a combination of factors. The grade assigned for participation was 30 points out of 1,000, so that was not a strong reason for this high participation. Other research studies could investigate how the teacher's enthusiasm affects students' responses, or how different results could have been if this same course had been taught by a teacher who was not enthusiastic about children's literature. These findings could illustrate the influence of the teacher in the development of a course and whether this variable should be taken into consideration when examining issues such as this one.

D) Findings from Five Selected Participants

In-depth case studies of five selected participants provided a more detail account of how students responded to the use of children's literature in this course. The results of

this investigation corroborated findings from the general student body: they all appreciated and enjoyed the texts, found them interesting and helpful, and did not think that the texts were childish, for example. The finding that was clearer to see, due to the fact that these five participants were selected according to their grades, was the relationship between proficiency level and difficulty: the higher the proficiency level, the less difficult participants found the texts. Again, this implies that text selection is a very important process that must be done carefully taking into consideration students' proficiency level. Of course, this also implies the existence of a threshold level to understand certain authentic literary texts.

A finding that called my attention was participants' view of the role of illustrations. High- and medium-proficiency students talked about how beautiful and appealing illustrations were, whereas low-proficiency students talked about how helpful illustrations were for vocabulary learning and understanding the plot. This finding implies that beginning students depend more on illustrations and other features that help comprehension. Therefore, children's literature seems to be an appropriate tool for the first year or even the first two years of language learning. After that, students can move on to courses where literature has fewer illustrations (e.g., young adult literature) and eventually no illustrations (e.g., canonical literature) in a gradual, smooth transition.

7. 3. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE THIRD RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of including the lessons learned as a teacher and as a researcher was to show the reflective nature of this investigation, which is essential in a teacher-

researcher qualitative study (Allwright, 2003; Florez, 2001; Nunan, 1997; van Lier, 1994) and it is a component in some models of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Ur, 1996).

A) Lessons Learned as a Teacher

a) Fears and doubts

Something that I learned during the investigation was that I experienced fears and doubts typical of a novice teacher (Krasnow, 1993): doubts about myself, regardless of my experience; doubts about children's literature; and fears about students' responses, despite my previous positive experiences. My conclusion is that introducing new elements in the curriculum and exploring their benefits and challenges created a sense of insecurity, mostly due to the fact that almost all texts were new to me and activities had not been tested previously. Also, the fact that I was asking for students' feedback in the middle of the semester created an awkward feeling. With time, I became more comfortable in my role, and focused less on me and more on my students and their learning, unconsciously following Barnes' (1992) theory of 'waves' in teacher development. When I, as a researcher, had to report this finding of the teacher's development process, I found the task difficult because I was both the teacher and the researcher. In other words, I was observing my flaws as a teacher and had to report them as a researcher, which hurt my teacher's ego, so to speak. However, the more I reported, the less biased I felt about the investigation.

b) Teaching style and pedagogy

I also learned quite a bit about certain pedagogical issues, such as the importance of matching assessment methods, materials, and objectives; of having a classroom setting

that is conducive to discussion; and of controlling the amount of homework assigned, for example. I also learned about my teaching style, identifying elements that I liked and did not like. Videotaping class sessions was found very helpful for self-observation and self-criticism. Hopefully, the lessons learned as a teacher during this course will help shape future courses more successfully from the very beginning.

In general, I had a very positive experience implementing children's literature in this fourth semester class. The benefits and challenges of children's literature became more real and concrete after using these materials, and I believe I developed a more accurate sense of the limitations and possibilities of this tool for the FL college class.

B) Lessons Learned as a Researcher

a) Organization

As a researcher, I learned that organization was crucial in keeping up with all the work necessary for the research study. The literature on how to conduct qualitative research was essential (Berg, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002). Outside circumstances were also found to be helpful, such as the fact that I had one hour free between my first class and my second class, so that I could expand anecdotal records and organize my thoughts a little. Time was found to be very important and very necessary: time for my job as a teacher and also time for my job as a researcher.

b) Problems

Despite this organization, problems appeared. Some were easy to resolve, but some were found irresolvable and detrimental to my study (this is further explained in the

section about limitations). There were also a few technical problems that have also been mentioned in previous literature, such as the immobility of the camera and the variable quality of sound and picture (Bloom, 2004). In addition, there was a feeling of loneliness on my part, which I imagine is normal for solo investigations or for novice researchers. It is recommended that researchers find a support group with whom to consult in case problems appear or when in need of any kind of help.

7. 4. LIMITATIONS

A) Teacher-researcher

Although I believe I have valid and reliable data to come up with the interpretations and conclusions that I have, this study has certain circumstances that can be perceived as limitations. For example, some people might see being a teacher-researcher as a limitation, in the sense that students might not be willing to provide truthful information for fear of repercussions on their grades, as it has been previously reported (Bloom, 2004). Another reason could be that the teacher's inclination for the tool to succeed might affect the researcher's interpretations of results.

Although this is possible, to me, the benefits of being a teacher-researcher prevail over the limitations or dangers, as long as these are under control. One way of controlling these threats would be collecting anonymous data to reduce students' fears. Another way would be performing team-research, that is, the teacher-researcher works with a second researcher (a TA or tutor who attends class regularly, is in contact with students, meets with particular students when necessary, and collects data). This position has numerous advantages over the position of outside observer, for example, because this TA or tutor

would be a participant-observer. The major advantage of having this second researcher in the class would be that students would not fear providing certain data to this person, because he or she is not the person who assigns grades. And a third way would be using different methods to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

B) Initial interviews

A limitation in this study was the loss of seven initial interviews –apparently, I taped over them with other students' interviews. Since I used these audio-taped interviews to obtain information from students that would help me select the participants for case studies, the loss of these interviews caused the elimination of these specific students as possible participants. Even though I do not believe I would have obtained results much different from the ones I obtained (otherwise I would have noticed some discrepancies during the course), it is possible that I missed additional data that might had been worthy of investigation.

C) Final interviews

The short number of final interviews, four, is another limitation in this study. The final interview took place at the beginning of the following semester in order to minimize students' fear of repercussions and, thus, obtain more truthful answers. Although attrition was expected to certain degree (some students were graduating, some would probably not come, etc), it turned to be very high. In addition to the short number of final interviews, the four students who came to do their final interview were all A-students, which reduces the validity of the data collected as representative of the entire class. However, I had the opportunity to do member checks with the students who came.

D) Outside observer

The outside observer only came once during the semester, and this can be seen as a limitation. In order to provide more opportunities for untainted observations and unbiased comments about the use of children's literature in this course, the number of outside observations should have been higher.

E) Course Instructor Survey (CIS)

The fact that I only collected 16 (out of 22) final course evaluations is also a limitation in this study. On that specific day, we were reviewing the aural part of the final exam and not all students attended class. Missing class during the last week of the semester is very common at this university, especially if no graded assignment is done in class or is due on that day.

F) Midterm evaluations (Eva)

The fact that there are 28 midterm evaluations ("*Tell me 3 things you like about this course and 3 things you don't like and want me to change*") instead of 22 is because I collected some evaluations from an identical second class that I was teaching that same semester, and accidentally put them in the same envelope. Since they were anonymous, I was unable to pull those extra six out. However, this second class was exactly like the first one (same textbook, same children's books, everything the same) and students reacted very much in the same way that in my main class. That is why I think the comments from those extra six evaluations do not interfere or contaminate the original data, but other readers might see this as a limitation.

7. 5. FINAL THOUGHTS

In general, the integration of children's literature in this fourth semester Spanish college class was a successful experience. I ended the course with a general feeling of satisfaction. Students liked the texts and found them interesting, liked the idea of using these texts at this level, received comprehensible input, believed their Spanish improved, and learned authentic culture. We used the texts for linguistic and cultural learning and they matched well the objectives of the course. Eventually, students performed just like students in other courses who were being taught with other tools. Children's literature showed to be a great tool for teaching Spanish, not better or worse than other tools, but students definitely enjoyed these texts better than more traditional readings (e.g., textbook readings). What I learned as a teacher is that there is no perfect tool for teaching a foreign language; every tool has its disadvantages. The naïve portrayal of children's literature as the 'answer' to the lack of literary texts in the first two years of FL education must be taken with a grain of salt. Findings in this study showed that children's literature can be as challenging as canonical literature when it does not match students' skills. As a matter of fact, I would say that one of the most important findings in this study is the clear relationship between students' proficiency level and text difficulty, emphasizing the importance of text selection when designing a similar course.

I was happy to see that only a few students had problems with children's literature. I believe if we had used canonical literature, more students would have experienced problems (although it also depends on the register and difficulty level of the texts used, I imagine). I have to agree that the language in *De Oro y Esmeraldas* was very literary and maybe too sophisticated for students who have never read literature in Spanish. If I had chosen simpler texts, maybe these few students would have had a better experience, but then again I would have taken the risk of boring the rest of students.

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Furthermore, low-proficiency students would have comprehended the familiar texts better, but they would not have performed better necessarily. The fact that low-proficiency students were able to select simpler, familiar texts from the library for their independent assignments was somewhat of a relief, and children's literature offered that variety. For future courses at this level of proficiency and higher (e.g., bridge courses), I think I will use the Delacre book again, but if there are low-proficiency students in the class, I will continue searching for a more appropriate anthology, so that all students feel comfortable.

Another important finding in this study is the fact that one student (out of 22) found most texts not cognitively challenging or stimulating. This could be considered a limitation of children's literature for certain type of students who are looking for more complex literary instruction, such as majors in English literature, Spanish literature, or American studies.

I hope that these findings can help other teachers develop future courses that involve the use of children's literature in the first two years of FL education and inspire other researchers to investigate this under-researched area.

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Appendix A: Initial Interview

Quick Spanish Assessment

-Warm up (¿cómo estás? ¿cómo te llamas? ¿de dónde eres? etc)

-Past tense: ¿Qué hiciste el fin de semana pasado? / ¿Qué hiciste la semana pasada?

-Future tense: ¿Qué harás cuando te gradúes? / ¿En qué ciudad vivirás en el futuro?

-Conditional tense: ¿Qué harías si tuvieras mucho dinero? / ¿Adónde irías de viaje?

Previous experience with Spanish

-When did you start learning Spanish?

-Did you like your previous Spanish classes? Why (not)?

-Was the last Spanish class difficult, challenging, etc?

-What grade did you get? (High, medium, or low?)

-What would you say are your strengths and weaknesses in Spanish?

Expectations for this class

-Do you think you are going to have problems in this class? In what areas?

-What grade do you think you are going to get?

-What are your goals for this class, that is, what do you expect to achieve at the end?

Plans for the future

-Do you think you are going to use your Spanish in the future? In what situations?

-Do you plan on taking more Spanish classes?

-Are you interested in talking to real Spanish-speaking people? Have you done it yet?

Reactions to the Children's Literature project

-When you heard me saying that we would be using Children's Literature in the class, how did you feel about it / what was your first reaction?

-Do you think Children's Literature is going to help your Spanish? How?

-If I gave you a choice among textbook readings, children's literature, young adult literature (like chapter books) and adult literature, which one would you choose? Why?

-Do you do any pleasure reading in English? Why (not)? What type of books have you read?

-What about in Spanish? Why (not)? What type of books have you read?

-What suggestions do you have for this class, for this project? Do you want to share anything with me?

Appendix B: Matrix for Participants' Profiles

	Marcos	Brian	Felicia	Karl	John
Grade	A	A	B/C	C	C/B
Language Skills[35]	Very good understanding. Very good speaking.	Good understanding. Good speaking.	Good understanding. Medium-poor speaking.	Poor understanding. Very poor speaking.	Very good understanding. Good speaking.
Gender	Male	Male	Female	Male	Male
Race / Ethnicity	White. European-American (US)	White. European-American (US)	Mestizo. European-American & Hispanic	Asian. Vietnamese-American	White. European-American (US)
Major	History & Government	American Studies	Sociology	Economics	Mathematics
Motivation	Wants to be fluent to live in another country.	Wants to graduate. Does not like Spanish classes or using Spanish (it is patronizing).	Part of family speaks Spanish (mom's side but not mom herself).	Unknown	Wants to graduate. Wants to talk to co-workers.
Interest in Spanish	Likes the language and the people. Likes classes. Gets good grades. Already studied abroad in Mexico.	Hates Spanish classes for many reasons. Doesn't think his skills will ever be good enough to use them.	Wants to study abroad in Spain. Likes classes. Wants to minor in Spanish.	Likes classes. Wants to communicate better.	Hates Spanish classes when they are too rigid. Hates rules (e.g., attendance) and homework. Likes to participate.
Opinion of Children's Literature	Good idea because proficiency level is that of a child.	Good idea because textbook readings are boring. Hopes to move to more complex literature as semester advances.	Good idea because CL will help with vocabulary and grammar and is more interesting than textbook readings.	Not that good of an idea to improve communication. Already read CL and is ready for more complex readings.	Good idea because it is easy and interesting, although can probably read anything.

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[35] The rubric for quick assessment of foreign language skills can be found on next page.

Rubric used for quick linguistic assessment.

Understanding:

-<u>Very good</u>: No repetition is needed. Complex sentences (with conditional, irregulars, imperfect/preterit, etc) are understood.

-<u>Good</u>: No repetition is needed most of the time. Complex sentences are understood most of the time.

-<u>Medium</u>: Repetition is needed sometimes. Complex sentences are not understood.

-<u>Poor</u>: Repetition is needed. Rephrasing to a simpler structure is always needed. Student often misinterprets the question.

-<u>Very poor</u>: Repetition and rephrasing is needed all the time along with very slow enunciation. Student often does not understand the question.

Speaking

-<u>Very good</u>: Student conjugates verbs correctly and uses complex forms (e.g., irregulars, conditional, future, preterit/imperfect, etc). Good fluency. Ample vocabulary.

-<u>Good</u>: Student conjugates verbs correctly most of the times and uses some complex forms. Good fluency. Good amount of vocabulary.

-<u>Medium</u>: Student conjugates verbs correctly but not in complex forms. Student pauses sometimes, reducing fluency. Student looks for vocabulary words sometimes and uses English once in a while.

-<u>Poor</u>: Student only conjugates present tense correctly. Pauses are long. Vocabulary is very basic and simple. English is used often.

-<u>Very poor</u>: Student makes errors even in present tense. Pauses are too long and interfere with communication. Vocabulary is deficient and English is used very often.

Appendix C: Midterm Evaluation of Children's Literature

Name: _____   Major: _____

Minor / Major 2: _____

Your comments, positive or negative, will not affect your grade in this class nor your relationship with your instructor. Your answers are for research purposes –be as honest as possible. Thanks.
Please type your answers and support them extensively, if possible. When you are finished, send an e-mail to your instructor (garciamaripaz@yahoo.com) with this form attached. Thank you.

1- How do you feel about reading children's literature in this Spanish class? Explain.

2- How interesting or boring do you find the stories?

3- Would you prefer reading something else in this class? If yes, what?

4- Some people say that children's literature is childish and inappropriate for adults, what do you think about this?

5- What do you think are the main objectives of this course? How do the readings relate to the course objectives?

6- Are the 'Fichas' of any help? If yes, how?

7- Do you think reading children's literature is helping your Spanish skills? If yes, how?

8- Have you learned any specific grammatical structure or vocabulary in Spanish from these stories that you found useful? Can you provide specific examples?

9- How difficult or easy do you find these stories (in terms of vocabulary, grammar, comprehensibility, etc)? Explain.

10- Many people think that reading children's literature is OK at the beginning of the semester but that we should be ready to read more complex literature by the end of the semester, do you agree? Do you think you will be ready?

11- When you are reading a story and you find words or expressions that you don't understand, what do you do about it?

12- Do you think reading children's literature in Spanish might help you understand better other literary texts (in English or in Spanish) in the future? Why (not)?

13- Have these stories taught you anything particular to the Hispanic culture? If yes, could you provide specific examples?

14- Do you like reading about culture from these stories? Why (not)?

15- Do you think we should devote less time to reading and more time to something else? If yes, what else? Why (not)?

16- What's your selection process, if any, when you have to pick a book from the library?

17- In the library, did you have difficulties finding a book you wanted? If yes, what type?

18- Do you like the *De Oro y Esmeraldas* book that we use in class? Why (not)?

19- How did you find the rules about List A and List B? What would you have preferred instead, if different than the current rules? Elaborate.

20- Additional comments, suggestions, etc…

Appendix D: Syllabus and Calendario

SYLLABUS

Instructor

Maripaz García (XXX) XXX-XXXX. Office: X building 4.102. Office hours: M, W, F 12:00pm – 1:00pm (or by appointment).

The course will be entirely taught in Spanish. Your instructor will be glad to assist you. Please see her with any problems, questions, or suggestions you have relating to the class. If you have a problem with your instructor and have not been able to solve it with her, please see the Supervisor X at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Materials

-Foerster, S. W., Lambright, A., & Alfonso-Pinto, F. (2003). ***Punto y Aparte*** (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

-Delacre, L. (1996). ***De oro y esmeraldas***. New York: Scholastic.

-Four (4) children's literary texts from different sources (more information will be provided).

Suggested: Punto y Aparte workbook and a Spanish-English dictionary.

Course

This is a fourth semester (lower-division) Spanish as a foreign language course. In this course you will work toward perfecting what you have learned in the first three Spanish courses while improving your ability to speak, read, write and understand Spanish. In this course, we will focus more on using the language to communicate and less on rote grammar learning. Therefore, students are expected to review grammar on their own,

preferably before class. Class time will be devoted primarily to applying the grammar rules in communicative situations, discussions of readings, oral practice, listening comprehension practice, and vocabulary acquisition. This class meets 3 times a week only, so the pace is faster than in the beginning courses.

The communicative goals for this course –also called 7 Puntos Clave— include: (D) describing and (C) comparing in detail; (P) narrating in the past and (F) future; (R/R) giving advice, expressing opinions and reacting to dramatic events and situations; (G) talking about likes and dislikes and explaining why; and (H) hypothesizing on both personal and impersonal topics. In both oral and written work, you will learn to support your opinions clearly and convincingly.

This course, unlike other sections of the fourth semester level, will also make use of children's literature as part of a research study. Your instructor will explain more about this subject during the first weeks of class. Students in this class will have neither more nor less work than students in other sections, and they will be evaluated basically for the same skills, even though the materials may be slightly different.

Attendance

The Spanish Department has set a maximum of 3 absences for this course. Ten points (out of 1,000) will be deducted from the final grade per every absence in excess of 3. If you miss the first two days of class (Wednesday and Friday), you will be automatically dropped. Official holy days do not count towards absences. If your religion requires you to miss class on certain holy days, you must announce that to your instructor in advance, so that your absence(s) will not be recorded.

Grade Breakdown

-Final Exam (cumulative)	200 points
-2 Tests (lesson 1-2, and lesson 3-4)	300 points
-5 Quizzes (vocabulary and grammar) (drop the lowest)	80 points
-2 compositions (on certain movies)	100 points
-4 escritos breves (on children's literature)	100 points
-1 oral presentation (on children's literature)	60 points
-1 final course oral assessment (on children's literature)	60 points
-Class grade (attitude, 20; participation, 30; homework, 50)	100 points
TOTAL	**1,000 POINTS**

-Final Exam (200 points): Your instructor will let you know, ahead of time, when and where your Final Exam will take place. However, you are responsible for finding out the day, time and location for your Final Exam by consulting the Spanish web site, the Registrar's web site, or Blackboard. All students are required to take the Final Exam. A make-up will be given to students who have obtained prior permission due to a conflict with an exam for another class (evidence must be presented). The final exam will have an oral and a written part and will cover chapters 1 through 5.

-Tests (2 / 150 points each): The dates of these two tests will be announced in the Calendario, the daily syllabus. The first test will cover lessons1 and 2 and the second test will cover lessons 3 and 4. These tests will have a written part and an oral part, will be done in class and will have a varied format. If a student misses a test with a valid excuse[36], he or she will be able to make up the test on the next day of class.

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[36] A valid excuse must be a legitimate or official reason that can be verified with a third party. Examples: doctor's visit, jury duty, religious holy day (please announce in advance) funeral, sport competition (please announce in advance), etc.

-Quizzes (5 / 20 points each, drop the lowest): These quizzes, announced in the Calendario, will focus on the vocabulary and grammar covered in Punto y Aparte. Students can make up one (1) missed quiz if they have a valid excuse. These short (20 minutes or so) quizzes will have varied formats, as well as oral and written sections.

-Compositions (2 / 50 points each): There will be 2 one-page, in-class compositions based on movies that have been selected by the Spanish department. Your instructor will post the list of movies on Blackboard ahead of time. You will receive up to 30 points per composition and up to 20 points per re-write. Students will be able to make up one (1) composition only, with a valid excuse.

-Escritos Breves (4 / 25 points each): There will be 4 in-class, brief essays based on the children's literary texts that you selected from the library. Your instructor will give you a topic and you will develop it in class using the language functions and vocabulary targeted at the time (e.g., description, narration in the past, etc). Students will be able to make up one (1) missed escrito breve only with a valid excuse.

-Presentation (60 points): All students must present 1 of the texts that they selected from the library. This in-class presentation will be in Spanish and will last approximately 3-4 minutes. Several days throughout the semester will be available for students to volunteer their presentation. Guidelines will be provided. No make-ups.

-Oral Assessment (60 points): There will be two oral assessments –one at the beginning of the course, not for grade, and the other at the end, for grade. Student's speaking and listening skills will be assessed at that time. The topic of the interview will be about your favorite children's literary text and cultural issues related to it. Your instructor will give you more information on this assignment and grading system. No make-ups.

-Class grade (100 points): Class grade is a compilation of different grades for attitude, participation and homework. Attitude (20 points) refers to the students' behavior in class

(such as respect for other's opinions, good disposition, demeanor, etc). Participation (30 points) refers to the willingness to take part in class discussions, answer the instructor's questions, or volunteer information on relevant topics. Homework (50 points) refers to any assignment that the instructor provides to the student for grade purposes with a deadline for completion (not the homework that is written on the Calendario, which is from the workbook and is only suggested). With a valid excuse, homework can be accepted late or made-up. Students must fill out a 'Ficha de Lectura' every time they finish reading a library text. This is not for grade, but it is appreciated.

Grades

The pre-requisite for this course is a passing grade (C or better) in the previous course (third semester or equivalent from a placement exam). If you do not have the prerequisite, please drop the course.   A = 100 – 89.5   B = 89.4 – 79.5

C = 79.5 – 69.5   D = 69.4 – 59.5   F = < 59.5

Miscellaneous

It is your responsibility to check your email regularly as handouts and assignments can be delivered to you electronically. For extra help, you can use the CD ROM of Punto y Aparte at the language laboratory, get a free tutor from the Learning Skills Center at X building, find a Spanish-speaking pal through the Pals Program at X building, or the Undergraduate writing center at X building. Questions? Spanish Advisor XXX-XXXX. Students with disabilities must bring a letter from Services for Students with Disabilities, X building 4.104, (XXX) XXX-XXXX, so that accommodations can be arranged. Dishonesty and instances of sexual harassment will be promptly reported and acted on according to this university policies and procedures on these matters.

CALENDARIO

(items related to children's literature appear in *italics*)

Date	In class	Suggested homework
W 8/31	Introduction to the course	
F 9/2	Introduction to the Seven Puntos Clave	

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 9/5	Labor Day – NO CLASS	
W 9/7	Vocabulary Chapter 1 (p. 20, 21, 23)	WB p. 21 (A, B), 24 (E)
F 9/9	Practice. Description / Comparison. Indirect Objects	Read pp. 197-202. WB p. 26 (A, B), 27 (C, D)

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 9/12	Description / Comparison. Oral assessment	Read pp. 203-204. *Visit the library. Bring a book on W*
W 9/14	*Intro to Children's literature.* Oral assessment	
F 9/16	*Children's literature.* Oral assessment	

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 9/19	*Instructions for Escrito Breve 1.* Quiz 1	
W 9/21	*Presentations. Escrito Breve 1*	*Hand in Ficha 1 today*
F 9/23	Vocabulary Chapter 2 (p. 46, 47, 49)	WB p. 41 (A, B), 42 (D)

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 9/26	Practice. Reactions and Recommendations	Read pp. 205-210. WB p.45 (A), 46 (B, C), 48 (D). *Lulu*
W 9/28	*Pre-reading Guanina*	Read pp. 211-213. *Read Intro & story.*
F 9/30	*Reading and Post-reading Guanina*	*Re-read story. Guanina, Puntos Clave. Caribbean people.*

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 10/3	*Post-reading Guanina*	*Guanina, grammar*
W 10/5	*Practice for Escrito Breve 2.* Quiz 2.	
F 10/7	*Presentations. Escrito Breve 2.*	*Hand in Ficha 2.* WB p. 58-59.

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 10/10	Test 1	
W 10/12	Vocabulary Chapter 3 (pp. 74-75, 77)	WB p. 65 (A), 66 (C, D)
F 10/14	Practice. Narration in the Past	Read 214-222. WB p. 69 (A paso 2, B paso 1), 72 (C), 73 (D). *Indigenous peoples -grammar. Zapotecas.* Watch movie 1

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 10/17	Narration in the Past. *Pre-reading Virgen de Guadalupe*	Watch movie 1. WB p. 96 (C)
W 10/19	Composition 1	*Virgen de G, history. Read Intro & story*
F 10/21	*Reading and Post-reading Virgen de Guadalupe*	*Virgen de G, grammar.*

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 10/24	*Post-reading Virgen de G. Presentations*	
W 10/26	Quiz 3. *Escrito Breve 3.*	*Hand in Ficha 3. Virgen, Puntos Clave.*
F 10/28	Vocabulary Chapter 4 (pp. 104-105, 107)	WB p. 105 (A, B), 106 (E)

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 10/31	Practice. Likes and Dislikes	Read 223-228. WB 108(A), 109(B,C), 110(A). *Read Intro & story El Dorado.*
W 11/2	*Pre-reading and Reading El Dorado*	*El Dorado, history.*
F 11/4	*Post-reading El Dorado*	*El Dorado, grammar*

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 11/7	*Practice for Escrito Breve 4.* Quiz 4	
W 11/9	*Presentations. Escrito Breve 4*	*Hand in Ficha 4.* WB p. 120-122
F 11/11	Review for Test 2	

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 11/14	Test 2	
W 11/16	Vocabulary Chapter 5 (p. 135)	WB p. 127 (A), 128 (E)
F 11/18	Practice. Hypothesis and Future	Read 229-235. WB 130(A,B,C),132(E),135(F)

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 11/21	*Presentations*	
W 11/23	*Presentations*	
F 11/25	Thanksgiving – NO CLASS	Watch movie 2

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 11/28	Review. Quiz 5	Watch movie 2
W 11/30	Composition 2	
F 12/2	*Oral assessment*	

Date	In class	Suggested homework
M 12/5	*Oral assessment*	
W 12/7	Review for final exam	
F 12/9	Review for final exam	

Appendix E: Final Interview

1. In your first interview, you mentioned that when you first heard we would be using children's literature in this class, you felt………………What do you think now?

2. What do you think about the book we used in class, *De Oro y Esmeraldas*? (easy / difficult; interesting / not interesting; learned any cultural issues? learned vocabulary or grammar?)

3. What do you think about the books you selected for your Escritos Breves? (easy / difficult; interesting / not interesting; easy / difficult to find in the library; need to read more than once? why? favorite? why? learned any cultural issues? learned vocabulary? learned grammar?)

4. What do you think about the activity of sharing the books you read in front of the class? (easy / difficult; fear? why? practiced? how?)

5. Do you think these readings have improved your Spanish in any way? How?

6. Would you have preferred taken a regular class than this class with children's literature?

7. At the end of the semester, were you ready for more advanced texts? Why (not)? (If Yes, young adult literature or adults' literature? If No, would you have continued reading children's literature or would you have preferred to go back to the textbook readings?)

8. In general, would your recommend this class to a student who is about to enter the 4th semester level? Why (not)?

9. Comments?

Appendix F: Children's Books Suggested

LIST A (select at least 3 out of 4 books from this list)

Ada, A. F., & Campoy, F. I. (2004). *En alas de cóndor*. Miami, FL: Santillana USA.

Álvarez, J. (2005). *Un regalo de gracias*. New York: Random House Children's Books.

Anzaldúa, G. (1995). *Prietita & the ghost woman / Prietita y la Llorona*. San Francisco: Children's B.P.

Arredondo, I. (1984). *Historia verdadera de una princesa: La Malinche*. México: CONAFE.

Así se hizo la patria (1998). Buenos Aires, Argentina: Billiken.

Barlow, G., & Stivers, W. (1989). *Leyendas mexicanas*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC / CPC.

Brito Arocha, C. (1987). *Bolívar visto por los niños*. Caracas, Venezuela: E. Presidencia de la República.

Bruni, M. A. S. (1989). *El sueño de Rosita*. San Antonio: TexArt Services.

Burgess, D. (1977). *¿Podrías vivir como un Tarahumara?* México: Bob Schalkwijk.

Camilo de Cuello, L. (Ed.) (1984). *Cuentos y leyendas de amor para niños*. Coed. Latinoamericana.

Canto, cuento y poesía de las niñas y niños de Michoacán (2001). México: I. N. Indigenista.

Castañeda, O. S. (1993). *El tapiz de Abuela*. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Cerezo Dardón, H. , & Contreras, J. D. (1976). *Ayer: Historia de Guatemala*. Guatemala: CC.

Cuentos de las abuelas y abuelos mayas (2001). Chimaltenango, Guatemala: Editorial Saqb'e.

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LIST B (select a maximum of one book from this list of personal choice books)

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Appendix G: Example of Homework Assignment

Nombre: _____

LA VIRGEN DE GUADALUPE

Responde estas preguntas con <u>una o dos frases</u>, atendiendo al Punto Clave indicado (D=description, C=comparison, G=gustar, R/R=reaction/recommendation, H=hypothesis, F=future) (6x3=18 puntos)

1.- Describe a la Virgen de Guadalupe (D).

2.- Compara la Virgen de Guadalupe de España y la Virgen de Guadalupe de México (C).

3.- Explica por qué les gusta a los mexicanos la Virgen (G).

4.- ¿Qué le recomiendas a una persona muy devota que quiera pedirle un favor a la Virgen? (R/R).

5.- Si tú fueras un obispo (=*bishop*) y un ciudadano de tu país te dijera que la Virgen se le apareció, ¿qué pensarías? ¿Qué harías? (H).

6.- ¿Qué pasará en Tepeyac en los próximos años? (F).

Ahora escribe un breve resumen de lo que ocurrió cuando la Virgen se apareció en Guadalupe (P) (7 puntos)

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Vita

María de la Paz "Maripaz" García Gómez was born in Madrid, Spain on February 24, 1970, the daughter of Jenaro García and Catalina Gómez. After receiving her high school diploma from Instituto Carlos III, she attended Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where she specialized in English Philology. In 1994, she received her 'Licenciatura' (B.A.) from the same university and went to University of Cincinnati, Ohio to study Spanish language and literature. She received a Master of Arts Diploma in 1996. While studying, she worked as a teaching assistant and taught Spanish at the same institution. After graduation, she moved to Chicago, IL where she worked for several years at different colleges and universities. In August 2001, she entered into the Foreign Language Education program at The University of Texas at Austin. While working on her Ph.D., she taught Spanish at UT-Austin, worked as a medical interpreter at a nearby hospital, taught classes in medical Spanish, and was a freelance translator for several companies. In 2004, she published an article on children's literature in the journal *Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education* and also a short story in a war anthology called *Women Write the War*. In the year 2007, she moved to Connecticut to teach Spanish at Yale University.

Local address: 7630 Wood Hollow Dr. #229, Austin, Texas 78731.

This dissertation was typed by the author.