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TESIS DOCTORAL:

Teaching to Learn ~ Learning to Teach

Classroom Research Tools for Second Language Learning

<u>A Case Study Based on English as a Foreign Language (EFL)</u>

<u>and Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL)</u>

<u>in a Secondary School and a University in Ontario, Canada.</u>

Presentada por Dª María Pilar Alderete Diez
para optar al grado de
doctora por la Universidad de Valladolid

Dirigida por:
Dra. Elena González-Cascos Jiménez

Declaration / Declaración

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own, unaided work and that recognition has been given to all references used. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Declaro que está tesis está basada en mi investigación propia y que ninguna otra persona ha realizado los trabajos de investigación y redacción de la misma, que se han referenciado adecuadamente los trabajos citados y consultados para la realización de esta tesis y que no se ha presentado en ninguna otra universidad para cualquier otra certificación.

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Teaching to Learn, Learning to Teach:

Classroom Research (CR) Tools
for Second Language Learning (SLL)

A Case Study based on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) in a secondary school and a university in Ontario, Canada.

María del Pilar Alderete Diez

Presented to fulfil the requirements for Ph.D. in Modern Philology

English Philology Department, Arts Faculty, University of Valladolid
Thesis Supervisor: Dra. Dª Elena González-Cascos Jiménez

2013

Enseñar a aprender, aprender a enseñar

Las herramientas de investigación de aula (IC)
para el aprendizaje de segundas lenguas (ASL)

Un estudio de caso basado en la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) y del español como lengua extranjera (ELE) en un instituto y en una universidad de Ontario, Canadá.

Memoria de tesis para optar al grado de doctor presentada por:

María del Pilar Alderete Diez

Bajo la dirección de Dra. Dª Elena González-Cascos Jiménez
Universidad de Valladolid
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Departamento de Filología Inglesa

2013

To all my students, who have been my best teacher trainers.
They taught me to teach them and learn from them at the same time.

I want to share the ownership of this work with the student assistants
who helped me to carry out the L.S.U.C. case study.
This thesis is a tribute to Christina Dahl, Eric Gilbert,
Emily Lonie, Sara McRae, Julie Lazenby,
Julia Elizabeth Anderson & Anne Stevenson
and the many student volunteers
who helped us in this project by writing journals and participating in interviews.
Hopefully, it will reflect the struggle and the anxieties
that language learning entailed for them
as well as the excitement of engaging in an innovative activity.

Para todos mis estudiantes que han sido mis mejores profesores de educación,
Porque me enseñaron a enseñarles y aprender de ellos al mismo tiempo.

Quiero compartir la autoría de este trabajo con los estudiantes asistentes
Que me ayudaron a llevar a cabo el estudio de caso AEAU
Esta tesis es un homenaje a Christina Dahl, Eric Gilbert,
Emily Lonie, Sara McRae, Julie Lazenby,
Julia Elizabeth Anderson & Anne Stevenson
y a los otros muchos estudiantes voluntarios
Que nos ayudaron escribiendo diarios y contestando entrevistas.
Espero que esta tesis refleje el esfuerzo y las ansiedades
Que el aprendizaje de la lengua supuso para ellos
Así como la emoción de sentirse involucrados en una actividad innovadora.

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List of Abbreviations

ACT - Adaptive Control of Through
AEAU – Aprendizaje de Español en el Aula Universitaria
AECI – Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional
ALE – Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras
B.C – British Columbia
B.U.P. – Bachillerato Unificado Polivalente
BIC - Basic Interpersonal Communicative
C.A.P – Certificado de Aptitud Pedagógica
CALL - Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CALLA - Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach
CALP - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAQDAs - computer-aided qualitative data analysis
CCLB - Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks
CEF - Common European Framework
CEFL - Common European Framework for Languages
CELT – Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
CIC - Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CLASS - The Classroom Assessment Scoring System
CLIL - Content and language integrated learning
CLT – Communicative Language Teaching
CoE - Council of Europe
COLT - Communication Orientation Language Teaching
COLT – Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching
CoP – Community of Practice
E.G.B – Educación General Básica
ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EEC - European Communities Council
EFL – English as a Foreign Language
ELD - English Literacy Development
ELE – Español como Lengua Extranjera
ELF - European Language Framework
ELP – European Language Portfolio
ELP – European Language Portfolio
EQAO – Education Quality and Accountability Office
ESL- English as a Second Language
EUDEC – European Democratic Education Conference

EUROPROF - European Language Teaching Portfolio
FFT - The Framework for Teaching
FIAC - Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories
FLA – First Language Acquisition
FLInt – Foreign Language Interaction
FLINT - Foreign Language Interaction Analysis
FLL – Foreign Language Learning
FOCUS - Foci for Observing Communications Used in Settings
FOCUS - Focus for Observing Communications Used in Settings
FSL - French Second Language
GT – Grounded Theory
HCP - Humanities Curriculum Project
HOLA – Hispanic Organization for Latin Awareness
HSST100 – Hispanic Studies 100 (First Year Ab Initio Course)
HSST200 – Hispanic Studies 200 (First Year Course)
HSST250 – Hispanic Studies 250 (Second Year Course)
ICR – Internal Consistency Reliability
ICT - Information and Communication Technologies
ILE – Inglés como Lengua Extranjera
IQ – Intelligence Quotient
L 1 – First Language
L 2 – Second Language
LEP - Limited English Proficiency
L.S.U.C. – Learning Spanish in the University Classroom
M!QI - The Mathematical Quality of Instruction
MA - Metalinguistic awareness
MCRE - Marco Común de Referencia Europeo
MET - Measures of Effective Teaching
MMO - Massive Multiplayer Online
MOLT - Motivation Orientation in Language Teaching
NCLC - Niveaux de compétence linguistiques canadiens
NDLR - National Digital Learning Resources
NSL – Native Second Language
NWGLB - National Working Group on Language Benchmarks
OISE - Ontario Institute of Studies in Education
OSAP – Ontario Student Assistance Program
PDP - Parallel Distributed Processing
PLATO - The Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation
QDA - Qualitative Descriptive Analysis

QST - The Quality Science Teaching
SALT - Suggestive Accelerated Learning and Teaching
SDAIE - Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English
SFL – Spanish as a Foreign Language
SLA – Second Language Acquisition
SLL – Second Language Learning
SWOT - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TL – Target Language
TPR - Total Physical Response
U.S. – United States

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        ii. HSST100 – JL – 5 files

        iii. HSST100 – SMR – 2 files

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[1] The abbreviation stand for the names of the student research assistants as follows: EG – Eric Gilbert; JL – Julie Lazenby; SMR - Sara McRae; CD – Christina Dahl; EL – Emily Lonie; AS – Anne Stevenson.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Foreign Language Learning (FLL) and Educational Theory while surveying the realities at play in the instructional setting through the practice of classroom ethnography. It began with an aim to clarify the language learning process in adults as opposed to the natural acquisition process, characteristic of the work placement immersion programs. During the 20th century, the predominant theories and case studies had based their results on the considerations of ethnographers, educational experts and linguists. While the current educational tendencies focus on the promotion of learner-centred teaching, this thesis aims to contribute to the general teaching practice from the learner point of view. The Spanish Language in the University Classroom (L.S.U.C.) project embarked on a learner-centred research, with two main objectives in mind: to understand the learner's point of view in regards to language learning in the classroom environment and in so doing to provide learners with tools for their understanding and critical examination of the learning system.

The reflective journal from the teacher observations made in an EFL secondary school classroom provided an invaluable tool that promoted a productive comparison between both classroom settings. The results of both kinds of student and teacher observations, interviews, journals and recordings guided the choice of current educational and linguistic theories of language learning against which they were measured in order to reach specific conclusions.

This case study highlights three elements of the classroom language learning process: the relationships between the participants in the classroom, the physical context and the languages involved. The students focused on the individual variables involved. They voiced their concerns about the distribution of power and the creation of identity within the classroom as reflected in the interaction between participants. Hence, this research reviews the role of the learner, of the teacher and of the researcher, in favour of a more collaborative language teaching/learning/researching environment. It also reconsiders the influence of the physical context of the classroom on learning, which is normally taken for granted at university level. It reassesses the assumptions made about code-switching and its influence on language learning.

From a meta-cognitive perspective, this thesis examines the advantages and disadvantages of the ethnographic tools employed in this study for research and learning. It contextualizes the value of these tools within the Common European Framework for Languages (CEFL) with a proposal for responsible teaching, which in turn tends to foster responsible autonomous learning, which in turn will foster realistic, constructive research outcomes, and suggestions for further research based on the educational reform currently taking place in the European University System.

RESUMEN

En esta tesis se exploran la teoría del aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras (ALE) y la teoría de la educación a la par que se examinan las realidades que entran en juego en el contexto institucional a través de la práctica de la investigación etnográfica del aula. Este proyecto de tesis comenzó con el objeto de clarificar el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas en adultos en contraste con el proceso de adquisición natural, típico de los programas de colocación profesional en el extranjero. Las teorías y estudios predominantes habían basado sus resultados en las consideraciones de etnógrafos, expertos de la educación y lingüistas en el siglo XX. Mientras las corrientes educativas se concentran en nuestros días en la promoción de una enseñanza centrada en el estudiante, esta tesis intenta contribuir a la práctica de la enseñanza general desde el punto de vista del estudiante. El proyecto del Español en la Clase Universitaria (AEAU) se embarcó en una investigación centrada en el estudiante, con dos objetivos principales en mente: comprender el punto de vista del estudiante con respecto al aprendizaje de lenguas en el aula y de este modo, dotar a los estudiantes de herramientas para la comprensión y examen crítico del sistema de aprendizaje. El diario reflexivo que surgió de las observaciones hechas en el aula de ILE del instituto además constituyó un instrumento inestimable que generó una comparación constructiva entre los dos ámbitos educativos. Los resultados de ambas observaciones, entrevistas, diarios y grabaciones por parte de estudiantes y profesora guiaron la elección de teorías de la educación y corrientes lingüísticas actuales a la luz de las cuales los comprobamos para alcanzar una serie de conclusiones específicas.

Así, esta investigación enfatiza tres elementos principales del proceso de aprendizaje de lengua dentro del aula: las relaciones entre los participantes en el aula, el contexto físico y las lenguas involucradas. Los estudiantes se concentraron en las variables individuales. Expresaron su preocupación en cuanto a la distribución de poder y la creación de la identidad dentro de las aulas tal y como se refleja en la interacción entre los participantes. Por esto, esta investigación revisa el papel del estudiante, del profesor y del investigador, a favor de un contexto de enseñanza/aprendizaje/investigación más colaborador. También reconsidera la influencia del contexto físico del aula en el aprendizaje, contexto frecuentemente ignorado a nivel universitario. A su vez reevalúa las habituales creencias en lo que respecta al "cambio de código" y su influencia en el aprendizaje de lenguas.

Desde una perspectiva meta-cognitiva, esta tesis examina las ventajas y desventajas de las herramientas etnográficas utilizadas en este estudio para la investigación y el aprendizaje. Contextualiza el valor de estas herramientas dentro del Marco Común de Referencia Europeo (MCRE) y desemboca en una propuesta que promueve la enseñanza responsable, que a su vez, tiende a promover el aprendizaje responsable y autónomo, que a su vez, promoverá resultados realistas y constructivos en investigación educativa y sugerencias en cuanto a las líneas de investigación que se deberán seguir en el futuro, basadas en la reforma educativa que se está llevando a cabo en el sistema universitario europeo.

CHAPTER I. Introduction

> THIS CHAPTER ...
> - States the rationale behind this project and the case study that this research focuses on.
> - Provides a summary of the dissertation chapter by chapter.

This thesis is written for teachers, future teachers and teacher educators, in the hope that it will be useful to them as they consider how students and teachers together construct their lives in classrooms (Manke, vii)

I.I Rationale of this Dissertation.

I decided to start the introduction to this dissertation with the quote above because it illustrates the spirit of this project and openly defines its audience. It also circumscribes this case study to the field of classroom research, adding its findings to this booming area of research. The reason why I decided to carry out a case study for this thesis comes from the relevance that language teaching and learning have had in the field of philological studies. The main goal of this project is to understand more systematically the reasons that lead to the success and failure of linguistic instruction from the students' point(s) of view. An empirical enquiry on language learning within the confines of the classroom and its pedagogical implications can contribute to the understanding of the teaching and learning process.

The majority of graduates in philological studies have oriented their career towards language teaching. Doctoral philological studies have ignored, to a certain extent, the pedagogical side of our discipline, denying an increasing demand for language teachers – at home and abroad - and the necessity to explore how languages are learnt. It felt as though the time was ripe for philology to make a contribution to the field of applied linguistics, and to incorporate a multidisciplinary perspective, which has always characterized language philology. Philologists bring a more complex system of language patterns and perspectives than general linguists or educators into the classroom. Their interest in language is not only at an abstract level, described by grammar and rules, but as a complex system of varieties that extend geographically and through different cultures and function beyond communicative systems, acknowledging

the aesthetic function, and other linguistic functions. Moreover, they are interested in language as a tool to understand the world that surrounds language and conversely, they study the worlds around a specific language as tools to study that language. This comprehensive perspective offers a wider point of view to the philologist, which at the same time can offer a more inclusive insight into the field of teaching methodologies. As a language teacher, the philologist, compared to the native speaker, can promote deeper approaches to language learning as the most desirable approach to the teaching of languages, especially in tertiary education.

For this thesis I have adopted the nomenclature of EFL and SFL as English as a Foreign Language and Spanish as a Foreign Language, because as Spangenberg-Urbschat and Pritchard (1994) have pointed out "the terminology ESL is a bit inaccurate" (p. I). All language students have different backgrounds with which they arrive into our classrooms, and various literacy levels. For instance, some ESL students in our own small study had learnt English in the schools in their home countries; others used it at random as their second language e.g. a Quebecois student; others have had no exposure to English whatsoever and others had learnt it by immersion but had never had any language instruction. The latter had strong BIC (Basic Interpersonal Communicative) skills but lacked CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) ability (Cummins, 1981, p. 22). Likewise, our students of Spanish in the second classroom environment that this case study explores shared this diversity of backgrounds. For this reason, the term 'foreign' was chosen to refer to the target language in this project because, among the students in our study, there was nobody who used English or Spanish as their home or native language. For our students, English or Spanish aimed to be their second or third language — for some, their fourth. The underlining common characteristic for all of them was that the two languages in our study were used in 'foreign' environments.[i]

It is necessary to clarify at this stage that the kind of communicative competence to which we refer in our thesis is a goal of language learning that includes not only linguistic (or grammatical) competence but also sociolinguistic discourse strategy and socio-cultural competences, as defined in Wilkins (1983). Linguistic competence is understood as the knowledge of vocabulary and the command of certain structural rules through which meaning is conveyed. Sociolinguistic competence is understood as the ability to interpret and use the different varieties of the language with accuracy and transparency. Communicative competence is understood as the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for the level of comprehension of the speaker. Discourse strategy is understood as the ability to perceive and understand the different coherent devices that organize discourse in the language in question. Sociocultural competence

constitutes a certain degree of familiarity with the sociocultural context in which the language is used (Wilkins, 1983, p.II).

The goal of this thesis is to develop a familiarity with the language classroom and investigate how to optimize language learning through linguistic instruction from the students' point of view. The preliminary experiments led by the students of Spanish in a Canadian university helped to choose several aspects of language classrooms. It developed an understanding of the classroom as a social space where social variables influence learning, without leaving aside cognitive and individual variables.

The first item that was raised by students was the use of 'English' in the classroom, which was the first language of the majority of students. In this way, the project attempts to clarify to what extent and in which way our students of Spanish and English as a Foreign Language used their first language to enhance or handicap their learning. We have tried to identify how our learners used their LI, whether or not they did, how they reported it and how aware they were of this strategy. A very interesting strategy and concept emerged while we were looking at this feature: the notion of code-switching, and it led to an exploration of how beneficial code-switching is for language learning.

Among other issues that students raised were power distribution and participant identity inside of the classroom as they impact interaction in each class. Traditionally, language learners have been defined as individuals, with more or less fixed features: age, intelligence, personality, attitude, motivation... which would contribute to their ease or difficulties when learning a language according to psycholinguistics (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. xi). For the students involved in this study, issues related to affect and power seemed more pressing. Later on, sociolinguistics, which was marginal in the fields of didactics and applied linguistics, contributed to the definition of learner as a social individual, whose identity is always under construction through his participation in class or in the community. This point of view has been explored in the field of ethnography, in the studies on communication and socialization (Bremer, 1996; Willet, 1995).[2] Our research considers that both perspectives are significant in order to understand the learning event inside of the classroom.

The third most relevant issue that the students raised was the use of space and time in the language classroom, which has not attracted enough attention in academic research and educational policies.[3]

This study seeks to offer an innovative perspective in ethnographic classroom studies, and that is the reason why we have carried out a student focused research. The main innovation of this project is that we have not only concentrated on the students as the objects of our study; we have invited them to be the motor and the lens for this thesis; we have tried to adopt their perspective to look at the aspects of the classroom that they consider important and throw some light at them from SLA theory and practice. Thus, the central participants of the classroom event have identified the issues and asked the questions. Together with the students, I tried to deal with these issues in an attempt to answer their questions with their help. For this purpose, we have used different tools of ethnographic research - interviews, questionnaires, observations and learning diaries - in order to allow students return feedback anonymously. We sieved their questions through existing theoretical frameworks in order to see how our results agreed or disagreed with recent prevailing linguistic and teaching and learning approaches.

Finally, this thesis wants to put forward a shift in the perspective of language learning and suggest further research procedures, based on the educational revolution that is currently taking place and, more precisely, in the Anglophone system. This proposal is not entirely original; it has been brewing in language teaching and learning in the last two decades. For instance, Holec (1981) raised the issue of learner autonomy in relation to the Council of European Modern Languages (p. 12). The educational transformation that I am referring to is the development of teaching practices which adopt strategies that focus on the student, with an aim to acknowledge students as individuals and the promotion of their learning autonomy. It emerges from a respect for individuals in a society and the building of skills necessary to enhance responsibility of one's own learning. Learning autonomy has been theorized as a fundamental human right by educators such as Freire (1972), Illich (1973) and Rogers (1969), who were preoccupied with the linguistic and pedagogical rights of students. As a result, many teachers have felt the need to broaden their roles and become classroom researchers and learning strategists, and to enhance language awareness, helping their students to take responsibility for their learning and to teach them how to learn languages. These procedures and techniques, so far, have been termed as 'student training' and can be understood within the broader approach of the European Portfolio.

The European Language Portfolio has been designed by Sophie Bailly as an outcome of the project for a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment[4]

carried out by the European Union Modern Language Council.[5] It covers all major problems faced by European societies except defence. Its program includes activities such as human rights, mass media, legal collaboration, socio-economic issues, health, education, culture, heritage, sports, youth, local and regional government, and environment.

In the area of education, this council has been involved in the promotion of the learning of modern languages since the Council for Cultural Cooperation was established in the late 1950s. This is probably the reason why their initial approach was imbued with the belief that classical languages played a main role in the education of social elite. Languages then were needed for the most part in diplomacy and commerce. In the 1960s, the Second World War was over and European society had become internationalized. This internationalization concerned the entire European population. We could argue that some countries like Ireland, Italy or Spain were late in coming into the process of internationalization because of their national histories and locations. However, what applies to all European countries is that, over the last fifty years, the globalization of their societies has continued and increased rapidly, requiring a severe shift and rearrangement of the social organization of *language learning, teaching and assessment,* (Common European Framework (CEF), p. 142). The council quotes increased personal mobility, access to information and mutual understanding and tolerance as the motors for this approach to language learning. The Common European Framework was born not as a policy document, but rather as an encouragement towards *reflection and communication about all aspects of language learning, teaching and assessment* (CEF, p. 8). The CEF supports research and exchange of ideas at *all levels from the classroom to the international community* (CEF, p. 3). Due to the number and diversity of languages present in European geography – over fifty have recognized status as national or regional languages in the member states of the Council for Cultural Co-operation, leaving aside many more in the Russian Federation[6]– 'plurilingualism' is considered by the CEF as a necessity within European society. The creators of the framework distinguish between plurilingualism and multilingualism and argue that the latter only refers to:

> 'knowledge of a number of languages, or the co-existence of different languages in a given society', whether that society be local, national or international. (CEF, p. 4)

It is noted that *multingualism* refers to *co-existence of a number of languages and cultures in a society,* whereas plurilingualism refers to the knowledge of a number of languages and cultures by an individual.[7]

Plurilingualism as a goal for individuals reinforces the belief that modern European citizens would need more than two languages - one of them being English, which is defined as the *lingua franca* of Europe in the CEF, the other being their mother tongue and a third language of instruction - to deal with a multilingual European society. This positive notion of plurilingualism has been mulled over in studies carried out on bilingualism in the area of Applied Linguistics, which we will deal with at the end of this introduction.

The European Language Portfolio has been designed in many member states to promote learner's autonomy and reflection about language learning and teaching strategies. It is a personal record for language skills and relevant experiences of all kinds in an acknowledged document, which includes the following sections:

- PASSPORT. This section acknowledges all language certificates, official and unofficial.

- BIOGRAPHY. In this section the students can describe their language level and experiences in all the languages they have had contact with.

- DOSSIER. This is the most creative section, where the students include pieces of their own work learning languages.

In general, the CEF does not sponsor any specific method, but endeavour users to reflect on the choices that they make when teaching and learning languages. The other main innovation of the CEF is that it includes a provision for the crediting of language experiences outside of school. In the biography section of the portfolio, the learner is encouraged to keep track, describe and reflect upon any activity s/he has carried out in the language that s/he is learning. Finally, the most interesting aspect about this material is its non-prescriptive nature. It does not attempt to give the answers that teachers, educators, planners and learners alike are searching for. Instead it provides worksheets and guided questionnaires that make them answer their enquiries themselves in an almost dialogic manner.

In this way, this case study is imbued with reflective teaching practice through the application of ethnographic tools of classroom research aimed at both the students and teachers involved in the study. The results of these ethnographic enquiries will guide our conclusions for this project, in combination with the theoretical frameworks through which our experiments have been shaped. Our approach is not only[8]

theoretical. We carried out bibliographical research on the experiments that led into the theories chosen for our framework at the same time as our research was taking place. We have directly involved our students to encourage cooperation in this research. Following the advice of the *European Language Portfolio* bases on cooperative pedagogy (as defined in Freire, 1970) and in autonomous language learning, we have tried to include a practice that secures a continuous deep learning approach and cooperation strategies inside of the classroom to secure results that come closer to the ideal reality of bilingualism or plurilingualism.

This study started as part of a Ph.D. program that concentrated on historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. I wrote the first comprehensive research paper in Spanish to account for the status of the English spoken in Canada. With this study, it appeared that the importance of education in the development of variation within the English spoken in Canada, and subsequently in the world, has been crucial. In addition, my professional experience has been linked to the realm of language teaching. Therefore, my research interests became focused on language teaching in the classroom environment in secondary, and particularly postsecondary, education. This study has been built on the combination of teaching practice, experimental and bibliographical research, and the study of the theories behind the issues to which students' perceptions of language learning in the classroom drew attention.

The main body of our thesis consists of the responses of the subjects involved in the case study in the Spanish classrooms; students of all ages and backgrounds. Instead of posing a limitation to the alignment of our results, the diversity of our subjects has in fact enriched the research. This research is a transversal study that intends to reach out through different levels of language education in order to combine the most productive elements of the different learning contexts. The heterogeneity of our subjects has served as motor for creativity for teachers and researches, and has guaranteed an environment more related to the necessities of an urban society that is becoming increasingly diverse.

This thesis is not a theoretical attempt. It developed as an exploration of the common characteristics of these classrooms and as an effort to discover how useful ethnographic tools are for language teachers. Consequently, this study did not consider it necessary to promote homogeneity in the selection of our subjects — even though it is traditionally required in scientific research. We consider this homogeneity to be rather fictitious in the reality of current foreign language classrooms, and so homogeneity is not desirable when carrying out research that attempts to give practical contributions, tuned

to linguistic theories that attempt to make relevant contributions to the present context of language teaching and learning. We have combined two target languages at once (Spanish and English) because we were interested in drawing some conclusions regarding the equivalences in both educational contexts in two different languages. Both learning situations were quite opposite: English was studied in a classroom where English was the first language of the majority of the population in this province in Canada. Spanish, however, was a marginal language in this same Canadian context. Thus, we have been able to explore the learning strategies our students used in a context where instruction is the main means to learning the language. However, English instruction took part in a classroom where the diversity of languages and realities was so appalling that English was not only the language of instruction but also the only means to communicate, together with the fact that the wider context of the Canadian reality in this town also happened in English. Both teaching contexts provided very enriching results to our practice as teachers of second languages.

Second Language Acquisition theories have tried to explain how languages are learnt inside and outside of the language classroom. The two main methods are commonly known as instruction and immersion (Krashen, 1981). In instruction, traditionally teachers have had the main role in the decision of both what language students will learn and the sequence of the materials. By the choice of a language textbook, for instance, they select an organization of content for the learner. One of the first assumptions explored later in the student journals is that the order of the presentation will correspond to the order of acquisition (Ellis, 2004, p. 1). As teachers, we also make also decisions on the methodology and strategies of teaching. We attempt to manage and assess the process of language learning. This thesis aims to help teachers make their perceptions on language learning explicit through an analysis of language-learner contributions and reflective practice. We believe that teachers will improve their practice if they are aware of the background theory that they use. We can only examine our beliefs when they are overt. If we do not question our practice as teachers, we may be operating in accordance with implicit beliefs, be uncritical and also resistant to change. Conversely, we may shift from theory to theory according to the latest fashion in methodology (Ellis, 2004, p. 3). One of the ways in which we can make our beliefs overt is by stating them in the shape of goals. The goal, at all levels of the SLA instructed in the classrooms where this project examined, has always been *bilingualism* (or its plurilingual equivalent). Whether the goal has been achieved or not by the teaching and learning strategies of the participants in the classroom event is a different issue. For our purposes, 'bilingualism' is defined as the performance and competence of two languages by the

same individual (Cummins, 1981, p. 1). However, there is no doubt that the concept of 'bilingualism' is a tricky one.

> Who is or is not bilingual is difficult to define and measure. In practice, arbitrary cut-off points are set to define a group of bilingual for research purposes. Much of the research restricts its sample to balanced bilinguals. This may be a special group of bilingual, thus restricting the generalization of results (Baker, 1988, p. 8).

In any case, there has been a popular belief underlining a negative notion of 'subtractive bilingualism' (Cummins, 1981, p. 3). This popular belief, which can still be found in present-day teaching practices, ran parallel to the early research on bilingualism and intelligence. This type of research used IQ tests. Baker uses the term 'the period of detrimental effects' to refer to the time from the 19th century to the 1960s (Baker, 1988, p. 9). There were plenty of research examples that showed the superiority of monoglots over bilinguals on both sides of the Atlantic.[9] There are several methodological flaws in these studies. The IQ test does not seem to be an accurate measurement of intelligence, supposing that intelligence can effectively be measured. It relies on many cultural and pragmatic issues, and so the reasons for these detrimental results can be explained by the phrasing and content of the questions, more than on the cognitive skills that the individual undergoing the test possesses. These tests reflected a strong negative bias against bilingualism and cultural difference in terms of even genetic inferiority (Cummins, 1981, p. 7). According to Cummins the situation could be summarized as depicted in the following table:

Table I: Blaming the victim in minority-language education (Cummins, 1981, p. 8)

A. AIMS	D. OUTCOMES.
Overt: Teach English to minority children In order to create a harmonious society with equal opportunity for all.	- Even more intense efforts by the school to eradicate the deficiencies inherent in minority children.
Covert: Anglicize minority children because linguistic and cultural diversity are seen as a threat to social cohesion.	- The failure of these efforts only serves to reinforce the myth of minority group deficiencies.
B. METHOD	C. RESULTS
Prohibit use of LI in schools and make children reject their own culture and language in order to identify with majority English group	1. Shame in LI language and culture. 2. Replace of LI by L2. 3. School failure among many children.
Justification 1. LI should be eradicated because it will interfere with the learning of English. 2. Identification with LI culture will reduce child's ability to identify with English speaking culture.	"Scientific" Explanations 1. Bilingualism causes confusion in thinking, emotional insecurity and school failure. 2. Minority group children are "culturally deprived" (almost by definition since they are not Anglos) 3. Some minority-language groups are genetically inferior (common theory in the U.S. in 1920s and 30s).

We will explore the shifts in the perspectives of 'bilingualism', which have led to the belief that the ownership of two or more languages is a benefit and advantage, in the next chapter. From the research that exists, there is a lack of conclusive evidence as to the positive effect of bilingualism but it has been acknowledged that bilingualism does not have negative effects, and grass-roots political movements promote and support bilingual education.

Our thesis points out some of the loopholes that the branch of linguistics devoted to learning languages possesses, through bibliographical research on the academic literature written about the topic. We will define the parameters of our research to improve the situation in the SL classroom. These parameters and loopholes will ask some of the questions of our thesis. We will also develop a chapter on the methodology and background to the use of this methodology in our field, describing in detail how we

have organized the data collected. We will classify and unify the results of our observations and projects to give an answer to our initial questions on improving classroom conditions. Some of these initial questions were answered in the innovative education project in the Spanish classes at the university. We had the chance to put into practice some of the suggestions provided by the classroom participants and to check their efficiency when applied in the educational situation inside of the classroom. As our project is mainly descriptive, it will describe our participants in the different learning contexts in which we have carried out our research and also describe in detail the projects this research is based upon. Once we have compiled results and responses, we will place them within the framework of prevalent theories of SLL and put forward a proposal for the improvement of learning conditions of linguistic instruction.

As already mentioned in this introduction, the methodological foundations for this doctoral thesis are located in the fields of bibliographical and ethnographic research. We have used the following tools for ethnographic study in our projects at university and secondary school level: free observation, and also controlled observation, through the presence of an observer or through audiovisual recording; teaching and learning diaries from the participants in the classroom; and interviews and questionnaires designed by the students themselves. From October 2002 to April 2003, I conducted a series of informal ESL Class observation and aiding, and from January to April 2003, we carried out the main case study for this thesis "Learning Spanish in the University Classroom (L.S.U.C. Case Study)", as part of an Academic Innovative Practice Project. From September 2003 to April 2004, I also completed a pilot programme on teaching and learning in higher education, taught by the centre for excellence in teaching and learning at the National University of Ireland, Galway. These varied methodological strategies have converged in this thesis to offer conclusions and proposals to the initial question about how to improve language learning as it happens within the classroom, from the students' perspective.

I know I cannot teach anyone anything. I can only provide an environment in which he can learn (Rogers, 1965, p. 389)

I.2 Structure of this dissertation.

The first chapter of this dissertation states the rationale behind this project and the case study that this research focuses on. It clarifies the main research questions and locates the study within the individual

academic background of the researcher as well as in the realms of philological studies and teacher training. It also relates this project to the current European cultural and linguistic context, through the Common European Framework and Language Portfolio. It highlights the importance of students' perspective of learning and the language classroom. It mentions the main issues underlined by student statements, such as the use of first language in the language classroom, the power dynamics and student affect in the language learning process and the impact of space and time on language learning. It gives a summary of the dissertation chapter by chapter.

The second chapter of this dissertation summarizes the history of the main concepts in our research question, from the point of view of Second Language Acquisition theories as well as the history of Second Language Acquisition methodologies, exploring the shift in paradigm in the first part of the twenty-first century. It gives a summary of the main educational theories that have had an impact in the design and assessment of this project, highlighting the lack of attention that these general educational theories have received from academic studies in language teaching and learning. It tracks down the evolution of the five main concepts present in our research question: Second Language Acquisition Theories, Language and language learning, Student, Teacher, Classroom and Research.

The third chapter of this dissertation outlines Classroom Research as an academic practice and describes the diverse ethnographic tools used in this project from a theoretical point of view, analyzing the benefits and the drawbacks of using such tools: observation, journals and interviews. It defines the project as a descriptive qualitative case study and also gives a description of the plan of the research project itself and the way in which it was carried out. It places an emphasis on the research team meetings.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation outlines the history of the process of analysis of the data collected through the project. It describes the methods of analysis used, justifying the choices made for a partial use of Grounded Theory in the context of the whole study. It underlines the contrastive nature of the research carried out for this dissertation. It explains what 'coding' consists of and the role of the academic literature review within this methodology.

The fifth chapter of this dissertation starts the report of the results of the analysis and coding. It focuses on the concepts derived from student journals. It isolates the initial core variables and their

recurrence, outlining the main contrast between student journals and teacher's journal, and it finally classifies the results of the analysis of the journal in six codes - Student Awareness, Student Affect, Classroom Dynamics, Teaching Methods, Student Strategies and Space – with many quotes and examples.

The sixth chapter of this dissertation continues the report of the results of the analysis and coding of the interviews. It focuses on the concepts derived from student journals, and applies to these the interviews that took place a few weeks after the beginning of journal writing, with many quotes and examples from both the interviews and questionnaires. It also discusses the role of preliminary written questionnaires, and compares them with the effectiveness of the oral interviews. It further develops specific codes with the outcomes from these questionnaires and interviews that differed from the journals.

The seventh chapter of this dissertation finishes the report of the results of the analysis and coding of the observations by first describing the outcomes of the scheduled observations and then illustrating a completely different learning environment: an intercultural and multilingual ESL secondary school classroom. It continues the classification of the outcomes of the observations carried out in the L.S.U.C. project with some of the codes derived from student journals and added in the interviews, and provides new insights through the specific codes dealt with as outcomes from these observations, as well as the outsider point of view from the volunteering experience in the ESL classroom. It describes the observations carried out with a camcorder.

The eighth chapter of this dissertation offers the results of the student feedback of the project, highlighting its benefits from a student and student research assistant point of view. It also discusses the drawbacks of this project based on the student answers in the feedback questionnaires. These results have been organized by the role of the students in the project and by the course module in which the students were enrolled.

The ninth chapter of this dissertation puts forward a notion of language learning competence that acknowledges the required skills in the classroom environment. It also describes the benefits and discusses the loopholes and drawbacks of the project from a teacher/researcher point of view. It suggests solutions for further qualitative teaching/research initiatives as well as new lines of research into competence and further collaborative projects.

The tenth chapter of this dissertation summarizes the findings and offers some conclusions to the whole project and dissertation in an aim to inspire more student and teacher-led research.

I.3 Estructura de esta tesis.

El primer capítulo de esta tesis justifica el razonamiento que apoya este proyecto y el estudio de caso en el que se concentra esta investigación. Clarifica las preguntas principales y localiza el estudio dentro del contexto académico individual de la investigadora así como en el dominio de los estudios filológicos y formación del profesorado. Relaciona también este proyecto con el contexto europeo actual cultural y lingüístico, a través del Marco Común y el Portfolio de Lenguas. Subraya la importancia de la perspectiva estudiantil del aprendizaje y de la clase de lenguas. Menciona los problemas principales marcados por las afirmaciones de los estudiantes, como el uso de la primera lengua en la clase de lenguas, las dinámicas de poder y afectividad en el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas así como el impacto del espacio y tiempo en la adquisición de lenguas. Da un resumen de la tesis capítulo por capítulo.

El segundo capítulo de esta tesis resume la historia de los principales conceptos de nuestra investigación desde el punto de vista de las teorías de la Adquisición de Lenguas, así como la historia de las metodologías de aprendizaje de lenguas, explorando el cambio del paradigma en la primera parte del siglo veintiuno. Da un resumen de las teorías educacionales principales que han tenido un impacto en el diseño y evaluación de este proyecto, subrayando la falta de atención que estas teorías educativas generales han recibió desde los estudios académicos de enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas. Sigue la evolución de cinco conceptos fundamentales para nuestra pregunta de investigación: Teorías de Adquisición de Lenguas, Aprendizaje de Lenguas y Lenguas, Estudiante, Profesor, Clase e Investigación.

El tercer capítulo de esta tesis delinea la Investigación de Aula como práctica académica y describe las diversas herramientas etnográficas usadas en este proyecto desde un punto de vista teórico, analizando los beneficios y obstáculos que se derivan del uso de estas herramientas: principalmente, observación, diarios y entrevistas. Define el proyecto como un estudio de caso descriptivo y cualitativo y da la descripción del plan de investigación y la forma en que fue desarrollado. Pone mucho énfasis en las reuniones del equipo investigador.

El cuarto capítulo de esta tesis delinea la historia del proceso del análisis de los datos recogidos a través del proyecto. Describe los métodos de análisis usados, justificando las elecciones tomadas a favor de un uso parcial del muestreo teórico, en el contexto del estudio. Subraya la naturaleza de la investigación desarrollada para esta tesis. Explica lo que significa 'codificar' y el papel que tiene la revisión de la literatura académica en esta metodología.

El quinto capítulo de esta tesis empieza con el informe de los resultados del análisis y codificación. Se concentra en los conceptos derivados de los diarios estudiantiles. Aísla las variables centrales iniciales y su recurrencia, describiendo el contraste principal entre los diarios de los estudiantes y de los profesores. Finalmente clasifica los resultados del análisis de los diarios en seis códigos — Consciencia del Estudiantes, Afectividad del Estudiante, Dinámica de Clase, Métodos de Enseñanza, Estrategias estudiantes y Espacio — con citas abundantes y ejemplos.

El capítulo seis de esta tesis continúa el informe de los resultados del análisis y codificación de las entrevistas. Se concentra en los conceptos derivados de los diarios de los estudiantes y aplicados a las entrevistas que se llevaron a cabo unas semanas después del comienzo de la actividad de escritura de los diarios con citas abundante y ejemplos de los cuestionaros y entrevistas propiamente dichas. También analiza el papel de los cuestionarios escritos preliminares y los compara con la efectividad de las entrevistas orales. Desarrolla más códigos específicos a los resultados de estos cuestionarios y entrevistas que diferían de los diarios.

El capítulo siete de esta tesis termina el informe de los resultados del análisis y codificación de las observaciones, primero describiendo los resultados de las observaciones programadas y luego ilustrando un contexto educativo completamente diferente: una clase de inglés como segunda lengua en un instituto multicultural y plurilingüe. Continúa la clasificación de los resultados de las observaciones llevadas a cabo en el proyecto AEAU con algunos de los códigos derivados de los diarios y añadidos en las entrevistas. Da nuevas consideraciones a través de los códigos nuevos sustraídos de las observaciones y de la perspectiva marginal de la experiencia como voluntaria en la clase de inglés como segunda lengua. Termina describiendo la observación llevada a cabo con una cámara. .

El capítulo ocho de esta tesis ofrece los resultados de la evaluaciones de los estudiantes del proyecto, marcando los beneficios desde el punto de vista de los estudiantes y estudiantes asistentes de investigación. También discute los inconvenientes de este proyecto basados en las respuestas de los estudiantes al cuestionario de evaluación. Estos resultados han sido organizados por el papel que el estudiante tuvo en el proyecto y el curso en el que estaba matriculado.

El capítulo nueve de esta tesis sugiere una noción de competencia de aprendizaje de lenguas que reconozca las habilidades requeridas dentro del aula. También describe los beneficios y señala las lagunas e inconvenientes de este proyecto desde el punto de vista de la profesora investigadora. Sugiere soluciones para fomentar más iniciativas de enseñanza e investigación cualitativa así como nuevas líneas de investigación en cuanto a la competencia y otros proyectos colaborativos.

El capítulo diez de esta tesis resume los resultados de esta tesis y ofrece conclusiones al proyecto entero y a la tesis a la espera de servir de inspiración para la proliferación de otras investigaciones dirigidas e movidas por la cooperación de profesores y alumnos.

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[1] It must be noted, though, that the term FLL, is normally used to refer to First Language Learning (Ellis, 1985). Considering children usually acquire their first language not through formal instruction, i.e. learning, but in natural environments, whether at home or in the world surrounding them, we will refer to this as FLA (First language Acquisition) to avoid any confusion.

[2] See BREMER, K. (1996) *Achieving Understanding: Discourse in intercultural encounters*, Harlow: Longman and WILLETT, J. (1995) 'Becoming First Graders in an L2: An Ethnographic study of L2 Socialization', TESOL QUARTERLY. Vol. 29. No.3, autumn, 473-503.

[3] It should be noted that the page numbering in this document started to malfunction. This should be page iii. The following pages appear wrongly numbered in this document. This issue has been investigated with no success. The rest of the thesis does not present such issue.

[4] See *A Common European Framework of reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* Council of Europe (2001) Cambridge University Press.

[5] Founded on 5 May 1949, by ten founder member states, the Council of Europe is the oldest European international political organization. Any European state can become a member of the Council of Europe provided it accepts the principle of the rule of law and guarantees everyone under its jurisdiction the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. At present the Council has forty-three member states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organization whose main aims are:

- to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;
- to promote awareness of a European cultural identity and encourage its development;
- to develop common responses to problems facing European society (minorities, xenophobia, environmental protection, bioethics, Aids, drugs, etc.);
- to develop a political partnership with Europe's new democracies; and

- to assist central and eastern European countries with their political, legislative and constitutional reforms. (http://culture.coe.int/lang)

[6] See http://culture.coe.int/lang

[7] Page v.

[8] From this page on, the numbers are in logical progression but this page should read as page vi, being the final page of this chapter page xvii.

[9] In the USA, Jewish, Spanish, Mexican, Italian, German, Polish, Chinese, Japanese and Bohemian bilinguals were usually, with few exceptions, shown to have a lower verbal (and occasionally lower non-verbal) IQ score than monoglot Americans (Darcy 1953; Jensen, 1962; Pearl and Lambert, 1962). In Wales n Wales, the research of D.J. Saer (1922, 1923), Frank Smith (1923), Ethel Barke (1933), Barke & Parry-Williams (1938) and W.R. Jones (1959) confirmed it. (Baker, 1988, p.10)

CHAPTER 2.

Language Teaching and Learning Foundations

THIS CHAPTER …

- Summarizes the history of the main concepts in our research question from the point of view of Second Language Acquisition theories.
- Summarizes the history of Second Language Acquisition methodologies, exploring the shift in paradigm in the first part of the 21st century.
- Summarizes the main educational theories that have had an impact in the design and assessment of this project.

2.1 Second Language Acquisition.

One of the most challenging tasks of writing a doctoral dissertation is to narrow down the field of study in which it takes place. In an interdisciplinary case study like this one, the task is complicated by the fact that each discipline acquires a different function within the overlapping theoretical frameworks. The length of this project has granted this dissertation an unusual wealth and variety of theories and approaches as well as conclusions enriched with a prolonged reflective practice. This initial complexity deemed a chapter of this kind necessary in order to present the theoretical scaffolding of the case study. As a consequence, this chapter revolves around the three disciplines from which the two main questions in this thesis originated; what happens inside a language classroom and how can it be improved. These disciplines are:

1. Second Language Acquisition Theories (SLA),

2. Second Language Learning Methodologies,

3. Educational Theories.

Before the Learning Spanish in the University Classroom (L.S.U.C.) project - on which the empirical side of this research is mainly based - was conceived, planned and designed, it was necessary to carry out a

bibliographical research based on these three main branches of knowledge. This revision did not stop at the earlier stages of our project but became the fuel for this dissertation. Thus, this chapter focuses on the paradigm shifts of five key concepts, concentrating on their evolution during the second half of the 20ᵗʰ century. These five key concepts are: student, classroom, language, teacher and researcher.

The purpose of this chapter is to achieve a deeper understanding of the state of the question and to show the unavoidable relationships between general educational theories and language learning theories and methods. I will establish the point of departure for the L.S.U.C. case study and English-language classroom informal observations that constitute the body of the empirical study described in this dissertation in order to develop a series of methodological strategies and tools to understand and improve what happens in the language classroom.

This chapter, on the one hand, shows the benefits of a theoretical – quite often discontinuous - time line that serves as a reference for the development of more fluid notions of the underlying concepts in any given linguistic educational research: the nature of language and communication, language learning and learners (Candlin & Mercer, 2000, p. 8). On the other hand, this bibliographical research has provided my teaching practice with a more precise language and terminology in order to explain the process and organization of language learning in a more systematic manner. At the same time, this terminology plays a vital role in the description of success and failure in language teaching and learning.

In the following three subchapters, contemporary, traditional lines of thought are outlined and a description is offered of the main obstacles and vacuums that these currents have encountered as well as the lines of research that they have ignored. In chapter nine of this thesis, we will come back to some of the hypotheses developed by these authors in light of the results of the case study as well as new theories that have been developed in the last ten years. For the time being, we will establish a time limit for this chapter towards the end of the 20th century in order to explore the preliminary definitions of the five key concepts (underlined as follows) in our initial research: language teaching and learning in the classroom.

2.1.1   Second Language Acquisition Theories.

For this dissertation we have used the terms SFL (Spanish as a foreign language or ELE in Spanish) and EFL (English as a foreign language or ILE in Spanish), using the adjective 'foreign' intentionally in order to refer to any language learned or acquired by the speaker after the first language. The multiple terms given to these disciplines have caused some confusion especially around the term

'foreign', since it would not apply in bilingual situations in which two languages are learned as first languages. Some authors prefer the term additional languages. The same confusion or disagreement have arisen from the term acquisition and learning. We opted for the term acquisition for the title of this subchapter because it is more widespread in the literature, but let us clarify the differences between these four terms.

Spangenberg-Urbschat and Pritchard (1994) consider the term ESL (English as a Second Language) as highly inappropriate because it does not bear in mind the diverse background of the students at their arrival in the language classroom (p. 1). That is to say, it does not take into account the individual characteristics of learners in the definition of the discipline that investigates their learning. Towards the end of the 1980s, SLA theory started to consider the need to pay more attention to the participants in the language classroom, both students and teachers, in an attempt to understand the variety of individuals who participate in the classroom.

For this relatively small case study, diversity was a very remarkable feature, given that the location of our study was the small city of Ontario, Canada. In the Spanish classrooms in which this case study took place, there was a student, for instance, who used the target language as a home language, due to the fact that one of his parents spoke Spanish as a mother tongue. Some students had learned it in a bilingual context since childhood, others had had previous contact with Spanish in formalized instruction settings; some others had already – at least – one other second language (French), so Spanish became their third or fourth language (given the presence of native languages in the area such as Ojibwa and Mohawk).

Acknowledging these realities, the term 'second language' did not seem very adequate or it would simply leave aside the relationship of the learner with the new language. In this way, the term 'foreign' seemed more convenient in order to refer to this language because it was a common characteristic to all students in our case study, including the student with a Spanish-speaking parent but who never referred to this language as a language of his own. In any case, most of the time both the students in the Spanish classroom as well as the students in the English classroom that we observed in the case study, did not use the target language at home very often. In the same way, Spanish or English was not the main language used in their country of origin. On the contrary, they were languages used in 'foreign' contexts for all the subjects of this research project. As a consequence, this thesis will explore the domains of the disciplines that have focused on the study of acquisition and learning of languages other than the first language or mother tongue, or home language.

Let us now turn to the object of study of this discipline: Foreign Language Acquisition and Teaching and Learning. Altman and Alatis (1981) depart from the teaching side of this discipline in their definition:

> Second language teaching consists of any activity on the part of one person intended to facilitate the learning by another person of a language which is not his or her native one (…) Methodologies, curriculum materials, performance objectives, audio-visual equipment are a convention of second language teaching which may vary from one educational setting to the next. (p. 5)

They enumerate the tools that the different traditions have used in order to facilitate language learning. They use the verb 'facilitate' (from Latin *facilis*, that can be done without effort) as a synonym of teaching (in English from Old English *taecan* and in Spanish from Latin *insignare*, to point or to give instruction). This shift in the meaning of what it is to teach is a key turning point in the evolution of educational theory which is currently revolutionizing teaching practices at all levels and is clearly impacting third level education in the English-speaking world as well as in the broader European context. It seems necessary to question what role teaching has in the language learning process. The experience of thousands of immigrants who circulate freely through our European borders nowadays and who have achieved fluency in the official languages of the territories to which they migrate, is the living proof that in order to acquire a language, instruction is not a necessary and sufficient condition. There is a side to language acquisition, then, that is not tied to language learning inside the classroom or conscious learning. SLA theories have focused on the explanation of Second Language Acquisition outside the classroom but also on language learning inside the classroom. This dichotomy has traditionally been called *immersion vs. instruction.* In fact, the frontier outlined by Krashen (1981) - between learning and acquisition - has been claimed by many authors, before and since. This dichotomy of formal learning / natural acquisition was originally put forward by Cazden (1968) in his study of first language acquisition (FLA). Currently, some authors consider this binary opposition inadequate because there is no concluding evidence about their disassociation in terms of cognitive processes involved. The truth is that neither learning nor acquisition has received enough attention and therefore we have not reached a clear definition that enables us to establish precise and systematic differences between both processes (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 6).

In any case, the distinction between these terms is relevant to our case study in order to classify the results of our classroom research. For our purposes, learning implies the existence of formal instruction and planned actions, whether autonomous, peer-initiated, or teacher-led; and acquisition will be used as a

general term that comprises all linguistic contact situations that derive in a certain command of the language.

This thesis focuses on classroom learning, but this subchapter explores SLA theories in order to understand the shifts in the concepts of the nature of language and language learning, as well as the notions of teacher and learner. Chronologically speaking, McLaughlin considers that there have been three main phases in SLA theory and he classifies them as linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic (Ellis, 2004, p. 4). We could further argue that a fourth phase can be added at the turn of the 21st century: the ethnographic phase. Since history is not the most direct route from the past to the future, these perspectives are still present among academics, researchers, language teachers and students. Ellis (1994) concludes that

> there is no simple answer to the question 'What is second language acquisition?'. It can take place in either a naturalistic or an instructional setting, but may not necessarily differ according to the setting. The goal of SLA is the description and explanation of the learner's linguistic or communicative competence. (…) Second language acquisition is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon and it is not surprising that it has come to mean different things to different people. (p. 15)

To sum up, the depth and breadth of this discipline indicate that SLA research must take into account a variety of subjects that speak a variety of languages, who are in the process of learning a variety of foreign languages in a variety of contexts for a variety of reasons (Larsen Freeman, 1991, p. 7). Hence, each study must identify the variables at play in order to define sub-disciplines or even interdisciplines, in order to successfully share the relevant results of their research.

Since the end of the 19th century, with the rise of positivism and the scientific method, language learning sought the support of linguistic theory (Ellis, 2004, p. 23). It is also true that this relationship between language theories and methods of language learning was not new. SLA theories broke away from linguistics and the business of teaching languages slightly later, due to the dissatisfaction that research results generated (Perís, 2005, p. 71). At the turn of the 20th century, linguistic theory provided the underlying ideology to the different approaches to learning and acquisition. The language teaching business

provided the practical side of this discipline. In this way, teachers only focused on an eminently economic goal, the search for the method that worked quickly and efficiently in teaching a target language. Linguistics, on the other hand, dedicated its studies to research and created models that illustrated perfectly the nature of language and its manifestations. The development of SLA theories has traditionally been explained as arising from the intersection between the academic discipline and professional practice. However, SLA theory has redefined and deepened its relationship with linguistics, to an extent that Ellis (1994) defines as symbiotic (p. 2).

For this subchapter, the amount of bibliography consulted has been enormous. Amongst others, Rod Ellis's work is significant in his review of the history and evolution of concepts throughout the 20th century. According to Ellis, SLA theories have stopped being a uniform and predictable phenomenon (Ellis, 2004, p. 5). Since the 1960s, SLA theories have claimed their autonomy from the language teaching business and from linguistic departments, establishing their own field of study. Current SLA comprises a wide range of topics and approaches. All of them study the process of language learning and acquisition, the characteristics of the participants and the results of this process. This broad field of study deals with the way in which students develop a new linguistic system, departing from a limited exposure to a second language (Gass & Selinker, 1994, p. 1) as well as with the development of theories about the effects of communicative interaction in language learning. Its aim is to explain what can be learned and what cannot, and the reasons why some students reach a better fluency than others. It tries to recognize and isolate the features of the 'black box', or in other words, the neurolinguistic data related to language learning.

As we will explore in the next subchapter, throughout history, SLA theory has worked on disparate topics. Even so, Ellis (1994) offers a reference framework for the areas that SLA has dealt with (p. 17).

How people learn or acquire a second language is a vast field of inquire that defies what Spolsky (1989) calls "a general theory". It is not surprising then that theories of second language acquisition (SLA) include perspectives from psycholinguistics (McLaughlin, 1990, 1992, Seliger, 1988), sociolinguistics (Beebe, 1988, Wolfson, 1989), neurolinguistics (Genesee, 1988), classroom research (Seliger & Long, 1983; Allen, Swain, Harley & Cummins, 1990), bilingual education (Appel & Muysken, 1987; Cummins 1988), social psychology (Clement & Kruideneir, 1985; Gardner &Lambert, 1972; Giles & Byrne, 1982) and self-assessment (Peirce, Swan and Hart, 1993; Yu 1990) Each of

these perspectives has an important part to play in an understanding of the complex nature of second language acquisition. (Peirce, 1993, p. 1)

The first main concern has been the description of the target language produced by the student as a system in its own right, or, what has been termed since 1972, 'interlanguage'. Errors, acquisition sequences and developments, variability and towards the last part of the 20th century, pragmatic aspects related to the way in which the language is used for communicative purposes have been studied. In the 1980s SLA started to pay attention to the external aspects of language learning as well, to the social context in which the students were located and how this influenced learning or acquisition of a foreign language. On the other hand, internal or intrinsic aspects have not been left aside either. In this regard, it is quite challenging to clarify how language acquisition happens and how the resources at hand are being used for this purpose, since the majority of these processes take place in the brain, albeit not totally automatically. This branch of SLA has focused on the transfer of knowledge between the first language or other second or third languages to the target language; universal mechanisms triggered in order to convert input into a particular interlanguage; and the use of a supposed set of linguistic universals in order to transform this input into 'performance'. Finally, SLA has also approached the issue of individual differences between the participants in the language learning situation. Language students – and teachers (who have not managed to attract enough attention of academic research) – show marked differences in terms of motivation, language aptitude and the use of different strategies (Ellis, 1994, pp. 17-18).

At the end of the 1980s, Spolsky offered a general chart of the scope of SLA:

Table 2. Spolsky's Scope of SLA (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 4)

```
┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────┐
│ Social context          │────────│ provides │
└─────────────────────────┘        └──────────┘
                │
┌──────────┐    ▼
│ leads to │──▶┌─────────────────────────┐
└──────────┘   │ Attitudes (of various    │
               │ kinds)                   │
               └─────────────────────────┘
                         │
┌─────────────────────┐  ▼
│ which appears in the │─▶┌─────────────────────────┐
│ learner as           │  │ Motivation              │
└─────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────┘
                                  │
┌──────────────┐                  ▼
│ which joins   │─────┐   ┌──────┬────────────┬────────────┬──────────────┐
│ other personal│     └──▶│ Age  │ Personality│ Capabilities│ Previous    │
│ characteristics│        │      │            │            │ knowledge    │
│ such as        │        └──────┴────────────┴────────────┴──────────────┘
└──────────────┘
                                    │
                                    ▼
               ┌─────────────────────────────────┐
               │ Learning opportunities (formal   │
               │ or informal)                     │
               └─────────────────────────────────┘
                                    │
┌──────────────────┐                ▼            ┌────────────────┐
│ The interplay     │─▶┌─────────────────────────┐│ All of which    │
│ between learner   │  │ Linguistic and non-     ││ explain the use │
│ and situation     │  │ linguistic outcomes for ││ the learner     │
│ determining       │  │ the learner             ││ makes of the    │
└──────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────┘│ available       │
                                                   └────────────────┘
```

This chart ignores the figure of the 'teacher'. When Spolsky refers to personal aspects such as attitudes, age and so on, he is focusing on the student. Thus, the model could be criticized for the partial dehumanization of the context of learning and a total dehumanization of the teacher; a legacy of an institutionalized tradition in which the teacher is a neutral figure and the 'bearer' of all knowledge. It is worth noting here that our case study is concerned with language teaching and learning in the classroom but in the same way, language acquisition in an open informal context requires significant input from the native speakers whom the student interacts with. B. N. Peirce studies the role and the impact of these native speakers, their attitudes and other individual factors when it comes to creating language learning opportunities. In spite of the lack of human aspects in Spolsky's chart, the variety of topics and overlapping issues is remarkable. This variety has ended in the inevitable interdisciplinarity of this field of knowledge. SLA has influenced and has been influenced by disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, psychology,

discourse analysis, ethnography and finally education. This multidisciplinary scaffolding is nourished by the results in language teaching practice and other applied branches of learning in general, although it also tends to undermine the status of this discipline as a field of study in its own right as well as the establishment of its boundaries and the systematization of its findings.

Nevertheless, this case study is not concerned with the examination of boundaries and testing the truth behind old concepts and procedures. Instead, one of our main concerns is to track the changes in the paradigm among the five axis of our initial question and understand the impact of theory on the student's set of beliefs about language learning. Hence, let us now turn to look at the shifts that have taken place in the five main concepts in our case study in the last forty years.

2.1.1.1 Language and language learning.

Ellis (1994) claims that we cannot agree on an exact date for the birth of the research on SLA, but that traditionally the 1970s have been quoted as the era of autonomous research on language acquisition (1). During the first phase, SLA research focused on the general aspects of language learning that sought similarities between students of different ages, different origins and different first languages. This linguistic focus coincides with the initial interest of our case study.

When tackling the task of language teaching and learning, the first issue that arises is the problem of the nature of language and languages (Stern, 1986, p. 119). Linguistics has traditionally dealt with this issue. Linguistics as an academic discipline started to develop in the 1950s, although the study of languages in the Western world is not as new, and even less so in the East. A lot of the concepts still used originated in the Greek or Roman worlds. In any case, it was the 19th century that turned the human capacity for language and its classical and modern manifestations into an object of study in itself. The traditional philologist studied these manifestations, formulated hypotheses, sought scientific evidence and gathered a corpus of information about the language in question. Thanks to these philological investigations, historic and comparative linguistics flourished rapidly (p. 120). The birth of phonetics at the end of the 19th century signalled the need to pay attention to the spoken language and provided linguistics with a universal code to be used for any language. Ferdinand de Saussure offered his course on General Linguistics, complied in book form in 1916 by his students, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (p. 121). This book

revolutionized the young discipline and it acquired its well-deserved academic status. Since then, from the 1920s to the 1960s, there has been a rapid growth in linguistics. It has branched out into different schools of thought, such as American Structuralism led by Bloomfield; Halliday and Firth's theories – also known as functional structuralism – and Generative-Transformational Grammar by Chomsky (p. 145). Together, these schools contributed to the origin of the different approaches in SLA.

First, behaviourism based on the models by Skinner (1924) and Watson (1957) considers that language learning is a process of habit formation encouraged by imitation and reinforcement. In the 1940s Lado, founder of contrastive analysis, and Brooks developed this approach to language learning that came into fashion again in the 1960s (Ellis, 2004, p. 23). From their perspective, language is a series of habits developed in society, leaving little room for linguistic creativity. Social changes in this decade did not leave linguistics aside and the second and third most important approaches to SLA came about: mentalism or cognitivism and sociolinguistics.

For a long time, foreign language acquisition has been equated with first language acquisition. Even though theories are nowhere near a full description of these two modes of learning, both processes have been looked at sufficiently to understand their main differences, and some of their similarities. However, popular methods and student beliefs still equate first language acquisition (FLA) and second language learning (SLL), favouring the first process over the second one. Traditionally, it has been assumed that all humans have a natural predisposition towards language (Mitchells and Myles, 1998, p. 8). Therefore, behaviourists thought that if we remove the possible obstacles that this natural 'gift' encounters, we would have a clear route towards language learning. The first obstacle was believed to be the learner's first language (Ellis, 2004, p. 39). Learner errors were explained as a result of 'interference' or 'language transfer' from the first language of the learner. In order to predict and 'cure' the effect of these interferences, they used 'Contrastive Linguistic Analysis'[1] (p. 22). Sooner rather than later, these 'error' studies showed examples that contrastive analysis could not foresee. Moreover, this type of analysis predicted errors that never happened (Wardhaugh (1970) and Dulay and Burt (1974)). Results showed that only 3 per cent of the errors were caused by interference (Ellis, 2004, p. 40). Interference was reconsidered as *intercession*, a learner strategy used when there are not enough TL resources (Corder, 1973, p. 68). L1 was appraised as a resource of prior knowledge.

The question remains to understand how learners use the LI in order to foster their learning. Traditional contrastive analysis assumed LI influence was a negative effect. More studies on contrastive analysis and language transfer (Fisiak, 1981; Gass & Selinker, 1983) maintained that the clarification of the understanding of the relationship between LI and TL would be valuable to language learning.

Mentalist researchers tackled the other 97 per cent of errors in order to elucidate their origin. There was an "explosion in what is called morpheme studies. These studies showed a fixed order of acquisition, regardless of the learning context. There is evidence that learners go through "a number of developmental stages, from very primitive and deviant version of the TL, to progressively more target-like versions" (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 10). However, learner language -or *interlanguage*, as coined by Selinker in 1972[2]- is also characterized by variability (Ellis, 1984, p. 2). Selinker suggested five stages:

- Language transfer
- Overgeneralization of internalized rules.
- Transfer of training.
- Strategies of TL learning
- Strategies of TL communication with native speakers

(Ellis, 2004, p. 48).

A learner's *interlanguage* then seems to freeze and learners undergo *fossilization* (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 13). Fossilized errors seem to have been the most problematic. At the same time, cognitive research found similar acquisition sequences in FLA so they engaged in language processing in order to ascertain if foreign language learners use this linguistic mental device as well (Ellis, 2004, p. 35). These theorists failed to include in their research bilingual accounts of language learning, which are now shedding some light on how first and additional languages relate internally and externally.

Mentalism was propelled by Clark and Clark (1977) but it was Chomsky who contributed to its popularity in the 1980s. Their view of language was more dynamic than previous behaviourist approaches. They see language learning as a dynamic process in which students use a wide range of strategies and available input (Ellis, 2004, p. 25) gradually from an initial awareness through to a manipulation of linguistic input towards a total automatism in their use of the language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.

217). From this perspective, language is a mental faculty governed by principles and parameters. Their most controversial aspect, though, is that based on the principles of Universal Grammar, this approach assumes the existence of an innate language learning device regulated by the principle of structural dependence and which focuses on the language in use (Ellis, 2004, p. 71). The hypotheses about the existence or inexistent of this innate device and the moment or the conditions that trigger its operation or render it inoperative, constitute the basis for the dichotomy between the approach called innatism and the approach for the development of the language acquisition device. Cognitive models include the competition model by Bates and MacWhinney (1982). It looks at the internal interpretation of meaning by comparing a number of linguistic cues in a single sentence that aid in language learning through the competition of mental mechanisms. It accounts for different psycholinguistic processes such as fields, cues, storage, parsing, codes and resonance. McClelland and Rumelhart developed the Parallel Distributed Processing (PDP) model, which develops a complicated mentalist model of language learning based on connectionism and networking between different cognitive areas and external realities. Also worth mentioning is the Adaptive Control of Through (ACT) model developed by Anderson along the same lines. Another cognitivist model focusing on interlanguage development and variation would be the multidimensional model developed by the ZISA group.

Neuropsychology and neurolinguistics (Lamendella 1977, Selinker and Lamendella 1978) offered new insights into the way the brain processes language in a language learning situation. The advances in technology have provided us with the tools to examine the modularity of the brain and its effects on language learning abilities. These neurofunctional theories "attempt to characterize the neurolinguistic information processing systems responsible for the development and use of language" (Ellis, 1994, p. 271) One of their main findings relies on the fact that the adult brain never loses the entire plasticity of the baby's brain. They have also theorized that the left hemisphere (Wernicke's and Broca's) is linked to linguistic comprehension and production whereas the right hemisphere is generally associated with the storing and processing of formulaic speech (p. 272). Sliger (1982) argued that if the left hemisphere does not engage in the analysis of the linguistic forms drilled through pattern and interaction, they will not be learned. The main problem of this model is that there is still uncertainty regarding the relationship of specific neurofunctions with their neurolinguistics correlates (p. 274).

At the same time, another movement developed as a response to behaviourism, bringing about a more humanistic and constructivist concept of language learning. From the 1960s, traditional linguistics started to consider languages not only as linguistic codes or vehicles for thought but in their relationship with external social realities and internal human characteristics. Sociolinguistics, pragmatics and linguistic ethnography called for an emphasis on external aspects while psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics focused on internal aspects (Ellis, 2004, p. 146). Language learning, then, needs to take into account these external and internal aspects.

One of the most interesting internal aspects of language use is variation (Ellis, 1984, p. 81). For cognitivists, led by Chomsky, all variability is non-systematic. The homogeneous competence model disregards stylistic variability as a less relevant aspect of performance (p. 77), but Labov (1970) proposed within a heterogeneous competence model. According to sociolinguists, there are five principles that any discipline dealing with language use needs to take into account:

1. All speakers possess several styles.

2. Styles can be ranged along a single dimension, measured by the amount of attention paid to speech.

3. The vernacular is the style in which minimum attention is given to monitoring speech. It is not possible to tap the vernacular style of the user by systematic observation of how he performs in a formal context.

5. The only way to obtain good data on the speech of a language user is through systematic observation.

(Ellis, 2004, p. 77)

The conflict between the fourth and fifth axioms leads to what Labov calls the 'observer's paradox'. Labov's theories have not focused on the practical application of learning as the previous concepts of language and language learning, but granted a more integral vision of people in general and students specifically as social beings as well as language as a social activity subject to constant use and change (Labov, 1997).

One of the most controversial models of language learning was put forward by Stephen Krashen in the 1980s: the monitor model. Krashen claims that language acquisition and learning are separate processes. The contrast between these setting is not based on their physical differences but it is of a procedural nature. Meaningful communication is a prerequisite of acquisition and Krashen equates this aspect of communication with a natural immersion environment (Ellis, 2004, p. 36). The monitor hypothesis claims that the sole purpose of learning is to monitor or edit TL utterances produced by the acquired language compartment (Ellis, 1983, p. 261). The sequence of foreign language production would be first to initiate an utterance and then to monitor it to finally utter it (Ellis, 2004, p. 36). He also put forward an input hypothesis, which claims that "input at the appropriate level of difficulty was sufficient for TL acquisition to happen" (p. 14) and he called it *comprehensible input.* Krashen situated the level of 'appropriate difficulty' along the lines of this formula: "Should a learner's current competence be i, comprehensible input would be $i+1$" (p. 38). This model has attracted a lot of attention and criticism, particularly from Merrill Swain and her colleagues. The main issue they have with Krashen's theory is that it lacks systematic description and empirical evidence. Swain considers that the weakest point of his theories is the little consideration given to language production. Krashen does not include any interactive negotiation of meaning of comprehensible input. One of Krashen's strongest points though, is the hypothesis of an affective filter. Affective variables had not yet received considerable attention (p. 263).

Some of the models produced during this era included the acculturation model, the nativization model and the accommodation model. In 1978, Schumann developed a model called 'acculturation', based on his realization that *interlanguages* developed in a similar way to pidgin languages. According to this model, a learner whose attitudes towards the TL community are favourable would become much more acculturated and they would achieve a greater fluency in the language. Apart from the generalization, this model - made without supportive empirical evidence at the beginning - became a transition towards new lines of research that compared foreign language learning with pidginization and creolization and stepped away from the traditional first language vs. foreign language dichotomy. It also provided a focus on social psychological variables and became the starting point to examine the factors at play in the process of becoming a member of a new culture and avoiding culture shock (with language shock as an element of this) (Ellis, 1984, p. 251). Acculturation is determined by social and psychological distance (motivation and ego-boundaries) (Ellis, 2004, p. 252). Following this model, Andersen added a nativization model. They both address foreign language acquisition in the natural setting. It is important to notice though that these models blame

the learner for the success or failure of this model without taking into account the interactional circumstances that s/he is subjected to and the different access to the target language, which is regulated by more than individual variables (Norton Peirce & Toohey, 2004, p. 283). Another model based on an emphasis on the cultural external aspects of language learning, which was developed by Giles, Lambert and Gardner, was the accommodation model. From this model rose the concepts of in-group (the learner's community of origin) and out-group (or target language community) (Ellis, 1984, p. 256). They analyze the relationship between the two communities in terms of perceived social distance as well, but they acknowledge the role of interaction in this perception. They also focus a specific layer of the concept on motivation, explaining that it will impact on how learners define themselves in cultural terms.

Finally, interactionist approaches have prevailed throughout the 80s and 90s, proving that the study of the circumstances that surround language interaction between people cannot be left aside (Norton Peirce & Toohey, 2004, p. 283). Based on Leo Van Lier (1988) and Spolsky (1989), and developed by Michael H. Long (1990), this approach focuses on the need for interaction in order to learn a language, something already highlighted by behaviourism and sociolinguistics; and studies the optimal conditions for these interactions through the speech acts involved (Van Lier, 1994, p. 71). They highlight the dynamic aspect of the nature of language and how it develops and shifts through interaction.

Gass and Selinker's model of language learning (1994) maintains that foreign language learning models need to take into account the multifaceted behaviour of language and integrate linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives. Their model is mainly an interactionist one. They focus on how learners transform input into output, differentiating between 'apperceived input', 'comprehended input' and 'intake'. These terms had started to be examined by Corder as early as the 1970s and became clarified with research on interaction. Intake needs to go through a process of integration in order to become outtake (Gass and Selinker, 1994, p. 297). They took into their framework external and internal conditions affecting this process, namely: 1. Frequency, 2. Affect, 3. Prior knowledge and 4. Attention (p. 300). Negotiation of meaning becomes an essential tool in the stages of comprehended input, intake and integration, highlighting the necessity of interaction beyond behaviourist models of language learning.

The turn of the 21st century has rescued functionalist approaches by Halliday's development of a new approach that is known as multifunctional. This approach to language learning and language in general

comes about in an attempt to reconcile and synthesize the concepts put forward by previous approaches and the differences between them, acknowledging their validity and incorporating them all into a multidimensional view of language. The multifunctional perspective comprises cognitivist and sociointeractionist theories. Due to this reconciling spirit, this new line of thought agglutinates theorists from very far-away approaches such as Vivian Cook or B. N. Peirce.

Before finishing up this section, I would like to look at the concept of bilingualism. Since our case study took place in Canada, this concept was very relevant to us, and the fact that SLA theories have failed to account for bilingual models of language learning and theories of bilingualism in general made it more pressing to include a summary of the paradigm shift along this idea.

Studies on bilingualism clarified that first language/s are an indisputable benefit not only for language learning but for other cognitive activities as well. These studies also discovered that the assumed goal of foreign language teaching has been bilingualism (or its multilingual equivalent), without bearing in mind individual differences and strategic modes of learning. Baker points out the difficulties of defining bilingualism:

> Who is or is not bilingual is difficult to define and measure. In practice, arbitrary cut-off points are set to define a group of bilingual for research purposes. Much of the research restricts its sample to balanced bilinguals. This may be a special group of bilingual, thus restricting the generalization of results. (Baker, 1988, p. 8)

This idea calls for a layered approach to bilingualism or multilingualism which ranges from basic communicate levels through actual near-native performance (Sharwood-Smith, 1994, p. 3). Vivian Cook (1991) coined the term 'multicompetence' in 1991 to refer to "the compound state of a mind with two grammars" (p. 112). This new theory does away with the notion of proficiency as a condition of bilingualism. Multicompetence is variable and it takes into account that languages are flexible and they vary across time and space, responding to external environments. These 80s and 90s visions of bilingualism were unconceivable at earlier stages. The negative notion of 'subtractive bilingualism' prevailed (Cummins, 1981, p. 3).

Baker distinguishes several periods in the history of bilingualism theory:

- From the 19th century to the 1960s - The period of detrimental effects (Baker, 1988, p. 9).

Research on intelligence during this period showed the superiority of monolinguals on both sides of the Atlantic. Studies showed that ethnic minorities (Jewish, Spanish, Mexican, Italian, German, Polish, Chinese, Japanese and Bohemian bilinguals) had lower verbal IQ scores than English-only Americans (Darcy 1953; Jensen, 1962; Pearl and Lambert, 1962). In Wales, D.J. Saer (1922, 1923). Frank Smith (1923), Ethel Barke (1933), Barke and Parry-Williams (1938) and W.R. Jones (1959) corroborated the results with similar studies in Europe (Baker, 1988, p. 10). They failed to account for a methodological problem since this IQ tests relied on cultural or pragmatic issues. IQ tests are usually designed from the point of view of the middle class and white definition of intelligence (Baker, 1988, p. 9). Cummins shows in his 1981 book how these 'scientific' approaches were supported by an Anglicization endeavour from the governments and society in general.

- 1960s – 'The period of neutral effects' (Baker, 1988, p. 9).

Research on the 1960s[3] tended to show that that bilingualism actually made no difference in terms of intelligence once individual differences (gender, age, economic, social and educational background) were taken into account (Cummins, 1981, p.16).

- 1960 – 1970s – 'The shift'.

Pearl and Lambert (1962) turned the history of research with their scientific study in Canada, which laid the foundations in the search for positive outcomes of bilingualism.[4] On the other side of the Atlantic, the British Bullock Report, *A Language for Life (1975)*, illustrated a shift in institutional perspectives of minority languages (Baker, 1988, p. 61). Finally, in the same year, a Draft Directive from the Council of European Communities (EEC) called for member states to teach the language and culture of the country of origin of EEC migrant workers within the school curriculum (Baker, 1988, p. 61).

- 1970s – 1980s – 'The period of positive effects'

The Lambert experiment (Baker, 1988, p. 94) conducted by Lambert and Tucker (1972) measured bilingual instruction with a psychometric-statistical tool. It showed that Canadian enrichment program of bilingual education had beneficial effects, underlining the fact that age, time spent in immersion

and the language of immersion had an impact on these benefits (Baker, 1988, p. 107). Attitude towards bilingualism itself seemed to be relevant. Katz (1960) had isolated four types of individual attitudes:

1. Utilitarian or instrumental.
2. Ego-defensive.
3. Value expressive.
4. Knowledge.

The attitude towards the foreign culture has also been considered a key issue in bilingualism and Baker proposes the following model to account for all these aspects:

Table 3 – Baker's Bilingualism Model (Baker, 1988, p. 183)

```
┌─────────────┐
│  Attitudes  │──────┐        ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐     ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
└─────────────┘      └───────▶│ Motivation   │      │  Bilingual   │     │  Self-   │─────▶│  Additive    │
                              │ e.g.         │─────▶│  proficiency │────▶│  concept │      │ bilingualism │
┌─────────────┐      ┌───────▶│ instrumental │      └──────────────┘     └──────────┘      └──────────────┘
│  Aptitude   │──────┘        │ integrative  │                                                     │
└─────────────┘               └──────────────┘                                             ┌──────────────┐
                                                                                           │ Subtractive  │
                                                                                           │ bilingualism │
                                                                                           └──────────────┘
```
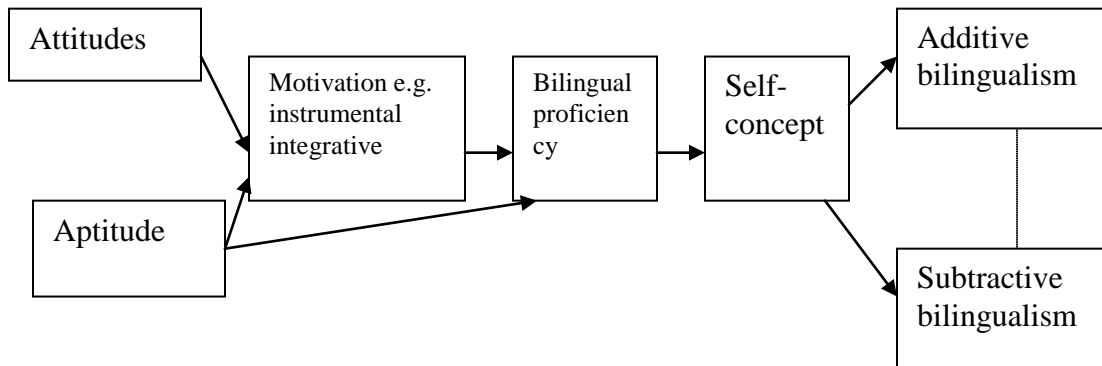
Dunkin and Biddle (1974) attempted to include the school context in their model of bilingual education. General foreign teaching at the time had not produced such a complex model to account for the reality of language learning.

Table 4 - Dunkin and Biddle's Bilingual Education Model (Baker, 1988, p. 189)

INPUT VARIABLES
A) TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS
- language proficiency
- linguistic knowledge
- cultural knowledge
- teacher competencies and attitudes

B) PUPIL CHARACTERISTICS
- ability in languages
- aptitude, attitude and motivation for languages
- language and cultural background

PROCESS VARIABLES
A) PUPIL-TEACHER INTERACTION
(e.g. % use of 2 languages)
B) PUPIL-PUPIL INTERACTION
c) USE OF CURRICULUM MATERIALS (e.g. interpretation given in use of materials by teachers and pupils)

OUTPUT VARIABLES
- ATTAINMENT IN LANGUAGES
- ATTITUDE TO LANGUAGES
- SOCIAL & CULTURAL INTEGRATION
- PREFERENCE FOR STUDYING EITHER OR BOTH LANGUAGES
- LONG TERM EFFECTS (e.g. cultural involvement, language of family)

CONTEXT VARIABLES
   A)   NATURE OF COMMUNITY re LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
   B)   NATURE AND AIMS OF THE SCHOOL
   C)   NATURE OF THE CLASSROOM (e.g. linguistic balance)
   D)   NATURE OF CURRICULUM (e.g. use of programs and projects)

- 1980s – 'The period of additive effects' (Baker, 1988, p. 12)

Another British document, *Education for all* (1985), or Swann Report, rejected traditional policies of assimilation and school segregation, encouraging the inclusion of minority languages in school curricula (p. 63).

Jim Cummins's research brought about the groundbreaking view that education in Canada had been "a means of Canadianizing foreign students" (Cummins, 1981, p. 3). This harsh critique of the country

provides evidence that the school system had assimilated the period of detrimental effects, spreading it through Canadian educational institutions. He offered brain models in order to understand the prevalent attitudes during the different periods of bilingualism. During the period of detrimental effects, he used the *Balance Effect Theory*, according to which the brain has a limited linguistic capacity (p. 27). This view of the brain does not encourage the development of two languages as they will have to compete for mental space and they will most likely generate psychological problems. The following model he identified was the *Think Tank Model,* which assumes that languages act as filters of thought (pp. 29-30). The think tank activates several controls of the input and output. Namely, these controls are a monitoring control, a switch control and a motivational control or value control (p. 31). This model shows a "greater mental flexibility, the ability to think more abstractly (…), resulting in superiority in concept formation, a more enriched bicultural environment which benefits IQ, positive transfer between languages benefiting verbal IQ" (p. 17).

Another advantage of bilingualism stemmed from Vygotskian theories. Bilingual children understand their first language as a system among many other systems. This relativity leads to an awareness of the linguistic mechanisms behind the process of communication (Cummins, 1988, p.12). Elsewhere, Cummins suggests three main benefits between bilingualism and general thinking. First, many bilinguals are more aware of the cultural aspects of meaning because of their experience of two cultures. Second, they have acquired a switching habit that allows them to shift between languages. This activity of code-switching may encourage flexibility of thought. Third, bilingual people may use the strategy of contrastive analysis more often than monolinguals (Baker, 1988, p. 38). These analytical strategies impact overall academic language skills and have showed beneficial results in reading and writing, creative thinking and sensitivity (Cummins, 1981, p. 22).

Cummins has also contributed to the definition of levels of bilingual competence, posing the developmental interdependence hypothesis. From the study of these stages of developments, Cummins conceptualized his BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) as the vertical and horizontal axis for mapping bilingual competence:

Table 5 – BICs and CALPs (Cummins, 1990, p. 41)

Cognitively Undemanding

Context Embedded	Context Reduced
Outside class	Inside Class
Interpersonal and Rhetoric	*Rhetoric*

Cognitively Demanding

This model has been criticized for ignoring contextual and individual factors. According to Baker, the theory has not taken into account individual socio-cultural differences and their influence in language results. Concepts like BICS and CALP tend to be ambiguously defined, subjective and binary, and can lead to oversimplification and fixed taxonomies of student levels of performance (Baker, 1988, p. 180-1).

In the history of research on bilingualism, the paradigm shift started with the Balance Effect theory, considering our brain as a static container in which two languages struggle for space (Cummins, 1981, p. 22); the Think Tank Model, still considers our brain as a container but language this time is not the content but a filter. From existing research, there is lack of conclusive evidence as to the specific positive effects of bilingualism but it has been acknowledged that it does not have negative effects, and most political movements promote and support bilingual education today.

This section has not given a full description of these approaches and models because this is not the place for a comprehensive account of theories and applications. However, it seemed necessary to offer a few lines about each of them, since they provide us with the temporal axis that we will refer to when exploring the five key concepts in our case study. These tendencies and their corresponding linguistic approaches have provided the skeleton for SLA theories and the branch of applied linguistics that deals with teaching and learning. Stern (1986) presents us with a chart that shows the main objects of study of SLA theory (p. 181). By adding a new level (level 0), it is easy to visualize the impact of the shifts in linguistic approach in every other level:

Table 6 – Stern's Chart For Language Learning

Level 3	Teaching of (materials for) language aspect
	L2 curriculum (language syllabus) 3

Level 2

Learning 2

Teaching 3

Language 1

L2 Pedagogy

Context 4

1 Description of L2

Linguistic research on L2

Level 1	SLA Theories
Level 0	Theoretical Linguistics
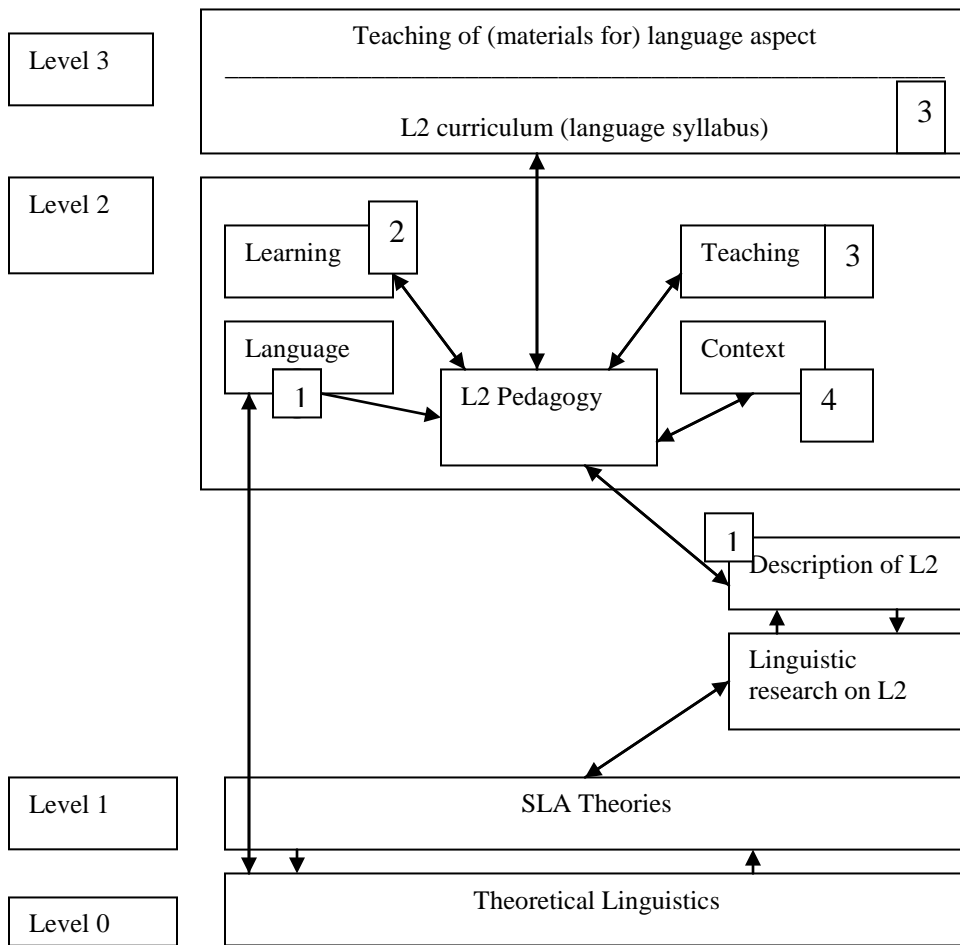
Number 1 refers to language, number 2 refers to student, number 3 refers to teacher and number 4 refers to classroom. This chart helped in the clarification of the main discipline for our case study: language teaching and learning because it showed that it shared a practical objective and an inclusive character and also because of the localization of the main concepts in the initial question that triggered this research. SLA research has been extremely prolific in the last few decades, although it has not yet developed a comprehensive framework for the explanation of language learning in a multitude of contexts, in spite of its efforts (Ellis, 2004, p. 4).

2.1.1.2 Student

SLA has regarded the learner in three main ways: as a language processor, as an individual with different factors, and as a social being. Focus on the language learner as an individual became a central issue in SLA with cognitivist/mentalist/nativists approaches. However, they have concentrated on the learner's mind and senses as a complex information processor and conceptualized 'perceptual saliency' as a prerequisite for acquisition. This principle of perceptual saliency proposes that learners pay more attention to some elements of language than others, such as ends of words, relations between words (especially semantic) and grammatical markers (Ellis, 2004, p. 10). This focus on perception and senses depicts learners as active agents of their own learning, capable of formulating rules. This constitutes the main difference between behaviourist and cognitivist views of the language learner. The book 'The Good Language Learner' (Naiman, 1978) came about in an attempt to examine both the cognitive process of language acquisition and the effects of individual learner characteristics on these processes. The authors suggest that good language learners (of any age) have different cognitive strategies (Toohey, 2000, p. 6). However, the issue of what cognitive abilities and strategies constitute a good aptitude is still unresolved. Naiman and Pickett (1978) identify but a few:

- preparing and memorizing vocabulary lists.

- learning words in context.

- practicing vocabulary.

And Ellis (1985) isolates more cognitive strategies that could describe a good language learner:

- Responsive to group dynamics
- Autonomous
- Efficient
- Focus on meaning
- Study techniques that involve attention to form

- Adolescent or an adult
- Analytic skills to perceive and categorize linguistic features.
- Self-correction
- Strong reason for learning
- Risk-taking

(p. 122)

Research on these aspects has been inconclusive and it points towards the inclusion of the individual and affective traits. Psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics advance this focus on the language learner by putting the emphasis on *traits such as age, intelligence, personality, language aptitude and motivation* (Ellis, 2004, p. 10). Dulay and Burt (1977) developed the notion of the socioaffective filter, saying that the combination of individual factors filter opportunities for learning. The combination of these aspects may enhance or hinder the rate and success of language learning (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. xi). This learner variability is more relevant than the applied branch of SLA as it needs to be borne in mind in every language learning situation (Ellis, 2004, p. 4). For this purpose, it would be necessary to develop research tools that help teaching practitioners to survey their particular learning environment but also engage learners in language content and skills.

Research on age has shown that, contrary to popular belief, it does not influence the route or success of language learning. However, some studies seem to point toward the benefits of an earlier starting age and longer period of exposure (Ellis, 2004, p. 109).

> When pressed, people asserting the superiority of child learners resort to some variant of the "critical period hypothesis." The argument is that children are superior to adults in learning second languages because their brains are more flexible (Lenneberg, 1967; Penfield & Roberts, 1959). They can learn languages easily because their cortex is more plastic than is true of older learners. (The corollary hypothesis is the "frozen brain hypothesis," applied to adult learners.) The critical period hypothesis has been questioned by many researchers in recent years and is presently quite controversial (Genesee, 1981; Harley, 1989; Newport, 1990). The evidence for the biological basis of the critical period has been challenged, and the argument made that differences may reflect psychological and social factors, rather than biological, that favour child learners. (Mclaughlin, 2000)[5]

Intelligence has been broken down into Basic Interpersonal Communicative skills (BICs) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency ability (CALP) (Cummins, 1981, p. 22). Aptitude is the term that has been less clearly defined, although tests have been created to measure it (Carroll and Sapon's modern language aptitude test developed in 1959, Pimsleur's language aptitude battery created in 1966).

The first one breaks aptitude down into three abilities: phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity and inductive ability (Ellis, 2004, p. 112).

Attitude and motivation have been the main focus of the research by Gardner and Lambert. Motivation, according to Gardner, is a general goal and attitude is the will to achieve a goal. Brown (1981) differentiates between global, situational and task motivation and uses attitudes to refer to the beliefs that the learner has towards members of the target language group. Gardner's socio-educational model is a precursor of the boom of 'motivation' studies (Baker, 1988, p. 184).

Table 7 - Gardner's socioeducational model.
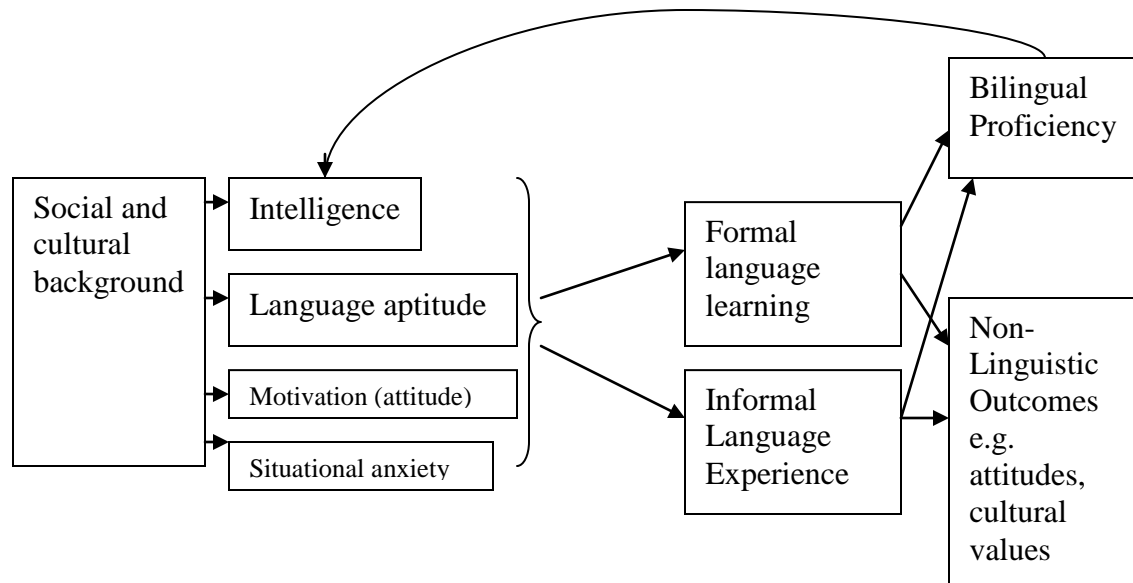
Gardner's model includes the sociocultural background as an influence on individual aspects, emphasizing that individual aspects vary according to changes in the background and that they should not be regarded as fixed or unchangeable traits. This model was investigated empirically to demonstrate its validity by Gardner himself (1983), Gardner, Lalonde and Pierson (1983) and Lalonde (1982) (Baker, 1988, p. 185), but other affective individual characteristics such as self-esteem have received little attention (Heyde (1979); Brodkey and Shore (1976) and Gardner and Lambert (1972)). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) defined 'integrative motivation' as the learner's desire to become a member of the target language

community. Hudson (2000) defined 'instrumental motivation' as the practical motivation typical of strategic learning. The ultimate goal of language learning would be social, economic or academic. Williams and Burden (1997) analyze the sociocultural background within Gardner's model to clarify what elements impact motivation:

- The Task or Language activity itself:
    o Interesting
    o Perceived value
    o Sense of agency
    o Mastery
    o Self-concept
    o Attitudes contribute towards motivation. Traditionally, researchers have isolated two main attitudes influencing the language learning process: 1. Attitudes towards the target language community and 2. Attitudes towards language learning in general.
    o Affective states
    o Age and developmental stage
    o Gender

- External Factors:
    o Significant others
    o Interaction with significant others
    o Learning environment
    o Broader context

Gardner dedicated his work to measure the association between the various aspects of motivation and foreign language achievement that resulted in the establishment of motivation as a key factor for successful language learning (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 43). In a groundbreaking line of research in motivation, John Schuman examined SLA from a neurobiological perspective. His Stimulus Appraisal theory corroborates that the process of learning may share the same neural mechanism as the process of foraging, in the common need to translate a stimulus into an activity in order to achieve a goal. He argues that both processes are guided by dopamine, which results in an evaluation of the stimulus according to its novelty,

pleasure and compatibility with the goals of the individual, his/her coping potential, ego and social image (Schumann, 2001, p. 23).

The last individual factor in this initial approach is personality (Douglas Brown, 1981, p. 124). SLA has concentrated on introversion and extroversion as influencing language learning (Bush (1982)). We will explore this aspect in the section dealing with learning styles in this subchapter.

Research about anxiety and foreign language learning led to mixed and confusing results (Swain (1976), Backman (1976), Chastain (1975), Kleinmann (1977)). Results seem to point to the notion that anxiety influences learner behaviour in a foreign language. Anxiety needs to be viewed as a cluster of affective states as applied psychology has proposed (Horwitz, 1987, p. 18 and Earl Stevick (1976)) and in the context of the model of acculturation offered by several forms of learner 'alienation':

- between the critical me and the performing me.

Weiner (1985) alerts about how past successes in language learning – or failures – can influence of students' performance and warns about the helplessness that this may entail (p. 560).

- between my native culture and my target culture.
- between me and my teacher.

Student and teacher's beliefs tend to shape their attitudes, and they clash in the middle of the language classroom and permeate through one another. The outcome of a learning process can be strongly influenced by teacher beliefs, (Claxton, 1989, p. 111) and vice versa, the outcome of a teaching process can be strongly influenced by learner beliefs.

- between me and my fellow students (Arnold, 2005, p. 117).

In conclusion, the affective side of learning is an important factor when dealing with learning and with teaching. Affective memories are stored with other kinds of data and they interfere with the ability to process information efficiently. The affective side of feedback and the role that it has played in the learner's educational lifespan will shape his/her experience as well as initiate voluntary or involuntary 'playback' of past feedback or even imagined feedback. All in all, the affective side of learning is an aspect that needs to be accounted for in the language classroom by all the participants involved in a language learning situation (Arnold, 2005, p. 55). In the presence of overly negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger or depression, our optimal learning potential may be compromised (p. 2).

Individual traits, cognitive abilities and affective aspects of the learner have enriched the perception of language learning and classrooms. Another pair of interrelated concepts that have illustrated the redefinition of leaner has been 'learner style' and 'learning strategies'.

Let us now turn to one of the concepts that have populated the academic and practitioner literature in the last few decades: 'learning style'.[6] Learning styles came to the fore in SLA in an attempt to account for individual differences systematically, and inventories started to multiply. One of the most regarded and popular of these inventories is the Myers-Briggs type indicator. Created in 1962 by Katherine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers; it is a psychometric questionnaire which deals with how a person perceives the world and his/her decision-making process. Nowadays, it is a profitable trademark, in spite of its reported low validity and reliability. It moves along four dichotomies, namely: extraversion/introversion; sensing/intuition; thinking/feeling and judgment/perception (Kline, 2000). The two first categories have been the most influential in SLA studies because of the extrovert's preference for action and interaction with other people as opposed to the preference of introverts to be alone and thought oriented. Although extroverted people have been traditionally regarded as the more successful language learners (Cathcart, Strong and Wong-Filmmore, 1979; Strong, 1983), Naiman (1978) did not show any correlation and Smart (1970) found a negative effect in extroversion.[7] Research into language skills and strategies is showing that introverts surpass extroverts in academic language learning and reading and writing skills because they play to their abilities.

Many students have been subjected to tests of this kind and categorized in terms of which learning tool they are most comfortable with; as visual learners, auditory learners, tactile learners, kinaesthetic learners. They have also been called field-dependent or field-independent learners. The former prefer to focus on the whole picture without paying attention to detail, while the latter enjoy analytic tasks and concentrate on the parts. Otherwise, terms such as reflective learner and impulsive learner have also been used to convey a general response to language use. One of the main caveats against the use of these tests is that students and teachers may fall into the trap of regarding these characteristics as fixed and unchangeable. A theory like the multiple intelligence model, which we will review later in this chapter, may be a better approach to learning style. Since a lot of language learners use a different learning style to approach different tasks, the concept has broken down into the exploration of learning strategies. "Strategies are the tools for active, self directed involvement that is necessary for developing communicative ability" (Oxford, 1996, p. x). Cultural background seems to affect the choice of strategy (p. xi). According to Oxford, there are many types of language learning strategies:

- Metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process: planning, self-monitoring and self-evaluation.

- Cognitive strategies are more directly involved with individual learning tasks and entail direct manipulation or transformation of the learning materials.

- Compensation strategies are used in communicative situations in which the learner needs to keep the conversation going but lacks the linguistic knowledge.

- Memory strategies help learners store information and retrieve it at a later stage.

- Affective strategies are geared towards the management of feelings in order to minimize any detrimental effects these feelings may have.

- Social strategies involve the effective use of interaction to promote learning.

Many useful inventories have been created for practitioners and learners to understand and plan their actions[8]. Little by little, the responsibility for learning has been displaced from their traditional site thanks to the work on autonomy in language learning, and many European programs have actively promoted it since the creation of the Council of Europe and the European Language Framework and Portfolio. Holec (1980) defined autonomy as "the ability to assume responsibility for one's own affairs, to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). The ability to be an autonomous learner has been qualified as a capacity to ascertain the following aspects of language learning (Arnold, 2005, p. 145):

- Benefits and drawbacks in general and in particular of the target language in question.
- The nature of language and language learning.
- Language elements needed in general and particular.
- Order.
- Learning strategies and techniques.
- Time management.
- Study management and plans.
- Resources needed.

David Little (1991) has advanced this concept towards the inclusion of the relationships between the learner and learning and so autonomy is conceived as the capacity to reflect upon and manage the following aspects of one's own learning (Arnold, 2005, p. 145):

- Individual characteristics and self-reflection
- Self assessment

The concept of autonomous learners moves the focus from teaching to learning and fosters peer support and cooperation. An autonomous learner needs to be reflective, organized and independent. This perception of learning and learners responds to the reality of our current global situation with more time constraints exerted on individual and cross-frontier mobility for work purposes as a common feature of everyday life. Autonomous learners are not constrained by the limits of the language classroom – though that does not mean that they cannot benefit from the advantages of monitored interaction.

If autonomy is one of the ideal competencies for a language learner, let us finish this section by talking about what other components of language competency have come to the forefront at the turn of the 21st century. As early as 1983, Wilkins dissected language competency in the following sub-competencies:

- Linguistic competency is the main element. It involves knowledge of vocabulary and the mastery of certain rules through which meaning is constructed in the target language.
- Sociolinguistic competency is the ability to use and interpret the different forms of the target language.
- Communicative competency is the ability to perceive communicative patterns.
- Discourse competency is the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate and aid comprehension.
- Sociocultural competency constitutes a certain degree of familiarization with the environmental contexts in which the language is being used. (Wilkins, 1983, p. 11)

Canale and Swain (1980) use communicative competence as an umbrella term for grammatical competence (linguistic, see above), sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and to add a strategic competence (which is the mastery of communication strategies) (p. 14). Since the advent of language learning technologies, a technological competency should be added to the list above or it should be simply recognized that notions of literacy have been expanded beyond reading and writing.

In the evolution from a behaviourist theory of learning to a humanistic theory of language learning, the concept of the language learner has shifted from a mechanistic view towards an acknowledgement of the fact that language learning is a very individual process, which should take into account the myriad of variables (affective, cognitive, sociocultural...) in order to draw from their benefits and neutralize their negative effects. The onus of this task has been displaced from initially belonging to the teacher, towards sharing it with the learner and finally to land in the learner's lap with the praise for autonomous learners. The multifaceted task of learning ma language is not an easy one and autonomy does not mean isolation. On the contrary, part and parcel of an autonomous approach to language learning is the development of strategies in order to find resources, language partners, peers and facilitators so that together it is much easier to achieve the daunting goal of learning a foreign language. In this regard, the internet has definitely been a source of aid. Free social networks with a language learning purpose have proliferated, with many individuals helping one another for free and creating language partnerships based on sharing and mutual respect.

2.1.1.3 Teacher

The concept and the role of the teacher in the language classroom have also shifted hand in hand with the changes in general SLA approach. For behaviourists, the role of the teacher was to spot difficult areas and drill as much as possible on them (Ellis, 2004, p. 24). As we have already mentioned, they considered the student a *language producing machine* (Ellis, 1990, p. 128). Therefore, the metaphor of the mechanic or the operator would be equally plausible for the teacher. The job of the teacher was to start and repair this machine in order to ensure the proper functioning of its parts. In this sense, they favoured bilingual teachers who could understand the functioning of both languages in order to predict areas of difficulty and devise exercises to avoid them. Their obsession with teaching grammar or focusing on form was regarded as passé and useless for cognitivists.

As teachers or consumers of SLA theory, it is not advisable to take these trends as a block since there are always theorists and practitioners claiming to belong to one approach who take advantage of the benefits of other approaches. For example, Sharwood-Smith, among others, sees grammar teaching as a shortcut to communicative ability (Ellis, 2004, p. 24). Cognitivists or generativists in general moved away from these mechanic notions and approached the learner as the organic centre of language learning activity.

Teaching was not their focus and, at times, they ignored the activity of teaching all together because they concentrated on natural or immersion settings. When they tackled it, they approached the teacher as the provider of communicative and language opportunities for practice. The role of the teacher in this approach is to come up with activities and create problems or tasks that provide the learners with the best opportunities for acquisition. According to Krashen, a teacher provides opportunities for communication rather than focus on the learner's attention to the L2 code. S/he will provide sufficient comprehensible input, communicative activities, and extensive reading (Richards, 1986, p. 125). Planning and curricular organization are key to this approach as it relies heavily on sequencing. They favoured the native speaker as the teacher and in their most fundamentalist approaches. They defended it as ideal for the teacher not to know the language of students so as to maximize the opportunities for meaning negotiation. Monolingualism was not always the norm (Baron 1990, Crawford 1991, Daniels 1990). It was the turn of the 20th century that brought about the decline of plurilingualism (Auerbach, 1993, p. 13). The introduction of speech and pronunciation tests excluded foreigners from teaching in the U.S.A. and the use of other languages in the classroom was seen as a failure of the teacher (p. 14).

Finally, interactionists and new sociocultural approaches, as we will explore in the next subchapter, regard teaching as a linguistic activity in a cultural setting, as stated in the title of a conference organized by the national institute of education (Altman & Alatis, 1991, p. 30). The more complex concept of the teacher as a facilitator arises from this approach and at the moment studies such as Heath (1978) of teachers' classroom behaviour have proliferated and become a tool for assessment and promotion. From this perspective, the role of education in general is to develop self-actualizing persons, who understand and respect others and themselves, capable of functioning to the best of their abilities and who are responsible for their own learning (Moskowitz, 1978, p. 12). This role is a shared responsibility for language learners and teachers, since they all participate in the same social situation. The main principles of successful instruction, then, acknowledge the domains of feelings, attitudes, socio-political awareness and interpersonal relations. They also recognize that other kinds of learning happen inside of the classroom and language learning will also continue to happen outside and after the classroom. In this regard, one of the main roles of the teacher is to motivate lifelong learning. A good teacher will have to master the subject matter and promote autonomous learning as well as develop and monitor his/her own and his/her student's social competence. Teacher-centred approaches are criticized as not necessarily the most effective because they develop co-dependent learners. Sociocultural and interactionist approaches favour

collaborative learning, at different levels (Ehrman, 1996, p. xii). Under these umbrella theories, the dichotomy between native/non-native speakers dissolves and it is not the essential element of the language learning situation. This approach is increasingly taking over due to the fact that with the abundance of input and free learning resources on the web, learners can cater for their input needs in an autonomous way. One of the roles of the teacher would be to help learners find and use these resources in order to develop tools to tackle other learning resources that they search for and find, and criteria to plan and select these resources.

Within both cognitivist and interactionist frameworks, there have been a lot of studies on teacher talk. The quality of the input provided by the teacher and the particular register and discourse used in the classroom would have a tremendous impact on learning and the development of a healthy atmosphere within the classroom. They have studied the impact of 'foreigner talk', *motherese* or baby talk (Snow and Waterson 1978). Even in spite of the wealth of empirical studies, there is no clear evidence or link between cause and effect. Flanders developed a category system for the analysis of the use of the teachers' and learners' language to cater for the lack of terminology and systematic ways of describing turn-taking and functions. The main issue lies in the wide range of variables under study. It is worth mentioning though that the study carried out by Gremmo, Holec and Riley in 1978 and Riley in 1977 in the University of Nancy concludes that teacher-centred discourse distorts interaction. Since the teacher leads and assumes a central role, even student-student interaction is constrained and inhibits language learning. As a result, educators such as Gagne (1993) and Kinsella (1996) have concluded that identifying a student's learning style and providing appropriate instruction contribute to more effective learning (Sims and Sims 1995).

Related to this teacher-student interaction talk is the use of the target language only in the classroom. According to Auerbach (1993), this approach is "rooted in a particular ideological perspective, which rests on unexamined assumptions and serves to reinforce inequities in the broader social order" (p. 9) The use of the target language only in a language classroom reinforces the unequal relationship of power (Fairclough 1989) applied by the authority through obligation or consent which assumes an unconscious acceptance of institutional practices. Skutnabb-kangas (1988) calls it 'linguicism': "ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce and unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language" (p. 11-13).

Phillipson (1988, 1992), however, locates *linguicism* in a broader framework of linguistic imperialism, focusing on English and arguing that it became the primary tool of postcolonial strategy (Auerbach. 1993, p. 11). Phillipson (1992) claims that "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other language" (p. 417). Similar views could be drawn from the exclusive monolingual approaches in current Spanish teaching institutions, but bearing in mind that these political observations in minority language situations where English is an environmental language, monolingual approaches seem to be favoured, such as is the case with French in Canada and Irish in Ireland.

In the last decades, teachers have become researchers of their own classrooms more and more. This change in the role of language teachers has been generated by the need to understand success and failure in the specific learning environments and situations. Teachers have adopted a more reflective practice and sometimes applied research tools and techniques not only to understand but also to change and improve their classrooms. The academic literature on this topic has proliferated especially during the last 30 years. Zeichnar and Liston (1996) alert to the fact that the first issue that s/he encounters is deciding where to start. Barlett (1932) had already tackled the practical and critical dimension of teaching and researching at the same time, especially at secondary or primary levels. The ethical implications and permissions to be obtained can be a long off-putting process.

One of the roles of the teacher researcher as well is to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Richards and Lokhart (1994) argue for the need to be familiar with what researchers have already found about L2 acquisition. Stenhouse (1975) and Weels (1994) recommend teachers doing reduplication of studies already done. However, in my case study, we argue that this is a very restrictive view of research in the classroom. SLA researchers are concerned with the development of theory and the discovery of evidence that support this theory. For their purposes, it is essential to understand and be familiar with the huge bulk of previous theory and practice as well as to reduplicate studies in order to pile up evidence along the lines of their results. A teacher, however, may approach research with a teaching purpose in mind. In other words, teachers may use research tools with an aim to impact the classroom or the language learning situation in question in a positive way. They may also use these research techniques with a reflective purpose in mind. In this sense, teachers use research as a means of improving their here-and-now learning environment or gaining practical knowledge for future learning environments that they have to deal with.

The latter perspective of classroom research does not exclude the former and in the long run, collaboration between SLA researchers focused on theory-building and teacher researchers focused on the improvement of teaching has been the missing link in SLA history and which would, of course, be ideal.

Let us know turn to examine the notion of teaching style and competencies as they have shifted in the last few decades. Teaching styles have been generally described outside the field of language teaching.[9] Sometimes this notion has been confused with method because they are interrelated, but by teaching style, we mean the general attitudes and beliefs that the teacher has towards teaching and learning. There are many inventories available on the web.[10] This is not the place to describe all the teaching styles proposed in the literature or the impact that these teaching styles have on learning (mainly because there has not been enough research conducted in order to arrive at conclusive evidence). However, it is important to highlight here that as with learner styles, teaching styles have been offered by the creators of tests and quizzes, and by assessment and evaluation educational agencies in quite a deterministic fashion, ignoring the flexible nature of 'style' and the effect of acquiring competencies in the teacher's style.

In a groundbreaking article by Selvi (2010), teacher competencies are described as "the set of knowledge, skills, and experience necessary for future, which manifests in activities". Gupta (1999) defines competencies as "knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, motivations and beliefs people need in order to be successful in a job" (p. 4). Traditionally teacher competencies have been classified as field, pedagogical and cultural competencies (Selvi, 2010, p. 168). In research carried out on English language teachers, Selvi applied the Delphi Technique – a computer-enhanced consultative method - in order to represent the competencies of new teachers based on their views. He concluded that teachers' professional competencies were composed of "four main subgroups such as Curriculum Competencies, Lifelong Learning Competencies, Social-Cultural Competencies and Emotional Competencies" (p. 168). Selvi has gone on to hypothesize nine competencies in total. Let us describe them according to Selvi's proposal:

- Field Competencies refer to the content of the subject and the mastery of the teacher of this competency. In terms of language learning, this is controversial in the sense that there is a need for clarification about the level of language competence a teacher must have, but also what understanding of metalanguage and linguistic (form and meaning) knowledge s/he must have (pp. 169-170).

- Research Competencies refer to the tools and techniques related to the research in the subject matter or the research on teaching itself. *(p. 170)*

- Curriculum Competencies comprise curriculum development and implementation. They include knowledge of curriculum design, curriculum elements and creation of aligned assessment (p. 170)

- Lifelong Learning Competencies refer to the teacher's ability to take on the responsibility for his/her own learning and professional development and to the teacher's ability to engage the learner in lifelong learning (p. 171).

- Emotional Competencies refer to the continuum of affective elements entering the language classroom both from the side of the teacher and the learner. Teaching entails giving appropriate emotional support (p. 171).

- Social-Cultural Competencies refer to the knowledge of the environment where the teaching and learning occur (p. 171).

- Communication Competencies refer to the ability to interact interpersonally and monitor intrapersonally in order to maximize communication. They include verbal and non-verbal elements as well as paralinguistic elements such as tone and eye contact (p. 172).

- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Competencies – also referred to as Digital Teaching Competency in Spanish Language Teaching and Learning, by Javier Villatoro – refers to the ability of using digital media to produce and disseminate information (p. 172).

- Environmental Competencies refer to the ecological aspects of the sustainable development of teaching and learning, such as minimizing impact and managing ecological resources (p. 172).

In the development from a behaviourist theory of learning to a humanistic theory of language learning, the author of the teacher has moved towards partnership with students and teams of teachers that work in collaboration within and between departments (Arnold, 2005, p. 8). The daunting enterprise of acquiring all these competencies may be shared and made lighter by a cooperative to teaching and learning, and sharing skills and resources within teacher teams.

2.1.1.4 Classroom.

The classroom has been the focus of most language learning research in the last few years, being neglected as an object of study in itself prior to the 1980s. The myth underlying this gap in the research

was supported by the fact that the more time students spend in a second language context, the quicker they learn the language (Oxford, 1997). This rationale supported what is known as "structured immersion," One might expect that the more target language the student hears and practices, the quicker the language skills will develop. Oxford (1997) has pointed out that there is research evidence indicating no difference between the results of research conducted in bilingual classes and in English-only environments (Cummins, 1981; Ramírez, 1991). Peirce has demonstrated that the opportunities that these language learners had to practice English - in and out of the classroom - were structured by asymmetrical relations of power in the home and other social milieu, which limited their possibilities to speak. Spolsky (1989) presents us with some prerequisites for language learning in his leading work *Conditions for Second Language Learning*. He defines a necessary 'exposure condition', suggesting that time plays a role in the quantity that is learned. The second condition that he defines is the 'opportunity for practice', which is also necessary, since learning a language involves new skills developed in practice, which culminate in fluency. These two conditions, according to Spolsky (1989), can be achieved in two qualitatively distinctive settings: "the "natural" or informal environment of the target language community or the "formal" environment of the classroom" (p. 171). Traditionally, their differences are defined as:

- In natural second language learning, the language is being used for communication, but in the formal situation it is used only to teach.
- In natural language learning, the learner is surrounded by fluent speakers of the target language, but in the formal classroom, only the teacher (if anyone) is fluent.
- In natural learning, the context is the outside world, open and stimulating; in formal learning, it is the close four walls of the classroom.
- In natural language learning, the language used is free and normal; in the formal classroom it is carefully controlled and simplified.
- Finally, in the natural learning situation, attention is on the meaning of the communication; in the formal situation, it is on meaningless drills.(Peirce, 1997, p. 3)

Spolsky claims that in natural language learning, the target language is used for communication purposes, as opposed to contrived classroom purposes. Peirce's study (1997) has shown that native speakers fail to take the time to repair miscommunication (p. 169). Spolsky continued his support for natural language learning claiming that in a natural setting, the learner is surrounded by fluent native speakers, which is not always

true. Spolsky's third claim is that the world outside is motivating because there are multiple signs and prompters for understanding language and encouraging its use (Peirce, 1997, p. 171). Spolsky's fourth claim for the freedom and naturalness of language outside of the classroom walls presupposes a theoretical freedom that is rarely present in the real world. His final claim is that native speakers make an effort to produce comprehensible language (Spolsky, 1989, p. 173).

SLA theories have also assumed that students choose under what conditions they learn the language and they are free to manage their interaction with members of the target language community. Traditionally, the access to the target language has been controlled and led by the learner's motivation. Thus Gardner and MacIntyre (1992) have even argued that "the major characteristic of the informal contexts is that it is voluntary. Individuals can either participate or not in informal acquisition contexts" (p. 213). SLA theorists until very recently have not taken into account that the opportunities students have for practicing the target language and interacting with native speakers are regulated by social relationships of power in both formal and informal environments. Such relations produce or deny learning opportunities, in spite of the desires of foreign language learners.

Bearing these issues in mind, many theorists propose different roles for 'natural' environments and 'formal instruction'. Studying the importance of formal instruction focuses on developing an understanding of SLA and language pedagogy together in the hopes that it will shed some light on how environmental conditions affect language learning.

Formal instruction has traditionally been equated with the teaching of grammar. Many methods consider that a focus on linguistic form assists in raising the student's awareness about the rules and tendencies of a target language in order to internalize them (Ellis, 2004, p. 215). Cognitive theories influenced or brought about another assumption related to formal instruction. It is generally believed that the sequence of teaching different grammatical aspects governs the order of learning. As we will see in the next subchapter, instruction can take many different forms, but here we will try to elucidate if formal instruction has any effect in itself. For our purposes here, instruction means some form of consciousness-raising targeted at specific linguist features with the help of a teacher or in a classroom. We have raised this issue within this chapter because all classroom teaching has an element of formal instruction. Morpheme studies have been

focusing on the route[11] and/or on the rate/success[12] of language learning,[13] but evidence has been inconclusive.

Towards the 1960s with the increase of classroom research, the study of the distance between method and teaching and student behaviour in the classroom revealed a new relationship between theory and practice, and introduced the concept of comprehensive output (Swain 1985) as a more pressing matter to be studied than the focus on form and grammatical routes.[14] Other studies concentrated on class organization and the impact of the classroom task[15] and finally in the last few decades, there have been a boom on discourse analysis studies.[16] Allwright (1984) proposed a collaborative creation of the learning process even if the relationship between the participants is asymmetric (p. 15). All these studies and many others have failed to show definite evidence for or against the positive effect of instruction. However there seems to be limited evidence that that instruction does not influence some processes such as the development of transitional structures in negatives and interrogatives and that classroom learners are able to put into practice the knowledge gained through formal instruction, when this is focused on form (Ellis, 2004, p. 222). Ellis goes on to explain why instruction seems not to have any "apparent effect on the sequence of development and very little on the order of development, although it seems to have relative value in terms of the success of learning" (p. 229). He puts forward three explanations:

- The non-interface position.

    Krashen (1982) claims that learning and acquisitions result in completely different types of knowledge and there is no relationship between them. Seliger (1979) proved that there was no relationship between performance and knowledge of the rule in his study (Ellis, 2004, p. 231). Terrell (1980) show that the acquisition of a linguistic rule occurs sometimes when instruction is directed at learning other linguistic rules. Krashen agrees and adds that when instruction is geared toward communication, acquisition is likely in the classroom environment (Ellis, 2004, p. 232). Krashen is not completely against classroom instruction. On the contrary, he believes that "the value of second language classes, then, lies not only in the grammar instruction, but in the 'teacher talk', the comprehensible input. It can be an efficient place to achieve at least the intermediate levels rapidly, as long as the focus of the class is on providing input for acquisition" (Krashen, 1982, p. 59).

- The interface position

As an antithesis to the previous position, supporters of this explanation reject acquisition/learning schism (Ellis 2004, p. 234). According to this approach, learners possess different types of L2 knowledge that are not separate. Pedagogical rules, therefore, may act as facilitators of acquisition, in the way they focus the learner's attention on specific attributes of the language (Seliger 1979, p. 368). The internalization of these features is a different matter all together but rules aid this process. According to Stevick (1980), there is communication between learning and acquisition. Bialystok (1977) with Fröhlich (1979, 1981) proposed the idea of implicit and explicit knowledge. According to this differentiation, practice works as the device by which explicit knowledge turns into implicit and vice versa. Mclaughlin and Sharwood-Smith (1981) support this model. Even though the opposition acquisition vs. learning and explicit vs. explicit is still functional, with the first term of the binomial being the upper term, this model puts forward a more realistic and advantageous relationship between them (Ellis, 2004, p. 237).

- The variability position

    The last alternative that Ellis (2004) puts forward is to treat the student knowledge as variable and context-dependent (p. 239). He explains how classroom learners do better than naturalistic learners on integrative tests because they acquire the tools for analysis and formal registers.

This shows, as Ellis points out, that it is not easy to draw conclusions for language teaching, since there is no agreement about why SLA happens in the way it does (Ellis, 2004, p. 243).

Classrooms have changed from the behaviourist idea of a classroom that provided a space for exercises of repetition and drills through cognitivist curricular programming and adjustment towards incorporating sociocultural perspectives. Sociocultural frameworks conceptualize the classroom as a space for social interaction, where language is a tool for thought and an instrument of power. In this way, they are more concerned with the role of input and interaction. Again, there have been sociocultural studies of both natural settings (Hatch and Long) and for classroom environments (Ellis). There have been studies about 'motherese' or baby talk (Krashen). There has also been a lot of empirical research on foreigner talk. A first phase of research leaned heavily towards the general characterization of this type of input and towards documenting the negotiation of meaning. Later on, researchers have taken into account environmental factors and how this input may be of benefit to learners (Ellis, 2004, p. 143).

Correlation studies have developed to investigate the relationship between input and output (Hoefnagel-Höhle). Once again evidence has not been conclusive but it points towards a positive view of comprehensible input. These studies would indicate that input helps development by providing the learner with patterns for subsequent imitation, modelling and establishing a positive affective climate. According to Hatch (1983a) "while social interaction may give the learner the 'best' data to work with, the brain in turn must work out a fitting and relevant model of that input" (p. 180).

Since the role of input and interaction seems to be unquestionable in language teaching and learning, if not in any kind of teaching and learning situation, classroom transactions are at the core of understanding language acquisition in formal settings. Interaction in class shapes the process of L2 acquisition. In a classroom, the interactions that learners experience constitute additional influences on the learning process. This interaction has been defined along four axes: intrapersonal, dyadic, interpersonal and intergroup (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 13). The four can be very influential in the language learning process but research has focused mainly on interpersonal interaction between the different members of a language class. Although language classes are formed to complete certain academic requirements, the interactional process established in a group enhances or hinders the way those requirements are fulfilled (Ehrman, 1996, p. ix). Coleman (1997) points out all the other learning happening in the language classroom, such as teacher and student roles, classroom norms, and maintenance of face and student solidarity (p. 35). These theorists depart from the view that learning is interpersonal and that cognitive, emotional and social processes occur simultaneously. They consider that the classroom or the group (classrooms have different fluid groupings and subgroupings) is beyond the addition of every single individual and that it holds together because of a common purpose and a sense of belonging. In this sense, group dynamics can help to enhance learning beyond what is possible in partners or in autonomous study. These dynamics can be observed in the transactions in and out of classroom established within a group. By classroom transaction, we refer to the acts of outreaching and sharing, which are emotionally charged. These transactions are patent in classroom discourse and non-verbal elements of the classroom such as space. Concepts such as gate keeping and power relationships developed thanks to this approach to the classroom as a social setting. Power here refers to "the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society are produce, distributed and validated" (Peirce, 1993, p. 8). Many classroom studies have focused on the asymmetrical

power between the teacher and students. A teacher has both a legitimate power from the official authority for which s/he works, but also expert symbolic power based on his/her expertise (Ehrman and Dörnyei, 1998, p. 150). "Symbolic power" refers to resources such as language, education and advantageous relationships. Power operates at the level of everyday social situations between people with different "access to symbolic and material resources – encounters that are inevitably produced within language" (Peirce, 1993, p. 8). Language constitutes "a means by which access to networks is regulated" (p. 12). In this way, language is not viewed as an objective medium of communication any more but as a powerful tool for the negotiation of social meaning and identity. Tajfedl (1978) reminds that social identity builds in the interplay of an individual's self-concept within the social group (or groups) and stems from the emotional significance attached to his/her membership to the group (p. 63). Stengal (1939) had already talked about language shock as "the situation when adult learners fear that their words in the target language do not reflect their ideas adequately, perhaps making them appear ridiculous or infantile" (Arnold, 2005, p. 21). The extent to which the social structures within the foreign language learning situations influence one's identity has not yet been given the attention it deserves. Some studies have looked at empathy, classroom transactions (hierarchical, cooperative, and autonomous) (Heron, 1989, pp. 16-17), cross-cultural processes… etcetera. The spatial arrangement of the language classroom has not received much attention yet. There have been but a few empirical studies about the physical positions of students, their distance, and their body orientations, and other non-verbal and physical aspects of the language classroom. However, it is generally agreed that they exert a considerable influence on the interaction in a language classroom. Teachers and researchers typically play down the importance of the physical environment, and institutions can be especially inconsiderate in this regard (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 293).

The boom of internet technologies favouring the inclusion of 'blended learning' and the increase of participation in 'virtual social networks' will add a new dimension to the impact of the social-affective in language learning. Whether these technologies take over our current classroom practices or not, undoubtedly language learning will continue to be socially patterned and the relationship between these patterns and the facilitation or 'difficultation' will need further study.

In this subchapter, we have attended to offer an inclusive view of how SLA theories and research have conceptualized the language classroom.

2.1.1.5 Research

As early as 1988, Chaudron was advocating for an ethnographic approach towards SLA research. SLA ethnographic research has been extremely productive in the past few years. However, a consensus has not been reached on central aspects about how languages are learned. The multidisciplinary position of the field has multiplied. Right from the start, SLA research involved a variety of disciplines since its birth because of the amount of elements involved and their nature.

As we have seen, the dominant theories have always been linguistics and psycholinguistics. The focus of these theories was to understand the sequence of language progress and to describe the inner psychological procedures, whether intrinsic to language or not (Ellis, 2004, p. 4). That framework was a little restrictive and it was necessary to include various other elements of SLA realities such as: situational factors, input, leaner differences, learner processes and linguistic output (p. 16). Learner differences are a key concept to understand success and failure in language learning. This variability stems from the context of learning and, as we have mentioned above, from individual features such as age, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation and personality (Ellis, 2004, p. 10). According to the different combinations of these variables, SLA situations are completely different realities for each and every learner. According to Ellis (2004), this learner variability is relevant to SLA theory only as much as it is identifies concerns that are reasonably stable and therefore, can be generalized, if not to all learners, at least to large groups of them (p. 4). It can be argued, though, that the applied branch of SLA needs to at least bear in mind this learner variability in every learning situation in order to maximize learning opportunities and achieve learning outcomes. With that purpose in mind, there is a need to develop styles of research that provide teachers with tools that help them analyze their particular situation and engage learners in both language, skills and transformation. Transformation here refers to the ability to change a situation that works unfavourably towards the goal that a learner has in mind and it is the general objective of action research, which is one of the modes of research that educational ethnographic research has adopted.

Ethnography can be defined as the study of the social roles of language, in structuring the identities of individuals and the culture of entire communities and societies (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998, p. 150). The application of ethnographic anthropological techniques to the study of teaching has been a rapidly developing movement. One of its proponents even tried to warn against "blitzkrieg ethnography", which is

the thoughtless over application of ethnographic techniques to educational research (Altman & Alatis, 1991, p. 30). Once again, a warning of this type stems from the scientific obsession to develop general theories and it does not bear in mind that the teaching practitioner needs tools to understand and manage a specific classroom situation in which general theories fail to assist him or her.

Toohey proposed the three following questions as a starting point for a teaching experiment:
1. Will the proposed experimental intervention affect learning or acquisition?
2. How will it influence specific factors related to learning?
3. Will the experiment measure not only students' language learning but also the intermediate responses on reactions that account for learning within a learning model? (Toohey, 2004, p. 1)

Borg (1987) differentiates between descriptive, causal-comparative, correlational, experimental, educational and action research (p. 160). These authors are very concerned with issues such as investigator bias, reliability, validity and other criteria for assessment (p. 171) that we will examine in the next chapter of this thesis.

On the other hand, Hopkins (1993) concludes that empirical research conducted by teachers or conducted in the language classrooms is desirable, even though there are limitations that need to be accounted for. He warns against the assumption that teachers and learners are autonomous beings, capable of making decisions in their own without reference to the socio-political context of their situation (p. 41). The difference between theory and practice is that they both depart from different kinds of knowledge: Theory is concerned with the development of abstract general principles and technical knowledge, whereas practice is concerned with the development of tools, skills and practical knowledge. "Learning to perform competently is never the same as learning to understand the process of performance and to explain it" (Hopkins, 1993, p. 123). Learning a language is never the same as understanding the process of language learning and how the specific language constructs meaning. Learning how to teach a language is never the same as understanding how languages are learned and what teaching approaches are more conducive to learning. In other words, the knowledge acquired through a process of reflection and research needs to be transformed into practical knowledge in order to be applied to language teaching and learning.

Foundational to our case study was the notion that investigating the circumstances of learning would be important in helping the teacher understand and deal with the individual ways in which languages might be learned and used. The clarification of specific aspects such as the type of school, the classroom and the subjects, and the explanation of the methodology for the analysis, discussion and conclusions, proved an alternative to quantification and generalization. In the design of our case study and the review by the ethical committee prior to the experiment, the project was awarded with a fund for innovation in teaching and learning as it aimed at engaging the reflective side of language learning and thus, it was hoped it would impact learning positively. My focus on classroom practice was geared towards the investigation of how to create possibilities of teacher/student dialogue, which, it was hoped, would be conducive to a more transformational classroom feedback. I aimed to examine the classroom as a community with specific boundaries and specific practices. Therefore, I found that I shared the same concern with other researchers of language teaching and learning: examining carefully teaching practices in contexts in which we could have some impact seemed urgently important to me in helping myself and other teachers to find effective ways of responding to these learners (Toohey, 2004, p. 3).

This subchapter has reviewed the development, for lack of a better word, of the main concepts involved in the research questions of this project as well as the shifts in the direction that SLA research has taken. Chapter 3 will deal in full detail with classroom research and will explain the specific background of this case study within the parameters of current classroom research.

2.1.2   Second Language Learning Methodologies.

The 1950s witnessed a boom in language learning and teaching methodologies. Language teaching businesses opened all over the globe, especially in an attempt to teach English and, sooner rather than later, the English language business became one of the most profitable in the world. The domination of English in areas such as trade, tourism, international relations, technology, media, and science drove the need for the most efficient and successful methods in language teaching and learning.

However, language teaching and learning were not new to the world and to human history. Traditionally, the origins of language teaching methodologies date back to the study and teaching of Latin in the seventeenth century. Latin had, as English is now, been the *lingua franca* of education, commerce,

spirituality, and government in much of our Western world until it was displaced by French and Italian. As early as 1657, *Opera Didactica Omnia* has been quoted as the first comprehensive attempt towards language teaching. John Amos Comenius held that language acquisition must be associated with feeling and experience. He was convinced that teaching should be oral to be most efficient and the classroom had to recreate environments in which the student could experiment with things: models or pictures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 10).

Comenius, as a precursor of experiential learning, and his methods were soon demoted to the margins of curricular development when the study of living languages such as English, French or Italian became the centre of the school curriculum. However, Latin was not completely removed from these 'Grammar Schools' and curriculum planners justified its study as it developed cognitive abilities as an end in itself. It is fitting for us to realize that the European Union program dedicated to the autonomous learning of European languages currently celebrates and commemorates this legacy and these educational theories which still have some relevance in our globalized world. In the same way, but perhaps less fortunately, countries such as United Kingdom and Ireland have lately been forced to use the same justification as the old Grammar School Curriculum planners in an attempt to defend the teaching and learning of languages in the primary and secondary school sectors. These two realities underline the fact that education and teaching and learning in general do not follow a strict timeline, constantly moving forward and backward, following trends that emerge and submerge according to the realities and needs to which they must respond.

In fact, the study of modern languages is not as old as it may seem. It did not take part in the curriculum of European schools until the 18th century (Ellis, 1992, p. 2). Copying Latin-based methods, teachers implemented the same exercises, explaining grammatical rules and using translation as a method of language learning and did not fail to include the unfortunate brutal punishment of learner mistakes. Oral interaction was not required but memorization, analysis and production of written language were vital. These were the principles of the famous 'grammar-translation' method. This method has received plenty of criticism in the past century as well as in the beginning of the 21st century, and translation has been the losing team in this game. It is only recently that cognitive strategies have been reappraised and amongst them, the use of translation is making its way back slowly into language teaching and learning.

The grammar-translation method borrowed from classical learning developed hand in hand with the Prussian method produced by Seidenstücker, Plötz, Ollendor and Meidinger. The main goal of this new method was the reading of literature in the target language (TL) (Stevick, 1990, p. 132).

Grammar-Translation emphasizes the capacity of the mind to think logically and decode. The criticism of this grammar-translation methods led European schools towards innovation in foreign language teaching at the end of the 19th century with the creation of linguistics itself. Early language educators such as Jean Manesca, who taught the famous Heinrich Gottfried Ollendorf, Henry Sweet, Otto Jespersen, Leonard Bloomfield, Wilhelm Viëtor, Paul Passy and Harold Palmer (1877-1949), focused on oral language, its phonetics and language learning-in-action (Richards and Rogers, 2001, p. 24). The 19th century started to experiment with methodologies and C. Marcel and Predergast introduced the practice of contextual cues for the negotiation of meaning and a syllabus oriented to linguistic structure, whereas Govin introduced non-verbal language to prompt learner's utterances in the TL (Ellis, 1992, p. 8). The French C. Marcel looked at children language learning and signalled the importance of meaning in learning. T. Prendergast was one of the first educators to describe contextual cues to interpret meaning. He put forward the first sequential program to teach basic structures in language learning. F. Gouin, another French linguist, thought that learning was facilitated by a sequence of related actions (Ellis, 1992, p. 14).

This conglomerate of approaches that developed at the beginning of the 20th century can be summarized as direct methods or natural methods, in the sense that they attempted to teach languages by the use of the TL only, aided by the use of non-verbal and inductive approaches, led by the teacher. These direct methods were the precursor of the prevailing method nowadays, and for most of the second part of the 20th century, called the Communicative Approach, proving again how teaching approaches and methods do not compete against each other but simply offer another side of the dodecahedron that the task of language teaching and learning seems to be.

New approaches to language teaching tend to showcase the different methods used before, offering the new approach as an efficient, successful method. These methods are often advertised as the author's creation, whether he is a successful student or a teacher of foreign languages. Most new methods though tend to ignore the benefits and inputs of the previous methods. Whether academically driven by linguistic theories (as we saw in the previous subchapter) or led by their business-orientation, these new methods have traditionally ignored previous scientific or efficient attempts towards language learning (Diller, 1978, p. 5).

Such was the case with the Audiolingual method created for the U.S. Army in World War II. Also known as New Key, it is based on behaviourist theories about language learning and it supports the idea that language needs training through a process of reinforcement and awards (Ellis, 1990, p. 13). It is the method responsible for the proliferation of language laboratories and drilling. These methods correspond to the basic empiricist approach that language learning is basically a consequence of habit-forming activities, influenced by conditioning and drilling. Audiolingualism emphasizes the capacity of the nervous system to develop speech habits through physical practice and to systematize existing habits to create new behaviour (Stevick, 1990, p. 133) De Sauzé's direct method, developed for the teaching of French, emphasizes the capacity to formulate rules and follow them (Ellis, 1992, p. 14).

These methods coexisted with cognitivist theories of language acquisition nurtured by the linguistic work of Noam Chomsky. With these methods, students are encouraged to induce and produce meaningful sentences to have a working knowledge of the grammatical rules. Their view of learning is an engaging process of analysis and response. Radically different from animals, humans share a linguistic device built into our neurosystems. The rivalry between these two main approaches is one of the main reasons for the proliferation of methods of language teaching and learning, and it promotes the persistence and lack of communication between theorists and practitioners who are associated with these approaches.

This is not the place to clarify the concepts of 'approach', 'method', 'model', 'technique' and other common concepts used when talking about the way that languages are taught and learned. For our purposes, approach is the most general term in the sense that it refers to the general concepts or views of the different elements that are at play in language teaching and learning. Method here refers to a developed program by which these views are implemented in order to acquire a language consisting of materials, lesson plans, descriptors, and guidelines about how to work with them, whether in the classroom or in an autonomous learning environment. Model, on the other hand, would be a prototype of a language method, so for our purposes in this project we would consider models any abstract representations of a method. Finally, the term 'technique' is rarely used in our project, but when it is, it refers to a specific task used in a particular instance of language learning. Approach and model belong to the abstract scope of language teaching and learning, whereas method and techniques belong to the concrete measurable levels.

The famous model designed by Byalistok[17] in 1978 reflected the change in point of view that was happening around language learning. The main innovation revolved around the acknowledgement of 'other

knowledge' playing a role in language learning, whether it was another language or knowledge of a completely different kind. Subsequent models have expanded and included more and more aspects of language learning in order to account for all the variables that are at play in any given language learning situation. The second innovation that this model presented was the mention of 'strategies'. Student strategies and later on, teacher strategies, have prevailed as an object of the research conducted in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, as we have seen in the previous subchapter, and they also played a crucial role in our project.

Table 8 – Bialystok's Model – Source: http://hoprea.wordpress.com/category/my-thoughts-on-elt/
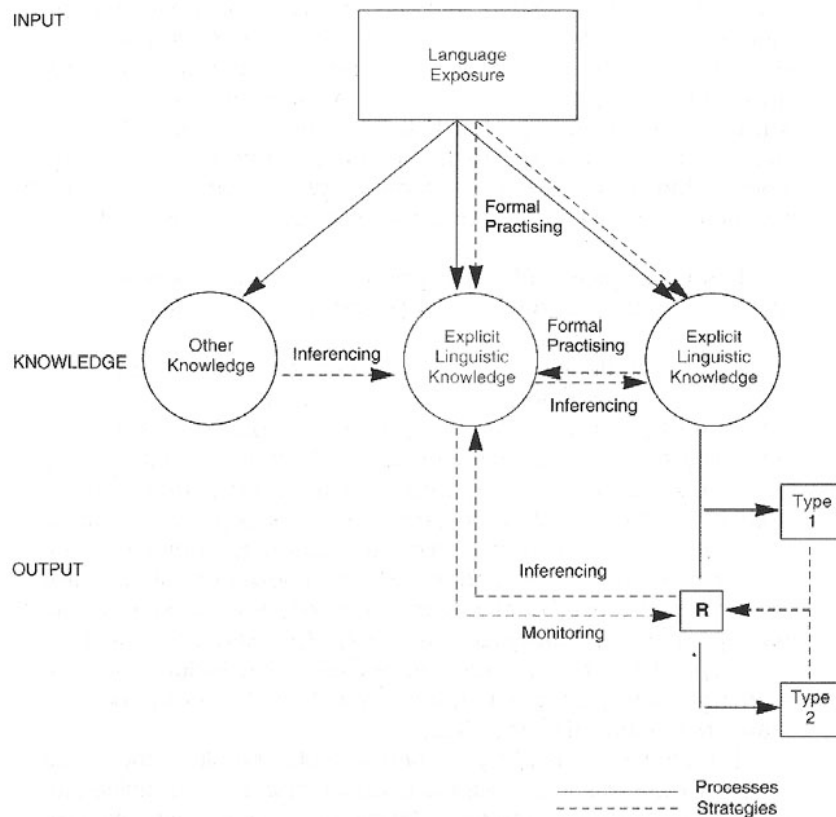
During the second half of the 20th century, several methods were put forward, showing efficient results. For instance, the method called Total Physical Response. Developed by James J. Asher, the model assumes that L1 learning and L2 learning are very similar and so it must combine verbal and physical aspects. The method has been successful with students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and it has also increased the rate of learning especially at the beginners' level. It has been furthered by Blaine Ray, a teacher of

Spanish as a Foreign Language in the United States by including stories. Her method is called 'Teaching Proficiency through Reading Storytelling' (TPR Storytelling) and it draws from Stephen Krashen's theories of language acquisition. She includes the use of stories and moved away from the mostly oral approach in Asher's method in order to acquire non-physical aspects of the language (Ray & Selley, 2004, p. 33). This is not the place to give a thorough description of each method. However, teachers should be encouraged to explore these methods (or at least some of them) in full detail and experiment with them, in order to fill up their toolbox and understand the benefits that each method provides. These two methods share a lot of features with the Natural Approach by Stephen Krashen in that they are more direct methods of learning and both of them work to some extent with the affective aspects of language learning, drawing from the direct responses and the previous knowledge of the student.

Similar but also radically different to these, Caleb Gattegno offered his Silent Way in 1963. Sceptical of mainstream language education, he proposed a new method that emphasizes learner's autonomy and the use of silence for numerous purposes. He introduced the use of Cuisenaire rods in language teaching to show grammatical structures, paraprosodic elements of language, to create models of grammatical systems and simply to represent real objects. The main innovation of this method is that it put the onus of learning on both the teacher and the student, encouraging both of them to focus on the actual learning (Gattegno, 1972).

Suggestopedia was introduced by Georgi Lozanov in an attempt to enhance learning. As the method improved it gained the new name of 'desuggestopedia' instead (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 23). It aims to work not only with the conscious level of the mind but also with the subconscious. One of the main aspects that is very relevant to our study is the focus on the physical space in the classroom and the emphasis on having comfortable and confidence-enhancing learning environments. Suggestopedia mainly uses music as a means of creating more learning-enhancing environments (Lozanov, 1978). The other important feature of this method is that it was recommended by a UNESCO working group in 1978. The official commending of a method was not something new in the history of language teaching and learning, as we just mentioned with the Audiolingual methods employed with the army, but it had rarely reached the level of an official worldwide commendation.[18] As was the case with the Silent Way, Suggestopedia has been advanced with methods such as Superlearning; Suggestive Accelerated Learning and Teaching (SALT) developed in the U.S. and Canada by Dr. Schuster and Dr. Bancroft[19]; and Psychopädie, developed in West Germany (Felix, Chapter 2, p. 7). The three methods also share the use of cued recall or hypermnesia,

based on the belief that the human brain retains more successfully if it generates the word from cues than when presented with the full answer.

Dogme language teaching[20], created by Scott Thornbury, in the 1990s is one of the examples of the Communicative Approach developed into a specific method. It is a conversation-focused approach and firmly rooted in the belief that language learning happens in the interaction. In this case, it is notorious for its disregard of published materials, claiming that it is better to engage the students in the production of their own materials through their engagement in learning tasks and problem based learning. Dogme's assumption includes a Freirean approach to learning, by attempting "to humanize the classroom through a radical pedagogy of dialogue" (Templer, 2004, p. 12). The preference for physical presence is not entirely opposed to the use of technology or web 2.0 but according to these authors, technology does not enable learner-centred teaching and authentic communication (Thornbury and Meddling, 2009, p. 15).

Derived from this tradition is the discouragement of the use of the first language (L1) in the classroom. This is not to say that teachers do not actually use the L1 every day. In general, "teachers have some sense, then, that using the TL as much as possible is important; however, they may not have figured out how to do so" (Polio & Duff, 1994, p. 324). The Communicative Approach promoted that the L1 is something not to be utilized in L2 teaching but to be left outside the door. A lot of the teaching methods recommended since the 1880s have adopted this Direct Method avoidance of the L1. According to Howatt (1984) "the monolingual principle, the unique contribution of the twentieth century to classroom language teaching, remains the bedrock notion from which the others ultimately derive" (p. 289). Stern (1992) feels that the 'intra-lingual' position in teaching is still so strong that, even though the academic world encourages interdisciplinary approaches, "many writers do not even consider cross-lingual objectives" (p. 281). Audiolingualism, for instance, recommended rendering English inactive while the new language is being learnt (Brooks in Richards and Rogers, 2001, p. 64). Recent methods are not as prescriptive in forbidding L1 but communicative language teaching and problem-based learning methodologies have no essential relationship with the L1 (Crookes & Gass, 1993; Nunan, 1989; Skehan, 1998). This anti-L1 standpoint has been a mainstream element in 20th century language teaching and learning.

The original justification was probably based in the comparison of L1 acquisition to L2 learning. The assumption underlying this justification would be that since the only successful method of language

learning is that used by children, teaching therefore would need to be based on the characteristics of L1 acquisition. This has been the advertising slogan of many of the methods above. For example, Total Physical Response simulates at a speeded up pace the stages an infant experiences in acquiring its first language (Asher, 1977, p. 17).

Some authors, such as Karen Atkinson and Robert Phillipson, have considered the historical or political reasons behind this assumption. They claim that this vision arose from the context in which there were several languages in the classroom as well as from the teacher's inability to speak the language of students This inability reinforces and promotes further distance between the teacher and the student and restricts the possibilities for language learning. In other words, going back to Bialystok's model, this attitude ignores all the 'other knowledge' that the student brings into the language classroom (Willis & Willis. 1996, p. 130). L2 learners generally come into the class with a working knowledge of the L1, some social development, an expanded short-term memory, and relative autonomy (Singleton & Little 1984); above all, L2 learners already know how to negotiate meaning (Halliday, 1964).

In alternating language approaches, the students are at one moment learning their L2, at another using their L1. These approaches consider reciprocity as very important, in that both languages are concerned equally (Cook, 2001, p. 19). These classes involve groups of students that have some ability in both languages. For example, the Tandem system has offered assigned e-pals in order to exchange messages in both languages. This system has also been implemented at a school level by alternating between languages for different parts or classes during a school day. Vivian Cook (2001) offers different manifestations of these alternating approaches. The Key School Two-way Model teaches classes of English and Spanish speakers through English in the morning and Spanish in the afternoon (Rhodes, Christian, & Barfield, 1997). Similarly, the Alternate Days approach teaches standard subjects to children using English and Philipino on alternate days (Tucker, Otanes, & Sibayan, 1971). Dual Language Programs attempt to strike a balance between two languages in the school curriculum (Montague, 1997).

V. Cook goes on to explore European variations of these programs, such as the Reciprocal Language Teaching, (Hawkins, 1987) through which pairs or groups of students learn each other's languages. A course for English teachers of French and French teachers of English switched languages on different days so that students were the teachers on one day and vice versa the next (Cook, 1989). This was applied to their activities throughout the day, teaching, conversation and social activities, so as not to limit the

registers that they were practicing. They even alternated countries, from England and France, every other year. The unique feature of this method of reciprocal teaching is the switching between learning and teaching roles. These alternating methods give the student the status of L2 user, but they are limited in the sense that they require two balanced groups of L1 speakers in order to avoid unequal relationships between the groups (Cook, 2001, p. 415).

There have been teaching methods that have promoted using both languages in the same lesson such as the New Concurrent Method, developed by Rodolfo Jacobson. In this method the teacher is allowed to switch from one language to another, according to specific rules (Jacobson, 1990). This method recognizes code-switching as an L2 learning activity. The language classroom transforms into a real L2 situation "in which both languages are concurrent, not a pretend L2 monolingual situation" (Cook, 2001, p. 418). Jacobson's rules follow the patterns in real-life code-switching, adapted to the classroom. Summing up, the role of the L1 in concurrent teaching methods is to advance L2 learning through a more authentic situation.

Dodson's Bilingual Method requires the teacher to interpret an L2 sentence into the L1. Then, imitation is used as a technique, first as a group and later, individually (Cook, 2001, p. 419). The teacher also tests understanding of the L1 sentence pointing to a picture while the students are required to answer in the L2 (Dodson, 1985). He developed the so-called 'Sandwich Technique' that has supported this approach by inserting the oral translation of the L1 between the new sentence in the L2 and allowing them to repeat it in order to gain speed and fluency.

Another method that has used both languages is known as Community Language Learning (CLL), developed by Charles A. Curran, yet another psychologist. Students are supposed to talk to each other of their own accord in the L2 using the L1 as mediatory (Curran, 1972). The role of the teacher is of a counselling nature and s/he also paraphrases what the student says in the L2. Community Language Learning developed five stages by which the learner increases his/her autonomy and becomes an 'adult' in the L2 and therefore, capable of learning by him/herself. This method has re-entered the world of language learning through the growth of social networks as a tool for language learning. The sharing and collaboration taking place in groups such as www.livemocha.com or other language learning communities resemble the principles of this methodology. The advantage of Community Language Teaching to Dodson's method is that it seems to be more student-initiated than teacher-led.

Perhaps, within the same context Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) was created. Offered by David Marsh and Anne Maljers in 1994 as a new term for language immersion, it is an approach for teaching content through another language, in such a way that the student will learn the subject and the language at the same time. This methodology has been appraised by the European Commission on Language Teaching and Learning and is being implemented at different levels in the member states where it lacked special attention until now. According to the European Commission, CLIL grants the students the opportunity to use their new language skills, supporting self-confidence and increasing the exposure to the new language without the need to allow for extra time or autonomous student-led activities outside of the classroom.[21]

Language immersion has reached the status of preferred approach towards language learning, through the establishment of certain beliefs within the student/teacher population that empirical evidence rather than a higher exposure to authentic input leads to a better mastery of the language. Amongst these models of language immersion is the Erasmus/Comenius Program of the European Union and the different summer or language holiday programs all over the world. These programs include the enriching environment of target culture and are geared towards the development of multicultural competence as well. They have, however, become the target of many international businesses, as perhaps research on methods was in the previous centuries. The pressing need to experience immersion when learning a new language has influenced negatively on bilingual approaches to language learning and the use of translation as a language learning technique.

Nevertheless, there is no need to avoid the L1, as studies such as Polio and Duff (1994) and other studies seem to indicate. L1 use can enhance efficiency and learning, create a more natural learning environment and simply be more relevant (Cook, 2001, p. 421). These authors show that teachers tend to use L1 for meaning purposes (conveying or checking), for explaining grammar, for organization and management purposes, communication with individual students and for testing. Student use the L1 within the confines of the classroom for different purposes as well and the situation is more complex to study because it includes private talk, which is not observable from a scientific point of view. In more open talk, students seem to use the L1 within the classroom for private communicative purposes but also for learning purposes, such as peer clarification and review, and expressing their emotions (p. 422).

During the 1990s, there seemed to be an acute sense of awareness of the emotional side of learning, and methods and models tried to incorporate this aspect. Heron (1992) developed multi-modal learning: action, conceptual, imaginable, and emotional (Arnold, 2005, p. 13). Several authors argued for an integrated view of L2 acquisition uniting the findings of various traditions and research lines (Gass and Selinker, 1994), trying to bear in mind that every person, student and teacher alike, has a particular learning style with their own strengths and weaknesses that can be associated with specific strategies (Arnold, 2005, p. 302). In this context, it would make much more sense to look at all the methods available in a positive manner and apply them when necessary or offer them to the student that requires them. In fact, our era has been called 'post-methods era' (Richards, 1981, p. 35).

Bell (2003) refers to an existent unspeakable vampiric fear (p. 327) of the term, as Brown puts it (2001) when he says: "we lay to rest (…) methods (p. 11), recently interred methods (p. 14), requiem for methods" (p. 17) as if there still lurks an unspeakable fear that methods, Dracula-like, might rise from the dead. Bell goes on to explain that this term has originated from the confusion, above mentioned, around the definition of the concept of 'method'. He differentiates between *methods* and *Methods*, in which the former refers to *a smorgasbord of ideas* (p. 326). He quotes Oller (1993) when he refers to methods as "programs, curricula, procedures, demonstrations, modes of presentation, research findings, tests, manners of interaction, materials, texts, films, videos, computers and more" (p. 3), but points out the difficulty of talking about these *methods* as a coherent whole. On the other hand, *Methods* are offered as 'a set of classroom practices that serve as a prescription and therefore do not allow variation' (Bell, 2003, p. 326). He qualifies this definition with Brown (2000) and Kumaravadivelu's (1994) criticism of Method. The former believes that these methods naively believe that teachers' procedures can be rationalized into a prototype (Brown, 2000, p. 170) and the latter criticizes their theory-driven nature, from disciplines other than language teaching and learning (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). Richards and Rogers (2001) also argue that these Methods have been fixed in time, responding to the specific demands of the context and are very constrained in nature (p. 20). However, these authors (2001) also define methods as 'an umbrella term' comprising many other terms used in the description of classroom practice, such as approach, design and procedure (Bell, 2003, p. 327). The term 'method' has been discredited at a theoretical level but it still has its purpose in the teaching and learning contexts (p. 325). The dislike of 'method' may stem from what Stern (1986) quoted as 'the century-old obsession' (p. 251) with the search for the definitive method.

Bell (2003) argues against this postmodern absolute rejection of M/methods because it causes certain blindness towards the discoveries of their authors and towards the value that they may present to a specific classroom and learning context (p. 329). He quotes Kumaravadivelu's (2001) assumption that the postmethod learner is an autonomous learner (p. 545) and refers to Brown's (2002) 12 principles of assumptions about SLA, which include language ego, self-confidence, and risk taking. Bell indicates that these ideas and attitudes towards language learning were the main focus of Curran, Gattegno, and Georgi Lozanov when they created their methods.

Brown's (2002) postmodern pedagogy uses the image of the doctor for the postmodern teacher, the same as this chapter has been referring to methods as tools for the 'classroom technician', who is capable of assessing the needs of his/her students and advise them in the use of successful strategies (p. 11). Pennycook (1989) is much more critical and perhaps pessimistic in her view that the shifts that have occurred in the realm of language teaching and learning have just rearranged the same basic concepts and procedures as a response to the sociocultural, political and philosophical milieu of the era (p. 600). These changes have more to do with larger social forces than with pedagogical maturity. Nunan (1991) believed that balance would be reached when research and insights about language learning offered an empirical solution (p.1).

Bell (2003) offers the Communicative Approach as the dominant paradigm (p. 333) and he quotes Jacobs and Farrell's (2001) assessment of this approach as prevailing in the past 40 years in language teaching and learning. The main axis of this shift have moved along the concepts of learner autonomy, cooperative learning, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, thinking skills, alternative assessment, and teachers as co-learners. Bell argues that this shift is an element of a larger shift from positivism to postpositivism and from behaviourism to cognitivism and that one of the reasons of its alleged failure has been its application as a piecemeal rather than comprehensive approach.

He concludes that postmethodology, rather than overtaking the notion of method, may be explained as a synthesis of various methods under the umbrella of CLT (Bell, 2003, p. 333) and he offers, amongst others, Rodger's (2000) predictions of the 'methods' that the postmodern era will give birth to, appreciating that the value of method lies in their unique insight. He concludes his article with two interesting ideas about teacher and student investment in the method in question (Rodgers, 2002, p. 334):

"As has been pointed out many times, it is not the method that is the crucial variable in successful pedagogy but the teacher's passion for whatever method is embraced and the way that passion is passed on to the learners" (Block, 2001, p. 72). As one teacher notes, "Learning will take place when students believe in 'teachers.' And when will students do that? Regrettably, only when teachers believe in themselves" (Walker, 1999, p. 231).

These two concepts will play an important part in our project and seem to be part and parcel of the set of student beliefs in our current university classrooms. These two concepts also relocate the onus of teaching and learning as a shared task between the teacher and the learner, not quite on the former or the latter's shoulder, and are, indeed, the product of cooperative learning approaches. These approaches go hand in hand with interaction-focused classroom techniques and favour face to face, small group classes and individual attention. Under these conditions, cooperative learning takes into account the affective aspects of the classroom, but it is in itself a skill that needs to be gradually introduced to support students as they work together, depending on each other in teams towards a greater autonomy as language learners. (Arnold, 2005, p. 244).

Outside of these interactionist parameters lies the origin of Computer-Assisted Language Learning or CALL. It was introduced as a term by Levi in 1997 as the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning (p. 1). It comprises all types of information technology applications and it started to be developed in the 1960s with traditional behaviourist software programs. The boom of CALL has seen a rapid spread of these small software packages into the realm of virtual environments, web 2.0 (and soon, web 3.0); the use of classroom technology such as pointers, interactive whiteboards and, nowadays, mobile-assisted language learning with the proliferation of Smartphones and tablets. CALL has seen such rapid spread that Sanders saw the need to record its history as early as 1995, when the internet was still in its infancy for most of its current users. Soon after him, Delcloque (2000) expanded Sanders' approach to the development of CALL worldwide. Finally, the most recent attempt to record the fast developments of ICT in language teaching and learning has been Hubbard's (2009) compilation of articles and excerpts, with an overarching view of most of the leading ideas and research results. Most interesting for this project's concerns, though, is Butler-Pascoe's (2011) text, which offers a new perspective into CALL, combining the results in general educational technology and SLA in order to

shed some light into the paradigm shifts in recent years. Warschauer and Healey (1998) offered classification of the periods that CALL has experienced:

- Behaviouristic or Structural CALL.
- Communicative CALL.
- Integrative CALL.

These three periods do not develop any new concepts and are clearly related to the underlying theoretical approaches in SLA.

Apart from histories of CALL, there have been numerous attempts to develop CALL taxonomies.[22] It is outside of this project's remit to explore these categories, but it is important to realize that most of the early software still exists in the new, innovative versions. Adding to the difficulty of classifying the types of ICT available, Web 2.0 included all manner of blogs and wikis, social networks and podcasting and, last but not least, language learning in Massive Multiplayer Online games (MMOs) or virtual worlds.

Most ICT tools though are not used on their own as language programs, except on rare occasions when the academic literature and research in language learning have not been reported. On the other hand, it has created programs all over the world that have been labelled as 'blended learning'. The notion of blended learning combines classroom interaction with computer-based activities. The internet has provided a wealth of tools and resources for those who teach and those who learn languages. In addition to the software that we have been referring too, there are social networks and language exchange websites (www.conversationexchange.com, for instance), language online tools and portals. Countries like Ireland are investing at a national level for the creation of free digital resources, like the N.D.L.R. (National Digital Learning Resources). The Instituto Cervantes has created an island on Second Life, the most famous virtual reality game, but it is not the only educational project or game within this virtual reality environment. Although the interaction in these virtual environments can be even more participative than in real life - since the affective filter lowers in general thanks to the anonymous nature of the participants - the results of learning languages in virtual environments remains to be empirically tested. For now, we will have to wait and see if a term such as 'authentic virtual interaction' will be developed in the near future.

Another aspect of language teaching and learning that has developed significantly in the last few years is the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) as languages have become part and parcel of

university degrees, especially through the decline in language teaching and learning in the primary and secondary school system in the English-speaking world and through the development of double university degrees under the Bologna program all around Europe. This approach, by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O'Malley, was geared towards students with limited English proficiency in its infancy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). This model focuses not only in the development of language per se, but in the training of learning strategies, academic language and cognitive and metacognitive skills in general. A key concept in this model is language awareness and self-assessment. In terms of skills training, these authors have focused on the five main skills that the European Language Framework (ELF) acknowledges: listening, speaking (conversation and presentation), reading and writing, but they do not stop there, offering other socially-based and academic-based skills such as summarizing, comparing, describing, interrupting, narrating and team working strategies as well as general learning skills such as autonomous study strategies. As Chamot (1995) points out, implementing CALLA in language learning is as challenging as in the science curriculum that she considers in this article because "the shift in emphasis in the (…) curriculum from a content to a process focus has posed a challenge for assessment, since standardized (…) tests measure primarily discrete pieces of content knowledge" (p. 392).

The 21st century has inherited a legacy of Second Language Acquisition methods that has shifted throughout its history. The different contexts in which language teaching and learning take place have raised awareness about the importance of affective and social aspects. The learner, the context, the most efficient teacher training, the cognitive processes inside the learner's mind and the expected outcome, whether it is bilingualism or a series of asymmetric multicompetences are concepts that have popped up in the last years of research. The future seems to be in the hands of anthropological approaches which could maximize the insights that teachers acquire about the type of learners that they are working with and the context of learning in which the classroom or the open-environment is located (Guthrie, 1981, p. 236). The challenge will consist of:

- moving beyond single method
- incorporating theory into practice
- improving the experience and quality of language learning
- improving teacher's and learners' understanding of classroom dynamics
  and adapting our teaching to the influence of social affective factors. (Guthrie, 1981, p. 237)

In terms of choosing methods it has become necessary to identify the general and specific linguistic needs, the adequate contents and resources (whether ready-made or learner-created), and also the outcomes and the selection of activities for learning, teaching and assessment. Traditionally this role was assigned to the teacher but cooperative language learning attempts to shift the onus of these tasks towards a shared commitment between learners and teachers. According to Richards (1986), a good assessment of methods will need to bear in mind:

- What skills for competence is the method designed for?
- What type of students is the method designed for?
- What type of teacher training is needed?
- What circumstances does the method work best in?
- How did teachers and students respond to the method?
- What is the method results compared to others?
- Do all the teachers work the same with the method? (p. 151)

According to Richards and Rogers (2001), a good assessment of the methods needs to bear in mind what the approach is in terms of linguistic theory and language learning theory (p. 28). The initial approach of this project deems it necessary to go beyond language learning theory when considering what methods are best to be used towards a general learning theory. The reasons for this approach will be fully explained in the next subchapter. The second thing that Richards and Rogers urge us to bear in mind is the conception of the method (what the general and specific outcomes are in the method, how it is going to be programmed and sequenced, what learning and teaching tasks it involves and finally, what role the student, the teacher and the teaching materials have). Lastly, they also advise considering the procedures in which the method is implemented. This is the most important part of any methodology because they can be observed and they are usually variable, especially if a group of teachers is implementing the same methods. They are the tip of the iceberg in any methodology.

Language teaching has indeed developed a considerable corpus of educational techniques, and the quest for the ideal method is part and parcel of that tradition. The acquisition of an integrative and systematic method of the curricular process of the language shows the limitations of this quest and emphasizes the need to develop more a rigorous basis for educational practice (Richards, 1986, p. 161).

2.2 Current Learning Theories and Concepts.

The title for this subchapter has been tricky to narrow down, mainly for two reasons. It is not easy to determine what learning theories are current and which ones are old-fashioned since the paradigm seems to shift quickly across the time and space continuum.[23] On the other hand, the theories and concepts that we will review here stem from different disciplines and origins. Traditionally, language teaching and learning research has failed to include broader learning theories within its theoretical framework, concentrating on their mother discipline: Linguistics and Applied Linguistics as the main source of theoretical concepts and hypotheses, without bearing in mind the immediate influence of the general education environment and sociocultural milieu in which these theories and methods are produced.

Educational theory is too broad a term for the purposes of this project. It involves theorizing about pedagogy (or andragogy, a preferred term for adult learning), curriculum, learning and educational policy in general. It is not easy to narrow down since it has traditionally inherited theories from history, philosophy, sociology and psychology. It has traditionally shifted from a normative (perennialism, progressivism and essentialism, for example) to a descriptive nature. Educational psychology developed as an empirical science concerned with the process of learning.

Four periods or approaches have been traditionally recognized in the history of learning theories: behaviourism, cognitivism, humanism and social situational approaches (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 138). The first one is known as behaviourism, whose more famous contributor was B.F. Skinner, followed by Edward Thorndike, Tolman, Guthrie, and Hull. Their main three hypotheses state: 1. that the outcomes of learning show in the changes of our behaviour; 2. that context is one of the main factors influencing our behaviour, and 3. they rescued old Aristotle's Law of Contiguity to emphasize the need for proximity between two learning events in order to form a bond between them, as well as the notion of reinforcement, which influences our current view of learning and assessment. This type of reinforcement that allows for a reward or a punishment is known as operant conditioning (Skinner, 1950).

The obvious criticism came from behaviourism (over-dependence on observable behaviour to explain and acknowledge learning) as early as the 1920s from the Gestalt philosophers (Gowin, 1965), which led the way into the new Cognitivist point of view of learning. Their two main principles state that our memory is an information processing system and that previous knowledge shapes new learning experiences. Whereas

behaviourists emphasize the environment of learning, cognitivists focus on the individual learner. Essentially, the learning process for a cognitivist is an internal brain activity and the development of the right materials and their optimum sequencing are key to successful learning. Unhappy with this mind-centred approach but still within the boundaries of cognitivism, Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey pushed towards the so-called constructivism, emphasizing from different parts of the world that learning is mainly personal and experiential. Their practical focus on real-world situations encouraged social-engagement and problem-based learning. Constructivism regards the teacher as a facilitator who introduces the student into the learned community and equips him/her with the tools needed in order to explore the field and build his/her knowledge by overcoming the obstacles s/he finds in his/her way. The image of the 'building' is especially meaningful since we owe to Bruner the notion of scaffolding (Mattingly, Lutkehaus & Throop, 2008, p. 18). We also owe to these philosophers the notion of a community of learning (Dewey, 1938), which is the basis for the organization of disciplines in third-level.

Humanism, initiated by Abraham Maslow and further developed by Carl Rogers, focuses on the development of the person as a whole. Both base their theories on the premise that every individual moves forward because of the desire to realize his/her potential, which they termed as 'self-actualization' (Rogers, 1961, p. 350). This notion is intrinsically related to Maslow's concept of 'hierarchy of needs'. With this concept, he established a ladder according to which an individual reaches self-actualization when all the other needs have been fulfilled: physiological, safety, love/belonging and self-esteem (Maslow, 1970). He also identified obstacles or pre-requisites to reach self-actualization such as freedom of speech and to seek new information. Both Maslow and Rogers believed in the goodness of human nature, probably as a response to the existing Freudian perspectives in psychology. Rogers' client-centred counselling principles include empathy with the client and unconditional positive regard, practices which have infiltrated the educational system and become the student-centred norm (Rogers, 1965).

In this attempt to understand the individual as a whole, Howard Gardner put forward his theory of the multiple intelligences in 1983. Gardner's multiple intelligences were described as logical-mathematical, spatial, linguistic, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. Logical-mathematical intelligence is related with abstraction, numbers and reasoning. Spatial intelligence refers to the ability to judge space and dimensions. Linguistic intelligence has to do with verbal abilities. Bodily-kinaesthetic relates to coordination of bodily movement and objects. Physical learning has not been

traditionally acknowledged and this type of intelligence brings its importance to the fore. Musical intelligence is related to sounds and rhythms. Interpersonal intelligence deals with social interaction and interaction with others. Intrapersonal intelligence is concerned with reflective and self-reflective abilities. Naturalistic intelligence is related to knowledge of the ecosystem around the individual. Gardner has added a new category to his notion of multiple intelligences, called existential intelligence, which would deal with spiritual or religious knowledge and the ability to go beyond sensory data (Gardner, 1999). Unfortunately, Gardner's theory still lacks empirical evidence and neuroscientists are criticizing it for this reason. However, for our purposes, it developed a notion of learning style beyond the popular dichotomy verbal/visual and it developed the concept of aptitude in language and in general, providing a descriptive framework with which to understand the multiple skills at play in any learning situation.

Finally, social and situated approaches of learning were first introduced by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, as well as the term 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Situated learning happens in the same environment in which it is applied (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They regard learning as a social process that is realized by workshops, apprenticeships, field trips, role-playing in the authentic setting and all other kinds of practice. They also emphasize the importance of the physical setting in itself and the communication patterns it enhances (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1994, p. 86). They draw attention to the fact that there are many patterns of communication and physical distribution in any learning environment, and that non-verbal communication is most important. Current ecological psychology is partially concerned with the physical arrangements of the classroom environment, especially seating arrangements. A number of researchers have analyzed the effects seating arrangements have on classroom communication, such as Harold Leavitt and Robert Sommer (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1994, p. 88). Albert Bandura was the main psychologist behind this learning approach. He firmly believed that individuals are capable of self-organization and regulation, which eventually gave way to his work on self-efficacy. His analysis of self-efficacy beliefs shed light on the constraints of anxiety and phobia as learning-repressing influences (Bandura, 1986). Gavriel Salomon added the concept of transfer of learning to this framework of situated learning theories. The famous notion of transferable skills has its origin in his work. Transfer of learning refers to the process of using one's skills from one circumstance to another and is related to connectivism and networked learning (Steeples & Jones, 2002). Salomon investigated the conditions of automatic transfer and the way to enhance this transfer in situations that are further from each other. Metacognition and isolation of these skills seems to aid in the transfer (Salomon, 1991).

In the same descriptive empirical line of research, educational anthropology developed in the hands of George Spindler, who expanded the notion of community of practice into that of culture, enquiring into the cultural aspects of formal and informal education. Related to Salomon's work is educational anthropological research in cultural transmission as enculturation (diachronically transmitted from generation to generation) and acculturation (synchronically transmitted from culture to culture). This area of educational internationalization is currently being researched all over the world (Spindler & Hammond, 2006).

Our case study emerges at the crossroads of cooperative and reflective teaching and learning, but before the project itself was designed, it was necessary to explore where these terms and ideas had originated and how they had acquired the status that they have attained today in an attempt to justify and clarify our choice for these approaches. Let us examine the notion of reflective teaching and learning.

Reflective practice is defined as "the capacity to reflect on action so as to engage in a process of continuous learning" (Schön, 1983, p. 13). Learning takes places through a process of critical engagement. Reflective practice has achieved the status of standard procedure in most professional settings in an attempt to best to learn from personal experience. It has its origin in Dewey's learning theories of reflection (Dewey, 1938) as well as Donald Schön (1983) and David Boud (1985). John Dewey's work acknowledged the fact that most students and learners did not know how to use reflection as a tool for acting on the changes needed in the classroom, their lives and so on. Donal Schön's work (1987) offered a logic sequence to the process of reflection:

- Think back.
- Try to remember as much detail of the events as possible.
- Investigate reasons for the events.
- Re-frame events in light of several theoretical frameworks.
- Generate multiple understanding.
- Decide on what needs to be done next in relation to the analysis of what has already happened. (Arnold, 2005 p. 110)

Key to the growth of reflective theory was the concern with the integration of theory and practice. Schön presents two kinds of reflective behaviours; 'reflection on action', which is the most traditionally

retrospective version (journals or diaries), and 'reflection in-action' where action and reflection happen at the same time. It develops the notion that in any practical situation, when confronted with a problem, an individual usually draws from his/her feelings and prior experiences to respond to the situation at hand. Reflective Practice has been recognized in many teaching and learning programs and environments, and reflective blogs have proliferated all over the web. Kolb (1984) developed the concept towards what is known as action research, through which the reflective process is carried forth and tested. Chris John's model (2006) is a structured mode of reflection designed to be shared with a colleague or mentor. This peer review of reflection adds the value of dialogue and interaction to the process of reflection and can become a form of regular feedback.

Reflective practice precludes that reflection is a condition in order for learning to take place. Reflective teaching refers to the practice that:

- examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice.

- is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she bring to teaching.

- is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches.

- takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts and

- takes responsibility for his or her own professional development. (Zeichner & Lichston, 1996, p. 6)

Zeichner and Lichston (1996) identify three main tendencies in reflective approaches to teaching and learning:

- The developmentalist tradition involves focusing on the students, their individual aspects in terms of cultural and linguistic background.
- The social reconstructionist tradition considers reflective practice a *political act* with a transformative purpose. (Kemmis, 1985, p. 57)
- The generic tradition considers reflection has its own value in itself and should be encouraged.

(p. 57)

This project, once again, is located at the crossroads of the three traditions since it focuses on the students in order to situate them at the core of the classroom situation. It attempts to transform a situation in a democratic way and it understands the value of reflection as a learning practice in itself.

The other central notion in our project is that of cooperative teaching and learning, which also owes its origins to the work of John Dewey, who emphasized the social dimension of learning. Social psychological theory influenced the notion of the classroom group and highlighted the dynamics of every group:

- the group as a system within systems
- formal and informal aspects
- emotional aspects of small groups
- group effects on self concept
- human motivation in social context (achievement, affiliation and power)
- group effects on intellectual performance
- cooperative learning. (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1994, p. 58)

At its root, cooperative learning stems from democratic education. Its introduction has been traditionally assigned to Leo Tolstoy in 1860, but education theory owes its development to John Dewey and A.S. Neill and his radical Summerhill School founded in 1921. Summerhill's model has inspired different institutions to follow similar parameters that they review and share in the International Democratic Education Conference[24] (established in 1993) with its European counterpart EUDEC[25] (operating since 2008). Negrin Fajardo and Vergara (2005) contextualize these approaches in the climate of the second half of the 20th century that gave way to comparison between education and economy (p. xv). In Spain, it shaped 'el movimiento de la escuela nueva o escuela activa' and other subsequence movements such as la escuela moderna by Ferrer Guardia and la escuela libre (free schools movement) (p. 33). Democratic education is a practice of learning and school administration in which everybody involved in the school participate freely and equally and share the decision-making process on all (Free Democratic Schools) or most matters. They lack a uniform and compulsory program, allowing the interaction between people to provide the incentive for learning. Students of all ages learn together and mentor each other, assuming total responsibility for their own education. These schools do not compare or rank students as they do not use compulsory standardized tests, apart from the official government ones and those for entrance to college. Portis criticizes the true democratic nature of the process because any standardization of procedures would oppose the true competing and ever changing nature of the democratic process. They support a pluralistic, dialogic education based on respect for human rights and critical social thinking. Concepts such as student

voice and empowerment have originated in this approach. Perhaps Foucault (1980), and more directly dealing with education, Bourdieu (1991), Giroux (1992) and Apple (1995b) are the authors that examine these two concepts more closely.

Michel Foucault concentrated his studies on power and authority on a different educational setting: penitentiary institutions, particularly in the 1970s. For our purposes, his concept of disciplinary punishment is interesting in the sense that it gives professionals an explicit power over the prisoner in this context. By proxy, Foucault observes that this power runs through society at all levels by the control prescribed by the norms in society and the power granted to teachers, program coordinators, deans, etc... over students in the sense that the former have the power to make decisions that will affect the latter (Foucault, 1975). More worthy of note is his analysis of 'power discipline'. He explains that all our structures and social situations are laden with power granted by the knowledge haves and have-nots. Observation of these situation leads to unveiling dynamics of fluid power-knowledge, which are intrinsically connected in our information age and therefore, inseparable (Foucault, 1980).

Pierre Bourdieu takes Foucault theory of power and focuses on language (1991). Language as knowledge can be seen as not just a method of communication but as an instrument of power. He emphasizes that power is relative to the space occupied in a social situation and that language and space are intertwined. In other words, the linguistic interactions between individuals will be influenced by their position in the social environment. This notion of space and language questions the way that meaning is formed relative to social position as well as how the right to meaning or the right to talk are granted. The most important aspect of Bourdieu's work is his emphasis on practice and know-how. His anthropological work focused on the way social hierarchies are imitated and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1984). *Symbolic capital* is the key to social power. Tagging along, he developed the concept of 'symbolic violence' in order to refer to the actions exerted by a symbolic capitalist individual (or a group of them) to guarantee and justify the legitimacy of the distribution of power and place in any given situation. His referred to social space as *fields,* which at the same time are hierarchically positioned in the struggle for dominance in the wider social space. Normally unquestioned, he called *habitus,* the set of socially-acquired *dispositions*, skills, and manners learned in our everyday life (Bourdieu, 2005). In the field of formal education, Bourdieu examined the process of enculturation of symbolic capital. Educational success does not depend solely on learning but on a wide collection of cultural aspects that tend to give the advantage to privileged children (Bourdieu,

1991). Bourdieu challenged the notion of objectivity in the field of research, drawing attention to the effects of the social position of the researcher. The only way out of this observer's paradox is reflective practice. Bourdieu warns academics against assessing students with a rigid academic register and to examine their practice in a reflexive manner in order to avoid the reproduction of class prejudice and not to analyze student work in terms of the register in which s/he writes. He also alerts scholars about the obsession with systematization, which does not account for the logic -or lack thereof- in the social world (Bourdieu, 1984).

Henri Giroux plays a vital role in the field of critical pedagogy. Owing to theorists like Freire and Bauman, Giroux's recent efforts (2010) concentrate on public pedagogy, by which he refers to the new media and global culture of education and politics. He defined 'critical pedagogy' as an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action.

Ira Shor (1992), however, defines this approach from an individual point of view in terms of the procedures required to put it into practice as

> Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse. (p. 129)

Critical pedagogy looks at learning as a process of constant revision that also involves the 'unlearning' and 'relearning' of habits and procedures through the process of reflection and evaluation. In order to be able to carry out this process of reflection, Paulo Freire (1970) observed the prerequisite of 'conscientization' (*conscientização*). He explains that this critical consciousness involves a deep understanding of the situation that renders visible social and political contradictions and it aims to transform them by acting against these oppressive contradictions. Ira Shor has put critical pedagogy into practice in instructional settings. Shor (1992) favours the revision of curriculum and cooperative construction of curriculum needs. He advocates for active student learning that involves an emotionally charged struggle towards self-

determination and ownership. Michael Apple (1995b) points out that the role of the teacher will also shift if the role of the student changes. The teacher in his critical pedagogy does not remain at the level of facilitator, but s/he has the responsibility of helping the student liberate him/herself from the contradictions observed in the instructional setting. Such a process involves a personal and critical engagement both from teachers and students (Apple, 2006).

<div align="center">✴   ✴   ✴</div>

In this chapter, we have reviewed the three main disciplines that have shaped the current state of the main question for this thesis with a general synopsis of the main concepts and procedures at play. This is not the place for a detailed explanation of these theories and *savoir-faires* because these concepts will only play a peripheral role in this project, and their in-depth description would defeat the purpose of the methodology employed in the analysis of the case study, as we will see in chapter four. This chapter drafted the picture of the theoretical and practical context of the teaching and learning environment that this project has studied. There is no consensus about the overall direction that SLA research should follow but it is indisputable that a comprehensive framework of investigation needs to include situation factors, linguistic input, learner differences, learner processes and linguistic output (Ellis, 1984, p. 290).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER …

- has summarized the main concepts in SLA theories, relevant to this project.

- has summarized SLA methods with a focus on new paradigms.

- has summarized the most significant educational theories influencing this project.

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[1] Bloomfield and Fries 1933 and 1952 influenced this approach as well as Lado, R. (1957) *Linguistic across cultures*, Michigan: University of Michigan; Stockwell, R. and J. Bowen (1965) *The sounds of English and Spanish*, Chicago: University of Chicago; Robinnet B. and J. Schachter (1983) *Second language learning.* Brooks, N. (1960) *Language and language learning*, New York: Harcourt Brace And World.

[2] Equivalent to Nemser's *approximative systems* 1971) and Corder's *idiosyncratic dialects and transitional competence* (1971).

[3] I.e.the study carried out by Dodson (1981) in Wales on the development of bilingual and monolingual children.

⁴ After them, this line of research proliferated in the studies of Barrik and Swain (1976), Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976), Hakuta, (1986) Ben-Zeev (1984), Bain and Yu (1980). Arnberg (1981), Rueda (1983), Hakuta (1986), Saer (1922), Smith (1923) and Barke and Parry-Williams (1938) (Baker, 1988. p. 20).

⁵ http://people.ucsc.edu/~mclaugh/MYTHS.htm (retrieved on the 12/07/2012)

⁶ For more information, see http://language.com.hk/articles/styles4.html

⁷ For a review of personality tests, see KEZWER, P. (1987), 'The Extroverted vs. the Introverted. Personality and Second Language Learning', TESL CANADA *JOURNAL/REVUE TESL DU CANADA,* VOL. 5, NO. I, NOVEMBER: pp. 45-58.
 http://journals.sfu.ca/tesl/index.php/tesl/article/viewFile/514/345

⁸ For example, see http://homepage.ntlworld.com/vivian.c/SLA/L2_learning_strategies.htm or the SILL strategies test http://www2.education.ualberta.ca/staff/olenka.Bilash/best%20of%20bilash/SILL%20survey.pdf

⁹ For more information, see http://www.spectrumofteachingstyles.org/styles

¹⁰ Such as http://www.texascollaborative.org/tools/TSI.pdf.

¹¹ For more information on the studies that show that sequencing does not help see Schumann 1978, Dulay and Burt 1977, Krashen 1982, Felix and Simmet 1981, Wode 1981 and Trevise 1992

¹² For more information on the studies that show that sequencing accelerates the rate of learning, see Perkins and Larsen-freeman 1975, Fathman 1978, Ellis 1984, Pienemann 1984, 1989 and Ellis 1989.

¹³ For more information on the studies that show a positive effect of sequencing see Fathman 1975, Lightbown 1980, 1983, Turner 1978, Perkins and Larsen-Freeman 1975, Pica 1983, Makino 1979, Sajavaara 1981a, Feliz 1981, Ellis 1984a, Schumann 1978b.

¹⁴ For example, Naiman 1978 and Strong 1983.

¹⁵ For more information, see Long 1983, Varonis and Gass, Long, Pica and Doughty, Roulon and McReary y Gaies.

¹⁶ Such as Givon's on class participation, on topicalization by Hatch, Long and Ellis and the effects of collaborative discourse by Faersch.

¹⁷Tunku Mohani, T.M. (1991) 'Learner Strategies in Second Language Acquisition', *The English Teacher* Vol XX: October. (http://www.melta.org.my/ET/1991/main2.html, retrieved on the 10/2/2012)

¹⁸ See Lozanov's webpage: http://www.suggestopedia.info/ (welcome) (01/1/2010)

¹⁹ For more information, see http://www.superlearning.com/superlearning_languages.html (12/2/2011)

²⁰ For more information, see http://www.thornburyscott.com/tu/portal.htm (12/20/2012)

²¹ For more information, see Commission Of The European Communities Promoting Language Learning and Linguistic Diversity: An Action Plan 2004 – 2006 http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2003:0449:FIN:EN:PDF

²² Such as Davies and Higgins (1985),[16] Jones and Fortescue (1987),[17] Hardisty and Windeatt (1989)[18] and Levy (1997, p. 118.).[1]

²³ For an illustrative summary of the most relevant learning theories, see http://www.teachersgarden.com/professionalresources/learningtheorists.html

²⁴ For more information see: http://www.idenetwork.org/index.htm

²⁵ For more information see: http://www.eudec.org/

CHAPTER 3.

Research Methodology

THIS CHAPTER …

- Outlines Classroom Research as an academic practice

- Describes the diverse ethnographic tools used in this project from a theoretical point of view, analyzing the benefits and the drawbacks of using such tools.

- Describes the plan of the research project itself and the way in which it was carried out.

3. I   Classroom Research and Ethnographic Tools.

In 1991, Allright & Bailey published an essential review on classroom research applied to language teaching, which has, since then, become a milestone for all language practitioners doing research in the classroom environment.[1] In the book, they claim that while this type of research was still quite new it was also well established (p. 2). Even though, this type of research did not break through until the late stages of the 20th century in the field of Foreign Language Teaching, it had already established itself in other academic disciplines, originating in the 1950s with teachers investigating the effectiveness of their methods (p. 6). This contradiction can be explained by looking at the history of research in education during the last century, which we have summarized in the previous chapter.

Early studies were initiated in the 1920s and 1930s in the United States. Modern research in classrooms, though, dates back to the 1950s as it was programmed as part of teacher training and peer observation (Dörnyei, 2007, p.177). In the 1960s, during the boom of the methods era, classroom research was mainly concerned with the comparison of methods, trying to pursue the fleeting ideal method. In Britain, the origins of classroom research as a movement can be traced back to the Humanities Curriculum Project (HCP) in the 1970s (Hopkins, 1993, p. 6). This project was sponsored by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 1965. It mirrored projects that had already been carried out on the other side of the Atlantic, North and South of the 49th parallel (Bramwell, 1976, p. 317). Its main aim was to find ways to reform the content of the curriculum in order to enhance pupil participation (p. 322). The positive outcomes that these early projects seemed to bring about influenced the growth of research in classrooms. However, in the 1990s, David Nunan still complained that "the context and environment of learning, as well as the management of language

classrooms were relatively under-represented in the literature on language teaching" (1995, p. 7). Our project aims to contribute to and enhance the representation of these studies, which focus on the topic of learning environment.

Once the methods era was left behind, it turned out to be unnecessary to prove that one method was better than all others. Improvements in the tools used motioned classroom research away from methodology testing. The tool that registered a quick and systematic improvement was observation. The publication of observation schemes or protocols of a highly prescriptive nature pushed this technical revolution. The most famous scheme of this period is Flanders' Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC)[2] (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 178). In this protocol, the observer records seven patterns of teacher talk divided as three direct and four indirect influences. Student talk is divided in response and initiation and there is also a category dedicated for silence or confusion. Observations are recorded onto a matrix that gives us the intricate pattern of interactions highlighting recurrences and absences (Allright and Bailey, 1991, p. 202-3). FIAC was undoubtedly the first attempt to record and quantify scientifically the details of teacher-student interaction in class. As an observation protocol, it still relies on the observer's subjectivity and broad generalizations, like the ones shown in the category of 'silence and confusion'. However, protocols like this one, and the others that we will examine when we turn to look at observation as a technique in this chapter – and later on chapter seven, helped classroom research to become much more than a compilation of teaching techniques and learning solutions.

As a type of research, the main principle of classroom ethnography would be best defined as the systematic investigation of what actually happens in the classroom through a range of methodologies and techniques that dig out and expose the variables at play (Nunan, 1995, p.4). These techniques can vary from peer-review and assessment, to data recording and analysis, case studies, direct observation, interviews, self-reports, longitudinal research, surveying tools and any other ways capable of eliciting data from the participants in a given classroom event or in a series of classroom events. The benefit of understanding classrooms better does not derive from the necessity to find the most effective teaching and learning methods any more, but the need to describe the diversity of elements at play in language learning, hopefully in order to reduce some of the stress that comes from taking sole responsibility for learning at both the student and teacher levels (Manke, 1997, p. vii). As Saville-Troike (2002) highlights:

Ideally, all language in classrooms would be used **cooperatively** by students and teachers to construct mutually satisfying exchanges that further educational goals. Realistically, however, instances of conflict or subversion occur in classrooms. Most instances of conflict in school settings are charged with emotion, and understanding the culturally different ways in which emotions may be expressed and interpreted is **vital to providing a climate for learning in the classrooms**. (P. 375 – **my emphasis**)

Classroom research has often been called Action Research, even though both terms are not exact synonyms. Action research was introduced in the 1940s by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (Dörnyei, 2007, p.191).

The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of **action-research**, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and **research leading to social action**. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice. (Lewin, 1946, reproduced in Lewin 1948, pp. 202-203 – **my emphasis**)

According to Allright & Bailey (1991), action research is an approach to classroom research based on intervention and observation, which leads to intervention again (pp. 41-42). Action Research is a specific process for problem-solving, verification and discovery (Cohen & Manion, 1980, p. 178). Kemmis (1985) offers a clear definition:

Action research is a form of **self-reflective** enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations **to improve** the rationality and justice of a) their own social or educational practices, b) their understanding of these practices, and c) the situations in which the practices are carried out. (p. 140, **my emphasis**)

Kelly (1999) presents two definitions that reinforce this focus on improvement:

Action Research has been defined as 'the systematic study of attempts to improve educational practice by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of these actions' (Ebbutt, 1983), and as 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it' (Elliott, 1981 in Kelly, A.V., 1999, p. 119).

The main difference between classroom research and action research is that the latter is oriented towards implementing new classroom activities and 'self-reflection'. Traditionally, only research carried out by the teacher him/herself was considered 'action research' (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 191). Classroom research is a general term for the hermeneutic activity of research within a classroom, and in our case, with an orientation to improve understanding and explanation of the reality of classrooms and language learning. So whereas all action research in the classroom is classroom research; not all classroom research is action research.

There are many action research models, mainly Elliott (1981); Kemmis (1983); Ebbutt (1983). As Hopkins (1993) points out, action research started for professional development purposes with a clear practical nature for the improvement of teaching and learning (p. 40). Classroom research, on the other hand, assumes a different character when it is the result of a quest for intellectual credibility and validity. According to Dörnyei (2007), there are several reasons that have prevented Action Research developing any further. These have to do with the teacher's conditions of employment, particularly: time, incentives and professional support (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 192). Rossiter states that "the majority of language teachers have minimal time for course preparation and reflection and even less opportunity to read the journals or research manuals to which they might have access" (p. 40). She has also called for attention to the downplaying in published reports of complications related to the practice of classroom research in general.

As Dörnyei maintains, the goal of action research is to activate links between teachers and researchers (p. 194) in order to establish a dialogue that is fruitful to either side. McKay (2006) argues that classroom research is involved in producing sensible L2 teaching, and evaluating teaching techniques (pp. 2-3). Allright & Bailey (1991) maintain that action research is one of the three approaches to classroom research based on intervention and observation (p. 42). The other two would be experimental research and naturalistic research, based on control plus intervention and observation and understanding respectively (p. 41). In any case, Action Research and Classroom Research are terms that have been used in a non-systematic way and can be considered interchangeable, with the slight nuance that action research has a more practical emphasis whereas classroom research does not need to inform practice on an immediate basis.

Most of the research tools employed within classroom research come from the field of ethnography (Guthrie, 1981, p. 10), which came into the field of SLA through the sociolinguistic tradition (Wei & Moyer, 2007, p. 4). Ethnography originated in the 1920s, mainly within the discipline of cultural anthropology, using fieldwork to offer descriptions and explanations of the

subject under study, whether it is a community, a language or a person. It is a socio-critical method founded on the principle that all the aspects of a system cannot be accurately understood independently from each other (Hammersley, 1993, p. 133). Echoing Kurt Lewin's (1951) application of this premise, behaviour is determined by the totality of an individual's situation (p. 240). It involves analytical and critical analysis at all stages (Wei & Moyer, 2007, p. 18). The classic examples of ethnographic research in education are the study conducted by Becker (1961) *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School* and more recently Boyer (1983) and Goodlad (1984). However, the massive nature of the task deters many educators from replicating and formulating new projects (Wiersma, 1991, p. 236). In Applied Linguistics, studies such as Roberts (2001) and Schieffeling and Ochs (1986) support this view of language learning as a social practice. In SLA, ethnography has been welcomed into the areas of analysis of classroom discourse and school learning; Duff (2002); Rampton (1995); Van Lier (1988); Watson-Gegero (1997); Harklau (2005). As Toohey confirms (2008), ethnography has made a great impact in language education in the last decade (p. 10). As papers with a focus on identities, practices and language learning have cropped up in all corners of the world, the task of carrying out a literature review has become gargantuan in the last few years.

Based on the scientific method, traditional research tends to idealize an archetype of student by focusing on some variables and neglecting others. With ethnography, researchers may choose to focus on some variables but always bearing in mind that many other variables come into play. Drawing on this, research should not isolate elements from the 'topology', 'psychology' and 'sociology' of the situation. Ethnography takes an interpretive stance, attempting to discern how people behave, their beliefs and reasons in a situation seen as a socially constructed reality (Wei & Moyer, 2007, p. 250). The reality of a classroom can be then described as a social network under constant change. Gelles and Levine (1999) define 'social network' as "a web-like pattern of relationships among individuals" (p. 207). They stress the dynamic nature of social networks (p. 273). This dynamism is influenced by external aspects but also by internal perspectives such as the diverse 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6) to which each of the participants believe they belong. The actual classroom always carries in its core these 'imagined communities' interacting through the desire of each student to create a situation in which s/he is more comfortable. It is suitable to extend Anderson's concept to the classroom environment because the reality of the university classrooms under study was that fellow classmates, teacher and tutors never got to know one another much as a group and their interaction was mainly based on the beliefs and images that they had developed of each another. According to Lewin (1948), once a group is established there is an interdependence of fate. A group does not come into being because their members are necessarily similar. Rather, a group is established when people realize that their fate depends on the fate of the group as a whole (Brown, 1988, p. 28)

One other main difference between traditional and ethnographic research is the stance the researcher takes. Depending on the status of the researcher as an insider or outsider to the situation under research, the quality of the research is radically affected. As Carr and Kemmis point out, an ethnographer is always viewed as a participant observer. In this sense, the concept of 'teacher as researcher' fully fits the requirements for the ethnographic investigation. Sitton (1980) and Strahan (1983) endorse the profitable position of the teacher as an ethnographer. In fact, one of the teacher's roles is already that of classroom observer (Kantor, 1982, p. 305). So the professional teacher has by trade already developed significant experience in observing the situation in any given classroom. However, the increasing demands on teachers' time and the increasing number of administrative tasks that fall upon modern teachers will, in the best case scenario, inevitably foster collaboration with other researchers instead of promoting research conducted solely by themselves (Wiersma, 1991, p. 237).

The concept of teacher as researcher does not imply a metamorphosis of the teacher into a research-exclusive position. On the other hand, a teacher-researcher is a professional of teaching who has extended his/her mission to include critical and academic reflection upon his profession (Hopkins, 1993, p. 1). Behind this participatory principle lies the belief that participation aids in understanding behaviour and thought, which radically opposes the positivist rationalist attitude of the scientific method and acknowledges the observer's paradox as a given in any kind of research (Hammersley, 1993, p. 235). Besides, research inside of a classroom improves participant responsibility and increases the energy and dynamism in the learning environment (Hopkins, 1993, p. 2).

Summing up, an ethnographic classroom research conducted by the teacher could be defined as a socio-critical practice that attempts to influence social change and transformation through reflection on practice on the part of the participants.

The obvious weakness of ethnography and by proxy, classroom research is that as soon as you attempt to incorporate the results of a case study into another classroom situation, they may not hold in any kind of practical way. Generalization is not the forte of this type of research. Classroom research is, indeed, a radically context-dependent inquiry (Kochis, 1995). Subsequently, if generalizability is not a given, traditional forms of assessing research cannot strictly apply to classroom ethnographic research.

On the other hand, reliability depends on the scope for replication (Wiersma, 1991, p. 239). Since ethnographic research depends greatly on a given context, the duplication of ethnographic studies is not a simple task. Even though the study may be applied in different contexts, the results may not only differ but they could easily have opposite results. Goetz and LeCompte (1982) emphasize that replication of an ethnographic study relies mainly on a very detailed account so that the researcher that replicates the study has enough details to reconstruct a very similar situation (p. 217). This is what they

call external reliability. In order to establish scientific criteria for this type of research, they theorize another type of reliability, which they call 'internal'. A study can be internally reliable depending on the degree of consistency in matching data with results.

Some theorists have felt the need to search for other alternative assessment criteria. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered the concept of 'trustworthiness' as a substitute for 'validity' (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 57). They assess the trustworthiness of a qualitative research based on credibility (as the truth value), transferability (as applicability of results), dependability (consistency of findings) and confirmability (neutrality). Also, Maxwell concentrated on the five components of validity: descriptive (factual accuracy), interpretive (peer review), theoretical (framework) generalizability and evaluative (assessment in terms of usefulness, practicability and desirability).

The concern for research validity and reliability has created a certain resistance against accepting the validity of the findings of these kinds of research mechanisms. However, the dependency of this type of research in the context and the blatant presence of 'subjectivity' – whether it is the researcher's or the participants' or both - call for a decline in these traditional concepts and the acceptance of open-ended data and conclusions in a post-positivist academic world concerned more with a world of possibilities than with the tradition of stone-carved truths. The role of ethnographic research is that of cultural description and interpretation (Wiersma, 1991, p. 243).

Another of the weaknesses quoted by the detractors of ethnography is the range of methodologies. There is no single and unique methodology available to study language classrooms and acquisition in general (Tarone, 1994, p. 10). The choice of methods is one of the main issues to consider before drawing up a classroom research project and it depends on the theoretical framework adopted for the phenomena in question (Wei & Moyer, 2007, p. 18). The earlier emphasis on observation schedules has been outmoded by an increase in the use of discourse analysis (Allright & Bailey, 1991, p. 61). Classroom research methods vary. They can be qualitative, quantitative, descriptive and/or experimental. We decided to carry out a qualitative instrumental case study[3] because our research was interpretive in nature. Our study is mainly descriptive and it was definitely an experimental classroom practice at the time that it was carried out. Case studies are defined as "a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period" (Gerring, 2006, p. 18). Instead of using wide samples and applying a strict set of rules to examine a few variables, our case study involves an in-depth examination of several students from a small set of different Spanish courses at the same university and observations carried out in a different setting: an English class in a local secondary school. The case study format provided us with a systematic way of observing events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results.

Case studies should not be confused with qualitative research as they can be based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. According to Flick, qualitative research is directed towards studying particular cases in their temporal and local distinctiveness and it departs from people's activities in their local milieu (Gerring, 2005, p. 30). Flick (2002) quotes Habermas (1907) and Malinowski (1916) as the precursors of qualitative research. Whoever started it, qualitative research has been present throughout the 20th century especially in the field of social sciences. As Van Lier points out, case studies have been a very fruitful method in SLA and Applied linguistics for the study of many complex processes over time (Hinkel, 2005, p. 387). A qualitative study must have four essential features: a variety of methods and theories, recognition and analysis of different perspectives, reflections of research as a product of knowledge and variety of approaches and methods (p. 15). Our study fits in those parameters and we are especially interested in the third item for the purposes of this Ph.D. dissertation.

In the 1990s, qualitative research returned to a study of oral empirical studies locally and timely-placed (Flick, 2002, p. 29). Even though, qualitative research nowadays is rarely questioned in general, qualitative studies are sometimes condemned as non-scientific and therefore unacceptable. When the study under survey was carried out, applying adequate paradigms and methods, this criticism came as a response to the study from a restrictive view of the scientific approach, by which all that is not measurable is not worthy of study (Kaplan, 1964, p. 206). Instead of considering qualitative and quantitative research as the opposite extremes of a dichotomy, Wiersma (1991) proposed to see both types of research as a continuum.

Table 9 – Characteristics of the Qualitative – Quantitative Research Continuum in Education – (Wiersma, 1991, p. 15)

Figure 1.4
Characteristics of the Qualitative-Quantitative Research Continuum in Education

Understanding Social Phenomena	Determining Relationships, Effects, and Causes
Holistic Inquiry	Focused on Individual Variables
Context-Specific	Context-Free (Generalizations)
Observer-Participant	Detached Role of Researcher
Narrative Description	Statistical Analysis

⟵————————————————————⟶

QUALITATIVE   QUANTITATIVE

Ethnographic   Experimental

Historical   Quasi-experimental

                          Survey
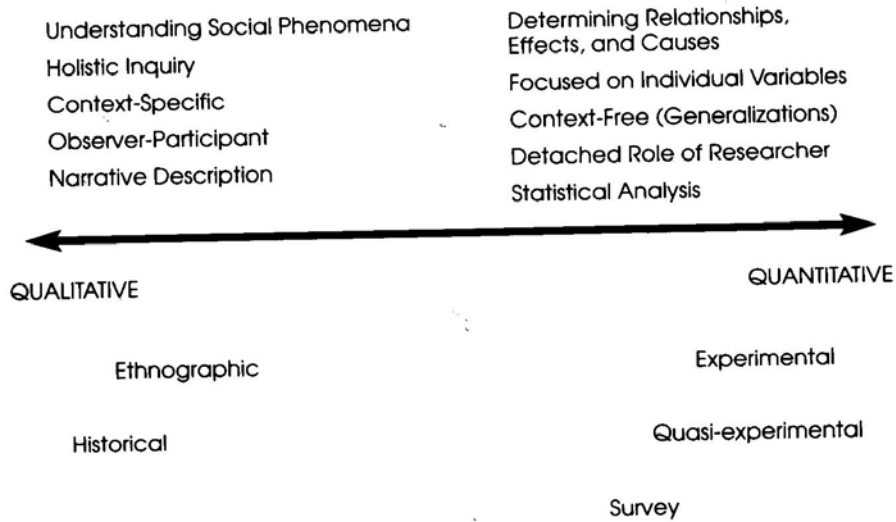
> Qualitative and quantitative research have their own characteristics, but as applied to educational research the distinction is more on a continuum than a dichotomy.

We were very aware of the advantages and disadvantages of this type of study from the beginning. We accumulated multiple sources of data through rich research carried out in a short and intensive timeframe. We also anticipated the possibility of encountering 'extreme cases', which would become the focus for further investigation – and called for urgent action. Due to the small number of participants and the contextualization of our project, it was clear to us that we were not going to engage in theory building through the process of generalization of our results. As Gerring (2006) explains, case studies are best suited for the attainment of 'insights' (p. 19), which can later be compared, and provide relevant information for other concrete situations. However, in the line of theory-building, case studies have been recently used as a means for testing hypotheses, especially in education. They have also been used as teaching methods, e.g. problem-based learning. In these instances they have often received the name of *critical incidents* (Stake, 1995, p. 20). Consequently, case studies cannot be primarily ruled out for theoretical purposes either, since not all theory-building is carried out through a process of analogical generalization.

We were also very aware of the limited availability of the subjects under research and our limited access to them, typical of the case study. Another disadvantage in this project was the training in the skills required for the techniques that we used. We had to factor in time for training in interviewing, observing, transcribing and reporting skills, both for the researcher and the student-research assistants. With such a variety of people in the data-collecting team, we were also acutely aware of the presence of bias at many levels and instead of trying to counteract it, we decided to accept it as a given and to try to minimize it by making it transparent. Identifying their own bias, researchers create an open and honest narrative (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 60).

Another issue that case studies bring about is the concern for ethical research. Most universities have developed codes of practice in terms of research ethics, especially on human subjects, as it was in our case. The fact that the 'problem' subjects, who are targeted by research of a practical nature are more vulnerable, calls for the creation of research agreements between the researchers and the participants in the study but also with the institution in or from which the research is going to be carried out. Ethical forms as simple as the signed voluntary consent are as old as the Nuremberg Code (1949) (Berg, 1999, p. 201). In order to ensure that the participant is clear about the research agreement, most ethical boards have introduced the notion of informed consent (p. 213). A written consent should at least cover a reasonable explanation of the purpose and procedures of the research, a description of any risks and benefits to the participants, a statement of confidentiality, a statement of voluntarity and that participants can withdraw with no penalty, an offer to give more information and to receive a copy of the results and finally signatures of participant and researcher (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 70-71).

However, as Johnson and Christensen (2004) point out, ethics go beyond the signing of a written consent. Several other issues have to be carefully borne in mind and clarified when educational research is carried out with human subjects (p. 111). They single out eight important issues for consideration: the amount of shared information; the limits of closeness and intimacy, or in other words, relationships established with the participants; data collecting methods; anonymity[4]; handling of the data collected, especially in terms of video recordings; ownership of the data; sensitive information; and testing and its impact on participants (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 65-66). The notion of voluntarity has also been criticized, because subjects can be coerced into taking part in a project for various reasons. Depending on the context in which the institution is located, the code of ethics may vary substantially and it is very important to become familiar with concepts and practices.[5]

Outside of these legal ethical issues, Dörnyei (2007) elaborates on the matter of 'researcher integrity'. There are few references in the literature to any definition of researcher integrity. Mainly, there are three areas where Dörnyei feels there should be especial attention: Falsification as the fabrication or misrepresentation of any aspect of the research; use of their professional status for fraudulent purposes; and the attempt to report their findings to all relevant participants (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 67). Shohamy (2004) highlights this aspect of ethics by reminding researchers of the cost-benefit balance of research for participants, who have spent time and energy in helping us (p. 730).

Qualitative research encourages the triangulation of methods. Triangulation is a term, used in social sciences since the 1970s. It is used regularly to indicate the multiplicity of methods used in a case with a view to check the results several times from different perspectives or using different techniques. It has also been called cross-examination. The validity of using several methods, then, arises from the concurrence of results no matter what techniques are used to elicit them. By combining different methods of data-collecting, our study hopes to overcome the fundamental bias emerging from the observers or the techniques used to obtain these insights (Berg, 1999, p. 5). In chapter two, through a theoretical interdisciplinary approach, we aimed to provide our project with a richer array of concepts and a means to verify their truth from different perspectives. Now, in chapter 3, we will show how by combining several tools and techniques, we aim at a more substantive picture of the language classroom (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1996, p. 117).

For this case study we have mainly used the ethnographic tools of class observation and recording; teaching and learning diaries; and interviews and questionnaires. The choice for these techniques was based in the open-ended nature of our research question: what actually happens in a language classroom from a student point of view? Observation - from teachers and student/teaching assistants - was key to understanding the situation and the few recordings that we carried out also shed some interesting light onto the discussion table. Through the use of teaching and learning diaries, we wanted to magnify our lens to observe classrooms through the eyes of many students and a few teachers, and to understand their focus of attention. And finally, the interviews and questionnaires, both directed to students and teachers, contributed to gathering more in-depth information about student perceptions, believes and activities regarding the classroom and language learning in general, and also teacher approaches and reflective patterns.

3.1.1 Class observation and recording

Our main objective in these sections is to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the methods outlined above in order to systematically define their scope. It is not the purpose of this chapter to develop a history of classroom observation and recording throughout the 20th and 21st century. We will not describe in detail our practice with these two techniques in this section either (see section 3.2).

Observation, as Entwistle & Nisbet (1970) highlight, is not a gift or a natural ability (p. 15). It is a practical skill that needs extensive background knowledge and deep understanding but also a certain ability to focus on significant or 'marked' events and an acute sense of analysis with a good dose of original thinking. Observation is probably one of the oldest methods that exist in the sciences. Its history has given it a bad name, mainly because of the presence of a bias through the subjective eyes of the observer, but if we take the issue of bias as a given, no matter how refined the observational tool is, and focused on the advantages of using observation, we would realize that it is a very interesting technique to use in order to gain an insight into the reality under study. For once, observation requires careful planning, training and piloting and it takes a lot of practice to use the technique at its best.

The issue of time is a primary concern when seeking to carry out classroom observation. You will not get many opportunities to carry out observation. As we have previously pointed out, the ethical protocol and the time-consuming activity of obtaining permissions restricts your freedom when you are trying to access a situation to observe. These time constraints prevent the discovery of natural patterns of development and force the researcher to clarify the reason and the purpose of the observation as soon as possible (Bell, 2003, p. 98).

The observers in this project were all novice, including myself. We all took upon ourselves the task of reading about how previous observations had been carried out, examining existing observation protocols and having a lot of discussions about how we would or should carry out our classroom observations. The discussions themselves provided the team of observers with a range of perspectives and reflective attitudes about how we analyzed and took notes in a given situation and encouraged a collaborative attitude both in the observing and interpreting tasks.

Probably one of the main obstacles of observation, especially in the case of the teacher or student researcher, is the familiarity with the situation and with the participants involved in it. Non-participant observers will always attempt to distance themselves from the group being observed (Bell,

2003, p. 88). External observers normally make a few attempts to understand the context and point of view of the participants, whether they are students, teachers or other people present in the classroom environment (Hammersley, 1993, p. 23). The desire for objectivity in external observer situations can favour simplification of the complex environment of a classroom. The use of pre-established mechanisms and concepts may obstruct the development of theories that acknowledge this complexity. This perspective supports the premise identified in service and community learning situations that action should be taken on the ideas and needs identified by the community and that observation relies on the principle that a participant's previous knowledge is key to the perfect unfolding of a classroom situation.

The main risk of participant observation is that by spending a long time in the company of the subjects who are being studied, we may become 'peer blind'. In other words, being familiar with a certain environment may cause a tendency to overlook aspects of people's behaviour that would be salient to a non-participant observer, completely new to the situation. In both cases, whether the observer is a participant or an external agent, their role is to watch and record in the most unobtrusive way possible and to interpret the data as coherently as possible.

The observer's attitude is crucial to the ultimate results. A conflictive attitude can destroy the chance of learning about the participants in the study. Berg (1999) offers the adjective 'neutral' to qualify the attitude of the desirable observer. Neutrality does not mean agreement or acceptance of the perceptions of the participants but it does mean empathy and respect (Berg, 1999, p. 91). The researcher engages in the study with certain motivational factors. For example, some may conduct research to offer positive steps towards an ideal situation. Some simply study certain settings because of their accessibility. The transparency of the observer's goals and biases helps in the description of the research process. "It is important to remember that over-rationalized, highly objectified, nearly sterile methodological accounts of field work efforts are not complete descriptions of the research enterprise" (p. 93). The purpose of observer's statements is not anecdotal but substantive evidence and they guide the reader of the study.

The presence of an observer in a classroom always creates a certain level of disturbance. This disturbance varies in terms of quality depending on the participant or non-participant status of the observer. While non-participant observers offer a desirable degree of distance between themselves and the subjects under study; they may be seen as intruders and foster student or teacher inhibition, thus significantly altering the situation under study. Participant observers may overlook crucial elements but also provide an acceptable degree of intrusion. This degree of intrusion varies according to the status of the observer in the community under study and the degree of distance to the different participants in

the classroom. In any case, there is a certain impact that the presence of an observer creates on a given situation and it has to be borne in mind when describing the findings of the observations. This phenomenon has been known as the Hawthorne effect or observer's paradox - the former coined by Roethlisberger & Dickenson (1939) and the latter by William Labov (1970) [for a revision of the concept, see 1997].

The process of establishment of a non-participant observer in a situation is a tricky one as well. Even for a participant observer, there is a need for justification of the change of role in order to ensure acceptance by the rest of the participants. A non-participant observer, though, first needs to develop strategies to gain entry and be accepted; later he needs to strike certain agreements and be aware of the participants' desire to be guides and informants. It is advisable to ensure that the group of guides and informants is large enough in order to improve accessibility and cooperation of the participants (Berg, 1999, p. 95). As you would expect, indigenous observers, or observers who are members of the group to be studied (even though they may not be participant in the situation under research), present certain advantages in terms of access and acceptance (p. 96).

According to Berg, observation develops in four stages:

1. Taking in the physical setting.

2. Developing relationships with participants

3. Tracking, observing and eavesdropping.

4. Locating subgroups and stars. (p. 104).

These four stages take time and have a natural rhythm depending on the context in question. With regards to developing relationships with participants, it is very difficult – and sometimes unadvisable - to become invisible. However, Stoddart (1986) clarified systematically the issue of invisibility within observational events (pp. 110-113). He concluded that time has an effect on visibility. Participant focus on the observer tends to fade with time. Also, unobtrusive, detached attitudes are regarded as innocuous and may help accelerate the observer's invisibility. Although, on the other hand, inclusive detached attitudes may also accelerate their introduction into the classroom environment. He realized that through personalization, the research element of the relationship between observer and participants becomes less of a concern. By hiding real research interests, it presumes that the real interests will be acted normally. And finally, he concluded that by hiding identity as an observer and by conducting covert observations, the observer is socially invisible. However, the last of these options is the most dangerous ethically and should be avoided (Stoddart, 1986, p. 99).

Instead of a participant or non-participant observer, we may decide for non-human observation. Recording is one of the most advantageous ways to observe a situation because it witnesses the non-verbal elements of a situation (Allright & Bailey, 1991, p. 18). Tapes and transcripts of recordings are an asset for accurate and precise records of interaction and discourse. A film monitors both conversation and interaction. When done overtime, it can trace development as well. Although recording, whether it is audio or video, is not a transparent method of observation either. It is impossible to record everything so depending on what we aim to find out with the technique, we need to decide on the focus of the camera and even the type of camera we need. Zuengler (1998) have also argued that even though technology has enhanced our visibility, it has also created 'blind spots' (p. 4).

Recording is also a tricky issue in terms of permissions. Video materials are classified as 'personal data' in most countries, therefore, it is essential to bear in mind what Wall (2007) calls the three Ps: *Privacy, Permission and Purpose* (p. 66). As we have discussed already, a written consent has to be obtained before recording is allowed in an educational institution. Each of the participants needs to sign a written consent, as well as the institution. It does not mean that if the consent of every single participant is not achieved we cannot record a situation. Some students may agree to be out of the range of the camera, as it happened in our study, and still participate in the video recording but only with their voices. This example illustrates how recording is neither an easy solution nor an alternative to observation. The main disadvantages are the expense of the technology and the time-consuming task of editing and viewing the lengthy materials that it can produce. The issue of disturbance and inhibition are also facts that needs to be borne in mind (Hopkins, 1993, p. 62). Students and teachers react differently to the presence of a camera than to the presence of an observer.

The task of observation does not start when the observer arrives in the setting. Any research about the institution, the participants and the setting can be handy. "The central component of the ethnographic research is the ethnographic account" (Berg, 1999, p. 107). The task of taking field notes depends on a personal approach. Some people prefer to write their notes after they have abandoned the situation. Others take secret notes and later develop full records. It is important to remember that the record and transcription of events is the first step in interpreting and analysis (Wei & Moyer, 2007, p 197). The general recommendation is to record everything as close as possible: details from the setting, verbatim quotes, and any other way to describe the situation as colourfully as possible, which would aid memory when we come back to the record of that situation. Opinions and other strong feelings about a situation are also excellent aids in transporting us back to the situation observed. It is important to remember their status as 'emotional data' but they should not be discarded (p. 198). Memo[6] writing on the field note provides an immediate illustration for an idea (Corbin &, Strauss, 1998, p. 108). The

task of observation is not finished either, when the observation has finished and the records are completed. The process of review is as important as the observation itself with regards to giving an accurate report.

Observation in ethnographic research is popularly unstructured (Wiersma, 1991, p. 229), but there are many schemes and schedules for structured observation. The most structured observation protocol alone will not be able to capture the whole picture of classroom life. However, there have been some significant efforts to achieve good quality snapshots. The main tenet of observation protocols is to establish a range of categories that allow the observer to record the situation without the use of lengthy comments (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 180). Coding conventions have been developed for this task. They vary greatly but some common categories can be found, such as 'the grouping format of participants' (pair work, individual…); content/topic of the lesson, 'interaction features' and target linguistic area (p. 181).

Among these protocols there are three that are widely used. The FLINT (Foreign Language Interaction Analysis) was published by Moskowitz in 1971 and is an immediate development on the FIAC, [discussed previously]. This protocol needs real-time coding in three second periods. It analyses twenty two categories, divided into teacher talk, student talk and miscellaneous. The COLT (Communication Orientation Language Teaching) published by Spada and Fröhlich in 1985 came to fulfil longitudinal investigations of communicative competence and language teaching at the OISE (Ontario Institute of Studies in Education). Divided into two sections, the first deals with classroom events recorded in real time in one minute periods. It has forty eight category columns to deal with activity type, participant organization, content, student modality and materials. The second part focuses on communicative features such as use of target language, information gap, sustained speech, reaction to code or message, incorporation of preceding utterances, discourse initiation and relative restriction of linguistic form. It is organized into more than thirty categories. Its complexity can only be dealt with using recordings. MOLT (Motivation Orientation in Language Teaching) was developed by Dörnyei and Guilloteaux to investigate aspects of teacher motivational practice and student behaviour (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 183). The categories are based on generating motivation, encouraging self-assessment and motivated behaviour.

Other protocols in use are the FOCUS (Foci for Observing Communications Used in Settings), the Embryonic Category System and Sinclair and Coulthard's system of analysis. FOCUS concentrates on five characteristics of communication: who, what pedagogical purpose, what mediums, how are these mediums used, what content (Allright & Bailey, 1991, pp. 106-07). The Embryonic system is divided into three subsections, which are then subdivided in the following events: pedagogical

moves (17), social skills (13), rhetorical acts (14). Sinclair and Coulthard's model consists of four ranks: lesson, transaction, exchange and move. Each of the ranks are classified according to the elements of structure and classes (types). All of them require some level of training and experimentation with the protocol. The more complicated the code is, the more practice and study it needs, especially if the concepts used for the categories rely heavily on the theory that created the protocol.

Observation is definitely a very versatile method for the description of the context. Structured coding protocols add systematic representation to the research process and can be analyzed quantitatively. Unstructured observation carefully carried out explores the complexities and individualities of each classroom as a new situation and enriches our vision of the phenomenon under study.

The evident weakness of observation in general is that not everything is recordable. Mental processes and cause/effect links are not accessible. Therefore, all observation, including the most structured protocol, is subject to interpretation. This strong interpretive presence is what has gained observation a bad name as a scientific technique. However, in conjunction with other techniques, it can provide a base for reality checks and a memory-activating narrative that acknowledges the observer's point of view as a possible world among the many other points of view available of the same situation. If the other techniques help us elicit the point of view of the other participants in the classroom situation, we may have found an effective mixed approach for the accurate description of what goes on in a given classroom.

Field notes from observation in the form of a subjective research journal provide a way of reporting day-to-day reflections and reactions to classroom problems (Hopkins. 1993, p. 59). Even though they may lack specific information, they let us examine a particular issue over a period of time, providing the general impressions of the classroom climate. This ongoing description of individuals and settings constitutes first-hand information and can help the researcher remember the situation in question. While they will not be suitable for the transcription of conversation, they may act as an aide-memoire by providing examples or events that struck the observer at the time of the actual research. The thoughts and feelings of the teacher as a researcher are data to a certain extent because the purpose, enthusiasm and affective state of the participants have an impact in the success or failure of the learning situation (Wall, 2007, p. 66).

3.1.2 Teaching and Learning Journals

In addition to the research journal - recommended for all researchers - teaching and learning journals provide a basis for the triangulation of methods. Journals are considered as all types of narrative discourse in which participants explore issues on a given topic. They can be personal stories, expression of desires or reflections on past events. Diaries or journals have been used in social research (psychology) since the 1970s. In Applied Linguistics, these documents have been used in research since the 1980s to gain insights into the personal experience of language learning of learners and parents. Teaching journals have popularly been used as part of teacher training programmes too (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 156).

According to Moon (1999b), there are slight differences between what we call journals, logs and diaries (p. 2). She is trying to establish a systematic terminology for the different types of narrative that are used for research or teaching purposes. A journal concentrates on registering the teaching/learning that happens; a log is a record of events as they happened; and finally, a diary fosters a retrospective reflection on the events (Moon, 1999b, p. 3). According to this definition, the narratives that we collected for this project from some of the students and teacher would fall under the category of diary and journal, since the participants were asked to record their experiences retrospectively, often with specific self-reflective questions and with an emphasis on the learning that occurred through classroom activities. Moon has isolated eighteen purposes for journal writing that can be summarized in these seven categories as highlighting learning from experience: enhancing metacognition and critical thinking; increasing engagement and reflection; for personal development and skills; fostering communication and self-expression; as a means of assessment and finally, supporting a research project (p. 7). When this project was designed, our intentions had an element of each of these seven categories.

The purpose of carrying out a diary study is twofold. Bailey and Ochsner (1983) defined diary studies as accounts of second language experience recorded in the first person. They highlighted that the advantage of diary study is that the affective factor and the subjective perception of the process could be reported (Bailey & Ochsner, 1983, p. 189). First of all, an insight into perceptions of the language learning process and classroom interaction is gained by the personal account of each student. Secondly, they are a way of validating and systematizing affective experiences of learning.

Teacher diaries provide a record of classroom experiences, observations and reflections. With their collection of descriptions and analyses they capture the essence of what is happening from a particular point of view. As a testimony, they allow teachers and researchers to travel down a time

tunnel into their classrooms in order to review and evaluate their experiences over a period of time (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, pp. 36-27).

In this sense, there is only one main difference between a student and a teacher diary, and that is the professional aspect of the latter (Bell, 2003, p. 80). Diary writing presents a clear advantage against observation as it is a continuous, habit-forming activity. The habit of diary writing allows access to the description of aspects of daily live that are not possible to capture using other methods. As a result, diaries cover a longer time span than observation reports. In that sense, even if they are highly subjective, they can target developmental patterns better.

However advantageous diary studies seem, though, there are also difficulties to encounter. There is a very important aspect that needed to be considered when using this method. The reality of 'learning diaries' in our classrooms nowadays refers to requested narratives. It is another activity set in a class, whether it is assessed or not, and with a clear purpose. The use of 'personal diaries' for research purposes is unethical and many times impracticable. This nature of 'requested narrative' takes away slightly from the richness of a spontaneous piece of writing and this aspect needs to be acknowledged. The fact that the diary is requested by a person 'structurally more powerful' (teacher, researcher, principal…etc.) than the student in question calls for extreme caution in the way that these studies are carried out as well. This requested nature can affect the way the diary is written.

There are two other important consequences of writing a diary. The fact that we are writing a diary about a habit or a type of behaviour will cause us to alter this behaviour somehow. Engaging in diary writing is always a form of self-reflection and in the best of cases, self-reflection leads to a change – through a heightened awareness of the situation in question. Diaries push participants to think about events and behaviours in a systematic way, especially if we set topics for them to explore directly or indirectly in our classrooms. Taking part in this reflective process, students become co-researchers by providing insider accounts of their experience of learning (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 157).

Journals tend to record immediate events, thus reducing inaccuracy from lack of clear memory of a specific event. Traditionally, diary tasks have involved giving paper and pencil to the respondents and sometimes providing them with a short questionnaire or a topic for a short verbal account. In the last few years, these diaries have been replaced by means of electronic collection, especially the use of free private blogs. It is important to emphasize the word 'private' because of the ethical issues a public blog would raise. Information technology has introduced advanced software mechanisms for these purposes that are extremely useful and sometimes more appealing to a reluctant student community (p. 157).

Student journals supply a rich insight into the student's world and experiences. As a powerful tool for triangulation, student diaries provide a fascinating contrast to the field notes taken by the observer and the teacher journal. They explain feedback from a student perspective and their random structure focuses on a specific teaching strategy or relates to general classroom issues. In free student journals, student can talk about lessons, or identify individual problems. Their reflective nature involves students in the improvement of the quality of their own learning but also the quality of teaching and of the class in general (Mills, 2007, p. 70). This aspect was one of the most important motivations of students in this project.

The main obstacle when setting a learning journal as part of a classroom activity is the fact that journals are not an established practice in many schools.[7] Also, journal writing may be too demanding for some students with difficulties to record their thoughts and feelings. Some students may not have had many chances to express their own thoughts in writing and those who have may be inhibited to discuss their feelings with the teacher or other students. (Hopkins, 1993, p. 65).

The second obstacle is that diaries are a very time-consuming, demanding task on the part of the participant. In order to produce interesting data, there must be a certain level of commitment and engagement that not all student learners are capable of, due to social and/or affective constraints. The students that are capable of such a commitment are normally those students that probably need less improvement in their learning in general. This is a problem that diary studies have not completely overcome yet. A solution has been put forward by the use of incentives. In this project, students were rewarded by the mere writing of the diary, no matter the quality of their entries. Incentives such as these are introduced to motivate the weaker students to have access to 'easy marks' and make them more engaged in their learning. The question of assessment in learning diaries is a thorny issue. If diaries are assessed as part of classroom practice, their purpose may be inadequate. Research has also found that the length and depth of diary entries has generally been found to decrease over time (Gibson, 1995, p. 70) as well as declining during stressful times (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 159), which may be the most interesting periods of time in terms of research importance. Thus, it is obvious that diary studies are not a sufficient means on their own either. A way to gauge this lack of information during stressful periods of time would be to carry out follow-up interviews (p. 159).

Summing up, diaries create an intellectual space for reflection and independent learning (Moon, 199b, p. 11). Both for teachers and students, the use of a diary can help in terms of self-awareness and awareness of the process in which they are involved (McKay, 2006, p. 68). As introspective methods they shed light on affective and instructional factors. They acknowledge a

personal voice that traditional academic research tends to ignore. Data-collection in this form is very accessible and it is easy to train people in it (Bailey, 1991, p. 88). Teaching and learning journals display a systematic attempt to reflect on practice by celebrating subjectivity involved and reflection (Mills, 2007, p. 70). They are a holistic tool that combines the affective, the cognitive and metacognitive aspects of teaching and learning. Journals are helpful in making the learning experience personal and they lead towards deep – as opposed to surface or strategic (Entwistle, 1997, p. 19) - learning and integrative strategies (Moon, 199b, p. 3).

3.1.3   Interviews and questionnaires

For this project we have also carried out interviews as a means of triangulation.
Interviews provide good verbal retrospective reports from a student perspective but unlike student journals, they are guided and the researcher can focus on the responses to the questions that s/he has in mind. Interviewing is a common practice of western social life and that is why it works so smoothly, because it belongs to our cultural common knowledge (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 134).

Undoubtedly one of the problems with which interviews presents us is the issue of power relations. A common issue shared with the methods of observation, and indirectly in the diaries, is that the establishment of healthy power relations is essential in the face-to-face interview. The asymmetry between the interviewer and the interviewee can create challenges that may obstruct the dialogue and render the interview useless (McKay, 2006, p. 54). All interviews in our case were conducted by fellow students, whether from a higher course or the same course but from a different class. This created a more relaxed atmosphere but also presented some problems, mainly, since the interviewer-students were also the research assistants and not the researchers *per se* the interviews neither completely flowed freely nor were they directed to the specific issues that could have been more expertly spotted by the focused mind of the researcher.

Using structured interviews allows the interviewer to ask the same questions to all the participants. This kind of interview helps to get consistent quantification of results and answers to a specific question (Mills, 2007, p 64). Some have considered structured interviews to be a form of oral questionnaire (Wallace, 1998, p. 146). However, the absence of a person with whom to discuss things is what mainly defines the questionnaire experience. Questionnaires are highly structured and reviewed. Some interviews can also be highly structured and reviewed but the human factor leaves a lot more room for surprise and personal experience than the questionnaire does. In any case, there is no such thing as an 'unstructured' interview because the necessity of a research purpose imbues the interview

with an inherent structure, whether it is a more fluid or more rigid structure. The adjective 'unstructured' here means that they do not follow a tight schedule of questions and expected answers. This type of interview contains a pre-cooked series of questions to be covered closely. The clear advantage of this type of questioning is that it provides a higher degree of comparability than the 'unstructured' or open interview, but the main obstacle is that it also loses the richness of an open conversation and ignores the covert information than the association of ideas and the inner organization of the interviewee can provide (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 135).

Hopkins (1993) highlights that interviewing can take four forms: teacher/pupil, observer/pupil, pupil/pupil and teacher/observer (p. 68). In our case, it was a mix between the second and the third options, since these research assistants were also the classroom observers. We also included a couple of teacher/observer+pupil interviews in which the teachers were interviewed and the pupils were the interviewers. These interviews developed as casual conversations with a set of questions to be introduced when it was felt it was necessary.

Wallace (1998) classifies the topics of interviews according to the following system: 1. facts/personal perceptions, 2. experiences/anecdotes, 3. opinions/preferences, 4. ideas (p. 125). Most interviews will have an instance of each of these categories but they provide a good reference system for interview analysis and classification of information.

Dörnyei gives a classification of interviews depending on their repetition as single or multiple sessions (2007, p. 135). Single interviews rarely provide a rich description of the information for which we are researching. The multiple interview process is a detailed cycle. First contact breaks the ice and starts to develop a relationship between the informant and the interviewer, but it is from the second interview onward that the focus gets clearer and the questions start receiving useful answers.

Agar (1980) suggests that interviewers have to develop a series of interviewing skills (p. 40). Hopkins (1993) names sympathy, attention, neutrality and reassuring (p. 68). Mills (2007) highlights the important and challenging phase of phrasing the question in a careful way. He recommends piloting the questions first and combining open-ended and closed questions (p. 64). It is important to avoid 'leading questions' of the type that require the informant to agree with the interviewer's point of view and also avoid the use of jargon or terminology (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 138). An interviewer should also be wary of 'double questions' such as 'did you study or go out today?' or 'presuming questions', in which the researcher has a strong opinion on a given matter and assumes everybody will feel the same way, but

also hypothetical questions of the type 'if you were a richman' (Bell, 1987, pp. 62-63). The author also reminds of the potential for offensive or sensitive issues that we may find in an interview situation (p. 64). Mills also stresses the importance of silence and wait time and the necessity of a private place to carry out the interview. Mills also includes note taking as one of the skills for interview, regardless of using a tape recorder. The notes that are taken during the interview, work as a guide and comment of the interview situation itself. He advises against constant note taking during the interview because it would detract from the establishment of a good rapport with the interviewee, which is essential (Bell, 1987, p. 65). Apart from note taking, there are many ways in which we can record data from an interview. Wallace suggests *recall, note taking* and *taping* (in Dörnyei, 2007, p. 148). Note taking is essential even in a recorded situation because some non-verbal cues are lost (Dörnyei, 2007, p 139). The establishment of a good rapport normally starts by the way the interviewer presents him/herself. Dörnyei recommends a balance between informality and formality and a non-threatening, friendly attitude towards the informant (p. 140). This is definitely easier said than done. These authors also discuss the use of probes, a very interesting technique that requires some experience at interview level. Probes are defined as clarification questions that focus on a concept given in the answer so that the informant elaborates (p. 138).

Another concept that comes in handy when carrying out interviews is the notion of focus group. A group interview is a good technique when the interaction between individuals will give an understanding of the questions asked. In conducting focus group interviews, it is necessary to keep an eye on neutrality and ensure that all participants take turns and have a say. This is probably the most time-consuming process of the interview types (Mills, 2007, p 66). Its moderation can be very challenging, especially because they tend to extend in time. Communication skills must work at their best in this interview protocol (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 146).

Time is a crucial factor to consider when we use interviews. It is important to give the participants a clear estimate of their time commitment to interviews (Wallace, 1998, p. 148) Mills (2007) praises the use of the internet to conduct non-face-to-face interviews and email through the use of questionnaires, as a way to solve time issues (p. 66). One of the advantages of emailing interviews is that the transcript has already been done, but there are also ethical issues with the confidentiality and anonymity of emails. Emailing interviews definitely shortcuts the difficulty of finding a suitable time for face-to-face talk (p. 67) and transcribing.

Questionnaires and emailed interviews provide a guide to action (Hopkins, 1993, p. 78). They are especially valuable when obtaining specific data aspects of the classroom, curriculum or teaching method because they are quick and simple (p. 72). Questionnaires have been especially used in quantitative research but they are not exclusive to this kind of research. They allow for massive amounts of data to be collected in very little time. Mills (2007) recommends avoiding lengthy questionnaires and always including an 'other comments' section (p. 68). This calls for the combination of closed and open-ended questions (p. 135), which will give us concise and systematic answers to some of the issues that the questionnaire raises but also the freedom to explore topics of student interest in the more open questions. The first thing that we need to bear in mind is the purpose of the questionnaire and the method that we want to apply to the data that we have collected through this questionnaire (p. 133). This helps us focus our mind and saves time by asking the question in a way makes the analysis simpler at a later stage. The issue of anonymity arises once again at the level of preparation of questionnaires. Even though a questionnaire may not require the person's name, some questions may elicit the person's identity through the specific queries about experiences (p. 134).

Interview and questionnaire preparation are demanding tasks. It is advisable to establish an interview guide. This guide will provide the researcher or the team of researchers with a systematic line of work that: 1. ensures that nothing is left out in the topic; 2. suggests appropriate wording of questions; 3. offers clarifications and probe questions in case they are needed; 4. lists some comments that may help the informant to respond to the questions. As Dörnyei (2007) points out, the interviewer can do with every bit of help during the interviewing process (p. 137).

In an interview schedule the first few questions are very important since they establish the character and the relationship between the two people talking. This is why, sometimes, the first few questions are not very relevant to the topic but are instead easy personal or factual questions (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 137). Regarding the content questions, Patton (2002) provides a lists of topics to ensure that we obtain a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon; mainly he suggests asking about experiences & behaviours; opinions & values; feelings; knowledge; sensory information and background or demographic information (p. 138). The final section of the interview is very important as well. The interview needs to be brought smoothly to an end. The final section should 'debrief' the topic (Kvale, 1996, p. 29), in other words, it should lead towards the friendly discussion of positive experiences and summarizing the main points touched upon. Finally, the last few questions should be open-ended. This gives a sense of 'ownership' of the interview to the informant that enhances the richness of the interview (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 138). It is vital to reinstate our gratefulness and respect at this stage and even to clarify once more the logistics of data manipulation (p. 143).

The advantages of eliciting data from interviews are twofold. On the one hand, the direct contact that happens at the interview and the fact that you can call out for relevant information. They are a great source of information to follow up problems immediately. The benefit of interviews and questionnaires is apparent when the feedback is immediate and they are relevant.

There are some other disadvantages to the use of interviews as well; they are very time-consuming and the need for recording equipment can be problematic. The subjectivity of the responses has been quoted in the literature as one of the potential drawbacks of interviews and questionnaires (Wallace, 1998, p. 127). We have argued before in the use of journals that we consider 'subjectivity' at interview level an asset and not a disadvantage because the purpose of the interview is to elicit not truths but perceptions and feelings. Hopkins (1993) also points out that the bias in interviews seems to be higher than at observations because of the level of sympathy and involvement with the interviewee (p. 69). Close relationships between the interviewer and interviewee are also discouraged. We may also wonder how representative the student or students are with which we are conducting the interview. Sampling is a complex activity and sometimes the time and space constraints of the study may not let us carry out a proper sampling of subjects. Some other times, we may not be able to achieve a good representation of student population because the subjects missing are simply not available for our research. It is therefore crucial to be transparent and honest about the limitations of the sample of participants with which we are working (Wallace, 1998, p. 128).

There is also the fact that most of us do not like responding to interviews or filling in questionnaires. The most common mistake on producing a questionnaire is to ask irrelevant questions that may deter from the whole purpose of the questionnaire, decreasing the trust of the interviewee. These two characteristics are essential if we want involvement to be successful at the level of interviews and questionnaires.

Interviews are very difficult to be carried out in some contexts. Some schools would regulate the access to this kind of activity and, like recording, they also involve the ethics of handling recorded data (Wei & Moyer, 2007, p. 101). It is recommended that interviews are transcribed and kept for private and confidential use. Even with careful treatment of questions and anonymity issues, the matter of desirability arises. As Dörnyei (2007) points out, we cannot avoid informant's expectation about the interview situation (p. 141). The interviewee will have developed some ideas of desirable and undesirable answers. In order to solve this issue, it is vital that the interviewer establishes not only a good rapport but a self-image that is less than perfect. Fontana and Frey (2005) disagree that neutrality should be achieved because interviewing goes beyond the disinterested exchange of information (p. 272). Dörnyei (2007) advocates for "a delicate balancing act […] between non-judgemental neutrality and empathetic understanding and approval" (p. 141).

Questionnaires and interviews are similar techniques for classroom investigation. However, questionnaires normally require more preparation. The absence of a person asking the questions calls for more clarity and simplicity, which in an interview could be explained by the interviewer; but in spite of the time consuming preparation process, questionnaires save the time employed in transcribing the information from our recording devices and also from carrying out the interviews themselves.

The main benefit of interviews is their flexibility (Wallace, 1998, p. 130). However, both techniques should rely on a good level of user-friendliness (p. 144). This may refer to formatting level or phrasing. After all, both techniques try to guide and enhance the participant engagement with the topic. The more accessible they are, the more engaging they will become. We tend to use interviews when we want to investigate people's perspectives in qualitative depth, whereas the questionnaire seems to be more suited for quantitative breadth (p. 151).

3.2   Methodology: Description of the Project and its Phases.

In 2002, I finished the first part of this Ph.D. program with an oral presentation for a dissertation that I wrote during the previous year. Up until then it had been a smooth process of self-discovery and rigorous bibliographic analysis through the different Ph.D. courses offered at the Department of English Philology at the University of Valladolid and the research carried out by the hand of my Ph.D. advisor for the dissertation on the area of history of the English language and dialectology in Canada, which happened to be my residence at the time. I was teaching at a third-level institution in Ontario that had become my *alma mater* with regards to the language teaching profession. After a few years of experience, I decided that it was time for a change in the specialization of my doctoral studies and I decided to shift my area of research from theoretical linguistics to aspects that were more practical to my life and to the life of my students, thus bridging my academic expertise and my professional activities.

In this effort to integrate my theoretical and practical activities, a huge bibliographical review had to be carried out, as is shown in the reference section of this thesis. Let us call this stage, the zero stage. Its focus was mainly to familiarize ourselves with the state of the question and to narrow down the topic of our research. I want to highlight this period of the project because without the constant reading and review of miscellaneous texts new and old, I would not have been able to attain the insights into the topics on which this thesis aims to shed light. Of high importance in this initial literature review process was my openness to areas of knowledge such as educational theory and current

European language policies. Without the acknowledgement of this framework, summarized in Chapter 2, the project in itself is meaningless and incomplete. This literature review started in 2001 and still goes on, and hopefully will go on, for the rest of my life. It proved to be one of more challenging periods due to the gigantic task of keeping up to date with all classroom research and language learning / teaching theories constantly being published, either in English or in Spanish. The fact that language teaching (especially of what are commonly considered Modern Languages: Spanish and English taking the lead role in the last few decades) is one of the most lucrative businesses in the world has had an impact on the sphere of research but it is not only the profitable aspect of language teaching that has motivated research on it, the fact that teaching has traditionally been considered a 'vocational' career has probably motivated the proliferation of studies, reviews and publications. On the other hand, the reverse is also true. Researchers coming from Arts faculties have traditionally found themselves in the role of teachers as a means to earn their living. Some of us have, therefore, decided to marry both purposes together and research on our teaching so that hopefully, one day, we will also teach drawing on our research.

At this early stage, one thing was clear: My thesis would deal with the issue of classroom language teaching. Up until then, as a novice teacher, I had relied immensely upon student feedback. Like many other students of English or other Philologies – if they were lucky enough -, I had been trained in the teaching of my target language. Having been educated in the Spanish Primary and Secondary Education system of E.G.B and B.U.P, I also had a good working knowledge of the linguistics of my own first language - especially when compared with students from other countries who were rarely given any working knowledge of the metalinguistics of their own native language. During my degree studies, I had spiced up my main degree with Spanish Grammar courses from the higher courses of Hispanic Philology under the 'free configuration' credit system of Spanish Universities. I even finished the old C.A.P (equivalent to Postgraduate General Diploma in Education, required for teaching at secondary school level) and did my practicum in a secondary school in my native town. However, all this was far from enough. When I faced my first university language classroom in 1999, I was ill prepared to meet the needs of the students and the situation. In 2002, this reality had changed to a great extent. Even though there was still a long way to go, two years of experience had sufficed to gain a more practical and pragmatic understanding of the situation. At that time, I was very aware that this change had been driven by the interaction that had developed inside (and outside) my classrooms, with the team of teachers and students that participated in them. It was in the dialogues, the complaints, the discussions, the disagreements, the praises, the heated arguments, the

reviews and the problematic situations where learning had actually happened. Here I am talking about my own learning, learning to teach.

So this thesis has been impregnated with that cooperative spirit from the beginning. I considered the language classroom as an event in which students learn and practice the skills and content related to a particular language and about how to learn the language; and the teacher also learns about the language as produced by the students that s/he is working with but most importantly about how to teach the individual students in that classroom in the best way s/he can. One of the main purposes of this research is to propose and test systematic ways to introduce and enhance cooperative and reflective teaching and research through learner-initiated guidelines. One of my original hypotheses was that if students were empowered with the knowledge of their own uniqueness and individuality, and introduced to their role as 'teacher trainers' in the context of the classroom, the basis of a more cooperative classroom could be established.

The other main general purpose of this project is to explore the issue of what actually happens in the language classroom in a practical way. I was aware from the start that there have been many more comprehensive studies about this topic. The difference between this project and the quantitative projects of which I am aware is that this project is a qualitative attempt to answer a broad question from a variety of points of view, by treating students as experts in a situation in which they have all had a lot of previous experience: classrooms and language learning. I believe that the initial validation of all points of view and the continuous dialogic process carried out during this project gives this thesis its unique status and provides a valuable skill to generate knowledge for an academic, student or teacher audience. However, I must admit at this stage that this thesis has been mainly written with a teacher, teaching student or teacher trainer audience in mind.

Once the preliminary zero stage was over, the first stage of this project involved gaining access to the classrooms that were going to be researched. It was assumed that, being a teacher at the institution, this would be an unproblematic task. However, the reality was far from that, and being the teacher of many of the classes that were going to be examined complicated things further with the ethics department. This first stage of this project can be summarized as a long, frustrating process of obtaining permissions and ruling out possibilities. Dörnyei (2007) states that this is a delicate phase and recommends note keeping as a means to revert to a map of the terrain later (p. 132). Bell (1987) spells out the process of negotiating access in the following duties: 1) Request permission from official channels and agree on outline, 2) Interview people searching for cooperation, 3) Submit your project, 4) Clarify the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality, 5) Ensure participants receive a copy of the

report, 6) Inform participants of the purpose of the research, 7) Submit a project outline for participants, 8) Be honest, 9) Always remember that people who agree to help are doing you a favour, 10) Never assume it will be all right as negotiating access is a vital stage (p. 47).

At first, I wanted to carry out three parallel case studies at three institutions, two third-level ones (one more academic and the other, more vocational), both of which taught Spanish as a Second Language; and a secondary school with an important New-Canadian population being taught English as a foreign language.

During the previous year, as part of a volunteering program, I had been teaching English to newcomers in the New Canadian Centre in the same city that I was going to carry out my research project. It was then, during the informal discussions of my project - with my students at that Centre and the people that managed it - that the suggestion to carry out research at this secondary school came about. I proceeded with caution, sending formal letters, with headed paper from the university where I was teaching, to the principals and directors of these three institutions, as well as to the heads of their language departments or main instructors. This letter (see appendix) outlined the purpose of the research and the main tools that were going to be used (class observation or recording, diary study and interviews). I also sought the advice of an experienced ethnographic researcher, Dr. W. Olivo, from the department of Anthropology, who gave me useful tips and articles that helped me rule out some possibilities. The secondary school was quick to reply with a negative answer. There was a long process for the attaining of permits to do research on human subjects (especially on teenage immigrants), which included the permission of the General Board of Education, and our timeframe was not long enough for that. However, I received a call from the main instructor of the ESL class, who had been forwarded the letter and I attended a meeting with her. She had not been informed of the principal's rejection of my proposal and she was willing to help. She would not go against the principal's decision but she did not oppose me participating in the class and conducting 'informal observations' as long as the anonymity and confidentiality of her students and her staff were secured. She would propose it to the principal and obtain permission. I decided to consider it. At this early stage, I did not want to rule out the possibilities that such a multicultural class with a huge range of literacies could offer. She was wondering what I would do in exchange. She already had the answer. She asked me if I could help with the newer students arriving in the school, in order to speed up their learning of English and therefore, the process of integration into the school. Due to the lack of financial resources and a significant population in any particular language spoken in the school, they had opted for 'mainstreaming' as a means of providing education to the newcomers. This school is not an exception in Canada, in spite of

the popularity and success of Canadian bilingual schools and multiculturalism programs. It is in the big metropolis, like Toronto or Montreal, where these programs have flourished. Smaller communities, like the one under research, cannot afford the cost of bilingualism or multiculturalism.

The third-level vocational institution did not reply to our proposal so I sent it several times to several members of the language department. In the end, one of the teachers decided to give me an interview about her practice, but that was the extent to which they could participate in the project. The reaction from this institution within the context of our project highlights the fact that teachers, especially language teachers – due to the amount of hours that language learning requires - are put under great stress and pressure by our educational systems. The issue of sensitivity was clearly a difficulty in the context of this institution and the anxiety and reaction of the participants to the presence of a researcher would have been undesirable.

Finally, gaining access to research within the other academic third-level institution, the one where I was teaching, was the most constructive process of them all. The head of the Modern Languages department encouraged me to go on with the case study and then he led me to seek permission from the Ethics Committee for Research on Human Subjects at the University. Their guidelines on the submission of the first proposal and their detailed feedback and editing were essential in the production of a second proposal (see appendix), which was finally edited and ready for student review. The emphasis was on student anonymity and how the data-collection procedures would ensure it. They were also worried about reward-giving procedures. Students could participate in the project at two levels. At the level of student volunteer, they would be available for interviews and they would write a student diary for the whole semester. This would award them a 10 per cent in their final mark. We assigned each of these students a numerical code[8] (visible on the floppy disks on which they wrote their diaries), to which I had no access. I also had to compromise not to look at diaries or interviews until the final mark for their classes had been issued. At the level of student assistant, they were also awarded a 10 per cent in their final mark if they completed the student diary and they would have to be available for observation and interview training, since they were to carry out both tasks. I also trained them in the transcription of interviews. The support of the unit for the enhancement of teaching and learning - not only financial but also functional - was key to renewing the necessary enthusiasm and to commencing the planning stage of the project. Their Innovative Fund subsidized our project with three thousand Canadian dollars that helped us buy equipment and remunerate the focus group of student assistants.

The second stage was the planning. We had devised an original plan at the beginning of our conversations with the three institutions, which had been revised several times as the dialogue progressed. When we originally started in September 2002, the plan was to interview the staff involved in the three institutions during the first three months, in order to elicit how their language programs were implemented, how they worked, the main issues that frequently arose and the problems that needed to be targeted right away. We wanted to start our observations in the three institutions as early as October and to start the student interviews then as well in order to create focus groups for the following month, but this plan fell through. It was already the end of October and therefore it was time to finalize the planning and call for volunteer students and student assistants to move on to the next stage of our project: The data-collection. So I decided to carry on with what I had been offered. In reality, I started the secondary school observations on the 22nd of November, 2002 and finished them on the 17th of June, 2003 when I left the school and the amazing students and staff, whom I still miss.

Canadian university life is structured in semesters. During week six of each semester, there is a 'reading week' in which students leave their classrooms to dedicate themselves to deeper study and catch up on the reading materials for each of their courses. This structure fitted our research perfectly because the student assistants could collect all data before that week and examine it briefly during it, highlighting the patterns of recurrence and most important issues, in order to plan for the second data-collecting phase of our project, which would take place during the following six weeks of term. So, during the initial six weeks the team concentrated on these ideas and concepts and the student assistants suggested making small changes in classroom practice according to the recommendations of the volunteer students and to monitor the result of these changes.

The project was presented to the students at this university during the first semester of the academic year. There were students of first year beginner, first year advanced, second year and final year Spanish. I decided to record just a few classes to diversify the data collected through observation and to have my assistants interview all the teachers involved in the teaching of these courses: namely myself and the language assistant from the Programa de Lectorados of the Foreign Affairs Department of Spain. The data collecting at the University started on the 9th of January 2003 and finished at the end of April 2003. It is important to clarify that during this third stage, we did not just collect data and store it away until further revision. As recommended by Dörnyei (2007) we analyzed the preliminary data to develop some initial ideas and concepts (p. 132). These four intense months were one of the most productive periods of my life as a teacher and I could almost say without fear of misjudgement that it was also one of the most positive experiences in the life of the students that were involved in the

project, especially at an assistant level. Their job ended that summer, as did my contract with the university. I had finalized all student grades as I had promised. It was time for me to start working on the fourth stage of this research: the analysis of all data collected. Up to this step is what Watson-Gegeo calls the comprehensive stage of ethnographic research (Allright & Bailey, 1991, p. 38). Because of the way this project was carried out, this was also the final phase of the field work and it ended with the necessary withdrawal. "An emotional taxing phase evoking the feeling of loss needed to be counteracted by the efforts to bring as little disruption as possible to the group or situation in question" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 132).

Once all data has been gathered, the second important aspect of ethnographic research is the organization of all the information collected into a framework of practical theory. This is not an easy task, especially when dealing with subjective data, because it tends to call for an organic framework instead of rendering submissive to any pre-planned systematic structure. It involves the use of different techniques to increasingly focus, sift, sort and review the data (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 132). We will describe in detail our method of analysis in the next chapter.

So practically, a number of significant changes surrounded my life, which have prolonged this phase. I changed jobs and moved to Ireland to teach Spanish at a University there, but as Wei and Moyer (2007) state, "research is an ongoing and dynamic process that involves a series of activities that do not necessarily […] follow a step by step order" (p. 18). It has not just been the fact that I have been working full time all these years, completed a masters in Translation in the meantime, or the issues that life has in store for us that have delayed the delivery of the analysis of this data. The fact that it is highly personal data and that I lacked any training in social science interpreting skills made this phase of our research the most demanding by far. In an attempt to quantify but also qualify the results of the data collection process in a systematic and academic way, this report was postponed beyond the targets of my own planning. However, the fact that it continually stayed at the front of my mind influenced my practice as a teacher and my selection of readings. Kemmis and Carr emphasize the importance of the practicality of theory and call for an improvement on the dialectical relationship between theory and practice (Hammersley, 1993, p. 235). Since the literature review process never ended, I consider the prolongation of this analysis as a positive outcome for this thesis. Moving continents provided this research with a new framework: The European Language Framework published after 1996 hit the European educational institutions after the recommendation of the council of Europe in 2000-1 and was spread widely by the European Language Portfolio. Moving into a new educational context, the voices of my Canadian students that I was reading and analyzing became a guide and a template that

persistently contrasted with the reality of my everyday language teaching job. This would be what Watson-Gegeo considers the topic-oriented stage of ethnographic research.

The fifth stage of my thesis started in October 2007. Once the analysis had been carried out, conclusions were needed. The findings of our project had to be put in the light of the new literature and practices in language teaching. During this period, I had the chance to visit my old university and meet some of the student assistants that were involved in this project. We shared some more ideas and I was happy to see that for most of them it was still an experience that was close to their hearts. This rekindled my enthusiasm to finish my Ph.D., to try and pin down the practical measures necessary to take action on the findings of our project. Finally, this stage is what Watson-Gegeo terms as the hypothesis-testing stage. During this stage, hypotheses are tested and questions answered. These answers led us to the final stage of this Ph.D. project.

The sixth stage of this research started in February 2008. It was time to compile the report that will shape this Ph.D. thesis and share these findings with others so that uniting our efforts, we can change and revisit the situation in our language classrooms whenever we need to.

3.2.1 From October, 2002 to April, 2003. ESL Class observation and aiding.

At the time this project started the situation of ESL in Canada had just been reviewed in the publication of the Canadian Language Benchmarks (2000). Similar to the development of the European Language Framework, in 1992 the Government of Canada assumed the need to enhance and support language learning and to tackle immigrant needs. A federal department known as Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) funded a project "to develop national standards, beginning with consultations with experts in second language teaching and training, testing and measurement".[9] They found that there were no national standardized guidelines, suitable to immigrant needs. In March 1993, CIC established the National Working Group on Language Benchmarks (NWGLB) to work on the development of the Benchmarks and in 1996 they publicized the first draft of the Benchmarks. Curiously enough, this is the same year that the Council of Europe published their Common Framework. The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (CCLB) derived from a conference that recognized that a non-governmental institution should take responsibility for the benchmarks. "The CCLB was created by CIC in 1998 in partnership with the provincial governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Saskatchewan to support and maintain the standard through a multi-stakeholder, nationally representative and inter-governmental board of directors".[10]

Now the CCLB has also embarked in the production and implementation of the Niveaux de compétence linguistiques canadiens (NCLC), for the French benchmarks.

The tradition of benchmarking in Canada was not long lived but it provided a scale of communicative proficiency in English as a reference for learning and teaching English as a Second Language in Canada. They emphasize learner-centeredness, task-based learning, with an emphasis on community, study and work tasks ('Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000', p. 7). They include a detailed but simplified provision of tasks for each of the benchmark levels and language skills. It is traditional in its structure and in some of the concepts, like the four language skills, but it assumes a forefront position with regards to the problem-based methodology and community focus.

Within this framework for adults, it is important to bear in mind that each of the Canadian provinces and territories have a different reality to cater to. As we have also pointed out, even within a province; the differences between urban communities can give us the whole spectrum of possibilities. In Ontario, linguistic and cultural diversity were not new. The government had already identified them as a source of cultural enrichment and global education making provision for language learning programs within the schools. These programs provided the means for developing the level of proficiency in English required for success at school and in post-secondary education and work. The government acknowledged not only the variety of geographical backgrounds but also the diversity of literacy skills in their first language. In this way they supplied models for ESL and ELD (English Literacy Development) courses as intensive, partial and tutorial support. In the process of identification of the students in need, the 1999 document acknowledges new students with no or little English and no or little literacy skills. The 2007 document adds the reality of Canadian students of a non-English heritage who may also need to avail of these services. In the 1999 document, the government suggests integration into the mainstream subject classrooms to be the outcome of the ESL/ELD support. In the 2007 document, they introduce the concept of substitution of up to three subjects (as will probably be the case of bilingual schools in greater urban areas such as Toronto, Ottawa or Kitchener/Waterloo). In both cases, they emphasize the desirability of connections between the ESL/ELD support and the mainstream subjects, suggesting implementation of courses such as Canadian history and civilizations, accompanied by intensive support. The Ontario report on achievement 2000-2001 published by Education Quality and Accountability office was positive. [11]

In the small city where we carried out our case study, and we could even argue that in this whole province, "English is the majority language not only in terms of numbers of speakers and users, but, more importantly, in terms of legitimized power and control" (Martin-Jones, 1984, pp. 426-7). The

relationship between English and the many minority languages in Canada, whether indigenous or not, is entrenched in the history of colonization, education, and immigration of this country.[12] In Ontario at the beginning of the 21st century, English continues to be the prevalent language of literacy, media, workplace, government[13] and other aspects of Ontarian life. English literacy is the key ability to succeed in both educational and labour environments. Minority languages and literacy have been legitimized through the different multiculturalism policies but they have been de facto constrained to the home, the church, the family business or the local community.

The school where I carried out my volunteering and observations is an old public school with a long history and reputation. It is located in an English-only community that is receiving an increasing number of immigrants due in part to an immigrant centre established there. The school is known for the peer learning programs and their Enrichment Department and ESL classes, which are the only ones in town exclusively for teenagers. It had a population of 1030 students and seventy six staff members, out of which sixty were enrolled in the ESL program. It claims that 80 per cent of their student population go on to post secondary education. They have a very reflective practice, as is observable in their school profile plan of action, which aims to improve the results of the EQAO[14] tests for the following year. Among the language origin of the students, the majority are from an English-only environment, with some French, first nation and immigrant population. The board of education in which the school is situated has a policy of ethno-cultural equity and anti-racism in place and spells out principles of equity and diversity in their documentation. The board proposes different second language programs:

- French As a Second Language (FSL) – Immersion;
- French As a Second Language (FSL) – Extended;
- Native Second Language (NSL),
- English As a Second Language (ESL)/English Literacy Development (ELD).[15]

The benefits that these programs provide according to the board of education list are:

1 developing the use of a second language through instruction;

2 enhancing understanding of students' first language;

3 strengthening ability to learn additional languages;

4 nurturing respect and understanding of a multicultural society;

5 preparing for life in a globally accessible economy and society;

6 expanding career and life opportunities;

7 increasing students' versatility and augmenting their personal development;

8 enhancing the understanding of the Native language and culture; and

9 enabling ESL students to continue their education and contribute to the social, economic, and political life of Canada.

(District School Board Policy Statement[16])

These characteristics describe the school[17] as a relatively big school teaching grades nine to twelve (ages 12-16) for a small urban environment[18], very aware of diversity and ethnical differences, with a 5 per cent immigrant non-English population. Founded in the 19th century, it is a unique institution with a strong commitment to individual learning, technology, the arts, sports and the greater community.[19] They are also well known for the establishment of programs in conjunction with the third-level educational institutions in the area.

By doing all this research about the setting and its participants, I had already started the observations and was getting ready to gain access. The learning environment in which I received partial access as a researcher was the ESL/ELD classroom in this school. The first thing that struck me was the physical distribution of the class. It was fairly big and multifunctional. There was much light coming from the windows strategically at the back of the class, opposite the blackboards.

Table 10 – Physical Distribution of The Class – Designed for this dissertation

---------------------------------Blackboards----------   DOOR

Table with books   TV

```
┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐
│          │      │          │          │      │          │          │
└──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘

┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐
│          │      │          │          │      │          │          │
└──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘

┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐
│          │      │          │          │      │          │          │
└──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘

┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐      ┌──────────┬──────────┐
│          │      │          │          │      │          │          │
└──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘      └──────────┴──────────┘
```

Computer

Teacher's desk

Bookshelves ###

------------------------------- windows --
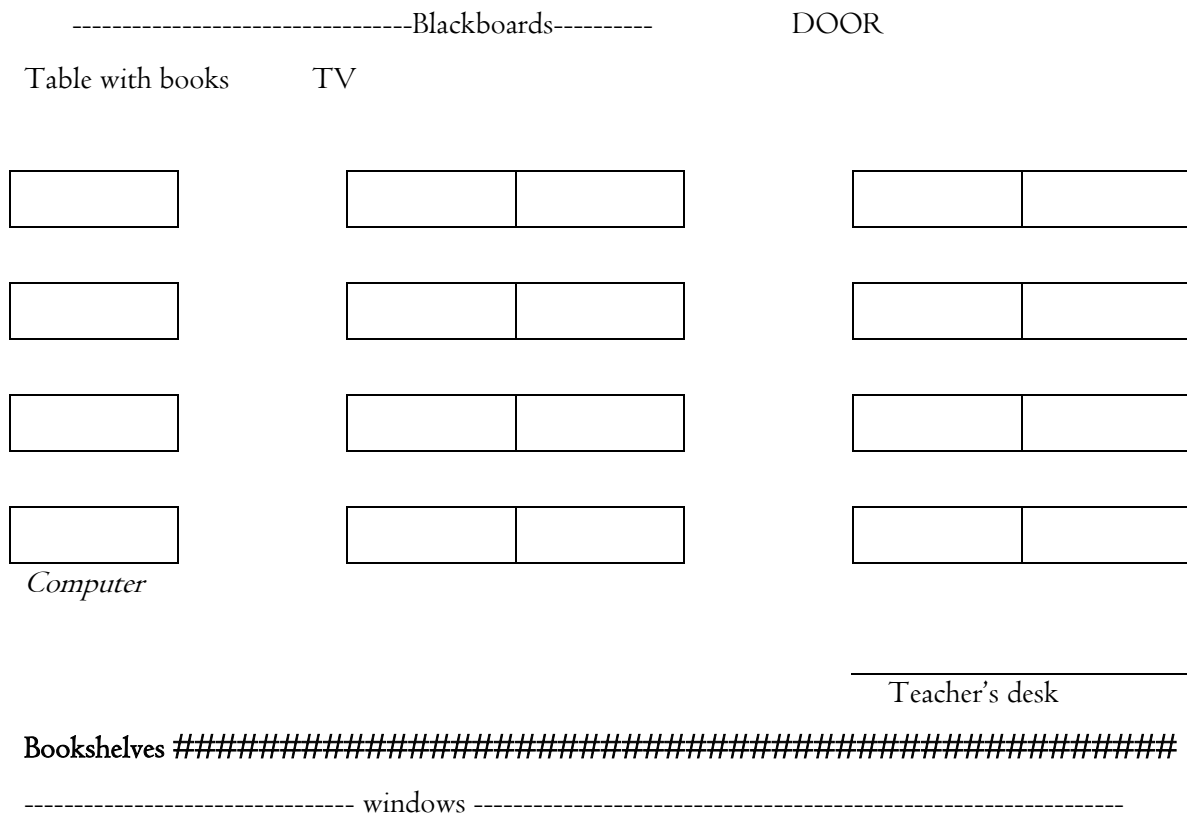
The teacher in charge of the class was very aware that same language students tend to pair up naturally and she suggested that they sit down with a different language partner so they were forced to speak English but she did not push this system into practice all the time, also aware of the need for peer-help and support. Another first impression I had noted in my journal is that the class always looked busy and "untidy". By "untidy" I mean, that the teacher's table always seemed full of activity and disorganized. The walls were full of collages, student bilingual presentations and posters of ecological or social principles in different languages. There were class organizers at the door with a calendar of the common activities throughout the year and any other necessary announcements. There were plenty of books literary or language methods, dictionaries of different languages (mono and bilingual), magazines and picture books - not only on the shelves but also on the student tables and all about the classroom. There were also games such as scrabble and stoke-market. I realized that the students felt free at any moment of the ESL session to go and pick up one of these aids to understand better or to better express themselves. The computer was rarely used during their class time, but students would use it to check their email early before the class or during their break/recess periods.

The class varied in size in terms of students, but there was always an average of 15 students. The reason why it varied was because students were accepted year around. As they arrived into the region, they took a placement test and arrived in the classroom, where they were assessed and assigned

different task routines according to their level. Some students also left the class, in the best of cases because they moved to a bigger city with their families for economic or social reasons. Some students, unfortunately, dropped out of the school.[20] As a result, the student configuration of the class was very dynamic and variable. There were students from Afghanistan, South Korea, Japan, Quebec, Somalia, Argentina, Iraq… and this nationality mix was not stable because students would arrive and leave the classroom as well during the year. The main teacher was a dynamic woman in her forties from an economics and teaching background that had become an ESL teacher in the last few years of her practice. She monitored all the students' work and coordinated a group of other teachers, monitors and volunteers to work with them. The classroom was very seldom a unit in terms of activities and teacher/student relationship. Sometimes she had a presentation of about ten minutes that was common for everybody, but more often than not the class was divided in groups, or pairs or students working on their own according to their level. Each student had a portfolio of activities to complete to reach the next benchmark level. The teacher rotated from group to group or from individual to individual or was summoned by a particular student or group of students to ask questions about their work. During the first semester she was on sick leave and another teacher from the English department substituted. The new teacher was teaching English as a mainstream subject in the more advanced years as well so she was engaging with these students later when they were incorporated to the mainstream school life. During the period in which she took the main teacher's job, she also kept her regular job and she felt the pressure of the double task.

The next teacher that worked with some of the students in the class was a Canadian history teacher who would give them some sessions on how to study history and the history of the country in which they were living, with a very practical purpose. In the Canadian citizenship test, some questions focus on Canadian history and politics. The students then receive aid for this from the school and are provided with the tools to pass the citizenship status tests. The history teacher did not have an ESL pedagogical background, but his theatre and performance background came in handy.

Finally, there was another teacher/monitor who joined from time to time. She had worked at the school for a long time but not as a full time teacher. She simply aided the main teacher with anything that was required. That was also the job of the volunteers and education students who came to do their practicum. I joined the class first as an observer for the first couple of days but then I became an aid since I was qualified to teach ESL as well and there was much need for all the individual help available. The volunteers worked on a one-on-one basis or with small groups, encouraging them to finish their tasks, pacing the speed of their work and/or solving problems or questions. There were three volunteers altogether, who came on different days. I started going twice a week for a three hour period, then I went everyday at the end of the semester when my teaching responsibilities at the

university decreased. One of the volunteers was a fifty year old from Poland who was a teacher in her native country. She was highly disciplined and organized and at the time she was trying to get a job with the school. She lived in a shelter and shared some of the background with the students. The other volunteer was an ESL education doing her practicum. She was a middle-aged woman and had a lot of ideas and suggestions. There were some older students who had belonged to the ESL group in previous years and had since moved up to the mainstream classes but came by from time to time to join in the Canadian history classes or to help fellow students with their work. Some of them were doing their social work credits[21] so they used their aid in the ESL class to count towards these credits.

When I wrote to the school for the first time, my proposal initially suggested that the project start in September 2002 by talking and interviewing the staff working for the ESL program, analyzing how it was implemented, how it worked, what its main issues were, what the problems were that need to be targeted. I also wanted to see the policies and guidelines for the implementation of ESL programs. I would go on analyzing this theoretical part of the ESL program until the beginning of December. In December, I wanted to come up with one or two proposals for the program. For instance, if there were a good number of students from Spanish background, I would have been able to offer some extra-classes or tutorial help in their own language to foster their literacy in their own language, or something else we could have easily figured or agreed upon as the year and my research progressed. I wanted to put these proposals into practice from January 2003 to March 2003 (until March break) and then work with three or four students from every age group from thirteen - nineteen or eighteen. The final part of my proposal was to analyze the results and evaluate them in April 2003. I also compromised that as my final thesis would be written in English, I would provide the school with a copy upon completion. I also committed myself to securing the privacy of the individuals and the school involved in my research, and to try to give back all the help and assistance that I had received from the school.

Due to the responsibilities of the staff involved and the problems with the resolution of permits, I could not develop the project as it was initially proposed. So, finally, instead of the exploration-solution-evaluation schedule, I used the surveying tool of unstructured observation and analyzed, as they were made, the changes introduced in the classroom and what their effects were. I used this classroom environment as a contrast to the environment that was being surveyed through the case study in the university classroom of Spanish. I also kept a journal of my observations with field notes. I used the observations of this ESL class as training in this data-collecting tool, to learn how to observe better and to improve reflective practice. This report is going to include some of my

observations during these classes and the reflections initiated from the readings that I was doing at the time. It is also going to incorporate the reflections on how the observations were made and what needs to be improved for further explorations in the classroom research tool of observation. These unstructured observations concentrated on issues arising from the use of the physical space, power relationships and use the first language, which were also the targets of our university survey. Observation as the only method was definitely not the best way of researching this highly complex situation but there was no way to achieve permission to carry out interviews or learning journals so my decision was not to rule it out completely. The issue of time constraints and investment that were mentioned earlier in this chapter was another issue that we had to bear in mind. Gaining access to the environment took almost six months so I was not ready to give it up completely, even when I knew that without the necessary triangulation, it would never have the same status as the University survey.

Gaining acceptance by the students in the class was a much easier task as a lot of them identified with me. First of all, I looked much younger than their teachers and I shared their immigrant background. This minimized disturbance. As a lecturer at a university level, they also considered me as having a higher status that is not easily achieved as someone from a non-English background. In the first few sessions I did not interact much with the main teacher. They were intrigued by my function in the class and my life in general, so establishing a good rapport with them was not difficult. Even those students who regarded me with disbelief were soon swayed by other students whose trust I had already gained. Later on, when they figured out that I had some 'authority', granted to me by their main teacher, they competed to a certain extent to be guides and informants for me. There was a girl from Argentina that felt closer to me through the medium of a common language and a girl from Somalia, who had established herself as a leader in the group in a few months, who often sought to help me. In less than a month, I had become 'unnoticeable' to most of them and part of their regular classroom life.

My day-to-day routine in the ESL classroom was very different. Some days I had to be the teacher's aide with some students, other days I was left alone to take notes – which the students curiously did not find intrusive. I established a routine in which I reviewed my experience immediately after the class and annotated any event or conversation that I could recall and found of especial relevance, as advised by the literature reviewed above. I never carried out an observation protocol in this class, so my field notes took the form of an unstructured recall of the situation. The main reason for this was that the classroom activities were more complex than any of the protocols I was aware of. Since there were different group activities and the teacher rotated from one to the other, a proper observation protocol would have needed at least 4 trained observers. I understand that this project

needs a follow-up and some more definite results but through this experience, it became apparent that the observation journal and reflection is a much more significant instrument for the language teacher and researcher to solve practical issues in their every day classroom than it is commonly believed to be. I am immensely grateful for the help, rapport and information that the principal, teachers, peer-volunteers and students offered me at this school. I will always remember them with gratitude. At the end of my observation period, I did not register peer blindness in my attitude towards them. On the contrary, I believe that my status as a non-participant observer granted me a level of distance that, in spite of the rapport that have developed between us, quickly allowed me a good deal of neutrality and objectivity.

3.2.2. From January to April, 2003. Learning Spanish in the University Classroom (L.S.U.C. Case Study) – Academic Innovative Practices.

Canada's official languages at federal level are English and French, being English the native language of 59 per cent of the population (which is according to the census in 2001 around thirty million) and French is the native language of 23 per cent of the population. The remaining 18 per cent is distributed between first nation languages (some of them official in the northwest territories and Nunavut) and heritage languages, official in other countries of the world, among which is Spanish. Spanish has never been a significant language in the Canadian Provinces due to a lack of a colonial history. It seems to be increasing slightly but not significantly probably due to an influx of Spanish-speaking newcomers from the United States.

If the presence of Spanish in the immigrant population is not noticeably higher than any of the other heritage languages, Spanish in the school system is not equally represented across the provinces. In the primary school system, only Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia offer it at a primary level. In secondary schools, the panorama of second language learning has changed radically. There has been a significant increase in the selection of Spanish – mostly against French – as a second language. However, bilingual public programs can only be implemented in provinces such as Alberta, B.C., Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The other provinces have legislated English-French bilingual programs only.

In Ontario, provision for Spanish as a second language has been made in order to provide second-generation immigrants with the learning of their language of origin. Spanish is found in all educational levels and is offered together with thirty other languages in primary (with 18,000 students) and together with other eleven languages in secondary (with 20,000 students). Classes are

extracurricular and tend to happen on Saturdays. In post-secondary education, Spanish has registered an increase as well across the country. In Ontario, there are nineteen publicly funded universities and most of them teach Spanish. The need for the enhancement of the marketability of university degrees has had an important effect on the increase in the number of students taking Spanish. Geographically, though, Spanish has been an appealing language for a lot of students due to the proximity of North, Central and South American Spanish-speaking countries.

In the town in which we carried out our case study, there was a public university and a third level vocational school, both of which taught Spanish. From 1999 to 2003, the population of students taken Spanish at this University increased steadily.

This small university – around 7,800 on two campuses in different cities[22] - boasts personal teaching and learning with award-winning professionals and lecturers. It ranked first for quality Education in *The Globe and The Mail* National Report Card from 2003-2005. It has also ranked first at a research, scholarship and bursary level. It is considered an institution that attracts a lot of funding in several areas as well. Within its walls, it combines the study of social and natural sciences, humanities and professional programs.

Spanish is embedded in the Modern Languages department, which teaches German, French and Spanish and offers the possibility of an emphasis on linguistics. It attracts students from various degrees, mainly International Development studies, Anthropology, Cultural and Native Studies, Education, History and other languages. The odd science student would also appear in the program.

As a first year student you could access the beginners' course with little or no background of Spanish. It was a four hour communicative class and one hour lab program. If you had completed the advanced level of Spanish in secondary school or you had lived and studied in a Spanish-speaking environment you could access an advanced level course of two hours of communicative class and one hour conversation class. As a native speaker of Spanish, though, you could progress directly to upper-year coursework.

As a second year student, you could either leave on a year abroad program to Spain or stay at the campus and combine an intermediate level language course of two hours of communicative practice and one hour of conversation and a Spanish and Spanish-American civilization course. Many of the students from the International Development joint major would instead choose the year abroad with this department and go to Latin America for their study option.

In third and fourth year, there are a variety of courses in Spanish language and Hispanic literature and civilization required to complete either the single-major in Spanish or the joint-major. My duties

during the year in which we carried out the case study excluded the teaching of language at this level so the students in these courses did not participate in our project.

The Spanish section of the Modern Languages department was a small department consisting on the head of the Modern Languages Department, three professors, two languages instructors (one of which is a language assistant from the International Cooperation Agency in Spain – AECI) and an administrative assistant. I had been a language assistant in this department during the three previous years, but during 2002-2003 I was incorporated into the department as a full time lecturer through the provision of a yearly contract, due to a sabbatical leave of one of the permanent professors. This contract created a new full time lecturing position which granted the department a fourth professor.

Let us have a look at the details of the courses that this project focuses on.

The beginners' course of Spanish at first year level is an introduction to understanding, speaking, reading and writing, designed for students who have very limited or no knowledge of the language. The majority of students belong to this category and at the time there were about 100 students. These students were divided into small groups and these groups were taught by the coordinator, me and the language assistant. The goal of the course is to encourage control of everyday vocabulary and the basic forms and constructions of basic communicative Spanish. The seminar activities stress a communicative approach with reinforcement in the form of written and oral exercises. It relies on the textbook book *Arriba* written by Zayas Bazán, covering up to lesson ten. Contact hours are distributed in three one-hour seminars weekly, one hour lab with tapes and the review and reinforcement through web exercises designed by the coordinator of the course to suit this method. During 2002/2003, we worked on improving the transparency of our assessment. The course is examined by attendance and participation (20 per cent), five written assignments (20 per cent), lab (18 per cent), extra-readings (6 per cent) [based on a reading I wrote for the course and the coordinator edited as a web version], class tests (18 per cent) and final written examination (18 per cent). It is important to notice how the final examination is worth less than class participation and attendance. With this assessment framework, the course attempts to encourage continuous effort on the students and to reduce the anxiety of heavy language examinations. This university is committed to the creation of an inclusive learning environment and welcomes student with disabilities and health considerations so this final exam can take different forms and settings.

The first year course of Continuing Spanish is designed for students who have completed at least two years of high school Spanish and for those who have learned Spanish through immersion. For this latter group, admission is granted on the basis of a placement test that takes place during Introductory Seminar week. This course is also intended for former students of beginners Spanish who wish to take

a second language without developing a major in Hispanic Studies. I was the coordinator of the course during 2002/2003, teaching it with the language assistant from AECI. The textbook traditionally assigned for this course was *Horizontes* by G. Ascarrunz. It consisted of two one-hour seminars weekly, one hour of conversation weekly and one hour lab. Assessment was based on Attendance and Participation (18 per cent), Reading assignments (6 per cent), written assignments (15 per cent), conversation seminar + oral exam (15 per cent), lab (16 per cent), class tests (15 per cent), final exam (15 per cent).

Finally, the intermediate course of Spanish seeks to broaden language skills acquired through the previous two courses. Emphasis is placed on oral and written work as well as reading comprehension. The textbook is *Conexiones* by Zayas-Bazán. The course consisted of a two hour weekly seminar with a focus on grammar and the development of writing skills based on the textbook, one hour lab, one hour conversation session. The aims of the oral section are to develop speaking, increase vocabulary and reinforce grammatical structures. Participation is expected to keep up with continuous assessment and there are three tests and a final exam. The assessment is divided as follows: Class Attendance and Participation (10 per cent), Lab (10 per cent), Workbook (10 per cent), Conversation class (10 per cent), four written assignments (10 per cent), three tests (30 per cent), final examination (20 per cent). This is the first course of the single or joint major in Spanish and is equivalent to the course students take in their year-abroad so the emphasis has shifted a bit from the other two Spanish courses and there is more pressure on the proficiency of Spanish and grammatical competences. Even though the weight between continuous assessment and tests and examinations is still 50/50, it is a much more demanding course for the students that want to achieve good grades and a good working knowledge of the language.

After a whole semester of negotiations with the ethical committee, getting applications for volunteering as a student or student assistant in the case study[23] and trying to get funding from the teaching and learning unit, our case study kicked off on a very cold Thursday morning on the 9th of January, 2003 with the first meeting with the student assistants that had volunteered to join the team. First of all, I reviewed the double role of the assistants. The assistant is in charge of the practical part of the research together with the researcher. They will meet regularly with the other assistants and the researchers to gather results. They also need to help in the writing of the questionnaires and carrying them out. This is so because I imagined that a student would find it easier to approach a fellow student than the researcher/teacher would. Sometimes the assistant will have to sit in class and do observations of the class in question according to a routine that the researcher provides. These observations and interviews will be transcribed, always preserving the identity of the subject under

study private and unknown to the researcher. These routines are observations of the dynamics of the class and help us to understand what was going on during this class. The last part of the assistant's role is to be critical. Not only of his/her own learning but also of the teacher/researcher methods and to bring up any ideas that s/he feels s/he has to provide. I explained that they were expected to invest about three to four hours a week on the project. During this first meeting, the project and goals were reviewed and the first provisional list of student volunteers was distributed. They had a week to finalize their initial commitment to the project. As a volunteer, they needed to keep up with a journal of the class. The volunteer was given a disk to type in his/her experiences in his/her language classroom. They were also given a code number to stick on the outside of the disk. A detailed description of what kind of information needed to be recorded in the entries of the journal was distributed (see appendix). We reinforced the interest of personal information, such as the thoughts the students were having while in the classroom, if their minds wandered and they started thinking of something other than what was being taught, what kind of thoughts the class triggered and also feedback. This feedback was welcome in a very informal way. This meant that the criticism against the teacher or other classmates could be given in as a blunt form as it came to the student's mind. None of this material could be used against the volunteers and it was completely private and confidential. The code number would only be known by the assistant and the student, the researcher never had access to it, in order to preserve the privacy of the volunteer. Because the journal was typed, the researcher/teacher could not identify any student behind the words in the journal. The second task of the volunteer role was to be available for the interviews and questionnaires that the assistant or assistants in the class approach him/her with. We would appreciate honesty at all times. They were told that they would need to allocate about one hour and a half a week, depending on how long it took them to write a page of feedback in their journal. They were also told that their journals would be collected by the student assistants during reading week for analysis.

The ethics committee had not finalized the time I would have access to the data – approval came at the end of this month – and I explained the status of funding. It was decided that the case study would go ahead with the assigning the task of writing a journal to the students that they had received. The students would be code numbered to guarantee their confidentiality. The assistants swore respect to the privacy of their classmates or they would be penalized, losing their status in the project. The first interview schedule needed to be devised so we talked about the information that it should target. It was to be a general conversation to start targeting classroom and learning problems with the answers that the students give us. We were interested in the problems that they encountered in their learning, in order to find out what their major difficulty was. We were also interested in the social environment in which they lived and the social dynamics of the classroom and their perspective on this. We also

wanted to know about their social and affective conditioning for learning Spanish in a university classroom. The next aspect of this general interview was the use of their first language in the learning of Spanish, their reasons and their ways of using it. Each assistant was assigned a tape recorder to record these interviews once we agreed on the questions that were going to be asked. Finally, I set the schedule for the first class observation and gave them their timetable. Eric, Sara and Julie were assigned a first year beginner class course that they were also taking but not to the group they were in. Anne, a student of intermediate Spanish, and Christina, a student of continuing Spanish, were assigned one of the continuing Spanish groups. Emily, a student of continuing Spanish, observed the only group of intermediate Spanish available that year. The student assistants were given the following open-ended guidelines to carry out during their first observation:

- Recurrent and/or repetitive patterns in teacher or student behaviour (problems, questions, silence, chatting, lost students…)
- Amount of teacher talk and student participation (and also in which language it happens)
- Correction of errors. Is the teacher correcting students? A student correcting another student? In which tone does the correction happen?
- Overall comment about the classroom environment according to the assistant's impressions (dynamics of the groups, attitudes, feelings …)

The final section of the first student assistant meeting was spent on socializing and relaxing. The meetings happened in an isolated room of a café in town, so the atmosphere was always relaxed. It was decided by the group to meet on Mondays as frequently as it was deemed suited by the main researcher and depending on the issues arising. The following meeting was just dedicated to the composition of the first interview.

During the third meeting, almost a month later, we had secured the funding and the ethics committee had given us the permission to go ahead. I needed to remind them to finalize the obtaining of signed consent forms, otherwise we would not be able to continue with the project. I reminded them of the deadline for submission of disks or emailing their files to the student assistant allocated to them. Most of the first set of interviews had been carried out and were submitted in transcript form. The question of influencing interviewees by the way the question was posed was discussed in depth. The conclusion was that the influence was unavoidable but by phrasing the question in a neutral non-judgmental manner next time, we would try to minimize it. Assistants had carried out at least two observations. Most had done three and submitted their reports. We also decided that observations were best carried out by sitting among the students, instead of separate and far away from them. It is less

disturbing for them. It also became clear to us that it was better to observe the classes at your own level. However, this wasn't possible due to scheduling constraints.

During the next meeting, after Reading Week at the end of February, we circulated a summary of the conclusions from the first reading of the journals, interviews and observations and discussed them (see appendix). They became our line of work for the layout of the questions in the second interview (see appendix for a summary of the results of this interview) and the focus of our next observations, which would be carried out during March. The team decided that they wanted to interview the teachers in the courses as well - the language assistant from AECI and I. One of the assistants, who was doing a course on anthropology, gave us very interesting guidelines about carrying out interviews. Another assistant raised the issue of recording. We decided to set a schedule to video-record some of the classes where they were doing observations. We also included a form on 'summary of the class' as a way of recalling what happened in the class that was being observed.

During the next meeting, at the beginning of March, we prepared the teachers' interviews, which were carried out by Anne and Christina. We started a new schedule of observations. We monitored the changes that I had introduced in the class according to the student recommendations. We again discussed the issue of recording. We found the students very reluctant to it and discussed the possibility of recording an extra class with only the people that did not mind being recorded. We drafted the second interview concentrating on the following topics: rapport with other students and teachers, participation, time for answering questions and exercises, length and speed in class, physical space and feedback in class.

We met again in the middle of March. We decided to record a review session after all classes were over and finalized the last questionnaire and interview.

Finally, we met at the end of March to announce the deadlines for student and student assistant work and to share our final comments on questionnaires and interviews. On the 30th of April, all work was submitted and included a project evaluation from both student and student assistants and the case study was all over for them with a potluck dinner and soirée.

3.2.3 Language Teaching and Learning in Higher education reconsidered: Reflective Teaching and Learning Journal.

At the moment, language teaching is a major part of higher education. Colleges, universities and other third level institutions spend a lot of their time and resources on language teaching. A great deal of language teaching at university level came through philological studies. These studies traditionally combined literary and linguistic studies. Classical Philology originated in the Renaissance

and concentrated on the study of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit languages and cultures. It was soon expanded to the study of other European and non-European languages. At the beginning of the 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure insisted on the importance of studying a language synchronically and not only diachronically and this urge promoted the creation of the discipline of linguistics, which at the time, needed to establish itself as a separate discipline from philology. Later on, both linguistics and philological studies embraced language teaching and learning within their curricula and now in the 21st century, the emphasis has shifted from the study of language to the study of communication. Through the communicative approach revolution, language departments at universities around the world embraced language teaching in a more communicative way. This method was quickly embraced by language schools and businesses from the 1980s. With an emphasis on visual rather than textual and aural rather than written, it revolutionized the sphere of communication in the language degrees. The continuous stream of authentic resources that the internet has provided, and creates constantly, has resulted in an even more synchronic approach to language study.

Being a skill-based discipline that needs continuous practice and a significant amount of invested hours, language study has always been a demanding subject at many levels:

- Students…
    o … feel the pressure of studying a language on top of their other subject commitments;
    o … understand that this language is the vehicle to understand the content of some of their other courses and it adds to the pressure.
    o … resist the continuous practice and skill-acquisition that language study involves in non-immersion environments.
    o … get anxious and feel emotional pressure when they are not able to express themselves.
- Teachers …
    o … feel the pressure of teaching long hours and the constant search for teaching strategies.
    o … feel that the onus of maintaining student engagement is on them.
    o … juggle more administrative tasks by the day.

Languages on their own manage to attract a lot of students, but only a percentage of them continue and succeed in their language learning. Nowadays, language teaching and learning does not attract much external funding from companies and businesses.

The reality is that language teaching and learning is shifting within the university world. With the amount of resources at our fingertips, both teachers' and learners' needs have changed radically. From a culture of scarce written texts and singular erudite personalities, language teaching has become a place of popular audiovisual texts and countless accessible methods. The common denominator is still the need for guidance and planning, though, and these cannot exist without reflection.

In 1992, C. James & P. Garrett published a book called *Language Awareness in the Classroom*. They were not the first authors to highlight the need to develop awareness and consciousness- raising skills at a linguistic level. In this book, they talk about how to empower students to develop foreign but also native language awareness. Today, almost twenty years later, the need is even more pressing as language learners and teachers need not only language awareness but also language learning awareness. The reason for this is the amount of materials and methodologies that surround us. A student and a teacher can only make efficient use of the abundance of information through a conscious use – and selection - of these materials. In fact, all language learning – and teaching – involves a certain amount of reflection, whether at the linguistic or the planning level.

Reflection is a useful but yet unclear concept. The term 'reflection' has been used to refer to a process, a set of skills and methods, and its conditions and outcomes. As a process, as early as in the 1930s, Dewey defined reflection as an active consideration of knowledge (p. 9), but nowadays the term 'reflection' still evokes a process of passive self-examination. In the 1980s, Boud emphasized the active nature of the process and its continuous application to past knowledge in order to establish new knowledge (p. 19). Kolb widened the concept by adding the sphere of experiential learning (Fry, 1999, p. 215). This retrospective thinking was termed by Schön (1987) as reflection-on-action, but he provides a second type of reflection called reflection-in-action (p. 34). Kemmis (1985) supports a reflection-for-action, emphasizing the need for a systematic action plan to transform future experiences (p. 142). Tsang offers a new approach to reflection: dialogue. As an internal dialogue, he argues that any given person has integrated, throughout the course of their lives, a number of voices from parents, teachers, texts, etc. Reflection, then, becomes a process through which this person achieves a balance from all these different voices within (Tsang, 2005, p. 8). The inevitable outcome of reflection is learning (Mezirow, 1981, p. 23). As a personal process, reflection comprises not only a range of cognitive skills but a degree of emotional involvement. This intellectual and affective engagement generates a feeling of ownership towards the product of reflection (Johns, 2006, p. 35).

These authors have laid the foundations for the on-going debate on reflection, but they all share a common ground that defines it as a continuous, affective and cognitive, intra- and inter-

personal process towards the development of an awareness of one's knowledge and practice that leads to responsible and autonomous action in order to transform one's way of knowing and doing.

In many respects, second language learning shares many of these features. It is a lifelong process that entails cognitive and affective skills. It is both an interpersonal and intrapersonal process. It clearly illustrates the difference between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action proposed by Schön. Reflection-in-action in language learning requires the use of a number of strategies that allow the learner to monitor his output (Little & Perclová, 2001, p. 45). There has been extensive research on the topic of language learning strategies,[24] which has lead to their classification on: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Ellis, 1997, pp. 537-8). With the exception of memory strategies, the other five groups require reflection to some extent. Among the metacognitive, directed and selective attention are crucial as they are both based on previous knowledge of the subject and self-awareness of learning style. Among the compensation strategies, self-monitoring and self-evaluation are the most common. Through note-taking, grouping, audiovisual representation and contextualization, the learner relates the new materials through personalization. Among the cognitive strategies are deduction, transfer and translation. Among social and affective strategies, cooperation, communication and questioning skills are essential in order to build the dialogue on which language learning is based.

Reflection on action in language learning is mainly for planning and self-assessment (Little and Perclová, 2001, p. 45). This category can be subdivided into two groups for our own purposes: reflection on language as a product, and reflection on the learning process. The former would analyze language output - whether written or oral - and linguistic knowledge. Self-correction and linguistic analysis can foster this kind of reflection. At the level of linguistic knowledge, reflective practice is difficult to accomplish because it involves the verbalization of technical knowledge. Reflection on the process involves questioning the contexts of learning and both the collective and personal itineraries. This is the most traditional model of reflection and it presupposes a certain degree of awareness on the part of the learner about the reasons for their learning, the purpose of the process and the methods that aid his/her learning. Transferable skills such as self-management, advance preparation, resourcing and planning are the stepping stones towards the goal of reflective learning. In order to do this, Brookfield (1995) suggests the quadrangulation of perspectives by means of autobiographies, peer feedback, teacher's feedback, and readings. Evans (1999) proposes critical incident analysis, reflective journal, and the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). She also puts forward the practicality of 'reflective apprenticeship' through observation (pp. 140-5). The reflective dialogue before and after the observation is essential to bring about that understanding (Tsang, 2005, p. 3).

Moon suggests learning contracts, action learning sets and learning partners/critical friends (p. 44). Teachers should engage learners in private learner-to-learner reflective dialogue within the classroom. The atmosphere in the classroom is crucial to work towards reflection. In the criteria of favourable conditions for reflection, research has underlined the need for cooperative classrooms and responsible teaching/learning (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 58).

In this spirit, we incorporated the journals in our project and also established the practice of an informal teacher's journal that I have kept from the 13rd of January 2003 to this day. This diary has shifted in nature several times as the problems that have interested me have varied. Its entries go from very detailed explanations of critical incidents to theoretical responses to obstacles encountered in class. Whereas a detailed description of a class recently taught can take up to about twenty minutes of writing, my teaching journal has not been very time consuming lately, since my administrative duties compel me to limit it to a once-a-month exercise of reflection.

Doel (2002) support the use of a portfolio as a tool for reflection. The portfolio is a type of learning journal that combines autobiographical writing with other sources of documents, such as examples of practice and reflective statements. The use of portfolios is not recent. Disciplines such as art, finance, history and education have been using them for a long time. The main advantage of a portfolio is that it integrates learning, practice, assessment and reflection. It encourages an analytical attitude towards knowledge and experience, which may potentially lead to greater autonomy. On the other hand, it promotes professional aptitude by the identification of transferable skills and the ability of recognizing errors and difficulties. The main obstacle has been its written nature. With the proliferation of audiovisual preferences in terms of learning style, writing has grown unpopular. The use of technology has made it more appealing with the creation of blogs and podcasting.[25] Learning style and approach may hinder or assist the promotion of reflection in the classroom context. Entwistle (1998) puts forward three types of learning approach: deep (to understand ideas for yourself), strategic (to achieve highest possible grades) and surface (to cope with course requirements) (p. 19). Learners change approach depending on the task or subject in question. One of the functions of reflection through the use of a portfolio is to help the learner recognize these styles and approaches in order to broaden her/his learning experiences.

Leaving aside teaching style, curricular constraints and time management problems, which are likely to arise in any academic module, another issue that arises from the use of portfolios is whether or not they should be assessed. Moon (1999a) argues that the assessment of personal development is unreliable and that the criteria for assessment are not transparent (p. 51). On the other hand, the expectation of a grade would influence the nature of the writing. However, assessment is part of the learning process

and it ensures participation. Teachers should be able to outline a set of assessable criteria and applied them consistently. In the case of language portfolios, the easy way out is to assess the linguistic proficiency leaving aside the content of the portfolio in question.

The Language Division of the Council of Europe (CoE) developed a European Language Portfolio during the last decade, in which all learners throughout Europe can record their standards and cultural experiences in a validated document. The ELP is personal and includes three compulsory sections:

- A passport for language qualifications and skills;

- A biography to describe linguistic knowledge and experiences;

- A dossier with examples of personal work.

At the time in which I carried out the field research for this dissertation, I was not familiarized with this tool since it hadn't been very popularized in North America. On my return to teaching in Europe in 2003, I was very interested in a tool like this, since it seemed to me that the results of my students' comments and reflections recommended the implementation of a tool like this instead of a free-flow learning journal. So I decided to explore it, and the uses that other people had given it.

The ELP aims, as stated in the official documentation[26], are mainly motivating people to learn languages and contribute to mobility within Europe (CoE, 2001, p. 90). It displays a double functionality: pedagogical and reporting. The reporting function is developed primarily by the passport and dossier in which the learner describes his identity as a language user (passport) and presents examples of his/her own work (dossier). Unlike a standard CV, the portfolio validates informal linguistic experiences as long as they are properly reported. Disregarding the difficulties that this validation entails, our goal in this article is to analyze the pedagogical function of the ELP, and specifically its relation to the promotion of reflective teaching and learning. Little & Perclová (2001) describe the ELP's pedagogical function as "making the language learning process more transparent to learners, helping them to develop their capacity for reflection and self-assessment, and thus enabling them gradually to assume more and more responsibility for their own learning" (pp. 25-36).

This function is attained mainly in the biography section. In the Irish portfolio for post primary education[27], which was approved in 2001, this section contains eight activity files:

- General Aims

- Checklists of Standards

    o Spoken Interaction

    o Spoken Production

    o Writing

    o Listening

    o Reading

- Setting Goals and Thinking about Learning

    o Target

    o Achievement level

    o Self-Reflection

- Things I notice about language and Culture

    o Materials used.

    o Aspects I noticed.

- How I solve communication problems

    o Problem

    o Solution

- Methods I use to learn languages

    o What I do and why it helps me

- Intercultural Experiences

    o I have experience the culture of this language in the following ways (enter dates)

    o I have been able to use this language in the following ways (enter dates)

    o I have learnt about the culture of this language in the following ways (enter dates)

- Heritage Languages

    o This language is important to me because…

    o Here are the ways I have learned and used this language…

The biography in the Spanish Portfolio for Adults[28], approved in 2003, contains the following elements:

- Historial lingüístico (or 'linguistic record')

- Aprender a Aprender (or 'learning to learn')

- Actividades de aprendizaje (or 'activities for learning)

    o En el aula (or 'in the classroom')

    o Por mi cuenta (or 'on my own')

- Tablas de Descriptores (or 'checklists of standards')

- Planes de futuro (or 'planning)

In terms of reflection-in-action, both ELPs foster the use of compensation strategies by the emphasis placed on self-assessment by the mandatory checklists of standards. They focus on communicative and social strategies in line with their choice for the communicative approach for language learning, but they leave the metacognitive and affective strategies up to the learner's ability to recognize them.

In terms of reflection-on-action, they highlight the importance of personal planning, whether in terms of general aims or specific goals. They both work at the level of learning style, encouraging the learner to reflect mainly on a sensory and learning approach. The Irish portfolio focuses on communication strategies, whereas the Spanish portfolio works from the learner perspective and encourages the learner state all the strategies of which s/he is aware. Finally the Irish portfolio incorporates the cultural and heritage section in order to raise awareness of the Irish legacy and the immigrant community. Thus, the ELP definitely engages learners in a kind of planning, monitoring and self-evaluation (Little and Perclová, 2001, p. 45), which are all part of the reflective process.

The weakness of both portfolios comes not from their nature but from the practicalities of an official printed document as a tool for independent reflection. Both of them rely heavily on checklists. If the portfolio were to be used in class, the danger of this sort of activity is that it would encourage a very passive mode by which the learner quickly fills in details without much thought because the qualitative job of self-analysis has already been done for him/her, instead of the active reflective

attitude that is conducive to learning. This may be solved by the use of reflective activities, such as the ones proposed by Little & Perclová (2001), which lead to the completion of these ELP forms.

They tend to repeat the same pattern of questions for several languages and different skills, presenting very official-looking forms for planning and reflecting. These repetitive forms may help students by providing them with a standard aid for reflection or lead them to boredom and passive thinking patterns of the copy-and-paste type. Depending on the learning style of the class, the teacher would have to gauge its appeal for the learners in question. Again the onus is on the teacher to enhance the appeal of these materials.

Its official document appearance, which enhances the reporting function, may deter the reflective nature of it because the learner may not develop a personal or emotional sense of ownership. This could be avoided by the use of alternative methods of reporting, using the ELP as a departing point and creating classroom activities with the use of ICT or other means that would be more appealing to the learners involved.

The written nature of the portfolios, as well as the quality of the questions stated, does not encourage dialogue in the way that the above-mentioned theorists have proposed. In order to fulfil a dialogic purpose, which will also be in line with successful language learning techniques, the ELP needs to be based on cooperative debates and tasks leading to a truly reflective attitude. The voice of academic research, though well integrated into the ELP, is not transparent enough. In higher education, the ELP needs to be supplemented with articles and bibliography that would provide the learner with the theoretical map to explore the issues of language learning at an abstract level. Otherwise, the ELP runs the risk of promoting a strategic or surface approach to language learning and research at the university level.

The ELP, however, has definitely initiated a process of reflective consideration that involves learners as well as their teachers. It is the first step towards the goal of language learning autonomy in line with the recommendations of the most recent linguistic policy published in Europe (CoE, 2007, p. 69). It stands as an invitation to inclusive dialogue and participation on how participants of linguistic contact situations may assist in the improvement of teaching and learning of languages by heightening their awareness of what the process entails and the obstacles that they are bound to face, personally and collectively. The Comenius Project 06-09 is currently working towards the creation of European Language Teaching Portfolio (EUROPROF), which will in turn question language teaching professionals across Europe about their reflective practices. With the alignment of all these efforts and the creativity of the individuals that design, analyze and supplement these learning materials, both our university students and teachers can become more reflective and develop a more active approach to

teaching and learning, which will hopefully lead to a more responsible and autonomous way of thinking about and making use of language.

3.3   Organization of the data collected.

The organization that we have used in this project has been according to method of collection and to the course/module that the students were attending. I looked for patterns of recurrence and the variety of answers given to a similar problem in order to reflect upon our results.

During the project, there was an initial examination and organization of the data in order to proceed with the second part of the project. During this stage the organization was superficial and it gave birth to the summaries that can be found in the appendix to this thesis. It was a quick organization by topic and method of the answers received, and which was to be used as a diving board to carry out the rest of our project.

In the post-case study period, the data was examined in a more exhaustive manner, according to the codes and concepts elicited. We used discourse analysis for the student and teacher journals. We also used contrastive analysis with the interviews and then we organized the results in relation to the topics as can be seen in the next chapter.

In the next chapter, we will examine the methods of analysis used on the collected data and the way this data has been organized in full detail.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER …

- has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using classroom research as a method of enquiry.
- has described a few ethnographic tools used in this project, namely observation, interviewing and journals.
- has outlined the research project itself and narrated its course of events.

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[1] When the term 'classroom' is used here, it refers to the variety of physical spaces where teaching occurs (seminar room, lecture halls, laboratories…). This thesis does not extend the notion of classroom to internet or distance-based learning environments, acknowledging, however, the possibilities that these virtual environments provide for further research.
[2] For further details, see http://www.kfmaas.de/lspr_fia.html

[3] For a systematic classification of case studies see Stake, 1995.

[4] The concepts of 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity' are often mistaken. Anonymity ensures that the subjects remain nameless and confidentiality guarantees that any element that indicates subject identities is removed (Berg, 1999, p. 213).

[5] In the next section we will examine the forms used in this project, located in the appendix of this thesis.

[6] For an explanation on the concept and practice of memo writing, see chapter 4.

[7] Dörnyei alerts us to the fact that participants may be even illiterate. This literacy issue can be overcome with the use of audio or video recording facilities. If the student is allowed the use of this audio and video recording facilities on his/her own, the diary is as valid as the written narrative. If s/he is not, the question then becomes how to differentiate between a journal and an interview.

[8] The student assistants had a list of the student volunteers and the tasks they needed to fill out under their guidance (template in the appendix).

[9] CCLB webpage → http://www.language.ca/display_page.asp?page_id=249

[10] See the webpage above.

[11] See EQAO website: http://www.eqao.com//

[12] Cummins (1981) talks about a widespread ideal of Anglo conformity. "Education was naturally regarded as a major means of canadianizing foreign students" (p. 6)

[13] Even though all services are available in French, almost everywhere, and in other minority languages as well in certain points of the Canadian federal state, Ontario is strikingly monoculturalist.

[14] The EQAO is the Education Quality and Accountability office. In the test mentioned in their profile, they give 9th graders – about 12/13 years old- consists on several tests on different areas to examine the level of education, give advise to their schools and plan for reforms of the school system. The students that sit for this test do not get an influential mark. They are evaluated for what they have done and assessed but they don't get a mark that will determine their trajectory onto further education. They have tests that range from 3rd grade to 6th grade and up.

[15] During the period I was observing the ESL classes; I have no knowledge of other programs apart from the ESL/ELD one in the school I participated in.

[16] I keep the reference to this school board hidden to comply with our agreement of confidentiality.

[17] The name of the city, class, school and names of the subjects of this observation will be kept anonymous as it was agreed in the proposal of the project.

[18] The 2001 census population of this town, roughly estimates: 70,000 people – according to http://www.citypopulation.de/Canada-Ontario.html

[19] Reference hidden as in endnote 15.

[20] In the nine month period during which I observed the class, two students, an Afghan and a South Korean dropped out of the school for completely different reasons. The Afghan was an older student (16) who never found his place within the Canadian secondary school system and decided to make his way into the workplace. The South Korean was forced to join the army in Korea by his parents.

[21] In the Canadian school system, the secondary students need to do some credits in a social or volunteer job of their choice. They cannot go ahead onto university without these credits.

[22] The name of the city, class, university and names of the subjects of this observation will be kept anonymous as it was agreed in the proposal of the project; so no reference can be made.

[23] All applications for volunteering were going to be accepted but I needed a small group of assistants only. We distributed the preliminary questionnaire (see appendix)

[24] Learning strategies are defined as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques -- such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task -- used by students to enhance their own learning" (Oxford, 2003).

[25] There is an electronic version of the ELP as well that can be used in a multimedia laboratory, which can be obtained from: http://eelp.gap.it/partners.asp

[26] For more information, check the official website: http://www.coe.int/portfolio.

[27] Copies of this portfolio can be purchased through: www.tcd.ie/clcs or www.authentik.ie

[28] Copies of this portfolio can be obtained free of charge from http://aplicaciones.mec.es/programas-europeos/jsp/plantilla.jsp?id=pel_docs

CHAPTER 4.

Methodology for Data Analysis and Quadrangulation

THIS CHAPTER …

- Outlines the history of the process of analysis of the data collected through the project
- Describes the methods of analysis used, justifying the choices made in the context of the whole study

> Working with naturally occurring data is inevitable a messy enterprise…
>
> (Leung, Harris and Rampton, 2002 in Dörnyei, 2007, p. 242)

4.0   Transcribing the data: a note on transcription guidelines.

> We may have understated a little the difficulty of observing contemporary classrooms. It is not just the survey method of educational testing or any of those things that keeps people from seeing what is going on. I think, instead that it is first and foremost a matter of it all being so familiar that it becomes impossible to single out events that occur in the classroom as things that have occurred, even when they happen right in front of you. (Murray and Rosalie Wax, 1971, p. 10)

The first thing worth mentioning is that transcription is a very time consuming enterprise. The first step in data analysis is to transform it into textual form. In the case of diaries and observations, this task is already achieved by the written nature of these tools but interviews and recordings need to be transcribed. Unfortunately though, the real concern in transcription is not time but loss of information through the process. The most evident loss is the nonverbal aspects of the recorded situation. Body language or changes in the intonation are regularly lost in transcription. Supra-segmental and paralinguistic factors (non-vocal noises, stress…) as well as imperfect speech (stammering, mistakes…) are problematic to record (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 248).

All researchers have their emotional background with their social and cultural undertones. This

background is often in conflict with their ideal to work within 'detachment' and 'neutrality' in the research field, and it tends to influence questions and answers (Carter and Delamont, 1996, p. xi). A qualitative researcher needs to develop an awareness of this background and learn how to strategically use it to develop research that is "an emotionally challenging and changing experience" (p. xi).

For the qualitative researcher, emotional overtones can be crucial and are normally punctuated with bold, underlining, uppercase graphics... "Traditionally, approaches to interviewing have taken a restricted view of the role of emotions" (Owens, 1996, p. 56). The person who carried out the interview had the onus of producing an effective rapport and trust with the person that was being interviewed, or observing them in order to monitor their mood and assess the validity of what they were saying. This traditional approach regards emotions as a feature that must be controlled to produce valid data or that can be used to discern reliable data.

However, the act of transcription is not the immediate unbiased record of a certain conversation or event. In the effort to convey a verbal and non-verbal situation in a textual format, the person who is transcribing makes certain choices, interpreting gestures, tones and connotations. In our case, transcriptions were by several individuals. Since transcription is an interpretive process, it is best carried out by the same person all the time but the time-consuming nature of the task can rarely afford such a luxury. In any case, there are no perfect conventions that can be adopted automatically. Detailed descriptions of protocol conventions can be found in Schiffrin (2003). However, it is generally recommended that an individualized format is adopted to fit a research purpose, in spite of the problems that using a non-standardized coding system creates.

4. I   Methods of data analysis

This chapter is the introduction to the analysis of the ethnographic corpus created by the L.S.U.C. Project and the insights from the observations of the secondary school ESL class. It explores and explains the methods of analysis used, justifying the choices made in the context of the whole study. It outlines the history of the analytical process and details the outcomes of each of the tools separately and quandrangulates the results of these tools together.

Data collected ethnographically can be analyzed quantitatively or qualitatively. The former method presents the results of the data in the forms of tables or graphs that can be understood at a glance. The latter method of presenting results consists of developing a report describing the information, normally

illustrated by quotes or academic protocols. Obviously, the choice of method depends greatly on the type of data collected.

However, these methods can be combined - as it was in our case - as recommended by Salomon (1991). Markee argues for a hermeneutic scientific tradition (Gass, 1994, p. 89). The variety of data collection methods employed in our project benefited the combination of the quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain clearer and more coherent results. On the one hand, our study lends itself to a more qualitative methodology because of its size. On the other hand, Bardovi-Harlig supports the quantification of qualitative data in order to facilitate comparison between projects. This, in turn, would let researchers move from anecdote to evidence (p. 60), as she calls it. Computing the results in a quantitative manner has helped us spot the recurrences and understand the dynamics of the project itself and the fluctuation of details throughout the timeframe when the project was taking place. And yet, through the use of qualitative methods we tried to avoid the dangers of assuming that 'reality' is an objective entity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). The idea that reality is shaped by culture is a central tenet of classroom research (Smith, 2005, p. 73) as we saw in the previous chapter in our discussion on K. Lewin's definition of action research. This open-ended system of data analysis provides our study with a specific in-depth quality.

In our project, we decided to start by reflecting on our own teaching context and reading and writing about theory and previous research in order to develop this micro evaluation. Writing this chapter and carrying out a detailed analysis of the data collected has been crucial for our understanding of the strengths and limitations of the project itself. Keeping our focus on our main research questions [1. What happens in the language classroom from a student point of view? 2. What student perceptions and beliefs exist about how languages are learnt best in the university classroom?] during the analysis of the data collected with the various tools of ethnographic enquiry became crucial in order to isolate the issues in question.

According to Allright and Bailey (1991), there are two main issues that come up in the classroom: the management of interaction and the management of learning (p. 9). In terms of the management of interaction, there have been numerous studies of turn-taking and power dynamics in class; but the approach to the management of learning has been quite traditional. Studies have focused on syllabus, method and classroom atmosphere and, even though it has been termed management of learning rather than management of teaching, they have concentrated on the figure of the teacher as the ultimate decision-maker on these three matters. With our project, the students involved as assistants -

or even as research subjects - needed to engage in the management of their own learning, even if it was just at the level of questioning what was done in their classroom or reflecting upon what they were doing themselves. In that sense, our focus was not exactly the management of learning but the perceptions of this management and the expectations that the students had about what 'good' management of teaching/learning entails. As Allright & Bailey (1991) underline in their review of the classroom research studies done in the 80s and early 90s, it is classroom interaction – and if I may add, reflection upon those interactions - not planning, that turns out to be the key to language learning (p. 15). This statement does not take away from the importance of good planning and the significance of a good management of teaching but with a learner-oriented approach, it localizes the site of learning around the learner instead of the classroom or the lesson.

One of the most interesting concepts that Allright and Bailey (1991) put forward in terms of the issues arising from a learner-centred point of view is receptivity (p. 160). This topic obviously engages with two other important issues that surround the learner: motivation (or investment) and attention. In SLA, it echoes Krashen's idea of comprehensible input, which was never easily defined because it depends on a variety of individual characteristics. This concept underlies the willingness or readiness of a student to take in:

- the teacher as a person
- the fellow learners
- the teaching methodology
- the course content
- the teaching materials
- being a successful language learner
- the idea of communicating with others… (Allright & Bailey, 1991, p. 167)

All these factors are sensitive issues that are going to trigger anxious, competitive and lower or higher self-esteem responses in the learner. On the other hand, the teacher will also be susceptible to these or similar variables; and will also respond to the way his/her students are feeling.

In spite of the constant accusation that the analytical process consists of generic, method-free procedures, many parallels can be found in practice in the way that academics make sense of the data that they have collected (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 242). In his book *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics,* Dörnyei draws our attention to the four features that characterize our research:

1. The language-based nature of the analysis
2. The iterative process
3. The tension between formalization and intuition
4. The tension between being methodology-bound and methodology-independent. (p. 243)

Firstly, in the analytical process, all the data collected was examined in a meticulous manner, searching for recurrences through inductive pattern finding. In this way, we arrived at concepts such as receptivity, which is recurrently brought up by the students in their journals. We analyzed the text of the student and teacher journals and the transcription of interviews within the remits of pragmatics. We also compared the interviews with the journals and then we organized the results in relation to the topics that the corpus brought up.

Secondly, qualitative analysis is not linear but repetitive. All throughout these years there was a need to move back and forth between the data collected, the analysis and the interpretation of these documents in light of theories or professional experiences that we had experienced. Dörnyei (2007) also reflects upon the temptation of novice researchers, such as the writer of this dissertation, of gathering too much data that indeed distracted us for a while from reflecting on the specific issues (p. 244). Time constraints also compelled us to gather as much data as possible, which resulted in a detriment to the quick turn-around of results. However saturated our project may seem, the recurrence of similar responses or beliefs supported our findings in a quantitative manner. Saturation is a concept from Grounded Theory referring to the point in category development at which no new properties, dimensions or relationships emerge during analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 143).

Thirdly, as the quote heading this chapter indicates, the initial stage of the analytical process is quite messy, if not utterly anarchic. The task of the researcher at this stage is to arrive at an insightful report of the experiences gathered. Both subjective intuition and systematic analysis have gained considerable support amongst qualitative researchers (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 244). The former is defended on the basis of the subjective and reflective engagement of the researcher in the analysis. It is validated by the necessity to safeguard a flexible and artful perspective that brings forth new paradigms. Miles and Huberman (1994), however, claim that the absence of standardized conventions for data analysis is definitely a drawback since intuitive reflection does not provide any guarantee against simply being wrong (p. 244). As a consequence, conclusions are rendered invalid if they are not based on a systematic procedure in a transparent manner.

The three crucial operations are: data reduction, display and interpretation - no matter what approach we decide to take. The real challenge lies in and the tension between rigor and flexibility during the third operation. By combining textual analysis techniques and inductive coding (see Grounded Theory), we tried to achieve systematic results, followed by the interpretation of these results in the light of the theories that describe the patterns or recurrent concepts found and their subjective analysis by the researcher, bearing in mind the specificity of the situation under study. In other words, by striking a balance between the removed scientific approach and engaged, insightful interpretation, we tried to provide our interpretation of results with the same stability that we had attempted to provide for our methods between the qualitative and quantitative approach. As Glaser and Strauss (1999) conclude, the problem is not what form of research to use but "rather how these might work together to foster the development of theory" (p. 34). This study, as we have previously pointed out, does not aim to theorize but to describe how the student responses match the existing theory, or not. Whether this case study supports or counteracts the main theories about language learning, it suggests that local differences should not be treated as 'errors or exceptions' to the rule. Instead, these local variables need to be respected and included in the explanation of our findings to enrich the observed phenomena (Erikson, 1986, p. 121).

Fourthly, there is a tension between generic analytical moves and specific methodologies when doing this type of research. Researchers strive for a balance between science and creativity. We have indeed used coding - the analytic processes through which data is fractured, conceptualized and integrated to form theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 3) - and memo writing - the reflective record of a situation that has been under study - as generic moves, finding an enormous aid in grounded theory in order to make sense of the data gathered, moving from a merely descriptive towards a more interpretive approach.

We may add to these four categories proposed by Dörnyei, one more: the tension between objectivity and sensitivity, described in the previous chapter as the two extremes of the observant spectrum. As we have previously discussed, when dealing with the tool of observation, researchers have finally agreed that complete neutral objectivity is simply not possible. Glaser & Strauss (1999) put forward a series of techniques to increase our attentiveness and to help us manage bias while maintaining sensitivity to the data (p. 42). They suggest that we think comparatively, obtain various perspectives of an event, maintain an attitude of scepticism and follow research procedures.

It is also important to bear in mind some issues that qualitative research brings forth. Potter has talked about three ironies in qualitative research (Potter, 1996, p. 40). His first irony is related to the nature of qualitative research. Many qualitative researchers state that everything is created by our individual consciousness. Taken to the extreme, this state rules out the possibility of any sort of scholarship. Should all knowledge be created by our individual consciousness, it would never be able to explain reality in a way that can be shared by other researchers and therefore rendered useless.

His second irony is related to the nature and limits of our knowledge. Since no one interpretation is better than another, and everybody has their own take on a reality, there can be no quality standards to assess these insights. However, academic practice has already established quality standards that assess interpretation of events and data. Although these standards may need to be reviewed in light of new methods and approaches, the production of academic knowledge falls within certain flexible boundaries that need to be observed. We have discussed how these standards and criteria apply to qualitative research in the previous chapter.

Finally, his third irony accounts for the impossibility of reconciling these multiple interpretive stances and academic scholarship into a constructivist new paradigm. Since there could not be any agreement on the meaning of the incident (whether it isa conversation, a class or a written piece) in question, no research would be possible.

Potter suggests that we need to suspend our qualitative disbelief in order to do any kind of research. These ambiguities are not easy to solve but they support a more pragmatic approach to research that does not necessarily follow righteously the parameters of established theory, opening the path for methodologies that challenge previous standards and clear the way for new methodologies, attempting to give new approaches to ever-shifting realities.

4.1.1.   The Use and Function of Grounded Theory Methodologies.

> If you don't know what method you are using, it is highly
> unlikely to be grounded theory. (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 56)

Grounded theory was developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser; initially in the 1970s and later again in the 1990s. Anselm Strauss was an American medical sociologist, known for his ground breaking work in chronic illness and the process of dying. Barney Glaser was a pupil of Strauss,

who also developed studies along the same lines of sociological enquire. They founded the innovative method of qualitative analysis, called grounded theory, widely used in sociology, nursing, social work and later, in education. It provided researchers interested in qualitative studies with a theoretically based methodology (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 258). According to Anselm Strauss, grounded theory is wrongly termed 'a theory,' it should be more precisely described as a methodology to discover dormant theories within the data gathered. The unusual feature of this methodology is that it works in reverse to traditional research and may seem contradictory to the scientific method. The goal of GT is to conceptualize what happens based on empirical data as well as to discover the main concerns of the participants and their strategies to solve them.

Strauss's thinking was influenced by interactionist writings, such as the works of John Dewey and Herbert Blumer. A background such as this permeated their methodology with an empiricist attitude, highlighting the importance of complex and variable data gathering on site, first – like our three sources of data: observations, journals and interviews - and the necessity of theory emerging from this data as a means to establish a discipline and to find suitable strategies for social action. Grounded Theory (GT) is also focused on the active role of participants and the meaning that springs from their interaction. It relies on certain attentiveness to the unfolding of the process and the relationships between the conditions, the action and the consequences.

Glaser, coming from a different sociological tradition based more on quantitative analysis, saw the need to make comparisons between data to isolate, expand and link concepts. This contrastive comparative method is the second step of GT.

A grounded theorist needs to be able to step back and critically analyze situations as well as recognize bias and think abstractly. S/he needs to be flexible and open to criticism, sensitive to words and actions of the participants and to have "a sense of absorption and devotion for the work process" (Glaser & Strauss, 1999 p. 7). A researcher engaging in grounded methodology is looking out for process and action/interaction in data. S/he is looking at the world from the perspective of participants, and bringing context into the analysis.

The third step of GT emphasizes generation of theory from data through the use of a well-defined paradigm. Instead of departing from a hypothesis and then checking it against data; the first step is to collect data with a variety of methods. Strauss and Glaser go beyond triangulation, to put forward *a true interplay of methods* that makes use of any or every method at the disposal of the researcher

(Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 33). Glaser is very radical in his view of not using any theoretical background. He believes that previous concepts filter our experience of new data and that we should let go of any filters, whether theoretical or practical. In the 1990s, Glaser and Strauss' methodologies split because of this issue. Glaser was convinced that if the paradigm consisted of theoretical terms with limited empirical content, data would be forced into the existing preconceptions and so it would have little GT value.

Another difference that is worth noting here is that between Qualitative Descriptive Analysis (QDA) and GT is the unit of analysis. In GT the unit is always the incident. An incident is an event with salient significance or marked in a certain way because of its value. An incident is the combination of different variables: setting, participants and interaction. On the other hand, in most QDA in education, the unit is the learner. A learner is also a site for a combination of different variables: affective, cognitive, attitudinal…etc. but this unit of analysis makes both approaches substantially different. An incident is static whereas a learner will always be a fluid and dynamic entity. The incident has a beginning, a middle and an end. We may have different perspectives and narratives about the same incident, but this multiplicity of points of view will not change its closed and finished nature. A learner is a more slippery unit, in the sense that it is always in transformation by the mere activity of learning.

4.1.1.1. Research Problem and Research Question

In GT, the research problem can arise from several sources: it can either be suggested or assigned by a mentor; it can appear in technical or nontechnical literature; it can develop from personal and professional experience; or it can emerge from research itself. However, in any case, Strauss & Corbin could not be any clearer when they state that "paying attention to respondent's concerns is the key to where the focus of a research project should be" (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 38) – in line with the main focus of our research. In fact, it was only after analyzing the data through this methodology that we clarified that the main focus of our research was not the discovery of what happens in the classroom in general - as it was originally our naïve intent - but how teachers and mostly learners respond in the classroom, what they focus on, how it affects them; in a word: their concerns.

These concerns arise from a sensitive analysis of the data. Sensitivity is an important concept in GT. Sensitivity is the ability to adhere meaning to the events and to interpret happenings in data. Sensitivity leads to insights, during the interplay of data gathered (wherever this data comes from: theory, empirical research, professional or personal experience). Strauss & Corbin explain that sensitivity is

comparative. The researcher needs to be discerning from what he sees at an empirical and at dimensional or property levels, since it is not the researcher's perception that only matters but also how research participants see events (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 47).

They also emphasize the importance of the original research question and the way in which it is verbalized because it will set the tone of the research, the data gathering techniques and the mode of analysis. The question normally aids in keeping the focus throughout the research. The fact that we started with a very generalized and open question helped us immensely not to rule out any source of data that we could use. The flexibility of our initial research question has granted our analysis a comparative breadth that we would not have been able to achieve should our starting question have been more specific. This highlights the importance of initiating qualitative research with a broader research question, which is narrowed down at a later stage, instead of the other way round. Throughout the research process, the constant re-reading and categorizing of the data that we gathered and, most importantly, thanks to the dialogue established with the student assistants, our question became refined and the mains issues and concepts started to emerge. According to GT, this is the stage at which the concerns of the area under study get defined (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 53). In GT, the emergence of concepts is always achieved through the close analysis of the data, also known as coding, and a constant process of comparison. A concept is an overall element that includes the categories and their properties. Let us turn to explore concepts in the next subsection.

4.1.1.2.   Microanalytic Coding

> Qualitative data analysis invariably starts with **coding**
>
> (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 250**, my emphasis**)

Coding involves highlighting passages in the data and labelling them to facilitate their subsequent identification. Grounded theory offers a multileveled coding system. All these levels of coding help to identify, develop, and relate the concepts, that are the ultimate building blocks of theory. Hence, coding procedures are the stepping-stones in the theory-building process and provide the GT researcher with analytic tools for handling ample data in a systematic and creative way at the same time. It has also been proven to help researchers in the consideration of alternative meanings of the incidents in question (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 13).

Open or substantive coding describes the process by which concepts and categories are identified and their characteristics or properties, described. It also involves the discovery of the dimensions in which these concepts and categories reside in the first level of abstraction (p. 101). This coding is done regularly, line by line on the margin of field notes. As many concepts emerge, these are compared and merged into new concepts, which eventually will take new names in a process of constant terminological sharpening.

Selective coding describes the subsequent process to finding the core variable. The core is defined as the variable that explains participant behaviour against the main concern. It is not easy to arrive at the core variable, since the variety of points of view may be dissimilar. In our case, the core variable was decided by means of quantitative importance and by consensus between the research assistants and the researcher. Once the core has been agreed upon, codes are selected accordingly, discarding sub-cores or concepts with lower relevance. In our case selective coding started in week 6 of the L.S.U.C. project, when we collated interviews, observations and journals so far as a team. Then the theoretical sampling started. We were still using the same tools but the focus of these tools had been refined, i.e. the questions in interviews and questionnaires were more specific. All the data gathered at that stage was going to be treated in a more deductive than inductive way.

Finally, theoretical coding describes the next process, which consists of the integration of concepts into hypotheses that work together in order to explain the main concern of the participants. It is important to bear in mind that both substantive and theoretical codes are based on emergence from field notes, data and memos and both Strauss and Glaser emphasize that they should not be forced. Memos are records of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions and directions for further data collection done by the researcher (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 110). Memo writing is extremely important in GT because the development of ideas and the verbalization of their relationships generates the depth and originality of the theory and allows the researcher to keep a record of the analytic process (p. 244). The researcher is recommended to register ideas about the ongoing study, and awareness of the serendipity of the method is an asset to achieve quality results. This level – and the following type of coding - can be graphically done in a tree diagram, such as the one NVIVO software can produce or manually by the design of conceptual maps.

There is another level of coding, outside of the chronological sequence of the three previously described, impregnating all the stages of GT research. Axial coding describes the process by which categories are related to their subcategories, and linked at the level of properties and dimensions

(Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 123). It involves laying out the properties of a category and their dimensions. It begins during open coding and it involves defining the axis of a concept by identifying the variety of conditions, interactions, and consequences associated with an incident. It participates in theoretical coding since it involves relating a category to its subcategories through statements that clarify their relationship supported by the cues found in the data (p. 126).

The concept of action/interaction is defined in GT as either strategic/routine tactics. Strategic tactics are purposeful or deliberate acts taken to resolve a problem that shapes the phenomenon. Routine tactics tend to more accustomed ways of responding to incidents in everyday life (p. 133). Routine and strategic tactics may or may not be in alignment (p. 134) and sometimes they can even be contradictory, as we will see in the analysis of our data.

Regarding the concepts we use in coding and how the labels have to be created, there is apriority for clarity. Some, though, believe that we should use key words from the actual text to enhance their emergence and authenticity. This is called 'in vivo' coding (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 251). For this matter, the software packaged called NVIVO was designed to facilitate the time-consuming process. Others have also recommended the use of a peer to check our codes or to recode a passage altogether and then revise their results comparing it with our own (Lynch, 1996, p. 140). For the sake of speed in terms of coding, we decided to carry out an initial coding using NVIVO; for which we had to be trained in the use of this software.

NVIVO is just one of the many computer-aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDAs) programs available in the market today. The advantages of using software for QDA are clear since computers can store huge amounts of data as well as mark fragments of the text for later retrieval (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 263). In the 21st century, these software packages are much more sophisticated. Beyond their office abilities they have extended into the realm of analysis. They include functions such as domain-specific words and sentences as well as producing frequency tables. They are graphically equipped to develop visual displays hierarchically organized and nowadays they can include non-graphical 'textual' data, such as video or audio recordings. Some researchers consider the use of technology antagonistic to the creative process of interpretation though (Weitzman & Miles, 1995, p. 4). They highlight the theory-laden nature of this program, built in with implicit assumptions about the nature of data (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 267) and alert us of the other possible dangers of using CAQDAs (p. 266). These authors argue that this kind of software is programmed along certain expectations based on previous practice, which defeats the purpose of GT. The ease and speed in which we can computer-code our text can lead

to a proliferation of both data and codes, or what Dörnyei calls *the coding trap* (p. 266). Cassany (2006) underlines the ways in which 'reading' – as a first step to analysis – has been changed through the migration towards computer literacy (p. 173). Seidman (1998) agrees, stating the fact that coding a text on screen never seems as thorough as doing it on paper (p. 128). On the one hand, it allows chunks of text to be analyzed separately, with the danger of de-contextualization provoked by the absence of the formal unity of computer-based texts as opposed to the book or the page. The migration towards computer-based qualitative methods requires a transition period in which the skills of both types of methods (screen and paper based) are combined and put to work at their best. With computers also comes the fear of losing data when technology crashes and the lack of technical support that can surround the whole new experience of working with a new computer program (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 267). Software for textual analysis and interpretation has proliferated in the last decades and we can only hope that the critical reflections and reports from researchers can engage in a fruitful dialogue with the software developers to refine these products and tailor them to QDA needs and not vice versa. All in all, the advantages of using CAQDAs surpass the disadvantages and we decided to try NVIVO for the purposes of this dissertation.

Other qualitative methodologies favour a template of codes, instead of the emergence of these codes (Crabtree & Millers, 1999). This method, of course, presupposes the existence of sufficient background information and study in order to be able to design a competitive, time-efficient template. Seemingly contrary to the nature of qualitative studies, templates can provide a simple way of checking emergent codes.

Summing up, coding is a series of focused procedures that helps to break the data apart and rebuild it from an interpretive perspective, by making comparisons along the level of properties and dimensions. This intricate analysis developed by constant questioning takes into account interviewees' insights. It is very sensitive to variation, alert to assumptions and delineates provisional hypotheses. Coding is, as Corbin & Strauss (1999) define it, a tool and an attitude that should be put into use the minute we start uncovering relationships between concepts, scanning incidents or when we are presented with a puzzle (p. 126).

The whole purpose of these procedures is mainly to guide reflection away from the constraints of both the technical and personal experience. It also attempts to stimulate the inductive process and keep the focus on the data, taking nothing for granted. The close examination of people's statements and actions allows debunking of assumptions and discovering properties and dimensions of categories.

4.1.1.3.   The constant comparative method

Analysis is the interplay between the researchers and data

(Strauss & Corbin, 1999, p. 13)

Comparative analysis is a staple feature of social science research (p. 78) and therefore, it is not exclusive of GT. The main difference between Qualitative comparison targeted for a descriptive approach and GT constant comparative method aimed at a theory-building approach is at the property and dimensional level. Comparison consciously starts after open coding has been done and is only focused when selective coding has been completed.

Asking questions and making constant theoretical comparisons help researchers understand obscure incidents, sensitize researchers to possible properties and dimensions undiscovered in the data, suggest further lines of interviews or observations and move quickly from description to abstraction. It also counteracts the tendency to focus on one or a few incidents, challenging basic initial assumptions, biases and perspectives. It allows a fluid and creative stance towards data analysis, facilitating the linking and condensation of categories (p. 85).

Glaser & Strauss (1999) describe the constant comparative method in four stages: 1. comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2. integrating categories and their properties, 3. delimiting the theory and 5. writing the theory (p. 105). As we have explained, the first stage of the GT analysis is 'coding'. This coding classifies data into as many categories as possible. These categories emerge from the actual utterances and actions of the participants involved. Strauss & Glaser highlight the importance of comparison even at the stage of open coding, because it leads to theoretical categories and properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 106).

There are two main types of categories and properties:

1. Constructed.
2. Abstracted from the language used.

They are directly correlated with explanations and behaviour. Strauss & Glaser explain that after a category has been coded several times, conflicts will arise and this is the time to "stop coding and record a memo of your ideas" (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 107). This starts the second stage of the

constant comparative method. These authors also emphasize the comparative dimension of teamwork. Codes and their explanations are discussed amongst the research team and the record of these discussions can shed some light on the categories themselves and their relationships. They suggest constant discussion with the members of the team to check and crosscheck coding and data-gathering.

Accompanying these codes and categories, is the needs for a compound of tools to develop ideas. Dörnyei offers analytic memos – "as short as a sentence, or as long as several paragraphs -; vignettes – short narratives that provide focused descriptions of events or participant experiences" -; interview profiles – "substantial summaries of participant accounts" - (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 254-55); and Miles & Huberman (1994) present us with data display methods – "an organized compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (p. 11).

The third stage is the integration of categories and properties into a theoretical axis. Strauss & Glaser recommend that theoretical sampling and analysis should be done at the same time for the transparent emergence of theory. In our project, it was done on a smaller scale, since our research did not aim at theorizing in the way GT puts forward but at the description and classification of concepts.

> Theorizing is work that entails not only conceiving or intuiting ideas but also formulating them into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme, considered by many angles or perspectives (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 21).

> Theorizing is the act of constructing from data an explanatory scheme that systematically integrates various concepts through statements of relationship. It enables users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action. (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 25).

> Describing is depicting, telling a story, without stepping back to interpret events or explain why certain events occurred and not others. Conceptual ordering is classifying events and objects along various explicitly staged dimensions, without necessarily relating the classifications to each other to form an overarching explanatory scheme (p. 25).

In this sense, the last stages of Grounded Theory are not as relevant to our project as they deal with the delimiting and writing of theory. Their relevance is limited to the reduction of higher level

concepts in order to simplify the description of our cases and help us group incidents and talk about general tendencies. At this stage, the concept of theoretical saturation comes into play. Theoretical saturation is defined in the next excerpt:

> After an analyst has coded incidents for the same category a number of times, he learns to see quickly whether or not the next applicable incident points to a new aspect. If so, then the incident is coded and compared. If not, the incident is not coded, since it only adds bulk to the coded data and nothing to the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 111)

In our case, we coded every single incident even if they were 'saturated' because they added to the description and provided examples coming from different individuals with diverse features and learning situations. GT, as we have previously stated, focuses on the incident, whereas our project has a combined focus on incident/ individual.

The very last phase is only started "when the researcher is convinced that his analytic framework forms a systematic substantive theory, that it is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and that it is couched in a form that others going into the same field could use" (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 113). The first phase of writing the theory would entail the collection of memos on each category for summarizing and further analysis. The coded data can be re-used to validate points, identify data supporting various hypotheses or isolate loopholes in the theory.

4.1.1.4.   Literature Incorporated.

According to Glaser, GT provides freedom to produce new concepts. This freedom is best achieved when the researcher refrains from doing a pre-research literature review or talking about it before it is written. Strauss and Glaser, though, agree that concepts derived from literature can aid in comparison. Strauss and Corbin add that they can be used as primary data or to supplement interviews and observations (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 52). Familiarity with relevant literature can enhance sensitivity but also can block creativity. Some publications have field data (interviews, transcripts, etc…). It can also help to formulate initial questions and to stimulate the questions during the analysis, and at the end of the process it can be used to confirm findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, pp. 51-2). The extent and use of literature or outside sources generated a chasm between Strauss and Glaser.

Glaser focuses on induction and emergence, as well as on the researcher's creativity within a transparent frame, while Strauss is more concerned with validation and a systematic approach. Whereas Glaser is more radical in the zero-use of outside materials, Strauss and Corbin consider them useful at many levels. Strauss & Glaser prefer the richness of personal experience as a participant or privileged observer (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 183) but Strauss & Corbin agree that library materials can make materials about the past (Corbin & Strauss, 1999, p. 176), far-away communities and reluctant potential informants accessible. Library materials are more flexible in terms of spatial and time constraints (p. 177.

Data accessibility brought into consideration the issues of *effort, cost and speed* of data gathering (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 51). Library materials seem effortless, cheaper and faster to gather. Among the disadvantages of library sources, they quote the lack of documentary evidence of some groups or institutions. They also alert the bibliographical researcher towards writer's bias and inaccuracy in reporting, equating it to the bias present in field notes, interviews and observations. They conclude that "a personal devotion to the accuracy of one's own eyesight in the field ought not to cause the researcher to overlook perfectly good documentary materials" (p. 181). Library materials, written from a different point of view, also tend not to be detailed in terms of the continuity of the events.

4.1.1.5.   Criteria for Evaluation

> The greatest religions convert the world through stories
> Ben Okri (1995)

Doing grounded theory implies developing a theory from data. The product of this type of research is more than a descriptive set of findings. GT presents its audience with a series of integrated concepts around a theoretical paradigm. Glaser & Strauss started a revolution against what they called 'armchair theorizing', and for going out into the field. GT methodology can be used for other purposes other than theorizing though. Grounded description adds to the corpora of case studies in a quantitative and qualitative manner and Grounded Conceptual Ordering provides new interpretive schemes for the cross-case comparison. According to Corbin, a story differs radically from theory in that it gives insight and understanding, but also helps us to predict and to plan. Corbin's assessment of the descriptive method is reductionist. Intuitively, stories have been enriching human understanding and helping humans predict and plan as well as the opening quote of this section highlights.

> Stories are a way of knowing. The root of the word 'story' is the Greek word 'histor', which means one who is "wise" and "learned" […]. Telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process. (Seidman, 1998, p. 1)

The inductive nature of this methodology concurs that theory is a process, not a product (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 249). Since "the root sources of all significant theorizing are the sensitive insights of the observer himself" (p. 251), theory is created from the combination of personal experience (p. 252), vicarious experience and existing theory (p. 253). These three main sources of data are combined to form 'an insight'. According to GT, the theorist's job is to develop insights into a systematic theory to avoid the pitfalls of anecdotal evidence. According to Qualitative Descriptive Analysis, these insights or anecdotes can be arranged in a structured manner, by which the process and the details of the research are transparently narrated in order to capacitate the reader with a series of tools and share a reality analyzed from an explicit point of view. Arguments for Descriptive research products can be made when avoiding the complexities and constant need for redefinition that abstract terms can add when sharing anecdotes and findings.

Apart from the general aim of theory-building, Strauss & Glaser defined four criteria for the assessment of grounded theory:

1. Fitness.

The theory must correspond to and be carefully induced from the data in order to be applied in daily situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 238).

2. Understanding.

If the theory is quickly understandable, it tends to facilitate its use (p. 241).

3. Generality.

The theory must be a general guide to multi-conditional, ever-changing, general situations (p. 242). They argue that theory is possible even in one-case studies. Theories thus generated will be rather restricted in their explanatory strengths. They will require further study, modification and expansion through other studies but the concepts they generate will be useful (p. 284).

4. Control

This is the most complex criterion offered by them. By control, they point towards a type of command that allows the researcher to understand and analyze ongoing situations; produce and predict change in them as well as predict and control consequences. In this regard, they describe controllable variables and access variables. The latter are variables that allow, guide or give persons access either to the controllable variables or to the people who control them (p. 248).

Thus, grounded theory offers a selection of accurate tools for in-depth analysis of incidents, but the analysis it entails is a demanding task, which requires highly developed analytical and conceptual skills (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 261).

4.1.2 Exemplary Qualitative Study.

As we have just mentioned above, quality standards are variable and varied among qualitative methods. Beyer (1992) highlights the importance of genuine curiosity on the part of the researcher, which is not only going to justify his/her investment into the research but also authenticate its purpose (p. 51). She reinforces the need to incorporate and contest existing theory but bring on new understanding from empirical data that comes about from a participant's immersion in the research field. She adds the need for flexible and imaginative research methodologies, which presuppose an unstinting effort on the part of the researcher. The emphasis, placed on the researcher in these criteria, for quality seems to lead us to the conclusion that exemplary research practice has moved on from the frozen ideals of academic rigor into a more socially responsible paradigm that takes into account ethics as globally-oriented, locally-active initiatives (p. 206).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER has explained the methodology of analysis of the data collected through the project, justifying the choices made and the advantages and drawbacks of this methodology.

CHAPTER 5

Student Journals in the L.S.U.C. Project

THIS CHAPTER …

- Focuses on the concepts derived from student journals.

- Initializes the first stage of coding and sub-coding.

- Isolates the initial core variables and their recurrence.

- Outlines the main contrast between student journals and teacher's journal.

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5. I   Focus: L.S.U.C. Project.

The analysis of ethnographic data is a layered, never-ending process that spreads along the timeline of any given research. Thus, as we have mentioned in chapter three, we carried out an initial reading of these journals in week six of the project - in other words, in March 2003 – in order to use the information that they contained to give direction to the next stage of our project. We focused our interviews on the issues raised and we carried out observations with an eye on the few changes that we had incorporated, thanks to the students' suggestions. I have collected below the first preliminary conclusions from journals, observations and interviews during week six. These conclusions, in terms of statements, were selected by the research team in a meeting and focused on the ideas that were repeated through several instances or what we considered serious enough (see Teacher-Student Relationships) and wanted to act upon immediately. We did not isolate the results in terms of course and module at this stage because we were interested in finding out what the student focus was more than designing a plan of action. However, we did carry out an informal set of corrective actions that set some changes in motion and were noticed and appreciated by class participants. One of the teachers in the courses in question was quite new to Canada and most of the negative comments in this section apply to incidents that had risen through intercultural misunderstandings, more than through bad classroom management.

Table 11. – Preliminary Conclusions from Data Gathered Through Ethnographic Tools. - Designed for this dissertation

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS FROM JOURNALS, OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS DURING READING WEEK
TEACHING (in bold the aspects that were acted upon after Reading Week)
• Too fast.
• Lost with grammatical terms.

- More conversation.
- Messy blackboard.
- The teacher should be more patient and let the class answer.
- Not correcting mispronunciation.
- A class should never be 2 hours long.
- Breaks, during the class, are good.
- Good cultural explanations on the side.
- Students question the policy of getting marks for attendance.
- Language learning is too oriented towards writing.
- Positive feedback on use of grammar.
- Students questions the purpose of group work.
- Little time for exercises in class.
- Avoid translation of vocabulary.
- Inexperience in teaching.
- Classes cover too much.
- Good reviewing.
- More contact hours.
- Debates would be good.
- More practice.
- More feedback instead of answer keys.
- Hard to understand accent of the teacher.
- Too worried with grammar correction.
- Effort and grade are not related.
- Fun.
- Good that the tests are low percentage.
- Tough to get motivated just for 50 minutes.
- Prefer another setting, cafeteria.
- Coaching through corrections is good, instead of simply giving the right answer.
- Never introduce a new concept until it is mastered by everyone.
- Present class content at the beginning of the lesson.
- Good use of rounds to answer questions.
- More reading.
- What is the best hour to learn a language?
- Stimulate more conversation.
- Try different methods of correcting.
- Conversation and seminar content is sometimes disconnected.

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

- Teachers shut people down in class.
- Teachers are rude.
- Teachers hurt self-esteem.
- Lack of attention of the conversation teacher.

STUDENT FEELINGS

- Lack of confidence in using the language.
- Student shyness.
- Being prepared motivates students.

- Too busy to study Spanish.
- Paying a lot of money.
- Lazy to ask.
- Lost hope with the class.
- Embarrassing to talk.
- Stress.
- Not asking a question through lack of language knowledge.

CLASS INTERACTION

- Low participation demotivates students.
- Knowing each other better in the class would help.
- Enjoyable peer feedback.
- Class distribution. Suggestion to use a circle structure.
- Noise and distraction.
- Groups smaller.
- Good atmosphere.
- Students do not like other students that do not pay attention.
- Teacher-students partying together.
- Sitting with my friends distracts me.
- Students do not feel threatened into participation.
- Group work is not appreciated.
- Work in pairs with a person that knows more.
- Student hostility in the class.
- **Lack of communication between teacher and students.**

MATERIALS

- Good reading, especially the visual dictionary.
- Workbook doesn't work.
- More vocabulary repeated.
- Grammar course for bonus.
- Good CD.
- Web exercises useless.
- They like dictations.
- Very few like the laboratory.
- Textbook → good combination between grammar and vocabulary.
- Audiovisual material more often.
- Tapes are broken in the labs.

DIFFICULTIES

- Problems with listening and understanding.
- Too much content for one course.
- Too many verb tenses.
- Programs for non-Spanish majors.

OTHER LANGUAGES

- French helps.

At this stage and no matter how these categories range, from imprecise to specific, the process of inductive coding had already started, by putting student feedback into these separate boxes.

We carried out a second, slightly more in-depth reading during week twelve when the whole journal was submitted anonymously to the student assistants. The student assistants then brought an initial draft of results to the last meeting of assistants and researcher. During this last meeting of the research team, we started to talk about what categories or aspects of the teaching and learning situations with which we were dealing seemed more relevant or adaptable, in order to act upon them. The process of selective coding had intuitively started at this stage.

The research assistant team seemed to focus on the distribution of power in the classroom, which would encompass three of the categories from the previous table: the teaching, the teacher-student relationships and the classroom interaction. They also concentrated on the student feelings, carrying an enormous amount of importance. However, they concluded that this was probably the most difficult aspect of the teaching situation on which to make an impact. They considered that even though it is idealistic to believe that teacher and student actions can positively impact on student feelings, it is almost impossible to predict the outcomes of our actions since they cannot be measured and vary from person to person.

In the multicultural settings that the teaching situations in question happened, the difficulties to predict the positive outcome are greater. An important aspect of this consideration, though, is how these research assistants considered it was not only the responsibility of the teacher to try and positively influence the student's affective side of learning, but also his/her fellow student learners. The fact that my research assistants took for granted this equal distribution of the responsibility for optimum learning pointed to the fact that the teaching/learning culture from which, or to which, these students belonged was quite democratic, open and cooperative. This, probably, reflected the agenda of the third level institution in question. It may also have been influenced by the fact that a great majority of them were majoring in International Development Studies, with a solid background in sociological studies on cooperation.

We also seemed to focus on the issue of the language of instruction, as well as the help or hindrance of other languages in the learning of Spanish, mainly through my own interest. Since the beginning of our research I had been very interested in this topic. There was no clear consensus in the data gathered from any of the three methods or amongst ourselves about the positive or negative influence of English in

the teaching of Spanish. Neither we did reach any clear cut conclusions in terms of other languages benefiting or hindering the learning of Spanish. It seemed that most students believed that French helped them but some of the teachers reported constant interference that would not obstruct communication but precluded fluency or correction.

From then on, our thinking focused on these three core variables: Classroom Dynamics, The Affective Side of Language Learning and Language of Instruction.

Finally, in the last stage of our project, and after several close readings and selective coding of the journals written by our students and teacher, we are attempting to contrast these original codes to the ones that these materials have elicited and refine them to allow more precision towards theoretical coding. Once we extract and finalize the codes from journals, interviews and observations, we will start the process of theoretical coding (see Chapter Nine). In other words, we will try to organize these codes into hierarchies associating them with their conditions, interactions and consequences. After we have finished these theoretical associations, we will try to offer a series of probability statements that will offer a series of possible answers to our research questions.

5.2   Results from student journals

As we explained in Chapter Three (3.1.2), student and teacher journals were developed for this project as a form of free-style narrative with a double purpose: they were a written record of their classroom experience and they allowed a reflection on these experiences, explained in their own words. Both students and teacher were encouraged to use a very uninhibited style of writing to complement the peer-directed interviews.

We used these diaries to elicit our main codes, since the narrative was elicited in a less guided manner than the other sources of data for this project. There were several stages of coding, as we have seen previously in this chapter, and the final stage of initial coding was carried out in the last few months of writing up this thesis as we went through yet another reading of the journals. During this time, we used nVIVO to mark the extracts that related to the different codes we had either been constructing or abstracting. The main difference between constructed and abstracted codes lies in the way the codes have been elicited. Constructed codes were elicited from words or terms that the participants used themselves. It should be noted that we use the word participant because there were several student journals and a teacher journal. Abstracted codes were interpreted from the 'ideas' or

'concepts' that participant utterances highlighted. This list of codes has been devised with nVIVO. All these codes were student-centred:

1. Awareness (113 references)
2. Cultural aspects of Teaching and Learning (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (2 references)
3. Deficiencies (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Methods) (28 references)
4. Difficulties (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (120 references)
5. Dynamics – Power distribution - Roles in the classroom (195 references)
6. Engagement (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (76 references)
7. Feedback (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Dynamics) (14 references)
8. Hard days (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Dynamics) (8 references)
9. Ideal conditions (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student Feelings) (25 references)
10. Improvement (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (38 references)
11. Intercultural awareness (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (10 references)
12. Language of instruction (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Methods) (37 references)
13. Methods (tests, textbooks) (100 references)
14. Other languages (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student strategies) (34 references)
15. Previous knowledge (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student strategies) (5 references)
16. Physical space (44 references)
17. Student expectations and perceptions (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student Feelings) (68 references)
18. Student feelings (153 references)
19. Student strategies (111 references)
20. Tools (➔ Later on coded as a subtopic of Methods and Student Strategies) (37 references)

Half way through re-reading the journals, we realized that some of the student-centred codes could be revised in terms of nomenclature to make the probability statements easier to articulate. We also realized that in some of these categories there were issues that had been essential to a student-centred study that we had managed to overlook until then. The codes in bold are the codes abstracted whereas codes in regular font refer to constructed codes. We worked, from then on, with the following 'qualified' set of codes, leaving in bold the previous term that we had been using until then:

1. Overall Awareness (359 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of awareness, cultural aspects of teaching and learning, difficulties, engagement, improvement and intercultural awareness.
2. Student feelings (246 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of ideal conditions, student expectations and student feelings.
3. Power Dynamics in the classroom (217 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of dynamics in classroom, feedback and hard days.
4. Teaching Methods (202 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of deficiencies, language of instruction, methods and tools.
5. Student strategies (150 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of other languages, outcome, previous knowledge and student strategies.
6. Physical Space (44 references).

This will not be the last set of codes we use. At this stage we realized that some of these categories somewhat overlapped with one another and that through a closer look at the journal entries together with the contrastive analysis of interviews and observations, we could refine the codes with which we were working; or rather each of these codes, then, became subdivided and further qualified as we moved forward in the analysis of the journal entries that we had associated with these instances. It should be noted at this stage that the codes and the number of references above refer to all the ethnographic tools used in the study. Since all these codes were going to be reorganized in subcategories, the number of references that they received in the student journals was only calculated for approximation purposes in order to estimate what the major areas were that captivated student concerns. This qualitative referencing, though, gave us a preliminary idea of what the main concerns were for students when looking at their language learning, and with what topics they associated writing a journal about language learning.

5.2.1 Student Awareness.

> The heart of the matter is a concern with enhancing the awareness of one's assumptions, values and intentions embedded in practice, and the various social, cultural and psychological forces shaping these assumptions and values.
>
> (Tsang, 2005, p. 2)

First of all, they reflected upon themselves showing the topic towards which their awareness was directed, especially in the journals. Here is the sub-classification we have drawn up for the examples of student awareness in the journals:

- ➢ Linguistic awareness
    - o Vocabulary
    - o Use of Grammar
    - o Pronouns
    - o Verb Tenses & Subjunctive
    - o Negative structures
    - o Por and Para
    - o Pronunciation
    - o Sentence structure
    - o Listening difficulties
    - o Speaking difficulties

- ➢ Personality awareness
    - o Aptitude
    - o Engagement
    - o Lack of concentration
    - o Reluctant
    - o Low self-confidence
    - o Experiential and creative learning
    - o Competitiveness
    - o Self-consciousness
    - o Work related stress

- ➢ Learning awareness
    - o Class times
    - o Student beliefs
    - o Learning difficulties
    - o Improvement
    - o Student needs
    - o Learning style
    - o Pace
    - o Time management
    - o Purpose

- ➢ Intercultural Awareness
    - o Food
    - o Multilingualism
    - o Manners

- ➢ Teaching culture awareness
    - o Patience and flexibility
    - o Native or non-native speaker
    - o Rapport
    - o Strategic learning
    - o Action
    - o Engagement with student learning

Let's examine these categories with some of the excerpts from their journals:

- ➢ Linguistic awareness

By linguistic awareness, we are referring to the student's capacity to reflect upon language

as a product and the concrete items that make up grammatical utterances. Students in this project showed their concern about:

- o Vocabulary

I hope that we will have vocabulary questions on future tests because it is more important than grammar in my opinion.[1] (Student Journal 100 #11)

It is definitely worth noting that a lot of students consider vocabulary prevalent to grammar or language rules. It is also interesting to note that a lot of students complained, at different stages of their Spanish degree, about not having enough vocabulary or not learning enough vocabulary.

- o Use of Grammar

It also seems to be motivating me to learn more and to make links between the grammar concepts I learn and their daily/regular usage. (Student Journal 100 #10)

A lesser percentage of students accept the teaching of grammar as an interesting tool and reflect upon its use in their language learning and its application in everyday life. But it is noticeable how the majority of them would not work on this link between language theory and practice.

- o Pronouns

The fact that there are 2 ways to put these pronouns (at the end or at the beginning) when there are 2 verbs being used is also a little tricky, because flexibility at this point is not too helpful. (Student Journal 200 #3)

Object pronouns in Spanish seem to be a major concern of students.

- o Verb Tenses & Subjunctive

I often noticed that I don't feel at all comfortable with using those verb tenses when I am writing or talking. I tend to change my sentences around so that I can use the verb tenses I feel I am comfy with:

indicative, present and past. I don't use subjunctive at all, even though I know there are numerous times when I could use it. (Student Journal 200 #12)

Verb tenses in Spanish seem to be another major concern of students, as expected. Most students in this project are aware of their difficulties with the use of the Spanish subjunctive. This statement proves their frustration and the complexity of the issue.

      o   Negative structures

The only thing that I am finding a little bit confusing is to answer questions in a negative manner correctly; (Student Journal 100 #11)

As a teacher, I would not have anticipated this issue, which seemed to be a concern for a good percentage of our students, as it is a common belief that the negative structure in Spanish is simpler than in other languages. However, this specific student was referring to the double negatives that are used with some of the indefinite quantifier such as 'nada, tampoco…' which pose some complication for a speaker of other languages in which this phenomenon is not mirrored.

      o   Por and Para

Finally this week we learned the words por and para and when and how to use them. I find that extremely confusing though because they translate in many different words in English like about through around along. (Student Journal 100 #11)

The distinction between the two problematic prepositions is one of the difficult mistakes to correct and that tend to remain fossilized.

      o   Pronunciation

I think it is mainly because most of us had a lot of difficulty in the pronunciation of some of the words. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Pronunciation kept coming up, especially at beginner level but strikingly at other levels as well.

o   Sentence structure

I think my biggest problem is putting sentences together. (Student Journal 100 #4)

Some students commented on their difficulty to string sentences together. This seemed to be especially relevant to those students with no language other than English or that had not learned any other language before.

o   Listening difficulties:

I find that is a big problem for me because I find it hard to understand when someone is talking to me, I can't really make out the words and I get words mixed up when someone pronounces them with other words. (Student Journal 200 #8)

My strong points in Spanish is reading and writing and not listening, I find speaking to be okay, but listening is so much harder! (Student Journal 200 #5)

The two quotes that we have selected highlight the emphasis in the courses taught at this university on skills other than listening, and also the fact that listening without interaction is a much harder and higher skill since it involves the understanding of words and the understanding of their collocations in a sentence, normally without the aid of a dictionary or a speaker with which to negotiate its meaning.

o   Speaking difficulties:

I have all the words and I know what I want to say, I just can't pull it out of my head fast enough. I get blocked and my mind freezes. I find it much easier to write what I want to say, and then say what I want to say. Most of the time that's what I do before I want to say something, I write it down. So I see myself struggling a lot with speaking. (Student Journal 250 #1)

The topic of student anxiety at the time of producing spoken language will be discussed largely in the section dealing with student feelings. What struck me as important is how aware students are of these feelings and how difficult it seems to overcome them. The more they recognized their nervousness speaking Spanish, the more it seemed to block them. It would seem that becoming more aware at this level defeats the purpose of awareness as an aid to overcome obstacles.

➢ Learning awareness

By learning awareness, we are referring to the student's capacity to reflect upon the process of learning and the specifics of learning a language. We were considering the items that a student would isolate and their main concerns at this level:

o Class times

I noticed that around 9:30-10:00a.m. everyone starts to participate more and their faces appear more alert. I know that for myself this is true. (Student Journal 250 #5)

It was so cold outside right now and having class from 5-6 at night, with no other classes around it, is NOT very motivating. (Student Journal 100 #1)

The issue of class times was definitely an issue repeatedly discussed in their journals. Different students would prefer different times during the day as their optimal times for learning. However, they all agreed that too early was not good and too late was not good either. They also agreed that these class times have a huge impact on their motivation and participation.

o Student beliefs

I've discovered that my theory of staying home to study for the test and missing class will get me a better mark than if I went to class was wrong. Trial-and-error, I suppose. (Student Journal 200 #1)

Most students in this project had been students of languages, or simply students, before. In the many years spent learning a language behind a desk they developed their own theories. This project will focus on some of their concerns and theories about language learning inside a classroom and it highlights that all students theorize about the process of learning to a certain extent, elaborating strategic or overarching theories that they, later on, apply analogically to other areas of knowledge that they are acquiring.

o Learning difficulties

Many students were highly aware of patterns that they had discovered through their previous life as

students. Similar to what happened with their anxiety about speaking, this knowledge sometimes seemed to hinder them in the advancement of their learning. Some students associated part of their identities to the negative statements they had received about their learning abilities in the past and showed little flexibility to be able to change them.

The hardest part about learning a new language is that it is hard to find the time to continue to speak it outside of class and the language labs because it is hard to find someone to speak with. (Student Journal 100 #7)

Most of the students in this project acknowledged the time-consuming nature of the language learning process and the restricted availability of time and resources outside of their classroom.

- o Improvement

These student diaries also proved to be very useful tools in recording student improvement as they commented largely on this subtopic.

What was really neat is that most of us seem to be asking less and less for meanings of words which shows how our Spanish is improving very quickly. (Student Journal 100 #11)

It makes me feel like I have learned a lot from the course when I can put everything together and actually have a conversation with someone or write a longer composition or even teaching someone a part of the Spanish language. I have had a few people ask me stuff in Spanish and I have even been watching movies or shows on television where people are speaking Spanish and I actually understand what is being said. (Student Journal 100 #15)

The movie helped me listen to and comprehend people speaking Spanish. It was also a good movie because it showed us a little glimpse of Spanish culture and what their movies are like. (Student Journal 250 #2)

They talked about how they used outside of class experience to measure their improvement:

We go over the grammar and she does activities with me in the book and won't let me move ahead until she feels that I have a grasp on that part of the grammar. She has helped me a lot over the course

of a few months, although it doesn't show in my test results. (Student Journal 200 #8)

I also found that I have been able to incorporate what [Teacher's Name], the conversation teacher and my tutor have taught me when me and my friend talk in Spanish to each other when we are walking somewhere and my friend has a easier time understanding me. So I guess you could say that I am making progress. (Student Journal 200 #8)

They also realized that sometimes class tests and actual use of language were in contradiction in terms of improvement:

I understood generally what the song was talking about. It was about how dancing can make your worries go away and the stress of the day to disappear and other words that I didn't understand but that is still an improvement to be able to understand the general meaning. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Their diaries not only helped them to notice their own progress but they made them reflect upon the improvement of their peers:

Some of the other groups did really well, and I've noticed some people really improving. (Student Journal 100 #8)

In general, they seem to find pair discussions and checking with other peers a very useful tool to measure their improvement.

My topic was in fact easily discussed with my partner something that I could not have done at the beginning of the year and therefore I can confidently say that my oral communication skills have greatly improved over the course of the year. (Student Journal 250 #7)

   o   Student needs

Students in first year found the use of summaries of what they had read and learned beneficial for recalling and practicing the content of the lesson.

Maria was due today, but I left it on my desk at home, but luckily we had an extension because it was late going up on the web. Even though I am benefiting from it, I don't think we needed it! It usually

takes me less than a half an hour to read through it and then write the summary. I think we should have to either do more of them, or longer summaries. (Student Journal 100 #3)

In terms of group work, their views were not unanimous but some of them found it beneficial in terms of completing work in class.

Recently, our class worked in groups to complete an assignment. I think that this was a good idea and that we should do this more often. I find that if I am able to talk to other students about the work to be done that I can learn the best. (Student Journal 100 #20)

They also expressed their preferences in terms of learning sequences:

For me I think it might be easier to learn how to speak Spanish (fairly well) and learn the grammar afterwards this way I may have a better understanding of it.. (Student 100 #20)

o   Learning style:

Learning style is the most ubiquitous subtopic in educational literature. In Canada, in the secondary school system most students had been subjected to assessment of learning style and they had learned their assessment and clung to them, for dear life some times. Once again, awareness of certain features contributed to a rigidity in terms of learning skills and patterns. Even though educational theory has moved on to a more accurate approach on multiple intelligences, these theories have not permeated into the beliefs of the participants in the classroom. These 'inherited' student profiles of students should be acknowledged and students need to understand the possibility of change at this level.

That way, like the 'Maria' I associate the picture with the Spanish word, no English is involved. I am a visual learner, so this seems to be working for me. (Student Journal 100 #12)

In language teaching and learning, there is a rather extended golden belief that languages are best learned in immersion. Many of our students held on to that belief so strongly that it did not allow them to exploit all the resources around them in order to foster their own language learning:

And I also think, if I could immerse myself in an atmosphere where I had no choice but to use my Spanish speaking skills, I would learn to speak fluently. (Student Journal 250 #1)

Most of them as well expressed their preference to work in groups:

I like the interaction and learning in groups rather than by myself. (Student Journal 100 #11)

They also commented upon the difficulties to develop an autonomous learning style:

I find that I learn so much more in class rather than by myself. (Student Journal 100 #11)

o   Pace

The contradiction between the pace of learning and the pace of teaching is one of the most discussed topics in the journals. Curricular demands force a pattern and a speed of learning that does not normally match the student's acquisition sequence and creates a lot of strain in teachers and students.

I find that class moves so fast and I know that we are supposed to tell the professor when we do not understand something, but if no one else has a problem, then you don't want to say anything. (…)There is another thing that I realized; it is difficult to catch up on your own if you miss a class. (Student Journal 100 #9)

When I learned French we'd only learn like 2 verb tenses every year or 2, and practice them ALL year, until we could do them second nature. But this is crazy! We learn something, have a week to absorb it, and then it's off to something totally new, which we are supposed to be able to learn and apply in a week also. (Student Journal 100 #8)

This speed permeates into the classroom dynamics sometimes:

The teacher skims through the answers so fast, that I miss most of them. (Student Journal 200 #1))

Students comment on the ideal conditions they experience with outside tutors that follow their pace of learning.

As for my tutor, I think we have covered the grammar pretty well. We go over the grammar and she does activities with me in the book and won't let me move ahead until she feels that I have a grasp on that part of the grammar. (Student Journal, 200 #8)

- o Time management

Taken for granted in most case studies, the issue of time management and constraints was most relevant for our students.

I did not attend the Spanish Lab this week for two reasons. One was because I wanted to do some last minute studying before the exam and secondly I hadn't finished some lab book work.. (Student Journal 200 #19

My parents brought me home for the weekend to keep an eye on me, and they almost didn't bring me back for class on Monday, but I had promised the teacher a note on Monday, so they let me come. I tend to miss a lot of classes on Mondays because my parents bring me home for the weekend sometimes, and it's a 4 hour drive there and 4 hours back. (Student Journal 200 #1)

I should have spent more time studying, it is just hard to find that time. I guess I need to work on my time-management skills. (Student Journal 250 #2)

Students complained at large about the lack of acknowledgement about these issues on the part of their teachers:

I was disappointed to learn that we had to prepare this as a group on our own time. I definitely think that class time should be allocated to this, not only so that the teacher can help us with any problems, but with such short notice it is hard to arrange a time to meet with all the other students. (Student Journal 100 #5)

- o Purpose

Student diaries also provided a perfect arena for the discussion of student goals. Most of the students in this case study were learning Spanish for practical reasons and travelling to Spanish-speaking countries.

I like Spanish, and I think the main reason why I am still taking the class is because I plan on using it someday. I want to travel, and I know it will have to be useful somewhere, someday. (Student Journal 250 #1)

They also questioned the purpose of the modules that made up their Spanish courses. The language lab seemed to encourage a lot of animosity.

I didn't go to my language lab yesterday. There didn't seem to be any point in going. I get done my lesson in 20 min. and then I have to sit there for the rest of the class. (Student Journal 100 #5)

They also highlight the fact that awareness of purpose encourages engagement.

[Teacher's Name] has asked me why our class doesn't participate that much and I think it is because some of the stuff that is being taught is slightly useless or it seems that way to the class. I think everyone in the class is questioning the usefulness of the stuff being taught in conversation class. (Student Journal 200 #4)

> ➤ Personality awareness

By personality awareness, we are referring to the student's capacity to reflect upon characteristics of their personality that they believe to be affecting their learning. We were considering the items that a student would isolate and their main concerns at this level:

> o Aptitude

I often ask myself, "Why can I not speak Spanish after so many years of taking Spanish courses?" I know the answer deep down, I know it's because I am not a genius and can't learn a language and be fluent in it without more effort. I realized when I was younger I should have taken it more seriously, and thus not be in the predicament I am in now. But then I also think, I am not that horrible. I know a lot more than most people do about speaking Spanish. I know a lot more about the culture too, and a lot of people don't see the importance of learning a new language. (Student Journal 250 #1)

This student in particular had a flexible view about his ability to learn languages. However, it's obvious that self-assessment plays a major role in the openness to learning in a foreign language. On the other hand, the issue of aptitude is in its majority checked against other peers and against themselves at earlier stages. In the next excerpt we can observe how the myth that languages are learned better as children is very much present in the student psyches:

I wish I could pick up a language as easily as her. I think that it has to do with age, though. If I was younger, a child, I'm sure I could pick Spanish up a lot faster. (Student Journal 200 #1)

- o Engagement

Students in this project considered their own engagement with the subject, without being asked to do so.

Sometimes don't push myself to practice, I know that I have some vocabularies, but I just don't try as hard as I could. That is something that I need to work on. (Student Journal 200 #2)

Many of them have a perfectionist view of what they should be doing, and logically, few of them considered that they did enough to match their goals:

I like it a lot, it makes perfect sense to me, but that doesn't mean I take full advantage of the all that is offered. (Student Journal 250 #1)

On the other hand, it was common to see that most students gave preference to other courses, more content-based, than the skill-based language learning process:

I have a full course load and don't always give as much attention to the Spanish classes. (Student Journal 200 #3)

At the institution where we carried out this project, attendance and participation marks were essential in order to do well, and therefore students were highly aware of their need to be engaged, not only and sometimes not quite, with the language, but with the course modules and materials. This itemized view of the course was reflected in the fact that in general they focused more on their success in the class assignments and exams than in an overall communicative performance in the language. These reflections proved that many of our students approached Spanish strategically more than deeply engaging with it:

I do not intend to miss anymore class for the participation portion of the course are easy marks and I'm doing very well in the class right now and I don't want to lose marks out of sheer laziness. (Student Journal 200 #4)

A good majority of them seemed to deem this compulsory attendance and participation as a positive feature of the courses at this institution:

I think that more involvement on the student's part is definitely a way to get them more inclined to participate. Mandatory participation is a great way to get students more comfortable speaking the language. I am figuring we all signed up for the course so that we could speak it, and so we should be forced to get over our fear. It is probably a better idea to get it done at the beginning of the year, but I guess better late than never. (Student Journal, 100 #21)

Under this topic they also reflected upon what activities and content made them more engaged or less engaged with the language. Verb tenses were very uninspiring:

Having earned my bilingual diploma in French, I did not enjoy learning French verb tenses either. I do enjoy learning new languages, but about the time when we are learning so many verb tenses I find that I am overwhelmed and am not enjoying myself. This in turn makes me unmotivated to pick up my textbook. (Student Journal 250 #2)

Whereas opportunities to use their language, on the other hand, seemed to boost their engagement, whether in a spoken fashion or with experiential learning tasks:

Today, when I went home I made the recipe that was given to us in class on Monday (Croquets de pollo). It turned out great and my family loved it. My mom said that it reminded her of an Egyptian dish that her mom used to make when she was a little girl. I even followed the recipe in Spanish, I was determined not to write the English translation which was a really good practice for my Spanish. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Once again, unawareness of purpose of an activity seems to decrease their engagement with the module in general:

[Teacher's Name] has asked me why our class doesn't participate that much and I think it is because some of the stuff that is being taught is slightly useless or it seems that way to the class. I think everyone in the class is questioning the usefulness of the stuff being taught in conversation class. (Student Journal 200 #4)

They seem to react positively and engage better if the activity is relevant and challenging than if it is not:

Really liked this exercise not only because I was able to practise my Spanish communication skills, but also because it was a very relevant and challenging topic, which our society faces today. (Student Journal, 200 #6)

I really enjoy working on these compositions, I find them a good way of learning new words and it is always neat to express myself in a different language. I always try to keep them as interesting as possible. (Student Journal 100 #6)

They also seem to be aware of the effect of engaging with the language outside of the classroom:

Recently I have been getting together more often with Spanish speakers outside of the university environment and this is greatly contributing to my Spanish communication skills. (…) All in all, the more I am subject to the Spanish language the more I feel motivated and interested in learning more. The upcoming HOLA events will be a great opportunity to further immerse myself. (Student Journal 100 #10)

In spite of the cliché of immersion, extracurricular activities seemed to make the students aware that they could use Spanish in a fully communicative way outside of an immersion environment:

On Saturday March 29 was held the Spanish Immersion Day, which I participated in. This day was very exciting for me, from the outset, since it meant that for a whole day I would be immersed in Spanish. The best way to learn is in fact to be immersed and therefore I think that there should be more of such opportunities offered throughout the year. (maybe one such day in the fall). Students could also, as part of course requirements, help organize certain activities and participate during the whole day. Clearly it is much more difficult to learn a language in a classroom and therefore as many

efforts as possible should be made to incorporate components that take place outside the classroom. (Student Journal 250 #7)

o   Lack of concentration

When we set the task of writing journals for our volunteer students, we were expecting a lot of comments about this issue. The number of references struck us as lower than we expected but yet, there were a number of comments that highlighted the fact that our students' concentration spans varied greatly. They quoted tiredness, new items in the classroom, classmates and noises as their main sources of distraction and poor concentration.

Then just as class was wrapping up, we were given homework, but I was tired and think I missed most of what was said, by reason of lack of concentration. (Student Journal 250 #1)

First distraction in this class: [Teacher's Name]'s shoes! I really like their shape. I guess a lot of time in classes I look at stuff like that.. (Student Journal 200 #3)

I forgot my book today. This caused some minor problems. Everyone should have their own book in class so that they can read it themselves and not have to worry about the other person being able to read. (…) The sharing distracted both myself and the person that I was sharing with. (Student Journal 100 #2)

Today in class I found it really hard to concentrate. For some reason every little noise distracted me, people turning their text book pages, coughing, little comments. (Student Journal 100 #12)

o   Reluctant

A lot of students talked about their problems to volunteer information or answers in their classroom, in spite of the fact that most of them agreed that they were in a comfortable learning environment and that they felt supported by their teachers and classmates.

I am getting better about volunteering and writing on the board, and because I usually feel comfortable with the other students I don't really care about being wrong. (Student Journal 100 #20)

Once again, in spite of the relative ease that could be presupposed from a language student to speak in public, many of them reported that they had a lot of trouble bringing themselves to speak in public in another language because they felt they were making fools of themselves:

I hate speaking in front of people, especially in a language I don't know too well. (Student Journal 200 #7)

- o Low self-confidence

It's just so discouraging when I see everyone else do so much better. I think I should think of it as an encouragement. In a way I am glad I am not stuck in a class with people who don't know what they are doing, I would definitely not enjoy that. I talked to the conversation teacher about it and she made a very good point, if I don't talk she can't correct me and I can improve myself. And that's what I really need to do, improve. (Student Journal 250 #1)

This is a very big issue among these students. Most of them have the habit of comparing themselves to others in the classroom and they always feel that they come out looking poorly. This contrastive assessment that these students apply does not seem to be uncommon at all and is very dangerous and partial. They do not seem to realize that all students have different strengths and that they can learn from one another.

I am usually reluctant in getting up in front of the class and doing work on the board because everyone is better at Spanish than I am. (Student Journal 200 #8)

- o Experiential and creative learning

We have commented upon these kind of activities that include creativity and hands-on approach to using Spanish. All the students agreed that these were the activities that they enjoyed the most because they felt they were getting a full experience of Spanish:

This exercise was good for me for many reasons. It made me practise my Spanish unprepared and on the spot. This is good for real life situations. (Student Journal 250 #3)

The teacher's journal noted that when the students had the power to use the elements of the course in a freer way, they would create very interesting presentations:

They are so creative. I can't believe some of the teachers here say they're passive.

- o Competitiveness

Negative reactions to peers that seem to have better Spanish in one way or another did not foster a comfortable and cooperative learning environment. Students seemed to be highly aware of situations of this kind, in which the class was very varied and students were at different levels in different language skills:

I feel as though many people in the class have such a strong advantage because some are Spanish or some have actually lived in a Spanish-speaking town. This might "up the ante" for those of us who are not so fluent. (Student Journal 250 #3)

- o Self-consciousness

Students report the way that self-consciousness affects their language performance by making them doubt their first thoughts and hesitating when they try to practice:

I think my problem stems from the fact that I second-guess myself…(I think I know the answer and then I begin to doubt myself, just to find out when I go back to look up the answer, I was right all along.) (Student Journal 200 #4)

They are aware of this negative strategy:

I think some days I'm too concerned with getting the wrong answer, or not knowing the answer so I don't participate. I'm afraid of embarrassing myself. (Student Journal 100 #4)

Most of them are very worried about what other students will think of them, so they refuse to run the risk of public embarrassment instead of practicing the language in a safe environment. A comfortable friendly class may have this after-effect. Some students report less anxiety in 'unfriendly' environments

or experiences with people that they did not know at all than in a classroom where they know and care about their peers

I believe I am too preoccupied with the other students might think of me and of my abilities which seriously hinders my capacity to learn. (Student Journal 200 #4)

Self-consciousness can also be shared by the teacher, as she explained in this diary entry:

The fact that I really like some of my students makes me very self-conscious not only when an observer is there but generally if there is somebody whose opinion really counts for me in the class, I get all nervous and I start wondering what they are thinking. It would be good to know what they are thinking. But I guess nobody wants to be giving their opinion all the time either.

- o Stressed with work

All students agreed that they were too busy and there was a lot to do. Some of them complained about the lecturer's lack of awareness of the commitments they had for their other subjects and the amount of work that they had to complete during certain weeks of the year:

The next two weeks for my journals are going to be short because I am very stressed with work and don't have too much to talk about.. (Student Journal 200 #8)

Nobody really wants to do it though or has the motivation to do it as we are all so busy and it is so much work just for a small percentage of the grade. (Student Journal 200 #19)

The way the teacher's job is structured also affects directly the classroom reality:

Maybe I can look for more material next year. But where would I be next year? That's something that doesn't help my teaching for sure: the uncertainty about where you are going to be and the lack of planning that is encouraged through this system.

- ➤ Intercultural Awareness

By intercultural awareness, we are referring to the student's capacity to isolate and comment on different features between the cultures that the target language thrives in and their own culture. Most of the students that commented on this feature seemed to enjoy language learning because of this 'difference'. Here are some examples about the intercultural topics that students were presented with and were able to pick up quickly:

o   Food

We also learned about the eating routine of Spanish people, which is very different than here in Canada and in my opinion <u>much healthier</u>. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Today we were given recipes from different Spanish speaking countries, to explain as a group in small presentations the instructions as well as the ingredients of the recipes. <u>It was really fascinating</u> to know what types of foods different countries eat and to see if Canadian food is at all similar to Spanish, Mexican or Chilean food. (Student Journal 100 #11)

<u>This was really cool</u> because I have a little sister who's from Mexico and she always drinks chocolate milk in the morning, which I find extremely gross. I don't know if it's the same in Mexico as Spain, but I recognize the strange eating habits in my step-sister and step-mother. (Student Journal 200 #1)

o   Multilingualism

I always thought that Spain only included Spanish people, I didn't know that there was so much diversity in Spain. Also [Teacher's Name] told us that there are different languages spoken in Spain, which I also didn't know. The idea of diversity and multiculturalism would make the experience even more worthwhile. (Student Journal 100 #11)

o   Manners

There were about 6 or 7 Spanish speaking people that were speaking in the table in front of us. I was really happy because I understood some of what they were saying. They were also very loud and very cheerful and they seemed all to be very close, they were hugging and kissing each other in a very friendly way. <u>I felt that I was in Spain or South America for a few minutes</u>. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Today [Teacher's Name] also taught us cool words like to flirt. It was really funny. The whole class was totally paying attention and laughing and having fun. I thought that that was one of the greatest lessons because these are the types of words that we want to know!! They were also supposed to be very useful for Thursday night. [Teacher's Name] invited everyone out to the Trash to see her sing! <u>It was great! I can't wait!</u> (Student Journal 200 #9)

We observed that throughout all these entries students were more engaged (see underlined excerpts in the quotes) or proved a willingness to learn that generated more engagement than in other topics. Not only did it develop a different perspective, providing the student with a different point of view about everyday experience, but also it provided them with a cultural framework for the daily use of the language.

➢ Teaching culture awareness

By teaching culture awareness, we are referring to the student's comments and beliefs about their teacher and the culture of teaching at the institution where they were carrying out their studies. It did not come as a surprise to realize that they discussed their feelings more openly with this tool, as diaries are traditionally associated with our affective experience. We have extracted some examples from the journals illustrating this issue and reorganizing them into these subsequent sub-codes:

o Patience and flexibility.

We have included some of their assessments of the teachers' performances in order to show students expectations about a language instructor. Patience and flexibility seem to be two of the most appreciated features:

I think (Teacher's Name) is a great instructor because she has a lot of patience and was very flexible at the beginning of this semester (Student Journal 200 #8)

o Native or non-native speaker.

Students commented on the 'native status' of a teacher.

I also think that it is very beneficial to have a native speaker as the professor because they've experience living in Spain as well as living in Canada so they can give insight on both experiences and both cultures. (Student Journal 100 #11)

However, it was surprising to find a few instances in which students seemed to realize, contrary to extended opinion, some non-native speakers of the target language can excel in teaching:

English speakers who have learned Spanish as a second language can be excellent teachers but they still don't have as much background about the country as the native speaker. (Student Journal 100 #11)

- o Rapport.

Some students had very clear ideas about what to expect from their teachers and found it very difficult to change their views or to change their relationship with the teacher. This excerpt was striking in the sense that the majority of students had a completely different view of the same teacher. What was interesting about this statement was the way that what the student believes about a particular person seemed to permeate all of their language learning experience, blocking communication and hindering learning:

I didn't even bother going through it. I won't understand either way. Every time the class bombshells another assignment, my teacher ironically asks us if we're having problems understanding the work. No, not at all. That's why I failed, right? Cause I understood? I don't bother answering my teacher though. Neither does anyone else. Its university and we all know that if we don't get it, we have to figure it out on our own. Even if I had piped up, I know that the teacher would just have made a sly comment like "Well, maybe if you had come to class on Monday…". I know the teacher is right, too. Oh well. I'll just have to try harder and come to class more often. (Student Journal 200 #1)

- o Strategic learning.

Some students seem to be quicker at picking up what is required of them to pass the course than others, no matter how transparent the curriculum may seem:

Some of the students say they are getting bad marks and I was thinking to myself, how could you get bad marks, if you show up for class, do the homework, study and participate, there is no reason not to get a good mark. (Student Journal 100 #7)

- o Action.

Half way through this project, students started to comment and respond very favourably to the changes and shifts that were introduced in the specific lessons thanks to their feedback. This had a tremendous impact on their learning, as they felt immediately engaged and responsible for the classroom environment:

I think most of us have noticed the shift in the way [Teacher's Name] teaches this semester. I love how she is open to change, and try new things to hopefully transmit the information, but it's not only transmitting the information with a language, it's making sure that it actually stays in there somehow. It's hard to do that, because many of us have different ways of understanding and memorizing and it's hard to ensure that everyone is learning from a certain way. I think [Teacher's Name] was challenged in the first semester with a huge class, and realized that working with smaller portions is much better, of which she switched to in the second semester. (Student Journal 200 #10).

- o Engagement with student learning.

On the other hand, they also seem to respond very positively to the teacher's engagement with their own learning. The more the teacher engaged, the more the students seem to engage as a reaction:

Our professor makes an extra effort to make sure we have more than enough study tools. She is the only teacher that I get e-mails from and I really think that adds a really nice personal touch. It makes me feel that whatever problem or question I have I can ask her. (Student Journal 100 #21)

These were the main subtopics under the code of student awareness that we have found relevant from our analysis of student journals.

5.2.2. Student Affect.

> In being 'in' an education setting (…) the student is there, in a particular place, being part of that place, at least, to the extent that she feels herself to be part of that place. Her feelings, attitudes, worries, anxieties, hopes, understandings, priorities, values, capabilities and felt certainties are all bound up in her being. (Barnett, 2007, p. 28)

Another aspect students reflected upon in their journals was their feelings and how these feelings influenced each moment of their learning in and outside of the class. In a way, students were attempting to establish their ways of being in the classroom with these types of comments. By being, we are referring to the philosophical concept and pragmatic manifestation of the way the student 'is' in the world (Barnett, 2007, p. 27). Students have distinct daily routines, both from each other and the teacher, and they bring their own agenda into the classroom setting, but they are also all students. In other words, they are sharing a space, taking a course, with its assignments, difficulties and schedules. Barnett advocates for a relational perspective: The student participates in sets of relationships with her learning environment and these relationships are not fixed. The student sense of self fluctuates constantly in response to the activities s/he engages in or is forced to participate by his/her mere presence in the classroom (Engestrom, Miettinen & Punamaki, 1999, p. 53). In this way, many of the statements from the same student in a given journal along the timeline of this project contradict themselves or show a completely different perspective along the same axis. Here is the sub-classification we have drawn up for the statements of student feelings in the journals:

➢ Autonomy

➢ Creativity and Innovation

➢ Peer influence

➢ Anxiety and stress

➢ Responsibility for learning

➢ Cost of learning and other life concerns

➢ Preferences

➢ Enjoyment

➢ Mood

➢ Difficulty level

➢ Expectations

  o Immersion vs. classroom learning

  o Children learning vs. adult learning

  o Time and Space

I often ask myself, "Why can I not speak Spanish after so many years of taking Spanish courses?" I know the answer deep down, I know it's because <u>I am not a genius and can't learn a language and be fluent in it without more effort</u>. I realized when I was younger <u>I should have taken it more seriously</u>, and thus not be in the predicament I am in now. But then I also think, <u>I am not that horrible</u>. I know a lot <u>more than most people</u> do about speaking Spanish. I know a lot more about the culture too, and <u>a lot of people don't see the importance of learning a new language</u>. And I also think, <u>if I could immerse myself in an atmosphere where I had no choice but to use my Spanish speaking skills, I would learn to speak fluently</u>. In the end however, I catch myself saying to people time and time again who ask me about taking Spanish in university, "if someone once told me that I would take Spanish courses for five years, and at the end I could still not carry on a simple conversation. <u>I would not have wasted my time</u>." OK, so I realize that I haven't wasted my time, and <u>I have enjoyed taking Spanish</u>, but I still think it's a little ridiculous. I like Spanish, and I think the main reason why I am still taking the class is because <u>I plan on using it someday</u>. I want to travel, and I know it will have to be useful <u>somewhere, someday</u>. (Student Journal 250 #1)

I decided to start this section with a lengthy quote from a second year student of Spanish. I found that in this kind of journal entry, in which students let themselves talk more freely, we find the interplay of contradictions and feelings at the core of being a student. I have underlined the utterances that I find more relevant to illustrate how this complexity unfolds.

The feelings of self-doubt and blame are immediately bailed out with a sense of self-esteem, especially in relation to his/her peers. As a way to justify his/her felt failure at speaking Spanish, s/he clings to his/her certainty of the superiority of immersion as a language learning environment. S/he assesses his/her language learning experiences as inefficient but also offers what seems like a contradiction: enjoyment vs. efficiency. At the end of the long entry, s/he talks about his/her expectations and plans for the future as if the language that s/he is learning at the moment is something to store and use later on, but not for using it in his/her current context. The crux of his/her last statement lies in the fact that s/he fails to find opportunities to use the tools that s/he is acquiring in the course.

The main purpose of starting with such a paragraph is to illustrate the complexity of the issue at hand when we try to account for student feelings. However, these feelings cannot be blatantly dismissed because it is in solving the equations and contradictions that these statements pose that student learning occurs.

Their responses in the journals challenged me as a teacher, because my nurturing instinct would have loved to pave their way and deconstruct their static believes about language learning. It became difficult not to offer my own solutions to the struggles that they were encountering when looking at themselves through language learning. Their answers guided the questions that their own peers (the research assistants) asked them in the interviews and the dialogue that developed in the research assistant meetings with the researcher. It was this indirect way -of letting answers develop and ontological knots untie in the students themselves- that some participants reported in their student evaluations of the project a sense of having been transported to another sphere of learning altogether. We will examine student assessment of the project at a later stage in this dissertation. Now let us turn to our classification of the sub-codes of 'Affect' in their journals.

> Autonomy

In spite of the abundance of self-teaching books, there is a common belief that languages are best acquired when led by someone else's hand.

But most importantly, I want to stress how important it is to attend class because without going, it is difficult to learn a second language on your own. (Student Journal 100 #9)

This belief expressed a certain kind of resistance to autonomous work.

> Creativity and Innovation

Today we are doing a flyer activity, which changes the pace of the class. I find myself to be getting bored with this semester already because all of my classes are year long, and so there is little change. Making this class fun definitely makes for a good learning environment. Creative exercises like this one provide opportunities for us to push ourselves to the limit of our knowledge of the language. (Student Journal 100 #13)

Even though resistance may be found in the introduction of innovative and creative activities in the classroom, our students seemed to prefer variety and diversity in year-long courses.

I am enjoying challenges because I find year long courses can be a drag after a while and they need stuff like this as well as innovative activities to keep the students interested way more so than at the beginning when we are all excited. (Student Journal 100 #14)

The innovative and creative changes had a direct effect on their interest and engagement, making them feel good about their progress.

> ➤ Peer influence

This is probably the most important aspect constructed from the code of student feelings. Their relationship with other students is a key issue that affects enormously and directly the way that students feel.

I really like the atmosphere in the class when writing tests, people aren't that stressed about it, so it is easy to relax. (Student Journal 100 #16)

They are also highly aware of the effect that their peers have on them, especially if it limits their opportunities to learn.

I believe I am too preoccupied with the other students might think of me and of my abilities which seriously hinders my capacity to learn. (Student Journal 200 #4)

I feel guilty because I feel like the longer we sit here the more of the teacher's valuable time we are wasting. I want to put up my hand, but I feel like a browner (eager student) because I always feel like I am always answering the questions. (Student Journal 100 #21)

Many times, students are less sympathetic to their own peers than the teacher may be. These dynamics of interaction have a profound effect in how the class develops, not only on the day of the incident but also for future reference. Expectations and prejudices are created through the interactions between all the participants in a classroom.

Today in class there were a few people, and it is always the same people so it gets really irritating, that were asking the same questions that other people had already asked, or that had been covered in last class, or asking questions that didn't even relate to what we were talking about. If I was the teacher, I

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would tell them I am not answering them, and let the class answer them, to make them feel foolish for not paying attention. (Student Journal 100 #8)

The teacher's journal also recorded incidents about her own prejudices at play:

I have a big issue with L. He is very disturbing in class and what I hate the most is when he plays the good guy. But when he fails or almost fails at the end, maybe he gets the message. I hate when a student has no idea of what is going on in the class and still asks questions to look good or participative.

The next excerpt illustrates how a student believes that the responsibility for managing these dynamics lies with the teacher. Whereas some teachers may take that responsibility on occasion, some teachers may resent the fact that the interaction between two adult participants in the classroom needs to be monitored and managed by an external observer. This belief is rooted in previous experience of learning environments. During our primary and secondary school years, it is not uncommon for our behaviour towards our classmates to be monitored and assessed. The large amount of publications on classroom management proves that this responsibility is still believed to be one of the teacher's tasks.

Everyone could do it except for me, and one girl gave me a dirty look. I have a high average in this course and try very hard to do my best, but this exercise really hurt my self-esteem. I think my negative experience could have been avoided if we were allowed to take the information pages home with us, or had to work with information from the text. (Student Journal 250 #3)

> ➤ Anxiety and stress

The second and most important issue under the code of student feelings is the complex array of uncomfortable feelings that seems to arise in language learning. Barnett argues that this *'discomfort'* is essential for learning and it is twofold: assessment-related anxiety and self-actualization (Barnett, 2007, p. 32). Even though Barnett does not use the term self-actualization, he talks about the discomfort of producing materials and knowledge from their own resources, from their own being. I have taken his concept a step further, referring to Hooks' notion of self-actualization as a process by which an individual engages in an outward movement from the self, someone willing and eager to transform and be transformed in rich and positive ways (Davidson & Yancy, 2009, p. 36). This long excerpt illustrates the way in which this anxiety arises under the best of environmental conditions.

Today we also went over some verbs that require a preposition before an infinitive. And we did an exercise out loud in class, I don't mind speaking Spanish, I don't even mind speaking it in front of a bunch of people. I just hate doing it when I have no idea what I am doing or what I am supposed to say. I know everyone else in the class could care less if I say the wrong thing, I could fart and they would forget that it happened in about a half hour, but for some reason I still get nervous and worried about what others think. I don't even understand why. I know nobody cares except me. I know the in class exercises are helpful, and I think I should the class should do more, and I should actually participate. We did a lot of them last year, and for some reason no matter how confident I was with my answer, it was always wrong. Maybe that's why I have such a fear of them. It's like getting off a chairlift. I think about it so much as it approaches and stress and get anxious. When it gets there, I freeze and fall, or in this case freeze and say nothing, or something dumb. (Student Journal 250 #1)

The student feels comfortable with speaking and speaking in public and s/he believes nobody will mind if she gets it wrong or does not understand. The issue of self-doubt in relationship to others still managed to paralyze this student. Instead of asking for clarification, the next excerpt illustrates how the situation was resolved at a given incident:

Well today was different, when it was my turn to answer, which, by the way I knew full well that I had no idea what the question was. (I read ahead to know what question was mine, a trick I learned last year) and it made no sense. I was waiting to sit there and look dumb and say something like "uh…. No sé" but to either the professor knows I am horrible at that kind of thing or I was lucky. She read the question to me, then again in English then gave me a hint as to what to start the question off with. Wow, did that ever help. (Student Journal 250 #1)

The student employed his/her own strategy at first, but still did not work. The teacher eased the way into the exercise with prompting in English. In so doing, part of the purpose of the exercise was defeated but at least production was achieved and the barrier of anxiety in terms of self-actualization was superseded.

This type of anxiety, which arises from an interpersonal environment, is at the core of our classrooms. In the next excerpt, the student comments on not being able to keep up with the pace of the class or his/her other students.

After the movie we did a little bit of work, but it was very rushed. I really don't like when this is the case. Even if it is something that I need to practice in order to understand or remember, I like having time to at least let it sink in before I have to leave and figure it out on my own. Also, I find that a lot of times it takes me longer to do a question or exercise than others in the class, and I don't end up doing a question on the board, but not because I can't do it, but because it takes me a minute longer to do. (Student Journal 100 #2)

Assessment is always a source of anxiety and the uncertainty about the grades or the lack of transparency about how the student is assessed manifests itself in negative feelings that bounce back and become, in the long run, student disengagement with the subject. When transparency is achieved, it is mistrusted because of previous experience and the fact that there always seems to be leeway in terms of quantifying student performance, even in the most 'grammatical' of exercises in language learning.

I can't believe how bad I did. It really upset me for the whole day. I thought that I knew what I was doing. The exact same thing happens in my French class too. I've been studying French since I was five years old. You would think that I would know my verbs by now! (Student Journal, 200 #11)

Throughout this project, I discovered as a teacher how important it is to explain 'failure' in an assignment with clear concepts to the student and also to provide alternative ways of doing the 'failed' assignment. Even though time constraints can become a hindrance, the ideal solution would be to let the student repeat the assignment, taking into account the feedback from the teacher. After all, it seems contradictory to affirm that languages are learned through making mistakes and making sense out of them, and then grading performance based on the mistakes made. It is very confusing to encourage an activity while punishing it at the same time. Furthermore, most students need guidance about how to study and carry out a task, as the next quote illustrates.

It is soooo frustrating when you put the effort in and you grade doesn't match your effort!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (…) I really don't know what else to do, I put a lot of time into this course, but I don't feel like I see the results on the tests. (Student Journal 100 #4)

Another belief causing a lot of anxiety is that working hard gets you the knowledge you need to acquire. Although it is true that language learning takes time and effort, the amount of effort and the amount of time seem to vary greatly from person to person. It may take students a while to gauge the amount of time and effort – and the type of time and effort as well - they need to put into a task.

When we got home and really looked over the review, we panicked. There is no way we are going to pass this test. We remember learning all of these verbs and tenses, but have no idea how to do them now...we only practiced them once! This is not fair...but I guess this is what we get for taking Spanish in University. (Student Journal 100 #11)

As this entry illustrates, assessment tends to create stress, not only during or after completing the assessment - when the uncertainty of the grade that will be obtained comes into place - but also during the process of preparing for it. This is probably the anxiety that is most difficult for the instructor to manage as it happens outside of the classroom. The immediacy of email and the reliance of students on their computers to study for an assessment can create tricky situations for teachers to manage. Frequently this anxiety can be expressed in an email to the instructor, forcing him/her to help the student manage these feelings outside of the main learning environment. The tension between content and how to put it into practice arises from the cognitive anxiety of not being able to cope with the curricular requirements of a certain module.

The other main idea in this entry is related to higher education. *The idea that higher education calls upon students to come to their own interpretations, actions, judgments and arguments* (Barnett, 2007, p. 37) is not always welcomed by the students.

> A genuine higher education is none other than a transformation of being (cf. Freire, 1978) and the transformation is complex, for it is not so much a transition from a mode of being for one kind of life to a mode of living for another specific kind of life (for empire or the state). Rather, the transformation is the taking on of a mode of being for uncertainty (pp. 38-39).

This uncertainty naturally entails a lot of anxiety in the transforming self of the student.

Furthermore, the relationship that the student establishes with the teacher, and vice versa, depends on beliefs such as:

Unfortunately if I complained about this teacher I'm sure my mark would suffer. (Student Journal 250 #2)

This is conceptualized as a personal anxiety (Barnett, 2007, p. 37).

Finally, there is an experiential anxiety that students feel about their experiences in the classroom.

It just really annoys me that this class in particular is super fussy about attendance and yet we learn and do nothing! (Student Journal 200 #5)

S/he was referring to the labs, once again. The need to attend was in contradiction with the inefficiency of the activities carried out in this particular type of classroom, which in our time-demanding society resulted in frustration.

In the teacher's journal, carried out by the main researcher of this project, there were also instances of this anxiety, conceptualized as 'being on the spot':

On Wednesday, I went to the secondary school (…). At the end (…), the teacher decided to make me do some presentation about my trips and my life. I was pretty much embarrassed. It felt as if I was some kind of celebrity. But it was nice. It made me very conscious of how I had to speak in front of an audience with a different English proficiency to mine. I'm sure I made more mistakes. When I started writing this journal I never hesitated about what language I was going to write in. I wonder why I have a favourable attitude for English.

➢ Responsibility for learning

The idea of responsible learning was put forward by educationalist in the 1960s. The process of ownership of learning is a long-term process and it develops at different stages for different students.

For me it's not as important to get good marks by scoring high on the test, but I really want to come away from all of this with a real knowledge of the Spanish language and an understanding. (Student Journal 250 #1)

The differences in priorities and goals are noticed by the students in the journals.

This reflects a general feeling I have that many people in the Spanish class are not prepared to put out the effort required of them if they wish to really improve their Spanish language skills. I do believe that I am ready to put out this effort, however I feel the need to be challenged to do so. (Student Journal 250 #4)

The variety of responses illustrates that in any given classroom there are different levels of responsibility. Even when at university level, many students have acknowledged the need to reclaim this ownership.

A language class is hard to evaluate, I think a lot depends on the individual student's interest more so than in other types of classes. (Student Journal 200 #4)

They also commented on the different nature of language learning or classes compared to their other subjects, probably based less on skills than on the accumulation of content. Many students are ready to let go of this responsibility to take learning into their own hands. The journals made this notion transparent to all participants.

I wish it were in the teacher's hands to just make us understand and speak it. (Student Journal 200 #10)

Barnett argues that anxiety is a necessary evil in the process of learning, in order for the student to move through the stages of learning. *These (…) struggles (…) are testimony to the emergence of an acceptance on the part of the student of responsibility* (Barnett, 2007, p. 36), which lies at the core of higher education.

  ➢ Cost of learning and other life concerns

Students have multiple and critical realities outside of the educational setting that they bring into the learning environment. Among these concerns, our students commented on the economic costs of their education:

 As a student I am paying a lot of money for my tuition and am quickly going into debt. (Student Journal 250 #3)

The class I stress about missing the most is Spanish class, and I don't know why. It isn't a compulsory for my major, and I could drop it I guess, but if I do, I'll have to pay back my OSAP, and I guess that's why I feel like I need to pass. (Student Journal 200 #1)

The burden of this economic investment creates anxiety and resentment towards others who do not feel this burden. The Ontario Student Assistance Program is a program developed on a loan basis and, therefore, students had to pay back their loans at the end of their degrees.

This is University; people should have respect for the others who have also paid a great deal of money to be here and want to get the most out of it. (Student Journal 100 #21)

However, life has a way to catch us unawares, and the following entries show how life outside of the classroom is intricately entwined with classroom activities and completely out of the control of classroom participants.

I didn't answer a single question in class today, in fact, I was more of a disruption. I probably should have left at break time (or half way through). I just ended up chatting with the girl next to me and making jokes. The reason I was so uninspired is because I found out some really bad news right before class. I checked my e-mail and one of my old colleagues told me that our boss had passed away the night before. I guess, initially I was shocked, and then I just tried to push it out of my mind, and that meant Spanish too. (Student Journal 100 #17)

The fact that these concerns exist does not necessarily mean that the teacher is responsible for the awareness of these individual realities, or even for offering a solution to them, which can sometimes be the expectation in certain student-centred institutions. However, it calls for an acknowledgement of the nature of human life and for flexibility and sympathy in terms of facilitating learning. In the teacher's journal, she notes that the dialogue established between the student and herself during this project made her question her own expectations:

Maybe I encourage somehow that the students that don't participate or don't take it seriously drop my courses. I would have to evaluate this, maybe later. I am going to ask the students what they think about it.

The next student was prepared to recognize the influence of outside concerns and its impact on a learning environment.

I guess it's not so much what goes in the classroom but one brings to the classroom to begin with, por ejemplo: a good mood, the exciting possibility of a new friendship. Plus I think our class has a really good mix of people, all of them really willing to learn. (Student Journal 200 #4)

The fact that our students were under a lot of pressure from other courses as well forced the teacher to take into account the multiple educational scenarios present in his/her classroom, as well as aligning the marks and assessment carefully with the work that they have to do, in order to avoid adverse reactions such as the following:

I really do not enjoy talking in front of other people, so this idea of a presentation does not appeal to me. And then when I learned that there were no extra marks involved, I was angry because I had put so much effort into my presentation when there were other things I could have been doing. I feel that the professor does not realize that most of us have a full course load, which means we have other work to do besides doing Spanish work. (Student Journal, 100 #9)

The teacher's journal includes a comment on how bigger issues can impact the everyday life of our students:

I was very honoured and moved to see that D. came to talk to me about her situation. She can't concentrate in her studies because of the imminence of a war around her country. She is very worried about her mom and 13 year old brother. I tried to support her but I feel so helpless because things like this are really the important things. I think I helped her because as I'm young and share some of her opinions, she felt relieved a bit. I hope I call her later. I don't want to forget. Maybe she can come for a drink or something.

➢ Preferences

Student preferences are a source of mixed feelings as well. Individual preferences need to be acknowledged in the classroom and students need to develop an awareness of this preference in order to optimize the learning process.

I like having all the new vocabulary at the beginning of each chapter. In the past when I studied French, the vocabulary was all over the place in a lesson or a chapter so we would have to search for it which was sometimes time-consuming. I also really like that there are so many grammar exercises to

practice from and I like that we do many of them in class because the discussions help clarify anything that is harder to understand .(Student Journal 100 #11)

➢ Enjoyment

Enjoyment and the lack of it in a classroom have immediate effects in the process of learning and the outcome of the learning process.

This class was a lot of fun because of we compared how to pronounce the words to music and this was so much fun! We were all singing to the syllables and clapping them out. This method of teaching this lesson was so much fun and it was easy for us to remember it. It was a great class! (Student Journal 200 #5)

One of the sources of enjoyment in the culture of learning environment, as the next student illustrates, is found in 'doing the right thing'.

Nobody likes grammar. You get made fun of a lot if you do. But these teachers did. They were so dedicated to making it fun. Even when all my friends went to see Sue Johanson, the guest speaker, I skipped that and went to my grammar class. Nobody could understand it. I was so proud of myself for doing the right thing. You see, I want to be a teacher when I grow up. I don't just want to pass my classes; I want to excel in them because this will become crucial information when I get older. (Student Journal, 200 #11)

Another student reflects on the contagious nature of enjoyment.

It seems as though the professor thoroughly enjoys her job, which is extremely beneficial for the student. (Student Journal 100 #20)

Creating a comfortable learning environment did not go unnoticed either and students seemed to appreciate that their teachers understood the need to make mistakes.

But it is not at all uncomfortable to be wrong in the Spanish classes, comparing to other classes I have. (Student Journal 200 #3)

The last entry explores the issue of student will and happiness. This student also reflects upon the complexities of 'being happy': the influence other fellow students have in this matter is crucial.

So I think that today, my thoughts on Spanish is that you can only learn it if your mind is up for it. On the days that your students have shut their brains off, you'll have to switch methods and trick them into learning. If in Spanish class people were miserable today, I bet I would have gone straight home to change my mood, and would have gotten less done. It happens to me all the time, I can only learn if I'm happy. (Student Journal 200 #14 – journal missing)

➢ Mood and energy

Another highly personal variable was highlighted throughout the journals.

The only problem with today's class is that I was very tired. Nine o'clock classes on Friday mornings aren't very well thought out. Seems like an evil torture method to me. There must be some research on when is the best time for teaching and learning a language and I highly doubt that it is at 9am on a Friday morning. (Student Journal 200 #15)

Being tired or sad hinders learning directly in these occasions.

I'm quite sure that I'm graduating this year, so it's kind of sad, thinking, ok, where will I go from here in terms of Spanish? Maybe I can read Spanish books, and learn from there, but can I? Maybe I'll go to Spain, but will I? Will I forget the language, could I? It's hard when you really really do want to learn, but then not necessarily find the time to give it enough time to review, and then expect class to be adequate in terms of being adept in the language. (Student Journal 200 #10)

Students actively seek solutions to their feelings:

A hypothesis of mine was that the weather (being warmer and getting more sunlight) improvement was helping us. I think that we had more energy in the mornings and were in better moods and not so sleepy because we weren't battling the cold and we had sunlight around us. It wasn't dark when we were getting up and coming in. (Student Journal 250 #5)

Even though sometimes the compulsion to attend a class would make them go even when they were

sick:

I found it very hard to pay attention, I kept having to blow my nose and eat cough drops to keep myself from having coughing, and my head hurt so much that I was barely able to follow what was going on in class. (Student Journal 100 #12)

On the other hand, there is a belief that language aptitude is a natural gift.

I think some people are just gifted when it comes to languages and I'm not one of them. (Student Journal 200 #13)

Repetitive negative experiences in a certain classroom lowered student motivation to attend and to learn.

I hate the lab. I hate it, I hate it, I hate it. I never want to go and I always want to leave. Always. I went today and I hated it. Two weeks ago, my tape player was acting up on me and it ended up eating two tapes. I'm sorry, it wasn't I purpose. It was embarrassing. People probably thought I was pretty stupid for not knowing how to use a simple tape player, but I don't care. It was difficult. (Student Journal 250 #6)

Again this variable lies outside of the teacher's and sometimes student's control. Nonetheless it cannot be ignored as it has such a big impact in the learning situation.

> ➢ Difficulty level

There are common believes about the level of difficulty of a subject and sometimes about the course in question. There is a student culture of expectation in terms of difficulty in all institutions.

I have decided that Spanish to a lot harder to learn than what I thought. At the beginning I thought it would be easier than what it is. I had forgotten how difficult it is to learn to a second language. I realize now how people take language for granted especially when you are trying to learn a new one. (Student Journal 100 #9)

The nature of this difficulty can put some students off.

➢ Expectations

There has been a lot of literature published on student expectations. Many times the contrast between student expectations and teacher expectations is very wide.

What I was expecting, though, was to learn how to speak Spanish, and at this point in the course, I'm the same as I started. (Student Journal 200 #1)

This student seems to put all the responsibility of his/her learning on the teacher and the module

o Immersion versus classroom learning

In language learning, the belief that languages are best learned in immersion contexts is firmly settled.

This is only reasonable since we are not learning in the ideal immersion setting. (Student Journal 100 #14)

One last suggestion that I think would help so much. I find the best way for someone to learn a language is, of course to be immersed in the language. (Student Journal 200 #12)

However, some students have also realized that the difficulty lies in engagement and the creation of opportunities to use the language, and not so much in the context in which we try to acquire it.

I find that a lot of the students from Spanish countries hang around together and it's kind of intimidating to try and start conversations with them and to sort of get into their groups. (Student Journal 100 #20)

Sometimes it is difficult to find opportunities to use the language in immersion contexts or surrounded by native speakers.

In the teacher's journal, we also found instances of how this topic affects everybody:

She learns structures far easier than trying to understand why they happen this way. A student like this is very strong in immersion but it is problematic in the classroom environment because she does not get as much practice as it is needed.

o   Children learning vs. adult learning

There is also another common myth about language learning. Language learning is more accessible when we are children.

I think language should be taught to us as kids, because somehow as children we pick up really quickly on these things, and I find that doing things the basic way, through pictures, through engaging the senses in general is most effective. Allowing us to reproduce the information, is again most effective. (Student Journal 200 # 18)

The naiveté of this belief lies in the fact that as adults we already have another language tool to guide our process of language learning. In the section on methods, students have commented largely on the use of another language to gauge their foreign language learning as an asset.

o   Time and Space

The issues of time and space seem to generate a lot of negative feelings. Keeping to and respecting other people's schedules, and acknowledging the fact that they have other courses and commitments, seemed to be the key to creating a favourable learning environment.

I don't want to get picky, but the conversation teacher kept talking close to the hour. I have classes all day long. I don't want to miss parts of any of them, including this one. If I leave to go to my next class, I don't want to feel like I'm missing something. Other professors do that too. It is very annoying (Student Journal 200 #14)

Students commented largely here and in the code of 'space' about the ideal time for language learning. As their routines varied, it was challenging to agree on an ideal schedule for all.

Today I feel energized, I've started going to the gym in the mornings and the exercise is really helping me concentrate in my morning classes, the only problem is by the time the afternoon roles around I'm ready to go to bed. (Student Journal 100 #18)

This issue seemed to concern them a lot and they actively sought solutions.
I was also up a few hours before class today, maybe that made a difference, allowed me to fully wake up before having to take in information. (Student Journal 100 #26)

- o Content

Even though our courses or curricula are more and more transparent, the issue of expectation in terms of content always seems to be there.

I think we should JUST be doing vocab and the present and future tense this year. THAT is basic Spanish, all this past tense, commands (formal or informal) is NOT basic. (Student Journal 200 #3)

The contrast between student expectations at this level and the reality of curricular needs seemed to generate a lot of animosity. Even though it has traditionally been the role of the teacher to decide on curricular content, students were claiming throughout this project the need to participate in curricular design in a more cooperative manner.

5.2.3 Classroom Dynamics

> Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships. (Palmer, 1998, p. 90)

In the third stage, student journals raised the topic of classroom dynamics. This is a topic that is not simple to isolate and in fact, in many of the codes and journal entries that we have discussed above, it sprung forth time and time again; as it will in the following codes that we elicited. It permeated all the codes so much that it has been considered as an overarching meta-code, abstracted from all the concerns that the student voiced in their journals. We have attempted a division of this complex code in the following sub-codes:

- ➢ Power
    - o Volunteers
    - o Student Responsibility
    - o Authority

- ➢ Voice
- ➢ Interaction
    - o Teacher-Students
    - o Student-Student
    - o Action
    - o Assessed
- ➢ Rounds
    - o Positive
    - o Negative

- ➢ Atmosphere
    - o Jokes and laughing
    - o Informal.
    - o Comfortable to ask questions
    - o Friendly
    - o Helpful
    - o Personal and engaging
    - o Small communities
    - o Pseudo-Immersion Environment
    - o Interaction outside of classroom
    - o Different groups, different atmospheres
- ➢ Action
- ➢ Feedback
    - o To students
        - ▪ Mistakes are allowed.
        - ▪ Correction is not personalized.
        - ▪ Feedback is needed.
        - ▪ Nonverbal feedback.
        - ▪ Feedback needs to be understandable
        - ▪ Peer feedback
        - ▪ Self assessment
        - ▪ Feedback is definitely a sensitive issue
    - o To the teacher

➢ Power

    ○ Volunteers

Even in a language classroom where most of the actual work comes from participating in the language, there are mixed views about how to manage the interaction. Students constantly give back to the teacher the responsibility of the management of interaction.

We got to read a dialogue in this lesson, the teacher asked for volunteers, maybe if she assigned the readings other people would be forced to speak aloud and would get more practice instead of the same usual people always reading. (Student Journal 100 #5)

Some students feel really powerless about this and will simply avoid participation:

Sometimes I think that some people are more eager to answer questions than others so sometimes it's easier to let them do most of the work. Sometimes they are just faster and get the answers quicker than I do so by the time I'm ready they already gave the answer. (Student Journal 100 #20)

Only approximately five people could participate in this game. I, with a bunch of other students could only sit and watch. I am so frustrated with this part of the course I do not want to go anymore. My reason for frustration should be obvious. (Student Journal 250 #2)

However, by looking at their own classrooms through this project, some students started to think about and realized their own patterns of participation, reflecting upon what would be more beneficial for overall learning:

I am starting to realize that I am one of only a few people who volunteer in class. (Student Journal 100 #21)

Students are sometimes less flexible than teachers in terms of participation. Once again, the responsibility for participating in a classroom is given back to the system or the teacher instead of taking it into their own hands.

I think that more involvement on the student's part is definitely a way to get them more inclined to participate. Mandatory participation is a great way to get students more comfortable speaking the language. I am figuring we all signed up for the course so that we could speak it, and so we should be forced to get over our fear. It is probably a better idea to get it done at the beginning of the year, but I guess better late than never. (Student Journal 100 #21)

- o Student Responsibility

They also reflected upon the reasons that made them more, or less, participatory in class, and as a consequence, they raised issues about student responsibility for their own learning, and coming prepared to the class:

While we were taking up homework today I felt really good about the class, because I don't think that too many people did the work, but I did. This gave me a chance to really do a lot more participation than usual because there weren't as many people jumping up and getting all excited about answering than there usually are. (Student Journal 100 #2)

By using activities that are enjoyable and funny, the teacher could break the lack of participation and engage the students in their own learning:

Today, we had a good class. Normally my class is extremely quiet and unwilling to participate but today we did a little acting, everyone participated and we even had a few laughs. (Student Journal 200 #4)

- o Authority

Even though we have dedicated a whole subsection to the topic of space, we have isolated the following quote in this section to show that there are certain physical arrangements that dissolve the 'authority' invested upon the teacher by the educational system. Some students considered it positive.

The teacher is part of our circle, it's great, because I'm often not aware of her authority as teacher, nor did she ever in any way impose it on us. (Student Journal 200 #10)

There are certain personality clashes though, that can be understood as 'authoritative'. The mixed views

from different students about this particular teacher proved that there was a constant misunderstanding between her personality and the student perceptions of her intentions:

Sometimes it is difficult for me because I know what the conversation teacher is saying, but it takes me a while for me to think of how to answer her. Plus, she is intimidating, which makes me nervous and makes it harder for me to answer. I'm sure she is a very nice person, but she scares the hell out of me. I hope she isn't reading this, but then again, I don't care. She drives me nuts in the conversation hour! (Student Journal 250 #6)

The system, the curricula and the culture at the specific institution define teaching and learning contexts. This student reflects upon how to overcome the restrictions imposed by external forces on the classroom.

The teacher agrees that it is too much for one test, but says that there is nothing she can do about it, it is in the curriculum...we joke with her that we won't tell anyone if she omits stuff from the test, but we know it is of no use (Student Journal 100 #8)

The teacher's journal highlights the presence of competition between students:

There is something going on between C and M. That is for sure. They have some sort of competition. I would like to encourage an environment that is competitive but I'm not sure how to do that.

Even in the best instances, most of our recognized teacher training does not prepare us for the creation of cooperative environments. On the other hand, this type of exercise is brilliant for examining our own beliefs that lie dormant until we see them on paper:

D. made me mad because she contested the way I evaluate this class. I don't think students have that right, maybe I should look up on that impression.

After bouncing ideas with students, the teacher examined ways in which assessment can work better when discussed openly with students.

In a way, the teacher's journal in this project highlights that her approach to teaching became much more inclusive and the responsibility was shared by all the participants in the class more often:

I have always said that I'm not responsible for the people that don't ask when they don't understand, but am I not? That would be a good question for the interviews. How do the students feel about other students that don't ask questions and obviously are lost? Is the teacher responsible? How could we cope with this?

> ➢ Voice

The topic of student voice has been one of the main concerns of this project from the very beginning. By using the tools chosen to elicit information from students, one of the project's main aims was to enable students to voice their opinions, to grow their own voice about their own learning. This dissertation attempts to show how empowering this exercise has been for students and also how trust and cooperation developed through an enriching dialogue between students and between students and teachers. For Barnett, learning of knowledge and skills is insufficient. The main goal of learning is to help the students to work on new voices of their own (Barnett, 2007, p. 100).

These students commented on the difficulties they had to raise their voice, due to peer pressure:

I find that class moves so fast and I know that we are supposed to tell the professor when we do not understand something, but if no one else has a problem, then you don't want to say anything. (Student Journal 100 #9)

Or feeling vulnerable:

Looking around the class I noticed that 2/3 of the people were not saying a word because they did not want to express their opinion and then have to defend it in a foreign language. While the idea was sound, the topic was questionable. Yes we need to practice and force ourselves, but that should not require us to feel vulnerable and exposed. (Student Journal 250 #5)

On the other hand, they also realized that the small class setting enabled them to speak out loud:

It was nice to have a small class because everyone was able to participate and ask questions. (Student Journal 250 #2)

The teacher was very aware of the need to create an environment where student voices are heard to the point that this is how she expresses this worry:

I felt bad because I told them off about listening to the instructions of the exercises. I hate doing this because it seems I encourage silence in class when my ideology is that they talk as much as they want to. In Spanish better than in English, of course, but this doesn't happen frequently. We did these exercises. M. said that they are like a bunch of high school students.

➢ Interaction

Interaction seems widely praised by all these students.

I like the interaction in the class and we don't just have to sit there and be spoken to. Interacting must stimulate brain cells. (Student Journal 250 #4)

o Teacher – Students

They mentioned their preference for interactive oral classes as opposed to language labs:

I would rather have interaction between the teacher and the students during the oral lab times instead of learning how to speak from a tape. (Student Journal 100 #15)

The only thing I don't really like is our language labs. I don't really find them beneficial and I don't feel that I am learning very much in them. I would rather have a fourth lecture a week and omit the labs completely because I learn a lot in class and I get to practice speaking, writing and listening in Spanish rather than just listening to a tape which most of them don't work anyways. I like the interaction and learning in groups rather than by myself. (Student Journal 100 #11)

They reflected upon the effect on their memory this interaction had:

The teacher was walking around interaction with the class as the human dictionary, which find helpful because when she tells us what something means in English, I retain it better then looking it up. (Student Journal 200 #2)

Today I thought was a pretty good class, because there was a bit of interaction, but not too much and I think I'll remember the subjunctive in the future. (Student Journal 200 #7)

There are dynamics that get established within a classroom that provoke irritation among fellow students. Once again, students seemed to be less flexible than the teacher herself:

Today in class there were a few people, and it is always the same people so it gets really irritating, that were asking the same questions that other people had already asked, or that had been covered in last class, or asking questions that didn't even relate to what we were talking about. If I was the teacher, I would tell them I am not answering them, and let the class answer them, to make them feel foolish for not paying attention. (Student Journal 100 #8)

       o   Student – Student

Students mostly reacted positively to student-student interaction in the class:

Recently, our class worked in groups to complete an assignment. I think that this was a good idea and that we should do this more often. I find that if I am able to talk to other students about the work to be done that I can learn the best. (Student 100 #20)

The more eager students carried forth this interaction outside the classroom walls:

Usually when we leave class we try to put sentences together on our way to the bus stop so that we can use the new Spanish that we learned that day. (Student Journal 200 #8)

They raised some issues about student-student interaction. Their main difficulties included working with someone that was at a different linguistic level:

I was incredibly nervous for this because it is hard to work with someone that is not on the same level as you. (Student Journal 200 #2)

However, other students found that experience helpful:

I am strengthening what I know by explaining things to her. We are helping each other in a way. (Student Journal 100 #21)

Others would actually recommend it:

I like the idea of having some time during this seminar to do exercises but more time must be consecrated to it. Like at least 15min if not more and then the group could share its answers. Also, students grasping certain concepts could be paired with others who did not quite grasp them and therefore The teacher would not have to run around so much trying to help each individual. (Student Journal 200 #15)

Student-Student interactions can be disruptive and students feel very powerless to manage these disruptive interactions:

Two people were moved, as they were being too noisy and then a discussion started as to how 'elementary school' it was. (Student Journal 200 #21)

Sitting with friends, students believe, has positive and negative effects on student concentration:

Another thing I have noticed in class is that whenever I sit with, or near, a friend of mine- I am often distracted. So I will try to sit in between people I don't really know, that way hopefully I won't be as distracted as I usually am… I find that I miss lots of important points that way. (Student Journal 100 #6)

The big woman who sits in front of me was complaining again and disturbing the guy who has to sit next to her. If she is not satisfied with the course then she should complain to the head of the department and do something about it, not the person next to her. What can he do? (Student Journal 200 #21)

The teacher sometimes acts as the conductor of this student dynamics in the classroom:

Today I had conversation class. I talked to the teacher about staying in the 12:00 class, she said she had

no problem with that on one condition...that I don't sit with my friends and sit and work with the other people in the class, I had no problem with that because I think I might be a little more productive if I don't sit with them because they like to talk. (Student Journal 200 #8)

However, some students understand this challenge as an issue that directly hinders their learning and are willing to take action as well instead of abdicating that power to the teacher:

Once again the new student disrupted the class by being very loud and obnoxious. How am I supposed to learn and get my work done if I am disrupted every week? If it happens again next week I will have to approach her. (Student Journal 100 #21)

The effect of student-student interaction, even on student feelings, can be observable and beneficial for the whole class dynamic:

I was slightly frustrated at the outset of this exercise but knowing that the rest of the group depended on me to hold up my share forced me to get over my frustration. (Student Journal 200 #4)

The dance of personal dynamics even in a small classroom is complicated and should never be dismissed:

On a personal note, I can't seem to get away from the person that I distracts me the most (I mentioned her name before and later realized that we weren't supposed to use names so I'll just call her Person M, and the girl I enjoy sitting with will be Person I). I was sitting by myself, then Person I sat down with me. This was also fine. Then Person M sat down–right beside me. And she walked in just as the teacher was starting the class. I tried not to allow myself to be distracted but it was hard. (Student Journal 200 #4)

- o Action

When the teacher used her tools to transform the space into another type of classroom that fostered interaction, her efforts were gladly appreciated:

The big lecture room was dominated by silence, though the teacher tried to transform it into an interactive environment through engaging the students in various activities and presentations. This tiny room was naturally interactive, the small size leads to closeness, which in turn made it easier to communicate and share thoughts with each other. Working with each other was more effective as well. Recovering my Spanish won't be as hard, I thought. (Student Journal, 200 #10)

Some students even give suggestions about how to solve the participation problems that some people have in the class through enhancing interaction and physical arrangement of tables and chairs:

I noticed that many people in the class remained quiet during the entire 2 hrs of class and sometimes wonder if there is not a way of making things less intimidating for them (if intimidation is the problem). Perhaps we could break up into smaller groups to practise certain concepts. This could be something to be brought up in the class. I also think that re-arranging the class into a somewhat circle-like shape would things less intimidating and would stimulate more conversation (instead of talking to the backs of fellow classmates). (Student Journal 100 #5)

o Assessed

Some students showed their disapproval of getting marks on the basis of merely attending a class:

If a person shows up to class it doesn't mean they deserve marks for participating if they don't. (Student Journal 100 #21)

➢ Rounds

The reason why this topic was isolated is because rounds were a common practice by some of the teachers in this institution. By rounds, we mean the practice of getting each student to participate in an exercise by going around the class one by one. Some students consider them positively, some students do not like them, but the general view was that they affected their learning and engagement in a positive way. However, the institutional point of view was very 'respectful' of student silence and discouraged this practice:

○ Positive

Rounds help to reassure students about their own understanding of a concrete point:

In the seminar, we looked at the imperfect subjunctive. This was a good activity. I like the activities where we have to choose between two verbs. We circle the correct answer and then we all talk about why that makes sense and the other one doesn't. I like the way this forces us to be logical. We don't race through it. We go around the class, one by one, answering the next question. Because this is such a small class, it works out perfectly. It's really great because this way, the teacher is sure that everyone understands. (Student Journal 200 #9)

Rounds help shy students offer an answer:

See a lot of shy people in the class as well. My suggestion is to continue with going around the class and taking turns answering the exercises. This is a great way for the shy students to get a chance to answer and also learn how to pronounce the words properly. (Student Journal 100 #7)

Rounds are less intimidating than being put on the spot because they are able to predict what question they would have to answer. They were also coached into skipping if they needed to:

However, I did like going through the exercises as a class like that. I mean, going around in a circle, getting everyone to do a question, but it just seemed to me that it was in a less intimidating way. (Student Journal 100 #2)

Rounds help to manage the turn-taking in a classroom and the power dynamics:

There are a few people who are keen on answering before others. I see a lot of shy people in the class as well. My suggestion is to continue with going around the class and taking turns answering the exercises. (Student Journal 100 #7)

○ Negative

The main negative response that was offered included the view that they were a necessary evil:

I hate being forced to talk in class but that also means that if I'm not made to talk I rarely will, (Student Journal 100 #12)

➤ Atmosphere

The class atmosphere is the result of many of the aspects above combined. Students reflected upon the types of atmosphere that motivated them positively:

o Jokes and laughing

Today I'm not tired! The teacher is in a good mood and is making jokes and making the class laugh as she teaches us, the class in fun today! (Student Journal 100 #18)

I find that in all of my classes I tend to lose my attention and my friend is always able to bring some humour into the class so that I can more or less react with her but pay attention, in other words she keeps the class from getting boring. (Student Journal 200 #8)

o Informal.

It was our first day back from the holidays today and I was surprised that the class was as laid back as it was. Not that the classes are usually strict or anything, but it just seemed to be less "class-roomy" and more "hang-outish." I liked this atmosphere because we were still getting work done, but in a less formal atmosphere. (Student Journal 100 #2)

There were only four students so the class was conducted in the cafeteria. I felt quite relaxed in this setting. (Student Journal 200 #4)

o Comfortable to ask questions

I enjoy being taught in the classroom setting as well as just reading the book. In the classroom it is a group that is open to ask other people for help and I have not been afraid to ask others when I do not understand something. It is a great atmosphere when you are in a class like that. (Student Journal 100 #7)

o Friendly

But in this class, I feel that I know everyone and I am confident and comfortable. It seems that all of the students can easily talk to one another and we do. This is partly due to the fact that we have this class three times a week and almost everyone knows each other's name. This makes the atmosphere of the class very relaxed and for me a much better learning environment. (Student Journal 100 #20)

I think it has been mentioned in class before that no one should feel shy because we are all like 'family'. I think today was first time that I felt that this 'family' idea is possible. (Student Journal 200 #4)

o Helpful

It was obvious in my group that everyone was willing to help one another. Some students were slower at reading their share. I believe this was a good exercise because it forced me not to dwell on the small details of the reading and to quickly pick out the main ideas. (Student Journal, 200 #4)

o Personal and engaging

Our professor makes an extra effort to make sure we have more than enough study tools. She is the only teacher that I get e-mails from and I really think that adds a really nice personal touch. It makes me feel that whatever problem or question I have I can ask her. Her classroom is a very welcoming atmosphere, with a pinch of comical relief. I just wish that she had the opportunity to decide what is taught or not because I think we as students would be better off and more fluent in the language. (Student Journal 100 #21)

o Small communities

With regard to Spanish class I am very happy with the size of the class. Everyone gets the chance to practice without dragging on each exercise. We also get the chance to kind of get to know everyone as well as the professor. She is the only professor I talk to and could approach about any concerns without feeling demeaned. She is very cheerful and makes learning as fun as it can be. As well she also expects a lot from of which in turn makes us strive to do better. The only thing I find difficult is having people come and go from the class because they missed their class> I understand it in theory but it disrupts the homeostasis we have created. (Student Journal 100 #21)

- o Pseudo-Immersion Environment

I also find it helpful when we have discussion times and ask and answer questions in small groups. Then we are actually using what we learn, and it creates a pseudo-immersion environment. (Student Journal 100 #13)

- o Interaction outside of classroom

This particular group was invited to interact with the teacher outside of the classroom walls and this had an impact on the classroom atmosphere, making it more personal and practical.

Today the teacher also taught us cool words like to flirt. It was really funny. The whole class was totally paying attention and laughing and having fun. I thought that that was one of the greatest lessons because these are the types of words that we want to know!! They were also supposed to be very useful for Thursday night. The teacher invited everyone out to the Trash to see her sing! It was great! I can't wait! (Student Journal 200 #9)

- o Different groups, different atmospheres

This week I missed my normal time for the Spanish lab so I had to make it up later on in the day. This proved to be quite an experience and it was interesting to see the difference in 'culture' between the groups. (Student Journal 100 #21)

- ➤ Action

Every change that was brought into the classroom was noticed by the students and appreciated at this level:

I found that the teacher had changed her lessons and slowed down a lot. I like that! I feel that I can keep up a little better now in class. She has also included some activities to keep our interest which is good too because I know that me and my friend have a really hard time trying to pay attention in any class, not just Spanish because we lose our focus when we get bored. Not to mention that the lesson tends to stick a lot better in my head that if it were to be taught traditionally. (Student Journal, 200 #8)

The action suggested by a student proved that interaction between teacher and students was satisfactory and that students were encouraged to take learning into their own hands and demand their learning needs:

One of the students in the class suggested a type of review exercise for grammar to the teacher and she seemed quite willing to devise an exercise similar to one suggested by the student. It was encouraging to see her willingness to accept suggestions from students in how the class is taught and what exercises are employed. (Student Journal 200 #4)

➢ Feedback

Feedback is one of the trickiest aspects of teaching and learning and in the case of language it can be complicated to devise effective ways of giving feedback. Students have also realized this and commented on the topic in their journals.

o To students

▪ Mistakes are allowed.

I like how the teacher doesn't ridicule people when they make mistakes. In my German class, the teacher speaks aloud to the class about problems of some of the students. I don't like that because it invades privacy. We have not run into that in our Spanish class as far as I can tell. (Student Journal 100 #13)

▪ Correction is not personalized.

A good teaching ability that the teacher has is to know when we know the answer and have just made a mistake, and when we simply don't know what we did wrong. She applies this to correcting exercises put on the board so that she doesn't grill someone and have them feel like an idiot. She knows when to ask somebody else and when to just provide us with the answer. This creates a really comfortable environment for learning. (Student Journal 100 #13)

- Feedback is needed.

We didn't get our mistakes corrected, and I am sure there were many. Although correction in front of the class might not be the best way, I realize it may be difficult to provide each student with a page of individual pointers. I don't really have a solution. (Student Journal 100 #13)

Students do not seem to appreciate not getting feedback at all because it leaves them uncertain about their own performance or it gives them a false sense of security.

However I felt I benefited quite a bit for the obvious reason that I wrote this paragraph (on my Grandmother) and got direct feedback from the professor about certain grammatical errors that I made. (Student Journal 100 #22)

Sometimes in a language classroom, the teacher is scared to correct too much on the basis that this overcorrection may contribute negatively on the student's motivation to speak. However, some students seemed to appreciate these corrections:

In today's class I was very happy to see the professor correcting pronunciation a lot more than usual. We are all adults and I think we can all handle being corrected. Besides how are we suppose to learn to say things properly if we aren't told the right thing right off the bat. (Student Journal 100 #21)

Positive feedback goes a long way in terms of developing student self-confidence.

The teacher was really nice to say things such as "You'll do great" or "Don't worry, try your best". (Student Journal 250 #2)

This kind of remarks about feedback made the teacher think about her own attitudes towards feedback and her methods:

It bugged me that one of the students who got a very good mark wants a higher one. I am going to try and not judge her before she explains everything to me but the truth is that I never give 100% in any language course unless it's outstanding how they perform orally and written language. We will talk this week. But I just wanted to note that her remark has affected the way I see her and I feel biased against her now. But I will try to change this. I am sure that when she explains it to me I will be able to

understand.

- Nonverbal feedback.

Feedback comes in a variety of ways and nonverbal feedback was extremely noticed. This came as a surprise and as an interesting feature to work on for classroom interaction.

The seminars are always enjoyable as it's only a small class so everyone can get involved and also. The teacher always has a smile on her face which makes a difference! (Student Journal 200 #20)

- Feedback needs to be understandable

I was annoyed again with class today. I didn't understand the exercises, and I tried to ask questions and the professor totally shut me down. She said, "No, we don't use…then some grammar jargon, but it was just her tone that made me get really embarrassed, like I should already know this, and maybe I should if I have 90%, in the class, BUT I DON'T. (Student Journal 200 #16)

This student is very enraged at the use of grammatical terms to explain what the student does not understand. The fact that the teacher was using grammatical terms was a matter of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

- Peer feedback

Peer feedback, whether verbal or nonverbal, is a feature of every classroom.

But there are a few people in the class that make me cringe every time they start speaking. They are always mispronouncing the same words! (Student Journal 100 #8)

Feedback by peers can be very detrimental to student confidence and needs to be monitored or a set of rules need to be proposed at the beginning of the year about how to respectfully give it.

Well that was for sure the wrong answer because everyone looked at me funny, and I think some people actually laughed. I don't care I mean, I would laugh too, I just felt dumb because I knew what I was talking about but I think the conversation teacher thought I was just saying any colour, and maybe

she thought I didn't know what was going on. Oh well, could have been worse. (Student Journal, #1)

- Self assessment

The journals contributed to encouraging the students to give feedback to themselves about their own performance as well.

My topic was in fact easily discussed with my partner something that I could not have done at the beginning of the year and therefore I can confidently say that my oral communication skills have greatly improved over the course of the year. (Student Journal 100 #17)

- Feedback is definitely a sensitive issue

I also didn't like the fact that only some of the groups were commented on (our group and the last group) when the middle group had grammatical errors. I also don't like the fact that students that don't have any problems with Spanish (I thinking of a Romanian) are praised. I think people who do have challenges, should be praised. (Student Journal 200 #4)

- To the teacher

Student journals were used to give feedback to the teacher in an open way. Their anonymous status freed the students to express their positive and negative views about the actions that were being taken in class:

I wanted to tell her that she's been great and that we were supposed to keep up; the thing is, there was no sense of inadequacy in her class, but the inadequacy was reflected through the grades: it's time for a different method. I think most of us have noticed the shift in the way the teacher teaches this semester. I love how she is open to change, and try new things to hopefully transmit the information, but it's not only transmitting the information with a language, it's making sure that it actually stays in there somehow. It's hard to do that, because many of us have different ways of understanding and memorizing and it's hard to ensure that everyone is learning from a certain way. I think the teacher was

challenged in the first semester with a huge class, and realized that working with smaller portions is much better, of which she switched to in the second semester. (Student Journal 200 #10)

Students always seem very appreciative when they see the effect of their feedback in the classroom:

We received the review exercise that one of the students requested from the last class and a very useful grammatical chart. The reason I mention this is because I am quite pleased to have an instructor who takes the students requests seriously and doesn't mind doing extra work to help her students. (Student Journal 200 #4)

5.2.4   Teaching Methods

> We are obsessed with manipulating externals because we believe that they will give us some power over reality and win us some freedom from its constraints. Mesmerized by a technology that seems to have done just that, we dismiss the inward world. (Palmer, 1998, p. 19)

The fourth most recurrent topic on the journals was teaching methods and materials. Here is the sub-classification we have drawn up for the examples of teaching methods in the journals:

- ➤ COURSE RELATED
  - o Grammar instruction
  - o Labs
  - o Conversation
- ➤ MATERIALS
  - o Textbooks
  - o Workbook
  - o Homework
  - o Companion website
- ➤ TEACHER RELATED
  - o Teacher's time management skills
  - o Mistake correction
  - o Rapport
  - o
- ➤ CLASS ACTIVITY RELATED
  - o Drills
  - o Team work
  - o Review
  - o Action in response to students' needs
  - o Language of Instruction

- ➤ STUDENT SUGGESTIONS
  - o Course related
    - ▪ Vocabulary
    - ▪ Reading
    - ▪ Curriculum control
  - o Student Related
    - ▪ Student Preparation
  - o Class Activity Related
    - ▪ Games.
    - ▪ Sample tests
    - ▪ Challenges
    - ▪ Films
    - ▪ Group Presentations
    - ▪ Practice time
    - ▪ Examples
    - ▪ Interaction

- ➤ COURSE RELATED

As it was expected, students commented at large about the different components that made up their language courses. Different students had different preferences and needs but these were the most recurrent points of view that were expressed throughout the diaries. Some of them seem to correlate with the issues that the literature in second language teaching and learning deals with.

- o Grammar instruction

Contrary to what was expected from the recurrent student appraisal of immersion programs throughout

this project, many students affirmed that the knowledge of grammar and grammar terms had been beneficial in their learning, not only of Spanish but other languages too.

I attended my second grammar workshop today. I find it very helpful. I am leaning so much about where nouns and verbs and adjectives are found in a sentence, and the importance and function of conditional, subjunctive and participles. None of which I knew before. I mean I knew they existed, and I knew somewhat about them from the Spanish course. I never realized how valuable it would be to refresh my English grammar skills. I would defiantly recommend this workshop to anyone who is taking language courses. I would even recommend just buying the grammar booklet. It tells you so much about the words you use on a daily basis. I am using what I have learned about English grammar and the uses, and applying it to my knowledge of Spanish grammar. It is honestly making a more sense to me now. (Student Journal 250 #1)

They seemed to apply this knowledge to the language in general and to concrete items as well, such as the verb tenses:

I have a recommendation to help ease the difficulty in learning new verb tenses. This year I also took a first year German course. For an extra 4% we could attend a language workshop through the Academic Skills Center of our University. I chose to attend the workshops, once a week for four weeks. These workshops explained to us the English language – including verb tenses, nouns, grammatical structures, etc. (Student Journal 250 #2)

However, some other students are concerned with the focus on grammatical items, instead of on the overall use of language, without the need to be grammatically-aware:

Two things I really felt I was not getting enough of where the component I mentioned earlier - using the language without just focusing on grammar. Either in the conversation or in the classes themselves, I felt I needed more talking or reading. (Student Journal 200 #12)

o Labs

The majority of students hated this element of the course. There were multiple complaints about different aspects of the language labs:

- Passive listening

Students found them boring and repetitive and could not engage with the activities presented on them.

The only thing I don't really like is our language labs. I don't really find them beneficial and I don't feel that I am learning very much in them. I would rather have a fourth lecture a week and omit the labs completely because I learn a lot in class and I get to practice speaking, writing and listening in Spanish rather than just listening to a tape which most of them don't work anyways. (Student Journal 100 #11)

- Technical problems and bad maintenance

Since the system was an old laboratory based on old tapes, it was continuously troublesome.

I also had the lab today. It was extremely annoying because none of the chapter seven tapes that were left worked so I had to do calculus homework instead which doesn't relate to Spanish in any way but I had no choice.. (Student Journal, 100 #11)

- Not interactive

Students expected a more interactive environment from which to learn, instead of passively doing something that they could be doing at home in their own time.

The lab this week was particularly boring. I had finished lesson six in the lab manual and I had completed all of the workbook exercises and since we had not started lesson seven in seminar, I did not want to move on in the lessons. The lab is probably the worst part of this course. I thought that we would be doing more conversation stuff in order to achieve a higher speaking level. (…). I like my lab, but there are not enough interactions in the lab. I wasn't quite sure what a language lab would be all about, so I guess I had the wrong idea. (Student Journal 100 #7)

- Waste of time

The way the lesson plans for the lab were structured, students found that they sometimes did not need

to use the full hour to do the materials for a lesson. Therefore, the lab became an hour to catch up on other parts of the course or other subjects.

The reason I am writing the journal though is because I wanted to talk about the language laboratories. (…) The major criticisms are that you run out of things to do, you listen to the lesson and do your lab book and you finish the lesson that corresponds to what you are doing in lecture. The frustrating part is that you finish the lesson, and can't go on any further, because we haven't covered that stuff in lecture. Personally, I do the lab lessons over a couple of times, but I know other people that just bring their workbook to class and work on that, or one girl even told me that she does her own homework and puts in one of her own music tapes and listens to it. (Student Journal 100 #19)

- ▪ Lab instructor is unnecessary

The lack of interaction with the monitor, who was there as a guardian or a technician, made his/her role quite dull and passive. This created a passive and dull atmosphere in return since the students did not expect the lab monitor to be helpful and s/he did not challenge their notions either. It should also be noted that this job is typically offered to undergraduate or post-graduate students of Spanish with very low pay rates. They did not have any feedback or assessment responsibilities.

Even if I have questions I can't really ask the lab instructor unless I ask her to listen to my tape. I know it is helpful to listen to Spanish, and pronounce words and stuff, I think that there has to be more of a percentage of the mark for actually speaking. The lab instructor should listen to you and judge your mark based on all the labs you've been to, but that is not the case. In reality, you get marks for just showing up to the class and people do just that, which is pretty disappointing. (Student Journal 100 #19)

- o Conversation

On the other side of the spectrum, the conversation or spoken hour in smaller groups was the hour that most students enjoyed the best. Students thought that it should be made up of longer sessions:

I think longer conversation hours would increase my conversational skills greatly. One hour is just not enough. It feels like just when I am getting into it, class is over. (Student Journal 250 #3)

But also they thought there should be more conversation classes:

There's an obvious lack of opportunities for students like myself to be exposed to interactions with native speakers. (Student Journal 200 #4)

> ➤ MATERIALS

Materials are the first things that stand out on any course. Our students commented on every element of these materials:

> ○ Textbooks

Student expectations to have all their needs met by a textbook showed up a couple of times. What was striking was that from a teacher point of view, textbooks are always deficient and can never manage to satisfy all the needs of a class, but students do not share that expectation:

I also worked on some of the Spanish homework that we had to do, and once again more unheard of vocabulary and oh what a surprise, the meanings aren't in the back of the text! Err, drives me mad! (Student Journal 200 #5)

The following students were talking about the differences between the textbook in her first year and the textbook in her second year. She disliked the changed in the language of the exercises:

The thing I absolutely hated about the textbook was that the instructions changed from English to Spanish. (Student Journal 200 #13)

On the other hand, students that had begun as beginners in the first year seemed to find the textbook very helpful and they explained their reasons:

I also really like our textbook that we are using because the way it is structured makes it really easy to study. I like having all the new vocabulary at the beginning of each chapter. In the past when I studied French, the vocabulary was all over the place in a lesson or a chapter so we would have to search for it which was sometimes time-consuming. I also really like that there are so many grammar exercises to

practice from and I like that we do many of them in class because the discussions help clarify anything that is harder to understand. (Student Journal 100 #11)

I find the content of the textbook extremely helpful because it focuses on the grammar aspects as well as learning the vocabulary. I enjoy the textbook as well as the workbook. (Student Journal 100 #7)

Another student expectation that surfaced at this level was that students expect their teachers to use their textbooks – for which they normally paid quite a lot of money – completely, and will feel disappointed if they are not.

This other student also pointed out, and I share in his complaint that the class is not fully utilizing our textbooks, granted the student can study the stuff we are not taught in class on their own time. But in my opinion the chapters are all constructed in a similar way all of which are tied together with themes. I think this repetitive, structured method of teaching would be more useful for the student being able to retain the new information. (Student Journal 200 #4)

- o Workbook

A lot of the textbooks used at this institution came with a companion workbook that expanded the practice of the contents covered in each lesson in the textbook. There were mixed opinions about these as well:

The workbook is the other writing, but I feel I get absolutely nothing out of these, because I do them just before they are due, take too much help from the answer sheets, and feel like I get no feedback whatsoever on them. (Student Journal 200 #12)

Their mechanical nature and the absence of detailed feedback – due to student numbers – made the task unprofitable. However, some students enjoyed this type of autonomous work and were worried about the way other students could cheat with them, because some of these workbooks came with an answer sheet at the back:

The workbook is a better way of getting us to do work on our own. I enjoy doing the workbook, because I feel I am getting work done on my own and with my own understanding.

Something I think that should be addressed is the ability to cheat on the workbooks. (Student Journal 100 #21)

- o Homework

Homework is also a regular component of any language course. The first excerpt shows a mixed view about it. Students seem to understand the value of doing homework and that the onus is on them, but they feel that when it is graded they resent it.

Not doing my homework really puts me behind. The value of doing one's homework is incredibly high in a course like this. I like that the homework is our responsibility because I find I resent homework when it has to be shown to someone and graded. (Student Journal 100 #14)

Another student, then, illustrates the point that homework is necessary but that making it compulsory seems to defeat part of the purpose of the process of learning. It shows that the situation with homework can be a catch-22 situation, since not making it compulsory seems to discourage students that have problems engaging with the subject.

Another problem, I think is that she mentions homework at the end of class, when everyone is packing up to leave. (Student Journal 200 #17)

However, engaged students definitely see the benefit of assigned pieces of homework and find them very beneficial for their learning.

Finally, I find the weekly assignments to be very interesting and beneficial because we are often asked to write about something familiar and practise certain grammatical concepts or verb tenses. Even writing one simple/short paragraph can be very rewarding. (Student Journal 200 #22)

- o Companion website

Companion websites for the materials or grammar-related websites were commonly used at this institution. Most of the students found them very beneficial:

As for the mas arriba website, I have been to a couple of times. I really usually look at it the day before any of our tests. It is a lot of help. It is also a source of new vocabulary. I think it is great how the answers are directly below the pictures. (Student Journal 100 #6)

I also found the web site (www.colby.edu/nbknelson/exercises) was helpful. I really don't know of a better or easier. (Student Journal 200 #13)

However, they also commented on the difficulties they had using them on their own:

The web pages like this did help but I never take the time to do them on my own (which I should start doing). (Student Journal 200 #7)

➤ TEACHER RELATED

The students did not seem to talk very negatively about their teachers, or at least they did not focus on them that way, contrary to common belief or maybe because they felt that the readers of their journals were the teachers.

However, they felt that they could voice their complaints about the things they wanted improved about a teacher's behaviour. The blackboard was one of the main issues repeated in the journals.

I find it very difficult to learn the lessons in class when the instructor uses the blackboard. It is always very messy and very difficult to read. (Student Journal 250 #3)

      o Teacher's time management skills

Some teachers who would not organize the classes in advance or fail to time activities properly were noticed in the journals.

Then the teacher took some time out to re-organize the groups. This could have been done on her own time. E-mail works pretty good. I don't learn anything in class from listening to her re-group people, and I am paying good money to listen to it too. (Student Journal 250 #2)

- o Mistake correction

They also commented positively about their teachers.

A good teaching ability that the teacher has is to know when we know the answer and have just made a mistake, and when we simply don't know what we did wrong. She applies this to correcting exercises put on the board so that she doesn't grill someone and have them feel like an idiot. She knows when to ask somebody else and when to just provide us with the answer. This creates a really comfortable environment for learning. (Student Journal 100 #13)

This kind of comment reinforced a positive feedback on what class activities worked and which ones were not so successful. Students praised innovation and creativity in terms of explanation and corrections:

The instructor told us to pronounce these r's as you would pronounce the t's in the word "butter". I found this very helpful. I have never had anyone explain it to me in that manner before and I would never have thought of it on my own. (Student Journal 250 #3)

- o Rapport

They obviously talked at length about their relationship with the teacher and the teacher's rapport with the group. They considered it beneficial to have the teacher constantly inciting students to question:

I like the way the professor conducts the class. She is always willing to help students at anytime but more importantly, throughout the class, constantly asks if anyone has any questions. (Student Journal 200 #4)

They also felt very rewarded by the fact that their suggestions were being taken into account. They realized that they were active agents in what was taught and how it was taught:

One of the students in the class suggested a type of review exercise for grammar to the teacher and the teacher seemed quite willing to devise an exercise similar to one suggested by the student. It was encouraging to see the teacher's willingness to accept suggestions from students in how the class is taught and what exercises are employed. (Student Journal 200 #3)

➢ CLASS ACTIVITY RELATED

Once again, with the wide array of students present in these classrooms, they all had different preferences and dislikes for certain activities. These are the activities that were most commented upon:

o Drills

In spite of the common belief that students do not appreciate drills and that they are old school and not beneficial, some students expressed positive views about this type of exercise. There are some activities in language learning that require memorizing and they appreciated their inclusion in class time:

It was repetitive work but at the same time I learned the subjunctive and by the end of the class I'm pretty sure I had the hang of the subjunctive. (Student Journal 200 #8)

o Team work

Team work is not the favourite feature of any course and here a student explains why:

The test is with a partner, which adds pressure, only for the fact that one wants to good job so as not to let your partner down. I think this added pressure is a good thing. Also I am with a student who is at about the same level as I am so I am not too worried about the test. (Student Journal 200 #4)

The teacher's journal though recognized that examples of best performance in class were based on student-created study groups:

I think that if they studied in groups and help each other in their learning, they will all perform better both in the class and in the tests. The best example for that are J & Ja who shared flash cards and stuff like that and prepare tests together.

o Review

Most of the students commented about reviews and review exercises in a positive way. Connections between previous knowledge and new knowledge were deeply appreciated.

Also, in class today we reviewed both direct and indirect pronouns and I found that very helpful because I have managed somehow to completely forget about forming those pronouns. This constant review helps old and new concepts to be always fresh in my mind. In addition, the many exercises that we do in class helps clarify any unclear concepts. (Student Journal 200 #8)

The teacher outlines an old concept, that has a connection to a new one, which I think is easier for a student as well, in that they can build up on what they previously know, and that remembering it will probably somehow be an addition to the old, rather than something completely new and different to store again. Connections between various concept is always effective I find. (Student Journal 200 #10)

They even included suggestions for activities that would make this possible:

Just as an extra thought on that – I was thinking that it may be helpful to have the similar verb tense that we have learnt before left up on one corner of the board, so that it is possible to constantly compare and differentiate it from the newer form that is being taught. (Student Journal 200 #12)

Students also appreciated reviews in chart form or schematic formulas that permitted them to remember a topic at first sight:

The table that the teacher used in class helped to clarify a lot of the things I didn't understand. When I started studying for the test I reformulated this table and that helped me remember them. The other thing I found very helpful was formulating a table for the direct and indirect pronouns. I think because I am a visual learner, these tables that distinguish different concepts help me understand and learn them much easier than I would have just studying from the textbook so I want to say to The teacher to continue doing that because it is very helpful. (Student Journal 100 #11)

The revision before a test was crucial for them:

Finally the teacher gave us a chance to ask last minute test questions and to see if there is anything that we are still not clear on and it was nice to see that most people including me didn't have many questions which showed that the review that we did this week and last week helped make the concepts clear and very few people had problems. (Student Journal 100 #11)

o   Action in response to students' needs.

The teacher won the students' confidence by listening to their needs and adapting the course according to the students needs:

I found that the teacher had changed her lessons and slowed down a lot. I like that! I feel that I can keep up a little better now in class. She has also included some activities to keep our interest which is good too because I know that me and my friend have a really hard time trying to pay attention in any class, not just Spanish because we lose our focus when we get bored. Not to mention that the lesson tends to stick a lot better in my head that if it was to be taught traditionally. (Student 200 #8)

o   Language of Instruction

This was one of the topics that we had set out to investigate from the very beginning and it turned out to be as controversial for students as it was for teachers. In the first year beginner group, some students liked the way Spanish was used more and more as the language of instruction:

One thing that did strike me though, was the fact that the teacher was speaking much more Spanish, and giving less English instructions. Of course, if we didn't get it, there were actions involved to try and get us to understand without the English words, a technique that I find very successful because then we are still associating the Spanish word with the action, not saying, "Oh, okay, that means _____ in English." (Student Journal 100 #2)

Explaining directions in English and then in Spanish helps us to associate words and such, and I like that the teacher is increasing the amount of Spanish that she speaks in class. It not only provided us with examples of full sentences, but makes the most for non-immersion setting, and shows me just how much I really understand already. (Student Journal 100 #13)

Some students do not resent the teacher's use of English in the classroom and believe it is beneficial for them to use all their tools at hand:

The teacher was walking around interacting with the class as the human dictionary, which find helpful because when she tells us what something means in English, I retain it better then looking it up. (Student Journal 200 #2)

Translation in class was highly disregarded:

Most of the time the professor reads them in Spanish while we follow along in English. I can honestly say that it did not help me to learn the point any better. (Student Journal 100 #21)

Another student of the same group analyzed the issue in greater depth, finding the connections from English and Spanish beneficial at times:

I wonder if connecting the information to English more often would be better. Especially the verbs, if the various verbs are constantly linked to their form in English, I think their use would be much easier and accurate as well. It's very hard to think Spanish when writing, I often find myself going through English and then trying to translate to Spanish. That is why connecting the grammar to English could be helpful, and even pointing out the differences in its use from English could prove rewarding. I do realize though, students are not supposed to be encouraged to go from English to Spanish constantly, and that I have to think in Spanish, but for a beginner, it's always safer to start there. (Student Journal 200 #8)

Some students find the connections between the target and other languages difficult to deal with and regard these associations as negative:

I think the best way to learn a language is to clear the head of previous knowledge and expectations, and learn the language as is. I don't mean that knowing French doesn't facilitate that learning of Spanish, but the constant making of comparisons all the time just blocks the understanding process. (Student Journal 100 #13)

To make things more complicated, in this multicultural setting there were many students whose mother tongue would not be English either. The use of English to explain a third or fourth foreign language made the whole experience of language learning more complicated:

I don't know if it is the fact that I was losing interest in what was going on, or that I couldn't understand what they were saying, but I didn't realize when I started talking with my neighbour. Actually, she started commenting about how hard it is for international students, whose mother tongue is not English, to try to explain these recipes from Spanish into English. And since I was one of them, I started telling her that I was one of them and that it is actually easier to think in my first language rather than in English whenever I studied Spanish. (Student Journal 200 #3)

In the first year advanced group, Spanish was more utilized from the beginning and students seemed to be comfortable with it:

The first thing we did was to read a reading in our textbook and try to fully understand it. Therefore, if there was any vocabulary that we did not understand, we simply had to raise our hand and the teacher would attempt to define it for us in Spanish. I found this to be a good way to learn new vocabulary because it was presented to us in a certain context. (Student Journal 250 #4)

Some students, especially in the morning, would find code-switching incredibly difficult and they preferred Spanish to constant switching:

Right now we arrive first thing in the morning to speak a different language (I find it difficult to transfer back and forth between the languages that early in the morning. I think that the teacher should only speak in Spanish. (Student Journal 250 #5)

But some were not comfortable either:

I find that when she teaches a whole lesson in Spanish I have a hard time in trying to keep up with her and the rest of the class. Which really bothers me because I feel as though I am holding the class back, especially when everyone understands and I don't. (Student Journal, 200 #8)

In the second year group composed of ex-beginners and ex-advanced students from first year, the widespread opinion was to stick to the target language as a language of instruction:

I would really like it if the instruction could be in only Spanish – just listening to the language all the time makes learning so much faster. (Student Journal 200 #12)

➢ STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Finally, students gave some suggestions in their journals about how to improve the things that were not working to their satisfaction.

o Course related

In terms of the course, they started by commenting on:

▪ Vocabulary

Vocabulary seems to be lacking at many levels in the courses these students were taking. Vocabulary learning is not an easy task and in higher education it has not received proper attention:

Sometimes I wish we could do more vocabulary. I love vocabulary and learning new words. Maybe we should have a vocabulary game in the end of the class, or beginning? (Student Journal, 200 #10)

▪ Reading

Some students believe that there should be more reading in the classroom at all levels:
I like to read things out loud. Stories, well, kids' stories would be great because they are simple. Maybe we can do some of that in class as well. (Student Journal 200 #10)

As for the readings we have to read during reading break, or the Christmas break, I think those are great for us to keep up with work while away. (Student Journal 100 #6)

Hey, I have an idea. Why not have the students read their compositions out to the class, the 5 written assignments that we have to do. (Student Journal 100 #14)

▪ Curriculum control

They also give empowering suggestions to their teachers. As we saw previously, according to this student, the teacher should have complete control on curriculum and be able to reform it according to

the needs of the classroom and the class pace:

Her classroom is a very welcoming atmosphere, with a pinch of comical relief. I just wish that she had the opportunity to decide what is taught or not because I think we as students would be better off and more fluent in the language. (Student Journal 100 #21)

- o Student Related

    - ▪ Student Preparation

Students were also capable of suggesting ways of modifying student behaviour in order to efficiently take advantage of the learning process.

One thing that I think would work out in a classroom such as this would be asking the students to read over the couple pages we would be doing. This would get more people doing it, because I know that many, many students only do as much that is asked of them, and no more. It may get the lesson moving a little quicker, without confusing too many people, because whatever is not understood would be clarified in that class, instead of the next one. This gives student three chances each time to understand: once on their own, another time in class, and once more during the homework for the day. Of course, this is just a thought of mine. (Student Journal 100 #2)

Even though they do not suggest how to do it, students at different levels believe that all students should be encouraged to come to class prepared in advance:

I think a good way to teach and instil verb tenses is to make students read the instructions from the text before coming to lecture. (Student Journal 250 #2)

- o Class Activity Related

Most of the student suggestions came in terms of class activities. I found their activities very enriching and interesting enough to include in my subsequent lesson plans:

    - ▪ Games.

I thought that that was a stroke of enlightenment for the teacher to come up with the game for us. I think it worked. With some sort of reward (perhaps candy, or some other non-course oriented reward) the game could be continued for various weeks; small groups of 3 or 4 could work together and the score could be kept. That way, we have to work together as a team and interact more as well as practice our Spanish more, and we would be in a competitive mode which would increase endorphin production in our brains and we would be more awake for when the teacher begins her actual lesson. It's just a thought. (Student Journal 250 #5)

- Sample tests

In terms of improving our test scores, I find sample tests work great. (Student Journal 200 #10)

I suggest regular testing, instead of three tests per year, so that we are encouraged to study bits at a time instead of in big and unproductive surges. (Student Journal 100 #14)

- Challenges

She has given us an assignment that requires knowledge that we have not yet learned. I trust her in giving us an activity that will not be too hard and therefore useless. It is good to challenge us and keep us on the edge. This might be unpleasant to some, though, who are just taking this course to fill up time. (Student Journal 100 #13)

- Films

Could we not watch parts of films or TV shows or listen to music from a particular Spanish artist? I know that this is a tool somewhat utilized in our conversation hour but it is something that I would like to see used more frequently. (Student Journal 200 #18)

I felt very stimulated after watching this movie and think that a discussion could have followed. I believe that having more such things as movies incorporated into this class would make it more stimulating. Perhaps movies are too long to view but certain scenes or short documentaries could be inserted into the syllabus once in a while. (Student Journal 250 #7)

- Group Presentations

Another thing that I really enjoyed in the past is doing group presentations in class. It is fun to research information about the culture of a country and also really interesting to present it. (Student Journal 100 #11)

- Practice time

More practice time, instead of overloading the course load would really be helpful for some lessons (especially grammar). (Student Journal 100 #6)

- Examples

I find seeing half a dozen examples helps clarify when and how to use and apply the rules. (Student Journal 250 #5)

- Interaction

I'm not sure how this would work, but I think if we attempted to have conversations-like (informal) discussion groups, on certain topics, with the monitor mediating with language and vocabulary corrections, it may be very beneficial. Perhaps debates? (Student Journal 200 #12)

5.2.5   Student Strategies

> A given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. (Oxford, 1997, p. 8)

The fifth most recurrent topic in the journals was student strategies. Student strategies have been widely studied in the last two decades and there are many classifications available. We have used some of the terms available in the classification offered by Oxford (1990) to describe the strategies the students were referring to. They used the journals to showcase the strategies that they employ when trying to acquire a language. Here is the sub-classification we have drawn up for these instances in the student journals:

- Use of other languages
  - English
  - French
  - Romanian
- Previous language learning experiences
- Eavesdropping
- Memorizing vocabulary and verbs
- Visuals
- Tables and summaries

- Test preparation activities
- Writing things down
- Studying with other students
- Extra practice
- Advance preparation
- Self-recordings
- Experiential learning
- Daily Linguistic Exposure
- Review

- Use of other languages

By use of other languages, students were transferring or directly translating some of the linguistic knowledge they had from another language into the learning of Spanish.

I found that translating a recipe into Spanish was a great way to learn the vocab. (Student Journal 250 #3)

As English and French are the official languages in Canada, they were the most commonly mentioned.

  - English

I wonder if connecting the information to English more often would be better. Especially the verbs, if the <u>various verbs</u> are constantly linked to their form in English, I think their use would be much easier and accurate as well. It's very hard to think Spanish when writing, I often find myself going through English and then trying to translate to Spanish. That is why connecting the grammar to English could be helpful, and even pointing out the differences in its use from English could prove rewarding. I do realize though, students are not supposed to be encouraged to go from English to Spanish constantly, and that I have to think in Spanish, but for a beginner, it's always safer to start there. (Student Journal 200 #10)

This student explains how connections between the two sets of grammar were helpful for her.

- French

The sister-language status of French and Spanish enabled the students to make connections between them and use them to their own advantage.

Because I have French as a background, it has been pretty easy to learn Spanish. I think it is great for people to learn a new language. (Student Journal 100 #7)

Actual vocabulary in Spanish is much easier to remember because I have a French background. There are many many similarities between the two languages. Although French helps me in my vocabulary, it is really bad for my verbs. I think that that's the thing I have most difficulty with in Spanish. (Student Journal 200 #11)

However, one student comments on the fact that it is not always feasible to draw patterns of similarity between the two languages in translation:

It does make it a bit easier though, when they are similar, for recognizing them on paper, or when hearing them out loud. But sometimes a word will look just like an English or French word, and will not even be close to the right translation. (Student Journal 100 #8)

- Romanian

In a multicultural classroom, there were a number of other languages present in the student mix. This student, of Romanian origin, also found that she had an advantage in Spanish because she could draw from the same Latin origins:

For now, I can say that during the Spanish classes and studying I think mostly in my native language since they are both Latin based and are so similar, hence. Yes, it is definitely an advantage to be familiar with another Latin language. (Student Journal 200 #3)

➢ Previous language learning experiences

Having some level in another language other than the target language provided benefits for the student, according to our student journals, but students commented on the way these languages had been

acquired. They also found that having experience at learning in a language in a classroom setting influenced their approach and strategies to acquiring the new target language:

Having earned my bilingual diploma in French, I did not enjoy learning French verb tenses either. I do enjoy learning new languages, but about the time when we are learning so many verb tenses I find that I am overwhelmed and am not enjoying myself. This in turn makes me unmotivated to pick up my textbook. (Student Journal 250 #2)

The lack of previous experience in language learning also turned out to be a main concern for the students.

It has been so long since I study another language other than English, I don't know if this has anything to do with my problems. (Student Journal 100 #4)

➢ Eavesdropping

When a language is acquired, even if it is at a very basic level, pieces of conversation or text that were 'inaudible' or 'invisible' before, catch the attention of the learner:

I remember Paula from Colombia on the bus saying to a friend of hers who had just died her hair: "no te reconoci". I didn't know any past at the time this happened, I guessed that it must be some other form of the verb "to recognize" that we hadn't learned about in Spanish. So know I understand where the "I" at the end of "reconoci" comes from. (Student Journal 200 #3)

This student applied the strategy of deduction to this real life experience in order not only to make sense of the utterance that was being overheard, but also to make sense of the grammar s/he had previously learned.

There were about 6 or 7 Spanish speaking people that were speaking in the table in front of us. I was really happy because I understood some of what they were saying. (Student Journal 100 #11)

These moments of linguistic understanding are very rewarding for the students.

The first is the portion towards the end of each exercise where you have to interview a Spanish speaking person. I don't know anyone besides my professor and to approach a stranger to take time out of their day to answer random questions about their life makes me very uncomfortable. (Student Journal 100 #21)

However beneficial some students may find the technique of eavesdropping, they are not as willing to approach native speakers and engage with them in fully meaningful linguistic interactions.

➢ Memorizing vocabulary and verbs

Memorizing is probably one of the most tedious tasks for the human brain. Very few students react positively to an activity that has to do with memorizing. Teacher and students alike are aware of this initial resistance and try to bridge the gap between active and passive linguistic knowledge by means of different aids:

After class today I practiced the vocabulary we studied in class by writing the words down in Spanish and their meanings in English and then I wrote them all in English on a piece of paper and then closed my book and tried to remember them in Spanish. I find that this is the best way to remember different words. (Student Journal 100 #11)

This student used a notebook and translation in order to retain vocabulary.

Also today when I went home I took the teacher's advice to label the food items as well as the utensils in the kitchen in Spanish to help me learn whenever I look at them or use them. I labelled things like spoon, knife, fork, bread, butter, frozen veggies and frozen chicken. My family found that really funny and now whenever they go to the kitchen they laugh, but they began to learn some Spanish from that.. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Another student decided to surround herself with the words attached to their object in order to learn them in a more 'unconscious' way.

The little pieces of paper that I put on my wall in my room helped me remember how to form the past tense and how to form the commands in both the tu form and the usted form and also how to form irregular verbs like salir, poner, traer and ver. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Organizing the knowledge into cue cards helps others:

Learning the past tenses have helped in speaking and also for my compositions. I find it helpful to make cue cards of all of the vocabulary as well as the verbs so that I can learn them as I study as well as save them for studying for the exam and tests. (Student Journal 100 #15)

Another student applied the same strategy to the learning of verb tenses.

The more words we learn right away the fewer terms we will have to try to memorize at a later date. I find if I have to go through a lot of effort to find a word, I am more likely to remember it. (Student Journal 100 #21)

This student believes that the 'effort' of learning something has an impact on retention of the concept. S/he would argue for the use of dictionaries instead of negotiation of meaning as an effective strategy for him/her.

Auditory and visual learning paired together are effective in helping me remember vocab words. (Student Journal 100 #13)

Another student reflects upon his/her need of many different aids to remember vocabulary. Students seem to be more aware of what aids they need as the project moves on. Auditory representation does not seem to be a very widespread strategy among the students in this project but some students find it useful.

This week I have been listening some Spanish music off the internet to expose myself to the language a little more. I find it helpful, although I have to listen to the song many times to understand it because they sing so fast. (Student Journal 250 #3)

➢ Visuals

A lot of students respond positively to the use of imagery and visual references to learn languages.

We were asked to talk about the pictures using those verbs. I found that a really helpful exercise because I am a visual learner and that's why these pictures made it easy for me to learn both the verbs and the vocabulary. (Student Journal 100 #11)

> ➢ Tables and summaries

Summaries and charts for different grammatical items were welcomed and encouraged by many students.

German one it has a summary of rules and new information learned in each chapter before any of the activities for the said chapter. These summaries are in table form, and the information is very clearly organized in a way that is not possible in the texts. Everything one needs is at ones fingertips. This is a very effective study tool. The Spanish program might consider looking around for a new text/program? (Student Journal 100 #14)

The next student also emphasizes the usefulness of 'formulating' them her/himself.

The other thing I found very helpful was formulating a table for the direct and indirect pronouns. (Student Journal 100 #11)

> ➢ Test preparation activities

Many of the student journals talked about reading the book with the elusive verb 'going over' what we had covered in class. While the majority seemed to prepare for a test in this 'passive' way, some students decided to re-do the exercises that had already been done in class and work from their own mistakes in order to make sense of their linguistic performance and the competence that they were expected to achieve for the specific test. This type of self-evaluation and error analysis seemed to give good results as a studying strategy.

To study for the test, I redid the review sheet that we took up in class correcting my mistakes and I studied the tables that we reviewed in class and that helped me remember them. (Student Journal 100 #11)

This exercise in question also involved 'problem identification' to a certain extent, which would help the student to be aware of the areas in which s/he would need extra explanations or practice.

➢ Writing things down

Note-taking is a strategy that takes a while to acquire properly and to make it work successfully for the student's benefit. Some students realized that the mere act of writing things down can be helpful for them:

I also used different colours (…) I find that seeing my own hand writing and using my own words to explain what's going along with the colours is really helping me. (Student Journal 100 #18)

This kind of note taking involves a certain degree of self-management that not all students are used to employing, however ideal it may seem to be:

Another thing I did was work on my personal dictionary before she came to meet me. I have found just by writing them down and going over it with my tutor that I have had a better understanding of the grammar. I have yet to start on the vocabulary of my dictionary.. (Student Journal 200 #8)

➢ Studying with other students

Cooperation between students is not unheard of but it depends on the culture of the country and the teaching/learning country of the institution. Some students are very resistant to work with others, settled in their firm belief that learning is an individual task, best performed in isolation. In the case of languages, our students reflected upon the benefits of meeting with their classmates outside of class and studying together:

Usually a friend and I make cue cards with all the verbs and vocabulary on them and test each other. It is a fun game that in which we give each other prices for if they get so many right. We also use the review and make up practice tests for each other and then mark them. Anything we get wrong we then practice that section in our workbook and on Mas Arriba. (Student Journal 100 #21)

They managed to minimize the amount of time for test preparation or review, as well as explaining things to each other and practicing small interactions.

I often get together with friends to study so we can bounce ideas of each other and help each other out. Sometimes though we get distracted and sidetracked. Still, it helps to work with other students. (Student Journal 100 #20)

Another student also comments on the beneficial experience of 'teaching' someone else something she had already learned, even though both students were from the same class.

Having to teach someone else also gave me the opportunity to practice for the upcoming test. (Student Journal 100 #21)

➢ Extra practice

On Saturday March 29 was held the Spanish Immersion Day, which I participated in. This day was very exciting for me, from the outset, since it meant that for a whole day I would be immersed in Spanish. The best way to learn is in fact to be immersed and therefore I think that there should be more of such opportunities offered throughout the year. (maybe one such day in the fall). Students could also, as part of course requirements, help organize certain activities and participate during the whole day. Clearly it is much more difficult to learn a language in a classroom and therefore as many efforts as possible should be made to incorporate components that take place outside the classroom. (Student Journal 250 #7)

Most of the students in this project complained about the lack of practice time in a non-immersion environment. Some of them actively sought opportunities to increase their contact with the language through different means:

Today I read some of a Spanish book that my friend lent me. It is a book called "See It and Say It in Spanish." I think that this book will help me a lot because I am finding that I need a lot of extra practice in vocabulary building. (Student Journal 100 #20)

Language interaction and exchanges are the most popular ways of doing extra practice, even though it is not easy to negotiate and create these opportunities for interaction in most cases:

I have also started to e-mail my friend who is Spanish and it is really fun. I wish I could speak with her on the phone though because I need the most help in my conversation abilities! (Student Journal 250 #3)

Like some of their teachers, many students believe that extra, ungraded assignments to practice the language will not motivate the students to engage with them:

Students just won't do this sort of thing if we are not assigned homework that will be marked. (Student Journal 250 #2)

➢ Advance preparation

Students have commented several times, at different stages of this journal, about the need to come to class prepared. The challenge for the classroom participants is how to achieve the goal of engaging all the students in this activity without having a detrimental effect on their class participation:

I think it's a waste of time to go over rules and exercises together in class. It would be better to prepare the rules and exercises at home and go over the answers in next day's class and then do additional exercises together. (Student Journal 200 #4)

➢ Self-recordings

Students help each other in their learning. They share ideas and strategies constantly. In this case, the activity of recording the student's speech and listening to it had a double outcome: getting the student to speak and feel comfortable with the sound of his/her own voice in another language, and using the student production to self-assess pronunciation problems.

One of my friends suggested that it would be helpful if I taped myself and listened to the words and their meanings all the time, so I will try that this week and see how it helps. (Student Journal 100 #11)

➢ Experiential learning

Even in non-immersion environments, some students investigated the possibilities of using their own

experience with the language and culture to learn and improve their motivation through the use of food and cooking:

Today, when I went home I made the recipe that was given to us in class on Monday (Croquets de pollo). It turned out great and my family loved it. My mom said that it reminded her of an Egyptian dish that her mom used to make when she was a little girl. I even followed the recipe in Spanish, I was determined not to write the English translation which was a really good practice for my Spanish. (Student Journal 100 #11)

Some students also realized the impact that an experience, especially if it is funny, will have on their capacity to retain certain words or structures associated with it:

I remember I was waiting for my aunt to get out of a bank (in a highly Latino-populated part of NY). There was this guy shouting in the middle of the street about selling licences "para la moto, para la caro". I will always remember how to say "for motorcycle, for car" in Spanish and also how to say "licence" ("licencia") because he was repeating this so many times. It has just stuck to my brain now. (Student Journal 200 #3)

➢ Daily Linguistic Exposure

Many of our students believe that they need everyday practice with the language in order to successfully learn it.

As I had mentioned before I wanted to go to the extra Spanish lecture to get a better understanding of the grammar and fill in the days that I don't have Spanish so that <u>I will have Spanish everyday</u> and remember it. (Student Journal 100 #21)

This student started to organize and manage her time due to this realization:

I am finding that the strategy of finding time to study every day as opposed to all at once is a way better approach especially in the language classes. (Student Journal 100 #20)

'Cramming' does not seem to work with languages according to our students, as a primarily skill-based subject as opposed to a content-based subject:

In my case, I think a review before the exam has the potential to confuse me. Next Monday, I will walk into the class prepared for exam, last minute cramming before an exam is not a good idea! (Student Journal 200 #4)

There is a belief as well that 'enlargement of exposure' directly produces better acquisition rates:

I hope that if I surround myself with Spanish, I'll be better able to pick it up. (Student Journal 200 #1)

➢ Review

Students request ways to employ advance organizers in their language learning and recognize the usefulness of organizing the material themselves as a way of studying:

I think it would be great if the text book had a review at the end of each chapter. Maybe that is something I can start doing myself. (Student Journal 100 #4)

Some of our students believe it is the onus of the student to prepare and organize this kind of review for him/herself:

It is the student's responsibility of course to constantly review, but things could be made easier for the student, if better marks are to be expected (Student Journal 100 #14)

Underlying these student strategies, and many others that have cropped up throughout this project, are a series of students beliefs. Associated with these strategies, students have exposed their belief that 'repetition' works as a strategy for language learning:

The thing is, once I pound them into my head, they will be there for good. I just have to sit down and go over them as many times as it takes. (Student Journal 200 #7)

Looking at the subcategories that the journal presented us with, and bearing in mind the main sub-classification that Oxford puts forward, our students mainly used five meta-cognitive strategies (advance organizers; self-management; advance preparation; self-monitoring and self-evaluation), twelve cognitive strategies (enlargement of exposure; practising alone; translation; error analysis; note-taking;

repetition; problem identification; deduction; imagery; auditory representation, doing tests/exercises and transfer) and two social/affective strategies (communication and cooperation).

5.2.6. Space

> The ethnographic literature on the socialization functions of schools and schooling has focused primarily on content (cognition, language, behaviour) rather than context (space, architecture, setting). The more material aspects of educational settings scant attention. (Brock Johnson, 1982, p. 41)

This quote illustrates the lack of studies about the physical conditions of learning in public schools. The same could be applied to the research on second language instruction. There are very few studies that incorporate this tangible aspect of learning into their consideration. However, the sixth and final most recurrent code from our student journals concentrates on the physical conditions of their classroom. By physical, students do not only comment on the spatial characteristic of the classroom in question but also on the time schedules and duration of their courses. The physical reality of their language classes seems to have a huge impact on the teaching and learning of Spanish. Commonly taken for granted, classroom distribution, organization and furniture availability seem not to be questioned unless they have an observably detrimental effect on the conditions of the classroom.

- Space
    - Circle
    - Classroom size
    - Furniture
    - Student seating arrangements
    - Temperature.

- Time
    - Class times
    - Class Duration
    - Frequency

- Space

The different classrooms used for the courses on which this project focused varied in size. Some were lecture halls, some were smaller venues, but they all had in common a similar distribution: students on one side and the teacher opposite to them. Some classes had rows of student desks and chairs one after another, some had them in a semicircle structure. Some had desks and others had chairs with a small

foldable desk on them. Some other, smaller venues had the student desks in a U structure with the blackboard and the teacher situation at the opening of the U. One of the FIRST YEAR ADVANCED classes was split in two and the lack of space at the institution forced this classroom into the teacher's office. Student numbers were kept low due to the lack of chairs in this venue - it had one big square desk that students sat around.

Most of the classes at this institution were well lit in terms of natural light, with big windows overlooking the river or the fields surrounding the campus, or facing student residences.

- o Circle

Most students preferred a circle structure but they expanded on it on the interviews more than in journals. It seems students have clear opinions about the physical structure of the class but they did not offer it unless they were directly urged to talk about it.

The teacher made us form a circle with our chairs, which I thought was really beneficial to facilitating conversation (Student Journal 200 #6)

- o Classroom size

I think the classes being smaller is fantastic. (Student Journal 200 #12)

Size definitely matters but it is not a matter that can be easily settled. This student compares the big, intimidating structure of a lecture hall with the teacher's office.

The big lecture room was dominated by silence, though the teacher tried to transform it into an interactive environment through engaging the students in various activities and presentations. This tiny room was naturally interactive, the small size leads to closeness, which in turn made it easier to communicate and share thoughts with each other. Working with each other was more effective as well. (Student Journal 200 #10)

The classroom, though really small, has allowed students to be more familiar with each other, more comfortable. Different voices were heard, voices didn't fade into empty walls. The classroom could have been claustrophobic; it is extremely small! (Student Journal 200 #10)

For these students the same change in venue was beneficial, but fluctuating numbers in student attendance meant the small venue became unsuitable for holding the number of students that were attracted to it. As the group had been split in two, some students who had been sent to the lecture hall venue started to try and change back to this group and the situation had to be managed by the teacher.

But however I went to the lecture and when I got there everyone was there and the room was so small that there wasn't even any room for me to sit on the floor. So I left, I didn't want to but I also thought that I had my lecture already and I wasn't going to put the people who have not had their lecture in an uncomfortable learning environment. (Student Journal 200 #8)

For the last few weeks of the academic year, the teacher managed to find another venue. The venue in question was used as a theatre and for many student leisure activities. It was distributed as a Roman theatre in a circular structure and the students related to it in a completely different manner. A student of the same group commented on this change:

This week the seminar was held in the [name of the venue] which made a great change as normally we are stuck in the teacher's small office. It was so much easier to concentrate and just a nice environment. (Student Journal 200 #19)

The teacher also commented about this in her journal, showing it was a concern of hers:

Then, I had the class I have volunteered to give in my office. The environment is better though crowded because it's about 15 students in my teeny weeny office. They were more participative than they are in the big group and I think they understood.

- o Furniture

Furniture has a very big impact as well. The change from the chairs with a foldable desk to a chair/desk environment is positive for this student:

I really like the new class room we are in, I think I like being able to actually write on a flat surface. (Student Journal, 200 #8)

   o Student seating arrangements

Students sometimes use the space consciously to meet their goals for the classroom:

Today I sat in a desk and not on the couch and it actually made a bit of a difference. Sometimes I like to sit on the couch because I feel like I'm hiding and you don't usually ask couch-dweller for too many answers, but it's really hard to hear what's going on and see the board. (Student Journal 100 #21)

It brings us back to the time we all spent in primary school, when the teachers had the control about where we were allowed to sit and beside whom, but the fact is that our students found seating arrangements very relevant to the way they engaged with the class and the learning that effectively happened.

It is so easy to feel lazy and don't go to the front just because one is nicely seated and prefer not to jump over other people's coats and backpacks but rather sit down. (Student Journal, 200 #1)

   o Temperature.

 It goes without saying that we are all affected by the temperature – and the air quality – of the environment in which we work.

I don't like Tuesday classes because they are in Bata Library, and it is FREEZING cold in our room. I always end up keeping my jacket on and drinking hot chocolate, which helps to distract me from my work. (Student Journal 100 #8)

  ➢ Time

If there was an array of preferences in terms of classroom size, the preference in terms of time seemed to be even more varied. Everybody seems to be different in terms of when their alertness peaks or slows down so students did not agree on what was the best time for language learning, however long they discussed it in their journals.

- o Class times

Some people preferred the afternoon.

It is also easier to get really involved in the afternoon instead of at 9! (Student Journal 200 #12)

But depending on what classes they had earlier during the day, some students preferred morning classes:

This is my last class on Thursday and I'm always quite tired. I think this part of the reason why I don't get much accomplished, I prefer to have my lab hour in the morning. (Student Journal 200 #4)

Other students realized that in the mornings it is not easy to wake up the group and facilitate interaction:

This class often takes a while to get going in the morning, as it is early, people would rather be in bed than sitting in a class! So, this leads to laziness and people not really talking for a while, finding it hard to open their mouths and answer questions. (Student Journal 200 #20)

The schedule of their other courses affected their attendance very directly as well. The distance from the campus, coupled with the Canadian winter, worked against their engagement:

To be honest with you, I almost didn't show up for class today. It was so cold outside right now and having class from 5-6 at night, with no other classes around it, is NOT very motivating. (Student Journal 100 #1)

- o Class Duration

This was also one of the most recurrent topics, both in journals and assistant meetings. Surprisingly, in this case there seemed to be a consensus that one hour classes were not enough and two hour classes were too long

I think longer conversation hours would increase my conversational skills greatly. One hour is just not enough. It feels like just when I am getting into it, class is over. (Student Journal 250 #3)

Apparently a two hour seminar, no matter what activities were carried out, would lead some students to exhaustion and lack of concentration:

Finally I think it is important to have a break between the two hours of this seminar, which does not always happen. It gives people a chance to ask questions one on one with the prof. and simply allows them to grab a snack and rest their minds for a moment. This should be so even if the seminar finishes early. This week for example, we went without a break and finished 15 min. early but the last 30min. were very tiring for me. I didn't feel like listening anymore. But a break would have given me the time to regain my energies. (Student Journal 200 #15)

Other students though prefer not to have any breaks because they feel more tired if the class extends for longer:

I also like how classes now go without breaks, and how we get to leave much earlier. Usually when we had breaks, I used to get pretty tired by the end- to the point where I did not really understand much of the lesson anymore. (Student Journal 100 #6)

Several students preferred the two hour schedule because it gave the teacher the opportunity to use a variety of activities that made the class more relaxed and flow more easily:

It feels like we have all the time to learn. The class is small in number, we have 2 hours and I have never felt rushed. But it is not slow that it becomes boring either. (Student Journal 200 #10)

- o Frequency

Intricately related to the topic above, students commented on the frequency with which a class would meet. The same as in the previous code, students seem to prefer to have classes more often instead of for longer, as it happened in their FIRST YEAR BEGINNER course:

I wish that we had the class more than once a week, I would much prefer to have it twice for one hour each time than once for two hours. (Student Journal 200 #12)

* * *

Student journals were the tool that proved more useful for the elicitation of student concerns because their format provided the participants with a freer, more subjective series of responses than the interviews or even the observations. Student journals encouraged such self-critique (as well as constant feedback on the classroom) that they allowed the students to create a new level of consciousness, whereas the pedagogical task remained the same *to engender the critical spirit* (Barnett, 2007, p. 162). However, since the interviews and observations were carried out simultaneously, the research team realized that the questions in the interviews and the focus of the observations influenced the participant reflections in the journals and sometimes guided their thoughts on them. Since this project does not rely on quantitative recurrences completely, it is safe to conclude that the six main codes we have elicited reflect fairly accurately our participant concerns.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER

- Focused on the student journals and the identification of the core concepts that would become our main codes and sub-codes, indicating their rate of recurrence.

- Compared briefly the nature of student journals and teacher's journals, aiming to find the common codes in both of them.

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[1] Even though we are aware that direct quotes are normally presented in between inverted commas, we decided to use italics to quote our primary sources in order to differentiate them from secondary sources.

CHAPTER 6

Interviews in the L.S.U.C. Project

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THIS CHAPTER …

- Describes the results of questionnaires.

- Describes the responses to teacher and student interviews.

- Classifies these outcomes with the codes derived from student journals.

- Develops specific codes further with the outcomes from these questionnaires and interviews.

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In the L.S.U.C. project, we did not only use journals as a means of eliciting student responses. We combined the journals with several questionnaires and interviews that directed the student attention to items that were the concern of the research team. The first questionnaires were designed by the teacher/researcher previous to the start of the project or in its early stages. These questionnaires had the teacher/researcher concerns as a basis.

The interviews and final questionnaires were designed by the research team and composed by the research assistants and the teacher/researcher in the light of a first reading of the journals. These interviews and questionnaires were directed by what the research team had perceived as the students' main concerns, combined with the issues that intrigued the research team and had been discussed in our meetings.

Questionnaires were distributed in class and by email and collected by the teacher/researcher or the research assistants anonymously. Interviews were always taped and transcribed by student research assistants. The teacher/researcher agreed to destroy the recordings from the tapes after they had been transcribed, erasing the main signs that would reveal the identity of the speaker. It is also relevant to point out here that the number of respondents to the first questionnaires and the number of participants in the last interviews fluctuated sharply. In the same manner, we started with a higher number of journal writers than we ended with, as discussed in the previous chapter.

There was only one interview with the teacher/researcher and the lab/conversation instructor, carried out by one of the research assistants who insisted there should be some input from the teachers into this project.

As we already described in chapter three (3.1.3) these means of eliciting data provide a more dialogical method in which the interviewer or questionnaire writer can direct the questions to specific issues. This quality can be a double-edge sword, since due to this 'manipulation' of reflection the interviewer or writer needs to be very careful in how questions are formulated to exert a minimal bias. This project was a learning experience for all the members of the research team, since we all came from diverse backgrounds and, as a result, there were very different experiences with this tool. In spite of the variety of interview situations, questionnaires and interviews provided this project with one of the most enriching experiences both for students and researcher and they added an outcome that we had not anticipated: bonding. Student researchers and student volunteers bonded at a deeper level when they started interacting. Student volunteers also got a glimpse of what was going on in the research team meetings through this interaction and they obtained more feedback from the project in their discussions before, during and after the interviews. In other words, interviews provided another source of direct dialogue between students, and indirectly between students and teacher/researcher, in which the student volunteers show the results of their input into the project.

Maybe one of the most difficult issues to cope with at the level of analysis of these interviews and questionnaires is that there was no specific deadline by which they had to be handed in or recorded. Therefore, the timeframe and the experiences or incidents that students are talking about are more widespread than in the journals, which had to be written every week.

In this chapter we are going to explore the results from questionnaires and interviews individually and then look at the codes, abstracted from the journals, as they unfold in the interviews.

6.1 Questionnaires

We are going to start giving the description and compiling the results we obtained from the controlled questionnaires.

The first preliminary questionnaire which students filled out before committing to the project involved questions about their age (most students were between the ages of 17 − 27); their country of origin

(even though the majority of them were born in Canada, they were of mixed origin themselves); student expectations (the wide range of expectations ranging from bilingual to working knowledge of Spanish was appalling); long term goals; other languages (English, French, Romanian, Arabic, Thai…); hobbies and spare time activities (we used this question to understand learning style and preference better); difficulties learning a language (pronunciation was quoted several times, but once again there was a wide range of topics, emphasizing the individualized nature of language learning); learning activities (the surprising feature of these answers was that a lot of them only rely on their textbook for revision of grammar and vocabulary); engagement in Spanish outside of the classroom (even though most of them claim to learn better in language immersion programs, which are very well- known and popular in Canadian programs for learning French, the majority of them were not willing to participate in extracurricular activities in Spanish or if they were, their time constraints would not allow them). The main aim of this questionnaire was to establish the range of students we had and their differences in terms of origin and destination. Student participation in the preliminary questionnaire was higher than thereafter. This questionnaire was distributed in class as a means to introduce the project as well as to invite the students to collaborate in it as volunteers or assistants. We present here its results in a chart form so that it can be seen at a glance. I have highlighted in red the box with the highest number of responses:

6.I.I QUESTIONNAIRE 0: <u>Personal variables in the Spanish classroom</u>

Students from HSST250 came from a variety of origins but they had all done at least one year of Spanish before. It was their second year at college and many of them were expected to go on a Year Abroad Programme to a Spanish, Equatorian or Mexican University in their third year, an experience that not all of them were looking forward to.

Table 12 – Questionnaire 0 – HSST250 – Designed for this dissertation

250 – 11 questionnaires /23 students

250									
Origin	Canada 7		E.urope 1			Other 3			
Languages	English 7	French 5		Spanish 7		Other 4			
Learning Process	School 4		Immersion 3			Other 0			
University Studies	Arts 2		Science 2		Social 5	Other 2			
Expectation	Speaking 5		Writing 1		Grammar 4		Learning 3		Vocab. 3
Learning Objectives	All 2		Languages 2	Express Myself 1		Literacy 1	Specific Grammar 3		Bilingualism 1
Long Term goals	Travelling 5	Cooperation 2	Work 3		Family 1		Living in Spanish 1		Other 2
Ideal teacher	Accessible 2	Useful 2	Helpful 2	Understanding 3	Interesting 2	Nice 4	Respectful 1		
Ideal class	Participative 4	Ideal Teacher 1	Interesting students 1	Understanding 1	Comfortable 2	15 – 20 students 2	Mixed 1	Demanding 1	
YAP	YES 8			NO 3			DON'T KNOW		

Difficulties	Speaking 3	Chance to Speak 2		Pronunciation 1	Grammar 2	Listening 2	Vocabulary 1		Reading 1	Writing 1
Method	Read 2	Notes 1	6 h/w 2	Exercises 3	1/day 2	Speak 1	Phrases 1	Bus 1	T.V. 1	Don't know 4
Interest in Spanish Activities	YES 7				NO 4			UNKNOWN		
Spanish Buddy	YES 6				NO 5			UNKNOWN		

NOTES ON QUESTIONNAIRE 0 – 250

- Origin:
  o Four students were from Ontario, one from Newfoundland, one from Saskatchewan and one from Québec.
  o Two students were from Spanish speaking countries.
- Languages: Among the languages mentioned were Ukrainian, Japanese, Hungarian, Romanian and Italian. Most of the speakers were bilingual or trilingual, except one person who reported speaking six languages.
- Learning: One person had a combination of both and four people did not mention how they learned it.
- University Studies: One person was only taking two Spanish courses and one was doing an MBA.
- Ideal Class: Students in general expressed their wish for the class to be interesting and informative, fun and with fewer students.
- Long Term Goals: One person did not know what she would like to do, one person talked about learning French in an immersion environment.
- Ideal Teacher: One person said that there was no such a thing as an ideal teacher, everybody has advantages and disadvantages.
- YAP (Year Abroad Programme): Among the countries quoted were Ecuador, Ghana, Australia, Italy, Thailand, Spain, and Peru.
- Spanish Buddy: Among the reasons quoted, there was being shy and not being able to find a buddy with whom to speak Spanish.

Students from HSST200 came from a variety of origins but they had all several years of Spanish before, whether through an informal or formal context of language learning. It was their first year at college and the students that had picked it up in informal settings found it very challenging to adapt to a University environment.

Table 13 – Questionnaire 0 – HSST200 – Designed for this dissertation

200   –   12 questionnaires /48 students

200								
Origin	Canada 10		E.urope 1		Other 1			
Languages	English 13	French 9	Spanish 12		Other 4			
Learning Process	School 12		Immersion 8		Other 0			
University Studies	Arts 3	Science 2	Social 7		Other 0			
Expectation	Speaking 8	Culture 3	Grammar 3		Learning 3		Vocab. 1	
Learning Objectives	All 1	Languages 1	Express Myself 2	Literacy 1	Specific Grammar 1		Bilingualism 0	
Long Term goals	Travelling 2	Cooperation 3	Work 7	Family 0	Living in Spanish 0		Other 2	
Ideal teacher	Fun 6	Competent 4	Helpful 2	Demanding 1	Clear 3	Nice 8	Intellingent 1	Kind 3
Ideal class	Participative 2	Pracical 1	Interesting students 6	Short 1	Varied 2	Small 3	Fair 2	Organized 2

YAP	YES 9						NO	1			
Hobbies	Cook 1	Draw 2	Music 8	Sports 10	Languages 1	Shopping 1	School 1	Read and write 4	Films 4	Computers 1
Difficulties	Speak-ing 3	Ortography 2		Pronunciation 2	Interference 2	Grammar 3	Verbs 3		Vocabulary 2	Writing 2
Method	Read 3	Notes 3	3-5h/w 3	Exercises 2	Group 1	Speak 4	Travel 1	Read 2	Early 1	Don't know 1
Interest in Spanish Activities	YES 9				NO 1			UNKNOWN 2		
Spanish Buddy	YES 10				NO 1			UNKNOWN 1		

NOTES ON QUESTIONNAIRE 0 – 200
- Origin: This student was from Costa Rica. All the Canadian participants were from Ontario.
- Languages: Bulgarian, German
- Ideal Class: Somebody said they expected a fun and practical class. Somebody suggested having movies in class. Somebody expected not to have books in this class. Somebody expected a lot of homework.
- Long Term Goals: Four students said they wanted to work as teachers or language teachers.
- YAP (Year Abroad Programme): Among the places quoted were Spain, Ghana, Thailand, Ecuador, Mexico, and France.

Last but not least, students from HSST100 came from a variety of origins but they all had in common the fact that they were total beginners of Spanish or they lacked the level to join HSST200, which worked at an intermediate level achievable through secondary school instruction in Spanish as a Foreign language. We included the variable of age in this group to determine the youngest point of entry and removed the University Studies variable because in the Canadian University system students do not decide on their degree until their second year.

Table 14 – Questionnaire 0 – HSST100 – Designed for this dissertation

100   –   43 questionnaires /90 students

100										
Age	18 – 20 34			22 – 24 2			24-26 1			26 – 28 1
Origin	Canada 35			E.urope 5			Other 3			
Languages	English 43		French 29		Spanish 16		Other 15			
Learning Process	School 21			Immersion 13			Other 0			
Expectation	Speaking 26		Understanding 8		Grammar 3		Learning basics 19		Vocab. 2	
Learning Objectives	All 1		Languages 14		Express Myself 7	Literacy 1	Fluency 6		Bilingualism 6	
Long Term goals	Teaching 13		Traveling 14		Work 12		Cooperation 3	Living in Spanish 2		Other 4
YAP	YES 34					NO 9			DON'T KNOW 2	

Hobbies	Talking 7	Children 2	Travel 6	Sports 31	Culture 2		Music 17	Crafts 5	Read 20	Writing 3	Films 9
Difficulties	Speak-ing 7	Sentence building 2		Pronunciation10	Understanding oral speech 1		Grammar 22	Verbs 3		Vocabulary 2	Writing 2
Method	Gram-mar 8	Cue card7	Home-work 13	+ 6 h/w 7	Group 9		3-5 h /w 12	Vocab. 10	Read 23	Quizz 6	Orally 14
Interest in Spanish Activities	YES 32				NO 7				UNKNOWN 4		
Spanish Buddy	YES 32				NO 11						

NOTES ON QUESTIONNAIRE 0 – 250
- Origin:
  o Europe: Russia, Italy, Romania, Switzerland and Holland.
  o Other: Egypt, Japan and one half Filipino, half Arabic.
- Languages: Arabic, Tagalog, Japanese, Russian, Romanian, Italian, Swiss-German, Greek, Danish, Newfoundland English, Zulu, Polish, Sign Language, Hebrew.
- Expectations: Somebody expected to learn about culture. Somebody expected to have fun.
- Long Term Goals: Linguistics, translator, family reasons, not sure, because it's an interesting and popular language were among the reasons given.
- YAP (Year Abroad Programme): Among the countries quoted were Spain, Australia, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, France, Italy, Germany, South Asia, Egypt, Ghana, Ecuador, Switzerland, Costa Rica, England, Mexico, Latin America.

One of the issues with this preliminary questionnaire was that the research team found the question on expectations needed more development. We also decided that in talking about the other languages that the student used, there was a need to introduce a grid about what their skills were in these languages and at what level and how they used these languages.

In the preliminary questionnaire that we carried out during the project, students discussed their interest and they portrayed parts of their personalities. The majority of our students in general were sporty Canadian students and inclined towards Social Studies. They could speak English and many of them spoke French as well. However, in spite of their nationality – or maybe because of it – the vast range of languages present in our language classroom conveyed a very rich environment in terms of language contrast and language use.

About 2/3 of our student population had learned languages at a formal setting and in immersion settings. However, we may point out that the immersion programmes these students were usually talking about were a mixture of formal and informal settings in the shape of Quebec Language Summer Programmes, which include certain hours of tuition plus living in a French speaking community.

From this preliminary questionnaire, we found it difficult to apply the three main approaches to study to Entwistle's categories (1998): deep – to understand ideas for yourself - strategic – to achieve highest possible grades - and surface – to cope with course requirements (p. 19). In the first year, student objectives expressed by our questionnaires were too general and in the second year too specific for us to see what the general approach to language learning would be. However, in the long term goals section, whereas the older students specified travelling and leisure activities as their main use of the language, which could encourage a surface approach relying on communicative competence, the first years were more focused on work or cooperation issues, which would encourage a deep or strategic approach

relying on a pragmatic performance. What was striking was that the majority of students seemed to focus on the speaking, which is also, according to the journals, the skill in the language that gets less time allocated at university courses. Most of the students want to spend a university year abroad and do extracurricular activities in Spanish.

When they try to describe a teacher they tend to use the most general and subjective adjectives, but they seem to be more specific about their demands for an 'ideal' class.

Their main difficulties seem to be in their ability to speak, and their study methods seemed to involve a 'read-over' methodology, to speaking practice, to discreet grammar point exercises.

6.1.2 FIRST PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

The first questionnaire in this project was slightly (synonym suggestion, you tend to use "a bit" quite a lot) more open and students could write more extensively in their answers:

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE.

Honestly, why are you interested in this project?

What are your courses, your workload and do you have a job? Develop.

Have you ever written a journal, whether personal or not? What kind? Why would you think of writing one?

How difficult is Spanish for you? What is so difficult about it?

How critical do you think you are? Give an example of your criticism.

What was your best teacher like and your worst? Have you ever been friends with one? Examples.

The first question was designed to elicit better information in a cheeky, challenging way about the approaches to language learning in the classroom according to Entwistle's (1998) classification:

Table 15 – Learning Approaches – Designed for this dissertation

	DEEP	STRATEGIC	SURFACE
100	Experience; Teaching; Feelings as a student; Support effective teacher; Interest in languages; Understanding learning process; Independent research and team work; To share my experience as a language learner; To get involved in university life…	Bonus marks; Career; Help me with the course; Get a reference letter; To improve my Spanish; To commit to learn Spanish…	Doing something different and original; Easy to work with the teacher …
200	Teaching; Understanding learning process; Teaching; To share my experience as a language learner; Experience; To get more involved in university life…	Bonus marks; Study more effectively…	Meet new people; To spend more time with Spanish…
250	Teaching; Understanding learning process; Teaching; Research on language and linguistics…	Bonus marks; To improve my Spanish…	To try something new…

It was surprising to see that many (synonym suggestion) students gave the project some thought and decided to include it as a real, valuable experience. In the long run, these students were the ones that continued with the project until the end, even though we originally designed the project for students who would primarily be attracted by the bonus marks.

The second question aimed to clarify the availability of the students who wanted to collaborate in the project. Even though this issue has been taken lightly in previous studies, it proved fundamental due to the perception of language learning as a 'time-demanding' activity, as we have already seen in the journals. Most of students had very busy schedules, which left language learning with very little time

from their general availability. We have summarized their responses in the following chart. The majority of students in the three courses reported having little time but they were still interested in participating. Most of the students worked and studied full time and some of them also have a family. In the second year, no student reported being available completely for the project, even though one of the students ended up as a research assistant:

Table 16 – Time availability – Designed for this dissertation

	LITTLE TIME	SOME TIME	AVAILABLE
100	Big course workload and a family; full time student and volunteer; work and study; very busy…	Work at the weekends and study; I do not have a job yet; my workload isn't too bad; I always find time to study…	Not demanding; School is my number one priority and comes first…
200	Busy full time …	Really flexible I only have a job until February; Not too heavy My workload varies throughout the year…	Not all that stressful…
250	Work and study…	Moderate work load; some spare time	

In terms of the experience they had writing journals, very few people had no experience at all writing a journal for personal or other purposes. It seemed that both at school, university and in general, there was a culture of writing personal thoughts in order to use them for some purpose later and most students were comfortable with this practice. This came a bit as a surprise at the beginning and it gave us an idea of what kind of responses we could expect. Students brought up the fear of being read at that personal a level and in fact, all the journals they wrote had an outside reader in mind. As we have seen in the previous chapter, students were very conscious of the fact that their ideas were being taken into account to facilitate some change that would be beneficial to them in the long run and they were very altruistic about collaborating with the learning of the teacher about the learning process. Their previous experience in journal writing possibly favoured this attitude.

Table 17 – Student Experience Writing Journals – Designed for this dissertation

	KEEP A JOURNAL	SOMETIMES	NO EXPERIENCE
100	I write my journal every day; I like them; Constantly writing journals for many classes and a personal one; I write on a regular basis about events and ideas I have; I'm good at it; For English class; Writing is a stress reliever…	I used to; 5 journals to date; In the past, since I am a writer, very personal, periods on and off; I like to write thoughts and emotions and look back on it to improve on something; Many journals before; I was always scared someone might read it and I gave it up; I keep a journal when I am on an extended stay in a foreign place, I can go back and figure out what I was doing, where and when; Co-op program and peer-helping; programs in high school…	I do not; Never written one; I have never kept one but if I did, it'd be to help me gage my progress in how I act as a Christian; I'm not the most organized person…
200	Keeping a journal at this point, personal and classes; I would write anything on my mind…	I kept a journal in Mexico; I have written a journal for various school projects; I used to keep a journal when I was younger; Never written a personal journal, but of camps and travels…	I have but not a personal one, poetry as a journal…
250	Always kept a journal; I started a learning journal for my native studies class; Personal journal because I like to look back and see the changes in my life …	Journals at different times of my life, courses and personal…	Never written a journal; Never been very good at keeping a personal journal…

As in the preliminary questionnaire, we wanted to investigate students' beliefs about the difficulty of Spanish specifically, so we asked again about their difficulties with it. We have summarized their responses in the following chart:

Table 18 – Student Perceptions Regarding Difficulty of the Subject – Designed for this dissertation

	VERY DIFFICULT	AVERAGE	EASY
100	Having difficulty because it requires a lot of time; Difficult because I do not speak any other languages; Challenging (verbs and tenses confusing); More immersed environment; A lot of new words at once); Speaking; To keep up with the workload; Complicated language to learn from English background; In the classroom it's more difficult because you are not immersed into a culture where everything is in Spanish; I'm not very good with languages; Moving along quickly causes me to forget what I already learned; I feel frustrated because I do try hard and put a lot of time; My big issue is that I'm shy to talk to a Spanish speaker or in front of a group is hard…	Not very hard; 5/10; Not extremely hard; It seemed easy at the beginning but not anymore; Not too difficult but a challenge; The grammar and some words are very similar to French and I have the ability to establish connections and similarities; Somewhat difficult for me to study Spanish because I cannot seem to commit to it…	Easy and enjoyable
200	Most of Spanish quite challenging; Very difficult but I'm fluent in French; It's actually very confusing because some of it is similar and some is very different from French; I wish I were in Spain; Trying to communicate orally is my difficulty; The hardest part I find	Not that difficult; Not difficult to study Spanish; it is a matter of keeping up and revising; Difficult at times but overall I enjoy it; Not extremely difficult but I do have troubles with verb tenses; and deciding when to use them…	I find it easier than many courses

	is applying and remembering what I have learned to actually speaking…		
250	The process is quite difficult; I often wonder if I will ever become fluent in Spanish…	Not very difficult; Not difficult but I cannot speak the language because it's too easy to speak English all the time; Enjoy learning Spanish and it's not incredible difficult because it's very close to French…	Easier because I know French…

As it had been expected, the number of students that found Spanish very difficult decreased as they moved from 100 to 250 or from 200 to 250. The majority of students found it difficult enough and challenging at many levels and they were able to recognize their main issues.

With our next question we wanted to encourage students to have a critical attitude towards their learning, our teaching and the project itself. The way we decided to phrase this question was not geared by the importance of their answers but more as a challenge to encourage this attitude. Most students considered themselves critical and there was not a single student that considered themselves not critical at all.

Table 19 – Student Perception of Critical Skills – Designed for this dissertation

	VERY CRITICAL	SOMEWHAT CRITICAL
100	Personal criticism; I'm honest; Very critical of myself; I have done a lot of critical work in history; I find very critical of the way people act and think; When I hear a lecture that I do not like I think of all the points that were discussed in the lecture and how far off they are from my opinion, to figure what my opinion is; I'm a perfectionist; I tend to analyze everything to death; I can be quite critical if I'm comfortable…	Leadership roles; Directed plays; Fairly critical, blunt; People think I'm too nice but I can be critical; It is hard to be critical in Canada because everyone is polite; I could not be critical before, but this last year at university has taught me to be; I offer constructive criticism and I always finish what I start, I'm not extremely critical; I have had to observe teachers during my teaching placements and criticize their teaching …

200	I know what I want and criticize whatever doesn't meet the standards; I am critical of myself and my work; Very critical persona; I set my standards and goals too high; I tend to be very blunt and honest when I'm expressing my opinions but in a constructive way; I am quite critical with teachers…	I do not think that I am very critical of other people but when required I can constructively criticize other's work and look at something analytically…
250	I'm very critical of myself; Being critical is a strong point for me…	Not really a critical person unless I'm asked to be; I think I can be respectfully critical; I do not mind sharing my opinion…

The main interesting points from the student answers were that they associated honesty with criticism and that when they reported being very critical, they were mainly very critical of themselves. This feature was very obvious in the student journals. There was a wide range of ideas behind the notion of criticism and what it meant to criticize something.

The next two questions explored the issue of best and worst teaching. We have summarized their answers in the following chart:

Table 20 – Student Definitions of Best and Worst Teachers – designed for this dissertation

	GOOD TEACHER	BAD TEACHER
100	Radical teacher in every medium (emotion, vision, taste, intellect) → He opened my eyes to the world, he taught in a way that it was up to you to gain the knowledge. He was funny, down to earth, joked and treated us like equals and listened; My grade 3. She doesn't teach completely from a text book but let their students be creative; He would hang out with students and talk frequently, he	He made fun of me for being Protestant in a Catholic school; She made students cry and call them stupid, I was afraid to answer any questions in class; He was loud and intimidating and he tried to hit on all the girls; She played favourites all the time and she gave no second chance; He didn't allow new ideas into the classroom and kept a strict schedule,

	knew all their names and concerned with their welfare; He was very supportive and gave marks based on effort; She made me love the subject even when it got difficult, allowed me to speak openly, understanding and open to student's ideas; Gave individual attention when needed, had awareness of his students varying needs; She liked her job, liked kids, and had a great sense of humour, cared and developed mutual respect, they are encouraging and challenging, they were willing to go the extra mile for you; They understood each student learned differently and were able to teach them…	doing the same thing every day; Very impersonal, never tried to get to know his students; Would yell at you for not doing your homework; I had a lecturer who would just read the overheads for us; The automatons, they speak in monotone and seem to be going through the motions while being more or less indifferent, disliked their job, students,; Got mad if we asked questions, and was very hard to understand as a speaker, he didn't like to give us notes…
200	She instilled the love of biology in me; We debated all the time; Always language teachers, always there to listen to me after class; She was like a sister to me; He was always able to calm me down when I got stressed out and help me focus, he was there for me to bounce ideas off him when it came to assignments and even just for a talk, compassionate; Very enthusiastic about the subject and very animated when lecturing…	She yelled all the time and she was very stressed out; He sent people outside of class on a daily basis; The sexist pigs, they would give girls better marks depending on how low they wore their shirts; He didn't like to teach, we were expected to teach ourselves from text book; They are there for the money and do not care about their students; She didn't even know what she was teaching, a student was constantly correcting her teaching the class, she never explained anything and had a very negative attitude when teaching, unattached and impersonal with their class, she was old and strict and I can remember hating school for a while because of her, never try to explain things in a different way…

250	I became really good friends with the teacher and we started a club at my school;	He focused mainly on memorization of text for dictates and oral presentations. He was always very grumpy and disinterested in the class, he never tried to reach the students;
	He was passionate about the things he was teaching and he worked hard to individualize the learning process so that each student got something out of the class;	I dislike teachers who put down their students;
	She encouraged me to be adventurous;	She is not prepared for lectures. She brought all her problems and frustrations from home, she had a short temper and was very condemning, she believed children should be seen and not heard…
	He was very knowledgeable, and took a personal interest in the subject, he was quite entertaining and humorous while maintaining a well-structured and informative class...	

Most students appreciate approachable engaged teachers that understand the affective side of learning and that are constantly encouraging. It is interesting to see that most of the students do not comment on the more technical side of the teaching job. There are only a couple of comments on the good teachers being knowledgeable and the bad teacher being unprepared. On the contrary, most of the comments or descriptions of the good teacher are based on the affective side of teaching and learning and how well those teachers can manage the variable factors influencing each student. Most comment on an open, approachable, positive personality that does not show up in any teaching job description and a lot of these descriptions are obviously highly subjective and only take into account one side of the person working as a teacher. Some students commented on this duality as well, talking about someone they thought was a bad teacher but a wonderful person.

Finally our last question introduced the topic of 'friendship'. One of our students from HST200 had commented in a questionnaire:

I tend to form close relationships with teachers I respect because I find it furthers my learning as much as being in class by providing a feeling of openness

This question was aimed at making them question the kind of relationships they establish with their teachers and how it affected their learning, and possibly explore the notions of friendship that the students had in order to understand what kind of relationships we could encourage in the classroom

environment, not specifically oriented towards teacher/student relationship but also student/student relationships. We were also measuring their openness and flexibility in terms of relationships. Here is the chart that presents the summary of their answers:

Table 21 – Ideas of Student/Teacher Friendship – Designed for this dissertation

	Teacher Friends	Never made friends with a teacher
100	We are still good friends and converse; I still talk to a teacher of mine, visit and chat, never; Many; Got really close and we started hanging out with our teacher and inviting him to parties; She helped through tough times with guys and with my parents in high school; A couple of my teachers; They helped me to learn to accept myself, feel comfortable with my own skin; Teacher from college; I was a teacher aid and had student friends; My dance teacher…	Never relaxed enough around teachers; Never been friends with a teacher who taught me; Friendship is hard especially if there is an age difference which there most often is…
200	I have gone back visiting her; Friends with English teachers; Extremely close with my teachers; One of them became a member of my family; I'm very good friends with one; I'm still friends with an awesome teacher who believed in me and made me a better student…	Never…
250	Yes, with a few of my teachers; On very friendly terms with some due to student union involvement…	Never…

The answers we got for this question showed that in Canada - or at least in Ontario where most of our participants came from - there is a very open and flexible culture of teaching and learning. Most of them were still in touch with a teacher in college or secondary school or had had friendly relationships with someone who worked as a teacher for them. Many of the students would not term the relationship

they had with them as friendship though. It was interested to note that some students had very strong negative answers. Many of them did not explain why they would never have a friendship with teachers and some based it on the age difference. These answer showed a qualitative dichotomy in the student population. While the majority was open to relationships based on mutual support and sharing from the teacher to the student, there were still a significant number of individuals that would not open themselves to those possibilities influencing the classroom environment with their point of view. We did not explore this question any further, but in the development and exploration of the classroom dynamics, however, we realized that it is an interesting topic for further research. However, the notion of friendship varies from person to person and it would need to be more clearly defined in order to carry out systematic research.

6.1.3 SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE

Our questionnaire number two focused on classroom issues and dynamics. In this sense, it had a more specific nature and the questions targeted issues that had already come up in journals such as amount of homework (most of them considered they had enough coursework, even though in another section they claimed not to have enough opportunities to practice Spanish), dictations (most of them find them useful), conversation (the majority of students indicated that they did not have enough opportunities to speak Spanish in their classes), length of a lesson (the consensus was that an hour was not enough

I like our Tuesday classes because they are 2 hours long, and you don't feel like you are rushing through anything. (Student Journal 200 #15)

This exercise was good for me for many reasons. It made me practise my Spanish unprepared and on the spot. This is good for real life situations. (Student Journal 200 #7)

and that two hours were too much as we have seen in the previous chapter), frequency of lessons (depending on the student goals and expected outcomes, this answer varied from everyday to 3 times a week), time management (many students had difficulties to keep up with the pace of work or content in class), participation (they didn't feel confident enough to participate and this hindered their opportunities), content (everybody had very different ideas of what the content of a course should be and how much there should be in it, once again this varied according to their goals and expected outcomes) and level of difficulty (in general they consider Spanish a demanding and time-consuming course but they do not consider it a specially difficult language).

Table 22 – Questionnaire 2 – Designed for this dissertation

	100			200			250			TOTAL		
Do you get enough home-work?	YES 5		NO 4	YES 7		NO 1	YES 4		NO 2	YES 16 – 70 %	NO 7	
Should it be graded?	5		3	5		2	3		1	13 – 27%	6	
Dicta-tions useful?	6		2	6		1	4		1	16 – 70%	4	
Do you get enough time to finish exercises in class?	6		3	3		4	2		4	11 – 50 %	11	
Best time for language class	Any time – 2 In the afternoon – 6 Morning – 3 Night – 1			In the afternoon – 5 After 10 a.m. – 1 After 11 a.m. – 1 In the evening – 2			In the afternoon – 4 Morning – 2 In the evening – 1			The majority prefers the afternoon		
Language Class Frequency	Twice 0	Three 6	Five 3	Twice 3	Three 4	Five 1	Twice 3	Three 1	Five 2	2 6	3 11 – 48 %	5 6

	100			200			250			TOTAL		
Language Class Frequency - Specified	Daily	Twice a Week 2	Once a week 5	Daily	Twice a week	Once a week 5	Daily 1	Twice a week	Once a week 3	D 1	T 2	O 13- 57%
How much conversation should there be in class?	2 – half of the class 4 – as much as possible 1 – 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning			8 – as much as possible			3 – half of the class 2- as much as possible 1- conversation on grammar			5 – half of the class 14 – as muchas as possible (60%)		
Ideal length of a class	60' 7	90' 1	120' 1	60' 3	90' 4	120' 1	60' 1	90' 4	120' 1	60 11 - 48%	90 9 - 40%	120 3
Preference of Pace of a Course	Fast 3	Medium 2	Slow 4	F	M 5	S 2	F	M 3	S 1	F 3	M 10 - 44%	S 7
What Level of Spanish are you in?	Basic – 9			Basic – 2 Intermediate – 4 Advanced – 1 Don't know – 1			Basic – 2 Intermediate – 2 Advanced – 1			Basic – 13 Intermediate – 7 Advanced – 2		

	100				200				250				TOTAL			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Do you think Spanish is easy (A) or difficult (D)?	3			6	3			5	1			5	7			18 78%
What should be the content of your course?	Practical conversation Visual Future Tense Vocabulary on daily life More oral work and culture Group work More vocabulary				Stress on verbs No labs More vocabulary More interesting activities More conversation More speaking and writing				More vocabulary No labs Speaking and listening More structure in the conversation class							
Will you communicate at the end of the course?	Yes 7		No 2		Yes 5		No 3		Yes 2		No 4		Yes 14 – 60%		No 9	

	100	200	250
COMMENTS	The most interesting and fun course I took this year. Effective class method. No labs. Ready to learn more with Spanish speakers or in class. More tests and more challenging (open ended questions). Lot of effort from teachers. More variety in class.	This has given me an understanding of the concrete blocks of grammar and rules. More conversation. Smaller compositions to complement the bigger ones. Maybe a journal in Spanish.	It's difficult to motivate myself to learn a language in a non Spanish environment. The strong mini Spanish environment created by the extracurricular activities was quite good. It's not possible to learn a language in a classroom. More class time. Not enough grammar homework.

			More conversation hours. More student speaking.

NOTES ON QUESTIONNAIRE 2:
- GRADED HOMEWORK:
    o One person said maybe, suggesting it should be graded just on the basis of participation.
    o The people that did not want the homework to be graded were offended in their response, saying that they were not in secondary school any more. The people that wanted it to be graded wanted comments on it not √ signs in order to be able to check their answers and understand their mistakes.
    o One person said possibly but was hesitant because of general workload. Many of the people that wanted it graded claimed they needed more feedback on their status in the course. Some said they would not grade the mistakes done but the completion of the homework.
    o Two people did not reply. They commented on the amount of homework in the course (compositions and readings) as quite time consuming or asked for more small tasks checked in class.

As we can observe in the results of this questionnaire, which was carried out in the middle of their second semester, addressing some of the issues that the students had raised in the first six weeks of their journals, students had identified this project as a way to have their voices heard and they constantly repeated the inefficiency of the language laboratory hour. What was more striking to find out, however, was their relationship with homework. Most of them wanted it but only 1/3 of the student population that wanted homework believed it should be graded. In the comment sections they also raised the issue of punishing mistakes, they believed that mistakes should not be punished because that is how languages are learned. Instead, marks should be given on the basis of participation in the homework and effort. Surprisingly, they liked 'old fashioned' exercises such as dictations and preferred them once a week. They also emphasized a need for more speaking practice at all times. There was a good consensus on the fact that language classes should be an hour and a half and in the afternoon. Half of the students wanted to meet for language class three times a week, one fourth wanted to meet less often, and one fourth wanted to meet more often. The most unexpected answer was the 50/50 response to the time allocated for exercises in class. This issue was addressed and time allocated to each exercise was negotiated in situ from then on. Most of the students wanted what they called a 'medium paced classroom'. They felt that everybody had opportunities to participate in their language classroom and also the majority of them - as opposed to their first and second questionnaire - said that they did not find Spanish either too difficult or too easy. Sixty per cent of students had good, positive expectations of reaching a communicative level of Spanish by the end of the year.

As we have said, these first two questionnaires were designed to get to know the individual variables of our students in a more controlled way, and the second questionnaire sought clarification for some of the issues raised in the journal that the research team had reviewed during the reading break.

We would have liked to have had more time to explore more of the issues raised in the second part of the journals but the academic year and our project schedule came to an end. The last questionnaire we gave them was the assessment and feedback of the project after it was over and another feedback three years ago that was sent by email to which many of them replied as well. We will turn to examine those in chapter 8.

6.2 Interviews.

Let's now turn to analyze the data that we elicited through student-student interviews. It is fitting to reiterate that the student interviewers were part of the job of the research team and the research assistant were paid a small honorarium for their contributions. Their main job was to agree on the content of the questions with the main researcher, meet with students and record their interviews. Further to this, they transcribed these interviews and gave them to the researcher for further analysis. Their primary experience with the interviews was positively praised during our research team meetings. They found the exchange between the students interviewed and themselves, undergraduate students as well but playing a different role, very enriching as most of the times they were in different classes and, preferably, in different courses. In other words, student research assistants that were in the higher courses would be interviewing students from lower years and vice versa.

6.2.1. First Interview

We designed the first interview in one of our first meetings:

FIRST INTERVIEWS

First interview
Before going on make sure they feel comfortable about the tape recorder.
Ask them if they do not mind that you use it.

- MOTIVATION
-What is your major?
-Why are you taking Spanish?
-Do you speak any other languages? If they say no, remind them that they speak English too!
-Do you think they influence your learning of Spanish? How?

- CLASS
-What do you normally learn first in a language?
-What are you good at? (not only in languages but generally, courses, hobbies, social skills etc)
-What's the one thing you'd keep about your Spanish class? What's the one thing you would change?
-Can you remember a class that you enjoyed? Some learning experience that was really successful? Describe it.

- SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
-How many people's names do you know in your class?
-Are you comfortable with the people in your class? Develop.
-What did you do before starting university?
-Do you work?
-What do you do in your free time?
-Do you speak Spanish outside of class?

Table 23 – First Interview – Motivation – Designed for this dissertation

Motivation							
University Major	Biology 2		International Development 3		Sociology 1		Native Studies 1
Reasons for studying Spanish	Keep it up	2	Lived in Mexico	1	Bilingual	1	Fun	1
Studying Languages	Yes	5			No	0		
Language interference	English	It makes it more difficult		French	It helps more The grammar is similar and it helps to remember The way it is taught is similar		Mohawk	It helped me to develop flash cards, but I learnt it in immersion
Manner of Interference		They are so different						

Table 24 – First Interview – Class – Designed for this dissertation

Class							
What you learn first in languages	Reading and Writing 1		Speaking 1		Put sentences together 1		Vocabulary that I use everyday 1
My strengths are...	Memory 1	Helping others 1	Languages 1	Sports 1	Writers work 1	People 1	
Strengths of the class	Review	2			The teacher	3	
Things you would improve or change in the class	New stuff 1	Vocabulary 1	More practice 1	The course 1	The pace 1	The lab 1	Learning environment 1
Learning experience they enjoyed	Inventing fairy tales 1	Reviewing the test 1	Diagrams and charts 1	The written accent 1	The recipes and group work 1	Self-discipline work 1	Conversation 1

Table 25 - First Interview – Social Environment – Designed for this dissertation

Social Environment							
Do you know other people's name in your class?	The people I sit with 1		Few 1		3 1	Some but i talk to everybody 1	Quite a few 1
Comfortable with classmates?	Some annoy me 1		Sometimes 1	Don't care 1	Not at the beginning 1	Not a lot 1	
What did you do before university?	High School	3		Work	1	Other	1
Do you work?	Yes	1		No	4	Other	
Spare time activities	Friends 1	TV 1	Music 1	Croche 1	Procrastinate 2	Family 1	Go out 1	Sports 1
Spanish outside the class	Yes	2		No	1	Other	2

INTERESTING ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS ON THE SECOND INTERVIEW
- Listening is very difficult because people speak way too fast.
- Everything is hard: vocabulary, grammar…
- It's a very dry course (200), very compartmentalized
- The people I was with and the things that came up were fun though normally I hate being in front of the class. I learned new words I will never forget because it was fun. I am very hands-on. Immersion works.
- Putting things into context helps me learn better
- From high school to being a rowing coach and then, university.
- This student favours immersion as well, and appreciates the hints about how to study.
- There are not a lot of people to speak it too, my friend from class and I try sometimes. I try but normally I just learn slang or something like that, nothing serious.

6.2.2 Second Interview

The second interview was carried out after their Reading Week Break and we had had even a closer examining of their journals. We had discussed the issues that we had raised on the first reading of the journals and targeted some of the topics that were important to our agendas:

Second Interview

1) What do you think about the fact that your teacher speaks English in the Spanish class?
2) What about people in the class speaking English?
3) What's your method of studying Spanish? Like how do you prepare for a test?
4) What motivation do you need to speak in Spanish?
5) How do you think the class should be organized? Like seating and stuff?
6) What do you think your teacher expects from you?
7) What were your expectations at the beginning of the class?
8) Have those expectations been met?
9) Which courses are your priority here?
10) Do you think grammar helps with learning a language?
11) How much emphasis should be put on grammar?
12) How do you feel about the rounds of exercises that we do in class?
13) What's your relationship with your teachers?
14) How do those relationships affect your learning?
15) Do you enjoy learning Spanish? Any specific reasons why?
16) Is there any time when you feel discouraged to participate in the class?
17) Do you feel self conscious when speaking in Spanish?
18) Do you have any ideas about how people who are self conscious could overcome that?
19) Do you get any feedback about your progress? From friends, or…?
20) Do you have any suggestions for something to replace the labs?
21) Anything you'd like to add?

This is a summary of the second interview results for the purpose of classification:

Table 26 – Summary of Results of Second Interview – Designed for this dissertation

Questions dealing with	Positive	Negative	others
1. Code-switching in the classroom by the teacher.	15[1]	2[2]	1[3]
2. Students speaking in their native tongue in class.	4	9	3[4]
3. Study techniques for a test.	Textbook review, notes, understanding; irregulars, conjugations; orally/written, making associations and tricks; lists of verbs; cannot make myself study too much for a language, pencils and colours, no method, posters, surround me with it, takes a long time and I get frustrated, cue cards, in pairs, tests and stuff, test outlines are very helpful, just book,		
4. Motivation to speak.	Goal-oriented: communication in Spanish speaking countries; personal motivation to keep up; feel comfortable and confident; joint major; people around speaking it; pass; a nice trip abroad or friends, to feel that you can answer, think in Spanish, meetings after class, comfort, establish that only Spanish should be used amongst ourselves, being around it all the time,		
5. Class organization	Bigger, a square all facing each other; more conversational; less than 20 people, sitting down in a group; freely in a circle, a round table, more visual stuff, videos, blackboard use, circle facing the blackboard, conversation at the beginning, more time on grammar material, good air quality, teacher part of the circle, more checked homework, the chance to go around the class, consistency is better, half circle, very fluent people influence a lot weaker people's confidence, variety, slow, posters,		
6. Professor's expectations.	Hard-work, improvement, grammar and confidence, feedback, communicability, homework, participation,		
7. Student's expectations.	No expectations, thought it'd be easier; speaking Spanish, more individual learning, smaller groups, to keep it up, fluent, speaking more, less grammar and more vocabulary, to learn a new language,		
8. Priority courses.	Major: Business; English (2); all equal, Spanish (6) and French (3), Biology (4), ERS , Physics and Computer Science, Chemistry, History, Sociology, Spanish supposed to be but it always comes at the bottom…		
9. Grammar to learn language.	15		2

10. Emphasis on grammar.	Not at the beginning, A lot, No-emphasis should be on vocabulary, we do too much, first vocab, then grammar; none, yes, big part, 50 per cent, not in the first year, more speaking than writing, at the beginning lots, not as much,		
11. Rounds of exercises.	16[5]		1[6]
12. Suggestions for class routines.	No suggestions,		
13. Relationship with your grammar teacher.	16		3[7]
14. Relationship with your conversation teacher.	9[8]	2[9]	7[10]
15. Influence of relationships in learning.	15[11]	2[12]	1
16. Enjoyment of learning Spanish.	16[13]		1
17. Discouragements to participate in class.	9[14]	3	
18. Self consciousness in Spanish.	12	4	2
19. Techniques to overcome self consciousness.	More speaking practice, no problems with correction or laughter, more knowledgeable, think about the fact that everybody is at the same stage, avoid error correction at the beginning, encouragement just to talk, conversation, pronouncing the best I can, creativity,		
20. Feedback from class.	6	7[15]	
21. Feedback from native speakers.	3[16]	2[17]	
22. Laboratory alternatives.	More teacher/student interaction, conversation, semi-organized tutorial for help, one tape for the whole class, combination of teacher and individual work, treat all of them the same, everything should change. Vocab class, just on vocab. Not compulsory if they do not work		
23. Comments.	Fun, a good year a good course, enjoyed it, would like to continue, lots of fun. Too much grammar,		

6.3 Analysis of the Questionnaires and Interviews:

These interviews provided us with a more in-depth perspective on some of the issues that the student journals had raised. Not all the issues that the diaries represented were targeted in these interviews. In

fact, during the meetings of the team, which consisted of the research assistants and researcher, these issues were discussed and isolated to make up the finalized interview. These are some excerpts from both interviews, highlighting the issues we had targeted with our questions, other issues that the students raised both here and in journals, and completely new issues:

6.3.1   Student Awareness.

For the sake of consistency we will keep the categories that we have abstracted and constructed from the journals to deal with the interviews in order to see how student answers vary. There are some categories though that appeared in the interviews that had not been mentioned extensively in the diaries, such as 'collaborative environments', under this heading. We will underline these new categories when they are raised in the following classification. We have found that sometimes the student gives contradictory answers, but these answers can be explained in the light of the incidents associated with the student's reaction. The student reacts differently in different incidents because every incident happens in a specific social situation and therefore it is open to many variables. The fact that the student would react differently at different times does not mean that there is a problem with the consistency of student reactions. It simply shows that all situations are subject to variability and that the control of all the variables requires a certain type of awareness and agency that are beyond our human capacity.

➢ Linguistic Awareness

o Use of Grammar

A lot of SLA studies focus on the impact of the study of grammar and language instruction in the improvement of performance, so, since students had isolated it as one of their main concerns in the diaries, we decided to target it with a question in this interview.

There were different views on the use of grammar in class when discussed openly in a dialogue form. They observe the lack of sentence-building in the traditional approach to grammar in the textbooks they were using, and linking words.

You have to have a basis of grammar because if you only have vocabulary like you can't put together sentences. I kn- that was what I found a lot in first year like I don't know how to say like… 'for, so,

but' all those words that you have to know to make a full sentence. So yah grammar is really important, and if you wanna be able to speak in something other than present. (laughs) (CD200-I)

On the other hand, a more mature student observed the fact that grammar is readily available and can be acquired autonomously without the need of an interactive classroom environment:

Ah…and then, grammar, as for grammar, I think – I think the books that we have – the textbook, like the grammar textbook is really good and I think it outlines very clearly the grammar concepts, so I think sometimes we did take up a little too much time on the grammar concepts, um I know some people felt it was a god thing, but ah I found, you know, oh, I can just read about it in the grammar (AS250-I)

➢ Learning Awareness

We discussed issues on learning awareness in a more open manner than the code mentioned above. We asked them what their methods were to study Spanish and we received answers around these codes:

o Learning Style:

A very common feeling among students was reported in the interviews. We found that people were expressing their feelings and complaints in a more confident manner with this method:

I hate looking at dictionaries (CD200-2)

The same thing that we noticed in the journals about learning style showed up in the interviews. At some stage during their schooling, students have been introduced to concepts related to learning style and students were happy to use this terminology when describing their own needs.

You could try it in Spanish, I don't know I find I'm more of a visual person so maybe if she wrote it on the board in Spanish {I- Mhmm} I would understand it more than if she spoke it in English. […] I'm not an auditory person so I learn better hearing it in English but maybe visual, so maybe cut down on some of the English in the classroom I guess. (CD200-3)

They also commented on the need for real practice when learning a language.

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I use Spanish <u>a lot</u> just you know like on the computer over like msn or whatever just being stupid like that but other than that yah we try and do- I went away for a weekend with one of the girls and we decided that we were gonna label her entire house with Spanish words and we did that. You know like I try to use it like I don't like totally ignore it, but you know what I mean, like if I'm with someone that speaks Spanish I will speak a little bit. (CD200-2)

Um....things that are hands on, working in the actual...being able to practice what I was learning has been the most beneficial because you learn it and then you are sort of able to do it and it is re-emphasized. (JL100-I)

- o Time management

The same old complaint about how time consuming learning a language is came up. Itseemed that students resent an activity that they have to practice every day.

Cuz it's so much time, it's consuming like it's like you don't have an hour or two hours every day you know, to sit down and do it. It's like, you don't … you just … you just don't do it. Especially when you're living on your own and you don't have somebody to cook something for you (laughs) you know what I mean? {I- (laughs)} Like you gotta take time out to eat okay (laughs). So, I don't know and I mean it's frustrating cuz like sometimes when I'm like at school all day and I have two hours between class, I wouldn't mind taking my Spanish books out- but to lug my books…(5) (CD200-4)

I think it's just because of what it is because learning languages is really hard…I think, well I don't know if it'd be the same like learning German or whatever but I find that Spanish does require a lot of work…like a lo t of afterhours work, stuff like that. (CD200-5)

- o Purpose

Not everybody was very aware of purpose, as we have seen in the journals, but even in the interviews is very clear to see how much variation exists between students in terms of personal goals. This is a more complicated issue in a language class than the issue of different levels of performance and it has failed to be acknowledged by SLA methodologies and research.

I like learning another language, and I like it, and I travel down south a lot. (EL200-I)

(S)-Um…my stepmom and my stepsister are from Mexico so I thought I should learn some Spanish so I can figure out if they're talking about me (laugh)…and plus it was an easy course (EG100-1)

Because, I…well first of all I like to learn languages, and then because I to do work in Latin America, and research and stuff like that. (EL200-2)

- o Feedback

Students brought about a new code through the interviews or rather they reclassified a code that we devoted to our 'classroom dynamics' into 'learning awareness'. For this student, the issue of giving feedback was not entirely the responsibility of the teacher. On the other hand, s/he felt it was his responsibility to try and engage with Spanish-speaking friends in order to obtain this feedback. S/he was also highly aware of the obstacles to achieve this goal.

Do you get any feedback of your progress in Spanish?
S-Not really. I'm afraid to speak Spanish with my friends. (EL200-3)

- ➢ Personality Awareness

In the interviews there were not as many marked aspects of their individual personalities. They seemed to sympathize with the interviewer – since they were students as well and sometimes if the student researcher interviewing them was from a course above the one they were doing, they would use them as advisers.

- o Engagement

Some students had already had experience in a Spanish-speaking world and they used it for practice outside of the language classroom.

I have um an entire life in Mexico so I stay in touch with them all the time. I went back down last summer and they're coming up here this summer so um phone calls are probably nothing more than once a month, but on the internet like on msn, I talk to them every day. And it's always in Spanish. (laughs) (JL100-2)

o Self-consciousness

I just find I don't speak as much Spanish cuz I get embarrassed if I make a mistake and I don't like doing that but, other than that not much. (CD200-3)

Both in journals and interviews it seems that the issue of being aware of speaking in another language is very difficult to overcome, no matter what level you are at.

Very. Very. And the same with every language, though it maybe it's just 'cause I'm shy, but when you have such a mixture in the class, it's really intimidating – you don't want to sound like that much dumber than everyone, so [laugh] (AS250-2)

In one of the interviews with one of the teachers, she comments on how children lack this self-awareness and find it easier to speak a different language, or at least they do not seem to hit this obstacle.

It's very beautiful because they [children] are shameless, and adults are very shameful when they are learning languages. (Interview with the Instructor)

In the interviews, we did not concentrate on issues of intercultural awareness so this code, that recurrently came up in the journals, is mostly absent in the interviews and questionnaires.

➢ Teaching Culture Awareness

We insisted, though, on clarifying the notions of classroom culture and the expectations that students come with into the language classroom. The most important issues for our students seemed to be:

o Rapport

The relationship between teacher-students and students amongst themselves seem to be a topic of much relevance for students. Most of us react very strongly to personality and dynamics, and this influences the language that we are studying.

And then I just, I gave up on it, because I didn't like the teacher (laughs) (EL200-4)

However, both students and teachers have very dissimilar personalities from one another and these personalities are also very influenced by external circumstances and can vary from one class to another or from one semester to the next. It is not unusual to find opposite opinions about the same teacher in the same class and sometimes even in the same student. However, some of the students justify their judgment by explaining what trait they like in their teacher's methods. In this case, s/he explained how the teacher was supportive and encouraging about correcting mistakes and giving feedback.

I think, like with our teacher, she's very good at, like if you don't say something right or whatever. She doesn't make you feel like wow I really messed up. (EL200-5)

- o Action

Some of the students reinforce the belief that students should take responsibility for their own actions and that the teacher's job is not to correct their behaviour.

I don't know it just seems that you shouldn't penalize someone with marks for not showing up or anything like that or baby them to be like 'you must show up!' {I- Yah} if someone doesn't wanna do well, that's their problem. (CD200-3)

However, in the interview with the main teacher/researcher, she commented on 'the extension policy' at this university as something she found foreign and she strongly disliked them.
The other-other cultural thing I just remembered - {A: [laugh]} the extensions. This University's extension policy, I wasn't very happy about [laugh] {A: no? [laugh]} That was a cultural barrier. Yeah – so ex-extensions are good, I don't think you should tell people in the university that they live in this bubble world, everything other…everything else that works in the real world is suspended because they're in university. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

Students seemed to think that an extension for a deadline was a norm, therefore neglecting that part of their responsibility towards the teacher.

- o Engagement with student learning

There is a constant tension between the need to develop self-responsibility and the need for being minded and looked after. This student is grateful for her/his teacher's involvement with his/her

learning and the care shown for her. The 'mothering' or 'nurturing' role of the teacher is still very much ingrained in the students' psyche.

Yah I think our teachers did really good though with the extra…{I- Oh for sure} like activities, the orientations and stuff like that. Like I was supposed to be part of the orientation but like I had two papers due (laughs) and I was just like 'shit!' {I- Mhmm} And (S) signed me up without asking me…{I- (laughs)} So (laughs)…I don't know I just think that they tried really hard ya know? Like to get people more into it, more involved {I- Mhmm} which was really good. {I- Yah} Cuz Spanish…like most of the profs really don't give a shit eh? It's not…
I- Yah you can tell they really do (laughs).
42- Yep, they care. Which is good cuz there's not many profs like that… (CD200-4)

- o Collaborative environment

Students brought about a new code through the interviews. For this student, the issue of learning with others was the essential feature s/he liked about the Spanish class. The fact that s/he could learn together with others in the same boat as him/her, inside and outside the classroom, was the main benefit of this language class.

Um, that it's close. Like you...I know a lot of the people and I associate with them outside the classroom as well as inside and others. (AS250-3)

6.3.2   Student Affect.

We were very interested to see what external factors influenced student learning the most so our questions at the level of affect were more open and we decided to carry this interview in a way that could highlight affective factors that would not have been specifically asked about.

- ➤ Autonomy

Surprisingly, they approached the issue of autonomy from another point of view at the level of interview than in the journals. A student highlighted the positive feedback he got from self-initiated participation.

I just remember the classes where I have to volunteer and ill do something on the board or answer a question and if I get it right I feel good, I feel proud of myself so I remember that the most. (EGI00-I)

➢ Creativity and Innovation

They also expressed more freely ideas that they had had probably during the previous months. In conversation with other peers (in this case the research assistants) students seemed freer to share their suggestions and innovations that they would do in the classroom. For example, this student expresses his/her need to have more of an open pattern in class, not a definite set of activities.

I think maybe, I quite like the idea of having more conversation. Or Having conversation that's maybe differently focused. If they had a time when we were just talking. Like it doesn't even matter if were just using present tense, just the confidence of speaking. The more you speak the more marks you get.

That way everyone is going to talk and it will be a discussion. Something like that would be good. (EL200-5)

S/he is also in favour of quantity instead of quality at this level as a means of solving the inhibiting nature of student errors.

Another student is in favour of including learning strategies into the curriculum. Because s/he experiences difficulties in knowing how to learn a language when you are not immersed in it.

hehe… Um… I'd actually have to say, I took um, learning psychology last year and the prof. Was amazing (went on to explain how the prof. Taught O how to learn, and how ppl learn and psychological learnings behind it- O got a really good mark bc O was learning how to learn) (SMR100-I)

➢ Peer influence

I don't think anybody is like- like the people who know how to speak Spanish very well they don't look down on the people who don't because we just all have different experiences with Spanish and I

think everyone is very understanding about that like it's not a competition to see who's gonna be the better speaker or like- I'm not afraid to make mistakes in class… (CD200-1)

In their journals, students had already highlighted the fact that one of the features they appreciated the most about their classrooms was that they felt supported and cared for by their peers. However, it is important to realize that this environment of support and caring is a perspective that is not shared by everybody.

I don't know if I can say this but some of the people in the class intimidate me like I know that they go home and study and I 'm like you scare me just that kind of thing its those kind of people that like shot out all kind of answer's and they're always right and I don't want to answer because I could be wrong and then they'll just be right, umm its not just that doing well…Its not that this class isn't important class to me. but I'm like here to learn and not for the mark so some people it seems like its like they're most important class to them and its not my major I mean I'm anthro and you know but I guess I'd get rid of them. (EG100-2)

Sometimes, it is the student's perspective of their peer reactions towards them that creates the tension. Instead of turning their peer's performance into an advantage, to better sources of Spanish, the student believes it will hinder his/her learning and participation, whether the students have a negative reaction to him/her or not.

Um, I'm intimidated by the, you know other students that have, you know, been to Spanish speaking countries or they're from Spanish families, its' just…yeah...I figure they get impatient with me trying to…spit something out. So… (AS250-3)

This quote highlights another issue: perceived levels of language. In our experience, student judgment of level was based on marks or pronunciation, but not on overall performance in the language. There were students that were terribly intimidated by people who dominated the oral seminar, even though they were much better than their 'vocal' peers at written language. This constant presence of intimidation and peer pressure among students calls for the creation of more collaborative, transparent and team-working classroom environments.

Mhmm. Cuz there's a lot of people in there that are just like…like they know…like they shouldn't even be in that class, they should be in 250. […] I don't know….I don't know. If I knew the

vocabulary better- I get my…I don't know I get my vocabulary mixed up, like the meanings…what they mean. So sometimes I could be saying like- I don't know I could say something totally opposite of what I actually mean then when people laugh at me I'm just like…'what'd I say?' (CD200-4)

This incident highlights the enormous pressure that this student felt with his/her peers' reactions. Laughing because of a student error is not intimidating per se. It is a strong reaction to a mistake that could have been very funny for one reason or another. However, the negative feelings this laughter generated were not easily managed by the student, the teacher or her peers, who did not mean anything bad towards him/her and were genuinely laughing at the funny examples of language s/he would come up with. Because the student felt at a disadvantage that could jeopardize her grade in the course, s/he did not feel supported at all by her fellow classmates.

I hate it when people laugh like cuz they know that we're trying right {I- Mhmm} so I just…I don't know. I left that class very pissed off. (laughs) (CD200-4)

A good sense of humour and laughing at your own mistakes has not been quoted in the lengthy manuals of 'good learning' that were written at the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century. With the laughter that this student concluded his/her answer to this question, it shows that at that stage she had learned to laugh at her own reactions and not to take them too much to heart.

Students, like the next one, highlight that this anxiety created by peer pressure is an element more ubiquitous at the beginning of the course, but in small group teaching is eradicated as the semester moves on; by talking and chatting to other people in the same boat, you realize that everybody shares the same feelings.

43- Not anymore. I did at the beginning for the first semester, I did. Just because of the other people in the class, that was it, like the fluent people. {I- Mhmm} But everybody feels that way so…that's about it. (CD200-2)

➢ Anxiety and stress

Apart from peer-generated pressure, speaking a foreign language, sounding 'stupid' for not being able to express yourself, or sounding like a kid are beliefs that tend to cause anxiety and embarrassment, and also work as an inhibitor both for language practice and for speaking at the level that the student

actually has. Students like the one in the next example are highly aware of their own mistakes, and always highly critical of their own performance:

It's harder for me because you know I know I'm not saying it right and I'm like 'oh I sound stupid' (laughs). (CD200-5)

Other students find it difficult to continue the sentence or speak out loud when they make a mistake. All of us have been submitted to overcorrection in our mother? Language as well as other foreign or heritage languages we may have tried to learn, so it is rather difficult to let go of this 'perfectionism' at the level of spoken language:

I just find I don't speak as much Spanish cuz I get embarrassed if I make a mistake and I don't like doing that but, other than that not much. (CD200-3)

As children, we learn how to express ourselves without minding structure or correction and we are then 'corrected' at home and at school in order to form grammatically correct sentences. However, our main objective as children was communication and we succeeded at communicating our message, no matter how many irregular verbs we used incorrectly. This spirit is completely lost as adults and our adult mind discards the experience of repeatedly making the same mistake until we get it right as useless; when it is in this experience where learning happens. It is not through the hyper-correction by the student him/herself or others that we learn the correct use of a word or a tense, but through the insightful experience of realizing the logical – or illogical, in some cases – use through our own practice of the language.

When I have to like, do a presentation 'cause I-I'm not very fluent, so I always don't want to say something in Spanish if I don't think it's right. (AS250-4)

'Being on the spot' is a feeling shared by many students, both in conversation class and in general language practice. The fact that one student only needs to come up with an answer as the whole class focuses their attention on him/her creates a huge amount of stress. Strategies need to be designed to avoid this pressure on the student or to neutralize its effect.

The conversation hour.

No, I hate it actually (laugh). Um, I always feel like I'm on the spot there, like always-like it's not too...(?) like, am I even right? I think...I'm not sure how you'd change that, but it could be changed, could be improved (laugh) (AS250-5)

➢ Responsibility for learning

This issue has come up time and again in the journals, questionnaires, interviews… etc. It is so ubiquitous because it is in our nature as human beings to try and delegate the responsibility of our actions and yet resent being deprived of our freedom. This student realizes this paradox:

Probably when we're doing exercises having to…I hate being forced to give an answer but if I'm not forced to then I wont so I don't speak and then the class just drags on forever and I hate that. So I'd probably rather be forced to speak, even though I don't like it. (EG100-3)

S/he concludes that s/he would rather willingly give up his/her responsibility to initiate his/her own language practice.

➢ Preferences

We are all different and some of us prefer to study in the early mornings while others prefer late afternoons. The fact that it is an internal, affective factor and so diverse, makes it a difficult one to tackle and solve. However, an awareness of preference enormously helped both the student and the teacher because together they could work on strategies to combat the obstacles that these preferences would pose or to profit from the benefits that they provided. In one of the research assistant meetings, it was informally suggested by one of the research assistants to deliver a quiz at the beginning of the year to highlight these preferences. It could be an activity for the class to find out who they were more similar to and what the preferences and differences of each student were. It would also work for team building, but instead of speaking of general preferences – like these activities, typical of textbooks, suggest - it would concentrate on learning preferences, and even language learning preferences.

I find at 9 a.m. my brain does not function in languages so…I am asleep for most of it but…other than that it was pretty good. (CD200-3)

➢ Enjoyment

When students were asked to share the stories of the best teachers they had, their answers were very consistent with what their expectations for a good class were. I will underline in the next quote the main characteristics that this student underlined:

Well the best teacher I ever had was in high school, and he had a different approach to learning, and every day at the beginning of class he would kinda test you on what you had learned in the last class, but there was a really big emphasis on improvement, and just a really big connection between him and what we were learning. There was a lot of discussion and openness about issues, but it made you not be able to not bring yourself into it. You had to be part of the class, and you had to really learn, not just memorize things, which was a really good approach to learning. So I guess that was probably my most positive experience. Because I find myself a lot of the time just memorizing things, and its really not fulfilling. It's just a waste of time. One of those things you do to get through, and I don't think that's what learning should be. (EL200-2)

In this quote there are two main issues: engagement and revision. The student says that the teacher always joined the classes together by a little test and that he was engaged with the subject and the fact that there was a lot of discussion – not presentation of materials by the teacher – which forced the students to engage. This teacher is capable of engaging his/her students in a way that means they need to participate in the class. He has the authority of a team-leader.

The next student highlights the power of perspective. From her perspective the items they are learning about seem bleak and void, but when the teacher explains the different ways of interpreting these items, everything seems to have an interesting meaning that had not come up in the first reading.

Oh, My modern poetry class, just because I don't know nothing in it, and were doing American, 20th century, and (3) were supposed to prepare the poem, like read it at home, and then come, and we read it in class. Somehow if I read the poem, there's nothing so interesting about it, but when the Professor talks about it…it's Amazing! (laughs) I think how I know if I've actually learned it, is if I walk out of the class, like drugged or something… (EL200-6)

This teacher is capable of engaging his/her students in the magic and enthrallment of poetry. S/he has the power that a performer or a storyteller would.

The following student describes a caring language teacher, which ushers her students along and gently prompts them to speak, taking it as her responsibility to make students participate in class and practice the language.

Um, She's the instructor, like, I really like her, I think she's, I think she's the best language teacher I've ever had. I took french in all of high school, and I didn't, like, I liked my teachers, but they weren't as effective as her, like I think <u>she's really interested in you learning</u>, you know her, her job is you know, to teach us how to speak, and <u>if you don't speak, then she didn't succeed w us</u>. Yah, I think she's really great. (SMR100-2)

This teacher is capable of engaging her students by her involvement in their own learning. She has the agency of a mother.

This final quote does not describe a teacher, but it focuses on the power of enjoyment as a learning enhancing experience. This activity with the fairy tales has been repeatedly praised in student journals, showing that when the students were enjoying themselves it imprinted the activity with a positive memory that could later be recalled. The learning inspired by this activity was readily available through that positive memory.

Um in Spanish class I enjoyed when we did the stories…the fairy tales when we translated them. I thought that was good. (EL200-7)

> ➢ Expectations

Expectations are hard to let go of, no matter how clear and transparent a course outline or a description of a classroom can be, which is why, throughout this project, it is very useful to air these expectations through classroom activities before they 'solidify'. Student expectations can become a major obstacle for learning if the class does not meet these initial expectations, and they result in constant frustration.

- Immersion vs. classroom learning

The fact that immersion environment are so praised throughout Canada, thanks to their French immersion programs, a constant expectation of a more communicative environment than a grammar-instruction based learning environment has been created.

I kinda thought there'd be like more…practical like, in a speaking sort of living sort of situation, less focus on like…different tenses. I dunno, that just seemed to have characterized the whole year. (AS205-6)

- Time and Space

In terms of space, most of our students seem to agree that they preferred – and expected – a circular classroom.

Definitely circular classroom. Ah, I think it just makes you <u>more attentive</u> because could be- could be watching you or – and it's way easier to just have a conversation – it makes people feel more comfortable, I think. Ah, like I felt I knew most people to a certain degree in my class last year, and this it feels like I haven't even talked to half the people in the class because the way we're sitting, you know, you always sit back and everybody's got their backs turned to you so you don't make eye contact, so you don't probably have [?] and I think that's really…a shame. Um, <u>good lighting</u>, that helps always. Preferably after <u>lunchtime</u>, I find it would be a good time – you didn't ask for the time…{A: No no, that's good} but ah, especially, you know, normally people have eaten, they've been awake for more than a couple of hours, so everything's functioning and on the go. (AS250-I)

Perhaps, it is important to highlight that these are the types of preference that we all take for granted. This student talks about after lunch being his/her preferred time for language learning, whereas some of us would prefer early morning and definitely would avoid 'siesta' time for learning anything. This aspect of the project, however, ended up being one of the most powerful. We rarely discuss the impact of the physical space in our learning and through these questions, we realized that students had very fixed ideas about it and it was very difficult to break them down or to question them because there was not enough room for experimentation in our physical classrooms. Some of the chairs were fixed and in some classes there was nothing that could be done to alter the physical environment.

I like it round. I think that if it were in rows you wouldn't want to participate as much because you

can't see everyone else. So I like both of the classrooms because it is round and how it is set up (JL100-3)

Another student commented on the fact that the circular structure is not very conducive to team work either.

Well that seating thing is interesting. Um…um…maybe if we were sitted in a group of three or four, it would be more personal, I dunno {A: Interesting.} it'd be more comfortable for myself probably. (AS250-7)

It also highlighted the fact that things like good lighting or air are rarely discussed even though they significantly influence our learning. Physical constraints tend to be taken for granted, which probably derives from the fact that most of us have not had much experience of comfortable learning environments.

In one of the teacher's interviews, she commented on the fact that in secondary or primary school, the physical environment is normally well looked after.

You end up always working in the same classroom or in the same kind of classroom, and it's kind of related to language. {A: Umhm} Okay, and that's like- it's supported theoretical, like our mind work like 'if in this room, I always speak Spanish, I'm always going to speak Spanish. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

She also talked about the circular structure and how, for her, flexibility was more important than a fixed structure. It was important for her teaching to be able to alter the physical characteristics of a classroom to suit the activity:

Circle normally works the best or semi circle, or square that is broken {A: Umhm} but facing each other. And ah, also mo-mobility, like I could break that and make it work into groups for different activities {A: Okay} The other thing too that I think helps is a variety of structure. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

The other teacher focused on the ideal length of a language classroom. She agreed with what students had stated in the journals, bearing in mind how intellectually cumbersome using a second language can

be:

The classes shouldn't be more than an hour and half, because when you create very dynamic classes and exercises in which they have to get up and more when you are listening to a foreign language all the time is very tiring, it's exhausting. Because you have to make the effort not only to understand but also to try and eee- see or… how the other language works, the sounds and more. Then… the effort is huge. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

6.3.3   Classroom Dynamics

Although this section will be explored in more depth in the next chapter, in which we will analyze the student assistant observations of several classes, it has had a very important role both in interviews and journals. Students agree with main writers of the academic literature on SLA that it is in the interaction and the distribution of roles that language learning will be enhanced or hindered.

➢ Power

Linked to the previous concept of autonomy in 'affect', power and its distribution was an issue on everybody's minds; teachers and students.

o   Student Responsibility

This student resents his/her responsibility in front of a silent group. Because of the dynamics s/he has created taking the lead, the rest of the class has fallen back and let her offer the answers when the teachers asks for volunteers. This shows that even the students that are granted with the power to participate by the whole class may not want it and feel uncomfortable with it.

Um, I am feeling discouraged to participate right now because I feel I am one of the only ones who does participate, and it is really frustrating me because it feels like I am pulling the rest of the class along because they know I will answer all the questions. (JL100-4)

➢ Interaction

In the following quotes, students qualified what type of interactions they considered learning-enhancing and learning-hindering.

- o Teacher-Students

They were very appreciative of patient, encouraging and supportive feedback from the teacher.

She just makes sure we understand everything and she makes people participate in class so you can't really shy away. --- um, what else do I like about her? She's very good at marking, like things are back to us the next day. (Student 200, 9)

One of the quotes that surprised us the most was the following:

The teacher is happy in this class- so are the ppl (SMR100-2)

Some students seemed very sensitive to teacher's enjoyment. If the teacher was enjoying her task, they would find it contagious.

- o Student-Student

The following student commented on the fact that small group teaching and the relationships she established in the class determined a lot of her attitude towards the subject. The fact that she was studying with another girl made the experience much more worthy.

Um, it affected my learning in a positive way just 'cause I was studying with one girl in the class. Because it was such a big class, it's really hard to get to know everyone, but some of the people I did get to know, like I was just telling my boyfriend "oh I'm so sad" like I don't think I can continue Spanish next year, so I really, like I'll really miss those people. (AS250-2)

- ➤ Rounds

We came back to the issue of 'rounds'. We defined this activity as the way the teacher carried out an exercise by going around the class one by one, so that everybody got to participate and a turn to speak.

They had been highlighted in the journals as a positive experience and the research team decided to contrast their answers in the journals with their answers in the interviews to check for consistency.

- o Positive

250-73: Um, I like that, actually. That way, you know, um…everybody gets a chance to see if they got it (AS250-5)

250-64: I think that's really good, I think actually, we should do that more often. I'm not so good at it but, if, you know, I'm hearing everyone else go through it and reading it from the book and have the teacher's help, I think that's a really good exercise. (AS250-4)

I like the rounds. It gives everybody equal participation {I- Mhmm} cuz I found before I was just kinda shoved to the back, I never really…{I- Yah} Cuz I couldn't keep up. And I don't know I didn't answer questions fast enough. (CD200-4)

I don't have a problem with the rounds, like if I get it wrong I get it wrong. You know what I mean it's no big deal she's not gonna you know make a big deal about it. (CD200-2)

Rounds are good…but um yah like I think we should get time to fill it in ourselves first and then rounds are good because you know then you have to speak, say the sentence or whatever it gets you into the…into the mode. So…and like just randomly whoever puts up their hand it's usually the same people over and over so…{I- Yah} (CD200-5)

I guess it's good because I would not participate in any other way unless I absolutely had to so I guess it forces me to do the work, which I do normally on my own but it forces me to do it and say it out loud and if I get it wrong then I'm explained why am I getting it wrong so I guess it's good. I hate being put on the spot but {I- Yah.} I guess it's a beneficial situation as well. (CD200-3)

I like them! I think that it helps everyone answer, because if she waits at the beginning of the class for people to answer she has to wait forever, because no one ever does. (JL100-5)

Yeah, because I find that um, if you make students participate, it's better. Like for someone like me, I'm shy so when she makes me answer stuff, it's a lot better. (AS250-2)

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Students were consistently positive about this way of carrying out exercises and 'forcing' people to answer. I used the word 'forcing' because it could feel that way, even when it had been established as a rule that a person could opt out of the round if they did not feel confident enough to give the answer.

One of the reasons the teacher/researcher wanted to double-check students' opinions at this level was because the department for which she worked was not supportive of this practice, on the basis of student freedom and avoiding the feeling of 'putting them on the spot' that we have talked about in the previous code. The students that are normally shy appreciated it as well, contrary to teachers' expectations. These rounds were carried out in a supportive manner so that, as one of the students above pointed out, mistakes were encouraged and allowed as a means of learning by doing.

- o Negative

The only negative comment offered about rounds was that sometimes they were done at a faster pace than some students could follow; as people were ready and expecting this kind of dynamics, they accelerated the pace of the class. This had initially been assessed by the teacher as another positive aspect of the rounds but it was clearly a disadvantage for the slower students.

Ah…I think it-it's I mean it's not a bad-completely bad idea, but I think it…a lot of times its too fast, like if-if it's not a-a homework that was assigned, then its too fast for some people-even I find it too fast-it- it seems like you're just scrambling to get an answer. (AS250-I)

- ➤ Atmosphere

The atmosphere in the classroom was created by several features, some of which we have already mentioned above and in our analysis of journals. One of the main features that provided us with a privileged environment was its size.

- o Small communities

The size and the number of students in the classroom provided more interaction and more opportunities for practice.

I like very much that it's small now, and that there is good interaction, like everyone is kind of talking and everyone, yah there is good interaction, and that makes a lot of difference for me, because I can't think if it's one person talking to me, but I can if I'm talking as much and were talking to each other. (EL200-8)

- o   Interaction outside of classroom

Students seemed appreciative of the interaction between students and teacher outside of the classroom. The fact that the teacher was an immigrant and closer in age with her students provided a ground, where friendship between students and teacher could develop.

Um…well obviously it means that she's nice ya know and cares about her students and stuff and I think that it helps out because if I have a problem then it's no big deal for me to go to her and ask for help. Like seeing her being friends with other students it kinda like (3) you know she's not way up here on some pedestal like 'I'm the prof!' and (laughs) {I- Yah) you're just the weakling little students, so that helps out a lot like I know if I have a problem I can just email her or write her and she can help me out whereas with other people, it's not so simple so… (CD200-5)

However, the differences in personality and the different levels of friendship between students and teacher also created perceived difficulties. This student believes that if s/he was closer to the teacher, she would get more help, because she is friends with the conversation tutor and she gets help from there. She also raises a very important point (see underlined): she accepts responsibility to ask for help and acknowledge her difficulties.

Um…I don't talk to the teacher too much, I know that she's good friends with the other students, or gets along with some of the other students, but I don't talk to her too much. Um…<u>it probably would help if I talked to her more because you know then she could give me exercises to do or suggest other ways of practicing the language</u>. Um…I get along well with the conversation tutor, um…I yah…I really like her I think she's really nice and it helps out a lot because like if I don't have a lab done she just says oh bring it tomorrow and you know, she's nice enough so that's okay…so that's good. Um…and that helps out a lot too so. (CD200-5)

➤ Feedback

Students also attempted to describe the kind of feedback that they found more helpful towards language learning.

o To students

Students requested corrections with suggestions for improvement. They suggest feedback given orally or written but with specific information on how to improve on weaker points.

They could give us like a handout, saying like you need to work more on this, or, and if they didn't want to do it, like write it all out, just have a private meeting with the instructor or something. So… (AS250-2)

▪ Mistakes are allowed.

We already quoted this student talking about his/her peers. S/he highlights the fact that the teacher allowed mistakes and some of them were not penalized.

I'm not afraid to make mistakes in class… (CD200-1)

▪ Correction is not personalized.

In this lengthy quote this student requests more feedback from the spoken classes. There is no personalized feedback in this format, she believes. She justifies the teacher's difficulty to give feedback at this level on the basis of her 'native' ability.

Ah, one to one, no. And I just- I guess maybe 'cause I didn't have a lot of trouble with my conversations or stuff, but she'd just write 'good job,' so, um… I got a little bit of feedback in my conversation because the instructor wanted me to fall back, she wanted me to take the 200 conversation, um, so I knew I wasn't doing too well in [laugh] that class, but it's also – it's hard, she IS Spanish, so…ah, and another boy was Spanish, so how are you supposed to compete with people who, like it's second nature to them. {A: Yeah, yeah} But other than that, I think need to do more feedback. (AS250-2)

- Feedback is needed.

Sometimes, the need for feedback is not easily perceived by the teacher, to whom certain errors are obvious. Students may not have the same perspective and fail to request this feedback in points where they do not understand how they went wrong.

I would suggest talking about what areas you need to improve on in a note, just something, because one time I did bad on a test that I thought I was understanding, and to have feedback on that would be great. (EL200-9)

- Feedback needs to be understandable

This student comments on the fact that correction of mistakes and grading is not enough information to understand what needs to be improved.

No, I don't think so. I mean, I've never like (laughs) no I've never had any of the teachers say like 'you need to improve on this or you need to- you're doing really well on this.' Even after the second test which I did like horrible on, there was no like 'okay here's some things to help you practice' it was just like 'okay you did bad.' (laughs) (CD200-5)

- Feedback is definitely a sensitive issue

Students need constant feedback, especially the weak ones because they feel especially vulnerable. We also realized that feedback was normally given when the student was performing badly, but positive or complimentary feedback was not a common practice in our classrooms.

Um… I don't even know. You know like…well basically they're just like 'don't be scared, don't be scared, you'll be fine' type thing {I- Mhmm} That's basically about all they do, well for me at least. Feedback wise…I don't know I can't expect them to be like you know every time I say two words 'oh my god!' you know what I mean but you know what I mean give me, maybe give me an assessment come December and then come April, you know what I mean, how they think I've done. That's about it. (CD200-2)

6.3.4   Teaching Methods

➢ COURSE RELATED

These were the most specific questions that we developed in the interviews. From the very beginning, one of the main objectives of this research was to ascertain what the student feedback was with regards to grammar instruction and language instruction in general, and other methods that were frequently utilized in the classroom.

o Grammar instruction

Definitely. You have to have a basis of grammar because if you only have vocabulary like you can't put together sentences. I kn- that was what I found a lot in first year like I don't know how to say like… 'for, so, but' all those words that you have to know to make a full sentence. So yah grammar is really important, and if you wanna be able to speak in something other than present. (laughs) {I- Yah} That's also… (CD200-I)

There were a series of students who definitely thought that language instruction had helped them to a certain extent. The previous student also highlighted that the teaching of discreet points in language does not enable the learner in terms of sentence structure, linking words or fluency in general.

Definitely. I think grammar does uh…it's also, sounds odd, improved a bit my English in thinking of verb tenses and stuff like that. {I- Yah} Um it's definitely improved my English and I guess Spanish. (CD200-3)

Some students, like the one above, found that grammar had also improved their native language in the sense that now they had a better understanding about how it worked and how to use it for contrastive purposes.

Very important. As English speakers –you're French, I don't know if English was your first…{I: Yeah, English is my first} Yeah, so we-we don't really know much about our own language, which is really important. Like grammar, I think is like number one for leaning any language. (AS250-2)

For people working with more than one language, it is also very important to understand the grammar 'rules' of the new language.

Um, I-I actually really like having the grammar cause I like seeing the structure and I like knowing why a certain thing is, I don't really want…just to be like, how do I say this – I want to be like why do I say this. (AS250-1)

The analysis-oriented student is also very appreciative of rules and norms, and understanding the inner workings of a language.

I think it should be…um…well, in our lessons, I think it should be mainly grammar, I mean cause we already have conversation hour, but sometimes I wish that conversation hours were more in line with…ah…the lessons. (AS250-5)

Another aspect of the grammar teaching that they highlighted is that it should be aligned with all the other parts of the language course, such as conversation. They regarded this conversation hour as a way to practice more efficiently the grammar that they had acquired in the language classroom.

All in all, there seemed to be a very strong coherence in the positive nature of language and grammar instruction, contrary to popular belief.

> ➤ CLASS ACTIVITY RELATED

Our other main initial concern had been what language should be used in language instruction in a non-immersion environment in which most students shared English as a native or second language, according to our students. We wanted to see if their opinions agreed with the communicative methodologies that were so widespread while they were growing up, eradicating the use of any other language except the language being taught inside of the language classroom.

> ○ Language of Instruction

Most students seemed to find the use of English for explanations and clarifications most useful. We have listed the different reasons why students found it beneficial.

I think that it's helpful when we don't understand, something if we need to be- something to be clarified and I think for me sometimes she speaks very quickly in Spanish so <u>it's good to have just a clarification in English.</u> But I think it should be mostly, like it is mostly in Spanish but if she sees I guess confusion on some people's faces (laughs) then she'll clarify so it's helpful. (CD200-1)

It helps. (CD200-4)

I think it's a good thing because, well it's good that she speaks Spanish but it's also good that she speaks English just to clarify everything, and <u>sometimes it's hard when you're just listening to Spanish</u>

<u>*all the time, you lose track and you don't keep up*</u>*. So it's good.* (EL200-10)

Um, I think it's helpful because sometimes um, people like myself can't understand what she's – like what point she's trying to get across in some instances and she realizes that so she'll go ahead <u>a re-explain in English</u>. But she does it minimal so it's not like affecting… (AS250-4)

I think it's a good idea because half of us wouldn't know what she would be asking right? I think it's good that when she's explaining lessons it's in English, so that you know <u>we actually understand what's going</u> on but all the other times it's, you know what I mean, she speaks pretty much in Spanish. (CD200-2)

I think it is useful, because I don't think I would understand it if she spoke only in Spanish. (EL200-11)

Ok, well I like the fact because not a lot of us can understand the Spanish yet and need to hear it in English to understand what is going on. (EL200-9)

For me it's very useful [laugh]. I'm ah, not up to par with some of the other students, so I can see why they might not like it, but for me ah…it's useful because she speaks really fast in Spanish so um with me I'm very good at writing and reading, but being able to speak it and take it in when someone else speaks it, it's hard. So I think she almost always say it first in Spanish so I get practice that way, but like I –<u>I would probably have to ask her all the time to say it again in English if she didn't</u>, so… (AS250-2)

I think it is a good thing because if she is speaking in Spanish then <u>I might get the general concept of what she is saying, but not the in depth meaning</u>. (EL200-10)

Enjoyed the fact that she spoke in eng, (p), and then in span,b/c you'd be able to tell exactly what she is saying, Um, I think that, you know like mid-semester, <u>we should be discouraged from speaking eng</u>, like the classmates just b/c like (p) b/c you might not grasp the language as well, like to pronounce it, I think, so...to me it should be discouraged, but I like the fact that she uh spoke in eng. (SMR100-2)

Thus, most students preferred to have some English, even if it was minimal, for clarification and re-assurance. Funnily enough, in the last quote we realized that a student suggests that English should be discouraged except in these instances. In other words, s/he raises the issue that the fact that the teacher speaks English encourages students to discuss things amongst themselves in English too, whereas in an English-free classroom, the use of English would be penalized.

Between this student being fully convinced of the benefits of English in their Spanish classroom and the students who strongly discourage it, there are a few who are not as clear. The first student prefers it as a lesser evil:

Um…I find it beneficial yet at the same time don't learn as much Spanish but I would rather be explained how to do something in English and then hear it in Spanish so…I don't know. It's a win-lose situation I guess. (CD200-3)

The second student describes exactly what the teacher was trying to do, but is obviously not successful in achieving it:

Um, it's good, it's good to a certain degree. But I think she should try and encourage us to speak Spanish a little more, but umm if you don't know what's going on, and she keeps speaking in Spanish, that's really discouraging. So I think it's important for her to just speak in Spanish and then speak in English. (EL200-10)

The first set of students seemed to believe that she used Spanish most of the time, except for clarification. The following students think that more Spanish should be spoken in the classroom.

I think it's good in a way, if people perhaps don't know what's going on. But I think if she speaks more Spanish it would be better. (EL200-11)

Finally, the last student did not clearly explain her position:

If she slowed it down {I-Yah} ya know and cuz- I had to ask her a couple times to repeat what she said and like when she- she would say it like- a couple times when I asked her she would say, like she'd

say it in Spanish but she'd slow her Spanish down. And then she'd say it again in English ya know, and then, that way I could be like 'ohhh okay' ya know? (CD200-4)

And the following student had contradictory views. In the first quote, she preferred Spanish with visuals and no English. In the second quote, she does not discourage English completely though recommends less dependence on it.

You could try it in Spanish, I don't know I find I'm more of a visual person so maybe if she wrote it on the board in Spanish {I- Mhmm} I would understand it more than if she spoke it in English. (CD200-3)

I'm not an auditory person so I learn better hearing it in English but maybe visual, so maybe cut down on some of the English in the classroom I guess. (CD200-3)

Finally, we got to the last group of students, who rejected it outright.

N: Umm, I don't like it, personally (AS250-1)

And it's whatever you're doing at that point, but it's not-I'm not thinking in Spanish, <u>I'm still thinking in English, translating, and then speaking</u>. And I don't know, that's also cause the teacher is talking in both and I guess for some people that makes a lot of sense, but for me <u>if someone is only talking o me in Spanish I think that would make me think in Spanish</u>. (EL200-8)

In the first quote, the student did not give any specific reasons as to why s/he would prefer if it were a Spanish-only environment. In the second quote, the slow process of 'interpreting' was deemed as negative and it brought up the belief that in a monolingual situation, our thinking patterns are monolingual too.

That's actually one of the things that would be very helpful for me personally if it was only in Spanish and not English, just cause <u>that makes me concentrate more</u>, otherwise I tend to just wait for the English Translation. (EL200-5)

This student commented on the fact that having an easy way out from trying to understand Spanish did not work for someone like him/her.

➢ STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

    o Class Activity Related

        ▪ Interaction

            ● In English between students.

If the majority of the students appreciated the teacher's use of English from time to time to explain concepts, most students condemned the use of English by students amongst themselves. The only two people who defended it did so on the basis of communication, and the second one even had doubts about that.

I think its <u>useful because a lot of us aren't bilingual yet</u> and can't understand what is going on. (JL100-5)

I think it is a good idea sometimes because we are at a basic level and <u>we don't always understand what each other is saying</u>, but...i think that <u>a bit more Spanish should be spoken</u> because we need to hear more of the language than just one person speaking it. (EL200-10)

Most students encouraged pressure from their teachers and peers to practice the second language.

Um…I think there is <u>too much English in the classroom</u>, I think maybe there should be a rule saying like, if you need to ask something, be sure that you ask in Spanish. Just, I dunno, there's not anything forcing you to speak Spanish. (AS205-6)

Immersion was glorified as the most effective method because it 'forces' the learner to use the new language

Um, because I was in French <u>immersion</u> all throughout public school, I'm used to it. Like it's that's what we would do- we would always have to be like slapped with a ruler, you know, 'speak in French, speak in French.' So, ah…maybe it's just that she has to tell us to speak more Spanish – I think that's

really important, but…I guess that's just human nature, maybe {I:[laugh]} in the immersion program and its just gonna happen 'cause it's easier, so… (AS250-2)

The conversation instructor does not let us speak English in class. It's beneficial. Yeah, definitely, I think definitely. It's kind of a strange phenomenon in some ways 'cause like…ah…(8) because it feels like you're back in preschool or something, but that's…I dunno, it's it kind of, when you learn languages, you are like a kid or whatever, I think you kinda have to go back to that stage almost [laughing] when you're more, more outside ah…<u>pressure and encouragement</u>, or whatever. (AS250-1)

Finally, the last student commented on the fact that as students in a non-immersion environment, their opportunities to practice the second language are very limited and they need to take advantage of every minute of practice in the language that they can.

We don't get a lot of this in class, but I <u>like interacting in span</u> and speaking in span, and trying it out yourself… And I don't think we have much of that in class (conversation bt I and O about not enjoying labs and how a conversation hour would be more useful and helpful- labs should be changed to conversation hrs) (SMR100-2)

6.3.5 Student strategies

We decided to open the dialogue about student strategies towards the learning of Spanish in the interviews as well. We thought that the student-student environment would be more conducive to share and get feedback about the strategies at play when approaching a new – or old, for that matter – language.

> ➢ Use of other languages

>> o English

Once again we had the same results as in the questionnaires and diaries. There are mixed views about how their native language hinders or helps the learning of a second language.

English (laughs)… I think it makes it more difficult cuz I don't have anything to really compare it with. (CD200-3)

(S) hmm…I think it actually hinders it (laughs)…I don't know, basically when you're saying something in Spanish how when you translate it into English everything is backwards so that's what my problem is. (EG100-4)

Uh, English definitely because...I've noticed that since I've been taking the grammar course, a grammar workshop that's offered here at Trent, I've learned a lot...about the English language and...learning the grammar aspect of English helps me a lot more in Spanish class because I'm learning what things like subjunctive clauses and conditional means in English so I can apply it so much better to...to Spanish, whereas before I didn't really know what it was in English so now I got a better...I got a grasp which kind of helps me out. (AS250-4)

In the case of the latter student, s/he recognizes that a working knowledge of grammar, in this case the English grammar, helps her to cope with the grammar terms in language class.

Another student commented on how English and French, both official languages in Canada, helped her but her native language, which is very structurally and culturally different from Spanish, did not.

<u>Definitely</u>. {I:Mmhm?} Definitely both English and French. Um, not so much Ukrainian {I:(laugh)} Um, definitely French for all the verb structures and concepts, it's the same almost and a lot of the other grammatical features or things of Spanish are <u>very </u>similar to French. Ah, especially things like when, things like subjunctive and all that and conditional and all these tenses are exactly, pretty much the same as in French. And ah, and bit of English too, I see a lot of similarities too. (AS250-1)

- o French

In the same way, French received a lot of good reviews as an aid in studying Spanish.

Well, I find myself switching between the two languages quite a bit, and then just like grammatically, the structure of French is similar to that of Spanish, so those kind of made it easier to understand initially. So I kind of understand Spanish through a lens of French learning as well as English learning, so it kind of makes it easier, like looking at the origin of words. (EL200-2)

French does for sure, because it's really similar. (EL200-7)

Uh yah French influences a <u>lot</u> because the verbs um like the conjugation and things like that the um the format is the same… (EL200-8)

Uh the way- the way I went through school learning French, I went through French immersion, was by doing the same things by learning the verbs and learning all these things and doing the exercises and doing it- although I've spent thirteen years doing learning it rather than one, it's the same way of studying it so I was able to learn how to speak Spanish faster and like some of the grammar rules are similar so it just helps me remember them. (JL100-2)

I totally think that the French is like an asset, you look around the class and the people who speak French can just pick things up so much faster. It is sort of similar, like saber and conocer, I guess I can just associate a lot of things. (EG100-5)

Its more like I just think some of the French words are related to Spanish and if I know some of the French words it helps me if the Spanish words are the same, that sort of thing helps me out, like the word library the word is the same, but I don't have such a vast knowledge of French that it helps me a lot. (EG100-2)

I know for me a lot of French verb tenses are similar to Spanish so that helps me or I translate things into English to help me understand them in Spanish. (AS250-8)

The last quote was very interesting because it does not only draw on the structural, lexical and cultural similarities between Spanish and French, s/he also comments on how Spanish (the learning of another language) has helped him/her with another new language, German, through the learning of grammatical structures.

French helped a lot because I think French and Spanish are very similar. {I:Mhmm} And ah, I guess French helped – English… not really 'cause it's my mother tongue. You don't really learn rules and stuff with English {I: right}, but learning Spanish so recently has helped me with my German a lot. The languages aren't similar but the rules and the tenses, I'm <u>well</u> acquainted with them now. (AS250-6)

  o Romanian

This student, of Romanian origin, commented on how both her native language and French had helped

her through Spanish.

Well, haha, Romanian and French (conversation but I know about how Romanian is really close to span, they are both part of the 'romance languages', grammer, vocabulary are very close, some verb tenses, but mostly vocabulary is close to this student's native language. (SMR100-I)
I think that bc I learned french, (p) span was definitely a lot easier and it's a lot easier to understand compared to other languages (SMR100-I)

    o <u>Mohawk</u>

Perhaps s/he was one of our most interesting students because she was a native speaker of a native language.

But I'm just like oh hey I kinda know what they're talkin about ya know (laughs) like- but not really you know like sometimes I- it takes me awhile. Like in Mohawk it- I was able to pick up on Mohawk so fast like I don't know why that was it but um to learn Spanish now it's so hard for me like cuz it's just not taught the way I was taught Mohawk. (CD200-4)

She draws on her experience with Mohawk and finds it very difficult to study a language in a non-immersion environment and at such a fast pace. She would prefer more imitative activities, drills and a long time to acquire these structures. Her analytical abilities were not strong at the time and hence it was not easy for her to acquire a language that was taught in an unnatural environment. It is interesting to highlight at this stage that languages in the way they are taught can be closer to science disciplines than to the arts disciplines, under whose umbrella they are placed. Many languages are taught by deduction or induction plus the explanation and exposure to a few exceptions and recommended regular practice, in a trial-and-error basis, and not by repetition and immediate correction. Sometimes the Arts student does not develop through his/her academic studies the discipline and capability to analyze, practice and apply.

    ➢ Memorizing vocabulary and verbs

Memorizing is a challenge in every language, since we have to retain a large corpus of data. The learning

of vocabulary has been dealt with extensively in the literature about language learning because to this day it remains a challenge for both teachers and students, especially in a non-immersion environment.

(S) Um…Its sort of taught me how I need to go about learning a language, for me I really have to concentrate on vocabulary or else I can't do anything. (EG100-3)

It is very difficult for the human brain to retain information that we do not use on a regular basis. So students are forced to come up with or ask others for strategies to cope with this challenge.

The teacher one day said in class to like make little pieces of paper of the verbs and like tape them up all over your room or whatever… (CD200-5)

➢ Studying with other students

This pair of students developed a system of pair work that proved very successful and less time consuming.

Um...I study with another person, I go through all the uh, main aspects that were learned, the chapters, we make up tests for each other and find out where are weak parts are and then we focus on those spots and we do cue cards for the vocabulary. Then we make up rewards for getting so many of the vocabulary right. (EL200-10)

➢ Writing things down & extra practice

In the next quote, it is remarkable to see that the student had the initiative to create opportunities to enhance his/her learning.

I make notes, and then I go through all the chapters and summarize them and do extra exercises on my own outside of class. (EL200-9)

➢ Daily Linguistic Exposure

Even when we do not actively engage with a language, in terms of production, we are capable of

retaining a lot of information by the mere exposure to it.

Well when I was traveling I had a friend who was almost fluent in Spanish so I didn't really have to use my Spanish at all but I picked up a lot of stuff so now it sounds familiar. I don't speak Spanish but I listen to a lot of Spanish music and Spanish movies and that kind of stuff but I don't actively speak. (EG100-3)

➢ Review

This was one of the most interesting questions. We wanted to elicit information about how the students reviewed and prepared for tests. Repetition and writing things down were reviewing activities that seemed to prevail

Um I go over all the notes, I write them out again and then I write what the textbook has to say. And then since everything's in Spanish in the textbook I try to translate it a bit cuz I- I learn as well I said I'm better at reading it but still sometimes the vocabulary's a little more…difficult but I pretty much just write out the verb tenses over and over. (CD200-3)

I read over my notes over and over. And I write a list of verbs. (EL200-11)

Um, studying for tests I use, q-cards, like I put main grammer pts or vocab on q-cards and then I just keep flipping them, memorizing them that way. I'll also go over what we did in class. (SMR100-2)

Other students simply 'go over' the materials, without engaging in the production of any language utterances.

Skim over the textbook. Go over conjugations, Sometimes look over vocabulary. I can't really make myself study too much for a language.)EL200-5)

I go through the textbook, and I write all the irregulars. I go through the conjugations of verbs, and then I go through the conjugations for the irregulars. And that's pretty much it. (EL200-9)

Um, just like I would any other test I guess. I get the books out, and all the materials and just read over them, like I read over notes, I don't know, try and understand them as much as possible. (EL200-10)

Um, I read the book, because there is a lot of good stuff in it. I mean, I take notes in class but I find the book very useful, with its explanations. (JL100-5)

As we can see, there is a group of students who engage in a more passive (comprehensive) mode of review and others who engage in a more active (productive) mode. The majority combine these two. It still remains a challenge to find the best way of putting both modes together to make the most out of review sessions and materials.

➤ Overcoming obstacles

A new category or code that appeared in the interviews was the advice of this student about how to overcome the silent period and start speaking the language.

Start speaking. Just throw it out, and don't expect others to expect that you're going to do it right, just say whatever anyway, and if it's wrong then someone is bound to correct you , or there are just going to laugh and it will be fine. (EL200-9)

6.3.6. Space

From the beginning of this project, we were determined to listen to our students' voices, but we were also very focused on finding out what their responses were to the issue of space and how it influenced language learning. When we gathered so many quotes in the diaries about space and how it hindered or fostered their language learning opportunities, we decided to have more specific questions about this topic in the interviews.

➤ Space

o Circle

Circular class i think that's a big thing. Last year our classes were lie that so it's kind of strange that this year isn't ... um... yea... it's quite... i think it really blocks a lot of possible interactions between the students and it's even harder to understand people when they are talking 'cause they've got their backs to you. (AS250-1)

Mmm…I don't know if we could get more of like a circle kind of like one of the half circle classrooms like where the chairs are kind of almost facing each other {I- Mhmm, yah} I like those better, cuz I tend to pay attention more and like it doesn't really matter where you sit, you're always up front. Unless you sit way in the back but… (CD200-4)

I just felt more comfortable when we were sitting like around a table (CD200-2)

I like um…like sitting in circles, you know I don't like like the teacher's at the front and we're all there. (CD200-5)

Um, I like the way its organized in our classroom when everyone is sitting in a circle. But in one of our classrooms the desks get moved around and I think it is very important to be able to see everyone. (JL100-4)

Definitely circular classroom. Ah, I think it just makes you more attentive because could be- could be watching you or – and it's way easier to just have a conversation – it makes people feel more comfortable, I think. Ah, like I felt I knew most people to a certain degree in my class last year, and this it feels like I haven't even talked to half the people in the class because the way we're sitting, you know, you always sit back and everybody's got their backs turned to you so you don't make eye contact, so you don't probably have [?] and I think that's really…a shame. (AS250-1)

I think if was put in lines then…and more organized like that, it would feel more like high school.. (AS250-5)

If everyone was facing each other, like in a circle, I think that helps 'cause you can I dunno, I think we did that once and I realized it was a little bit easier, you know you can see who's talking – like sometimes when people are talking Spanish, I have to look at them to read their lips and like watch what they're saying so. (AS250-4)

Once again, most our students preferred a circular or square structure where everybody faces each other and are at the same level. They reasoned this preference in terms of: facilitating interaction and understanding of student utterances in the foreign language, creating a more comfortable and friendly atmosphere, minimizing distraction, fostering oral interaction and breaking patterns of their previous culture of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, we enquired about the 'ownership' of the space and the answers were all ambivalent, the students did not seem to mind a change of classroom as long as it was with the same people.

Do you think it would be helpful to be in the same classroom for every class?
250-64: Not necessarily. I think it's the people more than it is where you are. I liked seeing the same people every class. (AS250-4)

- o Classroom size

This student was commenting on the change of room. We changed from a huge, cold lecture hall to a teacher's office. It was a nice change of environment in terms of structure but a little inadequate in terms of size. This 'classroom' was only intended for a few people because we needed to break the group in two, but the timetable and the environment attracted more people from the other group and it required a strict policy of keeping a class record of who could attend this class in my office and who could not.

It needs to be bigger, is that what you mean?
I-   Yah, desks in a certain shape…
S-   It's quite nice the way it is now, with us all facing each other. It's kind of close but at the same time a little cramped. Everyone needs their own space to concentrate effectively. (EL200-10)

- o <u>Visuals</u>

In the interviews a new code showed up: students wanted to transform the physical space of their learning environment into something that helped them learn with the use of visuals.

Our classroom is a bit sterile, I like the windows, um, we need a lot more visuals, um, I love learning about cultures and I think that's a really great way, um, to, um, learn the language b/c that's where it

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stems from (p) so, if we had (p) I dunno, little things that help us, like, (p) like hands on stuff, like, instead of learning this is an apple from the book, show me an apple, that's really basic, but, yah. (SMR100-2)

- o <u>Air quality</u>

Finally, even though this is a recurrent pattern it rarely gets mentioned in the literature, students talked about the 'healthy' conditions of the space. A lot of our classrooms in third level institutions get little time for ventilation and, therefore, end up with very poor air quality, especially in the wintertime.

Well, I would first of all not put it in a bad air quality library room because it is really bad in our one class and give me headaches by the end of class so I stop paying attention. (JL100-5)

- ➢ Time

- o Class Duration

Lastly, students (and teachers) seem to believe that an hour was not enough and two hours was a little bit too long for the attention and concentration span for the cognitive activities that a language entails.

Especially if it is 2 hours, it should be more like 1 to 1 and a half hours for a language class! (JL100-5)

6.3.6 Teacher variables.

In order to finalize our description of the interviews carried out in this project, we will turn to look at the two teacher's interviews. The main teacher and the spoken tutor were interviewed by one of the research assistant, on her own initiative. We were not planning on carrying out teacher interviews for this project but when one of the research assistants suggested it, the research team decided it would be a nice point of view to include. There were two codes abstracted out of the teacher journal (and interviews):

- ➢ Motivation to be a teacher

Teaching is traditionally a vocational job. At the moment, it is not in most countries. More and more people are attracted to teachers' salaries and holidays, regardless of what the job may or may not entail.

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Our language instructor 'confessed' that she was not aware of having a clear motivation to be a teacher until she started teaching.

I started to work as a teacher and one day I realized I liked doing it. (Interview with Instructor)

➢ Teacher's awareness.

   o Teacher preferences

It was not only useful for the teacher to reflect upon her own preferences – and fears - but also to discuss them with her students. Once they were aware of the challenges that the teacher was facing, they seemed ready to help out and it fed back into their engagement.

I like teaching all levels of Spanish. It's true that I have a preference for first year (basic) and third or fourth years (advanced). The level I'm most insecure in is 200 and 250 (intermediate) but that is because normally the class is more heterogeneous. There are more levels in it than intermediate, you know what I mean? It's not so much because of the level of the content but the variety of levels and skills that the people have. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

   o Class rehearsal time

Another item that came up and was discussed was the fact that teaching the same class throughout the week to different groups influences the teaching of it. In other words, the last class is normally much better than the first because of the interaction with the students. From this interaction, materials are suggested and things have been tested.

But, ah, those two 100, what I normally do is have the same class…Do you know what I mean? {A: The same…} The same class is going to be the same kind of content and material {A: right} as it's going to be in the following one. {A: Right} So normally in, the first 100 group that has it in the week has it the worst. {A: [laugh}} Right? Because it's my first…try. So then from that group, I learn and I make changes…and changes through the week. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

o   Affect and relationships

Acknowledging the fact that relationships in the classroom affect us is the first step to engagement with the students.

It affects totally. {A: Umhm?} Totally. Like,..I mean…I have it very clear: we're humans, and so we are biased, we are preju-prejudice , we are happy to have support. I mean, affective [?] relationships influence me totally. Maybe I'm a weird case, I don't know, but ah, if some- if there's somebody you like in the class, if, ah, you have a crush on somebody in the class, if you don't- can't stand whatever stupid things this person says, it does effect you immediately and it can make you mad, it can leave you…very happy, it can make you very nervous, very self-conscience. So…you have to make an effort as a teacher to try to stop that...to a-a at least to affected it negatively. For example, it really helped me to have people that I like because it affected me positively (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

As a learner teacher, she realized that all the feedback she got from students affected her positively and negatively, and she had to work on a balance and to learn from both types of feedback.

A: Umhm} SO what ended up being, is whatever feedback I got from them, I really put it in, and I felt comfortable so that was good. But it really influenced me when at the beginning to have a couple of people that really bugged me. And it got me mad {A: Oh} with their commentaries and stuff like that because they were very insulting many times, and very…careless and very… teenage like, right? {A: Hmm} And I'm not used to that group, even though I like it, teaching. Ah, so , I had to work on, to… control and to stop how it was making me mad because it was affecting the whole classroom too. And that takes a bit of an adjustment. Ah, it's very difficult…not to respond. You know what I mean {A: Hmhm} and sometimes you respond well and sometimes you respond bad…Yeah. (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

o   Cultural aspects of teaching

The main teacher/researcher of this project found it especially difficult to adapt to the 'culture' of extensions in the Canadian university system or in this university specifically.

The other-other cultural thing I just remembered - {A: [laugh]} the extensions. Trent extension policy, I wasn't very happy about [laugh] {A: no? [laugh]} That was a cultural barrier. Yeah – so ex-extensions

are good, I don't think you should tell people in the university that they live in this bubble world, everything other…everything else that works in the real world is suspended because they're in university (Interview with the Teacher/Researcher)

*   *   *

Student- student interviews were a significant tool in the long run for this project. It was not just the answers that were provided in this format and the intelligent way in which the student research assistants developed these conversations. The rapport between students improved the quality of the interviews, the project and obviously, an improved classroom interaction. It was very enriching to open up this avenue for dialogue, as opposed to the traditional complaint between students in the corridor. These types of complaints do not normally go beyond those chats and they never reach the teacher – and if they do they normally take the shape of angry gossip Let us now turn our focus to the observations and the protocols of class observation that the research assistant carried out. We have included them after the journals and interviews. However, chronologically speaking, they started earlier in the project. They are snapshots into the reality of the classrooms that these students have been talking about in their journals and interviews and will contribute to a larger and more focused picture of their realities.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER

- Focused on the student questionnaires and interviews in order to identify the coincidences and differences between these forms of data elicitation and the student journals.

- As a consequence, it offered specific new codes derived from these questionnaires and interviews.

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[1] *Reasons: Clarification,*

[2] *It has a positive side to it.*

[3] *Combination of both: first Spanish,*

[4] *Discourages you to speak Spanish,*

[5] *Reasons: no-one is on the spot, and encourages participation,*

[6] *When you get them right they are ok. Some students expressed their uneasiness to get their answers wrong but said that they do help concentration.*

[7] In this category we have included the students that said that they had an ok relationship with their teacher.

[8] *Tries hard and she is approachable.*

[9] *She is scary.*

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[10] *The lack of interaction between the lab monitor and the students in the lab made their answers more reluctant. They suggested there was a clear difference between teacher/student barriers in the lab.*

[11] *If a teacher cares about you, you will be willing to put in work.*

[12] *If they are good they do not affect me, if they are bad they do. In a very interactive classroom it would have an effect but if the barrier is high normally it does not affect me,*

[13] *One of the students said she was sick of the classroom environment and just wanted to be immersed.*

[14] *Personally I do not want to be in a class. I do not have a clue sometimes, I feel discouraged because I do not feel I have improved, when I'm tired, stressful situation discourages her, the labs, I feel I'm the only one that volunteers information and it feels bad, I feel people are in a higher level than I am.*

[15] *Only mistake correction in class and results of compositions and tests, more notes in the compositions and essays and tests we are given back.*

[16] *Sometimes it's really encouraging and sometimes the opposite.*

[17] *Laughter, suggested more teacher/student feedback in the forms of chats twice a year or so.*

CHAPTER 7

Observations in the L.S.U.C. Project and ESL Classroom in a Secondary School

THIS CHAPTER …

- Describes the outcomes of the scheduled observations.

- Illustrates a completely different learning environment: An intercultural and multilingual ESL secondary school classroom.

- Classifies these outcomes with some of the codes derived from student journals and added in the interviews.

- Provides new insights through the specific codes dealt with as outcomes from these observations and the outsider point of view from the volunteering experience in the ESL classroom.

Observation proved to be the trickiest of the ethnographic tools to use. It was not surprising that the activity that most of us, as humans, carry out throughout our lives from our very specific points of view would result in a very slippery depiction of our project findings. Nonetheless, I decided to carry on and experiment with this new tool, knowing that I would not reach definite conclusions or scientific theories with it. I was aware of the potential that the tool offered for opening up dialogue and contrasting different opinions on identical situations or general events. We could safely say that from the main three tools I have used for this project (journals, interviews and questionnaires, and observations), observations were our playground, whereas I was aiming for a more accurate and scientific approach with the former two. This was possibly because I was very aware of the short time that we had for training, experimenting, reviewing and refining the use of this tool. There was no way to research, train in and design a systematic or series of systematic observations in less than six months. As I have already mentioned, though, I decided not to discard this tool completely and to try and understand what information it could offer us in a less systematic way.

With this naturalistic approach in mind, we had different protocols of observation. I have organized them in the following classification, ranging from less controlled to more controlled:

I) Carried out by students themselves in a quick retrospective glance on a single incident.

2) Carried out by the teacher/researcher working as a teacher's aide in a secondary school environment.

3) Carried out by student-assistants.

    a. Type A: Free style report.

    b. Type B: Sticking to a protocol.

    c. Type C: Recording with a camcorder.

7.1   Student Informal Observations: Carried out by students themselves in a quick retrospective glance on a single incident.

The first type of observation carried out in this project was an interesting exercise that another teacher had suggested to us. At the end of a class, the teacher gives all the students (without previous warning) a small piece of paper that says 'Briefly summarize what this class was about'. This type of observation and reflective exercise is designed to check that the communication is flowing between the participants in the classroom and to understand what kind of points of view are at play in your classroom. I only carried out this exercise one day in two different classes (100 and 200) because it was suggested to us at the end of our teaching innovation project, but we found it very beneficial and would recommend it, especially at the early stages of teaching a new group. What we noticed the most is that some students focused on the vocabulary covered and some focused more on the grammatical information. Only a few were completely comprehensive and included information on the free conversation happening between participants (which, in this case, was related to a test coming up and the final exam). In the second higher class, students talked about the materials as well as the subject matter, focusing on skills, rather than on grammatical content or points covered. The poor participation in an exercise like this (5 per cent in the 100 class and 55 per cent in the 200 class) also influenced our decision not to reduplicate this exercise, but we can draw a couple of interesting conclusions from these poor participation percentages. First of all, this exercise can be understood as way of testing the student's concentration and understanding, and therefore, the student may feel uneasy engaging with it for fear of being assessed. At the same time, it is a completely new way of assessment so they would obviously feel apprehensive about it. Secondly, while people that were in the 200 group were also first year, they had had more experience with Spanish, whether in previous classroom environments or in immersion, and therefore had more skills for talking about what they acquired in the language. Their confidence and their previous knowledge made them feel more at ease in this kind of exercise. We would suggest for any teacher or teacher trainee that would like to use this tool to its full advantage, that they prepare the class well in advance for it, perhaps carrying out partial exercises like it and talk-out-loud protocols in

the classroom. Teaching students to explain in their own words what they had learned in a lesson serves a twofold function:

> ➢ It promotes faster retention and understanding.
> ➢ It allows the teacher to check confusions and misunderstandings.

7.2   Teacher's Aid Informal Observations: Carried out by the teacher/researcher working as a teacher's aide in a secondary school environment.

The second type of observation I carried out was an informal set of reports while I worked as a volunteer teacher's aide in a secondary school in the same town where the Higher Education Institution was located. The background story to how I started helping out in this secondary school is as follows: In 2001, thanks to my background as an ESL teacher, I started to volunteer at the refugee and new immigrant centre in this town. Most of the other volunteers had no training as teachers or as language teachers, but were mainly native speakers and native Canadians. I offered my services as a non-native trained teacher, with interesting results. Most female – and some male - immigrants were more comfortable learning from me than my native peers, who were also male. There was the issue of identification and empathy. As a non-native newcomer to Canada as well, I had been on a similar boat to them on my journey to learn English. On the other hand, there was the issue of facilitation. Through the formal study of English as a foreign language and through the training as an ESL teacher, I had learned shortcuts, grammar bridges and explanations that I could share with them at that stage. These students of English were adult learners. Through her work as a coordinator of the centre, the main administrator alerted me to the issue they had with the children (of various ages) of these adult learners, especially at secondary school level. In their experience, they had found that the children who joined a primary school as a newcomer from another country - and most likely native speaker of another language - did not have as many difficulties as the children who joined a secondary school system in this town. It is important to remember that this town is a small to mid size town with far fewer resources to promote multiculturalism than a city like Toronto or Ottawa may have. At the centre, the coordinator had tried to establish a peer-help system in which children of the same native language from different years in secondary school helped each other with their subjects. In this way, bilingualism and academic success were promoted at the same time. However, the amount of languages present in the community and the lack of resources or - at times - the commitment by these teenagers made the task quite daunting for the coordinator of the centre. She was aware of the research project that I was

about to carry out in the local University and she suggested that I could try and work in the same way with the local secondary school that these children attended.

In this secondary school, the ESL classroom is a transitional open space, through which students go in order to join a mainstream classroom. Designed as sheltered instruction, it does not focus on language teaching alone. It develops meaningful instruction of content areas, in this case, Social Studies, Drama and Canadian History – which are needed to apply for resident status. This sheltered instruction, also known as SDAIE (Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English), is focused on students with a Limited English Proficiency (LEP) who need to achieve certain academic results as well as improve their English skills – some of them also come to the class with Limited Literacy skills. Several teachers and administrators worked with this varied group of students. There are also several teachers' aides that come and go intermittingly, as their commitment is on a voluntary basis or for the TESOL teaching program requirements.[1] The students themselves enter this classroom at very different stages and with radically different needs, and leave the classroom for two main reasons: to go back to their place of origin[2] as school-leavers[3] or to join their native English speaking peers in the mainstream classroom.

After a series of conversations that took place during the autumn, the substitute teacher at the time (the main instructor was on sick leave) invited me to a class in November. We outlined the approach that we would take and what my role would be. In other words, I discarded the possibility of carrying out a parallel project to the L.S.U.C. with student journals, interviews and observations. I made my first contact with the classroom on the November 20th, 2002 and then I decided I would only carry out some informal observations during the month of May, after settling into the classroom environment and understanding its dynamics a bit better. I also wanted to see the main instructor in action and the classroom in its 'normality'. I only attended this class on Mondays and Wednesday mornings, due to the time constraints that my full time job imposed.

The first meeting in November only served as a way of becoming aware of the teaching environment and the teaching activities of the class. I only kept a few scattered notes of it. I mainly noted aspects of:

> - Learning awareness

    o Novel Study.

In this ESL class, one activity seemed to rule most of the acquisition of English: Novel Study. The students read a novel together and they would have activities about it at different levels:

- Vocabulary.
- Use of Grammar.
- Cultural issues.
- Relevance.

They seemed to have a path described in terms on novels. If you finished all the activities related to one you could continue onto the next at your own pace. Thus, it was the student who defined the speed and rhythm of their learning, with a little encouragement from teacher and peers.

➢ Teaching Culture Awareness

o Environment.

The first thing that struck me, on the very first morning when I arrived in the school, was that as the clock ticked 8.45 a.m. the national anthem started to play. I found it interesting to see that all the students in the ESL class stood up and showed respect to the cultural instance but I wondered what they were thinking. It definitely surprised me that in a very multicultural environment within a multiculturalism act the national anthem was spoon-fed to all students in the morning.
I would not have been surprised to find this in a school in the U.S. but it was definitely unexpected in Canada. I talked to some of the students about it informally and they did not seem to find it strange at all so it could very well be that my cultural background was interfering in my judgment.

o Rapport and Collaborative environment.

On my very first visit to the class, I noticed that the substitute teacher had a good rapport with them. She shares her authority with the class and lets them work in a more collaborative way than I had witnessed before in my previous experiences of teaching and learning environments.

o Teacher's aide rapport.

The first few minutes of my presence in the class were very decisive. The substitute teacher introduced me as a university teacher, which at first I assessed as negative, only to find in the later months that a

lot of the students found it encouraging. Being a non-native speaker of English and an immigrant myself, some of the students sought sympathy and empathized with me instantly, mainly because I could speak a language closer to their own (French, Portuguese, Argentinean Spanish…), some of them because I came from the Mediterranean, some of them simply because they wanted to go to university and perhaps become teachers in the future. I was very affected by the situation. I notice in my notes that I was seeking approval both from the teacher and from the students. When I started to speak to introduce myself, I became aware that I was imitating the accent of the substitute teacher, possibly to be closer to her and to gain her favour, but immediately assessed it in my notes as a mistake because of the risk of distancing myself from the students.

- o Patience and flexibility.

She explained everything slowly and with simple structures. I noticed though that the substitute teacher took up most of the class time (45 minutes) in terms of participation. This became more noticeable when I re-joined the class in May and the main teacher was back. She usually let the students use their time in class for participation and questions while she remained more silent. There was probably an issue of teacher's confidence at stake here.

- ➤ Student Strategies.

- o Use of other languages.

If two of the students share a common language, they use it to explain to each other anything that one of them does not understand. The teacher allows them to use this method of peer-mentoring as well as their personal machine translators. A lot of the students carry one of these, especially those of Asian origin.

The main part of my observations was recorded in the form of a journal, which focuses on the period between May 1st, 2003 and June 17th, 2003. It was a very informal way of recording observations but as I said, we were not including this project as part of the main case study but simply as a fourth coordinate that would give us another perspective with which to approach language teaching and learning. It also gave us some insight into how ESL is carried out in the nearest secondary school to the higher education institution in which we carried out our study. Even though it cannot be claimed that all secondary schools in the area follow the same pattern, we can see how a specific teaching culture can

influence the preference of university language students later on in their degree courses. I will not include the journal in the appendix of this dissertation because it is not directly relevant for our study, but I will discuss the insights that I recorded in it to illustrate the issues that arose in the ESL classroom for this short period of time. The journal became a way to make me reflect about affective issues that guide my learning (as a student of teaching[4]).

- ➢ Awareness.

  - o Teaching culture awareness.

During my second session of observation and aiding in this class, I was still quite at loss about the students that needed to be in class and the role of the teachers, which heightened my awareness of the difficulty of 'acquiring' a different educational environment. INCIDENT: The fact that the Canadian History teacher explained how he did not mind eating and drinking in the class (it was commonplace in this classroom) as long as he was not talking at the same time made me wonder about how these agreements are achieved in a learning environment and if they are transparent enough.

  - o Clarity of tasks.

I have also realized through this exercise of observing other classes that we tend not to be very clear in the instructions and explanations of exercises, whether to students or to fellow teachers. In general, we take things such as terminology for granted. For example, on the third session that I attended, I was asked to help the students with writing and explain to them the rules of paragraph writing. As I had no idea what the teacher's expectations and standards were on these rules, I was at loss as to where to start. That day, the teacher was clearly very busy and I did not attempt to ask her for a further explanation of the task.

On my fifth session, we had another incident of this kind related to themes and webs of themes in a chapter. These activities belong to clearly defined schedules and tasks within this teaching method and they need to be clarified for outsiders.

- ➢ Affect.

  - o Anxiety and Stress.

I have used an example of an incident in the language classroom to illustrate this category. INCIDENT: On my fourth session, I worked with a female Japanese student outside of the classroom. I started to perceive that students thought of this 'away' time as a punishment. They preferred to be in the main class with everyone. I was supposed to make her talk about the play that they had gone to the day before because she has a lot of difficulties with oral expression, especially because she is very shy. It took a while to break the ice but by volunteering information about my place of origin I got her to talk about hers. Our conversation diverged a little from the play but she started to talk about differences between schools in Japan and Canada. The interaction between both of us and the authentic attempts at communication solved most of the issues in terms of understanding and interaction. I enjoyed the exchange and she seemed more confident in talking towards the end of the session.

> ➤ Classroom dynamics.

>> o Rapport and disruption.

The first thing that happened as I joined this class as a teacher's aide again in March was an obvious disruption to the classroom dynamics. Some students who had been there in November, quickly acknowledged me and welcomed me into their environment, but there were new people who were not so readily friendly. The main teacher decided to use my help as a peer-support reader for their novel study, floating around the class or working with an individual student to help him/her complete the task at hand, or with their Canadian History classes. Canadian History classes are very important for ESL students, especially for those who want to apply for citizenship. There is a test that people applying for resident status need to take. In this test, there are several questions on Canadian cultures and history.[5] Their history teacher had no background in ESL and the main teacher was happy to use my background to support this teacher. I am not sure, because I did not explore the issue any further, how this measure was received by the history teacher, who also happened to be the father of an acquaintance of mine. In any case, the way that the main teacher used my help and the way the history teacher did were significantly different. In the main ESL class, I was more a teacher's aide, only intervening when a student required help. In the history class, the teacher treated me more like another student asking me questions or requesting my help to re-explain something that he thought the students had not understood. The dynamics in the classroom and the displacement of the responsibility for ensuring learning clearly differentiated both experiences.

- ○ Interaction.

The most positive feature in this class for me was the interaction between students and between teachers and students. One of the things that became quite clear to me was that sometimes teachers and schools are not sufficiently transparent about the role of their staff. In this class, apart from the main teacher, there were several teacher aides, student aides and other members of staff coming and going at different times, and I wondered if the students understood their role in their class and in their school. It was certainly not clear to me. In fact, since our role seemed to change from time to time[6], it was very confusing for the students to understand what level of authority and empathy we had with them. In the Canadian history class, the teacher normally retains the control of the task and the talk. He is very endearing, friendly, funny and dynamic and students trust him.

- ○ Student interaction: groups.

There is a group of around thirteen Eastern Asian students who stick together with another white girl whose origins I do not know. Then, there are two Somali girls who always work with a girl from the Dominican Republic, another girl from Argentina, another from Albania, and yet another from Iraq and, finally, one from Afghanistan. There is also a girl from Afghanistan who takes some classes in mainstream and comes and goes from the ESL class, working as a peer helper from time to time. There is a clear gap between these groups, even physically, and also a clear gap between the females and the males in the class. The people in the middle - a male from India and a male from Somalia - act as a bridge. They are quite shy.

Now this was the case within their class, but in my seventh session I witnessed another type of segregation. In this session, the ESL classes were put together with the drama class but they kept completely separate from each other. Only the Argentinean girl and the Indian guy made a contribution. Later on, when we came back to the ESL class, the next session was more informal and the group seemed to have eased their internal separation after having been exposed and confronted with the drama class group. During the eighth session, the ESL and drama group were working together again. Their main differences had eased a bit and there were people from both sides trying to interact with the others and taking risks. There was more choral exercise work this time and people were more willing to participate than when they had to offer individual answers. The class dealt with issues about war and Israel and Palestine. It made me wonder if the topic was the most appropriate, given the sort of

ESL class that was involved, in order to talk and foster their intercultural skills. However, I do not think that celebratory multiculturalism fosters any kind of exchange either.

      o   'Threatened' Teachers.

A few comments offered by some of the teachers[7] made me think that my presence in this classroom and in the school had posed a 'threat' to some of the staff. At the beginning, when I approached the school, some people seemed quite resistant to accept help from someone working in the university. I wonder if it is a trait of the teaching job to be so unconfident in our own teaching strategies, because I would certainly feel at least suspicious and nervous at the beginning.

      o   Absences.

In this class, there were a lot of absences. During my fourth session, after they had taken a trip to a theme park, I realized that a lot of students were erratic in their attendance. However, this was taken for granted and the main teacher never made a big deal about it.

      o   Group work.

In my fourth session, during the Canadian History class, they were given a group task to understand how recession and food prices affected a family during the 1920s. Group work takes longer and the problem is that normally the sessions we plan and the time that we can invest on a task are not nearly long enough to let the rich exchange and deep considerations happen. Also, the element of student social interaction in the groups during group work seems to have a bad agenda and it is discouraged in spite of the benefits in the long run that it purports to student learning.

      o   Atmosphere.

During my sixth session, or week, there was a test in the first session. The main teacher required the help of the teacher's aide during the test because she needed to be at a videoconference elsewhere. The test was on the novel they were reading and I was asked to work with the Somali girl to help her with understanding the questions and deciding the pace she needed to complete the test instead of wasting too much time on a few questions. The test was by no means quiet. There were lots of visitors to the class, even a radio reporter who wanted to arrange an interview with some of the students for later.

Some students did not appreciate the fact that I was helping one student but not all of them. The competitive nature of a test was present even in a class like this, in which everyone is considered at their own level and pace. I was not allowed to help specific students who are supposed to be at higher level but that were known to ask for help to facilitate their task. The class structure and seating arrangement had been changed for the test.

- o   Interaction with Teacher aide.

Towards the last week of this period — I attended every day at that stage, to make up for the week that I had been sick — most of the students were very comfortable with me. They did not see me as an authoritative figure or in any way related with the school, so they did not feel threatened. Towards the end of my experience in this secondary school, I became close with the Argentinean girl and I realized how easy it is to ignore other students when good interaction with some of them flows so well.

In general, I developed an affective relationship with all of them for having been part — a minimal part — in their achievements. Another main positive feature of the school that I found is that teachers and students celebrated their achievements during the last week of classes together.

- ➢   Teaching Methods.

- o   Collaborative Teaching throughout the school.

The main teacher informed me that this year they have chosen the topic of peace and antiracism to work through the school and they have been working with the drama teacher about how to put this into acting. For this project, Canadian students and ESL students have been working together sharing their stories dealing with these two issues.

- o   Student-Related.

On the first day of my arrival, a very interesting activity was announced throughout the school. In order to facilitate exchange between Canadians and non-Canadians, students were asked to sign up for language exchange. The non-Canadian would teach their native language and in return the Canadian would help them with their English. INCIDENT: The students from Québec offered their help immediately but the main teacher discarded their offer on the basis that this language is taught at the

school. This was not the first time that Québécois students were segregated from a generalized class activity.

      o   Focus on Student Production.

Another of the main positive features that I learned about the way ESL was taught at this specific school was the focus on student production. During the few months I was at this secondary school, the main teacher focused on reading and speaking because she said they had been working on writing and listening a lot in their first few months of mainstreaming. During the first session I observed, students read aloud letters that they had written about a film on Afghani people living in Iran.

      o   Rushing through.

During the second visit to the school, when I stayed for first and second periods, I became very aware of what rushing students to keep up with an externally imposed pace creates. I do it all the time in my own classes because I'm too aware of curriculum requirements and time constraints. Throughout this period, she ignored her small daily rituals and made sure the students checked to see if they were keeping up with the rest of the class. She checked where they were in the book they were reading and rushed on. She asked me to help with one of the Korean students, who was behind in the book, and we went to the corridor to work on this. In the corridor, there were very uncomfortable chairs and the boy was walking with crutches due to a leg injury. On my fifth session, I also realized that when I lack time to explore an issue, I tend to give answers to my students instead of letting them find them by themselves. This observation and reporting exercise proved most valuable for the evaluation of my own teaching techniques, much more than the assessment of others.

      o   Monolingual explanation of vocabulary and negotiation of meaning.

I helped the Korean student and one of the Somali students (who also has a hearing aid) with vocabulary in the book. I became aware of the difficulty of explaining some words. The Korean students wanted to understand the word 'slave', which was not very difficult, but the Somali student failed to understand the words 'to trace' and 'route', which were a bit more difficult to explain without the use of a bilingual dictionary.

o Awareness of student difficulties.

In my second visit, the main teacher alerted me to the fact that she had uncovered a difficulty in the letters that the students had written during the previous session: run-on sentences. She dedicated the whole next few sessions to solving this issue and teaching them strategies to deal with it.

o Watching movies.

The second period of the second session I observed was the Canadian History class. The teacher brought 'bowling for Columbine' into the class. Some students were talking about the movie and asking questions about it as it played, some other people were puzzled by it and some other people did not engage with it at all, instead they were doing their homework.

o Fiction in History teaching.

I found the history teaching method of using fiction and other forms of writing or film very interesting because it engaged the students in discussions about particular events and how these events are portrayed. However, the Argentinean girl in this class became very vocal about the fact that she disapproved of this method of teaching. She did not see the point and expressed her opinion to me in Spanish. I did not second her opinion but did not criticize it either. She had been approaching me in the last few sessions and I think the fact that I just listened to her complaints and did not comment on them increased the ease with which she felt she could communicate with me. She made the comment while I was interacting with the history teacher during his last session, in which the students were doing group work (activities? To avoid repetition with the 'work' the teacher is involved in. Alternatively have the teacher doing 'research' rather than work?). He is involved in very interesting work that deals with social strategies and documentaries. I wondered if he had an issue with listening, which made me question if I had an issue with listening.

o History lectures.

In the 8th session, the Canadian History period was a much more lecture-type session and lots of students seemed to get lost. Their strategy to cope with this situation was to copy from the blackboard.

➢ Student Strategies.

   o Visuals.

INCIDENT: At the beginning of my teacher aiding in this class in autumn, I had started to work with an older male student from Afghanistan. Since his English proficiency was very limited, he used the resources in the classroom to keep a conversation with me about his home town and the place where he used to live – a topic generally taboo and that as a teacher's aide in this 'interesting' learning environment we were encouraged not to ask about. This student initiated the conversation about this topic and I called the attention of the main teacher about it discreetly, and in the same way, she approved of it. We started a game in which I would teach him how to say the things he pointed at in English and he would make me repeat them in Arabic. He found it hilarious because my pronunciation was definitely worse in Arabic than his in English. We continued with this game for a few days.

When I came back into the ESL classroom in the spring, he had been assigned to an older teacher aide from central Europe. Due to the difficulties in keeping his attention on one task, she would take him away from the classroom and work with him elsewhere for most of the morning. He did not seem too pleased about this apartheid and eventually left the school.

   o Cheating/undermining authority.

During and after a test, one of the Somali girls, who always seemed quite strategic, tried to get answers and help from me in any way possible as well as try to get the test after it had been handed in so that she could finish it up in the next period (Canadian history).

➢ Space.

   o Furniture, items and seating arrangements.

I remember that the first thing that struck me was the physical organization of this classroom. It stood apart because it had a freer structure and more pastiche air than the others. The blackboard is at the front but the teacher's desk is opposite it, at the back of the class behind everyone else and cornered away to the left as you enter the classroom. Everything looks disorganized, especially because of the abundance of language resources: bilingual, monolingual and picture dictionaries mainly, but also games such as scrabble and the stoke market. There are also a couple of computers connected to the internet.

Some of the students come early in the morning or stay during recess or lunch break because they do not have the internet at home. There are several posters and signs made or brought by the students and teacher in their own languages or in English. The teacher has brought in posters on world issues, such as peace or community building. There are two big blackboards, a T.V., a slide projector and a VCR. There is also a speaker through which announcements are broadcast before classes and right after the national anthem or to call someone to see the principal.

The classroom has a lot of light with big main windows that look onto the rooftops of the school building and other local houses.

The main teacher informed me that it is her preference for students not to sit with someone that speaks their same language, but she does not enforce it every day. She merely encourages it or observes when it is happening too often and intervenes. This encourages them to use English as their means of communication and also allows them learn intercultural strategies unconsciously.

Summing up, my short experience as a class aide and observer at this secondary educational institution was very positive at all levels. It provided me with a different point of view and it enriched my experience as a teacher and as a person, granting me a new perspective on teaching. It allowed me to recognize myself in some of the methods and attitudes but also to compare my methods and attitudes with the ones of the teachers in this class in order to understand what works best in each situation. The first thing that struck me was the positive influence of the flexible and creative space that the teachers and students shared. The classroom did not feel like a classroom but more like a 'student bedroom' or a study room. The instances of student work on the walls and doors, the presence of resources in the shape of reference books, fiction, T.V., flashcards and games gave a sense of ownership to both teachers and students. They also ate and had a microwave in the class so the classroom sometimes became their shelter from the rest of the school or a place where they came to rest, to check their email in the common computer or to do their homework when no class was happening in the room. The fact that several teachers and students used the room regardless of their level and their subject made their roles more flexible and the situation more real. The subjects are linked by their target language but they have also made an effort to link other subjects that some of the students in the ESL class take by using topics like 'peace and antiracism' throughout their curriculum. This flexibility of roles and ambiguity of status of teachers and students promotes more autonomous and independent learning.

In terms of their method, what struck me the most was their focus on reading and literacy skills. The use of the whole language instead of focusing on discreet grammar points enhanced the fast pace of

student learning that happened in this classroom. I also discovered the power of monolingual explanations for certain grammar points or structures and the difficulty to come up with a correct, clear way to communicate these explanations. The challenge was a very interesting exercise for me as a teacher, especially when trying to explain the meaning of certain words. For this, I also found very useful the presence of several visual dictionaries that helped communication amongst the members of the class.

The interaction between these young students was also interesting in the sense that they looked for shelter amongst people with their own language, using peer help in this way. There also seemed to be a gender barrier in the class, but it was not hostile.

Taking the observer role, I became very aware of a few things that I do in my own teaching, probably still to this day: the effect of a fast pace, the different levels of clarity, the difficulty to overcome the silent period, the strong influence of an inspector's culture behind observations. As we will see in the next section, students comment on the fast pace of classes from time to time. Curriculum constraints and benchmarking force students and teachers to follow a pace that is not natural or feasible. This pace is sometimes beneficial to students who respond to prompting and make an effort outside of class to keep up with the pace of the class. Other times it provokes disengagement and frustration, as we will see. When I took the back seat in these classes, I had the opportunity to become more aware of the effects of a fast paced class in teacher and students and also to become more alert to the signs of the change of pace or the warning signals from the reaction on the students' faces. Pace, though, is a highly individualized concept and in groups as big and as diverse as this one, it is not easy to gauge what a standard pace is for everybody.

Clarity is also very different for everyone, but as an observer I became more aware of the non-verbal signals students give to the teacher when an explanation or the instructions of an exercise are not clear at all, or when parts of it are not clear. The challenge now remains to come up with ways in which to find strategies to clarify and, as it were, dissect the obscure parts of every exercise instruction or explanation.

Through the individualized work I did with the Japanese ladies, I became highly aware of how difficult it is to overcome the silent period of language learning, and how this is more so in some cultures. So again, the challenge would be to find strategies to instigate students who get stuck in the silent period

for longer than others to use the language, to force them to interact confidently and in such a sheltered way that they will not want to shut themselves up in their silent peephole ever again.

Finally, the aspect I became most aware of through my observations in this class was the strong influence of an inspector's culture behind the activity of observation. Being observed is not only a matter of peer pressure or shyness or emotional anxiety, in the teaching world it carries a profound stigma of professional assessment and judging, and it is very difficult to accept it without the fear of being undermined. The presence of an observer, whatever the background and the nature of their activities, makes the teacher feel on the spot, scrutinized for assessment purposes. In my case, my role as an observer came as part of my identity as a Ph.D. student so it was not under my remit to judge or to assess teachers' methods or behaviour. Quite the opposite, I wanted to become aware of other methods used and teacher attitudes that could help me to enhance my teaching and my learning. In spite of the fact that this issue was explained and repeated to the teachers in diverse formal and informal chats with them in and out of the classroom, this reassurance never fulfilled its purpose completely in the sense that the fear and anxiety never left the teaching environment when I was there. The students grew quite comfortable with my presence in the classroom but the teachers never quite got used to it, in spite of the fact that I was introduced mainly as their teacher's aide and that my observations were only informal notes for myself. It seems ludicrous for teachers to promote peer learning amongst their students in an environment in which most of us cannot enrich our teaching practice by benefiting from a peer-observer in the classroom.

7.3   Student Research Assistant Observations: Carried out by the project's student-assistants.

In the last ten years a boom has been registered in observation studies. In June 2011 a Google search for 'observation protocols' gave 166,000 results and a 'language classroom observation protocols' search gave 128,000 results. Even though some of these results are overlapping or deal with the same protocol, this shows how protocols have sprung up left, right and centre. The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project that is developing in New York, offers five protocols:

1. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) at the University of Virginia.
2. The Framework for Teaching (FFT) developed by Charlotte Danielson.
3. The Mathematical Quality of Instruction (MQI) developed at the University of Michigan and Harvard University.

4. The Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation (PLATO) developed at Stanford University.

5. The Quality Science Teaching (QST) developed at Stanford University.

This plethora of observation protocols did not exist when I started this project in 2002. They were probably in the making. They are highly technical and their classifications and categories are very useful. In our case, the team of observers and teacher/researcher decided to approach observation in a less restrictive way. As I have mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, I was not interested in the use of observation as a scientific tool for eliciting data that needed to be crosschecked with the data in the diaries and interviews. We wanted to use observation as another means to get student feedback about a class in question and to be able to extract from it the issues that seemed more relevant to students. The most adequate of these five modern protocols to our study would be the PLATO. We would like to acknowledge that it is a very thorough observation protocol and we found the sub-classification of the intellectual challenge category very interesting and useful, specifically: tasks that require higher intellectual challenge linked to analytic or inferential thinking and tasks that require lower intellectual challenge linked to recall or rote thinking. All the details of this observation protocol can be found in their website.[8]

In the meetings held previous to the start of the observations, I gave them simple guidelines. I wanted them to come into a class that I had assigned them and observe how the class was taught and how to improve it. In other words, I wanted the observers (also called before research assistants) mainly to observe me and criticize me in a free style of observation. Some students had used observation protocols before and asked me to provide some. In their learning process throughout this project, they decided it would be useful for them to add a new skill to their experience. We looked in the literature and on the internet and found the following observation protocols (see appendix for more details):

1. Chaudron's Features and Types of Corrective Reactions in The Model of Discourse.

2. COLT category of definitions.

3. Embryonic Category System.

4. Flint System.

5. FOCUS.

6. Interaction Analysis. Sinclair and Coulthard's system of analysis.

In the end, in spite of our search for more controlled methods of observation, it is worth noting that out of the six research assistants only one of the girls decided to use one. She used FOCUS (included at the end of this chapter.) We will deal with her observations separately and report the results from the free style student observations below.

Years after we carried out these observations, I had the chance to study a bit more about the topic thanks to the pilot project for the postgraduate professional programs in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, provided by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at the National University of Ireland, Galway, where I currently carry out my teaching and research activities. I found a very useful book, previously quoted in this thesis called *Doing your Research Project*. In this book, Bell has designed an observation studies checklist that we would have found incredibly useful at the time I designed our innovation project (Bell, 1987, pp. 99-100). I have decided to offer it at this stage for two main reasons. Firstly, it will allow others interested in carrying out observations to approach them in a more systematic manner from the beginning. Secondly, I have used and reorganized her proposal in stages that I have come up with in order to explain incidents as reported by our research assistants.

Stage Zero. Obtaining Permissions (OP).

1. Request permission. Clear official channels and also discuss what is involved with individuals concerned (e.g. the teacher, chairman, etc.) (Bell, 1987, p. 99).

Bell includes this point as number 5. To our knowledge, it is the first activity that a researcher needs to carry out. If permissions are not granted and the activity cannot be carried out, there is no point in preparing and spending any time for the next stages. As I have already mentioned in Chapter Three, permissions are a thorny issue because sometimes they are very meticulous and sometimes they can be very easy to provide. It is also very important that we need several permissions for the same situation: the institution's – and sometimes even the governing bodies under which this institution works - the teacher's, the students' – and if these are underage, we may also need parental or tutor's permission. It should also be borne in mind that due to the long list and variety of processes for permission granting, this could be one of the most time-consuming stages of any project.

In our case, as I have previously discussed, it involved clearance with the ethical committee for research on humans of the institution where the L.S.U.C. project was carried out. In the case of the secondary

school I have previously discussed, the procedure for obtaining permissions went on longer than the project itself and therefore I could not reduplicate the same study we did in the higher education institution (L.S.U.C.) in the secondary school, which was originally our intention. Throughout this process we found that the main resistance to participate in observations came from the teachers themselves. This is an issue that has been absent in the research literature on teaching and learning, but is probably related to the culture of inspectors' observations and could lead the way into new lines of study about teacher's stress.

Stage One. Previous Meetings (PM).

2. Decide what you need to know. List all topics/aspects about which information is required.

3. Consider why you need this information. Examine your list and remove any item that is not directly associated with the task.

4. Is observation the best way of obtaining the information you need? Consider alternatives.

5. Decide which aspects of the lesson/meeting/event you need to investigate. Are you particularly interested in content, process, interaction, intervention – or something else? (Bell, 1987, p. 99)

Stage Two. Training to Observe (TO).

6. Devise a suitable grid, checklist or chart. Consult published examples and adapt where necessary.

7. Pilot your method and revise if necessary. Memorize categories. Devise your own system of shorthand (symbols, letters, etc.). Practice recording until you are confident you can cope.

8. Prepare carefully before the observation. Draw a plan of the room, indicating seating arrangements and layout. Make sure you have enough copies of grids or checklists. Consult minutes of previous meetings, agenda, scheme of work, etc. (p. 99)

Stage Three. Observation Day/s (ODs).

9. Discuss where you will sit with the teacher or chairman and agree how you are to be introduced. You want to be as unobtrusive as possible. Exactly where you sit will depend on your own preferences and the views of participants.

10. Don't forget to thank the people who have allowed you to observe. You may need their help again. (p. 100)

Bell situates this point as the last one. I agree that it is very important to thank the people that have helped in the report of the project but since most of them are not a likely audience for an academic paper, it is important to remember to thank them as soon as we have finished our observation activities.

Stage Four. Writing the Report (WR).

11. Consider what you will do with the information. Is it likely to produce anything of interest? Will the data be sufficiently complete to enable you to come to any conclusions?

12. Remember that no grid, however sophisticated, will tell the full story. Try to place the event in its organizational/curricular context.

13. Analyze and interpret the data. Actual statements about what has been observed are only part of the task. Consider what the facts indicate or infer. (p. 100)

Finally Bell situates our number 11 in number 7. I agree that even from earlier stages, the researcher and the observer have to bear in mind what this information is going to be used for at a later stage, but it is even more crucial to remember the purpose of the observation at the time of writing the report. This purpose will determine format and delivery of the information.

This breakdown of the stages of observation would be incredibly helpful for us in planning and carrying out future observations. There are, however, constraints and limits. In our case, in stage two I had to monitor and control the information that I gave to the research assistants so that it would not defeat the purpose of the 'freer' observation style. I had several topics or aspects of the classroom in mind when I started this project. Because of my teaching style, these can be central or essential to me as a teacher but as a researcher I wanted the research assistants to tell me what they found useful and

essential, rather than guiding their observations. I was more interested in what they could come up with themselves than what I, or the academic literature, could tell them. I was not naïve enough to think that these students were approaching their observations with a *tabula rasa,* mind free of prejudice and presuppositions about the incidents that they were going to observe. They had been studying Spanish for a number of years and as such they had built up expectations and knowledge about what works and what does not work in a language classroom. They had also been working for this research team for a few weeks already and had read some of the diaries and talked to me formally and informally about this research project, so they definitely had pre-conceived ideas before entering the observation scenarios, but I wanted to see what they understood by 'observation' and what they noticed and assessed as positive or detrimental in the classroom as they watched it. Some students had already made up their minds that they were going to focus on the use of Spanish or first language in the classroom and the interactions between the participants in the classroom, and their observations were mainly geared towards these topics before they carried them out (see CD-ROM with primary sources).

7.3.I.   Type A: Free style report.

The first thing that I noticed about free style student observations was that most of the students commented on the gender make-up of the room and the number of students attending. We have not included here all the instances or comments about this aspect of the classroom because it would make the reading of this chapter quite tedious. We have just included some illustrative quotes from the observations. The full text of these observations as well as the diaries and interviews can be read in the CD-ROM accompanying this volume. They focused on the (I.) distribution of people, so they took a lot of notes about the (2.) space - in comparison to the interviews or diaries where students did not comment at length about the specifics of the physical distribution of the classroom, even though they did raise the importance and the impact that space had on their learning.

> ➢ Observers[9] seemed to be interested in the quantity and quality of students and in the substandard, rigid structures of their learning environments.

There was no natural lighting and the many cement pillars in the room blocked a number of people from the teacher's view $(200 - 2)$[10]

The students were also seated very far apart, making it difficult for them to interact with one another. $(200 - 2)$

11 Students in a very cramped class. (200 – 4)

One student is sitting on the floor working on other homework. (200 – 4)

Physical structure of class is a broken rectangular shape, however not enough room for all to fit so some students are relegated to the outskirts of the room, classroom very scattered (100 -4)

> ➤ They also talked about how students grouped themselves in the class.

Students sitting all the way at the back in a way informs the teacher on a student's interest level or willingness to learn, if they are way at the back it is as if they make a conscious choice to separate themselves from the class, to remain on the outskirts. But at the same time, because of how the class is set up some students have to sit at the back of the class, in terms of space, so they are put at a disadvantage. The teacher may not be able to interact with them as closely simply because they are further away, their comments may not be heard, and they end up interacting with each other more than anything which can be detrimental to their learning. So perhaps a new class structure might be helpful, one that is more inclusive and promotes equal participation and interaction. Although it may be the student's responsibility to participate and take an active role in their education, creating an environment that encourages student engagement in every way may make this easier. (100 – 1)

I found it very interesting that this student points out how the fact that the class space is limited forces some people who may arrive later to take the 'worst' seats, even though they may have had all the will in the world to participate at first.

The class was divided up in to 2 groups of two, 1 of three and 1 of six. Instructions for the exercise were written on the board and gone over verbally. The groups were very quiet; there did not seem to be much discussion between group members. The group of 6 was uncomfortable and did not know what to do; they were sitting in a row, making it difficult for the students to converse with each other. Eventually, though asking each other, they figured out what to do and began work. They continued to be very quiet, occasionally asking each other questions. One girl on the end of the table was excluded. The group of 3 actively discussed the assignment, all participating equally. The two pairs did not seem as enthusiastic, and one member eventually just put his head down on the desk and appeared to sleep. (200 -5)

The students seemed to be divided into two halves – talkative/participatory (A) on one side and quiet (B) on the other. (200 – 2)

In the case of the observer of the higher intermediate class, she/he went on to pose questions about how the space may be shaping student participation and whose responsibility it is to change these physical structures.

The physical structure of the class has a huge effect on the dynamics of the class as well, how much people participate, who participates and who might feel more involved in the class. In other words the way the desks are arranged, where the teacher stands etc. determines who is an active participant in the class and maybe getting the most out of it. The back row is like an independent group on its own, slightly distanced from the rest of the class. They more frequently depend on each other rather than refer to the teacher; does this have a negative influence on the quality of their learning? Is it the teacher's responsibility to come up with an effective classroom set up or is it the student's responsibility to choose a seat they know will maximize their learning? (250 – 1)

The most striking advantage of being able to use the third point of view of a student observer in my class was to notice these features and these patterns straight away. Having someone else who can spare the time to think about a class right after it has happened, instead of rushing to the next one and then to corrections and administration. It was a privilege to borrow a fresh pair of eyes that wanted to improve the situation for themselves and their classmates, and could take in such level of detail even in a very informal manner.

➢ The observers advocated for the circle as the optimum structure.

Entire circle participating, a chance for everyone, no more 'front row, back row' dynamic (100 – 4).

The class formation seems to have completely changed the dynamics of the classroom. Class atmosphere and feel is completely different from the previous observation. The circle seems to level everyone off, including the teacher who is no longer at the front dictating to the class but sitting amongst the students. The circle seems to discourage people from talking. In a way it forces them to participate because everyone can see each other and it is harder for students to wander off into their own worlds when they are facing their classmates and teacher in a circle, they cannot hide in the back. (100 -4)

Compared to the last observation done in this class, it was hard to believe it was the same class. Participation levels were high, teacher student interactions were very positive and observed interactions between students did not involve negative comments about the class (100-4).

On the other hand, they also seemed to comment several times on the speed of the class and they seemed to put it down to curricular and time constraints.

The pressure of this seems to form the mood of the teacher; it creates an imbalance in terms of how much must be covered by the teacher and how much students can participate. (100 -4)

The class was doing trying to finish an exercise out loud at the end of class, people kept giving wrong answers but there were no explanations as to why they were wrong due to time restraints. Teacher seemed a bit frustrated at the end of class because some students seemed a bit lost however there was not time to address their problems. (100 -4)

They even tried to explain why there was a faster pace at times and how it affected student learning.

There were so many outside factors that seemed to affect this class (time pressure, time of year, stress levels of everyone) making it very out of the ordinary and not exactly accurate in terms of research. (100 - 4)

There was something else one of the observers pointed out that the others had not, which I found very interesting: s/he mentions the information that s/he felt s/he had just by entering the room.

Could feel different social groups as soon as I entered the room, before teaching started, observed different confidence levels before the class started. (100-2)

It is interesting to notice how a student with little or no experience of teaching suggests that before starting the lesson, a single look can give her some information about how to approach the class and what kind of interactions are happening at that very moment. It suggests that teachers may use these informal and instantaneous observation skills all the time to adjust their methods or their class plans to the variables at play in every class.

They also seem to specify (3.) class activity, describing it in detail. A summary of the class activities in the three groups that were observed goes as follows:

1. Correcting homework.
2. Video – fast.
3. Introduction of a new grammar concept.
4. Hand-out with a summary of previous grammar concepts.
5. Optional bonus marks assignment. *People who remembered to bring flyers to class- to learn different types of food- were given bonus points- therefore, if you show you interest, you are rewarded* (100 -2)
6. Group work.
7. Games.
8. Teacher goes around offering individual help.
9. Diagrams or visual aids as an explanation on the board.
10. Assignments and practice followed by correction.
11. Goes around the classroom when doing exercises from the book or practice: *I notice a student who hadn't done the homework counting down the line to see which question he will be asked and preparing an answer for that question.* (100 - 6)

A lot of teachers have problems with the habit of students to try to do well. I have no problem with it as long as they are following what their classmates are doing and attempting it too. The problem lies in the fact that not everybody works at the same speed and some students need more time than others to come up with an answer and to understand what they did or did not do.

In relation to the class activity, one observer (200-2) seemed to notice that whereas the highly participating students seemed strong in the skills of speaking and conversation, grammar exercises were the strength of the more passive students in that class.

They also talked about (4.) the methods and activities in class in relation to the teacher and student behaviour:

- Teacher
  1. S/he goes around the room asking for answers.
  2. S/he asks for volunteers.

3. S/he repeats and is attentive to student responses.

4. S/he clarifies points.

5. S/he reiterates instructions at the beginning of a class for latecomers.

6. S/he sometimes forgets to give the page number, leading to confusion and lack of engagement.

7. S/he tries to include everybody present in the class. *The teacher continued to ask late comers to participate, which often slowed the exercise down since the student didn't know what was happening; this usually required yet another explanation.* (200 -5) *The teacher uses rounds for participation, everyone has a chance to say one word from vocabulary list* (100 -4)

- Students

1. They ask for more time and offer disclaimers about performance.

2. They have high degree of participation and volunteering, though same students volunteering all the time.

3. They work in pairs helping each other out

4. They sometimes start asking questions in Spanish.

5. They start asking more questions and answering in Spanish towards the end of the year.

6. They want to leave as soon as possible.

This last point is one of the most interesting student behaviours I had noticed even at tertiary level. I am not sure if it is just a die-hard habit from previous schooling. As soon as the class seems to be dismissed, they all rush to leave as if they had been in a prison. They disengage immediately and urgently. *Students begin to pack up before assignment is done. Quiet girl is now doodling.* (200 – 4)

People have already finished the work and have started putting it up on the board- but some people have not yet participated and the teacher announces that no one is leaving until all the questions are up on the board- two people get up [...]the teacher announced how disrespectful it was that people were getting to leave and not paying attention to classmates who were still answering questions for the

benefit of the whole class- partly because she knows that the rest of the class are soon going to have the same questions or misunderstandings if they don't pay attention. (100-2)

They also pointed out that attention seemed to leave in the last part of the class. It would be very interesting to explore how levels of attention increased and decreased through the different class periods and activities.

Attention seemed to wane a bit in the last 20 minutes, but most students were very attentive. (100 -3)

The observer of 250 shared the same worry as the teacher about the class passivity and lack of autonomy and engagement. S/he suggested there be more research done on participation-enhancing activities in and out of the classroom and fostering student engagement.

- Teacher

1. S/he corrects in a calm, patient tone.

- Students

1. *Participation concentrated in the front row.* (250 – 1)
2. *They correct each other* at the back of the class. (250 – 1)
3. They do not pay attention during other student presentations.
4. They chat at the back of the class.
5. *Same students always participate (ask questions, volunteer, remark).* (250 – 1)

Some students consider that (5.) the use of English or Spanish was a very interesting topic to observe because they had seen and raised their doubts about both types of instruction: monolingual and bilingual.

100
Teacher:

1. Announcements happen in English.
2. S/he starts class in English with a few Spanish words.

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3. S/he speaks Spanish, translating into English every few words.

Once again we were faced with the same extreme opinions as we found in the interviews and the journals.

It made me wonder how useful it might be to raise expectation levels and only interact Spanish with the students. This could get students used to trying to figure out the language quickly and become accustomed to hearing it in a more concentrated way. It might slow down the progress of the class and interfere with course material that has to be covered, but it might benefit the development of practical skills like comprehension and verbal communication. (100-1)

The teacher explains in both English and Spanish- more Spanish, unless it is not understood-then it is explained in English- good method at helping the class learn the language (100-2)

The teacher speaks to students more in Spanish, *slows down* when people do not understand. (100 - 4)

The teacher explains personal anecdotes in Spanish. (100 – 5)

The teacher reads instruction from the book in Spanish.Often she will read the instructions in the book (which are written in English) in Spanish and the class will follow along. (100 – 6)

200

Teacher:

1. S/he instructs in Spanish.
2. S/he instructs in both languages or with visual cues. *Instructions were given first in Spanish and then in English, or when only given in Spanish, The teacher provided visual cues (for example holding up the textbook at the appropriate page)* (200 – 2)
3. S/he explains vocabulary through English.
4. S/he uses Spanish to explain a word.
5. S/he uses Spanish all the time with the use of repetition. *An explanation was provided in Spanish, but required a number of repetitions.* (200 – 5)

250

Teacher:

1. S/he makes announcements in English.

2. S/he uses Spanish in the class but translates sentence by sentence.

3. S/he replies in English if students address in English.

4. S/he replies in Spanish if students address in Spanish.

5. S/he explains through English.

Students:

1. They chat in English.

2. They address teacher in English → teacher replies in English.

3. They address teacher in Spanish → teacher replies in Spanish.

The observer assessed the frequency of English and the code switching at this higher intermediate level as a negative. S/he believed that if students were forced to use Spanish in this classroom it would be beneficial to them.

The analysis of (6.) interaction between the participants in the class proved to be trickier in terms of reporting. When the class happened in a very orderly manner, it was easy to talk about it but when less organized incidents happened, the observers found it difficult to report without giving a detailed description of the event.

100

Teacher – Student

1. Fast pace.

The students commented a lot about the fast pace of my classes. They seemed to realize that there are curricular constraints and that we have to follow a certain pace fixed by the institution. However, their love for their teacher who is very supportive makes them lose sight of the fact that she can also forget about student needs and go at her own pace.

It was not giving first time Spanish learners or even first time language learners enough time to even formulate questions, to stop and think in their mind about what they are understanding and what they are not. (100 -1)

Students visibly disengaged at the beginning of the class when answers to exercises were rushed through, concepts presented and moved on from very quickly. (100 – 4)

What was interesting was that nobody called the teacher on the pace of the class, despite obvious dissatisfaction among the students. […] Students do not question the dynamic and fall very easily into being passive learners. (100 - 4)

Another issue that I notice in my own reflections about these incidents of rushed pace was that sometimes as teachers we work with the idea of the ideal student in our heads and we bring into the class certain expectations, such as 'the student will have read the chapter and tried the exercises', 'the student will have reviewed the main concepts so far before coming to class', 'the student will remember all the main points of grammar'… These expectations would be the foundations of a fast paced class. Otherwise, we, as teachers, would understand and acknowledge different paces and patterns of learning.

2. The teacher interacts mainly with the people at the front
3. The teacher struggles to get volunteers.
4. The teacher is friendly, good interactions.
5. *Students feel comfortable asking questions.* (100-2)
6. The teacher *prompts answers when student hesitates.* (100-2)
7. The teacher *gives positive feedback* (100-2) and does not correct all the mispronunciations. (100 - 5)
8. The teacher focuses on verbal and non-verbal signs. *Teacher very attentive: obviously watches for lost faces, confused students, approaches them if she senses they need help, actively monitors the state of the students in the classroom* (100 - 4)
9. The teacher *encourages shy or withdrawn students to participate.* (100-4)
10. The teacher normally circulates around the class during independent work to be available to student individual questions. This has received good reviews by the students and observers. *During independent work teacher does not circulate but organizes other things, students very LOUD at this time* (100-4)

11. The teacher *sometimes speaks while writing on the blackboard and it is hard to hear.* (100 -5)

12. The teacher offers disclaimers about the difficulty of a task and students appreciate it. *Had to review "comparisons" again, feel better when the teacher says we WON'T understand it all, it takes the pressure off. Everyone freely asks questions until we understand better.* (100 -5)

13. Students sometimes start with disclaimers. *I've noticed on several occasions that when students are called on to answer a question they start with a disclaimer like "I don't know how to do this" or "I'm totally confused" and then answer the question with the right answer or are closer than they think.* (100 -6) *The students seem to lower their voices when they think that they're wrong* (100 − 6)

14. The teacher gets up and goes to answer individual questions normally. *Some people asked the teacher for help and she didn't leave her seat to answer. This isn't normal for her. She was planning out the next few weeks. Seems worried about the rush/scheduling and tests. Not herself.* (100 -5)

15. Comfortable atmosphere in general. *Students seem quite comfortable with each other and the professor* (100 − 6)

Student – Student

1. *Noisy class, students eating or drinking* (100 - 6).
2. Student chats in the back row.
3. Peer help at the back, teacher-student interaction at the front.

100 − I report observes that there seems to be an *invisible line* dividing the front and the back of the class. By invisible line s/he meant a divide between the front and back of a traditional classroom. However, this invisible line had its own advantages, since it seemed to enhance student – student help.

Most students at the back ask each other questions before they ask the teacher questions, therefore explains why there are different groups talking while the teacher is talking. (100-2)

Often students will help each other, either pointing to something in the book or whispering answers to each other. Also, students will get help from each other if they feel that what they don't know is

something that was taught weeks ago, these instances seem to relate to forgetfulness rather than lack of understanding. (100 -6)

Another instance of self- or peer correction was the exercise led by the teacher in which:

A student answers a question or writes on the board the professor gets the students to correct them. i.e. "do you agree with her/him?" At other times the students will be called on to write answers on the board. When all the answers are on the board the instructor will put a mark next to any with errors and then ask the class "what do you think is wrong with this answer?" This type of self or peer correction seems to be well received. (100 – 6)

200

Teacher – Students.

One of the elements in which the observers of this first year intermediate class seemed to focus on was the feedback and corrections that were done in class as a main part of the interaction between students and teacher.

I. Positive feedback through repetition, emphasis and further explanation if needed. *Correction of the students work was very effective and done in a positive manner. The modes of correction included emphasis and repetition and further explanation when students did not automatically correct themselves after having a mistake pointed out. Repetition with change was also used. A number of loops occurred when students were asking vocabulary questions, however the teacher provided answers quickly after understanding the question. The teacher prompted and encouraged students during the exercise.* (200 -5) *She corrected students in a friendly and non-accusing manner.* (200 – 2)

When this method shifted for whatever reason – in the following instance I suspect the teacher was tired at that stage (it was a 2 hour class) and the sporadic participation had a disengaging effect on the teacher as well as on the students.

The teacher offered feedback, but usually just a 'yes' or 'no;' she didn't offer many explanations for the reasons why students were wrong. This method was occasionally abrupt and made some students uncomfortable. (200-5)

2. Position of the teacher in the class. *She tended to stay on one side of the classroom, making it difficult for some students to see her.* (200 – 2)

3. Positive atmosphere in general. *Generally the atmosphere in the classroom was friendly and enthusiastic – students did not seem unhappy to be there.* (200 – 2)

4. Teacher's honesty. *The teacher was very honest in explaining her disappointment with the exam and certain people's failure to participate.* (200 – 2)

5. Dealing with confusion or need for clarification. We can see in the variety of the three following quotes from the observation reports that the nature of the classroom event, the interaction in the classroom and the group itself were the main factors in determining the method employed in dealing with these obstacles.

Most seemed somewhat confused or uninterested. People asked each other for clarification, but few seemed able to explain. No one asked the teacher for help or clarification. (200 -5)

There was an even mix between students asking each other and asking the teacher questions of clarification. (200 -2)

Problems are often dealt with by laughter. (200 – 4)

In 200 – 3, the observer focused on the presence of silence in the classroom. It had been on my mind for quite some time how silence works in a language classroom. The question arose due to a common secondary school practice in traditional classrooms of enforcing silence while the teacher or the student/s who is/are participating at that moment speak. It also came to mind because of the several comments on the fast pace of some of the classes. It made me reflect on the use of silence within my own classes and how I could use it to foster students' participation or to relax the pace of a busy classroom. Silence, though, can make both teachers and students quite impatient and s/he relates an incident in which we can see this impatience playing on the teacher.

The teacher asks for answers they are slow in coming. One girl is starting to answer but the teacher cuts her off. (200 - 3)

In another instance, they also mention (7.) the use of silence and how this particular teacher discouraged it while working with the language.

1. *Quiet as they work,(reference)*
2. *The teacher says for them to use each other if they need help, or work in pairs if they want, and the chatter immediately starts up again- most of their speaking was done in Spanish- not English* […]
3. *Some students had no concern for the other students in the class (not in a bad way though), they just chatted through their work at high vocal levels, but no one minded, and the teacher enjoyed seeing the progression* (100-2)

Student-Student

The presence of a more inconspicuous observer[11] than the academic ethnographer allowed my research assistants to sit quite close to the students and to record instances of their direct interaction.

I.   Student Small - Talk.

One girl was very hyper and talkative which, according to her was because she was very happy in her relationship with her boyfriend. She was occasionally over-excited, leading her friend to ask her to be quiet. The second student was very angry and frustrated for the majority of the class. She swore a lot and became easily frustrated when she didn't understand. She mentioned how she didn't know why she bothered attending since she felt she was going to fail anyways. She participated only very occasionally, although she was the one previously mentioned who participated after having had the time to prepare her answer. Her negativity did not seem universal, although two other girls mentioned that they felt the class was moving too quickly and that they didn't have time to fully absorb verb tenses. (200 -5)

In this very long quote, we can closely observe the reality of student-student interaction in a lot of our classes and how difficult it can be for a teacher to measure their student responses to the content or to the classroom. The non-verbal signs that these students were most probably giving to the teacher were signs of being involved in their own conversation and not engaged with the class. The fact that the second students decides not to share her problems and fears with the teacher cuts off all communication between teacher and student and hinders progress from both sides. The teacher will not learn how to fix her problems by explaining more clearly and the student will have to obtain ways to overcome her obstacles from another resource.

2. Peer correction and guidance.

In general, both the teacher/researcher and the research team deemed these spontaneous instances of peer help and guidance as very positive.

Peer correction was very effective; students were always very quick to correct the mistakes of fellow classmates, and it was done in a positive and cooperative way (200 – 2)

Even when they may imply that the students are somewhat scared of acknowledging the fact that they are lost or need more clarification.

The quiet group finally whispered to another group "what are we doing" interesting because the assignment has been going on for 13-14 minutes. (200 – 4)

250

Teacher – Students.

1. S/he is generally attentive and encouraging. *I noticed that the teacher's attentiveness and encouragement had an extremely positive effect on the students.*
2. S/he frequently prompts them to ask questions.
3. Fast paced presentation leads to student passivity. *If they were a more aggressive class they might stop the teacher at any point they didn't understand, this passive class might be more reluctant to stop the teacher.* (250 -1)
4. Very few questions asked from students.
5. Some students try to get attention of teacher, but if unnoticed, they disengage.
6. Confrontation. *Teacher asks for recipes to share, a student says they have brought one but it is in English (teacher responds by saying) "Queremos una receta en espanol." (Student, at the back, responds under their breath a bit frustrated) "Well. I just brought it…" (Turns to another student and ignores the teacher as well as the student at the front who begins to read their recipe).* (250 – 1)

7.3.2 Type B: Sticking to a protocol.

I have included in the appendix to this thesis, the different forms of the protocols that the

research assistant team considered. They vary in terms of the instruction needed to work with them. However, only one student used this method of observation and she used a protocol called FOCUS, which we include below. FOCUS stands for Focus for Observing Communications Used in Settings, and it concentrates on the five characteristics of communications used in learning environments in terms of the 'subject', who communicates; the pedagogical purpose of the communication; the medium; the mode of use or the method of using these media, and the content area. It aims to be quite inclusive and so it develops a very specific range of categories that the observer needs to be familiar with before carrying out the observation. I found this the main flaw of any kind of protocol. The effort needed to juggle the many specific categories forces the viewer to select some incidents in the classroom event and leave out others that, without these categories, s/he may have found more interesting to record. On the other hand, the specificity of the terminology is a great asset when trying to arrive at any systematic, quantitative conclusions and to compare observations. The precision and definition of the categories employed in this protocol avoid misunderstanding between different observers.

Table 27 – FOCUS

Appendix C
Foci for Observing Communications Used in Settings (FOCUS)

Five Characteristics of Communications in Settings

1. Who communicates?
2. What is the pedagogical purpose of the communication?*
3. What mediums are used to communicate content?
4. How are the mediums used to communicate content of content?**
5. What areas of content are communicated?***

1. Who communicates?	2. Pedagogical purpose	3. Mediums	4. How used	5. Areas of content
teacher	to structure	linguistic	1 attend	language systems
		aural		contextual
		visual	2 characterize	grammatical
				literary
		ideogram	21 differentiate	
			22 evaluate	meaning
		transcribed		mechanics of writing
		written	23 examine	sound segmental supra-seg.
	to solicit	other	24 illustrate	speech production
		non-linguistic	25 label	unclassified
		aural	3 present	life
		visual	31 call words	
			32 change medium	
			33 question	
		real	34 state	formula
individual student		representational	4 relate	imagination
		schematic	41 explain	personal
	to respond	symbolic	42 interpret	public
		other		skills

[second portion of chart]

group of students	para-linguistic	5 re-present	social issues
	aural	51 combine	procedure
	visual	52 imitate	administration
	real	53 paraphrase	cf social beh.
		54 sub & change	teaching dir
		55 sub no change	
to react	symbolic	56 transform	tchg. rationale
class	other		subject matter

* These four pedagogical purposes are from Bellack.
** The uses and areas of content are presented alphabetically.

[continues]

206

358

In the three observations carried out with this method, we can observe a constant dialogue between teacher and student/s. There are never very long periods in which the teacher talks and the students listen. The most recurrent categories are:

Teacher:

1.   Asks (15)
2.   Assesses
3.   Clarifies (3)
4.   Confirms answer (2)
5.   Corrects (8)
6.   Encourages (2)
7.   Explains (13)
8.   Gives second chances
9.   Gives up
10. Goes around
11. Offers answer (8)
12. Praises (3)
13. Prompts (3)
14. Reads
15. Repeats (7)
16. Re-states
17. Rewards effort
18. Skips students
19. Sounds word out
20. States (2)
21. Waits in silence (3)
22. Writes (3)

Student:

23. Asks for clarification (10)
24. Corrects
25. Does not understand
26. Explains (5)

27. Forgets
28. Guesses
29. Is confused (4)
30. Makes mistake (14)
31. Offers answer (15)
32. Reads (3)
33. Repeats
34. Skips answering (2)
35. Struggles (5)
36. Understands (2)
37. Uses disclaimer
38. Writes on the board

Group of Students:

39. Discusses
40. Looks for words
41. Makes mistake
42. Offers answer (7)
43. Reads
44. Works towards understanding

Simply by looking at these categories, we can infer that the number of interventions by the teacher was higher and, therefore, most of the time in class was governed by teacher interventions or teacher-led pace and plans. On the other hand, the high number of explain/offering answers/ask show that the students, whether individually or as a group, are quite comfortable interacting with the teachers as the previous free style observations had pointed out. The interactions were nothing out of the ordinary in these three classes, which meant that there was nothing interesting to observe with this protocol either. If there had been any confrontations or the classes had dealt with more complicated topics, we may have had more insightful conclusions. As the observer worked with these categories, s/he noticed that the fact that silence or skipping a turn did not appear as a code was detrimental to a better analysis of interaction. She also found very difficult to record non-verbal responses. For that reason we decided to experiment with yet another mode of observation.

7.4 Recording with a camcorder.

This type of observation was definitely the most challenging in several ways. First of all, it involved a technology that I was not familiar with at the time. It also involved obtaining more permission from the students that were going to be on camera but also from the students that were not going to appear, but whose voices could be heard on the recording. Secondly, students were so aware of the presence of the camera on one side of the class that it seemed impossible to have a 'normal' classroom situation. I would suggest that the camera should have been introduced at the beginning of the year and start taking into account only observations towards the end of the year. As a teacher, I was highly aware of the camera as well and even though I knew that I was going to be the only person who would view it – and perhaps my assistants – the presence of the equipment made it feel more intimidating for me as well. I had agreed to destroy the recording when I was done taking notes from it but still its presence was far less inconspicuous than the student observer.

The comments I took from the recordings that were destroyed a year after the research took place, took the form of stream of consciousness. I wanted to explore the features that would catch my attention without thinking about them, and that had/created an apparent structure. I watched the videos a few times and then started to type up my impressions about them. The main comment about both observations was that even though they were both classes at 100 level, one of them was in the morning and the other one in the afternoon. There was also an important difference between both groups: the evening one was more cohesive and it worked as a team. There were also three people in this group involved in this project so they had a more acute sense of awareness about learning and teaching than the group in the morning. The class in the evening that day was a double session, possibly to make up for a class we had missed due to the bad weather that we had been experiencing. I should also comment that I noted down that I had a headache that day in both classes. I am highly aware of the differences between both classes and I am more comfortable in the second class in the evening.

- Veo a un arqueólogo de cuarto año y a gente de primero también. Y gente de educación. Es una clase diversa en todos los sentidos. (teacher's report from recording)

Once again the fact that I could review the physical distribution of the classroom made me comment at large on the physical characteristics of this class.

MORNING CLASS

Estas clases duraban más o menos 30 minutos y luego el video, del cual pase de grabar. La distribución de los asientos es diferente. (teacher's report from recording)

EVENING DOUBLE CLASS

It happened in a different classroom to the regular room we used in the library. Students seemed happier about this because the quality of the air in this class was better, so even though it was a 2 hour session they felt less sleepy. (teacher's report from recording)

I realized that I move a lot and I use a lot of gestures in my explanations. Moreover, I realized that the perception I had of a class at that moment was a space where the teacher feeds the students the tools and the materials to practice outside; and a lot of my students saw their classes as the space where they could practice their Spanish. These two views clashed very often.

Then I went on to comment the actual TEACHER-INITIATED activities that this class encompassed.

MORNING CLASS

Estoy organizando las fotocopias.

Estoy explicando cómo vamos a hacer los orales.

Pregunto quién ha hecho los deberes.

Saco a un alumno a la pizarra a hacer los deberes.

Paso lista.

Corrijo lo que han hecho.

Explico la acción con inglés y gestos otra vez.

Les propongo que quedemos para desayunar el día del examen oral.

Les doy trabajo por su cuenta.

Yo ando por ahí charlando con todos.

Respondo a una pregunta de una alumna en particular y la extiendo a todos.

Hablo más en ingles explicándoles la teoría.

Les pido que miren un poco de vocabulario.

No parece funcionar el video.

Les pido que empiecen a trabajar en su tarea y yo les voy a pasar el vocabulario que necesitan.

EVENING CLASS

Llamo a todo el mundo, pregunto si necesitan saber las horas en que tienen el examen oral.

Me preguntan otras partes del cuerpo que no están hay.

Preguntan mucho.

Me confundo y me corrigen.

No parece que lo explique muy bien pero ella lo entiende. :-S misterios sin resolver.

Les he mandado un repaso por email. Y los alumnos dicen que está bien.

Es mejor que hable en español porque al fin y al cabo es mi lengua madre, me oigo fatal con el drawl americano. Otra vez uso los gestos.

Borro el encerado a ver si terminan.

Les he pasado dos páginas webs para que practiquen para el examen, a los otros grupos no lo hice.

Recogen todos a lo loco. Se levantan y van guardando sus cosas.

(Source: teacher's report from recording)

The main difference between both classes was obviously the different relationship between each member of the class, their own relationship towards learning and the relationship with the teacher. The class in the evening was very diverse in age and origin and they were more much autonomous and self-directed students than the ones in the morning. They kept asking questions, requesting things that were not included in the curriculum and also questioning immediately the exercises that they found less useful and appraising the exercises they found useful. Their objective was obvious: to learn Spanish, and not just pass the course in general. The combination of these attitudes had a positive impact on the relationship with the teacher because, in turn, the investment of the students generated an increased investment of the teacher in this classroom.

I was primarily trying to observe, under the camera's eye, the role of the interaction between teacher/student and students themselves, but I noticed that a lot of the focus was on the teacher. There was a lot of teacher control due to the way these classes were carried out, despite the relaxed attitude and rapport between the students and the teacher, and also in spite of the focus of the teacher on each individual student (the teacher refers to the students by their names in the observations and comments on their personalities in a way that shows the good relationship between them). I also realized that my belief at the time was that the sole responsibility of classroom activities lay with the teacher. Today, as I was reviewing the report, which I wrote at the moment of viewing this video, a few months after I had submitted my assessment of the students involved as I committed to in the ethics report, I kept wondering what a different report I would have written if I had placed more importance on the

interaction between the students: the chatting, the peer help, the questions and the complaints to one another. I have found that this is very difficult to gauge from the teacher's perspective and that I need to involve my students in immediate feedback about what they see and do not see, and how they reflect on the impact of either. These elements of any classroom are possibly the most difficult ones to observe because they happen in the smaller, private spaces during the class that no observer or camera can get to effectively, but they are vital in the development of successful learning environments. These are the comments I had about these aspects of the classroom.

MORNING CLASS

La estudiante protesta porque si lo ha escrito bien pero es su caligrafía.

Andan todos hablando tranquilamente entre ellos.

EVENING CLASS

Esta todo el mundo tranquilamente hablando y mirando las fotocopias o charlando.

Las conversaciones son en parejas y así. O algo sobre los ejercicios o algo así.

Siempre se oye hablar y no les digo que se callen.

(Source: teacher's report from recording)

As it has been highlighted elsewhere in the other observations and interviews, silence was not imposed in the classroom because the research team believed it had a negative impact in the language classroom. This impact lengthened the silence period and prevented the students with difficulties from speaking up and developing more active conversational skills, whereas in the 'mess' of the chatting noise these students feel less on the spot and more daring, trying out a couple of sentences at first and, hopefully, more conversation as times goes by.

I noticed how I use humour to attract student attention and to make light of challenges or frustrations. I guess this part of my teaching has always been part of my personality so I had not become aware of it until my students started to point it out and said how they appreciated it. *Hago chistes con el vocabulario están relajados porque tiene que ver con algo que...* (teacher's report from recording)

I also realized that while I was in the class it was very difficult to assess the lack of participation. There were three students that participated all the time and they seemed to control my attention. These video observations also pointed out that there was a bit of a curve in terms of student attention during the fifty minute sessions, but more interestingly, they pointed out how there was also a curve in terms of

teacher attention during this period. I also realized how difficult it was to see the board or to hear the teacher. In those instances teacher-control needed to be summoned again in order to make sure that everybody heard what was being said. This was also a general problem we found with the amateur recordings that we carried out in a language classroom. The equipment that would be needed to record every single instance of conversation is unattainable for an exercise like this or it would defeat the purpose of the observation. However, we may question the need to examine every single detail in the classroom for the purpose of enhancement of teaching and learning. In a real situation, the teacher will not be able to assess all the student interactions either and therefore s/he will not be able to take them into account in the negotiation of his/her interaction with the students either.

<div align="center">✻   ✻   ✻</div>

As we noted at the start of this chapter, the observations carried out in this project are in no way thorough or systematic. This free style and less academic use of observation, though, has not resulted useless to us. In one way, as we will see in the next chapter, the research team found this exercise very insightful and enjoyable. We found they rounded up our experience as observers and researchers of the language classroom.

In terms of space, based on our observations, the following recommendations can be made in terms of maximizing our opportunities to enhance the teaching/learning environment. An ideal class would involve:

1. 15 – 20 students from diverse origins and gender and different ages.
2. Circular structure or equivalent is desirable in order for the students to be able to see each other at all times and interact in the public or the private spaces within the classroom. This should also avoid back/front row dynamics.
3. The teacher should be visible and audible to everyone in the activities that are teacher-controlled.
4. Students taking turns to speak should be audible to everyone.
5. Natural light should shine in the room and no obstacles should be present such as pillars in the classroom.
6. Ventilated room is desirable with fresh air from time to time and a comfortable temperature.
7. The board needs to be visible and the notes clear and big enough to be read from all points of the classroom.
8. In general, the classes in the afternoon worked better.

9. Levels of attention in the last 20 minutes of the class seemed to wane.

In terms of the rapport between the students and the teacher and the speed of the class, our observations vouch for:

1. A relaxed atmosphere.

2. A serene pace, both within the classroom event that day and related to the previous and the following classroom events.

3. A careful use of silence. Since it sometimes does not enhance learning but builds up tension between the classroom participants.

4. A careful use of humour. Since it can break barriers but can also build them up.

In terms of the activities carried out in the classroom, these observations showed that:

1. These students appreciated learning tools such as summaries and reviews.

2. These students preferred dynamic classrooms in which they came up and down from the board and they did a variety of exercises.

3. When the student takes the control of the class, having interacted with the content and materials in their own time and directs his/her learning by asking questions and requesting information the classroom, was most effective.

4. These students preferred a variety of activities to help deal with lack of concentration and slumbering.

In terms of student-student interaction or their group dynamics, these observations suggest that:

1. Turn-taking should be symmetric.

2. Rounds help everyone to have a chance to speak.

3. Students should feel comfortable enough to ask questions to each other and the teacher.

4. Peer help was most effective when it happened naturally.

In the specific instances in which there were problems between the students, it was very difficult to manage the situation. The students themselves seemed reluctant to try and solve the negative dynamics and the teacher intervention was sometimes not welcome at all. However, the negative affect was felt by the whole group. As we discussed these instances in our research meetings, we became aware of the need for training on conflict-resolution.

In terms of the language of instruction and interaction, the observations did throw some light onto what seemed an unsolvable puzzle in the interviews and questionnaires.

1. Students seemed to appreciate in general the use of English but they also demanded more Spanish in the classroom as their opportunities for practice in a non-immersion environment were restricted.

2. Students appreciated announcements and grammar explained and/or clarified in English. They also appreciated being talked to in English individually if they had a problem.

Finally, we could see that students find it reassuring to know that the teacher can speak their own language well and this tool can be used, if needed, for clarification. The fact that this common medium of communication existed allowed the freer and more direct dialogue and feedback from the student to the teacher and vice versa. In the same way, students want to hear as much Spanish and to use as much Spanish as they can possibly use in the classroom since the non-immersion environment limits their exposure to the foreign language.

I would like to add that as a teacher/researcher, I found the use of student peer review of my classes a very powerful tool that resulted in three primary outcomes:

1. Students felt empowered to own, assess and directly impact on the spaces available to them for learning.

2. I received immediate feedback and insights about the reality of each of the classroom events that they had observed.

3. I could compare their observations with my own insights and form a better, more multilayered understanding of what happened in each of the learning events. In the research team meetings, we realized that what mattered in the end were not the observer statements or the teacher's reflections on a particular instance but that the dialogue that arose from the comparison of my perceptions and their perceptions of the same situation was the most fruitful lesson in teaching.

It may be pointed out at this stage that an in-depth study of conversations between teachers and students along these lines seems to me a very interesting and fruitful area of research to be explored.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER

- Focused on the observations in both Spanish and English as a Foreign Language Learning Environments, in order to further identify the coincidences and differences between the codes derived from student journals and interviews.

- Provided new codes as a consequence of the new approaches and learning environments.

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[1] On a side note, this was the teacher aide that they seemed to take the least seriously out of all of us. She was not younger but it seemed as if the students were aware of her teaching student status and undermined it.

[2] This does not necessarily mean being denied citizen status or returning to their country of origin. It is important to remember here that there were a few exchange students from Québec in this class as well.

[3] I remember mainly two cases: the first was the case of a North Korean young male who decided to abandon the class and the country to join the North Korean army because he did not feel comfortable. The second case was of another young male, recently arrived from Afghanistan but older than the rest of the kids in class, who decided to look for a job instead of continuing with his education or formal instruction in English. In the first sad case, it raised the issue of community and the support available during the integration process.

[4] For example: 'I feel so great among these people. They reassure me in my motivation to be a teacher', or, 'I have problems asking questions'.

[5] For more information, see http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/citizenship/cit-test.asp

[6] When the Afghani young male did not come, his own teacher aide – the older woman from Poland – would be asked to carry out inventories of books and sort out which ones were needed to make a purchasing list.

[7] Even the main teacher asked me once about my academic background and suggested that it should be me who should be teaching grammar, as if to say that she lacked the academic background to do it.

[8] http://metproject.org/resources/PLATO_10_29_10.pdf

[9] With these arrows we will indicate the series of aspects on which our student observers seem to focus with their free style observations.

[10] These numbers refer to the classification of the observations in the primary sources CD-ROM. The first number indicates the course to which the observation refers to: 100, 200, 250. The second number indicates the order in sequence in which the observation was carried out by the student assistant. That is also the reason why these quotations are in italics, to indicate they are primary sources.

[11] *Few people noticed I was there, and if they did, it didn't seem to bother anyone* (100 -2)

THIS CHAPTER …

- Describes the benefits of the project from a student and student research assistant point of view according to the feedback questionnaires developed and distributed by the research team.

- Discusses the drawbacks of this project based on the student answers of the feedback questionnaires

Gathering relevant, representative and useful student opinion is

a necessary part of the quality assurance process.

(Rowley, 1995, p. 19)

Feedback is an essential element of any project or initiative, more so when it is an innovation in previous teaching practice or an experiment new to the participants in the project. In many instances, feedback has been identified as the most critical of all the components of a learning experience. However, it is an issue not devoid of problems and so it requires a lot of thinking and planning. There are many kinds of feedback, and in university culture - in which this project was developed - feedback mainly means two things:

- A grade
- Comments on performance
    - Recommendations to improve performance
    - Praise of performance

A few years ago, the practice of handing out end-of-the year questionnaires established itself as a tradition in university education. Depending on the institution, these questionnaires happen once or twice a year, sometimes more, and can be combined with open discussions with class representatives or other forms of verbal communication between teachers and students. Rowley holds that these forms suffer some intrinsic limitations: retrospective and summative. In his view – and some of the students

involved in this project – feedback is most effective when provided throughout the course of an action and in small doses. With all this in mind, we could claim that feedback forms, established in the culture of higher education, have created an expectation in terms of format and comments 'allowed' or 'possible'. They have also had some experience working with these types of forms and so their familiarity was considered as an advantage for the development of our project, but it also had its drawbacks. Another advantage of the questionnaire format was the fact that each individual would be granted a private space where they could fill out the form and think about the questions. They would also have a private and somewhat anonymous way of handing them in.[1]

Two issues need to be borne in mind before turning to the summary of these feedback forms, which turned out to be essential in gauging the general impact that our innovative teaching project had had on their language learning from a student's point of view, within their roles of student volunteers or student assistants. Feedback in general can be regarded as producing anxiety. As a junior researcher, at the start of this project I lacked a lot of self-confidence and experience and, to a certain extent, I was a little apprehensive about the assessment of the project that these forms would return. The feedback of my students had another important aspect of feedback in general: its instrumental value. Since this project was to become the main focus of my Ph.D. dissertation, I was very aware that I had partially given up my power to determine the success or failure of this attempt to them.

Another issue that we were very aware of was the fact that our 'language' and the volunteer student 'language' were different. The openness of our questions could be misunderstood by students (Chanock 2000; Falchikov 1995) – and on some occasions the students verbalized this difficulty in their feedback. However, we decided to run the risk of being misinterpreted and misinterpreting in the hope that they would have a freer style of writing and assessing. Sometimes, as we will see in the summary of the answers, students used broad words or value-laden words that would not give us a lot of information. We will underline these words in their answers.

In turn, as we have previously mentioned, the project had an expected outcome: a closer –more democratic - relationship between the participants of this project in their roles as learners, teachers and researchers, particularly between the research assistants and the teacher/researcher. At the stage of reporting feedback, I was very aware that the students may have been leaning towards kindness in their assessment of the project. In the same way, our collective ownership of the project may have influenced the production of positive feedback. On the other hand, we relied on the fact that a climate of trust had been created between all the participants in this project and that this environment would be conducive to the freedom of expression that we were expecting.

8.1 Feedback forms

For a project like ours, very limited in terms of time and the availability of its subjects and already laden with questionnaires and interviews, the research team decided that a shorter, rather open ended questionnaire was the way to go to ask for feedback on the project as a whole. Feedback was hugely important for us in that it would allow the students to transform the information that they had been gathering through their own experience in the interviews, journals and so on into knowledge by a process of selection and interpretation in the context of their own realities and related to their personal activities (Von Wright, 1992, p. 63). This perspective enables the exercise of feedback to be seen from the perspective of different learning theories and theories on motivation, support and guidance and assessment. In their feedback forms, their objectives and how these objectives had been met, defined the outcomes of our project and gave us the guidelines for further development. We were always aware that the real learning that stemmed from this project would be clarified at this stage, in which after a series of tasks (sometimes at a fast speed due to our time constraints), the participants in the project would examine their experience, challenging their original conceptions about the language classroom in light of their reflections throughout the project.

In any case, the main function of this feedback form was qualitative. We developed an open-ended questionnaire in which learners would talk at length about the positive and negative effects that the project had had on their learning. The student feedback for this project was carried out with a simple open-ended questionnaire that the researcher and the research assistants agreed on. In an aim to achieve more qualitative answers that quantitative, the following questions were asked:

LEARNING SPANISH IN THE UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM PROJECT EVALUATION

1. Have you enjoyed being part of the project? If yes, how and why?

2. What have you learnt?

3. What has struck you the most?

4. In which ways, has this project make you think and question your own learning of Spanish?

5. What activities of the project (journals, observations, interviews…) did you enjoy the most? Why?

6. What do you think could be improved if we did the same project next year?

7. Do you think this kind of projects is useful in the classroom? Why?

8. Comments.

The same questionnaire was distributed among the student volunteers and research assistants in the project. In this chapter we are going to examine their answers, highlighting the benefits and the drawbacks of this innovative learning initiative from a student point of view. In the next chapter we will turn to the evaluation of the project from the teacher/researcher perspective and in the light of current educational and SLA research.

8.I.I. Student Research Assistant Feedback

It is worth noticing that the feedback evaluation was the last part of the project and some students did not complete it, so these evaluations only present a partial picture of the project. Two of the group of assistants were using this project for their own degrees and could not reply to this questionnaire. Among the other five respondents we found very positive feedback with a few suggestions for improvement, should this project be repeated in the future. Here is a summary of their answers – the full text of the feedback form can be found in the appendix for this dissertation. :

ENJOYMENT: Strong yes (3)   Yes (2)

Enjoyment has been established as a premise of learning in primary education, but the issue of how enjoyment influences learning – and especially language learning - has not been thoroughly explored in higher education yet. We asked this question because we wanted to examine the assistant's perceptions of enjoyment in the light of the reasons that they gave for this enjoyment. In other words, I was more interested in the quality of the experiences that they found enjoyable than the amount of enjoyment.

Qualitatively, we can classify their reasons in three main areas: research related, teaching related and personal or professional.

Research related:
- <u>Interesting</u> research
- Sharing knowledge and reflections
- Sharing opinions and freedom of speech
- <u>Mind-opening and eye-opening</u> experience
- Positive impact of passionate research

Teaching related:

- Acting for change

- Empowering students

- Creating networks of students helping other students

- Improving student engagement

- Personal contact with teacher

Professional and personal:

- Hands-on experience

- Skills-training

- <u>Fun</u>

- Money!

OUTCOMES:

When we started on the journey of this project, we did not define learning outcomes because it was an open-ended, innovative experience. We offered the assistants a toolbox with which to explore the learning environment as junior field researchers. Together, assistants and researcher defined the use of these tools and opened up the ways for exploration. The sense of wonder and discovery carried through the project and finally, student assistants decided that they had achieved the following learning outcomes. This project:

1. Improved their awareness of a variety of learning strategies and approaches from the students (4).

2. Promoted and highlighted the importance of interaction between the students in the improvement of their learning experience (2),

3. Manifested the abundance of strategic learners as opposed to deep learners (2).

4. Highlighted the differences between the dynamics of different groups (2).

5. Pointed out strategies to improve classroom environment.

6. Corroborated the efficiency of small groups in language learning.

7. Exposed the complications of the education system as a block for the improvement of teaching and learning.

8. Alerted them about the urgency of the situation in the education system.

9. Re-instilled in them the love of learning.

10. Proved that constructive criticism does not lead to change, but innovation does.

11. Improved their organizational skills.

12. Emphasized the positive impact of trusting people's honesty.

13. Gave them opportunities to observe language classrooms.

14. Taught them to do transcriptions and reports.

15. Re-ignited their ability to speak Spanish due to increased exposure.

We have organized these outcomes from more frequent to less frequent and from more learning-specific to personal outcomes. We also asked about more unexpected outcomes and the assistants reported that it struck them:

1. How external factors block learning.

2. How the control of the curriculum does lie in the hands of the teacher many times.

3. How specific small actions lead to drastic changes.

4. How larger groups lead to frustration.

5. How people's feelings affect their learning.

6. How people can be aware of their needs and yet be reluctant to act on them.

REFLECTIVE VALUE:

In this project there was a strong emphasis on self-reflection and most of the assistants reported having been challenged as well as having benefited from the reflective aspect of the project. The main issues that this project seems to have made them reflect upon were:

1. Their responsibility for their own learning.

2. Some students' expectations of passive learning.

3. The importance of the relationship between teacher and learners.

4. Their choice of preferred learning contents.

5. Class dynamics.

6. Lack of self-involvement in classroom structures.

7. Out of classroom experience and its impact.

8. Their notion of ideal classroom.

9. The need for a reassessment of their own needs.

10. Student investment in language learning and learning methods.

11. Their mindset and attitude towards language learning.

BEST PART OF THE PROJECT

Observations and interviews were the preferred parts of the project in general. Two people reported that they enjoyed the observations the most and two people reported that they enjoyed the interviews the most, whereas one person identified both tools as the best part of the project. It was highlighted that the interviews provided a great way to get to know other students and share problems and points of view, even though sometimes it was very difficult to motivate students to meet for an interview or it took a while to schedule them due to the busy lives of students who also work or have family commitments.

On the other hand, observations were praised as a means to take a step back and question what actually happens in a classroom. They were reported as unusually positive experiences because they gave the assistants the opportunity to understand the classroom event in order to be able to make the most of it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROJECT

As insiders, the research assistants were amongst the most benign in terms of their suggestions for improvement:

> → Earlier start date (2) so that changes can be implemented and examined throughout the same academic year.
> → More research team meetings (2).
> → More interviews.
> → Accuracy and testing of observation protocols.
> → More commitment as a team.
> → More money.
> → Small incentives for the volunteering students to keep them engaged throughout the course of the project.
> → Interviews scheduled in advance.

VALUE OF THE PROJECT: Extremely useful (2)   Useful (3)

Research assistants qualify the project's value as a tool for the enhancement of the classroom experience through the constant reassessment and adjustment needed in the teaching and learning process that this project provides (2). They highlighted the positive impact that it had on student and assistant engagement (2) and motivation (2). They underlined their heightened awareness of the need to become active learners. They valued the exposure to wide range of student methodologies and comfort levels. They appreciated being exposed to and understanding the affective and the interactional sides of learning.

COMMENTS: One of the research team's strengths was this section. In all the meetings and questionnaires we designed, this section was left open and it generated a culture of freedom of speech – to which one of the assistants was referring in point I of this questionnaire. Therefore, and being the last report of the project, this section tended to be the most emotional and personal in the quality of their answers. They reported that they felt lucky to have been involved in a project like this, that they had enjoyed it a lot and that they felt guilty for not being able to invest more time and effort in it. They were very appreciative of the personal relationship that they had developed with the researcher and wanted to keep involved in the reporting phase in order to see the results and overall picture, thus highlighting the sense of shared ownership.

8.1.2 Volunteer Student Feedback.

Let us turn now to examine the results of the student feedback from the volunteers in this project. It is fitting to remember that the task of these students was mainly to write in their journal and be available for interviews, even though they were involved in small summary-of-the-class activities or short observations from time to time, which, according to their feedback, they seemed to enjoy.

Again, it should be noted that there were fewer feedback forms returned than students involved in the project. This absence of feedback leaves us wondering if those abstentions need to be considered as negative feedback or if they simply show a decrease in the level of engagement and commitment to the project towards the end of the semester, possibly due to the increase on the number of assessments that they needed to submit in their university courses and the proximity of exams, which would obviously take priority.

In our examination of student feedback forms, we are going to follow the same structure that we followed for the results of the assistant feedback, question by question. We will examine them by language module, in the same way that these questionnaires were collated.

8.1.2.1 First Year Spanish – Beginners. 100

It needs to be reiterated that these students were both new to the learning of Spanish and to the university environment. They were first year beginner students and they had only had a semester (12 weeks + reading week + Christmas holidays) of exposure to both the new subject and the new learning environment.

ENJOYMENT: Strong yes (3)   Yes (4)   Okay (1)   Not really (1)
Estimated: 40 % participation

Reasons why they enjoyed it:

- They had freedom of speech and their student's voice was heard (3).
- The journals.
- The project had a practical focus on how to learn.
- The bonus marks.
- They discovered new issues about what affects them as learners.
- The interaction between students.
- It involved talking about feelings.
- The element of self reflection (2).
- It allowed them to assess learning strategies.
- It clarified their expectations.
- It meant helping in the improvement of learning environments for future students.

Reasons why they did not enjoy it:
- It was hard to find things to write about in the journals.
- It was hard to keep up with the journals at the end.

It is important to highlight that several students reported that as a consequence of their enjoyment of the classroom (sometimes unexpected), they would love to continue with the subject in their second year. Some of those who could not, due to their main degree requirements, reported that they would like to continue studying Spanish on their own. We could therefore infer that, from a student perspective, student enjoyment is directly linked to student retention, which in the current economic and educational climate is essential.

OUTCOMES:

The volunteer students in first year beginners reported the following outcomes. I have rewritten them in the form of statements to facilitate their reading. The project:

- had relevant academic and social learning outcomes.
- showed me that a good group atmosphere in class helps me learn so much more (2).
- created an awareness of my language learning style (2).
- allowed me to evaluate the content and my success with it.
- proved that participation is essential for learning a language.
- taught me to be more observant.
- challenged my concept of ideal teacher → great teachers facilitate the hard task of language learning.
- proved that tiredness impacts language learning more than other content subjects.
- improved my attention in class and my awareness of different aspects of student/teacher reactions.
- helped me to discern between good habits and bad habits when learning a language.
- encouraged me to interact with other people in the project.

In terms of the unexpected outcomes, it struck them especially that the project:

- proved how a good instructor is essential for the improvement of learning in the classroom environment.
- showed how enjoyment makes the task of learning easier.
- motivated me to continue with the subject.
- highlighted the importance of curriculum control.
- made me aware of the range and variety of content that a student is capable of in a year.
- pointed out the difficulty of learning a new language in a non-immersion environment (3) and after so many years of not learning one (1).
- made me realize that Spanish is my only elective and the subject I enjoy the most.
- made me consider that different strategies should be used for different language skills.
- made me reach the conclusion that grammar needs to be learned – as opposed to memorized.
- made me realize that having a French background is an aid.
- showed that international students are quicker at learning languages.

REFLECTIVE VALUE:

Most of the first year beginners praised the reflective value of the project. The areas they seemed to reflect upon the most were:

- Some aspects of teaching and studying that enhance the ability to learn a language (2).
- Self-assessment.
- The need for more conversation.
- Personal commitment to the subject.
- The discovery of the ineffectiveness of some study methods.
- The wide range of influences involved when learning a language.
- Personal learning methods (2).

BEST PART IN THE PROJECT

First year beginner students preferred personal interaction and therefore isolated the interviews as the best part of the project.

- Interviews (6) - constructive and effective.
- Journals (2) - though time-consuming, was the preferred aspect for some first years.
- All of it (2) - 'but the journal was the most effective for me [...]. I was able to be honest with myself, reflect on that and move forward from there' – (See Appendix).
- Observation - A lot of them commented on the observation needed to carry out the journal as a positive experience. They reported they enjoyed the observation of their own experience and the small observations carried out after class (3).

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROJECT

First year beginners were amongst the most demanding students in the sense that they targeted directly what needed to be changed so it would benefit them the most. They wanted to see:

- More interviews (4) and less journals (3).
- More observations after class.

- A longer duration for the project (3).

- A change in the allocation of bonus marks → for quality, not quantity. They pointed out how it would be interesting to correlate student comments in journals with their performance in class.

- Clarification of the distribution of bonus marks and deadlines.

- Better arrangement of interview times.

- and they offered contradictory answers in terms of the journals

  o Some wanted freer journal guidelines

  o Others preferred specific questions for the journals because sometimes they found it hard to concentrate in class and to think about how the class was being taught at the same time.

VALUE OF THE PROJECT:

The overall assessment of the project for first year beginner students was positive:

1. Very useful (2) - They seem to think that it is more helpful to produce course assessment in an ongoing basis instead of simply at the end of the year. 'It sets everyone thinking and opens up communication' (See Appendix).

2. Definitely useful (3) - They felt empowered by being allowed to say what was needed or not needed in the course. It enhanced the knowledge of the pedagogic side of the classroom in students and teacher. They also found it useful in the sense that it questioned the barriers of language learners, forcing students to think about their own learning in order to get bonus marks.

3. Useful (2) - they highlighted the project's reflective side (2) → They deemed very useful the fact that it motivated them to explore strategies that they would apply in the future and this, in addition, motivated them to continue with the subject because of the efficient learning environment in which it was taught. They valued the networks of students that the project created, making them feel less isolated from each other and from their teacher. They enjoyed the participatory teaching, learning and researching methods employed in the project.

4. Somewhat useful - A student considered it insightful enough but an unnecessary stress.

COMMENTS

There was a mixed set of comments but most of them were emotional and positive.

- It was an inspirational project.

- Feelings of gratitude (2).

- Great combination of research and learning while getting marks for it!

- Apologies for an incomplete journal.

- Teacher / researcher appreciation.

- Best wishes and congratulations (2).

8.1.2.2 First Year Spanish – Improvers. 200

It needs to be restated that these students were new to the university environment but not new to Spanish. They were first year students in the sense that they had only had a semester (12 weeks + reading week + Christmas holidays) of exposure to the new learning environment, but they had had formal or informal experience at various levels. Some of them had learned Spanish in secondary school, others had lived in Spain or Latin American and acquired it in immersion environments, and others were raised in bilingual families. The answers from this group were very supportive, which went beyond my expectations.

ENJOYMENT: Strong yes (2)   Yes (4) - 12 volunteers

Estimated 50 % participation

Reasons why they enjoyed it:

- It helped them pay attention in class (1) and focus on Spanish studies (1).

- It helped them review class content and how they interacted with it.

- It helped them understand the learning process.

- They were able to voice their opinions and struggles.

- They gained a lot from it (1) and it was not time-consuming (1).

- It reminded them of my learning objectives.

- It helped them track their own progress.

- The constant feedback from peers.

- The teacher's care for student learning.

OUTCOMES:

These students reported the following outcomes. The project:

- pointed out the difficulty of learning a language in the classroom because of the limited opportunities to practice.
- clarified their learning style (2).
- helped them overcome some of the fears of speaking in front of people.
- helped them recognize the patterns and structures of my classes.
- made them think a lot about how to improve their learning.
- highlighted the importance of reflection in their own progress.

It struck them especially that the project:

- helped them with a class that moved at a much faster pace than they are were used to.
- showed them the extent of the impact of learning environments on learning.
- proved to them how much they had learned within the subject and what motivated them.
- proved that journals are not easy to write.
- proved that small group teaching works better because it is easier to socialize.

REFLECTIVE VALUE:

Most of the second years praised the reflective value of the project. The areas they seemed to reflect upon the most were:

- Clarification of personal learning goals and motivation(2).
- Identification of learning strategies.
- Self-assessment and re-evaluation of learning experiences and strategies in the past (4).

BEST PART IN THE PROJECT

Once again, the interviews seemed to be the winners of the project, however one student commented on how much they enjoyed writing the journals because it allowed them private time and it turned out to be an eye-opening experience.

- Interviews (4)
- Journals (2)
- All of it (1)

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROJECT

First year improvers suggested the following changes:

- More interviews (2).
- A longer duration for the project (2).
- More feedback from the researcher.
- Specific questions for the journals.

Three of the six students made no recommendations (3) because they thought the project was good enough as it stood.

VALUE OF THE PROJECT:

1. Very useful (4) – They appreciated group work in a comfortable environment. One student added that these projects are not for everybody, highlighting the issue of learning style. They also seemed to believe that both parties take advantage of studies like this.
2. Useful (2) – A student affirmed that projects like this mean that you get a better education.

COMMENTS

In this section, first year improvers showed their appreciation for the dedication of the teacher to the group and each of the individuals in it, probably because it was the most challenging of learning environments, in the sense that it had the most varied mixture of competences and it began as a very large group.

- Enjoyment (2)
- Gratitude (3)
- Appreciation of student care
-

8.1.2.3 Second Year Spanish. 250

It needs to be borne in mind that these students were second year students, having taken 100 or 200 during the previous academic year and they would be leaving the university the following academic year to embark on their Year Abroad Programs in Spain, Mexico or Ecuador. They were second year students and they had had formal or informal experience at various levels in terms of their module of origin, mode of acquisition or learning of Spanish and experience and exposure of the language. The answers from this group were very interesting in the sense in which they engaged with it, possibly as a tool for the following academic year in which they would lack the structure and guidance of a classroom environment in the learning of Spanish.

ENJOYMENT: Yes (3)   Not really (1) – 8 volunteers
Estimated 50% participation

Reasons why they enjoyed it:

- It was not what they were expecting.
- It made them reassess their learning experience.
- It provided a space to vent their frustrations.
- They had seen their suggestions implemented in the class.

OUTCOMES:

Second year students reported the following outcomes. The project:

- made them think about the conditions of a good learning experience.
- made them reflect upon their personal learning patterns.
- made them assess teaching structures and methods.
- made them more aware of their language learning.
- empowered and encouraged them to have an active role in their own learning.
- clarified their learning approach.

It struck them especially that the project:
- showed them how important interaction is for learning.

- showed how quickly their learning experience improved with their comments from the journals.

- showed how dedicated someone needs to be in order to keep a journal.

- manifested how important is to play an active role in your our own education.

- highlighted the individuality of each learning style.

REFLECTIVE VALUE:

Most of the second years praised the reflective value of the project. The areas they seemed to reflect upon the most were:

- Opportunities to learn Spanish.

- Awareness of learning style.

- Comfort levels and barriers to learning.

- Self-confidence.

BEST PART IN THE PROJECT

Second years did not hesitate. They were clear about their preference for interviews as the best part of this project.

- Interviews (3).

- None (1).

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROJECT

Second years brought in a new idea that neither of the first year groups had put forward:

- Small group discussion and problem solving tasks (2).

- More interaction between students involved.

- Experiment with methods and get feedback.

- More practical.

- Clearer communication between assistants and students.

VALUE OF THE PROJECT:

In terms of the project general value:

1. Definitely useful – They seemed to believe that both parties benefit from the process.

2. Very useful.

3. Useful (2). They felt a sense of ownership over the project and they considered that it was very beneficial because it provided methods that responded to the current reality in the class.

4. Somewhat useful – but only for teaching methods.

COMMENTS

Second Year students were very appreciative as well of the initiative, although they brought up an issue that the researcher had grown aware of towards the end of the project: the issue of the loss of motivation. In spite of being a short-term study, we had not anticipated the need for strategies to keep students motivated and small incentives along the way, focusing more on the overall outcome at the end of the project.

- Congratulations.
- Very beneficial.
- Gratitude (2).
- Lost motivation.

8.2 Evaluation of Feedback and Final Questionnaire.

We found the use of these questionnaires very useful. In spite of the low levels of participation, the answers obtained clarified the use of the project and made the purpose of an innovation like this plain for any future studies. It seems to be counterintuitive to put forward a project without expecting any results. As a team, we decided to approach the matter in a completely new way in order to strengthen the student voice and make it heard. We could speculate as to why the level of participation in the last feedback form was so low. As we have previously mentioned, it was carried out at the busiest time of year for students to keep up with any extra work apart from the university academic requirements. On the other hand, it would be disingenuous to deny that some of the negative feedback tends to be

weaned out by abstention, so even though the other half of the volunteer population decided not to fill out this questionnaire or ignored it, we can assume that some of that 50 per cent would have had a negative view of this project because as the student who wrote negative feedback believed 'this kind of tasks are not for everybody'.

In any case, we decided not to count the answers obtained in a quantitative way but in a qualitative way and used this questionnaire in many ways. It definitely assisted the researcher and the teachers involved in the project as diagnostic feedback in the enhancement of the quality of our teaching performance and students' expectation; and it definitely informed my future and current research. These students were not trained assessors, and yet their responses often challenged even very fundamental beliefs within the university educational system as well as within the tradition of foreign language teaching. The wealth and depth of their answers surprised the entire team and has guided many innovative teaching projects in which I have been involved. The way the feedback was given was not ideal but it opened up the possibility of dialogue, even in the cafeteria or on the bus between students and students and teacher. If the feedback system had been imposed upon staff by the college administration, then no sense of ownership would have existed and enthusiastic participation would have been minimized, both on the part of the students and the part of the students and teachers. The students, as they proved in their feedback, felt free to express their opinions and engaged with them. The interviews and the questionnaires, which they knew were created from their journals, belonged to them. As Johnson (2000) highlighted, the authority of the questionnaire was the issue at stake. Their sense of ownership of part of the project or most of it made them care for it and engage with it.

Summing up, this last feedback form developed an open-ended form of assessment which encouraged self-assessment, on the part of the students but also self-assessment on the part of the research team and researcher - which we will develop in the next chapter. It encouraged teacher/student dialogue but this dialogue, through the project, extended between the remits of the project, and started to affect and include other fellow students and teachers. It helped clarify goals, criteria and expectations from both sides but especially from the students, and it helped narrow the distance between current performance and desired performance both as students and as teachers. It helped students reflect on the whole process, encouraging them to continue learning in this way and motivating language learning, facilitating a positive self-view. It finally provided me as a teacher and researcher with the information needed to improve my teaching and the tools to create better and more productive classroom research projects. Out of the criteria described by Juwah (2004) for an effective feedback form, which we have

been following throughout this chapter, our questionnaire with simple and open ended questions complied with most of them.

Finally, at the end of 2005, in the process of writing this report for the final dissertation, I decided to email all the students involved in the project, whether at the earlier stages or throughout the project, and ask them a few questions. This final questionnaire was triggered by R.C. Gardner's article called *Integrative Motivation: Past, Present and Future*. It was a way to examine the impact that this learning experience had had on their future careers and experience. So in my email to them, I re-introduced myself after two and a half years away from them. At that stage, I guessed that most of them had finished their education at this university – since most of their degrees were three or four years – or about to finish it. I updated them about what I was doing and my whereabouts and explained my purpose in a very informal way. I apologized to them for not having finished the dissertation yet and reiterated the promise that they would receive it as soon as it was finished. I finally thanked them once again and promised them all the anonymity and confidentiality in the use of their answers. These were the questions:

FINALISSIMO[2] QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Many of the students involved in this project mentioned 'bilingualism' as a general learning outcome that they expected from their engagement in Spanish language classes or degree. Bearing in mind that bilingualism is not easily measurable and that there are several degrees of bilingualism, up to what degree do you think you have become bilingual in Spanish? How did you achieve this degree of bilingualism?

2. Have you become bilingual in other languages than Spanish? What happened? How?

3. Where are you working at the moment? Or studying?

4. To what extent do you normally use Spanish in your job or study? Do you use Spanish as the medium of any other daily activities?

5. To what extent do you use any of the other content areas that you studied in the courses you were enrolled in during your degree in your daily activities?

6. Is there any particular activity or feature from the Spanish classes that you found yourself remembering as very profitable for your language learning experience or general life experience in general? Could you explain it?

7. Is there any particular activity or feature from the Spanish classes that you found yourself remembering as very unsatisfactory for your language learning experience or general life experience in general? -- I know we all have great selective memories but I had to ask…

8. I know some of you have taken part of Year Abroad programs or language placements, did any of you have negative experiences about your relationship with native speakers of Spanish that you think may help this project? Could you share it with me?

9. Would you consider that your experience of Spanish changed your identity (personality, attitudes towards life, cultural perspective… etc) in any way? Expand.

10. Just as always, number 10 question is an open area for comments or anything you would like to add. I have to add a colossal thank-you note to each and every one of you – and your classmates - for having been the best 'education department' I ever experienced.

Since this questionnaire was by no means formal and part of the L.S.U.C. project I will only summarize the answers that I gathered from the twelve answers we got, out of which four were from research assistants.

1. Most of the students declared themselves as not bilingual, or very little. There were two of them who replied that they felt comfortable writing the language. A lot of them declared that they felt bilingual at some point in the last two years but that lack of practice or opportunities to use the language made them go backwards. One of them felt comfortable enough – though modest enough as well – to say that her degree of bilingualism was moderate. It is worth noticing that no one chose Spanish as a medium to answer this last questionnaire.

2. Half of them signalled French as the language in which they were bilingual and two of them had started German with which they felt very comfortable. One of them is learning Thai.

3. There was a mixture of answers ranging from History, to Education, Business, Science degrees, etc… (see appendix for a copy of their answers).

4. Most of them said rarely, except that they use it every day when they are travelling or living in Latin America. Some of them said that they use it with a few friends very often.

5. A lot of them were still studying something other than Spanish so in that regards they used their subjects a lot. Out of the two who had graduated, one used the other subject at work; the other did something completely unrelated.

6. They remembered enjoying the oral class. They appreciated the textbook and the fun (songs, plays) and extracurricular activities. They appreciated having a native speaker as a teacher and having open conversations with her and hands-on activities. They also seemed to remember the

interaction and team work fondly. They also remembered how the teacher twirled her pen in her hand.

7. On the other hand, the language lab and the compositions reappeared. They had some problems with the teacher in oral conversation and they found it hard to have a native there because they felt a bit unsupported.

8. Some of them reported having become more well-rounded individuals thanks to language learning and being able to understand themselves more. They also said they felt safer and more comfortable travelling now. They also said that Spanish literature had affected their view of literature itself and their worldview. They also became more aware of the struggle that children face when learning their mother tongue.

9. Finally they reported that they had been generally comfortable in their intercultural experiences but there had been a few cases of misunderstanding culturally that they could not solve while in the place.

10. In general, they showed an interest to see the final results of the dissertation.

Their answers were a bit disheartening since most of them, even students that I would have assumed would have continued speaking and using their second language seemed not to use it at all anymore. In this reaction to their answers, I realized that I had also had an expectation for them, which was my hope that most of them would have become bilingual and kept the language up. This expectation relies on the belief that it is better to use all languages we learn all the time. This false expectation may have influenced the way in which I taught the class and it would be interesting to research how it may have influenced my teaching. I found it quite encouraging though that they would still want to contribute to the project and that they remembered good features of it. Some of them were aware of its impact, some of them were not aware or it simply had not had an impact on them but I hoped it had made a difference in their study experience. Let us know turn, so, to the self-evaluation I offer about the project and my role in it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

* THIS CHAPTER …

- Focused on the analysis of the student and student researcher feedback of the project.

- Discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the project from the student's point of view.

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[1] We do not consider it completely anonymous because we classified their responses according to the module in which they were enrolled.

[2] I am aware of the informal nature of the name given to this questionnaire, but since its nature was mainly informal and by email, and it also fell out of the limits of the case study, this denomination seemed appropriate.

Chapter 9
Language Teaching and Learning Horizons

THIS CHAPTER …

- Recommends the notion of language learning competence to acknowledge the skills necessary for learning a language in the classroom environment.

- Describes the benefits of the project from a teacher/researcher point of view.

- Discusses the drawbacks of the project from a teacher/researcher point of view and suggests solutions for further qualitative teaching/research initiatives.

- Suggest new lines of research into competence and further collaborative projects.

The real challenge is that the questions an oppressed group wants answered are rarely requests for the so-called pure truth. Instead they are queries about how to change its conditions, how its world is shaped by forces beyond it, how to win it over, defeat or neutralize those forces arrayed against its emancipation, growth or development and so forth (Harding 1987, p. 8)

9.1 Researcher's Interpretation of Results and Recommendations.

9.1.1. Language Competence Revisited.

Student feedback of the project had an important role to play for the teacher/researcher and the study itself. The students involved in this project at a research assistant level or at a volunteer level had shown a general satisfaction with the study. Their feedback had not only highlighted aspects of the research (such as the collaboration and dialogue established between student volunteers and assistants) that I was not aware of from my teacher/researcher perspective and marginal position, but it also transpired a positive attitude and appreciation for the experience that they had undergone. In this way, our case study fulfilled one of the requirements in Toohey's criteria: it affected learning and thinking about learning in a positive way.

The project had been initiated by the teacher/researcher but had taken shape in the hands of the students in their different roles in the case study. However, feedback still felt like a threat in the sense that the power of the project evaluation was given to them without a previous set of criteria. They came into the project with a written description and a consent form to sign but the fear was that they all had very different ideas about what this project was and would do. They had been offered bonus points in order to focus their attention on 'achievement' through the completion of tasks but their expected outcomes were unknown. It would have been interesting to ask them at the beginning and also at the end of the project about their expectations. Their feedback at the end of the project definitely helped clarify goals, assessment criteria and expectations both from the students' and the teacher's side. On the other hand, it is fitting to say that at the end of the case study with the students' results and grades not showing a significant quantitative improvement in their language learning, I felt a little discouraged as a teacher, but their feedback helped me see things in a different light. The collaborative project about language learning did not improve their language learning immediately in terms of language level or achievement. In the obsession for quantification, inherent to our grading and evaluation systems, it was easy to oversee the qualitative nature of the project. At the end of the project, we could only speculate that students seemed to have developed enquiring strategies and language learning approaches, likely to offer long-term rewards. The students also seemed to have been incorporated a deeper knowledge system or have been encouraged to acquire a deeper approach to language learning and to learning in general. So, it was their response to learning and their attitude and perspective of it that had changed radically after the project, as students commented in their feedback. In this way, our case study fulfilled the third of the criteria developed by Toohey, which we discussed in chapter 2.

In order to fulfil the second criteria, we need to elucidate what the quality of the influence of the case study was on their learning. It transpired through the feedback forms that the project had helped students reflect on the language learning process, facilitating a positive self-view, which had also been the case for the teacher after reading the evaluations. It also highlighted where my teaching, and sometimes my research, needed to improve. In the university milieu where this project was carried out, there were students from the social sciences who were much more versed in social research techniques and protocols than I was and their participation in the project was very instructive. The collaborative nature of the project had encouraged this space for the sharing of knowledge, probably because it departed from the principle of the recognition of prior knowledge and the acknowledgment of student expertise. It also dissipated the apprehension around student feedback or assessment of any kind in the sense that even though their feedback pointed towards areas where both project and teaching strategies needed improvement, the students provided solutions and suggestions, and many times gave their own

explanation for why they thought things had not gone the way they expected them to go. In other words, most of the students involved in this project provided constructive and beneficial criticism based on the respect for each other's work, which the case study had established as the basis of research.

This initial set of ethical principles had, by osmosis, filtered into the classroom environment, and as the project moved through its 12 week duration period, students and teachers seemed to become more active in the creation of a quality learning environment in the language classroom. Through a closer look at the situations that developed in the classroom, all the participants in the project became more aware of the variety of aspects at play, and started to share the responsibility of managing these aspects. We all gained, through practice, from the benefits of the dialogue established, and from the sharing of these conversations, whether formal (in the shape of interviews) or informal.

Students also seemed to become more sensitive about language learning as an everyday experience rather than as a subject matter you simply take up and then drop again as you enter and exit an educational institution. By incorporating the dialogues about language teaching and learning into their everyday experience, students were compelled to reflect on them, and the project ended up encouraging a kind of self-assessment that most of them had not experienced before. This reflection helped both students and teacher narrow the distance between current performance and their desired outcomes, and it developed towards the creation of a 'reflective competence'. We have organized the codes constructed from the case study in the following competence charts.

Self- reflective competence
Students in this project showed a degree of self-reflective competence that seemed more efficient towards the end of the project. They constantly considered the following concepts: their language aptitude, their own engagement, how the lack of concentration affected their learning, their levels of self-confidence, a preference for experiential and creative learning, their reactions to the competitiveness of the language classroom, the disadvantages of being self-conscious and their levels of external stress.

Table 28 – Self-Reflective Competence

Only a few students involved in educational training had been involved in the production of student portfolios and had had some experience with reflective practice of this nature. However, even they commented on the fact that the dialogic prompting of the reflection that this case study encouraged had provided a tangential approach in their reflection. Other student voices, as well as the voice of the

teachers, helped corroborate some of their beliefs by absolute majority but sometimes, for the most critical students, the fact that the majority agreed made them question and investigate where that belief about language learning was coming from. Sometimes, the other voices that were taking part in the dialogue were diametrically opposed and the struggle to validate one stance or the other led them to different kinds of research. Traditionally, student voices had been conceptualized as conflicting with teacher voices, and so this whole project began by trying to raise individual student voices up to a level where they could contest and establish a productive dialogue with teachers and research.

One of the main objectives of this project is to identify what the main concerns to students were in their approach to language classrooms. We are going to use the following charts to systematize the codes that we have come up with. The following chart isolates the main competencies involved in language competence:

Table 29 – Language Competence – Designed for this dissertation

Language competence	
Students in this project showed a fairly low awareness of language competence, limiting language competence to the level of linguistic competence and a very traditional view of intercultural competence.	
Linguistic competence	Linguistically, they highlighted aspects such as: use of grammar, vocabulary, pronouns, verb tenses & subjunctive, negative structures, por and para, pronunciation, sentence structure...
Communicative competence	Most of them listed communication as their main objective in the initial questionnaires but they failed to show awareness or to explain what communication entails. They mainly listed listening difficulties and speaking difficulties.
Sociocultural competence (intercultural)	Sociocultural or intercultural competence was understood as knowledge of food, the multilingualism of Spain and an understanding of manners. This view is probably encouraged by the textbook culture at the turn of the 21st century and the policies of celebratory multiculturalism in Canada during those years.

Students in this project failed to refer to sociolinguistic or discourse strategies competence, which are also included in the five categories put forward by Wilkins in his work with the Council of Europe. This work is one of the precursors of the current European Language Framework (Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 66).

The most recurrent topics that this case study isolated came under the heading of Classroom Dynamics, The Affective Side of Language Learning and Language of Instruction. They all fall outside of the categories above. The first thing that we can deduce from this is that students taking language courses in a formal/instructional setting are highly aware of the differences between this process and the process of so-called immersion or informal language learning, in other words, they have an awareness of what we will call from now on 'language learning competence'. The second thing that we could infer is that students have a very limited 'metalinguistic competence' and are not familiar with the details of what language competence entails.

Table 30 – Language Learning Competence – Designed for this dissertation

Language Learning Competence	
Strategic competence	Students seem to be very conscious of their language modules: Grammar instruction, Labs, Conversation; the materials they need to use: Textbooks, Workbook, Homework Companion website; teacher's behaviour: Teacher's time management skills, Mistake correction, Language of Instruction, Rapport, Action in response to students' needs. They are also very aware of the activities that happen in class: Drills, Team work, Review...
	They started to offer and suggest new content or activities: Course related: Vocabulary, Reading, Curriculum control; Games, Sample tests, Challenges, Films, Group Presentations, Practice time, Examples, Interaction; and also suggestions to other classmates: Student Preparation.
	Their awareness of other languages in the classroom was heightened: English, French, Romanian, and Mohawk.
	In terms of their out-of-the-classroom language learning strategies, they named a few: Previous language learning experiences, Eavesdropping, Memorizing vocabulary and verbs, Visuals, Tables and summaries, Test preparation activities, Writing things down, Studying with other students, Extra practice, Advanced preparation, Self-

	recordings, Experiential learning, Daily Linguistic Exposure, Review, Overcoming obstacles. They wanted to 'do' things with language, more than to talk about language.
Teaching and learning cultural competence	They seem to have a good round awareness of the cultural environment of teaching and learning institutions, and they highlighted the following aspects of this culture: Class Times, Student beliefs, Learning difficulties, Improvement, Student needs, Learning style, Pace, Time management, Purpose... They had already developed a notion of a good language teacher and they isolated the following features of efficient good language teaching: Patience and flexibility, Native or non-native speaker, Rapport, Strategic learning, Action, Engagement with student learning, Collaborative environment...
Sociocultural competence	They identified the classroom and the educational institution as a specific context with certain sociocultural rules, and they were concerned about the distribution of power in the classroom (Volunteers, Student Responsibility, and Authority). They were concerned about their voice being heard and the quality and quantity of interaction (Teacher-Students, Student-Student, Action, and Assessment). In this context they evaluated 'Rounds' and they agreed on a language-learning enhancing atmosphere characterized by Jokes and laughing, Informal, Comfortable to ask questions, Friendly, Helpful, Personal and engaging, Small communities, Pseudo-Immersion Environment, Interaction outside of classroom, Different groups, different atmospheres... They also underlined the importance of feedback in the creation of a successful language learning environment: Mistakes are allowed. Correction is not personalized. Feedback is needed. Nonverbal feedback. Feedback needs to be understandable. Peer feedback. Self-assessment. Feedback is definitely a sensitive issue, but they emphasize the responsibility of students to give the teacher feedback too.
Social competence	They did not talk at length about this competence at the level of the student but they emphasized the importance of the teacher's social skills, influenced generally according to them by the motivation to be a teacher and the teaching style awareness (Preferences, Class rehearsal times, Affect and relationships, Cultural aspects of teaching). The notion of social competence is key to the language learning situation since, as previously mentioned in chapter 2, much of language learning – and learning

	in general - happens through interaction.
Affective competence	They talked about the affective side of learning a great deal as well. The students are aware of the need to have a degree of affective competence to be successful in a language learning environment. This competence is characterized by the student's autonomy, creativity and innovation, through their response to peer influence and anxiety and stress, their responsibility for learning, the cost of learning, and other life concerns, their preferences, their enjoyment, their mood, the learning challenges that they encounter and the management of expectations [Immersion vs. Classroom learning, Child learning vs. Adult learning, Time and Space].
	In this regard, they talk a great deal about the impact of the logistics of the classroom in student learning, mainly space and time. They posit as ideal a small classroom size, with a circular student seating arrangement, and good air quality and temperature. They prefer to have visual aids in the space as well. They also have an acute awareness of inconvenient class times, class duration and frequency.

I would like to mention here a new aspect of literacy that has been brought up by our technological advancement at the beginning of this century: the so-called digital competence. J. Villatoro has conceptualized this competence as a teaching skill that 21st century teachers cannot fail to include in their teacher's toolbox. However, I would like to bring it up as well in the context of Language Learning Competence, under the heading of strategic competences.

Table 32 – Digital Competence - (J. Villatoro)[i]

Digital competence
Learning dimension
Informational dimension
Communicative dimension
Digital culture dimension
Technological dimension

According to Villatoro, the learning dimension involves the transformation of information into knowledge and language acquisition. This simply involves the transfer from a different format (multimedia) but it is a dimension present in all kinds of learning. The informational dimension involves the gathering, assessment and management of information in digital environments. This

requires a higher level of familiarization and knowledge about digital learning environments. It also requires critical skills in order to discern between the different resources available. The communicative dimension involves interaction and interpersonal communication online. This aspect is the newest feature of our Web 2.0 and the rules that regulate social and interpersonal communication are being created and recreated constantly. Digital culture dimension involves a working knowledge of social and cultural practices in digital communities. Finally, the technological dimension involves a level of technical knowledge about how to manage, work or create digital resources or environments.

Even though this author and his collaborators have posed this competence at the level of teacher's competences, I would like to include them also at the level of student strategic competences, for two reasons. First of all, digital environments have enriched the world of language learning at many levels. For example, they have increased the opportunities of language exposure and interaction in a language without the need to travel to a particular country. Language immersion has lost its footing in the real world and a person can use an L2 all day through the use of social digital interaction and digital resources, but in order to do that, the student needs to have at least a working knowledge of the three first dimensions. The other reason why I think it is important to bear in mind this competence is because in an increasingly technology-based world, children and young adults have acquired, quite autonomously, a satisfactory level of mastery in several dimensions of this digital competence before they engage with educational environments.

Cassany and Ayala (2008) quote Prensky's list of the cognitive skills developed in digital activities, such as multitasking, fast pace, hypertextual reading, multimodal, community connection, brief information packages, enjoyment and games in learning and self-directed learning. If the educational system, and teachers as the human elements working in it, is to take advantage of this prior knowledge that the students arrived with, it needs to recognize it and to study systematically its features so that we can focus on how to transfer the skills acquired through this competence to the competence that they would have less experience with, such as the next item that we are going to examine. Cassany and Ayala (2008) also alert about the modern dichotomized view of reality as digital vs. analogue, when the truth is that these two versions of reality complement and enhance each other.

Linguists have conceptualized 'metalinguistic awareness' as a label primarily to describe a model to explain the interaction between language and written text, primarily in bilingual learners' literacy development (Bialystok, 2007). The term was coined by Cazden (1974) to describe transfer of linguistic knowledge across languages. Metalinguistic awareness (MA, in the literature) can be defined

as an awareness of linguistic form and structure and their relationship to meaning in a specific language system. It involves the skills to analyze language as an "object," as a "process," and as a "system." The main corpus of research developed in the 1980s and the 1990s, with results indicating that it worked as a crucial component in bilingualism. As an ability to "think about language" (Kerper Mora, 2009), it provides language learners with a tool to detach, observe and understand from the object of study towards metalinguistic transfer. Adult language learners, as opposed to children, already have a working knowledge of at least one other language. The understanding and analysis of the L1 as an object, process and system provides a facilitation instrument towards the understanding of any other language as such. It involves the skill to contrast two languages and discover similarities as well as differences. Research studies show that there can be a positive transfer between L1 and L2 in several areas: phonemic awareness and phonological processes; decoding and word recognition strategies; use of cognates and overall comprehension strategies (Kerper Mora, 2009). Research seems to support that explicit instruction in metalinguistic knowledge is helpful, at least, for developing effective reading strategies.

The absence of L1 grammar and linguistic knowledge about their first language has determined the choice of method and obstructed an avenue of language learning for most of the English L1-speaking students in this project. Even though Canada has a clear policy of bilingualism, and therefore most students had previous linguistic knowledge and language learning experiences that would shape their learning in university, they had developed a general attitude against this level of abstract thinking about languages, and a certain disregard for grammar concepts in general. We would like to put forward the idea that the concept of 'metalinguistic competence' is as important as any other language competence and maybe more so in the university environment, in the sense that it develops and explores cognitive and metacognitive skills that the other competencies leave aside. This metalinguistic competence would involve a degree of metalinguistic awareness and it should be benchmarked like the communicative competence in the ELF accounting for the three qualities of language as 'object', 'process' and 'system' in every level. The ELP is a comprehensive reflective tool that has made an effort to include the linguistic, cultural and experiential aspects of language learning. In an attempt to foster multilingualism, it is also presented in a different format and aims to start raising an awareness of language use – both L1 and L2 - but as most current curricula and language planning are still under the effect of the communicative approach fervour, they fail to account for the fact that most language students nowadays regularly function in more than one language, and can avail of the cognitive strategy of contrastive analysis to scaffold their L2 learning.

9.1.2 Researcher's Assessment of the Project and Further Research.

As a researcher, the keeping of a journal shed light on problems that the case study and the project in general bumped into, and the inner conflict between the ideal project and the reality of the research conducted. A few topics seemed to persist throughout the months in which this diary was kept. The first issue was the difficulty in establishing cooperation with other teacher in the same course, and colleagues in the department, in order to carry out an innovation project together. Even though this obstacle may be anecdotal and pertaining to this institution and project alone, since we lack evidence of other cases, the researcher felt that this inability to cooperate was a constant in academic language departments and that further research and intradepartmental initiatives can clarify and lead the way towards more informative research. It seems ludicrous to come up with such a proposal in an academic world moving towards interdisciplinary, but the lack of research conducted in the teaching and learning of different languages, together and by researchers within the same institution, is symptomatic. In the same way, the research journal seems to reiterate the shift towards a more individualistic classroom culture in which peer-review and peer-help between students is a tool less and less used in our current classrooms. The narrowing of the distance between teachers and students that student-centred approaches to teaching have enhanced has had a negative impact on the relationship between students in a classroom. This student-student distance does not support a collaborative and social environment in our classrooms.

Textbooks and materials used in the class occupy a good amount of space in the researcher's journal, as well as the affective side of conducting research towards the realization of a doctoral dissertation. These two topics suggest further lines of research and creation. On the one hand, there is a need for the creation of collaborative plurilingual materials that promote the development of the different competences. These materials should be ideally created with students and other teachers as a team and should be made available to a wider audience of students and teachers to get successful feedback from the different contexts in which they can be used and for different learning situations. On the other hand, the affective side of research and the management of the affective side is an element of research that has lacked attention from psychologists, pedagogues and social scientists. The isolation of obstacles and the transparency of what a research process entails would help any junior researcher not only at the early planning stages but preventing and expecting the obstacles that s/he may encounter along the way. This research journal expanded on the difficulties and obstacles tackled along the way in a non-systematic manner but the reporting and sharing of the subjective accounts of the process of

research may help to demystify the status of research, to clarify its goals, objectives and standards and to bridge the gap between academics and teachers, and theory and practice.

The problems with the variation between classroom observers and their methods were also present in the researcher's diary. As a solution, observation techniques within a team should be scaffolded and rehearsed. The scheduled observations and the reporting of these incidents were probably the tools that required most technical knowledge. Our project focused in the interaction between students and students and teacher, and that generated a stronger focus on the interview as a technique, while observation was less practiced due to time constraints. However, it proved to be a great tool to monitor classroom interaction from a marginal point of view and to attempt to change interaction for the better through direct action.

The criteria applied to the assessment of social science case studies have recently been subject to variation. The traditional concepts of accuracy, validity, reliability and practicability – or reduplication - have shifted. Accuracy has been described as the degree of freedom from error. The subjective status of most of the primary data in this case study would deem it most inaccurate. Our social science standpoint vouches for a concept of subjective accuracy over generality. It takes for granted that the subjects involved in the project are being truthful in the description of their realities within their individual frames of mind and in a language that can be shared. Regarding these individual frames of mind, it is important to recognize that subjectivity permeates them all: students, research assistants, teachers and researcher. The divergence of opinions and perspectives does not render the project less accurate, on the contrary it illustrates the language learning classrooms that the subjects aim to qualify and describe via a more detailed multi-perspective account. These perspectives spring from the subjects' reactions and experiences of the same situation. However, they are motivated by the affective side of teaching and learning. Unfortunately, the three tools that we chose for this case study do not convey the emotional overtones in the most efficient manner. Some student statements portray their reaction to the classroom situation through linguistic devices, but most of the non-verbal language and contextual cues are lost. Another instance where the case study could be improved would be in the provision of research context production. The context in which the journals, interviews and observations were carried out would provide a lot of information that would enrich our view of the learning situation. The diversities of students and research assistants worked against the case study at times because without clear guidelines from the junior researcher the initial classification of materials was done on an individual basis, which made it very difficult to contrast and systematize the primary data at the end of the project.

Students in the project and the students that worked as assistants were already akin to the teacher/researcher at the beginning of the project, so the case study was very aware of the presence of a favourable bias. Instead of assessing it as negative, it was regarded as a positive motivating factor for student participation in the project and taken into account at every step, through critical interpretation of student views. The same problem arose at the level of student engagement in the project. Although the initial intention was to account for the view of language learning in the classroom with the students that struggled the most with this learning environment, the project finished with the volunteers that were most engaged in class and in the project, despite the dangling carrot of 10% bonus grades offered. The bias was not the only influence that we had to bear in mind when analyzing these materials and trying to elucidate what kind of conclusions we could draw from them and their practicality. *Reactivity* - defined in chapter three as the awareness of being tested – was clearly an issue that we could not detach ourselves from. Students were very aware of the audience (student assistants and teacher) of their journal and interview, and their opinions had to be interpreted within this context.

This is where this case study diverts from grounded theory (GT). The logistics of the project did not allow for the consideration of the 'incident' as the unit of study or the 'learner' and therefore it offers a fragmented vision of particular classroom contexts. One of the main reasons for this lack of contextual information was the absence of consistent memoing. Further projects will have to include training on memoing and systematic methods of classifying incidents. Another problematic condition arising from the use of GT is that the establishment of codes was done from the students' diaries and then we adjusted the term chosen to adapt to the results obtained in interviews and observations. This is not a generally valid method of extracting code and it would be interesting to invert the order and extract codes from interviews or observations and apply them to the other data collected afterwards, to account for the variation that could be found within the same data. However, since the aim of this small case study was not the production of theory, this exercise was deemed unnecessary.

Validity is the second traditional criteria applied to case studies. The validity of the conclusions refers to the foundations of these conclusions. The research journal allowed the researcher to step aside and observe the project and the case study from an involved outsider point of view. The awareness of the filters and the loopholes in the case study directed the nature of the conclusions, probability statements and recommendations put forward in the final two chapters of this thesis.

Reliability is perhaps the most problematic criteria as applied to this project, and which may, in part, be unconsciously influenced by the practice of language testing and the difficulty in obtaining reliability

through this testing. It depends on replication. Precision, or reliability, has been defined as consistency of measurements. On the one hand, it would mean that different people would obtain the same results with the same methods or instruments. The nature of the context and the classroom situation, and the choices that this case study made to allow variation and inclusion of different perspectives, would deem reliability of this kind impossible. This research, then, aims to attain internal consistency reliability (ICR). The concept of ICR has been put forward to account for situations like this. It assesses the consistency of results by making methods and contexts transparent. The report of the logic used to infer conclusions and recommendations provides a map for the audience and examiners. If the map is clear and well founded in the realities described, the project is internally consistent and, therefore, reliable.

This project lacks good descriptions of incidents, which would not only serve as examples for the conclusions offered but would also provide a richer depiction of the situations in question. Incident writing and reporting is a skill in itself that should be included in teacher training courses. Incident reporting has been standardized in health and legal sciences, but we have not reached an agreement on what the basic details are in an educational setting in order to achieve an informative description of the situation. It is not only important to know how to write up a report accurately and in an accessible language that can be understood by other teachers, students or researchers; the main obstacle that we found during this project was to know what to report, and how to decide what is a relevant incident and what is not. These are areas in which educational research and practice needs more creativity in order to develop the appropriate skills and proposals to tackle criteria that would elaborate efficient field notes, and facilitate reporting that is conducive to sharing and comparing language learning environments and situations.

Ellis (1997) suggested that the teacher/researcher of any innovation project in education should apply a microevaluation plan, bearing in mind the following aspects (p. 202):

- Purpose - why was this project carried out?
    In our case, the main purpose for this case study was to try and examine the variables of the language classrooms in which the researcher was working so as to find the tools to understand how language learning happens from the point of view of the students. From the beginning, we were very aware, as McKay and Wong (2000) alert, that "a contextualized perspective on second-language learning does not, indeed cannot, provide instant, localized recipes for pedagogical change" (p. 604), but we certainly hoped that it would demonstrate some of the

tools, available to the participants in the language classroom, that help unearth the singularity of its situation and, hopefully, manage it in a more efficient way.

- Audience – who are the results of this project for?

Initially, the results were primarily for the people involved in the project. The direct consequence of the main purpose of this project would be raising awareness about the aspects of the classroom that the students deemed important. However, as the project started to show a qualitative change in the classroom, its audience expanded. Even though we noticed that the students that were more engaged in the project there were: 1. Those interested in studying languages and language study and 2. Those interested in pursuing a career in language teaching or teaching in general.

- Evaluator – who would assess it?

As part of this Ph.D. program, this project already had an external academic evaluation team. It was important for the researcher to allow students to evaluate it. The assessment of a project of this kind did not seem complete until it included as many participants, and perspectives, in the language learning situation as possible. This is why chapter eight was very important in the development of the project and not an external coda for it. As student feedback shows, it was the process that the students enjoyed the most. It was also the process that shifted the language-learning situation, and not the conclusions achieved through the tools that the students and teacher had employed. The skills that they had learned and the process of critical enquiry on a situation in which they were all involved brought about a change in their way of 'participating' in the language classroom.

This made us shift our attention back to assessment criteria. Although honing the criteria for evaluating results has been the focus of academic studies for quite a long time, developing criteria for the evaluation of process, these criteria would have to go beyond the binary nature of current assessment measures (good/bad, valid/invalid, reliable/unreliable, generalizable/non-generalizable…) as these qualifiers fail to account for the complexities of (the/our?) process and the multiplicity of perspectives from personal experience.

- Content – what will this project cover?

This was the most open-ended question at the beginning of our project. Even though the teacher/researcher had a specific interest in finding out how the students' first language

affected the learning of a second language, according to their student perspective, grounded theory allowed the main content of this project to be elucidated from the diaries and interviews (mainly). The observations brought another perspective - those of the student researchers' - into play, and with them, new matters that they considered essential in the development of a language classroom.

In the end, the content revolved around the three main issues of Language of Instruction and First Language, Classroom Interaction and the Dynamics of Power, the Affective Side of Learning and the Distribution and Arrangement of the Physical Space in the Classroom.

- Method – how did it take place?

In chapter three and four of this dissertation, we explored the methods used in the elicitation of data and analysis. The time and cost for training in these methods of analysis limited our experience with the methods in question. NVivo is a program with a lot of potential for discourse analysis but training in it is costly and requires a lot of time and practice. We only used a few limited features of the software, mainly for coding and referencing, which sufficed for a qualitative case study like ours, not aimed at theory-building.

The same would apply for grounded theory. The results of this project would have aimed at a higher and more generalizable theoretical level if we had had the time and the money to be trained in the use of this research methodology. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, it seemed acceptable to generate probability statements, instead of theoretical hypotheses, for several reasons. Firstly, the nature of the learning situation made it difficult to be generalized. Secondly, its target audience, nowadays, is generally resistant to theory and seems to respond more favourably to shared experiences and localized results. Thirdly, probability statements open the door to further research and further case studies - perhaps of a smaller magnitude and more localized, for hypothesis testing. Lastly, the research team hoped that probability statements and the easy-going nature of this project would invite others to follow in our footsteps and critically engage with the learning situations in which they find themselves, without the fear that words such as 'theory', 'hypothesis', 'thesis', and so on inspire in language students and teachers alike.

- Timing – when did it take place?

Ideally, the project should have run throughout a whole academic year, which would have allowed the research team to implement more changes and investigate the results of these

changes in student learning. Unfortunately, the time constraints imposed at the beginning of the project, by the process of obtaining permissions and clearance from the ethical committee on research on human subjects, delayed its start and the team had very limited access to the students in question.

As the researcher, and many of the students, moved on from the institution in question, the project was not reduplicated. Its reduplication may have provided another item for comparison, and would have given the research team the opportunity to improve observation protocols, interviewing techniques and field notes.

Another checklist put forward in this case by Mills (2007) examines action research reports as follows:

- Intractability of reform – Does your action lead to an action?
  As one of our project's main goals is to try and reach a teachers or teacher trainees audience, we hope our case study becomes an inspiration. It definitely lead to action while we were carrying it out and it will lead to more specific research by this researcher.

- Audience – What is the intended audience for your report?
  This project is part of a Ph.D. program so its audience is essentially academic. However, it is intended for a wider teacher and student audience, in the hope that it inspires collaboration projects and similar teaching and learning innovation experiments.

- Format – Have you presented the report using an acceptable format?
  This report has been carefully structured and organized in a way that, hopefully, is pleasant and clear to read. It has been peer reviewed by several students and academic supervisors, and I have worked on the recommendations that they have made in order to ensure that the logic of conclusion inferring and the arrival at probability statements is presented in a transparent way.

- Prejudices – Have you shared any prejudices that may have affected your findings?
  This project has been very consciously carried out trying to make ideology and subjectivity as transparent as possible, in order to minimize its effect on the research exposed.

- Professional disposition – How has the action research effort contributed to your professional disposition? The research carried out, and the dialogue established within the research team

and in the classrooms under study, has changed my view of language teaching and learning. It has also provided me with ethnographic skills that I lacked previous to the project.

- Reflective Stance – In what ways has the action research effort contributed to your reflective stance in the way you view teaching and learning? The project and meetings with the research team have deepened my reflective practice. Whereas before the project, my focus was on external factors such as organization of curriculum or content, this project has made realize that these factors have deeper consequences and that they influence teaching and learning in indirect ways. This project has also made me consider internal factors such as stress and feelings as something that can be managed and used for the enhancement of teaching and learning.

- Life enhancing – How have your efforts enhanced the lives of the students in your care?
  The feedback given by students shows that most of them enjoyed the project and that they all benefited from it in different ways. They saw their classroom environments being changed and responding to their explicitly expressed needs. They also realized that their learning behaviours could be changed with small actions and that this contributed to their learning.

- Action – What action have you taken?
  Our case study was not a complete action research case since the timeframe that we used was not viable for the application of our findings. However, we did apply student suggestions throughout the course of the project, which resulted in significant class improvement. On the other hand, as a teacher, I hope to learn from this experience and continue applying the findings in my everyday practice. As a first year coordinator, the information on student engagement and the way identity influences language learning and engagement, as the project showed, are currently being applied in a different educational context on a smaller scale.

- Action-data connection – How is the proposed action connected to your data analysis and interpretation? I expect to be able to plan and carry out smaller case studies with the probability statements developed in the next section of this report as well as with the insights and further research in the final section of this chapter.

- Impact – How will you monitor the effects of your practice?
  Since the teacher/researcher moved from one educational setting to a similar educational setting in a completely different country, it would not be viable to apply directly the results

from this project to the different context without having first studied the main characteristics of that context in a systematic way. However, though this case study had an action research element to it, it was not designed as an action research project due to the time and space constraints that it faced.

To counteract this lack of quantitative measurability, we used student and research assistant feedback in order to understand the effect of the project itself as innovative action in teaching and learning.

- Changes – What would you do differently next time?

    In this section, I have already enumerated several aspects of this project that could be done differently in order to obtain more aligned results. My two main doubts are the observations and the use of NVivo, as both the research team and researchers would have needed more training and, consequently, more time, in order to take full advantage of these tools. I believe I would have also restricted the numbers of this project to make the compilation of data and the analysis less saturated and more manageable for a small research team. This would have helped the delivery of the report in a more synchronic timeframe.

- Colleague Response – How did your colleagues respond to your findings and the actions recommended by your research?

    My colleagues at the time were not very involved in the project, but they responded positively when they heard about it and were surprised by some of the student answers. In the higher education institution where I currently work, there is a strong focus on the improvement of teaching and learning and we engage in informal conversation about specific aspects of language teaching, and learning in particular. In fact, the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures has created a teaching and learning committee, which I intend to become more involved with in the near future. Some of my current colleagues will be part of the jury for this Ph.D. dissertation. I will have to wait for their feedback until then.

The next distinctive feature of our project was the use of an external language classroom for contrastive analysis. This practice would not be considered entirely scientific. The classroom was utterly different in several ways: it was located in a secondary school, students were learning English, and the variety of origins, languages and ages was far more diverse than the classrooms studied in the L.S.U.C. project, which shared many more features. However, no matter how unscientific this comparison may seem, it was very effective in putting the L.S.U.C. classrooms in a different perspective. The teacher/researcher

became a teaching aid and classroom observer, and the completely different ways in which learning was handled in this classroom allowed for the questioning of her own practices and methods in her own classroom and institution. Many teacher-training programs include observation periods at the moment at the school where these teacher trainees will carry out their practicum later on. This project would argue that the practice of peer observation in different school settings enriches the teacher's experience (and even the students' experience) not only at the training stage but also during professional practice. There is a general belief that language is taught very similarly in most classes and that all teachers have a very similar understanding of what language teaching entails. This project has highlighted the fact that even in a similar language course and classroom, the variety of views and methods of studying languages is huge, and sometimes even contradictory. Projects like Cassany's Critical Literacies Research group[2] in the University of Pompeu i Fabra (Spain) explore individual experiences of acquiring literacy in the subject's first language across different cultures. Further research is needed on the description of personal experiences and beliefs about language learning, but also on the description of personal practice in language teaching. Nowadays, more teachers are showcasing their methods and materials in the space unlocked by online, open-source software and creative commons. These approaches are interesting but are normally geared towards professional and/or promotional purposes, and it (what is this 'it' referring to?) tends to revamp the learning object to fit the purpose (of what?). This itemized style to teaching is very useful in terms of finding resources and for sharing skills with other teachers or teacher trainees. Nonetheless, it does not develop the story of a language classroom from the beginning – when the group meets for the purpose of learning – to the end – when they finish their exams and they get their results (and how their queries are handled).

Institutions do not usually have strict protocols about language teaching, and teachers have not traditionally examined their practice as a storyline, but as a series of classroom events that are sometimes connected to the one before or the one after, or as a series of classroom events developed in a class plan. Looking at classroom teaching practice in a fresh way can help unblock stagnant practices. Creating a dialogue with the students and participating in the classroom can produce richer accounts of language courses and language learning stories. Asking students to engage in the way that languages are taught and learned makes them shift their views of language learning by accepting different roles as 'critics and commentators' of the language learning situations in which they are involved. The more dimensions this dialogue includes and the more roles that the participants take on, the more flexible the learning situation becomes and it is easier to adjust for individual learning needs.

The notion of flexible roles comes from the importance of the acknowledgement or development of social identities by Norton Peirce (1993) in language learning environments:

> Classroom based social research might engage the social identities and investments of language learners in ways that will promote language learning as well as the enhancement of human possibility. Without neglecting a focus on grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary (the basics), I will argue that classroom based social research might help the learner to understand how opportunities to speak are socially structured how the learner might create possibilities for social interaction with target language speakers and how the teacher can gain insight into the learner's social identities. (p. 225)

Ellis (1997) states that the discourse of second language acquisition as an academic discipline "owes allegiance to academic discourse and, as such, must follow its conventions (p. 238). These limits restrain individual imagination, preventing creativity, innovation and experimenting. As Woods (1986) defends:

> I am not arguing that we should not have a rigorous methodology with due attention to matters of validity, access, ethics, data collection, etc., nor that we should not have tested and recognized techniques and routines. Rather that, as part of that methodology, conducive to the production of theory as to the collection of data. One requires liberation, creativity and imagination: the other discipline, control and method. In some ways, they tend to work against each other, and where we put more emphasis on one, the other will suffer. (p. 169)

However, SLA has become an academic discourse on its own in the last few decades by creating specialist jargon and a distinctive community of practitioners. Academic style constraints in form, structure and the nature of theory – and practice sometimes – are generally imposed on teacher research and they discourage classroom participants from critical enquiry. He notes that "researchers are very rarely language teachers themselves […] and that teachers are placed in a position of receiving proclamations from researchers" (p. 239). The shift on the role of the teacher or his/her view of teaching is imminent. Freeman and Richards (1996) suggested three ways of teaching: 1. Teaching as behaviour, 2. Teaching as cognition and 3. Teaching as interpretation. In the first instance, teaching means transmitting knowledge from teachers to students. In the second view, teaching means developing students' understanding of the principles underlying a discipline. Finally, the third perspective views teaching as "a craft that teachers exercise in deciding what to do in a particular

situation at a given moment, thus emphasizing the contextualized nature of all teaching" (Ellis, 1997, p. 237). The development of teachers as researchers would fit into this last view of teaching, but it does not exclude the two former perspectives.

Academic style is a language of its own and in order to communicate and express beliefs and individuality, researchers need to be well versed in it, which rarely happens in the earlier stages of research practice. Ellis (1997) recognizes that "it is common to distinguish between theory, […} and practice […]" (p. 237). He also reminds us that it would be more precise to acknowledge the fact that both applied linguistics and language pedagogy involve theory and practice. He continues to explain that this difference emerged from the distinction between technical knowledge and practical knowledge. Quoting Finochiaro and Brumfit (1983), Ellis goes on to underline the fact that understanding the process of performance, even explaining it, does not equate to performing competently (p. 61).[3]

On the other hand, teachers' voices have been ignored (Ellis, 1997, p. 251). Research accounts, like this dissertation, and teaching reports, like the ones proposed above, may bridge the gap between teachers and researchers, inviting and including them in dynamic dialogues about their everyday lives and professional experiences. According to Ellis (1997), "learning and teaching need to be located firmly within the social worlds of learners and teachers" (p. 241). He does not only advocate for teachers as researchers developing their own tools and hypotheses, but also "for teachers as active agents investigating the relevance of proposal derived from SLA to their own teaching" (p. 249). This project tried to expand the role of 'active agents' to the majority of the participants in the language classroom: the students, acknowledging their voice, validating their previous experience and recognizing their prior practice as language learners and learners in general. Projects such as this one have gained momentum in higher education institution. It is worth mentioning Elisabeth Dunne's project in University of Exeter. To support the idea of collaborative partnership and developing the role of students as engaged collaborators, the University of Exeter has developed a student-led action research initiative that involves student and staff collaborating on improving learning and teaching experiences. During 2010-11, twenty five small 'Students as Change Agents[4]' projects were run, in which students were responsible for endorsing evidence-based amendments. In the abstract to her presentation in the conference 'Engaging Minds', organized by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at the National University of Ireland in Galway in 2011, Dunne explains that the students, working with the Students' Guild, "select aspect of teaching and learning that are of concern to them, develop a research question, and plan their own methods of data collection".[5]

In the previously mentioned Ph.D. dissertation, Norton Peirce (1993) concludes that there are varied benefits in conducting classroom social research in terms of learning. As a teacher researcher, I share the belief that engaging in research about language teaching and learning with your students compels them:

- To investigate their opportunities for interaction with native speakers in different settings.
- To reflect on their engagement with a target language and language learning.
- To question cultural practices and teaching and learning practices, whether their own or other participants in their classroom or learning environment.
- To establish a dialogue with their fellow classmates about this task and specific or general aspects of language learning.
- To perceive their classroom as a social network – which is part of a bigger social network - in which resources and skills can be produced, analyzed and exchanged.

Once the dialogue is established, the teacher's experience will also be enhanced by the guidance that issues brought up in conversation have provided. In the introduction to her dissertation, Norton Peirce (1993) suggests that "classroom-based social research might help to bridge the gap between formal and natural sites of language learning for her specific research context", but I would argue that this conclusion can be applied to other sites of language teaching and learning. Kurt Lewin (1951), one of the precursors of experiential learning and action research, already reminded us that "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 169).

As Elliot (1996) explains:

> If we are to move forward, then clearly a significant research effort is needed to understand the changes that will overtake conventional educational practice. The research that is needed needs to be transdisciplinary and action oriented. It has to provide, not just feedback, but what Paul Black has called 'feed-forward', closely geared to developing responses to changes as they happen. It has to be research that is intellectually agile and maintains a high degree of reflexivity, for many of the assumptions that inform it will be subject to change as the research proceeds. (p. 26)

This project challenges conventional teachers' practices as well as the received practices from the institution in question. It tried to be transdisciplinary in the sense that it included a corpus of terms and knowledge from disciplines that traditionally do not play a role in SLA research. Re-flexibility and intellectual challenge have characterized the project from the beginning up to the completion of this

very report. The project did not start with an aim to review research practice, quite the opposite; it wanted to follow in the lines of academic practice and methods. As the project developed, the choices that the research team had to take in order to see the project to its completion led us down a road less travelled by academic practice, abandoning the trails of generality, reliability and validity as our primary motives.

Following Grounded Theory assessment criteria, we could focus on other aspects of the project instead of its potential for theory-building. They talk about 'fitness', for example. This criterion of fitness refers to the correspondence between the data and the conclusions, and their practical, daily applications (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 238). The methodology for analysis of this project has tried to be faithful to the words uttered by the students through the different ethnographic media that we have employed, in order to change their everyday experience of the language classroom. In other words, this project had this criterion in mind from the very start to the very end. However, the main issue is its measurability. Glaser and Strauss have been criticized for the lack of concretion in this sense, and so they offer a second criterion, 'understanding' (p. 241). If a theory is easy to understand, it normally facilitates its practical application. Since this project tries to bridge the gaps between teaching/researching/learning, the second main focus was to deliver it in the most understandable terms possible, as well as to carry it out in a transparent and negotiable manner. Once again though, the establishment of such criterion is rather naïve because it ignores the fact that in order to enhance the understandability of a project, a common language and familiar experiences are required. The two other criteria offered by these authors: 'generality' and 'control', do not apply directly to our case study. The former dictates that a theory must be a general guide to multi-conditional, ever-changing, general situations (p. 242). In spite of what general social science would accept, they argue that theory is possible even in single case studies. Theories thus generated will be rather restricted in their explanatory strengths and they will certainly require further study, modification and expansion through other studies but the concepts they generate will be universal (p. 284). The latter, or 'control', relates to a certain ability to manage situations (p. 248). Our project did not aim to have an immediate impact in the classrooms under study; therefore, this was the criterion that was less observed throughout the duration of the innovation and research. Our method emerged from critical examination of behaviour (our own and others) and it sought to explore and describe, rather than to change and control.

As described in previous chapters, and summarized here, quality standards vary throughout time and across the diverse spectrum of qualitative methods. Beyer (1992) highlights the importance of genuine curiosity on the part of the researcher, which is not only going to justify his/her investment into the

research but also authenticate its purpose (p. 51). She reinforces the need to incorporate and contest existing theory - and we might add, practice - but bring on new understanding from empirical data that comes about from a participant's immersion into the research field. She adds the need for flexible and imaginative research methodologies, which presuppose a determined effort on the part of the researcher. The emphasis, placed on the researcher in these criteria for quality, seems to lead us to the conclusion that exemplary research practice has moved on from the frozen ideals of academic rigor into a more socially responsible paradigm that takes into account ethics as globally-oriented, locally-active initiatives (p. 206). As the main researcher in the project, and thanks to the feed-forward from assistants and students, I was able to step out of these criteria and assess the project in a different light, a light that will hopefully be shed on further research innovation projects.

9.1.3 Probability Statements from the Students' Perspective.

However saturated our project seems due to the amount of frequent responses, the recurrence of similar responses or beliefs supported our findings in a quantitative manner and guided this subchapter's choices. Saturation, as we explored in Chapter Four, is a concept from Grounded Theory that makes reference to the point in the development of a category at which no new properties, dimensions or relationships emerge during analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 143).

When I started to do open coding in order to describe the process by which our main concepts were identified I assigned the following concepts to the data (see Chapter Five):

Table 33 – Open Codes – Designed for this dissertation

1. Awareness (113 references)
2. Cultural aspects of Teaching and Learning (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (2 references)
3. Deficiencies (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Methods) (28 references)
4. Difficulties (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (120 references)
5. Dynamics – Power distribution - Roles in the classroom (195 references)
6. Engagement (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (76 references)
7. Feedback (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Dynamics) (14 references)
8. Hard days (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Dynamics) (8 references)
9. Ideal conditions (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student Feelings) (25 references)
10. Improvement (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (38 references)
11. Intercultural awareness (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Awareness) (10 references)
12. Language of instruction (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Methods) (37 references)
13. Methods (tests, textbooks) (100 references)

14. Other languages (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student strategies) (34 references)
15. Previous knowledge (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student strategies) (5 references)
16. Physical space (44 references)
17. Student expectations and perceptions (Later on coded as a subtopic of Student Feelings) (68 references)
18. Student feelings (153 references)
19. Student strategies (111 references)
20. Tools (→ Later on coded as a subtopic of Methods and Student Strategies) (37 references)

By awareness, I had coded any statements from the students that reflected a level of appreciation of the learning process, the language and its aspects, and themselves (self-awareness). The second topic was related to the student's understanding of the specific culture of learning in his/her institution. Deficiencies was a code that emerged from the comments on the problems students encountered with the previously mentioned learning context or the methods used by the specific teacher. Difficulties referred to the problems that they encountered learning; so whereas deficiencies were related to the institution and the teacher, these were the obstacles emerging from the student's own perspective or skills. Dynamics came to refer to the management of power and student voice in the classroom. Engagement referred to the student's acknowledgement of his/her participation and the awareness of what triggered it. Feedback referred to the feedback received by the teacher or the institution in general. Hard days referred to the student's description of the affective variables that threw them off course occasionally. Ideal conditions referred to the conditions that the students considered or believed to be ideal whereas they had experienced them before or they were just abstractions without empirical confirmation. Improvement referred to the acknowledgement of improvement in the learning of the subject in question, which was regularly accompanied by the description of activities that led to this improvement or the analysis of the conditions that led to it. Intercultural awareness referred to the acknowledgement of the differences between the culture under study and their own. Language of instruction referred to the language used by the teacher, be it English or Spanish, or the habit of code switching between both. Under the concept of methods, textbooks and materials were used as well as techniques and strategies utilized in their language classroom. Other languages grouped the references to other languages used by the students, whether as first or second languages or as languages they had some limited command of but that came in handy in the learning of Spanish. Previous knowledge was a wide concept that involved all the previous knowledge about the subject itself but also about other subjects that impacted the learning of Spanish or knowledge related to language learning in general. Under Physical space, I coded all the references to the physicality of the classroom, whether they were positive or negative feelings. Under Student expectations and perceptions, I grouped all the references stating what the students anticipated, especially if they were directly opposite or somewhat different to

the teacher's expectations or the research team expectations, as they would be more noticeable. By student feelings I referred to statements highly marked by affective content reflecting their attitudes and emotions towards language learning at the moment of writing or speaking. Under student strategies I clustered all the references to skills, techniques and tactics that they students mentioned they used in order to achieve short-term goals in the classroom or long-term goals in their language learning process. And finally, tools as a first open concept combined student strategies and methods used by the teacher.

At that stage, selective coding led us to a simplification of this table, in an effort to finding the core variables that our students seemed to focus on as important aspects in order to improve the learning taking place in a language classroom. In our case, the core variables were decided by means of quantitative importance and by consensus between the research assistants and the researcher.

Table 34 – Categorized Codes – Designed for this dissertation

1. Overall Awareness (359 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of awareness, cultural aspects of teaching and learning, difficulties, engagement, improvement and intercultural awareness.
2. Student feelings (246 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of ideal conditions, student expectations and student feelings.
3. Power Dynamics in the classroom (217 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of dynamics in classroom, feedback and hard days.
4. Teaching Methods (202 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of deficiencies, language of instruction, methods and tools.
5. Student strategies (150 references) encompassing issues previously coded under the categories of other languages, outcome, previous knowledge and student strategies.
6. Physical Space (44 references).

These six concepts were easier to manage for our purposes and they will guide the probability statements that will be offered in this subchapter. It will also make use of the constant comparative method at this stage and weigh the learning environment in which L.S.U.C. was carried out against the learning environment that I observed as a teacher's aide in the secondary school classroom.

The probability statements offered below are the summary of the results of our project. In other words, they are the insights offered by the students involved in this case study about what may improve language learning in the classroom. Since our case study was highly contextualized and very local, the influence of the context would not allow for the proposal of hypotheses or firm conclusions, but as a research team, one of our aims was to offer guidelines to teachers or teacher-trainers with the results that we had obtained. These statements do not offer a master key to unlock all learning environments

but they can guide their perceptions (and their students', if shared with them) and enhance the awareness that the contextual variables can also be changed to maximize learning opportunities. In other words, learning environments are more flexible than they are traditionally considered and the awareness of different possibilities opens them up to potential transformation.

> I. Overall Awareness

I.I A certain linguistic awareness may assist language learning.

The awareness of the features of LI seemed to help students in general. Sometimes it was the awareness of their second or third language that came in handy. However, it is worth noticing that this linguistic awareness also has a dark side: topics such as the 'subjunctive' and the differences between 'ser' and 'estar' have developed bad press amongst students, and their belief that they will never understand them constitutes the first obstacle that must be tackled.

The students in the secondary school classroom who had had language training in their own language in their home countries seemed to understand the concepts in the new language much better, as well as have some idea of language structures.

I.2 It may be necessary to develop an awareness of what language learning entails in order to succeed in language acquisition.

There is a general lack of awareness of the activities, time, process, investment and so on that language learning entails amongst students, and unfortunately, sometimes, amongst teachers as well. The language learning portfolio proposed by the European Council of Languages helped fill that gap, but students need more accurate guidelines in terms of activities and strategies involved in language learning, as well as transparency and an accurate description of the effort – but also the enjoyment – needed in language learning.

I.3 By proxy, it may be necessary to develop an awareness of the learning process in order to succeed in language modules and ultimately in language acquisition.

I.4 Reflection on the learning process at a personal and individual level may assist learning – when carried out in a non-judgmental manner.

The danger of becoming obsessed and only highlighting the negative features of our individual differences lurks behind every reflective learning process, and it may lead to disengagement and dropping out. This process needs to be monitored and coached, but the question then would be whose responsibility it is to carry out that activity. Some universities in the UK and Ireland have come back to the figure of the academic mentor for those purposes.

I.5 Personal goal-setting and reflection on the purpose of language learning may assist in language learning.

Our modules have descriptions of learning outcomes and the goals described by the institution, but the majority of language learners in our classrooms do not clarify their goal when they decide to learn a new language. They do not reflect on the level that they wish to achieve, the skills that they want to develop or the type of bilingualism that they intend to develop; partly, because they lack this type of linguistic awareness about their own language as well.

Most of the students in the secondary school ESL classroom wanted to blend in with the Canadian school setting. This goal – as high as it was – served as the engine and the beacon that guided their efforts. The individual treatment of students by the teacher heightened the awareness of personal individual goals. As students trickled into the classroom depending on their date of entry in the classroom, there was no choice but to individualize the language learning process.

I.6 The development of intercultural awareness may enhance engagement and participation.

Our students seemed to be very inspired by topics of interculturalism and cultural differences.

The constant experience – and criticizing – of a different culture also acted as a motivator in the ESL classroom. Students there seemed to develop an inquisitive spirit and ask a lot of questions, which in turn, became language learning opportunities.

1.7 The clarification and flexibility of teacher and student roles may accelerate the learning process.

Our case study indicated that the main obstacle in the learning process was sometimes the clash between student expectations from the teacher and teacher expectations from the students.

In the ESL classroom, the teacher spent a few sessions at the beginning of the year clarifying how she would help them learn English. She repeated this every time a new student joined the classroom in a private session with this student. The need for an individual approach to language learning in this classroom setting underlined the need for students' responsibility in their own learning.

> 2. Student feelings

2.1 Autonomy in language learning may be ideal but students may prefer to be led by a teacher.

We are, ultimately, autonomous learners and with the proliferation of resources populated by Web 2.0, the time is ripe for autonomous language learning. However, the majority of students in our case study acknowledged the fact that they prefer to enrol in a course, which would mostly serve as the motivation to do what they would not do if led by themselves.

In the ESL classroom there seemed to be a similar feeling. However, these students had little choice, as there was no alternative autonomous route to stream them into the secondary school system. These students, though, showed an interesting level of autonomy and self-initiation in the sense that there was not a classroom but an individual pace.

2.2 Innovation and creativity in language teaching may enhance deeper learning but it may hinder surface or strategic learning.

Students with shorter-term goals or a very specific purpose for language learning seem to benefit from a clearly described traditional set of activities. This was clearly highlighted by the ESL secondary school classroom in which most of the learning was conducted through reading, writing and chatting. Seen from the outside, it seemed like a traditional, tedious approach to language learning, which would lead to disengagement. However, in its context it worked. This reality highlighted the fact that student needs define what activities will be more successful.

2.3 Student-student relationships may be the key to unlocking the language learning potential of a classroom.

Both the university and the secondary school classrooms showed that the groups that were most successful in language learning seemed to be ones that were most cohesive in terms of students' rapport, support and collaboration. Once again, the question of whose responsibility it is to develop those relationships comes to the fore.

2.4 Language learning may be one of the most uncomfortable experiences so it may be necessary to develop an awareness of anxiety triggers, and skills to manage this anxiety.

Both learning environments observed and studied in this project underlined the issue of anxiety. There have been many studies exploring the topic of anxiety in language learning and how to create more comfortable language learning environments. Rapport between both students and teacher and amongst students may be the basis to the successful management of anxiety. This also calls into question the common belief that the native speaker is the best language teacher. The absence of a common language may trigger more anxiety episodes as well as create an uncomfortable environment.

2.5 The acknowledgement of affective and contextual variables affecting all participants in the classroom may assist in creating better learning environments.

The reality that all the participants in the language classroom – including the teacher – are subject to affective and contextual variables needs to be acknowledged in order to explain in a more accurate way our successes and failures. I would like to emphasize here that this project does not suggest lowering required language standards or softening academic

practices, but (softening/contesting/easing?) the rigidity of the administrative systems that mechanize the learning experience.

A lot of the students in the ESL classroom came from very stressful environments – war and poverty, for example – and the affective side of their learning was not only very carefully treated but acknowledged in a respectful way. Many of them needed to work and therefore they lacked the time that their peers had. The school had put in place structures that allowed them to join mainstream classrooms – achieve the target level of language performance – at a later stage, without penalization. In other words, it allowed for the time needed by the student without imposing a judgment on them, acknowledging - and sometimes celebrating as we will see in point 2.7 - their individual route of language learning.

2.6 A responsibility shared by all the participants in the classroom may enhance language learning.

The language classroom appears to be most useful when it provides a complete opportunity for language practice. The responsibility for that event to happen resides in the intersection between students and teachers, and therefore it is a shared responsibility. Traditional approaches have put the onus on the teacher, but some students have reclaimed it. The danger of student-as-producer approaches is that sometimes they fail to acknowledge the expertise of the teacher, and write it off. Even though sometimes, for research purposes, this attitude may be productive – as it was in this project - it is important to understand that shared responsibility involves shared knowledge and the rule of the majority can be overturned in order to achieve a better goal.

2.6.1 The acknowledgement of the cost and effort invested may enhance a more responsible attitude towards language learning.

As a consequence, in our stressful lives and with the economic constraints that the world is facing, there is a need to take into account the fact that time and financial resources are limited - for teachers and students - when we try to identify suitable goals for language learning.

2.7 In order to enhance engagement and participation, it may be necessary to focus on the enjoyment of language learning from two sources: the realization of improvement and the social aspects of language learning.

Language learning is a never-ending process and therefore can be viewed as one of the most frustrating experiences. This does not enhance motivation and engagement. It may be necessary to include in our classroom practices the opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge improvement in a more systematic manner. In the ESL classroom, there were small sessions/celebrations in which the students and teacher celebrated their achievements.

On the other hand, any classroom is a social event. The fact that language is best learned by interaction brings the social nature of learning to the fore. Social interaction requires time that teachers and students may lack, therefore ignoring the potential of the language classroom to be its own motivation for our students. Facebook and Google+ groups have provided our classrooms with extracurricular activity that fosters the social side of the classroom. However, it would be important to explore the potential of time in a classroom invested in social interaction, as well as its impact on language learning.

2.8 The belief that language learning is best achieved as children may hinder the language learning process.

In this case study we are not concerned with scientific truths, but with practical tools and strategies that will help enhance language learning in a classroom. Hence, the fact that children seem to be more successful in language learning than adults is irrelevant for this statement. The truth is that this belief is an obstacle and people who have exceptional language aptitudes use it as an excuse to justify certain attitudes and lack of investment.

The successes of the ESL classroom prove that even though it may be more difficult to acquire certain aspects of language performance as adults – such as pronunciation and intonation - adults do have some advantages over child learners. One of these advantages is a first language, which can be used to foster and accelerate the L2 learning process, through cognitive abilities that are absent in the child's brain.

2.9 It may be necessary to develop skills to manage how space and time influence learning.

In our sixth code, the topic of space and time will be developed extensively, but under this code, students seemed to be highly aware of the constraints that time and space put on them. They also seemed to accept these constraints rather than try to change them or counteract them in healthy ways.

In the ESL classroom, space was personalized and flexible. Books were added. Changes were made constantly. There were no specific time slots in the day, except for a daily, one hour of Canadian history. This fluidity and flexibility forced the students to take control of the time there. There were a few crowd-control rules, such as eating only happened between specific hours and they needed to clean after themselves. There were no cell phones at the time and only one, very old computer in the classroom, which students were only allowed to use at specific times and could only access through a sign-up sheet.

> 3.   Power Dynamics in the classroom

3.1 The hierarchy or power structures developed inside the classroom may affect language learning in several ways, mainly as they directly influence classroom interaction.

It is impossible to forget, though, that interaction outside the classroom impacts directly on the classroom environment. Students and teachers carry their agendas into their classroom, and authors like bell hooks refuse to believe that we can leave these agendas outside the classroom as if they were a coat or a bag. It is also true though that nobody can manage those agendas and it would be the responsibility of the individual to reach a level of maturity that allows them to minimize their impact. In a university classroom, this would be a desirable achievement, but the reality leaves a lot to be desired. A conscientious practice of reflective teaching and learning may aid in unearthing these issues and help neutralize their negative effects.

By classroom interaction, we refer namely to:

3.1.1   The interaction between teacher and students (as a group or the in-groups within the group).

3.1.2   The interaction between teacher and student (in an individual basis).

3.1.3   The interaction between class representatives and students.

3.1.4   The interaction between students.

These levels and spaces for interaction show the complicated social structures within a small classroom, no matter what the size is. Obviously, these structures will multiply in larger classrooms. From the moment participants come into the classroom, these interactions start taking place and the activity – or lack of it – will generate learning, or prevent it.

In the ESL classroom that I observed as a teacher's aide, there were further lines of interaction. There were older students who either only came to the class for part of the day or were about to leave the ESL classroom. These students had gained the status of role models and I could see some of the younger students struggling to establish cooperative relationships with them. The teacher never interfered, unless there was serious conflict between them, letting these interactions happen naturally. These students seemed very aware of the importance of helping one another or working as a team. It was probably their 'differences' from the mainstream Canadian group, outside of their ESL classroom.

3.2 Using diverse methods to pay attention to student voice may create better learning environments.

This case study showed that not everybody prefers to speak up in the same way. Some students prefer to write lengthy emails. Others would just rather have a chat in the cafeteria. Some others loved being interviewed by their peers. Student feedback forms normally take the shape of an end-of-the-year questionnaire, to be written and handed-in anonymously. This form of feedback does not enhance dialogue and is not ideal for some students. What became apparent through our project was that students were less shy or more engaged in transforming their classroom realities when we asked them – sometimes the very same questions – through diverse media.

3.3 Student-initiated proposals adopted by teachers may influence engagement and participation in a positive way. The opposite also applies.

Actions taken on student proposals to change the conditions of learning have an immensely positive impact. Even when the change was subtle, students noticed and appreciated the change, which directly influenced their engagement in the classroom, through the development of a sense of ownership and a sense of respect from the teacher.

The same happened in the ESL classroom. The teacher implemented some of the students' suggestions throughout the year and students responded in a very positive way. On the other hand, when the student proposal was not viable, she discussed it with them in the open forum. Sometimes they would agree, sometimes they would disagree, but the effect was still positive because instead of ignoring their proposal or dismissing it, she engaged with them in explaining her reason not to take it.

3.4 Clear feedback that allows mistakes and does not put anyone on the spot may lead student learning in a better way.

Feedback has always been a tricky issue. In language learning, it has always been a contested area where agreement is very seldom reached. Allowing mistakes in language learning, as our case study suggests, is a slippery suggestion. As a teacher, I receive students that have gone through the secondary school system carrying appalling mistakes with them in their language performance, some of them fossilized, which require Herculean efforts to uproot and replace. But students appreciate it when teachers focus on communication and not grammatical perfection and praise effective communication in spite of mistakes or errors. The real question is how to solve the issue of correction without leading towards disengagement and drop-outs.

It may be necessary to develop guidelines on what mistakes should not be penalized for each of the European Language Levels. A possibility would be to correct all mistakes but to penalize only the issues that we have covered in class, or spelling. We may use different colours or explain to the student what an acceptable mistake is and what is not. All these suggestions lead to the first word in our probability statement: clear. One of the main issues in our busy lives as teachers and students is that feedback is not clearly given and it normally takes the shape of a grade and nothing else. The grade is rarely informative enough and it does not point to ways of improving performance at a later stage.

In the ESL classroom, the teacher took her time correcting and handing the exercises back to the students. I never witnessed how she dealt with the corrections and feedback from a test but when handing back class work, she called the students to her desk while the others were working independently in the same class and discussed their results with them. The class numbers varied between 15 – 32 students in the period I was there, so she had a significantly big class. With all our time commitments and constraints, it is not easy to give clear feedback, and we may also lack the appropriate training or language. SLA has concentrated on mistakes and error correction, but more research is needed into what constitutes good feedback for language learning.

3.5 Feedback may be most effective when it is bidirectional (from students to teacher and from teacher to students).

One of the aspects of the classrooms in which this case study took place was the fact that students were very direct in their responses to class activities and exercises. As a junior teacher, this attitude had helped the researcher in her first year of teaching Spanish as a foreign language because the students took charge of their learning by getting involved in the class planning and implementation of methods. That was probably the seed that a few years later developed into this project.

3.6 Self-assessment may be one way to activate student's reflection and autonomy in language learning.

The case study shows that students engaged in self-assessment of their own level anyway. They are constantly monitoring the language they produce and comparing it with the language produced by their peers. Without any guidelines, this exercise is emotionally charged and it can lead to misconceptions. The European language levels have granted us with grids and tables by which the student can gain more productive ways to carry out this self-assessment.

More proposals for self-assessment in language learning are needed. They may develop the European language descriptors to fit specific learning contexts or create different assessments all together.

> 4. Teaching Methods

4.1 Grammar instruction may accelerate language learning.

The university classrooms that we explored in this case study took a rather 'traditional' textbook approach to language learning in that they explained a grammatical point and then spent as much time as needed, according to the curriculum requirements, to practice it.

In the ESL classroom, situated in an immersion environment, the approach was the contrary. Students were exposed to language items – texts, videos, comics, etcetera – and then they were either left to their own devices or given some guidance from peers or teachers to make sense of these items. They would then receive some grammar instruction on different issues that the teacher observed in student production, or issues that she expected would become a problem in the long run.

Both classes had very different goals and very different contexts. However, in both classes there was some grammar instruction. Adult language learning seems to be accelerated by the reference to grammar because it allows for a comparison with the language or languages that these adults already know.

4.2 Language laboratories for comprehension skills may be obsolete.

The loud consensual voice of our students condemned the language laboratory as a useless exercise. The omnipresence of the internet makes this environment less comfortable than the comfort of their own homes where, at the moment, they can do the same exercise through the use of video or audio platforms. The portability of audio/video player devices also calls into question the need for language laboratories for comprehension purposes.

4.3 Students may benefit from more conversation classes.

In the same way students were very loud in their preference for conversation classes. Once again, the issue of interaction arises. At some level, students are conscious that language learning is activated by interaction.

4.4 Rationalized classroom materials guide learning and may speed up the learning process.

Most students in this project expressed their preference for textbooks and extra materials from different sources. The task of finding an adequate textbook to serve the needs of our specific learning contexts is a time consuming activity. Once we find the materials, there is usually some tailoring required as well. More sharing and clear descriptions are required in the creation and development of materials for language learning inside the classroom.

4.5 Classroom activities may be varied but they may need to develop a certain classroom routine as well.

Behaviourist language theorists taught us that we also learn by creating habits. These habits become dull and we need to reactivate them by introducing a difference. This may be the trick to classroom activities. By default, our language class timetables establish a weekly routine. The clarification of programs and activities will guide students' expectations and allow them to be prepared for these little changes.

4.6 Reviewing activities may be appreciated.

In our project, reviewing and revision classes were praised. Time and curriculum requirements impose constraints that push revision outside the classroom.

4.7 There is no consensus about language of instruction: L1 or L2.

In the ESL classroom, there was no choice on this matter. The variety of languages in the classroom made it impossible for any one teacher to be able to refer to the students in their L1s. As a consequence, some students fell to the side for several reasons. Sometimes they lacked support from their peers; one of the phenomena I witnessed in the ESL classroom was a very significant amount of peer-help and translation. If a student happened to have a friend or a person who spoke the same language as him or her in the classroom but with more advanced English skills, they used them as their peers and found support that way.

4.7.1 The use of L1 in the classroom when this language is common to the students may enhance the establishment of a good relationship between students and teacher, especially if the teacher is an L1 learner.

4.7.2 The use of L2 in the classroom may create communicative opportunities in the target language, and may serve as encouragement for the students, especially if the teacher is an L2 learner.

These two corollaries underline the role of the teacher as a language learner as well and minimize the distance between him/her and his/her students.

4.8 Activities suggested by the students may be the most successful.

The same as in 3.3 students sometimes suggested an activity. The teacher, then, proceeded to develop and implement and student response was more direct as they felt appreciated.

4.9 Immersion may not be the ultimate method for language learning, even though it may increase the availability of learning opportunities.

Despite the fact that students maintain a firm belief in immersion as the necessary and sufficient condition to learn a language, our case study tried to contest this belief; with no success. The belief is markedly inbuilt in student psyches. This belief highlights the fact that the effort involved in creating language learning opportunities outside of the L2 context is not desirable and that students avoid it.

The cases of ESL classroom failure when situated in an immersion environment corroborated B.N. Peirce's findings that immersion is not the 'be all and end all' of language learning.

> 5. Student strategies

5.1 Adult students use other languages in order to acquire the target language.

This is no surprise. Every time a person takes on a new subject or a new skill, s/he tends to use his/her tools and previous knowledge in order to learn it in a more efficient way. Fundamentalist communicative approaches have neglected this side of adult learning instead of developing methods and techniques to put it into use.

The European Council of Languages is developing local projects at the moment where several languages can be learned at the same time and they(who - students or projects?) help each other in the creation of materials, such as http://www.eurocatering.org/.

5.2 The study of previous language learning experiences in a given context may clarify success, failure and expectations.

Projects such as Critical Literacies, mentioned above, shed light on the prior knowledge and experiences that students arrive at our classrooms with. Studying the way languages are taught in the contexts in which we work will help us clarify student needs. It will also recognize good practice in our area and the establishment of teacher interaction and collaboration.

5.3 Sharing of student strategies may accelerate the learning process.

Collaboration between students is one of the keys that the students involved in this project mentioned as the reason for the success in the language classroom. Depending on the size of the classroom, the teacher may encourage the creation of study teams in order to foster the sharing of resources and strategies.

5.4 Experiential learning may need to be incorporated into our language classroom activities.

A language is a living thing. It changes every day, within us, and outside in its real world context. Students believe that daily language exposure is needed and the limited time allowed for language practice in the language classroom is not enough. Problem-based learning tasks and assignments tend to be based in an imaginary world. More research and proposals are needed about how to incorporate L2 language experiential learning in a non-L2 context, in other words, in a non-immersion environment.

> 6.   Physical Space

6.1 Space and spatial conditions tend to be taken for granted.

The aspect of the ESL classroom that I appreciated the most, because it was markedly different from the classrooms I was used to teaching in, was their use of space. They were free to change it. There were different areas in the classroom: for eating, for independent study, for consultation with the teacher... (an ellipsis makes this looks a bit scrappy. Were there other spaces in the classroom? Otherwise, just use a full stop). This personalization of the space seemed to give clear results.

I would love to be wrong when I say that a lot of teachers experience uncomfortable learning environments: temperature, air quality, crammed spaces, light, surrounding noise...the list goes on. These spatial conditions tend to be taken for granted and not questioned. Students will learn, no matter what. Teachers will teach, no matter what. Lately, our fascination with high technology has reinforced this tendency to ignore the basics.

6.2 Classroom seating arrangements influence interaction and therefore influences learning.

Our case study highlights the fact that most of the students preferred the circle. In this seating arrangement they all feel that there are at the same level (including the teacher) and they can see each other. I would like to add that the circle may be enhancing full class interaction but certain activities require different seating arrangements and the ideal situation would be to have a space that can be changed and modified to our teaching and learning needs.

6.3 Classroom size matters.

A lot of the current research in teaching and learning has started to develop parcelled studies on small group teaching and large group teaching. This is a clear acknowledgement of the fact that classroom size will influence the approach to teaching and learning that would be most effective in that environment.

6.4 Class times and duration need to be acknowledged.

Student preference for class times was varied and individual differences are notable in this regard. Class times are rarely flexible but it is necessary to acknowledge that class times influence interaction, in order to choose the activities and methods for that particular time slot.

In our case study, most of the students agreed that the language class is best scheduled for ninety minutes. They felt was that sixty minutes was not enough but two hours was too much. A study of attention span and brain activity within a language classroom may clarify these constraints and how they affect language learning.

6.5 The frequency with which a language class meets may be best defined by learning outcomes.

In the current European teaching and learning environment, our courses have been classified by ECTs. These European Credits define the classroom time requirements and independent work for each of the courses. Most institutions implement these credit systems and requirements mainly for administrative purposes, without any consultation with course planners, highlighting the fact that most educational policies are written without any consultation with educational practitioners.

The main goal of these probability statements was to present "an organized compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

9.2 Theoretical Insights and Further Research.

With this final section of this chapter, our aim is to share the insights that this project has inspired at a theoretical level. The term 'insights' here is deliberate as the case study never had in mind a theory-building function. This section was structured as a mirror to chapter two of this thesis, which deals mainly with theory, in order to show the transformation of the five main concepts of this project after the analysis of its results. It also places the case study in the context of contemporary trends and research approaches within the current revolution of fields of research on teaching and learning, and specifically, language teaching and learning.

9.2.1 Language and Language Learning.

The modern world has magnified opportunities for language learning, through the omnipresence of the media (with mobile internet leading the way people interact not only in virtual environments but also in real environments).[6] These media use verbal — and mostly textual — communication, and whereas twenty or thirty years ago only a few letter writers would use the written word on a regular basis, now most mobile phone users write short texts every day. The urgency to use language in these environments, and to communicate with one another, is changing language itself and its uses, as well as the perception of language. The consequences of this shift will not be immediately apparent and they do not necessarily need to be gloomy, as some researchers like to forebode. Short attention spans, lack of critical stance, and more strategic and surface learning approaches have been mentioned as negative effects of the use of social digital applications. However, more research is needed to understand the new communicative uses of language through these media and how they would impact language learning, and students' perceptions of what it means to learn a language and become bilingual. Commonly, teachers and students do not share the same perceptions and in the gap left by clashing expectations lay many of the classroom failure stories. Bilingualism may very well be the target goal of some students, and most teachers, in tertiary education, but it is definitely not the ideal for all students or language learners.

The European Language Framework offers a remarkable outline with which to measure language performance and make our goals and expectations more transparent. The Canadian students in this project asked for such an outline in 2003. However, as a teacher actively working with it, I have always found myself trying to clarify and specify each of the other descriptors. On the other hand, the framework fails to highlight the process of learning as an interactive, time-consuming endeavour; ignoring how circumstances and social conditions determine the student's access to learning opportunities. Even though it encourages the student to record the process of language learning and experiences in the target culture, it may lead to the false perception that has established 'immersion' as the ultimate method for language learning, because it equates staying in a target language country with language learning opportunities.

In our current social media environment, language interaction and language learning resources and opportunities have detached from the restrictions of space. Students can access newspapers, television, language practice exercises and a plethora of materials as well as seek language partners and exchange opportunities - verbally or non-verbally - without the need to experience the culture and the country

where the language originated or is currently spoken. This is not to say that these are the ideal conditions for language learning, but the possibilities opened up by the new uses of the internet have made language teachers and researchers consider what constitutes a language learning opportunity and how to enhance language interaction in order for it to make learning more efficient.

More research is needed along the lines of power and how it is exercised by social media in a real time, virtual space environment, as well as in cultural linguistic exchanges in immersion environments. It will not be an easy task as it is never localized in anybody's hands, but it circulates and is exercised through a net-like organization (Foucault, 1980, p. 96). The old notion of power as something that can be obtained, is also contested by Manke (1997). The notions of capital, habitus and market developed by Bourdieu (1976) would be especially relevant in an analysis, let us say, of how social networks[7] like Facebook may enhance language learning; highlighting the fact that comprehension may not be the primary goal of communication. The degree of integration into a social network depends on individual differences and the normative pressures that the network imposes on its members' behaviour. Language users, on the other hand, monitor their own behaviour for the purpose of achieving strategic outcomes, often at the cost of misunderstandings.

Along these lines, this case study highlights the fact that first languages are used in target language classrooms, as yet another tool to accelerate and enhance language learning. It would be more productive to understand when it is best to use it and best not to use it by studying the context in which it is used and how it impacts learning, rather than simply ruling it out as interference or as taking up the time for language practice.

Our project also advocates the detachment of first language acquisition and second language learning as different processes with certain similarities. Their main difference lies in the fact that most second language learning experiences happen at a very different age and the learner is a completely different being with motivations, prejudices and tools that differ greatly from that of a child's. In this case, the adult learner has at least one linguistic system to help him/her study and learn the new language. As recognition of his/her prior knowledge, teachers can help students and devise activities and strategies that put the students' first language into use in the acquisition of the foreign language.

9.2.2 Student.

A lot of studies have focused on individual differences in order to explain language learning.

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Teacher and students identities are rich and complex because they are produced within a rich and complex set of relationships. Educational studies on individual differences have traditionally considered identity as a fixed category, a personality trait or a role, when it is essentially an experience, "which involves both participation and reification" (Wenger, 1998, p. 162). Another aspect of identity that needs to be considered is their negotiated status. It is not confined to specific periods of life, like adolescence, or to specific settings like the family, the classroom, etc.

Our learning environment forced us to focus on the social aspect of identity. Student membership to the classroom manifests itself in the familiarity that they experience with the context and their status within them. This case study also considers identity a nexus that combines multiple forms of membership (L1, L2…) through a process of reconciliation of these many aspects. (Wenger, 1998, p. 163).

In this regard, language learner autonomy has sometimes being misunderstood as the individual enterprise of an individual trying to learn a language on his/her own. Autonomy in language learning means agency and independence. It relates to self-sufficiency in terms of finding and using resources to advance his/her own learning, but also in planning and obtaining from others the requirements for language learning. Autonomy as the individual ivory tower approach to language learning is an unadvisable utopia, because languages are social mechanisms, first and foremost, with a higher level of both introspection and extroversion. However, on the other hand, interaction cannot be idealized either, because for it to be meaningful it needs a certain degree of reflection.

This notion of autonomy underlies the approach of 'student as producer', slowly but surely making its way into current higher education institutions. Productivity implies autonomy (Benjamin, 1996, p. 42). This idea of students as producers goes against the traditional perception of students as consumers. This new role encourages the development of collaboration between students, teachers and researchers in the production of knowledge, like our project. The most radical expression of this approach goes beyond the re-design of curricula and assessments and into the realm of research and the creation of free and copyleft materials. Science Commons, Open Knowledge and Open Access are examples of these initiatives. The student-centred classroom came about in order to counteract the abuses of the teacher-centred model, creating an imbalance in the learning system once again. With the focus on collaboration, students and teachers are creating new subject-centred approaches for the classroom, sharing their passion for the same subjects and for knowledge in general. As Neary and Winn (2009) affirm:

Through these efforts, the organizing principle is being redressed creating a teaching, learning and research environment which promotes the values of openness and creativity, engenders equity among academics and students and thereby offers an opportunity to reconstruct the student as producer and academic as collaborator. (p. 210)

The nature of the subject matter makes language classrooms slightly more restrictive than other subject in the Arts and Humanities; because of their skill-based nature, languages and language study can sometimes be more comfortably equated with science subjects. The status of the teacher as a gatekeeper, granting access to linguistic skills and target language, has disappeared with the pedagogy of excess in which we currently teach and learn. The overwhelming amount of free high-quality resources call for a change of roles, and for collaboration between students and teachers in order to make the most of these resources, and to develop the tools and techniques to work strategically with them. Facilitation as a teaching approach acknowledges all aspects of the teaching and learning experience.

9.2.3. Teacher and Teacher Training.

In this project, we have explored many aspects of student affect, but neglected to tackle the affective side of teaching. This disregard for the affective aspects of teaching and teacher's affect is not unusual in academic literature on teaching and learning. bell hooks touched upon it briefly when she focused on the notion of pleasure in the classroom (1994, p. 7), which would be related to our concept 'enjoyment' in the case study. Pleasure, laughter and excitement are still viewed as negative in learning environments (Hooks, 1994, p. 165), but her approach to teaching is summed up as "being a teacher is being with people". She calls for a humanization of the whole teaching and learning process.

Another issue explored within our project is the notion of method. Our case study argues for the need to develop and refine tools and techniques for language teaching and learning that would nourish the intersection between student needs and teacher expectations. Hence, the exploration of student needs is a must in our current environment of teaching and learning. This case study explored diaries, interviews/questionnaires and observations as tools for the clarification of student needs and feelings about language learning. The training in the use of such ethnographic tools is a necessity for the teacher. In order to maximize learning, the teacher needs to be at least an amateur researcher of his/her own classroom.

Table 35 – Forms of Research-Led Teaching - Trigwell

Forms of research-led teaching
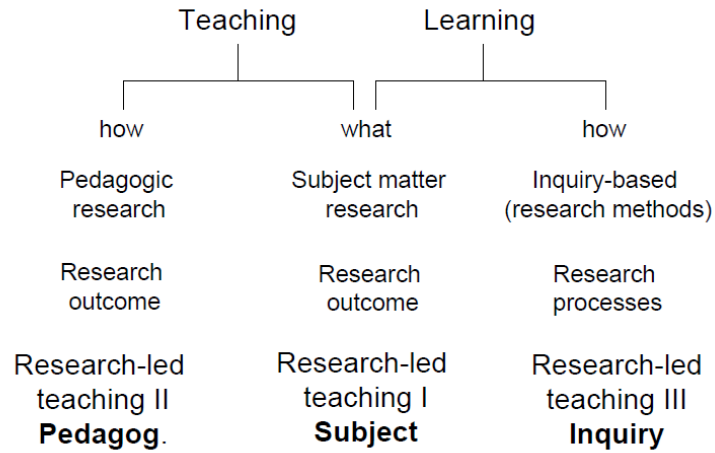
In this chart, Trigwell situates our case study in his research-led teaching III or Inquiry. In his presentation 'Achieving Excellence in Research-Led Teaching' for the Annual Teaching and Learning Conference at Monash University in Australia (December, 2006), he showed that teaching and learning involves research of some kind and that this research has immediate impact on both the teaching and the learning, which would agree with the insights of our project. With this other chart, in the same presentation, he illustrates the immediate relationship between teaching and learning.

Table 36 – Model of Teaching/Learning System - Trigwell

Model of teaching/learning system
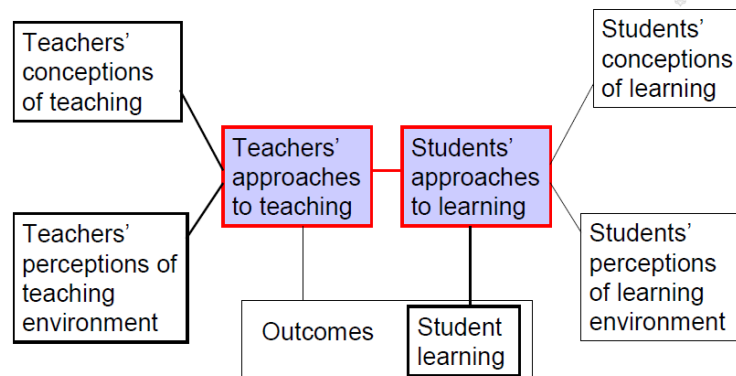
Although training in language and linguistics is an essential component of teacher preparation, it is not sufficient for understanding the nature of communication. The ethnography of communication provides an important additional set of tools[8] for achieving an understanding of the patterns of language use in the communication systems of different cultures. (Saville-Troike, 2002, p. 376)

We must acknowledge that teaching has the potential to be 'a daily search for the learner's point of view' (Vivian Paley in Ellis, 1997, p. 110). This necessitates the development of a range of facilitative skills and awareness in order to examine the way listening, speaking, power and authority are exercised by the teacher and the students, as well as group processes and the management of attitude and beliefs (Arnold, 2005, p. 140). The need for the teacher to develop research tools as part of his/her teaching pencil case does not add more tasks to the teacher's work-load; it simply calls for the extension of teaching skills to include critical reflection upon the profession. This realization may entail developing diverse ways of accounting for more voices and allowing their stories to surface.

Feedback also jumped out of our case study as one of the keys to language learning and learning in general. The importance of feedback in language learning came from understanding that language learning happens in interaction. This interaction needs the presence of a person who gives constant feedback about production. This feedback may be verbal, written or gestural, but feedback is needed to monitor progress.

In the same way, teachers need feedback to make any progress in their teaching. This case study was an elaborate way to get the most out of the constant feedback from students. This case study argues for the use of tools that allow us to obtain varied and continuous feedback from participants in the classroom and external agents, such as friends, peers, colleagues, institution managers and policy makers. All these different sources of feedback need to be taken with a critical stance. Behind every feedback, there will be a set of ideologies at play that triggered it. The growing pressure to put only the needs of business and industry into the goals of the educational system has made the need for a critical stance even more pressing if we are to deliver quality teaching for quality learning (Apple, 1996, p.99). Whether positive or negative, this feedback will help us understand the context in which we teach – which is in constant change – and invite us to explore how to develop better tools for current learning environments. The resistance to feedback does not only stem from the fear of doing things in the wrong way, but also from the penalization that normally accompanies it. This belief has developed and

fossilized in our school systems and it may need to be reviewed or reconsidered if the goal is to become responsible teachers.

In the same way, this case study calls for the development of new ways of assessing language learning that allow for errors to occur. Maybe the definition of what constitutes an acceptable error in the terms of assessment according to the different European Language Framework levels can help make more transparent what constitutes a fail in each level. The fact that most of our language learning happens through reflection on error should be acknowledged by our assessment systems, and not just penalized.

9.2.4. Classroom.

> If classrooms are understood as places where a group of individuals, a teacher and some students, together construct what happens, what can happen, what is possible and what is impossible, what gets learned and what doesn't, then the teacher cannot be solely responsible for classroom outcomes. (Manke, 1997, p. 130)

Classrooms, in the same way as other social networks – virtual or real - impose a certain normative behaviour that varies from institution from institution, and from culture to culture. At the beginning of every academic year, there are always a few weeks in which a covert negotiation of norms within the classroom occurs. This case study argues for the disclosure and overt negotiation of these norms. This process may be carried out in the target language - in the case of our language classrooms - and in this way, it becomes language practice as well. One of the regrets that the research team had at the end of the project was that they did not carry out journals and interviews in the target language, which may have optimized language learning throughout the case study. However, the benefits of using the LI shared by the majority of students showed in the student feedback of the project and in the rapport established by the participants in the project (research assistants, researcher and subjects) which facilitated a more cooperative, supportive environment for all.

"What is communicated in the classroom is a result of complex processes of interaction among educational goals, background knowledge, and what various participants perceive over time as taking place" (Gumperz, 1981, p. 5). This complex situation feeds from beliefs and perceptions of what classroom culture is, but it is also responsible for how specific expectations and reactions are created. The need to clarify teacher and curricular requirements as well as reconcile them with student expectations calls for the development of parameters through which these requirements and

expectations can be clarified and successfully communicated from teachers to students and vice versa. The rationalization and negotiation of this cultural knowledge about language classrooms may clarify the requirements of each specific context, which shapes the learning experience, but will also help in the resistance and changing of protocols or structures that may work for one group but not for another. Some attempts have been made at classroom typologies (Ellis, 1984), but this project does not argue for the creation of complicated taxonomies, rather, it makes a case for the creation of frameworks or sketches of the general characteristics of a language classroom that can be negotiated in each specific instance. As a very simple example, let us offer this diagram:

Table 37 –Proposed Diagram to Research Space Characteristics of the Classroom – Designed for this dissertation

Space VENUE	Time	Preferred Language	Preferred Activities	Students' Expectations from the Teacher	Teacher's Expectations from the students	Time invested in the language outside the classroom
Circle:	Duration:					
Pairs:	Time of the day:					
Group:						
Personalized:						

This simple diagram is by no means comprehensive and further research needs to be made in order to clarify which aspects of the language classroom would need to be made more transparent in order to maximize the learning opportunities that the language classroom has on offer.

In order to study formal learning environments, we created a simple diagram to account for the spaces of interaction between the main elements of language teaching and learning in a classroom setting:

Table 38 – The Butterfly Diagram of the School Spaces for Interaction – Designed for this dissertation
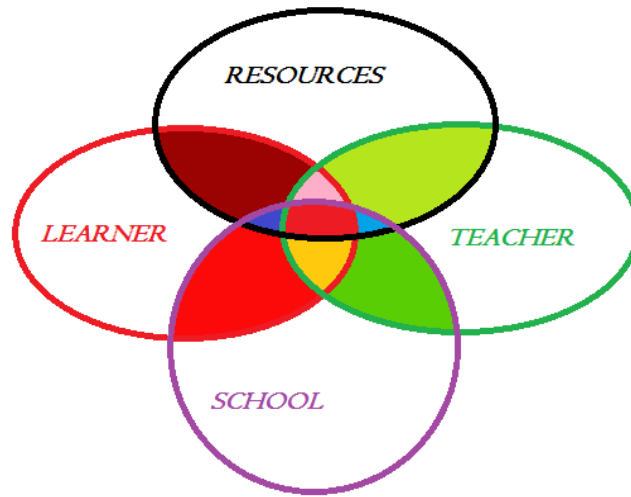
With this simple butterfly, colour-coded diagram, we can explore in depth the intersections between learner/teacher/school/resources, which ideally would have a language classroom in the deep red at the centre. The two blue items in the centre would refer to the library or multimedia rooms that many universities would have, where teachers and learners can interact with resources in the school environment. The dark red would account for a learner's independent work outside of the school environment, and the light green would indicate the teacher's independent work outside of the school environment. More interesting is the pink area, where learners and teacher would share resources outside of the school environment. At the bottom of the butterfly, green would refer to the interaction between the teacher and school that has nothing to do with learning, such as administrative tasks and politics, and red would refer to the same kind of interaction between the learner and the school environment. In this red space, we could include the physicality of the institution and how it impacts on student engagement. Finally, yellow would refer to teacher/learner interactions together with the school, with a general or social purpose and not with a teaching and learning goal in mind. All these spaces of interaction exist, and in order to fully account for failure or success in teaching and learning, they need to be acknowledged.

Engagement is one of the main issues that preoccupy third level institutions at the moment. As Norton Peirce (2001) duly notices, student identities are not only produced through the practices that they engage in but also through the activities they decide to ignore (p. 160). She argues that there are three

modes of belonging: engagement, imagination and alignment. With the first concept she highlights active involvement, with the second, imagery and connections, and finally, the third addresses the coordination of activities to fit the structures. She underlines that the methods that the teacher employs will engage the identities of the learners in diverse ways and, therefore, will correlate with diverse belonging responses. Indirectly, the clarification and description of classroom cultures may serve as an engagement agent or at least it would contribute to understanding the cases of student disengagement in a more efficient manner.

9.2.5. Further Issues on Research.

One of the main goals of our project was to let students lead the areas in which our research for action would focus and the use of some of the research tools. Learner-initiated reflection on action led us to a very fruitful dialogue, which focuses on practical expertise and critical analysis. Taking part in this process, students became co-researchers by providing insider accounts of their teaching and learning experience. The involvement of the teacher with the students that worked in the project and those that volunteered, as well as the ones that did not, was both emotionally and intellectually challenging, and also a radically changing experience. Ethical issues and responsibility from the researchers to the students and the subject matter, makes research into our classrooms one of the most sensitive areas of research, even more so given that the involvement and self-criticism are comprehensive. The researcher is involved at all levels and that has a profound effect on identity and, as a consequence, on teaching practice.

As we saw in chapter three, Potter suggests that we need to suspend our qualitative disbelief in order to do any kind of research. In the case of teachers as researchers, we need to go further than that. Both identities would need to be separated in order to be critically analyzed. I would argue that the process is not easy to carry out. It is facilitated by a larger research team that can offer different points of view and by a very open attitude towards criticism and flexibility in his/her teaching practice. These contradictions are difficult to resolve but they would lead towards a more pragmatic approach to research, bridging the gap between theory and practice for the creation of methodologies that challenge previous standards, and try to respond in a responsible manner to ever-shifting realities.

Carter and Delamont (1996) tackle the affective side of research, primarily taking about how fieldwork changes the researcher and how researchers use their own biographies in fieldwork. They cite Stanley and Wise (1993) as an example of autobiographical literature on qualitative methods, as well as

Hammerseley and Atkinson (1995), and Delamont (1992). These authors highlight the fact that behind the façade of presenting a professional stance during field work, researching some groups of people brings to the surface a myriad of feelings which challenge the researcher's objectivity (Carter & Delamont, 1996, p.10). The research described in this report is not just an intellectual endeavour but also an emotional one. Feelings were the main motivation in the initial selection of the type of research. Student and teacher feelings were involved in the definition of its scope and the level of analysis chosen. Emotions influenced the questions the team asked and how they were asked. They flooded the interaction between the research team and the students, and between these two groups and the researcher. In these emotions lies the essence of doing participant observation. The group work and the research that we conducted together gave us joy and pain, and both feelings started the engine every time it needed to be re-ignited.

Through this process, it became apparent that research on teaching practice and the production of practical research was paramount to my academic work. Hopefully, this project will be the diving board, not just for this teacher, but also for other teaching practitioners, willing to engage with their own learning (in order to teach better) and their own teaching (in order for their students to learn better). This project aims to be inspiring, not only to teachers and teacher trainees, but for students that decide to take their own language learning into their own hands and collaborate, like the students and research assistants in this project, with their teachers in order to research together how to better learn in our current learning environments.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

THIS CHAPTER…

- Examined the notion of language learning competence to acknowledge the skills necessary to learn a language in the classroom environment.
- Evaluated the project from the teacher/researcher point of view with a variety of frameworks and critical references.
- Provided new insights on the five key concepts of this project and suggested further research.

[1] For more information, see http://competenciadigital.wikispaces.com/

[2] For more information, see http://www.upf.edu/pdi/daniel_cassany/en/rec/grups.html

[3] For a technical description of the relationship between 'practical' and 'theoretical' knowledge and their place in action research, see Elliot (2006).

[4] The term 'change agent' was coined by Reid (1981) in his account of what happened in the National Training Laboratory in Group Development (held at Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine, in 1947). Change agents were essential for facilitating communication and feedback in the participant group.

[5] For more information, see http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/current_projects/change/ .
The proliferation of similar project illustrates the shift in perspective that higher education is currently undergoing. It is also worth mentioning the work on 'student as producer' by the University of Lincoln here. For more information, visit: http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk/.

[6] I am referring to Twitter or Whatsapp for example. Applications that have changed the way we interact with one another in the physical spaces that we share.

[7] Social networks are defined as shifting and developing web-like pattern of relationships among individuals (Gelles & Levine, 1999, p. 207).

[8] More training on communication will highlight the fact that a lot of the classroom practice that is described as the 'communicative' method or approach is not far removed from the old audio-lingual and behaviorist repetitive models of language learning.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

THIS CHAPTER …

- Synthesizes the contents of this dissertation.

- Stresses the importance of the thesis question and the methodology used to elicit answers.

- Collects the new insights into foreign language Teaching and Learning offered in this dissertation.

If you follow reason far enough it always leads to conclusions that are contrary to reason.

(Samuel Butler)

10.1 Introduction.

This thesis aimed to provide teaching professionals and language learning students with a deeper cross-sectional understanding of contemporary language classrooms. It has attempted to unearth issues, from the student's point of view, that arise when learning a language in a classroom environment. It has also aimed to contribute to the corpus of qualitative research on classrooms as language learning environments, through the collection of journals, interviews, observation reports and feedback forms as primary sources for this dissertation. It has stressed the importance of carrying out collaborative classroom research between teachers and students in order to impact the personal learning and teaching situations that they face on a daily basis. The analysis of their realities in a reflective and dialogic manner helped the students and the teacher/researcher in this project to gain a more comprehensive view of the language classroom and the process of learning and teaching, based on examples and incidents. This data has offered the real basis for learning since it is based on personal experience and interpersonal exchange. This exchange has shed some light on the successes and failures of language instruction from the point of view of the learner. It has reinforced the need for recognition of conflicting perspectives and expectations in the language classroom, and it has attempted to analyze these perspectives in order to find similar concerns shared by students and teachers alike.

The innovative project for the language classroom on which this dissertation was primarily based had three main objectives: 1) to question the validity of L2-only methodologies for language teaching and learning, in particular regarding adult or young adult learning; 2) to explore the language classroom from the student's point of view as a social space and event whose elements are not quantifiable and in which individual socioaffective variables are crucial; 3) to establish a system that allowed individual feedback from students to teachers, and from teachers to a students, to occur on a regular basis. In other words, this dissertation has offered and tested systematic ways to introduce and enhance cooperative and reflective teaching and research through learner-initiated guidelines.

The hegemony of the Communicative method and conservative notions of bilingualism have fostered the preference of L2 teaching methodologies amongst teachers and learners alike, dismissing the wealth that L1s bring into the language classroom for adults and teenagers who have achieved a certain level of mastery and fluency in their own languages already and have developed a series of transferable skills into the learning of a foreign language. This idea of immersion as the most successful method for language learning promoted the widespread preference for native speakers as the ideal language-teaching professionals. Though it may be necessary to count on the presence of a native speaker in a language classroom for certain aspects of language performance, this project has argued that it is not a sufficient condition for language learning to happen. Language schools have always hired native speakers with little understanding of what language learning entails, let alone what language teaching involves. This project has argued for an acknowledgement of the wealth and depth of knowledge that the philologist may bring into a language classroom, and his or her experience with all the elements of a language system (linguistics analysis, translation, history, dialectology, cultural structures and cultural artefacts), but it also has argued for the need to incorporate a practical teaching side to philological degrees, in order to enhance the chances that philology students have of becoming successful language teachers and to equip them with tools to take advantage of the study that they have undertaken for the different subjects throughout their degree. Teaching is commonly considered a lifelong commitment to learning, and the sooner the teacher starts thinking about it and engaging with it in practice, the easier it becomes at a later stage. If practical knowledge of teaching becomes part of the experience of philological degrees, it will take part in the students' corpora of incidents from which to draw or to move away. Even the act of carrying a reflective journal of a certain classroom, like the ones the students in this project carried out, can spark a little interest and motivate students to explore the elements that come into play in a language learning situation.

It can also help them to question how to change or improve these elements for their own benefit or for the benefit of the whole class.

In the same way, the breadth of the approach of a language philologist made us reconsider the concept of language competence, which tends to be limited to linguistic aspects. This project has reviewed the need to amplify the linguistic side of language performance to other realms, and for higher education or tertiary level, this language competence should go beyond language systems and towards metalanguage and critical perspectives. In these new notions of language competence, defined by the different requirements of the institution in question, there could be ways to explore a code-switching competence, related to the translation skills of the student. This code-switching competence could also acknowledge the students' previous knowledge of at least, one language system (L1) and its culture, however limited this knowledge is. In other words, this competence would account for a more accurate reality when it comes to learning a language as an adult.

Language classrooms as social events and from the point of view of the students resulted in a dynamic mosaic of conflicting views and expectations. In the struggle to learn, students engage in power dynamics with an aim to establish their identities within the language classroom, as language learners and as observed subjects in their interaction with their teachers and peers. This issue came up again and again in the diaries, as students sometimes found it frustrating to negotiate the power dynamics in a classroom. This issue of power and identity is slightly ignored in the literature about teacher training and it is rarely discussed in a language classroom, though both teachers and students seem to be aware of the influence of power and authority in the classroom at some level. The L.S.U.C. project aired some of these concerns and the creation of a 'community' within the project fostered the negotiation and redefinition of these identities, first through reflection-in-action, and then through dialogue between students and student assistants. In turn, these student assistants interviewed their peers and commented upon the issues raised by other students, anonymously, creating an awareness of the problems that people were experiencing in the class due to unequal chances of participation, shaped by student identities and the roles that they had assumed in their classroom. So the project, in a way, became a bridge between the classroom forum as it was, and the project community as an active focus group that brought new perspectives into the classroom as their participation in the project increased. These new perspectives were communicated to other students, who didn't participate in the project, and contributed to the creation of a more positive and flexible language learning environment.

This project, and other projects like this one, point towards the need for the creation of active communities of practice in language teaching and learning. These communities may or may not be located within the current academic structures such as departments, schools or disciplines, but they definitely can take advantage of the existing structures to explore the establishment of fruitful dialogue and sharing of experiences. They will serve as dynamic structures for communicating findings and sharing needs and concerns as well as creative tools and efficient techniques for our language classrooms. These communities of practice (CoP) should develop first locally, and then become represented in bigger CoPs so that they do not support a top-down approach, which is unattractive to teaching professionals who have allegedly rejected theory from the academic world so purportedly distant to their real everyday teaching scenarios. Diagonally, it has also addressed the fact that language teachers have traditionally belonged to teams of teachers but these teachers rarely share their experience with certain tools and techniques in a productive way. These conversations happen in a casual manner over a coffee break and, as useful as they could be, teachers could benefit from platforms where they can show, exchange, criticize and share their experience with certain resources, student types, language issues – such as grammar points or cultural incidents – and other elements of their profession in a more reflective and coherent manner as well as obtain feedback from their peers that they can contrast with other feedback obtained from student or collegial sources. The project has shown that there is little peer feedback in the language teaching and learning profession, and that there are very few forms or protocols available for this purpose. Language teacher training courses use observation reports in order to give feedback on a specific incident or over the period of language teaching practicum for the training program; but there is rarely a continuous follow-up and exchange with regards to techniques and rapport, unless it is for penalizing performance. This aspect of peer feedback has imbued the practice with a negative image. Needless to say, peer review and feedback is a sensitive issue. Professional language teaching performance is a risk-taking activity, which involves self-confidence and a successful management of anxiety, not unlike efficient language learning performance. In this project, both the assistants and the researchers needed to be extremely careful in the selection of tasks and questions, and in the establishment of rapport between with the research subjects, since the levels of anxiety and embarrassment would increase if they considered that the tasks, interviews or relationship established with them were rather childish or judgmental. The sensitive nature of a peer feedback exercise should be borne in mind in the creation of these CoPs and colleague feedback reports just as much as these issues come into play when writing or giving student feedback.

These communities of practice may very well extend to the students. The L.S.U.C. project showed that the students who were involved in groups or teams were most successful in language learning and in the completion of the tasks for the project. They all enjoyed being part of the project, certainly because it meant belonging to a community that worked together to enhance each other's language learning experiences. They realized that their involvement had a direct impact in the classroom, through the teacher/researcher immediate application of some of their suggestions, but also through their own reflective practice. The interviews, where volunteers and student research assistants came together, proved to be the most enjoyable experience in the project because the exchange of perspectives was real, and in them the students shared problems and solutions with one another. As an active language teacher, the need for student spaces that facilitate the discussion of learning issues is clear. These spaces can be within and beyond the classrooms in order to enhance successful classroom instruction conducive to language learning. The creation of these spaces is time-consuming and in the current economic climate, it will be challenge to find ways to exploit the ready-made space that is the language classroom.

Teacher CoPs and Student Communities can develop as separate entities, as they have traditionally done. However, as this project has shown, they will both enrich each other's perspectives by merging in the middle and developing a figure of eight approach by which CoPs and Communities share the core of their experiences. Opening up the avenues for this two-way communication between groups of students and groups of teachers can lead to true cooperative learning[1], in which students will learn language and language learning, and teachers will learn and improve language teaching by the same token.

This issue also leads us into the consideration of space, not just as a theoretical entity, but the physicality of the language classrooms in which the students of this project tried to learn a language. The recurrence of this concept in the student journals, observations and interviews made us realize that physical space and time is generally taken for granted, subsuming to a very idealistic notion of learning. There is very little attention paid to the real conditions of a classroom (air quality, classroom size, mobility of desks, ability to personalize the space and so on) and yet it is one of the most immediate and clear impacts on language learning and learning in general. Linked to it, our students also raised the issue of time, both time of the day and duration of a classroom. Class times are stipulated by sections within our institutions that may or may not have borne in mind learning curves and attention spans when coming up with timetables. The triviality of these matters tends to push them aside when planning or tending to learning needs. Matters such as method and curriculum content seem to be more pressing at meetings or discussions about teaching

and learning. However, the impact of the conditions of space and the duration of a classroom can hinder or enhance learning immensely, as we observed in the ESL classroom in the secondary school teaching environment. The most striking feature about this class was its personalization. It was a space that belonged to the students, and so the institution was more flexible about how students could use or decorate it. As they felt more comfortable in that environment, their focus on learning the language – which was the only characteristic they had in common – was stronger. A highly personalized environment and methodology was conducive to personal paths of language learning. Any skills-based subject shares with language this highly personalized sequence because individual differences and investments vary greatly from one student to another. The assessment method based on threshold levels allowed students to progress at their own pace without risking any penalty other than their own motivation and a delay in joining the mainstream classroom in the secondary school. Even though classroom space and times cannot be easily changed in our current university environments, the impact of time and space on learning needs to be acknowledged and accounted for in the description of courses and in our assessment methods.

10.2 Interdisciplinarity in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning.

> Research is a never-ending activity and the results of one study often lead to new research problems and projects. Conducting research is a valuable learning experience regardless of the level of sophistication of the research procedures. (Wiersma, 1991, p. 389)

This project developed from a series of literature reviews that mainly focused on Second Language Acquisition. The prevalence of the discipline in the academic literature at the time this project was carried out was remarkable. Currently, an increasing number of articles on Foreign Language Learning can be found. Their focus on English as a Foreign Language has also shifted. More and more articles can be found on the teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language and, likewise, other modern languages, including minority languages. It may be argued, though, that there are very few attempts to share findings between different languages. Conferences and other fora for academic or teacher discussion tend to focus on the language that they teach or research in common. The first level of interdisciplinarity that this project has favoured is: once communities of practice have been formed among teachers that belong to the same language teaching activities, units or events by which these findings are shared with other communities of

practice or other-language teaching professionals can/should be formed. In 2010, the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures in the National University of Ireland, Galway identified this lack of communication between the teaching professionals in the different languages taught in the school and organized a language teaching and learning conference which included French, German, Irish, Italian and Spanish teachers and academics.

Many European Universities have started centres for excellence in learning and teaching in the last two or three decades. This move to highlight teaching and learning in academic institutions was probably needed in light of a zealous focus on research. This emphasis has created a bulk of research at the level of general topics in teaching and learning that can be shared across the different disciplines and departments at any given institution. Some universities have also developed literature on teaching and learning in specific areas, such as Math, Physics and Languages. Skill based disciplines seemed to be more developed in this way.

Reaching outside of the scope of Second Language Acquisition or Applied Linguistics seemed to be the best approach towards learning about how to improve a language teaching and learning specific situation. Modern languages or Philology departments seem to leave aside general education theory and history. Conversely, these subjects tend to be part and parcel of education degrees, devoted to child or primary education. Not entirely disconnected to Second Language Acquisition, the literature review carried out for chapter two of this thesis, ended up being a crucial element in anchoring this project to the discontinuous timeline of general education theorists and their schools. It helped in achieving an understanding of the impact certain schools or ideas have had and how these concepts weave in and out of the current academic literature on language teaching and learning, as well as in the beliefs that students and teachers hold. Some of these ideas, more or less publicized, seem to be embedded within the structures that promote language teaching and learning in our institutions, and tend not to be questioned but rather carried through as established truths. Other schools of teaching and learning have sunk beneath the power of these publicized currents and only tend to surface when one of their success stories reaches a general audience. In the critical situation our education systems find themselves in, and accounting for the failure of language teaching and learning in the public education systems generally speaking, a review of earlier general theories may inspire new methodologies and techniques with which to change and improve this reality. For our innovation project, some of these theories – as summarized in Chapter Two – supported our collaborative approach, at a time when the popularity of cooperative language learning was not as widespread as it is today.

It has helped, once again, to locate our case study in a different discipline. In this context, it has become apparent that our project could also be framed in the context of 'New Literacy Studies', developed from the 1980s (Barton, 1994; Street 1993), and concerned with the critical analysis of communicative practices, considered in their social and historical context. This school of thought analyzes how people actually use – many times in utilitarian ways – external and internal mechanisms, searching for the links between identity and literacy. In our case, the links would be between language learning and identity. This area has yet to be fully explored in academic research. Erasmus students who travel back and forth between their native countries and their host universities every year could be an ideal place to start.

The 'discovery' of ethnographic tools and qualitative research methodologies became the key element in the interdisciplinarity of this project. It is important to bear in mind that the three main techniques used in this project, that contributed in fostering student engagement and investment in language learning, did not come from applied linguistics or education in general, but from ethnography and sociolinguistics, showing that a narrow or specific focus on SLA would have given very different results. The technical complication, which some of the so-called scientific approaches to language teaching and learning offer, deters the participants in any given research from using them. Using a metaphor from the English language to illustrate this point, people do not need to know the name of the trees to navigate their way through a forest, but they do need to know what a forest is, where it starts, where it ends and where the dangerous parts are located in it. More often than not, academic research has focused on the development of terminology and jargon to achieve the status of academic discipline and be set apart from the others. Although the clear definition of terms and conditions is a given in a academic research, the establishment of links between different areas of knowledge and the exploration of the intersections between these disciplines proved to be the engine of this research, maintaining the interest of the research team and fuelling it towards the end of the project. It also contributed to the creation of a positive memory of the project and the application of the learning acquired in the process for other purposes, beyond language teaching and learning, as the last questionnaires by email showed, years after the project was carried out.

Even within Second Acquisition, there has been a tendency to dissociate the theory and the practice. In Chapter Two of his thesis, Martín Peris clarifies and raises his concern about the differences in the object and purpose of study between linguistics, applied linguistics and language didactics. He separates the need to know from the need to know how to. He quotes H.G. Widdowson (Martín Peris, 2005, p. 32) saying that teachers should act as mediators between theory and practice. This assumes that the teachers have a

certain level of knowledge and understanding of theories as well as an ability to transform this theory into practice; in other words, the ability to apply abstract thinking into their everyday classrooms. Leaving aside the variety of backgrounds that teachers come from nowadays, placing the onus of becoming the bridge between theory and practice on any teacher seems a bit excessive. Without bearing in mind the time constraints that they already face with student numbers and the increase in the tasks that their job entails, such responsibility would in turn necessitate further teacher training. The responsibility to create training for these purposes would fall on the universities and academic research centres.

The language teacher today is definitely not the only source of language practice and theory. The abundance of websites, social networks and videos on the web made the classroom and the teacher redundant as simply a place where to find language practice and exposure. The fabulous grammar practice websites readily available for free also deem the class useless as a means to drill exercises on grammar. In other words, what is the place of a language teacher in the middle of the information highway? What ultimately transpired from our project and in the results of this dissertation is that the current role of teachers and teaching professionals in third level education has been established as 'facilitation'. We owe the widespread use of the term to Carl Rogers' psychological client-centred theory of personality and behaviour which relied on the belief that we cannot "teach" other people directly but can only "facilitate" their learning (Rogers, 1965, 1994).

In the same way, informal instruction does not only refer to immersion programs and language stays in the country any more. Currently, different languages can be practiced in many places in the world, especially in Europe, through the constant current of immigrants. Even in the remotest places, language practice social networks have expanded the notion of language interaction beyond physical borders. Therefore, traditional ways of conceiving formal and informal language instruction are in the process of being reviewed thanks to changes in the way we interact with one another globally. As a result, the teacher, as a bridge between formal and informal instruction, is landed with a more intricate task: facilitation. This term is broadly used to define any activity that makes tasks easy for others or assists them in easing those tasks for them. In this sense, teachers cannot be viewed as the gatekeepers to knowledge or language any more.

Facilitation is a slippery area because 'making things easy' is a highly personal statement. What is easy for one person can be daunting for another. In general terms, the task of facilitation needs to be explored in depth in language learning. There are descriptions of skills, language competencies and areas that need to

be covered when learning a language. Language theorists and mostly language teaching professionals have developed techniques and tools to tackle many of these areas. There is a wealth of practical knowledge out there, and more that needs to be shared in language learning communities in order to have quicker and easier access to these shortcuts in language learning. Once these techniques have been mapped out, the teacher facilitator will have a guide that s/he can follow and offer to his/her students on a group or personal basis. In other words, teacher training is still lacking in regards to preparation for facilitation. There is language theory, language teaching theory, teaching practice sessions, observations, journals and so on... but there is a need to explore obstacles and solutions in a less personal way, through teacher circles, blogs, or any tool that allows for dialogue to occur and for solutions to specific problems to be shared.

In the same way, this role of facilitation precludes student engagement and cooperation. However, in other disciplines teacher/student and student/student collaborative practices have started to enter the new ways of teaching in higher education, even at the level of curriculum development, programming, planning sequences of learning and giving feedback. These collaborative practices can be extended to the sharing of problems and solutions in language teaching and learning, making facilitation easier and developing a transparency about the language learning process, its difficulties and the ways to overcome them.

A clearer definition of The Language Learning Process, with capital letters, or specific language learning processes, uncovered itself as a priority throughout our project. This journey has not yet received a lot of attention from sociological or educational studies. A systematic review of descriptive accounts of language learning would show the similarities and differences between individuals as they progress through different stages of interlanguage. Interlanguage as a concept was reviewed in chapter two of this dissertation, as assessment practices in the classroom may need to be reviewed. It has been postulated that language, in a formal setting, is best learnt through understanding of errors, and yet language assessment methods rely heavily on the punishment of errors. There is a need to develop methods of assessment that encourage the development of interlanguage and the student's discovery of his/her own errors. On the other hand, chapter two and chapter nine of this thesis have argued for the need of a framework, perhaps language specific, describing the errors that would be allowed at the different stages of a developing interlanguage. This kind of transparency and the development of student self-reflective assessment techniques may clarify and pave the way for easy language learning routes. These practices preclude a certain degree of autonomy and reflective skills, but we cannot forget that this dissertation focuses on language learning in higher education, where autonomy and reflection-on and in-action are fundamental to the learning process.

Interdisciplinarity helped not only in the consideration of research approaches that combined ethnography, sociology and other education research techniques, but also in the review of the main concepts in the research question in this project. It contributed to an understanding of language as a set of habits, as a brain mechanism and as a tool for social interaction, taking into account the different perspectives that have defined it. It also helped in the reconsideration of the student as an individual with a certain cognitive and affective filter, identity, goals – guiding his/her investment and engagement - and expectations. S/he also has a history and educational background that contributed in the shaping of his/her learning style, beliefs and strategies. By proxy, it led us to the exploration of the classroom as a physical space for language exposure and practice, in which grammar and formal instruction happen, and where social interaction develops between participants. This interdisciplinary spirit that permeated this project propelled us into the use of cross-methodologies rather than adhering to a single Method or methods. Broadening the scope of the main discipline involved in this thesis, Second Language Teaching and Learning, to general theories of teaching and learning allowed us to consider older concepts and views on reflective, cooperative and dialogic learning. It also allowed us to incorporate concepts such as multiple intelligences in the definition of language competencies, highlighting that interdisciplinarity is beneficial but historical intradisciplinarity is advantageous too.

An exploration of what classroom research entails opened the way into concepts such as Anderson's imagined communities, which has been applied to classroom contexts before but rarely to language classrooms. In language classrooms there are at least two types of communities at play: the classroom learner community and the native speaker community. The classroom learner community is circumscribed within a larger language learner community (more language students in the same year but in different classrooms, other-language students in the same year, other non-language students in the same year, language students from other years in the same college, etcetera). The native speaker community can be viewed as L2 native speakers in the country where classroom learning is taking place or native speakers in their country / countries of origin, which in the case of Spanish or English involves quite a regional and cultural variety. The complexity of these imagined communities, which play a role in student identities, needs to be understood and clarified in order for teachers and learners to understand its impact on language teaching and learning.

The main apparatus from Classroom Research into this project were the three main ethnographic tools that we used in the L.S.U.C. case study: observations, journals and interviews. This case study provided this

project with primary data, and also allowed the research team to reflect upon the elaboration of a case study in itself. The first obstacles that the project encountered were the ethical and practical issues that surrounded student anonymity and voluntarily. The reward system for the participation in this project needed an intermediary, i.e. the research assistants, who were also students who received a monetary reward for their participation in the project. Other practical issues included the fact that the reward was supposed to attract weaker students – and a healthy number of weaker students did participate at the beginning of the project, – but in the end, the project finished with more of the stronger students, and only a handful of weaker students who persevered to the end. The nature of the project involved a significant degree of student involvement and most of the weaker students lacked that dedication. The only way to maintain weaker students in a project of this nature would be to make it compulsory for those students. However, this requirement would defeat the purpose of the study since it would rule out the critical nature of journals and interviews.

This was not the only obstacle that the L.S.U.C. project needed to overcome. Throughout the case study, student resistance to innovation was blatant. This resistance was overcome by the familiarity and common benefit of the open-ended, broad question that led this project on. The next obstacle came at the stage of planning and obtaining permission from the different third level institutions that were considered, and from the secondary school. The delay in responses and the necessary re-planning forced us to reshape the project, and to restrict it to one institution and one semester. A broad project like this would have benefited more from the contrastive analysis involved in grounded theory.

Through this dissertation we have elaborated extensively on the benefits and flaws of these tools and we have showed the necessity of triangulating the results obtained with each of the tools. Our experience has been that interviews are the most successful and most enjoyable part of creating a student community through the development of student-student rapport. The journals became our main source of data because they were more elaborate and free-style than the interviews, which were designed by the research team from the journals. The journals were the least liked by the students, probably because they involved more work and also written work. The observations also gave us a lot of problems, mainly stemming from the fact that none of us had received formal training in this tool and the protocols in existence did not meet our needs. These protocols had been designed with different purposes in mind, drawing from different theories of classroom interaction or language learning. They did raise awareness of all the elements involved in a classroom and they highlighted the fact that observation works best when it is fine-tuned or focused on one

or two specific items. All in all, it turned out not to be the best tool for our general purpose of eliciting the main elements of a language classroom from the student point of view; but it enriched our view of classroom interaction and it allowed us to observe and assess the impact made in the classroom by the changes we introduced from the feedback in the journals we had collected in the middle of the case study. As a result, the triangulation of these three tools provided this case study with the depth and breadth displayed in this dissertation.

However, the project would not have been entirely complete without the external perspective provided by the informally observed ESL classroom in the secondary school. The comparison between this language classroom setting and the characteristics of its students and the other main learning scenarios described in this project provided our conclusions with a wealth of diversity and offered different insights that would not have arisen from the analysis of the data in the L.S.U.C. project. The myth that language learning classrooms have a lot in common was definitely exposed through the variety and radical differences of individual, institutional and spatial variables at play in both settings.

The most enriching part of this project was the interaction within the research team, in and outside of meetings. This group of seven engaging students was the heart, mouth and soul of this project, while the researcher played the role of mere brain. They were completely devoted to the project, carrying the researcher forth even towards this report and encouraging the writing of this dissertation as a tribute to their work. Some of them constantly wrote emails to me, enquiring about the stage of this dissertation and also cheering me on towards completion. From the very beginning, they stood out to volunteer for the project and their engagement and enthusiasm got them their position as assistants when the funding from the Innovation in Teaching and Learning fund was granted. They carried out the observations and interviews as well as transcribed them; and they collected the journals in week six and week twelve of the semester, assigning each of the student volunteers in their care a number to protect their identity. They encouraged these volunteers and guided them in the writing of journals and interviews, although sometimes the student in question would prefer to approach the teacher/researcher about them. They actively designed the interviews with the researcher in meetings held to discuss the progress of the project and issues that had arisen. Some of them voluntarily received training in observation and decided to read more about protocols, and then applied them at their own will. This was probably the last foray into interdisciplinarity, as these students, with degrees in two disciplines, brought knowledge and skills from the different disciplines they studied. One of the girls was doing a teacher training course at the same time and

she was eager to experiment with these ethnographic tools. Another girl studied sociology and was very keen on observation protocols and impact in the classroom. The meetings teemed with ideas and concepts from several disciplines that were brought to the table and considered or rejected. It was in this dialogue between the teacher/researcher and the students that the real transformation of this project happened. The teacher learnt to learn from her students and the students taught teaching to the teacher/researcher. In their feedback, described in chapter eight, they showed the pronounced learning curve in language learning, teaching and research in general that this group of seven had experienced as a result of the project, showing a marked success in promoting a research culture amongst students in higher education.

10.3 Towards the Creation of Pedagogies of Possibility in Language Teaching and Learning.

> In my view, there are four fundamental features of a researcher that will help him/her to achieve excellence: genuine curiosity, a lot of common sense, good ideas and something that can be best described as a combination of discipline, reliability, and social responsibility. (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 17)

With the L.S.U.C. project, the teacher/researcher tried to tap into the concept of Pedagogy of Possibility, coined by Paulo Freire in the 1980s. She tried to create a collaborative environment by which the students and the teacher cooperated to improve the learning environment and enhance everybody's chances of learning the language. A Pedagogy of Possibility, though, as Freire intended it, is a much broader concept, encompassing more than one isolated classroom or a small group of them. It precludes an institutional engagement and integrative approach to student learning and development throughout their undergraduate experience, or even beyond that.

The National Learning Communities Project in the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education at the Evergreen State College, in cooperation with the American Association for higher Education, published a monograph under the title, 'The Pedagogy of Possibilities: Developmental Education, College-Level Studies and Learning Communities' in 2004. It denounces a criticism shared by a lot of academics about declining standards as a result of the push for access into higher education. The natural response is to provide academic support services and most of the current academic institutions have a form of academic support for students. However, time and again, we find that these structures are not

enough, and that the time constraints in our curriculum and semesterized academic years are more and more demanding.

This innovative learning project within a language classroom led to the creation of a learning community within the classroom and within the focus classrooms selected for this project. It poured out into their fellow classmates, who had decided not to participate in the project, transforming and expanding the learning space, linking learning in the classroom with learning outside the classroom. As a consequence, the responsibility for learning became transparently more balanced between students, teachers and learning environmental conditions; as a result, it seemed easier to understand and explain success and failure. Another issue that transpired throughout the project was that the onus of the management of classroom interaction did not fall solely on the teachers. The students who participated in the project reflected upon their own role in controlling and enhancing classroom interaction. The research assistants also commented on it at length in their classroom observations. All these issues that permeated from journals, interviews and observations pointed to the existence of an imagined culture of teaching and learning, and specifically an imagined culture of language teaching and learning. This culture exists in the mind of the students as individuals and as a collective. They enter the classroom with the 'rules' and strategies with which their previous experiences of language learning and learning in general have equipped them, and transforming these ways of doing is a time-consuming activity. It seemed as though, through the student/student conversations promoted in this project and student/teacher briefing sessions - which sometimes happened at the beginning of a class so as to address a suggestion given in the journals, or to announce a change - these 'rules' and strategies were challenged and the creation of a new academic set of savoir-faires was in the making.

That is why Grounded Theory was chosen as a methodology of analysis for the primary sources for this case study. Even though the project was born from the extensive literature review carried out before the classroom research activity, at this stage, it seemed more advantageous to let go of the theoretical framework and ask the students feedback about language instruction with the minimum influence from the researcher's background. Analyzing the repetitions in their answer with the creation of codes constructed or abstracted from their statements in the journals and interviews seemed the most responsible way of listening to the student voice. Further to this stage of coding, there was a need to systematize these concepts and codes into larger categories in order to understand them and to be able to report them in a scientific manner. At this stage, memoing would have been a very useful aid. There had been a certain level

of memoing carried out throughout the project, in the form of a research journal and also a teacher reflective journal, but it proved insufficient. The lack of experience with this researcher's skill became an obstacle in the next stage of Grounded Theory. However, the main aim of this dissertation is descriptive and not theory-building. The scope of the project was neither broad nor long enough to theorize from Grounded Theory because of time constraints due to the teacher researcher's contract. Hence, probability statements derived from these categories were chosen as a form of concluding the analysis and offering suggestions to further research and improving language teaching and learning.

These probability statements lay the groundwork for collaboration with other participants in language teaching and learning situations, as they offer a specific view of language teaching and learning, shared by most of the participants in this case study. They can be used as beliefs or relative truths, and contribute to the students' or teachers' questioning of their own beliefs and ways of doing in their classrooms. They also expose the need for more communication between student communities and teaching and learning institutions. The real transformation of spaces for teaching and learning, as the case study shows, faces the obstacle of institutional constraints, constraints as physical as the rigidity of classroom spaces and air quality or heating, which the participants in this project report time and again. It is important to bear in mind that the institution in question was a semi-private, government funded third level institution. Institutions with less funding and support may find themselves in less than desirable conditions for optimum teaching and learning, which tend to be ignored or taken for granted in teaching and learning quality reviews. Shorter semesters, length of lectures and seminars, curriculum pace, and the increase of teaching/student ratios make learning environments challenging and unfavourable to teaching and learning.

The majority of the students in the L.S.U.C. project were first years. This fact led us to question the skills needed to tackle language learning in college. Language teaching practitioners in third level institutions tend to complain about the difficulties that student face when differentiating between a non-academic language school approach and learning a language at college level. Language entry exams such as the Leaving Certificate in Ireland, the A-levels in UK and 'selectividad' in Spain fail to address this issue. The time is ripe for academics to examine what it takes to be "prepared" for language learning in college. The curriculum of these examinations still tends to focus on content and language skills (namely, writing and reading, and lately, speaking and oral comprehension in conversation). These are the essentials skills for any language learning, and so non-academic language schools and academic institutions share them. A certain degree of autonomy was suggested by the student journals and interviews, and the students who found

language learning more difficult reported lacking the self-direction and discipline that learning autonomy requires. Reflection on language and reflection on language learning seemed to enhance learning and engagement throughout the project and so it could be postulated as a necessary skill for language learning in college. What other skills, though, need to be highlighted and transparently communicated to our prospective students and secondary school teachers and curriculum planners? Maybe it is time for more research on the sets of skills that different language teaching and learning professionals – and students - in higher education institutions identify as key to their success in the first year in college, and throughout their degrees. These sets of skills will vary from institution to institution, depending on the agenda and rationale behind the different language faculties, but there will be similarities that may guide and facilitate the transition into college, and the awareness of the culture of college language teaching and learning.

10.4 Student Reflection as Continuous Assessment of Teaching Practice.

In many ways, the L.S.U.C. project attempted to access student opinions and criticism in an informal but continuous way. There are many advantages to conducting this type of student consultation. This project showed results that concur with Flutter & Ruddock's (2004) statement about the outcomes of involving students in the analysis of teaching and learning. Students can describe learning processes in a more systematic way through the acquisition of technical language in a dialogic manner in discussions with their peers. It helps them to engage with learning and promotes metacognition. It also seems to raise self-confidence as a result of student opinions being valued. The advantages are definitely clear from the student's point of view.

For teachers, it offers continuous feedback that can improve aspects of their practice, and it often points towards the improvement of teacher-student relationships, contributing to a more collaborative classroom environment. It aids in the identification of problems hindering progress and can be used to develop new concepts to improve teaching and learning. The downside to this type of feedback is that it needs to be balanced in its positive and negative elements. The affective side of teaching has not yet received enough attention in academic literature on teaching and learning. It is also very time consuming, since it requires devoting large tracts of time to reviewing the primary data collected and organizing it in a systematic way in order to make sense of it and to use it concurrently or at a later stage. It should also be interesting to collate this data with the teacher's own reflective journal, since this project has shown that the most

constructive insights come from incidents where there is disagreement between student and teacher perspectives.

For teaching and learning institutions, continuous systematic assessment of teaching may suggest a new direction. If taken seriously, this data can contribute to monitoring and evaluating processes and help to establish a more positive learning culture within the school or faculty.

In the L.S.U.C. project, the research assistants collected the diaries in the middle of the semester. These diaries were read and briefly scanned for recurrent topics. This preliminary mid-term data was very helpful. The allowance of a reading week in this Canadian institution granted teacher and students a break from new class content in which they could organize class materials and evaluate their performance as well as catch up with reading and assignments. For our project, it was fundamental to have this break because it gave both teachers and research assistants the time to read carefully and meet and discuss the diary entries collected. In this meeting we also decided which aspects were easier to tackle immediately in the classroom. The actions that followed this exercise increased the level of student trust in the project as they saw some of their suggestions being put into practice.

From the researcher's point of view this exercise narrowed down the scope of this dissertation and cantered her attention around issues such as awareness, cultural aspects of teaching and learning, difficulties, engagement, improvement, intercultural awareness, ideal conditions for teaching and learning, student expectations, student feelings, power dynamics in the classroom, feedback, hard days, deficiencies, language of instruction, methods and tools, other languages, outcome, previous knowledge, student strategies and physical space. These concepts and issues guided the design of the interviews, which were created by the research team during the reading week.

At this stage some written questionnaires had already been handed out. They provided two main benefits: 1. They broke the ice and started the conversation, and 2. They clarified the purpose of the project and gained student trust from the outset. At the beginning of this second stage, student research assistants started carrying out the interviews, which focused on the codes elicited from the first set of journals. The research assistants had already been present in the life of the student volunteers - through the assignment and collection of journals and also as classroom observers. Some of the student volunteers were initially

apprehensive about their presence in the classroom but the interviews helped put them at ease, establishing a positive relationship between them.

The previous mechanism of journal review was repeated at the end of the semester. In the last week of classes, diaries were collected again and from the second part of the journals and their recurrences, the wealth of issues and topics was reduced to six codes: Overall Awareness, Student Feelings, Power Dynamics in the Classroom, Teaching Methods, Student strategies and Physical Space. These codes were finalized from a quantitative analysis of their recurrence but our choice was also guided by the research team's interests. The stage of subcoding these higher codes was again carried out according to the recurrence of certain topics but trying to be as inclusive as possible. The research assistants had one more month to finish transcribing and submitting the interviews that they had recorded on tape. These transcriptions were stored and included in the analysis after a descriptive report of the journals had taken place. Then they were subjected to the same levels of coding, and filtered through the subcodes elicited from the journals, abstracting even more from new insights that appeared in the interviews.

Under the first code, 'Awareness', students seemed preoccupied with grammatical topics. They identified the need to have some linguistic awareness and grammar knowledge as an asset. The grammar topics that they isolated tended to coincide with the grammatical focus of the teacher. They talked about learning style at length and their own engagement with the course and classroom. They talked about their personality and how it affected their learning. They seemed very fixed on items of their learner's identity that they believed fixed, such as learning style or aptitude. They also expressed their ideal preference of a native speaker as a teacher. However, they also commented at length about the difficulties establishing a good rapport with one of the native teachers in the department, and they attributed it to language and intercultural barriers between them.

Under the second code, 'Student Affect', students expressed their expectations and beliefs in language learning. They seemed to cling to myths about language learning without having tested them personally or having read about them in scientific papers. They showed a resistance to innovation, to take the responsibility of learning into their own hands and to become autonomous learners. They analyzed the causes of their anxiety in language learning situations and the influence of their peers, as well as the influence of the cost of higher education and the impact that this increasing cost had in their everyday lives.

Under the third code, 'Power Dynamics in the Classroom', students raised their voices about student-student rapport, even more than about student/teacher relationships. They were very concerned about power and its distribution in a classroom or a seminar and they were willing to share the responsibility of managing this interaction with the teacher. They elaborated on student voice and how to make it heard at departmental or institutional level. They explored the ideal classroom atmosphere and they seemed to be happy with the Spanish classrooms that they engaged in. They favoured the use of rounds to answer questions in the classroom as a way to ensure everybody's participation, even though they understood that this had its disadvantages as well. Finally, their attention turned to feedback and the way that this feedback was given in the language classroom. They were highly aware of the acute need for feedback as well as its sensitive nature. They considered positive practices such as allowing mistakes and general – as opposed to personalized – verbal, continuous feedback. They seemed to suggest that when the student takes control of the class by asking questions and seeking clarification, having interacted with the content and materials in their own time, learning was most effective.

Under the fourth code, 'Teaching Methods', students adamantly opposed the need for a language lab but advocated for grammar instruction and more conversation practice in general. They offered comments on the materials used for learning and gave advice in terms of teacher activities and class activities. They did not reach a consensus about language of instruction, highlighting the benefit of using their L1 occasionally in class but also its detrimental effect for other purposes.

Under the fifth code, 'Student Strategies', they displayed a limited set of techniques or strategies to carry out efficient language learning. They stated their use of L1, organization strategies such as advanced preparation, vocabulary charts and verb tables and summaries, note-taking and review. They also highlighted daily exposure to the language, eavesdropping on real life conversation and experiential learning. They also seemed to prefer team study and some of them did self-recording to improve their phonetic and prosodic performance.

Finally, under the sixth code, 'Space', they raised their concern about the physical conditions of their classrooms and explored the physical structures that they believed enhanced teaching and learning. They agreed on a circular structure, an adequate temperature and ventilation, and a smaller number of students as ideal conditions for a classroom. The board or projector screen would need to be visible and the notes clear

and viewable from all points of the classroom. They also elaborated on their preference for class times, frequency and duration.

As previously mentioned, the few observations carried out in this project are not thorough or systematic. This free-style use of observation has not rendered them useless to us. The research team found this exercise insightful. The observations that were carried out throughout the semester, whether in an informal, free style or protocol basis seemed to focus on (1.) the distribution of people, (2.) the physical pace, (3.) the class activities in question, (4.) the methods used in response to teacher and student behaviour, (5.) the use of English or Spanish as a language of instruction, and (6.) the interaction between the participants in the class. This focus seemed to highlight one of the conclusions of this thesis, namely, that the topics that came up as a result of using a different ethnographic tool were influenced, not only by the background of the research question and the dialogues that were active in the learning community created within the project, but also by the tool in question. Observation as a tool proved to be the microscope of teaching and learning, allowing the teacher researcher and the assistant a close-up view of the conditions in the language classroom in real time. Journals provided the rewind button and the recording device of personal experience and interviews became the discussion boards in which concepts and ideas were tested. The three tools, and the possibility of a fourth, external point of view - which aiding in the atypical classroom of the secondary school allowed us - constituted a better equipped tool box with which to elicit student feedback and to make use of it in the most efficient way.

Finally, chapter eight of this thesis has dealt with the student and research assistant feedback of the L.S.U.C. case study and research, in which they had so actively participated. If this thesis shows that student continuous assessment of teaching may be beneficial, the feedback on research carried out by students helped the researcher see the project in a completely different light and carry this report to completion. They acknowledged that their participation in such a study had introduced them to a variety of learning approaches from their fellow students that they have never considered before, promoting interaction between students in order to maximize learning. It also made them acutely aware of the constraints that education systems exercise on the improvement of teaching and learning conditions and alerted them to the urgency of taking learning into their hands in order to transform those conditions. They also confessed that the project had infused them with the love of learning that the stress of college life had made them forget. It improved their organizational skills due to the fact that they needed to work in teams and that a lack of organization impacted their classmates. The assistants reported that they valued

the research skills, such as transcription, teamwork and reports, as well as conducting interviews and observations.

Researcher and students started to value how external factors may block learning and how many times there is no control over these factors. They also highlighted in their feedback the surprise of realizing how small, specific actions actually lead to significant changes. They also reported that awareness might not lead to action. Action needs more motivation than simple awareness. They realized how people could be conscious of their own needs and yet be reluctant to act on them for very different reasons.

Finally, the research assistants recommended a few changes to the case study, should it be reduplicated. They advised an earlier date, possibly the start of the year so that there was more room for action, and feedback on action from the students, and possibly other language teaching peers. The beneficial nature of the research team meetings made them call for more meetings and also perhaps to include volunteer students in some of the meetings, so they would also benefit from the dialogue that the project inspired at an earlier stage. They also called for more interviews for the same reason, and more training and testing of observation protocols before employing them. The commitment of the assistants team was different as they all had different agendas about why they participated in the project. Some of the research assistants seemed to believe that more symmetric commitment would have helped. As a researcher, I enjoyed the different levels of engagement with the project. They all covered the minimum requirements in the research agreement and it was interesting to observe their different approaches to it. They also believed that there were more incentives needed to enhance student volunteer engagement, showing that they were also concerned with levels of commitment from the research subjects of this project.

Unlike student feedback forms, which are predictable and admittedly uninspiring, the L.S.U.C. project was reported as an enjoyable experience for most of the participants, which was probably the main motivation for the students, the assistants and the teacher/researcher to keep going, and also the reason why learning occurred. It led us to more questions that will probably become more case studies and research projects in the future because "in learning, we cannot ever achieve final answers, rather we find new questions, we discover other possibilities which we might try out. Knowledge is ultimately governed by constructive alternativism; everything can always be reconstructed" (Salmon, 1988, p. 22).

10.5 Suggestions for further Innovative Teaching Practices and Action Research.

If the students' continuous assessment of teaching, and their feedback on the project, contributed to the understanding of its impact, my self-reflective feedback on the case study from a researcher's point of view helped me consider the project from a more detached perspective, which is generally considered more scientific.

Chapter nine of this dissertation has revisited the literature reviewed in the early stages of this Ph.D. program and made a recommendation to redefine the notion of language learning competencies in higher education. Language competence has been traditionally defined as a combination of linguistic, communicative and sociocultural or intercultural competences. This project has highlighted the need to focus on language learning competence as well, which consists of strategic, teaching and learning culture, sociocultural, social and affective competencies. This project has underlined the importance of two more competencies: self-reflective and digital, both competencies are essential in the development of language learning autonomy in the current social contexts. The detailed description of what these language competencies entail needs to be explored and transparently described in the form of learning outcomes. Perhaps more research needs to focus on the sets of skills that language teachers and students at university level isolate as essential for a successful transition from secondary schools, and throughout their degrees. These skills will be different in different contexts but the similarities will be helpful in understanding the culture of college language teaching and learning.

As a researcher, this thesis was torn between the application of scientific conventions for the assessment of the case study or listening to the positive assessment of the participants as a main source of feedback. This conundrum led the final stage of this report to carry out a literature review of the status of the traditional concepts of accuracy, validity, reliability and practicability – or reduplication. Accuracy as the degree of freedom from error rendered itself invalid for the assessment of this case study. The subjective status of the primary data would deem it most inaccurate. The social science perspective this project advocates favours subjective accuracy over generality. It assumes an intention on behalf of the participants to be truthful in the description of their realities from their individual perspectives. Traditional notions of validity refer to the foundations of conclusions. The probability statements have been offered as results of this case study and my analysis of it has stemmed from the nature of the data, biased by the use of the ethnographic tools in question and the filters and loopholes in student, assistant and teacher researcher's perspectives.

Reliability turned to be the most testing criterion. Reliability, defined as consistency of measurements, would mean that different people would obtain the same results with the same methods or instruments. The nature of the classroom situation and the effort of this case study towards the inclusion of multiple perspectives would deem this kind of reliability impossible. Alternatively, this thesis focused on internal consistency reliability (ICR), which evaluates the consistency of results by clarifying research methods and contexts.

Grounded Theory also offered us a way to assess our case study, but since our general aim was not theory building, the categories they offer mainly assess the theory produced by their methodology so they would not completely fit our purpose either. In the process, the discovery of a new set of criteria was helpful. They look at the fitness of a theory according to its correspondence with the data and its application to daily life situations. They also look at understandability, favouring transparency in order to facilitate practicability and application of the theory. Generality is their main premise as Grounded Theory is directed towards theory building. In our case, this criterion was out of the question. Finally, they suggest control as a command granting the researcher the production and prediction of changes in a specific situation. The complexities of any learning contexts render this notion of control invalid, which is why we deemed probability statements as the most suitable outcomes of this project.

In general, traditional criteria for assessment did not fit the purpose of this project so we turned to new ways of assessing educational case studies put forward, namely by Ellis, Mills and Norton Peirce. Ellis recommends a micro-evaluation plan that includes a description of purpose, audience, evaluator, content, method and timing. Mills suggests a similar assessment method including intractability of reform, audience, format, prejudices, professional disposition, reflective stance, life-enhancing opportunities, action, action-data connection, impact and changes. Putting the case study through these filters highlighted the positive aspects of the project and pointed towards its main loophole, which was the lack in the description of incidents. Incident reporting as a skill needs to be included in teacher training. More research is needed conducive to the creation of guidelines to elaborate professional field notes and facilitate reporting for sharing in teaching communities of practice. The itemized nature of the primary data and the lack of incident reporting do not contribute to the creation of stories of language learning in a classroom from start to finish. Looking at language classrooms in this fresh way may help understanding participation and withdrawal, and help us tackle issues of engagement in a more efficient manner.

The next distinguishing factor of this research project was the use of an external language classroom for contrastive analysis. This practice, elsewhere considered unscientific, was very helpful. It pointed towards the need for more peer observation in alien school settings, not only at teacher training stage but also during professional practice. This observation can be complemented by research into the classrooms of individual teachers. This case study has argued for the development of teachers as researchers in order to promote a more accurate understanding of classroom events, and also for teachers' voices to be taken into account. This project has agreed with Ellis's approach, in which teachers need to be active in the election of relevant topics and methodologies.

Norton Peirce's criteria focuses on the project's ability to compel the students to reflect on their engagement, to question practices, to establish a dialogue with their classmates and to understand their classroom as a social network. This case study definitely contributed to that, as seen in the student feedback. This project has questioned the teacher/researcher's conventional practices. It ended up questioning also research conventional practices, and pushing the barriers of assessment conventions towards creativity and flexibility of assessment as well as towards the development of new lines of research that allow us to establish assessment criteria that would be more suitable to the nature of qualitative studies on teaching and learning.

As a way to conclude this dissertation, let us focus our attention on a few lines of research and action steps suggested throughout this doctoral report. The conclusions of this dissertation have pointed towards the need for more specific language teacher training on facilitation, and research into what facilitation entails for our discipline. This shift in the teacher's role should also be reflected in the assessment practices in the classroom. There is a need for research and innovation of assessment methods in language teaching and learning, that promote the positive learning from errors and the developing of 'imperfect' interlanguages in relation to each of the European Language Framework levels.

This student-focused project also has advocated for more student led research in language learning, specifically in the identification of the imagined communities at play in a given language classroom and on the impact of these communities and other aspects on the affective side of learning. Conversely, the affective side of teaching has failed to receive enough attention in the academic literature of teaching and learning. Self-reflective diaries and interviews will help provide more insight into this affective side of

teaching but there is also a need to develop new protocols of observation that fit the needs of practical research into the improvement of professional teaching conditions.

Student/teacher and student/student collaboration has been an essential foundation for this project and deeply changed the interaction between the participants in this project. I would like, therefore, to finish this report stressing the imminent need, reiterated time and again in this final chapter, for the development of spaces for discussion, communities of practice and fora within the same language teaching and learning environments, and beyond them. The process of creation of these networks and the active engagement of its participants will bring about some of the changes and offer solutions to the obstacles that language teachers are facing. When faced with obstacles or problems as language teachers, our training has encouraged us to go to Theories – with a capital T- and manuals written from a general point of view, usually in a different country and in a different learning context all together, away from the intricacies of the local milieu in which we work, which on the other hand, shapes our students' daily lives and perspectives, and our own. The similarities and differences found between our classroom and students in the same local communities will offer new questions and pave the way towards a much more empowering culture of teaching and consequently, of learning.

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[1] Deustch's (1949) initial concept of cooperative learning derives from social interdependence theory, which considers how people exchange rewards and costs in a relationship (pp. 4-5).

Capítulo 10

Conclusiones

EN ESTE CAPÍTULO…

- Se sintetizan los contenidos de esta tesis.

- Se acentúa la importancia de la pregunta inicial y la metodología usada para llegar a las respuestas a esta pregunta.

- Se recogen las nuevas impresiones sobre enseñanza y aprendizaje ofrecidas en esta tesis.

Si sigues a la razón lo suficiente, siempre te lleva a conclusiones que son contrarias a la razón.

(Samuel Butler)

10.1 Introducción.

Esta tesis pretendía dotar a los profesionales de la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas con una comprensión más profunda y transversal de las aulas de lengua contemporáneas. Ha intentado sacar a la luz temas, desde el punto de vista del estudiante, que surgen al aprender una lengua en un aula. También ha intentado contribuir al corpus de investigación cualitativa sobre las aulas como lugares para el aprendizaje de lenguas, a través de la recogida de diarios, entrevistas, informes de observación y formularios de evaluación como fuentes primarias para esta disertación. Ha enfatizado la importancia de llevar a cabo investigación de aula colaborando profesores y estudiantes para que tenga un impacto directo en el aprendizaje persona y en las situaciones de enseñanza con las que se enfrentan a diario. El análisis de sus realidades de manera reflexiva y dialogada ayudó a los estudiantes y a la profesora/investigadora de este proyecto a adquirir una perspectiva que abarcara más aspectos del aula de lenguas y del proceso de enseñanza y aprendiza, basado en ejemplos e incidentes. Estos datos han ofrecido la base real del aprendizaje ya que está basado en experiencias personales e intercambio interpersonal. Este intercambio ha mostrado las razones de algunos de los éxitos y fracasos de la enseñanza de lenguas desde el punto de vista del aprendiz. Ha reforzado la necesidad de reconocimiento de las conflictivas perspectivas y expectativas en

el aula de lenguas y ha intentado analizar estas perspectivas para poder encontrar las similitudes en las preocupaciones compartidas por los estudiantes y los profesores.

El proyecto innovador para el aula de lenguas en que está tesis se basaba tenía tres objetivos principales: 1) cuestionar la validez de metodologías basadas en la instrucción a través de la L2 únicamente, en particular para el aprendizaje de jóvenes y adultos; 2) explorar el aula de lenguas desde el punto de vista del estudiante como un espacio y acontecimiento social cuyos elementos no son cuantificables y en el que las variables individuales socioafectivas son cruciales; 3) establecer un sistema que permitiera que la evaluación individual de los estudiantes al profesor, y de los profesores a los estudiantes, ocurriera de forma regular. En otras palabras, esta tesis ha ofrecido y probado varias formas sistemáticas de introducir y mejorar la enseñanza e investigación reflexivas y cooperativas a través de las guías iniciadas por los aprendices de lenguas.

La hegemonía del método Comunicativo y las nociones conservadoras del bilingüismo han instaurado la preferencia de metodologías basadas en la L2 entre los profesores y alumnos, rechazando la riqueza que la lengua 1 aporta al aula de lenguas con adultos y adolescentes que ya han alcanzado un cierto nivel de maestría y fluidez en sus propias lenguas y han desarrollado una serie de habilidades transferibles al aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Esta idea de la inmersión como el método con más éxito para el aprendizaje de lenguas promovió la preferencia universal del hablante nativo como el profesor de lengua ideal. Aunque pueda ser necesario contar con la presencia de un nativo en el aula para ciertos aspectos de la práctica lingüística, este proyecto ha argumentado que no es condición suficiente para que el aprendizaje ocurra. Las escuelas de lenguas han contratado desde siempre a nativos con pocos conocimientos sobre lo que el aprendizaje de lenguas conlleva, y mucho menos la enseñanza. Este proyecto ha propuesto el reconocimiento de la riqueza y profundidad de los conocimientos que el filólogo puede llevar al aula de lenguas, y su experiencia con todos los elementos de un sistema lingüístico (análisis lingüístico, traducción, historia, dialectología, estructuras y artefactos culturales), pero también ha argumentado la necesidad de incorporar un lado práctico en la enseñanza en los grados de filología, para mejorar las oportunidades que los estudiantes de filología tienen de convertirse en profesores de lenguas competitivos y para equiparlos con las herramientas que aprovechan los conocimientos que han adquirido en sus diferentes asignaturas a lo largo de su carrera. La enseñanza está comúnmente considerada con un compromiso con el aprendizaje de por vida, y cuánto antes empiece el profesor a pensar sobre ello y a involucrarse en su práctica, más fácil le será más tarde. Si los conocimientos prácticos de la enseñanza pasan a ser parte de los grados de filología,

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tomará parte de la selección de incidentes que el estudiante habrá vivido de los que sacar conclusiones o corregir. Incluso el mero hecho de escribir un diario reflexivo de una clase en particular, como los que los estudiantes en este proyecto llevaron a cabo, puede generar cierto interés y motivar a los estudiantes a explorar los elementos que entran en juego en una situación de aprendizaje de lenguas. También pueden ayudarlos a cuestionar cómo cambiar o mejorar estos elementos para su propio beneficio o para el beneficio de toda la clase.

De la misma manera, la amplitud del acercamiento de un filólogo lingüístico nos hizo reconsiderar el concepto de competencia en una lengua, que tiende a estar limitado a aspectos lingüísticos. Este proyecto ha revisado la necesidad de ampliar el aspecto lingüístico del uso de la lengua a otros territorios, y para la educación superior o terciaria, esta competencia en una lengua debería ir más allá de los sistemas lingüísticos y hacia aspectos metalingüísticos y perspectivas críticas. En estas nuevas nociones de competencia en una lengua, definidas por los diferentes requisitos de la institución en cuestión, podría haber formas de explorar la competencia de cambio de código, relacionada con las habilidades de traducción del estudiante. Esta competencia de cambio de código podría también reconocer el conocimiento previo del estudiante de al menos, un sistema lingüístico (LI) y su cultura, sin importar lo limitados que estos conocimientos sean. En otras palabras, esta competencia debería tener en cuenta una realidad más adecuada en lo que se refiere al aprendizaje de lenguas como adulto.

Las aulas de lengua como acontecimientos sociales y desde el punto de vista de los estudiantes resultaron en un mosaico dinámico de puntos de vista y expectativas en conflicto. En su esfuerzo por aprender, los estudiantes participan de unas dinámicas de poder con el objetivo de establecer sus identidades dentro del aula de lenguas, como aprendices de lengua y como sujetos observados en su interacción con sus profesores y compañeros de clase. Este tema surgió una y otra vez en los diarios, ya que los estudiantes suelen frustrarse tratando de negociar las dinámicas de poder en el aula. El problema del poder y la identidad se obvia en la bibliografía sobre enseñanza del profesorado y raramente se discute en un aula, aunque tanto los estudiantes como los profesores parecen ser conscientes de la influencia del poder y la autoridad en el aula hasta cierto punto. El proyecto AEAU sacó a relucir algunas de estas preocupaciones y la creación de una 'comunidad' dentro del proyecto ayudó a la negociación y redefinición de estas identidades, primero a través de la reflexión-en-acción, y luego a través del diálogo entre los estudiantes y los asistentes estudiantes. A su vez, estos asistentes estudiantes entrevistaron a sus compañeros y comentaron sobre los problemas que otros estudiantes notaban, de forma anónima, y creando una consciencia de los problemas que otros

estaban teniendo en la clase debido a las oportunidades asimétricas de participación, generadas por las identidades de los estudiantes y los papeles que habían asumido en el aula. Así que el proyecto, de una forma u otra, se convirtió en el puente entre el foro del aula tal y como era, y la comunidad del proyecto como un grupo de foco activo que traía nuevas perspectivas al aula como consecuencia de su participación en el proyecto. Estas nuevas perspectivas fueron comunicadas a los demás estudiantes, que no participaban en el proyecto, y contribuyeron a la creación de un ambiente más positivo y flexible para el aprendizaje de lenguas.

Este proyecto, y otros como éste, apuntan hacia la necesidad de la creación de comunidades activas de práctica en aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas. Estas comunidades pueden o no estar localizadas en estructuras académicas actuales como departamentos, escuelas o disciplinas, pero definitivamente pueden aprovecharse de estas estructuras existentes para explorar el establecimiento de un diálogo fructífero y fomentar compartir experiencias. Servirán como estructuras dinámicas para comunicar resultados y compartir necesidad y preocupaciones así como herramientas creativas y técnicas efectivas para nuestras aulas de lengua. Las comunidades de práctica (CoP) deberían desarrollarse primero a nivel local, y luego adquirir representación en CoPes más grandes para no asumir una perspectiva piramidal de arriba abajo, que es tan poco atractiva para muchos profesionales de la enseñanza que han rechazado la teoría de las esfera académica por estar a años luz de sus contextos reales de enseñanza día a día. Transversalmente, también ha intentado atajar el hecho de que los profesores de lenguas han pertenecido tradicionalmente a equipos de profesores pero que estos profesores raramente comparten su experiencia con herramientas y técnicas especificas de manera productiva. Estas conversaciones ocurren de manera informal con un café y, aún siendo útiles así, estos profesores se beneficiarían más de la creación de plataformas donde puedan mostrar, intercambiar, criticar y compartir su experiencia con ciertos recursos, tipos de estudiantes, problemas de lengua – como puntos gramaticales o incidentes culturales – y otros elementos de la profesión de una forma más reflexiva y coherente así como obtener evaluaciones de sus compañeros de profesión que pueden contrastar con otras evaluaciones de estudiantes o profesionales. El proyecto ha mostrado que se reciben pocas evaluaciones de compañeros en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas, y que hay muy pocos formularios o protocolos disponibles para este propósito. Los cursos de formación del profesorado usan informes de observación para dar comentarios sobre un incidente específico o sobre un periodo de prácticas para el programa de formación de profesorado; pero raramente hay un seguimiento continuo y un intercambio en lo que se refiere a las técnicas y la relación con los estudiantes, a no ser que sea para penalizarla. Este aspecto de la evaluación por otros profesores ha dotado a esta práctica de su

imagen negativa. Huelga decir que la revisión y evaluación llevada a cabo por los compañeros es un tema sensible. El ejercicio de la profesión de enseñanza de lenguas es una actividad de riesgo, que conlleva confianza en uno/a misma/ y un control efectivo de la ansiedad, que no distan de los sentimientos que genera el ejercicio del aprendizaje de lenguas. En este proyecto, tanto los asistentes como la investigadora tuvieron que tener extreme cuidado en la selección de tareas y preguntas, y en el establecimiento de la relación con los sujetos de la investigación, ya que los niveles de ansiedad y vergüenza podían aumentar si consideraran que las tareas, entrevistas o la relación que se establecía con ellos eran infantiles o prejuiciosas. La naturaleza sensible del ejercicio de la evaluación debe ser considerada en la creación de estas CoPes y en la escritura de los informes críticos de la misma manera que estos temas entran en juego cuando se escribe o se da una evaluación a un estudiante.

Estas comunidades de práctica pueden extenderse a los estudiantes. El proyecto AEAU mostraba que los estudiantes que participaban en grupos o equipos tenían más éxito en el aprendizaje de lenguas y en llevar las tareas del proyecto a su término. Todos disfrutaron de tomar parte del proyecto, ciertamente porque significaba pertenecer a una comunidad que trabajaba junta para mejorar la experiencia de aprendizaje de cada uno. Se dieron cuenta de que su participación tenía un impacto directo en el aula, a través de la inmediata aplicación por parte de la profesora/investigadora de algunas de sus sugerencias, pero también a través de su propia reflexión. Las entrevistas, donde los voluntarios y los estudiantes asistentes de la investigación se encontraban, demostraron ser las mejores experiencias del proyecto porque el intercambio de perspectivas era real, y con esta herramienta, los estudiantes compartían problemas y soluciones entre sí. Como profesora active de lenguas, la necesidad de espacios para los estudiantes que faciliten la discusión de los problemas de aprendizaje entre sí está clara. Estos espacios pueden estar dentro o fuera de las aulas para promover la enseñanza efectiva de lenguas que conduzca al aprendizaje. La creación de estos espacios lleva tiempo y en el clima económico en que nos encontramos, será un reto encontrar formas para explotar los espacios diseñados que son nuestras aulas de lengua.

Las CoPes de profesores y comunidades estudiantiles pueden desarrollarse como entidades separadas, como lo han hecho tradicionalmente. Aunque, como ha mostrado este proyecto, se enriquecerán de las perspectivas ajenas al mezclarse en el medio y desarrollar una estructura de ocho a través de la cual las CoPes y las comunidades comparten el cogollo de sus experiencias. La apertura de avenidas para esta comunicación dual entre grupos de estudiantes y de profesores puede llevar a un aprendizaje cooperativo

auténtico[1], en el que los estudiantes aprenderán lengua y aprendizaje de lenguas, y los profesores aprenderán y mejorarán la enseñanza de lenguas de la misma manera.

Este tema nos lleva a la consideración del espacio, no como entidad teórica, sino la fisicalidad de las aulas en las que los estudiantes de este proyecto intentaron aprender una lengua. La recurrencia de este concepto en los diarios estudiantiles, observaciones y entrevistas nos hizo darnos cuenta de que el espacio físico y el tiempo se dan por sentado, asumiendo una noción muy idealista del aprendizaje. Se presta muy poca atención a las condiciones reales de un aula (calidad del aire, tamaño, movilidad de los pupitres, capacidad de personalización del espacio, etcétera) y aún así tiene un impacto inmediato y claro en el aprendizaje de de lenguas y aprendizaje en general. Relacionado con esto, nuestros estudiantes también sacaron el tema del tiempo, tanto la hora del día como la duración de una clase. Las horas de clase se estipulan por secciones en nuestras instituciones que puede que hayan tenido en cuenta o no la curvas de aprendizaje y periodos de atención al desarrollar estos horarios. La trivialidad de estos asuntos tiende a ignorarlos cuando planeamos o consideramos las necesidades de aprendizaje. Asuntos como método y contenido curricular parecen tener más importancia en las reuniones o discusiones sobre aprendizaje y enseñanza. Aún así, el impacto de las condiciones del espacio y la duración de una clase pueden ralentizar o acelerar el aprendizaje inmensamente, como observamos en la clase de ILE en la escuela secundaria. El aspecto más sorprendente de esta clase era su personalización. Era un espacio que pertenecía a los estudiantes, y de esta manera, la institución era más flexible en cuanto a cómo se podía utilizar o decorar. Al sentirse más cómodos en ese ambiente, su concentración en el aprendizaje de la lengua – que era la única característica que tenían en común - era más fuerte. Un ambiente personalizado y una metodología individual conducían a trayectorias personales de aprendizaje de lengua. Cualquier asignatura basada en la adquisición de una serie de habilidades comparte con las lenguas esta secuencia personalizada de aprendizaje porque las diferencias individuales y la motivación varían mucho de un estudiante a otro. El método de evaluación basado en niveles umbral permitía a los estudiantes progresar a su ritmo sin arriesgarse a otra penalización que su propia motivación y el retraso en ser asimilados en el aula general de la escuela. Aunque el espacio del aula y las horas no puedan ser cambiados con facilidad en nuestros ambientes universitarios actuales, el impacto que tienen en las necesidades de aprendizaje tiene que ser reconocido y tenido en cuenta en la descripción de los cursos y en los métodos evaluativos.

10.2 La interdisciplinariedad en el aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas.

> La investigación es una actividad interminable y los resultados de ésta normalmente llevan a nuevos problemas y proyectos de investigación. Llevar a cabo investigación es una experiencia de aprendizaje valorable sin importar el nivel de sofisticación de los procedimientos de investigación. (Wiersma, 1991, p. 389)

Este proyecto se desarrolló desde una serie de revisiones bibliográficas que se centraron eminentemente en la adquisición de segundas lenguas. La prevalencia de la disciplina en la literatura académica en el momento en que este proyecto se hizo era notable. Actualmente, se puede ver un número creciente de artículos de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. Su énfasis basado en el inglés como lengua extranjera ha variado también. Se escriben cada vez más artículos de la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera, y de la misma manera, otras lenguas modernas, incluyendo lenguas minoritarias. Se podría argumentar que ha habido muy pocos intentos de compartir los resultados de estas investigaciones entre las diferentes lenguas. En los congresos y otros foros de discusión académica o profesional suelen concentrarse en la lengua que enseñan o investigan en común. El primer nivel de interdisciplinariedad que este proyecto ha promocionado es: una vez que las comunidades de práctica se hayan formado entre los profesores de la misma lengua, se deberían desarrollar actividades, unidades o eventos a través de los cuales compartir estos resultados con otras comunidades de práctica y otros profesionales de otras lenguas. En el año 2010, la escuela de lenguas, literaturas y culturas en la Universidad Nacional de Irlanda en Galway identificó esta falta de comunicación entre los profesionales de diferentes lenguas que se enseñaban en la propia escuela y organizó un congreso de aprendizaje y enseñanza de lengua que incluía francés, alemán, irlandés, italiano y español, sus profesores y sus académicos.

Muchas instituciones europeas han empezado centros de excelencia en el aprendizaje y la enseñanza en las últimas dos o tres décadas. Este movimiento para subrayar el aprendizaje y la enseñanza dentro de las instituciones académicas probablemente se necesitaba a la luz de una concentración obsesiva en la investigación. Este énfasis ha creado una cantidad de investigación a nivel de temas generales de aprendizaje y enseñanza que se puede compartir a través de diferentes disciplinas y departamentos en cualquier institución. Algunas universidades también han desarrollado bibliografía sobre el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de áreas específicas, como matemáticas, física y lenguas. Las disciplinas basadas en la adquisición de habilidades parecen haberse desarrollado más en esta línea.

Sobrepasando los límites de la adquisición de segunda lengua o de lingüística aplicada parece ser la mejor metodología hacia el aprendizaje sobre cómo mejorar una situación específica de enseñanza de lengua. Los departamentos de lenguas modernas o de filología parecen haber ignorado la teoría de la educación general y su historia. Por otro lado, estos temas suelen ser arte y parte de las carreras en educación, dedicadas a la primaria o infantil. Con cierta conexión a la adquisición de segundas lenguas, la bibliografía que se revise para el capítulo dos de esta tesis, terminó siendo un elemento crucial para anclar este proyecto a la línea temporal discontinua de teóricos de la educación general y sus escuelas. Ayudó a lograr una comprensión del impacto de ciertas escuelas o ideas y cómo estos conceptos entran y salen a lo largo de la literatura académica sobre enseñanza y aprendizaje de lengua, así como se presentan en las creencias de profesores y alumnos. Algunas de estas ideas, más o menos distribuidas, parecen insertarse en las estructuras que promueven la enseñanza de lenguas en nuestras instituciones, y no suelen ser cuestionadas sino mantenidas como verdades establecidas. Otras escuelas de enseñanza y aprendizaje se han hundido bajo el poder de estas corrientes prevalentes y solo salen a la luz cuando una de sus historias de éxito alcanza un público general. En la situación crítica en que se encuentra nuestro sistema educativo y justificando el fracaso que la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas tiene por lo general en el sistema educativo público, sería necesario revisar las teorías más tempranas generales de la educación que puedan inspirar nuevas metodologías y técnicas con las que cambiar y mejorar esta realidad. Para nuestro proyecto innovativo, algunas de estas teorías – como resumimos en el capítulo dos – apoyaron nuestra metodología colaborativa, en un momento en que la popularidad del aprendizaje cooperativo de lenguas no estaba tan extendida como hoy en día.

Ha ayudado, una vez más, a localizar nuestro estudio de caso en una disciplina diferente. En este contexto, ha resultado aparente que nuestro proyecto podría también enmarcarse en el contexto de 'los estudios de literacidad critica', desarrollados desde los años ochenta (Barton, 1994; Street 1993), y preocupados con el análisis crítico de las prácticas comunicativas, consideradas en su contexto histórico social. Esta escuela de pensamiento analiza cómo la gente usa realmente – muchas veces de forma utilitaria – mecanismos internos o externos, para buscar enlaces entre identidad y literacidad. En nuestro caso, estos enlaces serían entre aprendizaje de lenguas e identidad. Esta área todavía no se ha explorado a fondo en la investigación académica. Los estudiantes Erasmus que viajan de sus países nativas a sus universidades de acogida cada año podrían ser un buen lugar para comenzar esta investigación.

El 'descubrimiento de herramientas etnográficas y de metodologías de investigación cualitativa se convirtió en el elemento clave de la interdisciplinariedad de este proyecto. Es importante tener en cuenta que las tres

técnicas fundamentales usadas en este proyecto, que contribuyeron a ayudar a la participación e inversión del estudiante en aprendizaje de lenguas, no surgieron de la lingüística aplicada ni de la educación general, sino de la etnografía y sociolingüística, mostrando que un punto de vista concreto y específico en ASL hubiera dado resultados muy diferentes. Las complicaciones técnicas, que algunas de las perspectivas llamadas científicas ofrecen a la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas, evitan que los participantes de una investigación las usen. Usando una metáfora del inglés para ilustrar este punto, tendemos a no saber el nombre de los arboles cuando caminamos por el bosque, pero necesitamos el nombre del bosque, donde empieza, donde acaba y donde están las partes de mayor peligro. A menudo, la bibliografía académica se ha concentrado en el desarrollo de terminología y jerga que le dotara del estatus de disciplina académica y le separara de las demás. Aunque una definición diáfana de términos y condiciones es necesaria en una investigación académica, el establecimiento de conexiones entre las diferentes áreas del conocimiento y la exploración de las intersecciones entre estas disciplinas ha demostrado ser el motor de esta investigación, manteniendo el interés del equipo de investigación y repostando nuestras fuerzas hacia el final del proyecto. También contribuyó a la creación de un recuerdo positive del proyecto y de la aplicación del aprendizaje realizado en el proceso para otros propósitos, lejos del aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas, como mostraron los últimos cuestionarios por email, años después de que el proyecto hubiera sido llevado a cabo.

Incluso dentro de la adquisición de segundas lenguas, ha habido cierta tendencia a desasociar la teoría y la práctica. En el capítulo dos de su tesis, Martín Peris clarifica y se preocupa de las diferencias entre el objeto y propósito de estudio de la lingüística, la lingüística aplicada y la didáctica de la lengua. Separa la necesidad de saber de la necesidad de saber cómo. Cita a H.G. Widdowson (Martín Peris, 2005, p. 32) diciendo que los profesores deben actuar como mediadores entre la teoría y la práctica. Esto asume que los profesores tienen cierto conocimiento y comprensión de las teorías así como una capacidad de transformar esta teoría en práctica; en otras palabras, la capacidad de aplicar pensamiento abstracto a sus clases día a día. Dejando de lado la variedad de formación que los profesores traen a las escuelas, centrar la responsabilidad de servir de puente entre teoría y práctica en el profesor parece excesivo. Sin considerar las limitaciones de tiempo que ya tienen con sus números de estudiantes crecientes y el incremento de las tareas que sus trabajos conllevas, esa responsabilidad necesitaría a su vez de más formación docente. La responsabilidad de general formación para estos fines recaería en la universidad y centros de investigación académica.

El profesor de lengua de hoy no es la única fuente de práctica y teoría lingüística. La abundancia de páginas web, redes sociales y videos en la red hacen que la clase y el profesor sean innecesarios como lugar donde

encontrar práctica y exposición a la lengua. Las páginas web fabulosas para practicar gramática gratis también hacen que la clase sea innecesaria como lugar para repetir ejercicios o exponer gramática. En otras palabras, ¿cuál es el lugar de un profesor de lenguas en el medio de la autopista de la información? Lo que desde luego podemos concluir desde nuestro proyecto y con los resultados de esta tesis es que el rol actual de profesores y docentes profesionales a nivel educativo terciario se ha establecido en lo que se conoce como 'facilitación'. Le debemos el uso extendido de la palabra a la teoría psicológica de la personalidad y del comportamiento centrada en el cliente de Carl Rogers que se basaba en la creencia de que no podemos enseñar a la gente directamente sino simplemente 'facilitar' su aprendizaje (Rogers, 1965, 1994).

De la misma forma, la instrucción informal ya no solo abarca los programas de inmersión y estancias lingüísticas en un país. En la actualidad, se pueden practicar diferentes lenguas en muchos lugares del mundo, especialmente en Europa, a través de la corriente constante de inmigrantes. Incluso en los lugares más remotos, las redes social de práctica de lenguas han expandido la noción de interacción lingüística más allá de las fronteras físicas. De este modo, las formas tradicionales de concebir instrucción de lenguas forma e informar están siendo sometidas a un proceso de revisión gracias a los cambios en la forma en que interactuamos entre nosotros mundialmente. Como resultado, el profesor, como puente entre instrucción formal e informal, ha de acoger una tarea más complicada: facilitación. Este término se usa generalmente para definir cualquier actividad que hace una tarea más fácil a los demás o les ayuda a llevarlas a cabo con facilidad. En este sentido, los profesores no pueden ser considerados ya como los guardianes del conocimiento o de la lengua.

La facilitación es una área confusa porque 'hacer las cosas fácil' es una afirmación altamente personal. Lo que es fácil para alguien puede ser un reto para otro. En general, la tarea de facilitación necesita ser explorar en profundidad en aprendizaje lingüístico. Se necesita cubrir descripciones de habilidades, de competencias lingüísticas y de áreas cuando se estudia una lengua. Los teóricos de la lengua y los profesionales de la enseñanza de lenguas han desarrollado técnicas y herramientas para lidiar con estas áreas. Existe una gran riqueza de conocimiento práctico y más aún que necesita ser compartido en comunidades de aprendizaje de lenguas para poder tener un acceso más rápido y fácil a estos atajos en aprendizaje de lenguas. Una vez que estas técnicas se clasifiquen, el profesor facilitador tendrá una guía que puede seguir y ofrecérsela a sus estudiantes como clase o individualmente. En otras palabras, la formación del profesorado aún carece de preparación para la facilitación. Existen cursos de teoría lingüística, teoría de enseñanza de lenguas, sesiones practicas de enseñanza, observaciones, diarios, etcétera… pero se necesita explorar los obstáculos y

soluciones de una manera menos personal, a través de círculos de profesores, blogs y cualquier herramienta que permita el dialogo y abra un espacio para compartir soluciones a problemas específicos.

De la misma manera, este papel de facilitación asume cierta participación y cooperación estudiantil. Otras disciplinas han introducidos dinámicas de colaboración entre profesores y estudiantes y estudiantes entre sí estableciendo nuevas formas de enseñanza a nivel superior, incluso al nivel de desarrollo curricular, programación, y plan de secuencias de aprendizaje y evaluación. Estas prácticas de colaboración se pueden extender a compartir problemas y soluciones en aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas, haciendo que la facilitación sea más factible y desarrollando una transparencia en lo que se refiere al proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas, sus dificultades y manera de superarlas.

Una definición más clara del Proceso de Aprendizaje de Lenguas, en mayúsculas, o de los procesos de aprendizaje de lenguas especificas, surgió como prioridad a través de este proyecto. Este proceso no ha recibido mucha atención desde los estudios de sociología o educativos. Una revisión sistemática de testimonies descriptivos de aprendizaje de lengua mostraría las similitudes y diferencias entre individuos al avanzar por los diferencias estudios de interlengua. La interlengua como concepto fue revisada en el capítulo dos de esta tesis, sugiriendo una revisión de prácticas evaluativas en el aula a la vez. Se ha postulado que la lengua, en un contexto formal, se aprende mejor a través de la comprensión de errores, y aún así los métodos de evaluación de lenguas se basan fundamentalmente en el castigo de los errores. Existe una necesidad clara de desarrollar métodos de evaluación que motiven el desarrollo de la interlengua y del descubrimiento por parte del estudiante de sus propios errores. Por otro lado, el capítulo dos y el nueve de esta tesis han argumentado la necesidad de un marco, quizás específico a cada lengua, que describa los errores permitidos en los estadios diferentes de una interlengua en desarrollo. Esta clase de transparencia y el desarrollo de técnicas de evaluación basada en la reflexión por parte del estudiante podrían clarificar y alisar vías que nos lleven a rutas de aprendizaje de lenguas más efectivos. Estas prácticas asumen un cierto grado de independencia y capacidad de reflexión, pero no podemos olvidarnos que esta tesis e centra en el aprendizaje de lenguas a nivel superior, donde la autonomía y la reflexión sobre la acción y en acción son fundamentales en el proceso de aprendizaje.

La interdisciplinariedad nos ha servido no sólo para considerar metodologías de investigación que incluyeran etnografía, sociología y otras técnicas de investigación educativa, sino también en la revisión de los conceptos principales de la pregunta inicial de este proyecto. Ha contribuido a una comprensión de la

lengua como un grupo de hábitos, como un mecanismo cognitivo y una herramienta para la interacción social, teniendo en cuenta las diferentes perspectivas que la definen. También ha ayudado en la reconsideración del estudiante como individuo con un determinado filtro cognitivo y afectivo, identidad, metas – que guían su participación e inversión – y expectativas. El estudiante también tiene una historia y un pasado escolar que contribuyen a la formación de su estilo, creencias y estrategias de aprendizaje. Por extensión, nos llevó a explorar la clase como un espacio físico para la exposición a la lengua y la práctica, en la que ocurre la enseñanza gramatical y formal, y donde se desarrolla una interacción social entre los participantes. Este espíritu interdisciplinariedad que se filtra a través del proyecto nos lanzó a la búsqueda de metodologías transversales más que aferrarnos a un Método singular o métodos. Expandiendo el alcanza de la disciplina principal que se trata en esta tesis, el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de segundas lenguas, a teorías generales de aprendizaje y enseñanza nos permitió considerar conceptos viejos y visiones de aprendizaje reflexivo, cooperativo y dialógico. Nos permitió también incorporar conceptos como inteligencias múltiples en la definición de competencias lingüísticas, para subrayar que la interdisciplinariedad es beneficiosa pero que una interdisciplinariedad a través de la historia también tiene sus ventajas.

La exploración de lo que conlleva la investigación de aula abrió nuestros ojos a conceptos como el de comunidades imaginadas de Anderson, que se ha aplicado al aula anteriormente pero raramente al aula de lenguas. En las aulas de lenguas existen por lo menos dos tipos de comunidades: la comunidad de estudiantes y la comunidad de nativos. La comunidad de estudiantes se inscribe en una comunidad más grande de estudiantes de lengua (más estudiantes de lengua en el mismo año pero en otra clase diferente, otros estudiantes de otras lenguas de ese mismo curso, otros estudiantes no de lengua de ese curso, estudiantes de lengua de otros años en la universidad, etcétera). La comunidad de nativos se pude considerar como los nativos de L2 que viven en el país donde se está aprendiendo la lengua o nativos en sus países de origen, lo cual en el caso del inglés y del español conlleva una variedad regional y cultural enorme. La complejidad de estas comunidades imaginadas, que juegan un papel en las identidades de los estudiantes, necesita ser estudiado y comprendido para que los profesores y estudiantes entiendan su impacto en el aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas.

Las herramientas de Investigación de Aula en este proyecto fueron tres fundamentalmente: observaciones, diarios y entrevistas. Este estudio de caso dotó al proyecto con las fuentes primarias, y permitió al equipo de investigación reflexionar sobre la elaboración de un estudio de caso en sí mismo. Los primeros

obstáculos que el proyecto se encontró fueron los temas éticos y práctico que surgieron de asuntos de anonimato y voluntariado. El sistema de recompensa por la participación en este proyecto necesitada de un intermediario, los estudiantes asistentes, que también eran estudiantes que recibían una pequeña remuneración por la participación en el proyecto. Otros asuntos prácticos incluían el hecho de que la recompensa pretendía atraer a estudiantes más débiles – y un número considerable de estudiantes débiles sí que participaron al principio de este proyecto – pero al final, el proyecto terminó con más de los estudiantes fuerte, y sólo un puñado de estudiantes débiles perseveraron hasta el final. La naturaleza del proyecto involucraba un grado considerable de participación estudiantil y los estudiantes débiles carecían de esta dedicación. La única manera de mantener a los estudiantes débiles en el proyecto sería hacerlo obligatorio para estos. Aunque este requisito sería contraproducente al estudio porque restaría la naturaleza crítica de diarios y entrevistas.

Este no fue el único obstáculo que el proyecto AEAU necesitó sobrepasar. A lo largo del estudio de caso, la resistencia estudiantil fue clara. Esta resistencia se superó con la familiaridad y el beneficio común de la cuestión abierta que inspiró el proyecto. El siguiente obstáculo llegó a la hora de planear y obtener los permisos de las diferentes instituciones que se consideraron, y de la escuela secundaria. El retraso en las respuestas y el necesario replanteamiento nos obligó a reformar el proyecto y a restringirlo a una institución y a un semestre. Un proyecto amplio como este hubiera mejorado con el análisis contrastivo que conlleva el muestreo teórico.

A lo largo de este tesis hemos repetido los beneficios y desventajas de estas herramientas y hemos mostrado la necesidad de triangular los resultados obtenidos con cada una de las herramientas. Nuestra experiencia ha sido que las entrevistas son las que tiene más éxito y de las que los estudiantes disfrutan más a la hora de crear una comunidad estudiantil gracias al desarrollo de relaciones entre estudiantes. Los diarios se convirtieron en nuestra fuente principal de datos porque eran más elaborados y libres que las entrevistas, que fueron diseñadas por el equipo de investigación desde los diarios. Los diarios gustaban menos, probablemente porque conllevan más trabajo y también trabajo escrito. Las observaciones nos dieron muchos problemas, principalmente a raíz del hecho de que ninguno de nosotros había recibido formación a este nivel y los protocoles que existen no satisfacían nuestra necesidades. Estos protocolos se diseñaron con otros fines, desde diferentes teorías de interacción en el aula y de aprendizaje de lenguas. Contribuyeron a que nos diéramos cuenta de los elementos que participan en la clase y subrayaron el hecho de que la observación funciona mejor cuando se centra en uno o dos aspectos específicos. De esta forma, no resultó

ser la mejor herramienta para nuestro fin general de conseguir elucidar los elementos principales del aula de lenguas desde el punto de vista del estudiante; pero enriqueció nuestra visión de la interacción en el aula y nos permitió observar y evaluar el impacto hecho en el aula por los cambios que introdujimos sugerido por las evaluaciones en los diarios que recogimos en el medio del estudio de caso. Como resultado, la triangulación de estas tres herramientas dotó a este estudio de caso con la profundidad y extensión que se exhibe en esta tesis.

En cambio, el proyecto no habría estado complete sin la perspectiva externa garantizada por la clase observada de ILE en el instituto de secundaria. La comparación entre este contexto de lenguas y las características de sus estudiantes y los otros escenarios de aprendizaje de lenguas descritos en este proyecto nos hicieron llegar a unas conclusiones con una riqueza singular por su diversidad y nos ofreció diferentes impresiones que no habrían resultado del análisis de datos en el proyecto AEAU exclusivamente. El mito de que el aprendizaje de lenguas en las aulas tiene muchas cosas en común en todos sus contextos fue expuesto a través de la variedad y diferencias radicales de las variables individuales, institucionales and espaciales en cuestión en ambos contextos.

La parte más enriquecedora de este proyecto fue la interacción dentro del equipo de investigación, dentro y fuera de las reuniones. Este grupo de siete estudiantes participativos fue el corazón, la boca y el alma de este proyecto, mientras la investigadora jugó el mero papel de cerebro. Se dedicaron al proyecto totalmente, llevando de la mano a la investigadora incluso al término de esta tesis y animándola a que escribiera este informe como tributo a su trabajo. Algunos de ellos escribían emails constantes, preguntando por la tesis y animándome a que la completara. Desde el principio, sobresalieron como voluntarios en el proyecto y su participación y entusiasmo les consiguió su estatus de asistentes cuando llegó el presupuesto del Fondo de Innovación en Aprendizaje y Enseñanza nos fue concedido. Llevaron a cabo las observaciones y entrevistas como también las transcribieron y recogieron los diarios en la semana seis y doce del semestre, asignando a cada estudiante voluntario a su cargo un número para proteger su identidad. Animaron a estos estudiantes voluntarios y los guiaron a la hora de escribir los diarios y de hacer las entrevistas, incluso aunque el estudiante a veces prefiriera preguntar a la profesora investigadora sobre estos. Diseñaron entrevistas con la investigadora en las reuniones que se hicieron para discutir el progreso del proyecto y los temas que habían surgido. Algunos de ellos recibieron formación voluntaria sobre observación y se decidieron a leer mas sobre protocolos, aplicándolos cuando venían al caso. Este fue quizás nuestra última exploración de la interdisciplinariedad de este proyecto, puesto que los estudiantes, con grados de dos departamentos, nos

trajeron conocimiento y habilidades de las disciplinas que estudiaban. Una de las chicas estaba haciendo un curso de formación de profesorado a la vez y quería probar estas herramientas etnográficas. Otra chica estudiaba sociología y quería trabajar protocolos de observación y el impacto en el aula. Las reuniones estaban llenas de ideas y conceptos de diversas disciplinas que se traían a la mesa y se consideraban o rechazaban. Fue en este dialogo entre la profesora investigadora y los estudiantes que la transformación real de este proyecto tuvo lugar. La profesora aprendió a aprender de sus estudiantes y los estudiantes enseñaron a enseñar a la profesora investigadora. Con sus evaluaciones, descritas en el capitulo ocho, mostraron la curva pronunciada de aprendizaje sobre aprendizaje de lenguas, enseñanza e investigación en general que este grupo de siete había experimentado como resultado del proyecto, mostrando un éxito notable en promover una cultura de investigación entre los estudiantes de educación superior.

10.3 Hacia la Creación de Pedagogías de Posibilidad en el Aprendizaje y la Enseñanza de Lenguas Modernas.

> Desde mi punto de vista, hay cuatro aspectos fundamentales que ayudarán al investigador/a a lograr excelencia: curiosidad genuina, mucho sentido común, ideas buenas y algo que se puede describir como una combinación de disciplina, fiabilidad y responsabilidad social. (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 17)

Con el proyecto AEAU, la investigadora/profesora intentó adentrarse en el concepto de la pedagogía de la posibilidad, término acuñado por Paulo Freire en los ochenta. Intentó crear un contexto de colaboración a través del cual los estudiantes y la profesora cooperaban para mejorar el aula y optimizar las oportunidades que todos tenían de aprender la lengua. Una pedagogía de la posibilidad, según la proponía Freire, es un concepto muchísimo más amplio, que va más allá de una clase aislada o un grupo pequeño de clases. Presupone un compromiso institucional y una perspectiva integradora hacia el aprendizaje estudiantil y su desarrollo a través de su experiencia durante el grado, o más allá de este.

El Proyecto Nacional de las Comunidades de Aprendizaje del Centro para la Mejora de la Calidad de la Educación Universitaria en el Evergreen State College en Washington, en cooperación con la Asociación Americana para la Educación Superior, publicaron un monográfico bajo el título, 'La Pedagogía de Posibilidades: Educación del Desarrollo, Estudios Universitarios y Comunidades de Aprendizaje' en el 2004. Este denuncia la critica compartida por muchos académicos sobre el declive de los niveles

universitarios como resultado del empuje hacia un mayor acceso a la educación superior. La respuesta natural es garantizar servicios de apoyo académica y la mayoría de las instituciones tienes al menos un tipo de servicio de apoyo para los estudiantes. Aún así, una y otra vez, parece que estas estructuras no son suficientes y que los límites de tiempo en nuestro currículo y los años académicos divididos en semestres son cada vez más exigentes.

Este proyecto innovador de aprendizaje dentro del aula de lenguas modernas llevó a la creación de una comunidad de aprendizaje dentro de la clase y por entre las clases en las que este proyecto se había concentrado. Se extendió a sus compañeros/as de clase, que habían decidido no participar, transformando y expandiendo el espacio de aprender, relacionando aprendizaje en el aula con aprendizaje fuera del aula. Como consecuencia, la responsabilidad de aprender se hizo patente y más equilibrada entre los estudiantes, profesores y las condiciones del contexto educativo; como resultado, nos parecía más sencillo entender y explicar el éxito y el fracaso. Otro tema que se destiló gracias a este proyecto fue que la responsabilidad del control de la interacción en el aula no sólo recaía en el profesor. Los estudiantes que participaron en el proyecto reflexionaron sobre su propio papel en la mejora de la interacción en el aula. Los asistentes estudiantes también comentaron sobre esto en sus observaciones de las clases. Todos estos temas que habían surgido en los diarios, entrevistas y observaciones señalaban la existencia de una cultura imaginada de aprendizaje y enseñanza, y específicamente una cultura imaginada de aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas. Esta cultura existe en la imaginación de los estudiantes como individuos y como colectivo. Entran en la clase con las 'reglas' y estrategias que sus experiencias previas de aprender lenguas y de aprendizaje en general les han enseñado, y la transformación de estas maneras lleva tiempo. Parecía, a través de las conversaciones entre estudiante promovidas en este proyecto y las sesiones de entrenamiento entre los estudiantes y la profesora – que a veces ocurrían al comenzar la clase para atajar una sugerencia que se había hecho en los diarios o para anunciar un cambio – como si estas 'reglas' y estrategias se estuvieran revisando y cuestionando y como si se estuviera forjando un nuevo saber-hacer académico.

Por eso es que elegimos el muestreo teórico como metodología de análisis para las fuentes primarias de este estudio de caso. Aunque el proyecto nació de una revisión bibliográfica extensa llevada a cabo antes de la actividad de investigación de aula, a esas alturas, parecía más ventajoso soltar el marco teórico y pedir opinión a los estudiantes sobre la enseñanza de lenguas con la influencia mínima del entrenamiento académico de la investigadora. Analizando las repeticiones en sus respuestas con la creación de códigos construidos o abstraídos de sus afirmaciones en los diarios o entrevistas parecía la forma más responsable

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de escuchar la voz estudiantil. Después del estadio de codificación, nos vimos en la necesidad de sistematizar estos conceptos y códigos en categorías mayores para entenderlos mejor y poderlos compartir de una manera científica. En esta etapa, la notación hubiera sido una herramienta muy útil. Llevamos a cabo cierta notación a través del proyecto, en forma de un diario de investigación y también un diario del profesor, pero no era suficiente. La falta de experiencia con esta técnica de investigación se convirtió en un obstáculo en la siguiente etapa del muestreo. Puesto que el objetivo principal de esta tesis es descriptivo y no teórico, el alcance del proyecto no es ni lo suficientemente ancho ni largo para teorizar dados los límites temporales del contracto de la profesora investigadora. De este modo, las afirmaciones probables que derivamos de estas categorías nos parecieron idóneas como forma de concluir el análisis y de ofrecer sugerencias para desarrollar más investigación y mejorar el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de lenguas.

Estas afirmaciones sientan las bases para la colaboración con otros profesionales de la enseñanza o estudiantes, ya que ofrecen una visión específica del aprendizaje de lenguas, compartida por la mayoría de los participantes en este estudio de caso. Pueden usarse como creencias o verdades relativas, y contribuir a cuestionar las creencias de estudiantes y profesores y las formas de hacer las cosas en el aula. También exponen la necesidad de mayor comunicación entre las comunidades estudiantes y las instituciones de enseñanza. La transformación real de los espacios para la educación, como muestra el estudio, se enfrenta al obstáculo de las limitaciones institucionales, limitaciones tan físicas como la rigidez de las aulas y la calidad del aire o la calefacción, que los participantes en este proyecto denunciaban una y otra vez. Es importante dares cuenta de que la institución en cuestión era semiprivada, subvencionada parcialmente por el gobierno. Otras instituciones con menos apoyo y subvenciones pueden encontrarse en condiciones poco deseables para optimizar el aprendizaje, condiciones que tienden a ser ignoradas o se dan por sentado en las evaluaciones del profesorado o de la calidad de los programas. Semestres más cortos, duración de clases y seminarios, ritmo curricular, y el aumento del número de estudiante frente al de profesorado hacen de los contextos no favorezcan necesariamente el aprendizaje y la enseñanza.

La mayoría de los estudiantes del proyecto AEAU eran de primero. Este hecho nos llevó a cuestionar las habilidades necesarias para tener éxito en el aprendizaje de una lengua en la universidad. Los profesionales de la enseñanza en instituciones terciarias tienden a quejarse sobre las dificultades que el alumnado tiene para diferenciar entre el acercamiento de las escuelas de idiomas no académicas y el aprendizaje de las lenguas a nivel universitario. Los exámenes de acceso a la Universidad como el Leaving Certificate en Irlanda, los A-levels en el Reino Unido y la selectividad en España fracasan a la hora de solucionar este

problema. Ha llegado el momento en que los académicos deberíamos examinar lo que se necesita para estar "preparado" para aprender una lengua en la universidad. El currículo de estos exámenes todavía se centra en contenido y habilidades lingüísticas (principalmente, escritura y lectura, y últimamente, conversación y comprensión en conversación). Estas son las habilidades esenciales para cualquier aprendizaje lingüístico y así tanto las instituciones académicas como las no académicas la comparten. En los diarios y las entrevistas, los estudiantes apuntaban cierto grado de autonomía, y los estudiantes que encontraban muchas dificultadas a la hora de aprender una lengua denunciaban la falta de iniciativa y disciplina que se necesitan para ser autónomos. La reflexión sobre la lengua y sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas parecía mejorar el aprendizaje y la participación en el proyecto y así podríamos decir que son habilidades necesarias para el aprendizaje de lenguas en la universidad. Es necesario dilucidar qué otras habilidades se necesita resaltar y comunicar de manera clara a los estudiantes que quieren acceder a la universidad y a los profesores de secundaria y diseñadores de los currículos. Quizá sea el momento de investigar más sobre esta serie de habilidades que los profesionales de lenguas – y los estudiantes – que trabajan en instituciones superiores identifican como clave para el éxito en el primer año del grado, y en los años subsiguientes. Esta serie de habilidades variará de institución a institución, dependiendo de los ideales y el espíritu que se promueva en las distintas facultades de lenguas, pero habrá similitudes que guiarían y facilitarían la transición de la secundaria a la universidad, y concienciarían con respecto a la cultura universitaria de aprendizaje y enseñanza de lenguas.

10.4 La Reflexión por parte de los Estudiantes como Evaluación Continua de la Práctica Docente.

De muchas maneras, el proyecto AEAU intentaba accede a las opiniones de estudiantes y sus criticas de forma continua. Llevar a cabo este tipo de consulta con los estudiantes conlleva muchas ventajas. Este proyecto ha mostrado los resultados que están de acuerdo con la afirmación de Flutter & Ruddock (2004) sobre los efectos positivos que tiene involucrar a los estudiantes en el análisis del aprendizaje y la enseñanza. Los estudiantes pueden así describir sus procesos de aprendizaje de forma más sistemática a través de la adquisición de un lenguaje técnico de forma dialogada en las conversaciones con sus compañeros. Les ayuda a participar en el aprendizaje más activamente y promueve la metacognición. También parece aumentar la confianza del estudiante en sí mismo como resultado de la valoración por parte de otros de las opiniones del estudiante. Las ventajas están definitivamente claras desde el punto de vista del alumno/a.

Para los profesores, ofrece evaluación continua que puede mejorar los aspectos de la práctica docente y normalmente señala hacia la mejora de la relación entre el profesor y el estudiante, contribuyendo a un contexto de clase más colaborativo. Ayuda en la identificación de los problemas que ralentizan el progreso y puede ser usado para desarrollar nuevos conceptos que mejoran el aprendizaje y la enseñanza. La parte menos positive de este tipo de evaluación es que necesita mantener cierto equilibrio entre los comentarios negativos y positivos. El aspecto afectivo de la enseñanza aún no ha recibido la suficiente atención por parte de la literatura académica sobre aprendizaje y enseñanza. Por otro lado, también lleva tiempo, ya que requiere dedicar horas a la revisión de las fuentes primarias recogidas y organizarla de manera sistemática para poder entenderla y usarla consecuentemente. Sería interesante comparar estos datos con los del profesor en su propio diario de clase, ya que tal como este proyecto ha mostrado, las impresiones más constructivas vinieron de aquellos eventos en que el desacuerdo entre el profesor y el estudiante eran mayores.

Para las instituciones educativas, una evaluación continua de la enseñanza puede ser una nueva dirección interesante. Si se toman en serio, las evaluaciones pueden contribuir a los procedimientos de evaluación y ayudar a establecer una cultura de aprendizaje más positiva dentro de la escuela o facultad.

En el proyecto AEAU, los asistentes de investigación recogieron los diarios a mediados del semestre. Estos diarios fueron leídos y revisados rápidamente para encontrar recurrencias. Estos datos preliminares fueron de gran ayuda. La provisión de una semana 'de lectura' en esta institución canadiense dotaba a los profesores y estudiantes de un descanso de nuevos materiales de clase durante el cual se podían organizar y evaluar su propio progreso a la vez que alcanzar el ritmo de la clase con sus tareas y lecturas. Para nuestro proyecto, fue fundamental tener esta semana porque nos dio el tiempo para leer con más calma y reunirnos para discutir los diarios recogidos. En esta reunión también decidimos qué aspectos eran más fáciles de solucionar inmediatamente en la clase. Las acciones que siguieron a este ejercicio aumentaron el nivel de la confianza de los estudiantes en el proyecto puesto que vieron que algunas de sus sugerencias estaban siendo puestas en práctica.

Desde el punto de vista del investigador este ejercicio concentró el alcance de esta tesis y concentró nuestra atención en temas como consciencia, aspectos culturales del aprendizaje y la enseñanza, dificultades, mejoría, participación, consciencia intercultural, condiciones ideales para el aprendizaje, expectativas del estudiante, sentimientos del estudiante, dinámicas de poder en el aula, evaluación, días difíciles, deficiencias,

lengua vehicular, métodos y herramientas, otras lenguas, resultado, conocimiento previo, estrategias estudiantiles y espacio físico. Estos conceptos y temas nos guiaron en el diseño de las entrevistas que se crearon durante la semana de lectura.

A estas alturas ya habíamos entregado algunos cuestionarios escritos. Nos reportaron dos beneficios principalmente: 1. Rompieron el hielo y empezaron la conversación, y 2. Clarificaron el propósito del proyecto y se ganaron la confianza de los estudiantes desde el principio. Al principio de esta segunda etapa del proyecto, los estudiantes asistentes de investigación empezaron a llevar a cabo las entrevistas, que se concentraban en los códigos extraídos de la primera serie de diarios. Estos ya habían entrado en la vida de los estudiantes voluntarios – a través de la asignación y recolección de diarios y también como observadores de clase. Algunos de los voluntarios al principio se mostraban aprensivos sobre la presencia de estos estudiantes en clase pero las entrevistas sirvieron para relajarlos y establecer una buena relación entre ellos.

El mecanismo mencionado de revisión de diarios fue repetido al final del semestre. En la última semana de clase, los diarios se recogieron otra vez y en la segunda parte, los diarios y sus recurrencias, la riqueza de temas y problemas se redujo a seis códigos: Consciencia General, Emociones de los Estudiantes, Dinámicas de Poder en el Aula, Métodos de Enseñanza, Estrategias Estudiantiles y Espacio Físico. Estos códigos se fijaron a través de un análisis cuantitativo de las recurrencias aunque nuestra elección también fue guiada por los intereses del equipo de investigación. Este estadio de subcodificación de estos códigos superiores fue nuevamente aplicado de acuerdo con la recurrencia de ciertos temas pero intentado ser tan inclusivos como fuera posible. Los asistentes tuvieron más de un mes para terminar de transcribir y entregar las entrevistas que habían grabado en cinta. Estas transcripciones fueron recogidas e incluidas en el análisis después de elaborar un informe descriptivo de los diarios. Luego, se les sometió a los mismos niveles de codificación y se filtraron por los subcódigos extraídos de los diarios, abstrayendo aún más códigos de las nuevas impresiones que aparecían en las entrevistas.

Bajo el primer código, 'Consciencia', a los estudiantes les preocupaban los temas gramaticales. Identificaron la necesidad de tener cierta consciencia lingüístico y conocimiento gramatical como ayuda. Los temas gramaticales que aislaron tendían a coincidir con la concentración gramatical del profesor durante esa semana. Hablaban de estilo de aprendizaje mucho y de su propia participación en el curso y en el aula. Hablaron de su personalidad y de cómo afectaba su aprendizaje. Parecían muy interesados en temas de identidad como estudiantes, identidad que concebían como fija, así como estilo de aprendizaje o aptitud.

También expresaron su preferencia por el hablante nativo como profesor. En cambio, también comentaron extensamente las dificultades para establecer una buena relación con un/a de los profesores/as nativos/as en el departamento, y lo atribuían a las barreras lingüísticas e interculturales entre ellos.

Bajo el segundo código, 'Emociones del Estudiante', los estudiantes expresaron sus expectativas y sus creencias sobre aprendizaje de lenguas. Parecían aferrarse a mitos sobre aprendizaje lingüístico sin comprobarlos personalmente o sin haber leído mucho sobre ellos. Mostraban Resistencia a la innovación, a tomar responsabilidad sobre su propio aprendizaje y a ser estudiantes autónomos. Analizaron las causas de su ansiedad en la clase y la influencia de sus compañeros/as, así como la influencia del coste de la educación terciaria y el impacto de este coste en aumento en su vida diaria.

Bajo el tercer código, 'Dinámicas de Poder en el Aula', los estudiantes hablaron sobre la relación de estudiante a estudiante, incluso más que de la relación entre profesor y estudiante. Les preocupaba el poder y su distribución en un aula o seminario y estaban dispuestos a compartir la responsabilidad de controlar esta interacción con el profesor. Elaboraron muchos comentarios sobre la voz de los estudiantes y cómo hacerla patente a nivel departamental o institucional. Exploraron la atmosfera ideal de un aula y parecían contentos con las aulas de español en que participaban. Favorecían el uso de las rondas para contestar preguntas en la clase como forma de asegurarse de que todo el mundo participaba, aunque entendían que esto tenía desventajas también. Finalmente, centraron su atención en la evaluación y la forma en que se evalúa o corrige en clase de lenguas. Sabían perfectamente la necesidad primaria de corrección así como su naturaleza sensible. Consideraban que practicas positivas como permitir errores y evaluación continua general – en vez de personalizada – de forma verbal. Parecían sugerir que cuando el estudiante toma el control de la clase preguntando y pidiendo aclaraciones, habiendo interactuado con el contenido y los materiales en su tiempo libre, el aprendizaje era más efectivo.

Bajo el cuarto código, 'Métodos de Enseñanza', los estudiantes se opusieron radicalmente a la necesidad de laboratorio de lenguas pero abogaban por la enseñanza de la gramática y más práctica conversacional en general. Ofrecieron comentarios sobre los materiales usados para el aprendizaje y dieron consejos sobre actividades para el profesor y para la clase. No llegaron a un acuerdo sobre la lengua vehicular, subrayando el beneficio de usar la L1 ocasionalmente en el aula pero también su efecto negativo para otros propósitos.

Bajo el quinto código, 'Estrategias Estudiantiles', se mostraba una serie limitada de técnicas o estrategias para llevar el aprendizaje de lenguas a buen término. Hablaban de su uso de L1, estrategias de organización como preparación de antemano, cuadros de vocabulario y resúmenes, apuntes y revisión. También subrayaron la exposición diaria a la lengua, escuchando conversaciones reales y el aprendizaje experimental. También parecían preferir el estudio en equipo y algunos se grabaron para mejorar su maestría a nivel fonético y prosódico.

Finalmente, bajo el sexto código, 'Espacio', se agrupaban las preocupaciones sobre las condiciones físicas de sus aulas y exploraban las estructuras físicas que creían mejoraban el aprendizaje y la enseñanza. Estaban de acuerdo en que una estructura circular, una temperatura adecuada y ventilación óptima, y un grupo pequeño de estudiantes son las condiciones ideales para una clase. La pizarra o la pantalla de proyección necesitarían ser visible y los apuntes claros y disponibles desde todos los puntos de la clase. Elaboraron sobre su preferencia de horas de clase, la frecuencia y su duración.

Como ya hemos mencionado, las pocas observaciones que llevamos a cabo en este proyecto no son sistemáticas ni comprensivas. Este uso libre de la observación ha sido útil para nosotros. El equipo de investigación encontró este ejercicio muy productivo a la hora de producir impresiones sobre la clase. Las observaciones se hicieron a lo largo de un semestre, tanto de manera informal, estilo libre o siguiendo un protocolo y se centraron en (1.) la distribución de gente, (2.) el espacio, (3.) las actividades en cuestión, (4.) los métodos usados en respuesta al comportamiento de profesora y estudiantes, (5.) el uso del inglés o el español como lengua vehicular, y (6.) la interacción entre los participantes en el aula. Esto parecía marcar una de las conclusiones de esta tesis, principalmente, que los temas que surgieron como resultado del uso de herramientas etnográficas diferentes estaban influidos, no sólo por el trasfondo de la pregunta de investigación y los diálogos activos en la comunidad estudiantil creada por el proyecto, sino también gracias a la herramienta en cuestión. La observación como herramienta parecía ser el microscopio de la enseñanza y aprendizaje, permitiendo al investigador una perspectiva aumentada de las condiciones en el aula a tiempo real. Los diarios nos dotaron del botón de revisión y grabación de la experiencia personal y las entrevistas se convirtieron en el foro de discusión en las que los conceptos y las ideas se ponían en tela de juicio. Estas tres herramientas y la posibilidad de una cuarta, el punto de vista externo — que el voluntariado en la clase atípica del instituto nos brindó — constituyeron una caja de herramientas mejor equipada con la que elucidar las evaluaciones de los estudiantes y usarla de manera más eficiente.

Finalmente, el capítulo ocho de esta tesis ha tratado de las evaluaciones de los asistentes y estudiantes en el estudio AEAU, en el que habían participado tan activamente. Si esta tesis muestra que la evaluación continua de la enseñanza por parte del alumno puede ser beneficiosa, la evaluación de la investigación llevada a cabo por los estudiantes ayudó a la investigadora a ver el proyecto de manera completamente diferente y terminar este informe. Reconocían que su participación en tal estudio les había presentado una variedad de acercamiento al aprendizaje que nunca hubieran considerado antes, promoviendo la interacción entre estudiantes para maximizar el aprendizaje. También les hizo dares cuenta claramente de los obstáculos que los sistemas educativos ejercitan en la mejoría de las condiciones de aprendizaje y enseñanza y señaló la urgencia de tomar la responsabilidad de su propio aprendizaje para transformar esas condiciones. También confesaban que el proyecto les había generado amor por el aprendizaje que el estrés de la vida universitaria les había hecho olvidar. Mejoró sus habilidades de organización por el hecho de que tenían que trabajar en equipos y que la falta de organización tenía un impacto directo en sus compañeros de clase. Los asistentes anotaban que valoraban las habilidades de investigación, como transcripción, trabajo en equipo y escribir informes, tanto como llevar a cabo entrevistas y observaciones.

La investigadora y los estudiantes empezaron a valorar cómo ciertos factores externos bloquean el aprendizaje y cómo muchas veces no tenemos control sobre estos factores. También señalaban en su evaluación la sorpresa de darse cuenta como acciones pequeñas y específicas llevaron a cambios significativos. También decían que dares cuenta a veces no lleva a la acción. La acción necesita más motivación que darse cuenta. Percibían que la gente podía dares cuenta de sus necesidades y aún así resistirse a actuar por diferentes razones.

Finalmente, los asistentes de investigación recomendaban algunos cambios al estudio de caso, por si este fuera reduplicado. Aconsejaban empezar antes, posiblemente al principio del año para que hubiera más espacio para la acción y evaluación de esta acción por parte de los estudiantes y posiblemente otros profesionales de la enseñanza. La naturaleza beneficiosa de las reuniones del equipo de investigación les motivó a convocar más reuniones y también pensaban que incluir a los voluntarios en algunas reuniones beneficiaría a ambos, porque ellos sacarían partido del diálogo que el proyecto inspiró aún antes. También proponían más entrevistas por la misma razón y más formación y experimentación con protocolos de observación antes de usarlos. El compromiso del equipo de asistentes era diferente porque todos tenían intereses diferentes sobre su participación en el proyecto. Algunos de ellos parecían pensar que sería bueno tener una participación más simétrica. Como investigadora, los diferentes niveles de participación en el

proyecto me sirvieron. Cubrían los requisitos mínimos en el acuerdo de investigación y fue interesante ver las diferentes perspectivas. También creían que se necesitaban más incentives para atraer la participación de los voluntarios, mostrando que también les preocupaba el nivel de colaboración de los sujetos de la investigación de este proyecto.

A diferencia de los formularios de evaluación, predecibles y claramente poco apetecibles, el proyecto AEAU fue descrito como una experiencia interesante por la mayoría de los participantes, lo que fue la principal motivación para los estudiantes, asistentes y la profesora/investigadora a la hora de seguir con él, y también la razón por la que se dio aprendizaje a través de él. Nos llevó a más preguntas que probablemente se convertirán en estudios de caso y proyectos de investigación en el futuro porque "en el aprendizaje, no podemos lograr conclusiones definitivas, más bien encontrar nuevas preguntas, descubrir otras posibilidades que probar. El conocimiento está gobernado por una alternatividad constructiva; todo puede ser reconstruido siempre" (Salmon, 1988, p. 22).

10.5 Sugerencias para más Prácticas Docentes Innovadoras e Investigación Acción.

Si la evaluación continua de la enseñanza por parte del estudiante, y su evaluación del proyecto, han contribuido a la comprensión de su impacto, mi evaluación autoreflexiva de este estudio desde el punto de vista de la investigación me ayudó a considerar el proyecto de una manera más distante, también considerada generalmente más científica.

El capítulo nueve de esta tesis ha revisado la bibliografía de los etapas iniciales de este doctorado y ha hecho una recomendación clara: debemos redefinir la noción de competencias de aprendizaje lingüístico en la educación superior. La competencia lingüística ha sido definida tradicionalmente como una combinación de competencias lingüísticas, comunicativa y sociocultural o intercultural. Este proyecto ha resaltado la necesidad de concentrarse en la competencia de aprendizaje de lenguas también, que está compuesta de competencias estratégicas, de la cultura de aprendizaje y enseñanza, socioculturales, sociales y afectivas. Este proyecto ha subrayado la importancia de dos competencias más: autoreflexiva y digital, ambas esenciales en el desarrollo de la autonomía en nuestros contextos sociales contemporáneos. La descripción detallada de lo que estas competencias conllevan necesita ser explorada y escrita de manera transparente en forma de resultados de aprendizaje. Quizás necesitamos más investigación enfocada en una serie de habilidades que los profesores y estudiantes de lenguas en la universidad señalen como esenciales para la transición de los

institutos a la universidad y a lo largo de los grados. Estas habilidades serán diferentes en diferentes contextos pero las similitudes nos ayudarán a entender la cultura del aprendizaje de lenguas a nivel universitario y de su enseñanza.

Como investigadora, esta tesis parece dividida entre la aplicación de convenciones científicas para la evaluación del estudio de caso y la evaluación positiva de los participantes como fuente primaria de crítica. Este dilema nos llevó en el estadio final de este informe a llevar a cabo una revisión bibliográfica del estatus de los conceptos tradicionales de precisión, validez, fiabilidad y practicabilidad -o reduplicación. La precisión como grado de libertad de error no nos servía para la evaluación de este estudio. El estatus subjetivo de las fuentes primarias lo describirían como poco adecuado. La perspectiva de las ciencias social aboga por la precisión subjetiva sobre la generalidad. Asume la intención por parte de los participantes de ser honestos en la descripción de sus realidades desde sus perspectivas individuales. Las nociones tradicionales de validez se refieren a los cimientos de las conclusiones. Las afirmaciones de probabilidad han sido ofrecidas como resultados de este estudio de caso y mi análisis del mismo ha nacido de la naturaleza de las fuentes primarias, condicionadas por el uso de las herramientas etnográficas en cuestión y los filtros y lagunas en las perspectivas tanto de los estudiantes, asistentes como de la profesora investigadora. La fiabilidad resultó ser el criterio más problemático. La fiabilidad, definida como consistencia de medidas, significaría que diferentes personas obtendrían los mismos resultados con los mismos métodos e instrumentos. La naturaleza de la situación en el aula y el esfuerzo de este estudio por incluir perspectivas múltiples harían que este tipo de fiabilidad fuera imposible. Alternativamente, esta tesis se ha concentrado en una fiabilidad de consistencia interna (FCI), que evalúa la consistencia de los resultados a través de la clarificación de métodos y contextos.

El muestreo teórico nos dio la forma de evaluar este estudio, pero ya que nuestro objetivo general no era la creación de una teoría, las categorías que ofrecen principalmente asesoran la teoría producida por la metodología así que no nos sirven completamente. En el proceso, el descubrimiento de nuevos criterios ha sido de ayuda. Estos se centran en la aptitud de una teoría de acuerdo con su correspondencia con las fuentes y su aplicación a situaciones cotidianas. También consideran la facilidad de comprensión de la teoría, premiando la transparencia para facilitar la practicabilidad y la aplicación de esta teoría. La generalidad es su premisa principal puesto que el muestreo teórico se dirige a la génesis de teorías. En nuestro caso, este criterio no se podía plantear. Finalmente, sugieren el control como forma de dotar al investigador de la producción y la predicción de cambios en una situación específica. Las complejidades de

cualquier contexto de aprendizaje hacen que este criterio sea inválido, con lo que decidimos que las afirmaciones de probabilidad serían los resultados más sistemáticos para este proyecto.

En general, los criterios tradicionales para la evaluación de la investigación no servían a los propósitos de este proyecto así que buscamos nuevas maneras de evaluar estudios de caso de educación propuestos por, principalmente Ellis, Mills y Norton Peirce. Ellis recomienda un plan de microevaluación que incluya una descripción del propósito, audiencia, evaluador, contenido, método y temporización. Mills sugiere un método similar que incluya la imposibilidad de reforma, audiencia, formato, prejuicios, disposición profesional, perspectiva reflexiva, oportunidades de mejora de vida, acción, conexión acción-datos, impacto y cambios. A través de estos filtros, el estudio de caso muestra los aspectos positivos del proyecto y señala la mayor laguna, que fue la descripción de los eventos o incidentes. Los informes de los incidentes son una técnica que necesita incluirse en la formación del profesorado. Se necesita más investigación que conduzca a la creación de guías para elaborar apuntes de campo profesionales y facilitar estos informes para ser compartidos en las comunidades de práctica docentes. La naturaleza detallada de los datos primarias y la falta de informes de incidentes no contribuyen a la creación de historia sobre el aprendizaje de lenguas en el aula de principio a fin. Considerar las aulas de lenguas de esta manera innovadora puede ayudar a comprender la participación y las bajas, y ayudarnos a tratar los temas de colaboración de una forma más efectiva.

El siguiente aspecto que distingue este proyecto fue el uso de un aula externa de lenguas para el análisis contrastivo. Esta práctica, considerada no científica por otro lado, fue esencial. Indicaba la necesidad de más observación en contextos escolares extraños, no solo en la etapa de formación del profesorado sino también durante la práctica profesional. Esta observación se puede complemente con investigación en las aulas de profesores individuales. Este estudio ha promulgado el desarrollo de los profesores como investigadores para promover una comprensión más precisa de los eventos en el aula y también que se tenga en cuenta la voz de los profesores. Este proyecto se ha mostrado de acuerdo con el acercamiento de Ellis, en el que los profesores necesitan ser activos en la elección de temas relevantes y metodologías.

Los criterios de Norton Peirce se centran en la capacidad del proyecto para motivar a los estudiantes a reflexionar sobre su participación, cuestionar las prácticas, establecer un diálogo con sus compañeros y entender sus clases como una red social. Este estudio de caso definitivamente contribuyó a este aspecto, como hemos visto en la evolución estudiantil del mismo. Este proyecto ha cuestionado las prácticas

convencionales de los profesores investigadores. Ha terminado cuestionando también las practicas convencionales de la investigación y extendiendo las fronteras de las convenciones de la evaluación hacia la creatividad y la flexibilidad de la evaluación como también hacia el desarrollo de nuevas líneas de investigación que nos permitan establecer criterios evaluativos que sean más adecuados a la naturaleza de los estudios cualitativas en enseñanza y aprendizaje.

Para concluir esta tesis, centremos nuestra atención en unas pocas líneas de investigación y acciones que se han sugerido a lo largo de esta disertación doctoral. Las conclusiones de esta disertación han indicado la necesidad de formación de profesores de lenguas más específicamente centrada en facilitación y más investigación sobre lo que la facilitación conlleva para nuestra área. Este cambio en el papel del profesor también debe ser reflejado en las prácticas de evaluación en el aula. Se necesita más investigación e innovación en los métodos de evaluación de lenguas, que promuevan aprendizaje positivo desde el error y el desarrollo de interlenguas 'imperfectas' en relación con cada uno de los niveles del Marco Común Europeo.

Este proyecto centrado en los estudiantes también ha promovido más investigación liderada por estudiantes en lenguas, específicamente la identificación de las comunidades imaginadas en juego en un aula determinada de lenguas y sobre el impacto de estas comunidades y otros aspectos en la parte afectiva del aprendizaje. Por otro lado, la parte afectiva de la docencia no ha recibido suficiente atención en la bibliografía académica de la enseñanza. Diarios y entrevistas ayudarían a generar nuevas ideas sobre este aspecto de la docencia pero se necesitan nuevos protocolos de observación que se adecuen a la investigación práctica para la mejoría de las condiciones profesionales de la enseñanza.

La colaboración entre estudiantes y profesora y entre estudiantes ha sido fundamental para este proyecto y cambió la interacción entre los participantes en el proyecto radicalmente. Me gustaría, por tanto, terminar este informe enfatizando la necesidad inminente, reiterada una y otra vez en este ultimo capitulo, de desarrollar espacios para la discusión, comunidades de práctica y foros dentro de los contextos de aprendizaje y enseñanza de una misma lengua, y más allá de estas fronteras. El proceso de creación de estas redes y la participación active de estudiantes y profesores generará algunos cambios y ofrecerá soluciones a los obstáculos contra los que los profesores se encuentran. Cuando nos enfrentamos a estos obstáculos y problemas como profesores de lengua, nuestra formación nos ha animado a recurrir a las Teorías – con T mayúscula – y manuales escritos desde un punto de vista general, y normalmente en un país diferente, y en contextos de enseñanza completamente diferentes, lejos de las idiosincrasias del ambiente local en el que

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trabajamos, que por otro lado, da forma a la vida y a las perspectivas de nuestros estudiantes y las nuestras propias. Las similitudes y diferencias que encontramos entre nuestras aulas y los estudiantes en las mismas comunidades locales nos ofrecerán nuevas preguntas y alisarán el camino hacía una cultura de enseñanza, como consecuencia, de aprendizaje mucho más facultativas.

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[1] El concepto inicial de Deustch (1949) de aprendizaje cooperativa deriva de la teoría de interdependencia social, que considera como la gente intercambia recompensas y costes en una relación (págs. 4-5).

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