UNITING ORAL PROFICIENCY AND CONTENT: COLLABORATIVE REASONING DISCUSSIONS AS A MEANS TO DEVELOP ADVANCED SPEAKING SKILLS IN FRENCH AND PROMOTE RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

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By

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This dissertation investigated the viability of the Collaborative Reasoning (CR) approach to discussion as a way to foster advanced proficiency via use of the target language, French, during discussions of literature. A literature course was chosen as the context for this study because a student’s progression from foreign language elementary courses to upper-division content courses often means that their language development (especially speaking skills) is no longer a central focus for instruction. Yet as Donato and Brooks (2004) noted, the literature course should provide opportunities for students to develop advanced speaking skills. Thus, another aspect of this study was its attempt, through Collaborative Reasoning (CR), to bridge the long-standing gap between language and content in Foreign Language instruction.

In order to provide a specific means by which to address the development of speaking skills in the literature classroom, the CR approach to discussion was implemented in this course. CR aligns well with the ACTFL guidelines for advanced speaking functions and encourages students to share personal responses to literature, a goal of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999).

The results of this study suggest that the CR framework is a viable means by which to: 1) elicit extended discourse in French in a literature course 2) provide opportunities for authentic communication between students and 3) provide opportunities
for students to state and defend opinions using the target language. An additional finding was that the CR discussions elicited examples of students supporting each other linguistically. This occurred during discussions when a speaker struggled to find the right vocabulary word or grammatical form. This type of support is often provided exclusively by teachers; yet, perhaps because students are active participants in CR discussions, they were able to provide each other with the necessary assistance. Regarding CR and literary goals, the results of this study also suggest that CR allows students to respond to literature in several ways (i.e. making personal and textual connections to story events, considering alternatives, and comparing and contrasting themes).

This study also examined the students’ responses to CR. Findings suggested that the students appreciated the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions with their classmates. Specifically, the students in this course appreciated having specific expressions to use when expressing their ideas in CR discussions. Most of the students in this course responded positively to the comprehensive nature of the CR discussion framework. However, some whom had not had previous literature courses at the college level felt that the framework was not “instructive” and did not allow for enough explicit instruction.

The current study extends our knowledge theoretically by highlighting that collaboration through active discourse in a foreign language literature course provides opportunities for students to develop their ability to formulate and express ideas in the target language. Likewise, a pedagogical implication for literature professors (and
professors who teach other upper-division courses) is to reconsider their classrooms as a context in which literacy (as opposed to individual skills) in the target language can be developed.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The progression from beginning language courses to upper division literature courses marks a new challenge for many undergraduate foreign language students. As Kern (2002) noted, in beginning courses instructors seek to provide a warm learning environment in which students interact, express personal thoughts, and work collaboratively on classroom tasks. In contrast, interaction in advanced-level content courses tends to be more academic in nature, as these courses typically consist of reading and lectures. This shift in pedagogical practice is particularly noticeable where speaking skills are concerned. In many cases, the speaking activities in beginning classes allow students to participate in communicative exchanges. In literature courses, however, speaking is often limited to asking or answering questions to demonstrate text comprehension.

I first became aware of this as an undergraduate French student in a modern literature course. In this class, our teacher summarized the texts we had read and asked basic questions about them. We often had short, factual quizzes and essay tests to monitor our reading and understanding. I can recall wanting more opportunities to communicate in French, but I was never able to express that desire to my professor.
Glisan and Donato (2004) confirmed that other French students have also experienced this:

Students often refer to the brick wall’ they hit when they enter an Advanced-level class, where they are now expected to sit and listen to lectures in the target language and regurgitate information on written tests, after having completed conversation courses where verbal interaction with others in the target language was a daily event. (p. 474)

When our class did attempt to converse about French literature, it was frustrating for us because we were better communicators in English than we were in French. Because we wanted to talk about what we had read intelligently, many of us opted for English during these discussions. To my surprise, our professor also occasionally resorted to English, particularly when she was presenting readings she thought we had not understood. She was apologetic, but claimed that the ideas were just too difficult for us to grasp and discuss in French and she did not want us to leave the course without understanding important literary works.

After completing my degree, I had the opportunity to work as a graduate assistant in a Masters of Foreign and Second Language Education program. While in this position, I confirmed that my experience as a language learner was not unique. I interviewed recent language graduates for a course project and found many had been frustrated with their upper-division literature or content courses. Indeed, one of the most pervasive complaints from these students was that they felt they did not have substantial opportunities to discuss literature during course meetings. As a result, they were unsure as to how well they would be able to use the target language to teach advanced level courses at the high school level.
These experiences as an undergraduate French student, a graduate teaching assistant, and a French instructor have led me to reflect on how we become proficient speakers of a foreign language at each instructional level. Personally, I think emphasizing speaking in upper division classes is important because content courses provide opportunities for students to develop analytical skills that elementary language courses may not. In literature courses, for example, topics of study are broader, more mature, and require discussion that is more spontaneous. As a result, students have to think in the target language and express themselves through it. In my view, as students’ knowledge of content increases, so should their ability to communicate ideas in the target language.

Beyond an individual instructor’s reasons for emphasizing oral proficiency, foreign language departments are also increasingly requiring language students to demonstrate oral proficiency in order to graduate. (Swender, 2003) At the national accreditation level, pre-service teachers are required to demonstrate proficiency at the Advanced (low, mid or high) levels as established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines. Some characteristics of this level are narrating in various timeframes, using communicative strategies successfully, and extended discourse. Extended discourse refers to students’ ability to express their ideas in the target language using connected sentences of paragraph length. However, Swender (2003) showed that the majority of students tested perform at the Intermediate level. Thus, many departments are reevaluating how to incorporate speaking into every level of the curriculum.
For the above reasons, I am interested in exploring pedagogical practices that promote students’ use of the target language to express ideas in upper division literature courses.

**Statement of the Problem**

The current study is motivated by the need for students in literature courses to develop their speaking skills as they interact with texts. Although research has been conducted in foreign language literature courses, most studies do not focus on oral proficiency. Instead, studies address either the cultural knowledge students need in order to comprehend literary texts (Furstenberg, 2003; Hall, 2002; Huntington & Scott, 2001; Standly, 1998) or the broader research agenda of reading in a foreign/second language (Eskey, 1998; Hammadou, 1991; Knutson, 1993, Kransch, 1985). It appears that the only studies directly related to discourse dynamics during discussions of literature in upper division courses have been conducted by Mantero (2002a) and Donato and Brooks (2004).

In discussing their findings, these researchers concluded that students and professors were not capitalizing on the literature course as a means to develop advanced speaking functions. In fact, although they observed that upper-division literature courses could provide opportunities for the development of speaking skills, they noted that the courses in these studies did not make that goal a clear priority for students. Instead, students were largely passive and did not demonstrate they were developing advanced speaking skills in Spanish. Nevertheless, as Kransch (1985) noted, an understanding of text that goes beyond form and content is only achieved through “open discussion and negotiation of meanings” (p.357). Mantero (2002b) also noted the importance of
authentic exchanges in the language classroom. He wrote, “True dialogue stems from a negotiation of meaning, an attempt to understand, or convince someone of, a point of view” (¶ 6). Essentially, students may be able to improve their speaking skills and their understanding by interacting with classmates through discussions.

Literature instructors may also want to boost their students’ confidence through speaking practice because, as Davis, Gorell, Kline and Hsieh (1992) showed, students who feel confident speaking the target language report enjoying literature courses more. Consequently, it may be important to provide a space in which students can practice speaking the target language. Davis et al. (1992) hypothesized that “students who value oral fluency highly may perceive that their needs for improved communication skills are not being met in literature classes” (p. 325). On a related note, they also noted that students viewed literature more positively if they expressed personal opinions, discussed underlying meaning in a text, and read about people and experiences different from their own. Thus, in addition to providing a place for students to practice communicative skills, discussions allow students to share ideas and personal reactions to what they are reading, a motivating factor for some students enrolled in FL literature courses. In essence, the university literature classroom seems to be a logical place for learners to respond aesthetically to literature through the target language. As Donato and Brooks (2004) said, “learning language and literature study are mutually constituting and supporting experiences” (2004, p.184).

Despite these assertions, research conducted regarding classroom participation and discourse (Cazden, 1988; Hall, 1995; Mantero, 2002a; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wells, 1999) has shown the prevalence of the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) and the
Initiate-Respond-Feedback (IRF) patterns, both of which emphasize teacher control and limit student discourse. For example, Weist (2004) found that students were limited to passive roles because the instructor dominated the discourse approximately 90% of the time in the class periods observed. Below she describes a typical class period:

Starting at one end of the room (students sat in rows, in assigned seats), the instructor asked the first student to begin reading. Periodically, he interrupted the student in order to comment on sections that he found interesting or worthy of note. Occasionally he asked students, “¿Qué puede simbolizar una mariposa?” (What could the butterfly symbolize?) or “¿Qué representa el caballo negro?” (What does the black horse represent?) He often provided the answer to his own questions when no one responded to his queries. When they did respond, he replied, “Sí, es una posibilidad. ¿Hay otra?” (Yes, that’s a possibility. Is there another?) or “Sí, es verdad. Pero ¿podría ser otra cosa?” (Yes, that’s true. But could it be something else?) After he commented sufficiently on that passage, the class continued with the next student reading aloud until they made their way around the room. Each class period followed this general format, with little variation of activity types. This approach appeared to engage the same few students in every class meeting, but by no means involved the entire class. (p. 214)

This description of the literature classroom makes clear that the IRE pattern does not encourage students to respond to literature. Instead, more often than not, instructors adopt a traditional lecture format in which many students are passive. Within this format, students do not have opportunities to clarify, elaborate, share their personal opinions, or explore their relationship with the text.

Because some literature professors are not experts in foreign language pedagogy and are largely unfamiliar with the ACTFL guidelines which describe the language functions students should be developing in their advanced content courses, (Donato & Brooks, 2004) they may also be less familiar with how to address language in the context
of a literature course. Likewise, the instructor in the Donato and Brooks study (2004) expressed that there was not ample class time for students to discuss the works deeply because she had too much to cover in too little time. She went on to note that when time became a concern it was easier for her to give students the information even if she would have preferred for them to arrive at the information through discussion. Nevertheless, Glisan and Donato (2004) fear that if literature instructors do not address linguistic issues they may only have “discussions with international students or heritage language learners in the course” (p.185).

On a similar note, O’Keefe (1995) argued that student talk develops thinking. She writes, “By giving students power over language, we enable them to have power over their thought processes. If language is the means by which we gain control over our thinking, and speech is the primary mode for the process, we need to look at speech to see how it uniquely performs this function” (p.9). Giving students opportunities to explore the connections between their non-native language(s) and their thought processes provides a valuable means for improving linguistic skills. Likewise, responding to texts aesthetically allows them to make a personal connection with a text. Moreover, giving students opportunities to express themselves through the target language is an important focus for teachers who want to develop their students’ oral proficiency, especially as it relates to responding to texts in the literature classroom.

In order for successful language acquisition to occur, students need to express their ideas and opinions in the target language. (e.g. Aski, 2003; Glisan & Donato, 2004). Aski (2003) explained that students need opportunities “to interpret and express real-life-meaningful messages, negotiate meaning, and exchange information” (p.62). When
students are engaged in these types of exchanges, language becomes more authentic and enables them to share who they are as well as what they think. As students consider what they want to say and produce their thoughts, they become actively involved in the construction of meaning while also achieving communication through the second language. Glisan and Donato (2004) stressed the importance for students to produce extended discourse. That is, if students are to reach the advanced level of proficiency they must have extensive opportunities to express themselves freely and at length. If students are limited to answering basic questions with a few words, they will not become advanced speakers. They wrote:

“From a discourse perspective, the types of experiences that will most likely help learners to perform Advanced-level functions are those that provide sufficient opportunities for learners to nominate and engage in meaningful and pertinent discursive interactions, to have multiple turns in talking, and to develop strategies for self-expression, to name only a few” (p.474).

The reality, however, may be that teachers do not know how to provide opportunities for extended discourse. For students to have these opportunities, teachers have to move away from the Atlas complex and the Recitation (traditional) format. They need to experiment with new approaches that allow them to facilitate discussion by focusing on their students’ ideas and responses to content. In fact, several in the profession (Bernhardt, 1995; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Katz, 2001; Muyskens, 1983; Weist, 2004 to name a few) have noted that literature professors should alter or develop their current teaching methods. More specifically, Donato and Brooks (2004) stated, “What is critically needed is an understanding of the relationship among literary discussion, the teacher’s orchestration of classroom discourse, and the students’ attention
to advanced proficiency in the framework or an interpretive literary discussion” (p.195).

In discussing the implication of their study, they also recommended that literature courses should create opportunities for a variety of interaction patterns, and that professors should recognize the literature classroom as a space for developing students’ advanced speaking skills. In addition, they recommended implementing specific models or approaches to discussion that allow for the development of advanced speaking functions while also engaging with literature.

**Purpose of the Study**

Since undergraduate programs currently emphasize oral proficiency and are likely to continue offering literature courses as part of the core curriculum, it is imperative to address how advanced oral proficiency can be developed in this context. Additionally, because literature professors question whether their students are proficient enough to discuss literary texts in the target language (Scott, 2001), or assume that they are proficient enough when they are not (Steinhart, 2006), it is important to investigate how students can continue to develop their target language skills within these courses, even as they develop their knowledge of literature and other subjects. As Donato and Brooks (2004) suggested, the literature course should be viewed as a space in which students can develop their speaking skills. Therefore, in response to their recommendations, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the viability of a specific approach to discussion as a means to foster the development of advanced proficiency as students respond to literature through the target language, French.

Several approaches to discussion have been implemented in elementary, native language classrooms (e.g. Instructional Conversations, Philosophy for Children, and
Collaborative Reasoning, see Chapter 2 for more complete descriptions) in order to get students involved in their reading and to help them develop various skills. Of these current approaches the current study will employ Collaborative Reasoning in an upper-division literature classroom.

Collaborative Reasoning (CR) is an approach to discussion which is grounded in developing students’ abilities to express and consider different points of view (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, & Anderson, 1995). A major goal of CR is to “promote growth in students’ abilities in reasoned argumentation” (Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou, & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2003, p.183). In a CR discussion, students consider a central question raised by a text students have read. Students share their ideas and consider each other’s perspectives. As they discuss the question, they refer to the text and to their own experiences. CR discussions place an emphasis on understanding each other’s positions and considering how each participant arrived at that position (Waggoner et al, 1995). Another distinctive feature of the CR discussion is that it encourages an Open Participation Structure. This means that students are encouraged to talk to each other without requesting permission from the teacher. Students talk about texts almost as they would in conversation and they monitor their own turn-taking as well as the topic of the discussion.

The CR approach to discussion was chosen for use in this French literature course for several of its distinctive features. First, the open participation structure supports the goal for increased student participation, especially when used in conjunction with instructional strategies designed to minimize the teacher’s discourse. Second, the focus on reasoned argumentation emphasizes the important skills students at this level are
trying to develop in French. In fact, one trait of an advanced speaker of a foreign language is that he or she is able to express personal opinions and defend them. Finally, CR encourages students to respond to text both through personal experiences and through analysis. Therefore, CR supports language goals and content goals simultaneously. For example, in this course, students are learning about literature and Francophone culture and are expressing their personal opinions and reactions to it at the same time. This allows them to develop various features of an advanced speaker (e.g. sharing personal opinions, formulating an argument, using extended discourse) as they consider the multiple perspectives presented by the literature they are reading and by their classmates.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the viability of the Collaborative Reasoning (CR) approach to discussion as a means to achieve the following goals in an upper division French literature course: 1) to provide an alternative to the traditional lecture format 2) to elicit extended discourse in French 3) to give students opportunities to respond to and think about Francophone literature. Implementing the CR approach in this context of a university French literature course will also provide information to professors who want to explore pedagogical practices that emphasize student discourse and response to literature.

**Research Questions**

In order to provide ways in which literature professors can simultaneously address literature and oral proficiency goals, four research questions were examined in the current study. These questions were investigated in the context of an undergraduate French literature course on Francophone literature. The primary aim of the current study was to answer the following question: What happens when the Collaborative Reasoning
approach to discussion is implemented as a means for students to respond to literature and develop oral proficiency skills?

Specific questions located within the broader question stated above are:

1. Does CR encourage spontaneous student discourse? More specifically, does the CR framework for discussion provide opportunities for students to produce extended discourse in French, one feature of an advanced speaker?

2. In what ways does the CR instructional frame influence students’ oral participation in the Francophone literature course?

3. To what extent do CR discussions promote response to literature through the target language in this upper-division Francophone literature course?

4. What are the students’ perspectives regarding the implementation of CR discussions in an undergraduate French literature course after one semester of exposure?

**Significance of the Study**

This study has significance for a wide-ranging audience. First, SLA researchers working in the field of instructed SLA and professionals in foreign language education will be interested in examining research conducted in an upper-division French course focused on content (literature). As we know, many undergraduate programs are now required to document that their students possess advanced levels of oral proficiency upon graduation. Although some students achieve this level after four years of instruction, the majority does not. Because course sequences typically progress from those focused on “language” to those focused on content, it is important to explore ways upper division courses can continue to address oral proficiency and language learning goals. Although some basic language programs are moving toward a content-based approach, much of the
available research on language acquisition has been conducted at early and intermediate language levels dedicated to the teaching of isolated language skills (Nassaji, 2000; Krashen, 1983; Schulz, 1991; Shrum & Glisan, 2000). As a result, very little is known about students’ language development as they move beyond beginning language course sequences. The current study describes the experiences of students in an upper-division literature course and gives researchers insight into the development of oral proficiency skills at this level.

The current study is also relevant to professors teaching upper division courses because implementing new pedagogical practices may result in effective outcomes for their students. Many teachers of literature have experienced frustration with students who do not speak in class or who seem uninterested in the content. In the current study, one particular approach to discussion was implemented in order to describe what happens when students are given opportunities to use the target language to connect with and respond to literature. While CR is not necessarily the only option to address these challenges, examining its role in one literature classroom may encourage literature professors to think about the opportunities CR discussions create. Further, these professors may benefit from this study because it was conducted in the context of a literature course. Because much of the research on foreign language instruction is conducted in language (elementary and/or intermediate) courses, literature professors may not feel that the findings of these studies are relevant to their setting. This study, because it was conducted in a literature course, may be more meaningful to literature professors who are facing the challenge of balancing language and content goals.
While some departments are working hard to restructure curriculum to integrate beginning courses and content courses (see Byrnes and Kord, 2001 for an example) more research in upper-division courses can help inform the field with regard to what students want and need as they move through departmental course sequences. Along those lines, for departments witnessing declining enrollments in literature courses, the current study may provide a means for reviving student interest, especially if implementing CR discussions is received favorably by the students in this course. As we know, students are less interested in literature because they think it is difficult, boring and impractical. If CR discussions involve students by giving them opportunities to talk and makes content more accessible and enjoyable, we may observe increased enrollments in literature courses over time.

Students engaged in literature study will also benefit from this study because investigating pedagogical practices can inform the practices of instructors. In order to improve instruction, it is important to understand what students’ goals and expectations are. The students who participated in this study were frank and gave invaluable feedback relating to the structure and usefulness of CR discussions in a literature classroom. More investigations of this sort would not only help to bridge the gap between language and content courses, but could also give insight into the ways in which students learn. Understanding the struggles and the successes students have with regard to language learning in literature courses will push the profession forward as we continue to reflect on ways to improve students’ language development in the context of literature and other advanced courses.
Most importantly, the current study has important pedagogical implications. If foreign language teachers are to shift their practice from a recitation format to one in which open participation is encouraged, it is important to begin to share what that transition looks like when implemented. The current study, then, contributes to the lack of knowledge in the field regarding the incorporation of oral proficiency goals into literature courses and possibly into other content courses as well.

To sum up, the current study contributes to research investigating oral proficiency in upper division literature courses. In this study, oral proficiency refers primarily to a student’s ability to generate extended discourse in French. This study also describes the utility of CR as a means for providing oral practice in stating and defending opinions as they respond to literature. The study provides data regarding the nature of student participation in collaborative reasoning discussions and considers how they responded to its use as a pedagogical tool. Finally, this examination of CR discussions in an undergraduate literature French course enables others who teach literature and content courses to reflect upon their current practices and to consider the utility of implementing alternative pedagogical practices.

**Basic Assumptions**

Several assumptions framed the current study:

1. Language learning is a complicated sociocultural process shaped by a learner’s participation in various contexts (i.e. social, historical, and educational).

2. The development of oral language proficiency is a social activity. In order to improve speaking and conversational skills, students need opportunities to speak.

3. Language learning is a social event affected by dynamics in the classroom.
4. Students who are majoring in French will be interested in developing their ability to converse and speak French.

**Limitations**

The current study was conducted in the context of an upper division literature course which met for 15 weeks. As a result, there were challenges relating to familiarizing students with the CR framework and with its implementation. It is difficult to adapt and refine a way of teaching (and thinking about teaching) in such a short time. Likewise, it is hard for students to adapt to a new way of learning. Thus, more time would have allowed for a deeper analysis of the research questions for the current study. Additionally, this course consisted uniquely of eight female students, thus the generalizability of the results of this study could potentially be limited.

Limitations also related to the diverse maturity and ability levels of the students enrolled in the course. With regard to linguistic ability, students were at two extremes. The seniors had had prior literature courses, had traveled abroad, and had studied other content which they were able to easily connect to the literature of this course. For the four freshmen students in the course, this was their first literature course in a university environment, as well as their first semester in college. Their language use, as a result, was limited to high school experiences. Only one of the freshmen students had been to a French speaking country. The freshmen students reported a need for more structure (e.g. specific daily homework etc.), whereas the senior students were quite comfortable with self-regulated learning.

Finally, the role of researcher and teacher was constantly negotiated. At times, one perspective took precedence over the other. For example, although I had intended to
group students heterogeneously, as time went on, several of the freshmen students indicated that they were not comfortable when grouped with the older students. Indeed, I did recognize that the freshmen girls participated less and seemed much more nervous when paired with the older students in the course.

As a teacher, I chose to group students in ways I thought would best facilitate their participation in CR discussions. Additionally, when some students expressed a desire to have more lecture and less discussion, I explained that I was committed to incorporating CR discussions into the classroom in order to give them opportunities to practice speaking. When students were uncomfortable, and when it might have been easier to resort to traditional practices, I stood by the CR approach in order to fully investigate what happens when students are involved in these discussions in a foreign language classroom. In all, the study helped me improve as both a teacher and researcher despite the fact that each role required different perspectives.

Definitions of Terms

In order to establish consistent meanings throughout the study, the following key terms are defined as follows.

Authentic question: A question that reveals a genuine inquiry and does not have a pre-specified answer (Nystrand, Gamoran & Heck, 1993).

Foreign language literature course: Students enrolled in a foreign language course are learning a language not officially spoken by the citizens of the students’ country. They are reading literature intended for native speakers of French.

Advanced level speaker: According to the ACTFL guidelines, an advanced speaker is able to formulate connected discourse of paragraph length. He or she is able to converse in a participatory fashion; to narrate, describe and initiate or bring closure to communicative tasks.
Collaborative Reasoning: An approach to literature discussion (Chinn, Anderson and Waggoner, 2001) designed to facilitate critical reading and thinking skills in an environment that is openly structured, such that many students have opportunities to speak and to share their opinions on a central question. Additionally, students are encouraged to support the opinions they are stating with evidence from the text or personal experience. Teachers using a collaborative reasoning format limit their discourse to encourage student talk while also modeling skills and providing support for what students are trying to communicate.

Fluency: The ease and speed with which a student is able to formulate and generate speech in the target language.

Instructional Practice: The way(s) in which an instructor creates, organizes, and executes strategies for teaching and learning in the classroom.

IRE Pattern: A pattern of discourse Cazden (1988) in which the instructor Initiates a Response by asking students a question. The student’s response to the question is then Evaluated by the instructor. This exchange is usually brief. An example follows:

T: So, what do you think the theme of this poem might be?
S: Jealousy.
T: Well, yes, O.K., that’s an option. Does anyone have another idea?

The teacher’s response does not encourage additional participation from the student.

Literature: The texts used in this literature course were short stories written by French speaking authors from areas other than France such as Cameroon, Vietnam, Sénégal, and Québec. All of the stories were taken from the textbook, “Diversité: La nouvelle francophone”. When not referring specifically to the texts used in the Francophone Literature course, literature should be understood as stories, poems, novels etc, written in the target language for native speakers of that language. In general, foreign language literature students read works that have become significant within the target culture.

Open participation structure: A term (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001) that describes interaction in a CR discussion. Within this structure, students speak without raising their hands and without being called on by the teacher. They are encouraged to listen to each other and to take turns speaking, but these turns are dictated by the students themselves. The teacher may occasionally share in the control of the turn taking in order to scaffold the students’ reasoning or expression of ideas.

Oral Proficiency: Drawing from the ACTFL guidelines, oral proficiency in this study was defined as a student’s ability to produce extended discourse in French during discussions of literature.

Recitation Format: In this instructional frame teachers generally control the turn taking. The teacher chooses who speaks and when. The teacher also retains control of the topic being discussed and also frequently dictates what constitutes an acceptable answer.
Recitation formats often include IRE patterns (Cazden, 1988). Recitation is common in the university context because teachers frequently lecture while students take notes.

**Extended discourse:** Discourse of paragraph length consisting of 2-3 complete sentences in which a student expresses ideas in French. This discourse is the opposite of what is found in a typical IRE exchange in which a student might respond to a question using a few words.

**Student led discussion:** A discussion led and facilitated by students.

**Turn:** In this study, a turn is defined as the initiation or response to a statement made by a speaker in the group.

**Upper-division course:** An upper division language course requires at least four semesters (20 hours) of prior language study. Upper division language courses typically follow basic language sequences (such as beginning and intermediate French) and focus on content.

**Whole class discussion:** A discussion in which the students and the instructor participate together to negotiate and construct meaning.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on research conducted on language acquisition in advanced learning contexts and is divided into three major sections. First, the relationship between language teaching and literature courses will be examined. This research addresses the tension between teaching language and teaching literature, the sequencing of language curriculum for University students, and the increasing belief that language teaching should be redefined at all levels. The second section provides further contextualization for the present study by describing the theoretical underpinnings of discussion, traditional classroom discourse patterns, and the emergence of discussion as a pedagogical practice. The third section provides an overview of discussion approaches and a rationale for discussion in the foreign language literature classroom.

Language Teaching and Literature

In the fields of literature and language, many researchers reference a divide between scholarly and pragmatic approaches. This divide is well-documented and refers to the rift in many FL departments between language instructors and literature professors. Several historical factors have contributed to the gap between language and literature, but World War II broadened it by turning the profession’s attention to the development of oral proficiency. Prior to this time, literature was the goal of foreign language study and grammar-translation the preferred instructional method. Schultz (2001) noted that as communicative methodologies came into favor, literature seemed unresponsive to the
need for “authentic, contemporary, primarily oral linguistic input….the often stylized and sophisticated language of the literary text, which formerly had been seen as providing examples of refined linguistic structures to emulate, came to be considered far too difficult and therefore inappropriate for the language learner” (p.3).

The increasing interest in linguistics and language acquisition edged literature out of elementary programs which focused on oral production and personal interaction. This emphasis inadvertently created a difference in classroom atmosphere which can also make the transition to literature study more difficult. Students today expect interactive, stimulating environments and they also want to use language in authentic settings. As Kern (2002) points out, the literature classroom has not always emphasized these characteristics. He writes:

In terms of classroom culture, teachers typically strive to create a warm and supportive learning environment in the first two years of language study. Classroom tasks are often collaborative, involving small group teams to encourage interaction, and focus on the communication of personal thoughts, feelings and ideas…Advanced-level courses, in contrast, are usually content focused, organized around lecture and discussion about a particular text or subject…Less attention is paid to learners’ comfort level, and interaction tends to be primarily academic in register (p.20).

These differences in each learning environment (the language and literature classroom) may explain students’ tendencies to avoid upper-division literature courses, especially if they believe other courses provide more personal, interactive environments. In turn, students may perceive language classes (as opposed to literature courses) to be more useful because they emphasize practical, marketable skills. This trend is leading literature faculty to question their relevance. Byrnes and Kord (2001) wrote: “the literature-
language divide has found frequent expression in the fearful comments by literature professionals on the increasingly uncertain status of literature in upper-level FL instruction, accompanied by worries that literature is being replaced with classes that target ‘communicative competencies’” (p.36). Thus, as Shanahan (1997) noted “two camps have developed, one basing its emphasis on communicative competence, the other on the importance of exposure to culture and especially, literature” (p.164).

The study of literature has long been associated with advanced language study and this association is still prevalent today because most universities sequence instruction so that students progress from language courses to literature courses, where the latter signify students’ readiness and commitment to interact with more sophisticated content. However, as Maxim (2006) noted, lower-level learners often find it difficult to transition to the upper-division course because they have not had any previous exposure to extended discourse and the textual thinking commonly found in these courses. The coupling of advanced courses with content often leads literature professors to believe that students have completed their language learning and are now ready for the real work of analyzing literary texts. Yet creating programs of language study in which there is a distinction between language and literature often poses problems for students because they have not had opportunities to read or work with texts prior to studying literature.

To address this problem some language departments have completely reconstructed their curriculum to make it more coherent and meaningful for students at all levels of language study. For example, in 1996 Georgetown University set out to “link language acquisition and the development of literacy in a second language within a comprehensively conceived curricular framework that overcomes the split between
language courses and content courses” (Byrnes & Kord, 2001, p.35). They developed a holistic model of language education that integrates challenging literary and cultural content from the very beginning.

The department’s rationale for this undertaking stemmed from their observations that their students were not prepared to read and analyze literature at cognitively appropriate levels. Essentially, their students’ linguistic inaccuracies were hindering their ability to read and discuss literature in meaningfully ways. The faculty at Georgetown decided to develop courses that focus dually on context and language. This program takes a content-oriented and task-based approach in all courses. In doing so, Byrnes argues, it “does away with the traditional dichotomy of language courses and content courses, and creates an integrated program which is expressed in terms of five instructional levels according to specific curricular goals” (Byrnes & Kord, 2001, p. 50).

At the earliest instructional level, students use a commercially produced textbook which is extensively supplemented by materials and pedagogical tasks. From that point on each course depends on materials developed by graduate/faculty research teams. A goal of courses at early and intermediate levels is to include discourse training to give students the tools they will need to discuss intellectually challenging content. Another general feature of all courses is a focus on students’ interests and student-led interaction. Byrnes and Kord (2001) ultimately defend their groundbreaking rationale through a different conceptualization of text and students’ abilities to interact with it. Byrnes wrote:

An elaborated ability to work with texts is not merely a precondition for substantial work with literary texts. It aptly describes all second language learning by collegiate foreign
language learners, regardless of programmatic emphasis or individual student interest and regardless of level of instruction. Because a sophisticated literacy is essential for attaining advanced levels of performance, the construct of genre and the pedagogical approach arising from it support the integration of all undergraduate FL instruction that has heretofore eluded FL departments. (p.56)

Harper (1988) also supports a methodology that allows for greater student participation and fosters a negotiated interpretation of the text, as opposed to one prepackaged by an instructor. Likewise, Kramsch (1985) wrote “the teacher can explain and teach the rhetorical structure, the form and content of the text, but an understanding of the values, intentions, and beliefs embedded in the text can only be achieved through open discussion and negotiation of meaning” (p. 357).

Other tangible advances in integration relate to reconceptualizing ways we think about foreign language teaching. Kern (2003) argued for the term literacy in order to “convey a broader scope than the terms ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ and to allow for a more unified discussion of relations between readers, writers, texts, culture, and language learning” (p.40).

This amounts to an understanding of literacy in which “both social and individual dimensions of written expression are explored, leading to language programs that value aesthetic as well as efferent reading (Rosenblatt 1978, as cited in Kern, 2003) and that teach students to know the difference” (p. 41). Kern also serves as an advocate for reuniting goals that have tended to be at odds with each other, those of personal, verbal interaction and those of reading, writing, and thinking about texts. In synthesizing these goals he proposes enveloping the textual within the communicative. Thus, curriculum would “emphasize both oral and written communication that is informed by a
metacommunicative awareness of how discourse is derived from relations between language use, contexts of interaction, and larger sociocultural contexts” (p. 50).

The sequencing of instruction in this type of program would not, as is common in language classes today, focus only on individual skills or speaking alone but would incorporate activities for interrelated reading and writing activities, thus building students’ literacy in the target language. As Kern (2003) has made clear, “in literacy-based teaching the relation between reading, writing, and talking is not linear but overlapping” (p.52). Viewing the FL literature classroom as a space where literacy in the target language is developed requires a pedagogical shift where all foreign language professors recognize that language and content are interrelated and interdependent. Such a shift would also likely require implementing some effective native language literacy practices into FL classrooms. These changes may serve to break down traditional barriers by focusing on reading, writing, and speaking as forms of communication that are interrelated and serve as catalysts for thinking.

**Theoretical Framework**

Current views of language study emphasize how language is used to shape our social and cultural worlds. Within this perspective is the belief that communication is the essence of human action. In contrast to a perspective that views linguistic resources to be fixed and invariable, a sociocultural perspective understands them in terms of their cultural applications. That is, the members of the culture both inherit and develop the everyday forms they use to communicate (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995). As Hall (2002) put it, “In our individual uses of our linguistic resources we accomplish two actions simultaneously. We create their typical-historical-contexts of use and at the same time
we position ourselves in relation to these contexts” (p. 11). This view extends to how we view language learning. Where formalist approaches consider language acquisition to be a straightforward process by which the mind organizes and makes sense of incoming data, a sociocultural perspective emphasizes that acquisition of knowledge and skills occurs as we participate in society through interacting with and receiving guidance from more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, approaches that view language learning as a primarily cognitive process view individual differences as a peripheral issue that is not central to language development. In contrast, a sociocultural perspective acknowledges that the social worlds of learners play a fundamental role in their identities, in their language use, and in their cognitive abilities.

The sociocultural perspective has important implications for language teaching. One such implication is that language development is tied to participation in activities related to everyday life and to the practices into which they are socialized in school. Put simply, because students spend so much time in the classroom, they learn how they are expected to interact in this environment. Therefore, the classroom becomes an important site for understanding language acquisition and use. As Hall (2002) wrote, “the communicative activities of the classroom and their resources, the particular participants and their histories, and the very processes by which the participants conjointly use the resources to accomplish their lives as members of their classrooms or other learning contexts, become the fundamental units of analysis” (p.64). This focus on the social, historical and intellectual lives of students will broaden our understanding of the myriad of processes that shape and contribute to language learning. Likewise, the instructional practices implemented by the teacher determine the learning opportunities available to
students. As a result, it is important to examine instructional practices that facilitate language development. Connections between instructional practices and learning have interested researchers and practitioners for decades. Most relevant to the current study, though, are studies that address how the language patterns of the teachers and students influence learning opportunities, linguistic development, and patterns of interaction.

Discourse Patterns in the Language Classroom

Recitation Format and the IRE Pattern

As described in the previous chapter, the most prevalent instructional frame in the language classroom is the Recitation format (Barnes, 1992; Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979; Nystrand, 1997) which includes the predictable IRE pattern. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) described the IRE as the “basic unit of classroom discourse” and Nystrand and Gomoran (1990) go so far as to describe it as “normal classroom discourse” because it occurs so frequently. The Recitations format is frequently employed to verify student understanding by asking questions that have a single correct answer (Chinn, Anderson & Waggoner, 2001). Also, in Recitations, the teacher controls discussion by posing questions and choosing who responds to the question. Generally, after a student responds, the teacher evaluates the response or moves on by asking another question. This type of pattern limits the ways students can interact in the classroom.

As Hall (1995) found in a study of a high school Spanish class, the prevalence of the IRE pattern limited students’ involvement to listing and labeling and presented no opportunities for communicatively complex exchanges. Cazden (1988) drew the similar conclusion that the IRE pattern facilitated teacher control rather than student learning.
These points are well illustrated in the following example from Nystrand and Gamoran’s (1990) study of eighth and ninth grade English classrooms.

Teacher: According to the poet, what is the subject of the Iliad?
Student: Achilles’ anger.
Teacher: Where does the action of the first part of ‘Book 1’ take place when we enter the story?
Student: On the Achean ship?
Teacher: Well, they’re not on their ships. Let’s see if we can give you a little diagram…
Student: Was it on the shore?
Teacher: Yes, it’s on the shore. Let’s see if we can kind of visualize where everything is here. [proceeds to draw on the board]…Remember that Troy is on the coast of Turkey—at the time called Asia Minor—so let’s see if we can—okay—this is the scene, and all of the ships are anchored—a thousand ships are anchored here…So the war has been going on now for how long?
Student: Ten years.
Teacher: ‘Ten years’. You have to understand—the battle takes place only during the day time…[draws some more on the board] So this is approximately what it looked like…Now the city is immense—much larger probably than what we consider the [our own city]; it could be as large as all of [our own] county.
[Recitation continues]

While the Recitation format may offer the benefit of summarizing important general facts for the benefit of the entire group (Wells, 1999) most agree that this format limits opportunities for student thinking and involvement. For example, Barnes (1992) found that the pattern limited opportunities for complex communication between the teacher and students. In the above example, though it may seem that the student is involved, the student’s response never alters the teacher’s direction. In fact, it seems like the teacher is following a script he has used several times before. It is also clear that the teacher has a specific answer in mind which he provides himself if the student does not.

The impact of the IRE pattern on student learning was documented by Nystrand’s (1997) seminal study of 112 eighth and ninth grade language classrooms. This work showed that the pattern was used nearly exclusively in the classroom and that its use was negatively
correlated with learning. The literature classroom often falls short of providing opportunities for authentic discussion and negotiation of meaning because of the persistence of the IRE pattern. However, it should provide these opportunities because it is a logical space for students to develop speaking skills while talking about what they have read.

In the foreign language literature classroom, there are many factors contributing to the prevalence of the traditional lecture format. First, because professors want students to come away with an appreciation for the beauty of literature, they tend to talk about their love of literature and their specific interpretations of it. Their passion for literature results in lecture and sometimes leads to discussing works in English. As Bernhardt (1995) noted, some professors know that students in literature courses do not speak the target language very well, but claim “that is not what they’re there for” (¶ 5). As for using English instead of the target language, the instructor in Weist’s (2004) study apologized for using texts in English but stated that “he had ideas and concepts that were important and that exposure to Neruda was more important than using Spanish” (p. 214). The priorities of these professors are understandably for students to appreciate literature, but sometimes that appreciation comes at the expense of continued language learning. Likewise, if professors are not confident regarding their own use of the target language, they may also prefer to talk about the literary texts in English.

Professors also adopt the lecture format because it emphasizes the knowledge they have worked hard to possess. As Lee and VanPatten (2003) note, it is quite common in language classrooms for teachers to adopt an “Atlas Complex” in which the teacher is viewed as the expert transmitter of knowledge. In such a paradigm, the teacher is the
center of instruction and students are an audience. In literature courses, the professor is both a more competent speaker and is an expert in the content area, so this tendency may be exacerbated. Certainly, professors feel some degree of responsibility to function as a linguistic model for their students. At the same time, they may also expect students to come to literature study as proficient users of language.

The expectation literature professors have for their students to be proficient in the target language likely accounts for some of the frustration students feel because many of them are still developing target language proficiency (Bernhardt, 1995). Since it is difficult for them to speak fluently, some students are content to let their teachers summarize the readings and answer their own questions. As Nance (1994) shared, even when professors intend to have interactive discussions they may still resort to doing the plot analysis themselves. Essentially, because professors can speak effortlessly, they do all of the talking. While these factors may explain why the traditional format is common, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the traditional lecture format is unlikely to provide students with opportunities to develop their speaking skills.

**Discussion as a pedagogical practice**

Because of the passive and ineffective attributes of Recitations, new approaches to language instruction are being investigated. In recent decades, discussion has become an important alternative instructional format. Chinn et al (2001) define discussion as “the everyday implementation of the principle that learners must be active agents in their own learning” (p. 378). They elaborate further that if students are to construct new ideas they must have a chance to express their own ideas and respond to the ideas of others. For Nystrand and Gamoran (1990) discussion means “turntaking among students and teachers
which depart from the normal IRE structure of classroom discourse and do not obligate students to wait for the teacher’s evaluation before responding themselves to another student’s response, and where their teacher, rather than evaluating a student response, joins in and becomes a conversant” (p.16). These definitions show the contrast between traditional classrooms and classrooms employing discussion as a pedagogical practice. The most obvious difference is that students are active instead of passive. Second, in a discussion-based classroom students can create meaning for themselves as they listen and interact with others.

Nystrand and Gamoran (1990) also identified two important features of discussion: uptake and authentic questions. Both of these features were present in discussions that provided opportunities for student learning that the Recitation format did not. Uptake occurs when a teacher incorporates and builds upon what students have said in subsequent questions. Authentic questions also show a genuine interest in students’ thinking because the teacher is investigating possibilities along with the students. These differ from test questions where the teacher is looking for a single, correct response.

Consider a second example from Nystrand and Gomoran’s (1990) study which highlights the differences in Recitation and Discussion. In this example a student has read his summary of a chapter in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry to the class. While he read his summary, the teacher noted key points on the board.

**Teacher:** [to the class as a whole]: Wow! What do you think about that?
**Student:** It was very thorough.
**Teacher:** Yeah, pretty thorough. I had a lot of trouble getting everything down [on the board], and I think I missed the part about trying to boycott. [Reads from the board] “…and tries to organize a boycott.” Did I get everything down, John, that you said?
**John:** What about the guy who didn’t really think these kids were a pest?
**Teacher:** Yeah, okay. What’s his name? Do you remember?

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John: [indicates he can’t remember]
Another student: Wasn’t it Turner?
Teacher: Was it Turner?
Students: Yes.
Teacher: Okay, so Mr. Turner resisted white help. Why? Why would he want to keep shopping at that terrible store?
John: There was only one store to buy from because all the other ones were white.
Teacher: Well, the Wall Store was white too.
Another student [addressed to John]: Is it Mr. Hollings’ store? Is that it?
John: No. Here’s the reason. They don’t get paid till the cotton comes in. But throughout the year they still have to buy stuff—food, clothes, seed, and stuff like that. So the owner of the plantation will sign for what they buy at the store so that throughout the year they can still buy stuff on credit.
Teacher: [writing on the board]: So, “he has to have credit to buy thing, and this store is the only one that will give it to him.”
John: [continues to explain]

This exchange differs starkly from the previous example. First, from the beginning of the excerpt, it is clear that the teacher has not positioned herself as the expert because she has used student work as the source material. She lists John’s ideas on the board which gives him the authority to elaborate on his ideas later in the lesson. There are also examples of uptake and authentic questions. She builds on what John has said when she asks, “What’s his name? Do you remember?” and she seems eager to explore various possibilities when she asks, “Why? Why would he want to keep shopping at that terrible store?” This example shows that the teacher is thinking with the students and that their input to the discussion is valuable. Also notable, is that more students are involved in this exchange and students are talking to each other and not just to the teacher. Langer (1995) noted that successful classroom practices for discussion include acknowledging that all students can have important understandings of and contributions to discussion. She also pointed out that considering multiple perspectives can enrich understanding, and
that it is important for teachers to recognize questions as a productive starting point for discussion (as opposed to using questions to verify traditional interpretations).

As work in the literacy field has focused more on discussion and effective discursive practices, several specific approaches to discussion have developed. Though these approaches differ somewhat in emphasis, all discussion approaches provide an alternative to the Recitation format and seek to value the knowledge and contributions of students. Nystrand (1997) emphasized that recognizing students as sources of knowledge is a crucial component for creating a classroom environment in which language learners are empowered and given significant opportunities for language practice. When students work together to understand a text or problem, knowledge is something generated and co-constructed. In discussions then, according to Nystrand, “The teacher’s role is to moderate, direct discussion, probe, foresee, and analyze the implications of student responses. Whereas knowledge in recitation is prescripted, knowledge during discussion unfolds, a process that values personal knowledge and accordingly promotes student ownership (p. 17). Some current discussion approaches are: Instructional Conversations, (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), Questioning the Author (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan & Worthy, 1996), Collaborative Reasoning (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001), the Padeia Seminar (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002), and Literature Circles (Schlick & Johnson, 1999; Short & Pierce, 1990). To provide some background, here is a brief description of each approach.

The Instructional Conversation is a methodology recommended for use with culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Tharp, 1997; Tharp & Gallimore; 1988). This instructional strategy is most closely associated with researchers involved with the
KEEP Project in Hawaii. According to Cazden (1988), instructional conversation is "talk in which ideas are explored rather than answers to teachers' test questions provided and evaluated" (p. 54). Instructional conversations (IC), as Tharp and Gallimore (1988) have noted, are *instructional* in intent but they are *conversational* in quality. At some level, ICs replicate the types of learning exchanges that occur between parents and children. For example, IC’s allow for direct teaching of skills and concepts when necessary and the teacher sets up discussion by activating background knowledge or choosing specific themes. At the same time, the students choose when to speak and there are few test questions (http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/ncrcdsl/epr2/index.htm).

Questioning the Author (QtA) (McKeown, Beck, & Sandora, 1996) and Collaborative Reasoning (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001) are discussion approaches that relate to the readers’ comprehension of and response to text. According to Beck et al (1996) QtA is unique because of the following four features. 1) It addresses text as the product of a fallible author; 2) it deals with text through general probes for meaning directed toward making sense of ideas in the text; 3) it takes place in the context of reading as it initially occurs; and 4) it encourages collaboration in the construction of meaning. Collaborative Reasoning (Chinn et al, 2001) also encourages collaboration by stimulating students’ thinking abilities and personal engagement. In these discussions, teachers present a central question raised by the text, and students take a position on the question. The students freely discuss the question and offer reasons for their thinking. The students defend their positions and discuss the merits of their classmates’ arguments. This focus is designed to encourage students’ sophisticated thinking and reasoning skills.
The Paideia Seminar is based upon the sociocultural construct of dialogic discussion. This means that language, meanings, and understandings cannot be separated from the social and cultural contexts in which they occur. The Paideia Seminar was one from of classroom instruction advocated by Adler (1982) more than a decade ago. Key tenets of the Seminar are that there should be an interchange of student ideas in a respectful, democratic environment. Teachers are facilitators of dialogue and should avoid making evaluations and fixed eye contact with individual speakers. Likewise, questions should be open ended so that students can participate and explore ideas together (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002).

Literature circles differ from some of the above approaches primarily in that students choose the texts they will read (Daniels, 2002). Following the reader, the students come together to discuss an assigned portion of the reading. Before the discussion, each participant notes things he/she would like to contribute and everyone comes to the group ready to share their ideas. Literature circles are also unique because the groups are peer-led, meaning the teacher does not participate. Once a group finishes discussing a reading, they share broad ideas with the class as a whole before selecting a new reading and joining a new group.

When a teacher discusses a story with students, he/she makes several choices which constitute the instructional frame for the discussion. Chinn, et al. (2001) define these choices as 1) determining how the text should be understood by the reader (interpretive authority) 2) who decides when and what to talk about (control of topic) 3) who gets to speak and when (turn-taking) and 4) the position from which a text is read (stance). The latter term refers to the approach a reader takes toward a text. For
example, in Recitations readers usually approach the text from an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 2001). This means that students are reading for information and facts. Other possible stances are aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1994) and critical/analytic (Chinn et al., 2001). In an aesthetic stance, students respond to the text emotionally by expressing their feelings, emotions, and personal reactions to a text. In addition to the aesthetic and efferent stances (Rosenblatt, 1994), Chinn et al. (2001) suggested a third stance, the critical analytic stance, inspired by the work of Wade, Thompson, and Watkins (1994, as cited in Chinn et al., 2001). When readers approach a text from this position, they “focus on a major dilemma or problem facing a character, a consideration of reasons for different courses of action, and appeal to the text for evidence and for interpretive context” (p. 382).

Though teachers will likely make additional decisions regarding the instructional frame such as whether to lead discussions with the entire class or with small groups, how groups should be formed, how large groups should be, when texts are read, and who chooses the text, (Hanssen, 1990 as cited in Chinn et al., 2001) the above choices were referred to as key parameters for discussion by Chinn et al. (2001). The table below was compiled from a presentation on group discussion approaches presented by Wilkinson and Reninger (2005) and it summarizes the parameters and instructional decisions for each approach previously listed. Regarding stance, many discussion approaches use more than one. Therefore, the primary stance is listed.
Table 2.1: Parameters for Discussion Approaches

According to Chinn et al (2001) instructional parameters and decisions affect discourse features such as “the amount of teacher talk and student talk, the frequency of interruptions, the character of teacher and student questions, and the cognitive processes manifested in the students’ talk” (p. 378). These features are significant because they help to gauge the learning environment as well as students’ linguistic and cognitive processes. Each approach to discussion will vary regarding the instructional parameters. As a result, teachers should examine their pedagogical goals when choosing an instructional frame.

Rationale for Discussion in the Foreign Language Literature Course

Although the studies of classroom talk in FL literature classes (Weist, 2004; Mantero, 2002a, Donato & Brooks, 2004 etc) reveal that students are not engaging in communicative exchanges, ironically, the literature classroom is perhaps the most logical
of all spaces for such discussions to occur. As Rosenblatt (1994) said, “Reading is a transaction, a two-way process involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances” (p. 268). The uniqueness of each individual and each text forms the basis for each person’s relationship with the text. Thus, a literature course should offer students the opportunity to respond to texts more personally and to learn about themselves and their peers during literary discussions.

Despite this opportunity, the few studies that have examined discourse patterns in upper-division language classrooms have found that the Recitation format is just as prevalent in the foreign language setting as it is in native language classrooms. Mantero (2002a), for example, examined the discourse dynamics of literary discussion in a Spanish “bridge course”. The course was designed to help students transition from language to literature courses and it emphasized conversation. The researcher examined the students’ talk according to three linguistic levels: utterance, dialogue and discourse. The goal of the study was to investigate text-centered talk by recording instances of student-initiated talk and opportunities for discourse in the Spanish classroom. These instances were observed in relation to the opportunities afforded to or provided by the instructor. In analyzing the students’ talk at the utterance, dialogue and discourse level the analysis showed that the university-level foreign language course was predominantly “teacher-centered, student-supported dialogue that did not take advantage of the majority of opportunities for extending classroom talk into the discourse level” (p. 437).

Another study particular to discourse functions in the literature classroom (Donato & Brooks, 2004) investigated advanced speaking skills in a Spanish literature class. Their study explored the question, “Does a senior-level literature course for Spanish language
majors provide occasions during group discussion for participation in advanced speaking functions as defined in the ACTFL Speaking Proficiency Guidelines?” (p. 186) and analyzed the discourse structure of discussion, question types, verb tenses and student uptake. They also examined whether students elaborated on their ideas, described their views, defended their positions, or made predictions about what they were reading. Finally, they considered if the professor and students had similar learning goals for the literature course. One important difference that surfaced was that the instructor wanted students to “describe, analyze, and personalize” (p. 194) what they read. However, in the five classes the researchers examined, “No student was ever observed to engage in sharing their expanded descriptions or analyses of a literary work with one another or the instructor. Rather, their contributions to discussion were mainly word, phrase, and sentence-level factual recollection of plots (‘the basic stuff’) and some speculation lacking textual support” (p. 194). In this environment (as in ELL contexts) the linguistic skills of the teacher provide a distinct advantage when it comes to opportunities to talk.

As a result, the implementation of a specific discussion approach in an upper division foreign language classroom can address several important learning objectives. First and foremost, discussion unites content, language, and thought. Second, it emphasizes oral proficiency. Third, it attempts to make the literature classroom more lively and interactive, which may more closely resemble the positive atmosphere often found in language courses. To elaborate on these goals, discussion encourages students to trust their ability to express their ideas and enables them to use language in meaningful contexts. When language can be learned through participation in meaningful exchanges (such as attempting to understand a point of view, negotiating information, or convincing
someone of something), students are more likely to internalize the linguistic forms they are using and they may also learn to situate them within the larger discursive framework (Mantero, 2002a).

In such exchanges, language becomes more authentic and enables them to share who they are as well as what they think. As students consider what they want to say and produce their thoughts and produce their thoughts, they become actively involved in the construction of meaning while also achieving communication through the second language. Discussion also requires spontaneity which forces students to process what is being said, weigh it according to their understanding of the text, and then produce a response. Brook’s (1991) supported the benefits of spontaneous authentic discussion in a Spanish conversation course. He wrote:

Learners need to have opportunities for doing things spontaneously between and among themselves through language as opposed to simply repeating language forms, saying rehearsed language, participating in whole-group teacher-led lock-step discussions, and narrating and describing through the ubiquitous interview task. (p. 1123)

If students have opportunities to practice speaking in these ways, they are likely to become more proficient and more confident users of language. Consequently, emphasizing discussion in the advanced literature classroom allows students to explore the relationship between thought, language, and expression, a valuable linguistic activity.

**Collaborative Reasoning**

The current study implemented the Collaborative Reasoning framework. Before describing the rationale for CR in the FL literature classroom, some relevant background information and findings from previous research regarding CR is provided.
As mentioned previously, each approach to discussion will have a particular focus with regard to instructional choices. These choices can be referred to as the approach’s parameters. The table below (Chinn et al, 2001, p. 382) describes CR in greater detail with regard to its four parameters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stance</th>
<th>Interpretive Authority</th>
<th>Control over turns</th>
<th>Control over topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primarily critical/analytic, partly aesthetic</td>
<td>Students are completely responsible for their own judgments about which positions and arguments are stronger</td>
<td>Students are free to talk when they wish; teachers may retain control through questions asked for purposes of scaffolding</td>
<td>Shared by teacher and students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Parameters for Collaborative Reasoning.

The above parameters show that CR has a unique emphasis on student participation because students are free to talk when they want to talk, as they would in conversation. This lessens the role of the teacher regarding who speaks and when. This feature also gives students greater control of the topic by allowing them to listen to other student’s interpretations and ideas as opposed to only listening to the teacher’s. Interpretive authority is given to students, who are allowed to determine which positions to accept and reject. The CR framework emphasizes the critical/analytic framework but also has an aesthetic focus because students are encouraged to draw from personal experiences and reactions when responding to text. As Rosenblatt (1982) said of the aesthetic stance, “A much broader range of elements will be allowed to rise into
consciousness, not simply the abstract concepts that the words point to, but also what those objects or referents stir up of personal feelings, ideas and attitudes” (p.269).

Because a key element of CR is teaching students how to think and to support their thinking with reasons, research on CR tends to examine how students formulate arguments, and how the CR parameters affect classroom discourse patterns.

A study that launched the inquiry regarding CR and classroom discourse (Chinn et al, 1997) focused on whether students in elementary school were able to make logical, valid, arguments. This study demonstrated that most students’ arguments are logically valid even though they may leave out some information when constructing them. It also noted that what students omit can usually be reconstructed by the listener, thus making the arguments intelligible. Anderson, Nguyen-Jahiel, McNurlen, Archodidou, Kim, Reznitskaya, Tillmanss, and Gilbert (2001) further investigated how students think and talk during CR discussions and noted that students were able to pick up successful argumentation strategies used by their peers during discussions. They found that students observed how their peers convinced each other of certain positions during discussions, and adapted these strategies for their own purposes both in CR discussions and in their personal lives.

Building on knowledge obtained from these studies, Clark, Anderson, Kuo, Kim, Archodidou, and Nguyen-Jahiel (2003) decided to investigate the CR frame to see if increased students’ abilities to explore and argue diverse points of views. Their rationale for investigating this question was that the traditional discourse patterns of the classroom (the IRE) restrict the ways children talk and think in school. According to Clark et al. (2003) “When questions have only one right answer, students are not able to consider
alternative points of view…However, when students are permitted to participate in a form of reasoned argumentation, they may hear several voices representing contrasting perspectives on an issue” (p.182-183). These types of interchanges allow for reflection and provide opportunities for comparisons. Further, CR discussions allow students to listen to others as they think aloud and offers each student that same opportunity.

As part of an ongoing three-year study, Clark et al, (2003) reported four characteristics of the CR framework and how it contributed to students’ ways of talking and thinking. They reported that 1) children responded to text, 2) they used the text to consider multiple possibilities, 3) they used tools to persuade others, and 4) they had control over turn-taking and the topic of the discussion. The researchers also summarized some key elements for conducting CR discussions. The table below is based on information presented in Clark et al. (2003) and shows some of the key components of the framework with regard to the procedure for discussion, the ground rules given to elementary students, and the teacher’s role.
After reading a story, the class comes together to discuss it. The teacher poses a central question. Students freely explain their positions on the question. Students expand on their ideas adding reasons and supporting evidence from the story and everyday experience. At the end of the discussion, the teacher takes a poll to see where everyone stands. The students and teacher review the discussion and make suggestions for improvement.

Table 2.3. Procedures for Students and the Teacher in CR Discussions

Clark et al (2003) concluded that CR was useful for helping students develop ways of thinking and reasoning together. Specifically, the authors stated, “To construct new conceptions and acquire new ways of thinking, students benefit from having an opportunity to express their ideas and listen to the ideas of others (p.198).
Another study of the CR framework (Chinn et al, 2001) sought to determine if teachers could successfully implement the framework, and, if so, whether it would have an impact on classroom discourse patterns. Regarding the first question, the authors found that the teachers could implement the CR framework but they were not completely successful in adapting to each of the framework’s parameters. They found that the teachers were able to shift from an efferent stance to a critical-analytic stance quite well and that they were also successful in relinquishing interpretive authority. However, the teachers were only partially successful in ceding control of the topic and of turn-taking. On the whole, the results of this study indicated that CR is recommended for use for teachers who want to: 1) enhance student engagement and 2) encourage students to elaborate on their ideas, make predictions, use evidence to support opinions, and express or consider alternatives. The authors also noted that teachers who want to focus on the events of story would not have to sacrifice that emphasis when using CR because their study found no decrease in explanations of story-related events in CR discussions. Finally, they stressed that teachers who want to promote the use of evidence and elaboration during discussions about texts would be good candidates for the CR framework.

Until now, research on CR has been conducted in native language environments with elementary school children. The current study will implement the CR framework in the university, foreign language literature classroom to determine if the approach is also successful and adaptable for work with older learners. Specifically, this study will investigate the effects of CR on students’ oral participation as well as its usefulness for promoting response to Francophone texts. In an elementary school context, the emphasis
in CR is on developing students’ ability to reason and think critically about texts. Because university students will have more advanced reasoning skills, the emphasis will be on helping students learn how to convert the ideas they have in English (or other native language) into a comprehensible message in the target language. In this study, one goal was to implement CR in order to give students opportunities for extended discourse which would in turn allow them to develop their abilities to express their ideas about literature in the target language.

**Rationale for Collaborative Reasoning in an Upper-division French literature course**

The primary reason to use CR in the university FL classroom is that it inherently supports many of the foreign language advanced speaking goals outlined in the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. These goals include participating in social conversations, discussing topics that have personal relevance and/or individual significance, and using extended discourse. In addition, CR also connects well with the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (ACTFL, 1999). These Standards complement the ACTFL guidelines and expand the boundaries of language learning curricular goals. The Standards ask teachers to consider how to incorporate complementary elements such as cultural traits and concepts, communication strategies, critical thinking skills, and learning strategies into their instruction. The Standards identify five specific areas: Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. The Communication Standard comprises three goal areas for students to achieve as FL learners. The chart below provides the Communication Standards:
**Table 2.4: Communication Standards for Foreign Language**

In addition to developing communication and speaking goals, CR embraces the idea that students need to understand alternative perspectives and viewpoints presented through the target language and culture, a goal specifically identified in the Connections Standard. (Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures).

Likewise, in CR discussions students consider how their peers are interpreting and analyzing literature which may serve to facilitate their own reasoning and thinking about a text (Clark et al, 2003).

The emphasis CR puts on the critical-analytic stance is also an important focus for learners in advanced FL contexts because the advanced proficiency level requires that students have the ability to reason and to defend their opinions in the target language. In CR discussions, “the discussion is a process of teasing out and working through ‘big’ issues; handling of ambiguity and opposing viewpoints; reasoning, exploring, evaluation and building of arguments; and holding one's own or letting go within a social context”
In the foreign language university classroom, this type of discussion would provide students with opportunities to develop their ability to explore texts and build arguments using the target language. Likewise, as students talk about literary texts, they would have opportunities to express their opinions and support those opinions as their peers react to them. The interaction between talking and thinking would give students authentic opportunities to formulate and express their ideas in the university foreign language literature classroom, something not always present in this setting. An additional benefit is that as students present and share ideas they may be able to clarify their comprehension of the text. As Chinn et al (2001) noted CR is appropriate for teachers who want to use discussion to highlight or confirm story events.

Although other approaches encourage critical reading and thinking, CR distinctively employs the Open Participation Structure which encourages students to talk freely, as in conversation, without being called on by the teacher (Chinn, et al. 2001). This particular feature is important for the upper-division foreign language classroom because, according to Donato and Brooks (2004), students need to have multiple turns in talking and chances to express themselves if they are going to produce extended discourse. Extended discourse is important because it is a marker of an advanced speaker.

As was noted earlier, CR is recommended for use when teachers wish to emphasize that students should elaborate on their ideas and support their opinions with evidence from the text. Soter, Rudge, Wilkinson, Murphy, Reninger, and Edwards
(2007) found that discussions in which a critical-analytic stance is prominent (especially as opposed to an efferent stance) result in shared control between students and teachers. The open participation structure, coupled with the emphasis on the critical-analytic stance, would seem to make CR extremely well suited for discussion in the upper-division FL literature context.

In summary, the goals for extended discourse, communication, critical thinking and developing a personal relationship with literary texts are all addressed by the CR framework and may be one means by which to simultaneously address language and literary goals.

In the next chapter, I explain the methodology framing the current study and provide information regarding the role of the researcher, the participants, the setting, and the data sources and procedures for analysis. Also in Chapter 3 is more detailed information describing the Francophone literature course, the students in the course, and the texts taught in the course. The chapter also gives more detail regarding how CR was incorporated into the literature classroom. This information is provided to help the reader make sense of the results presented in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is organized into two major sections. The first section describes the students and the design of the Francophone literature course. I then turn to the second major section of this chapter, in which I focus on the research methodology. In this section, I describe my role as a teacher/researcher and the research design. Finally, I describe the data collection strategies, analysis, and the reliability and trustworthiness criteria.

The Students and the Francophone Literature Course

In the first major section of this chapter, I give an overview of the study’s context by providing a description of the setting, the students, and the francophone literature course. A summary of the students, the course, and the manner in which CR discussions occurred will facilitate an interpretation of the data presented in the next chapter. Likewise, a description of the students’ attitudes toward each other and their expectations for language learning and literature study in the first week of the semester will provide a backdrop against which their later reactions to the CR framework can be better understood.

Setting

This study took place in a private, religious university in the southeastern United States with a population of about 4000 students. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures offers courses in four languages (French, German, Spanish, and Russian),
but students are not required to study a language unless they are receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree. Students who are required to study a language must do so for at least one year. As a result, first-year courses for all languages are consistently full (15-20 students per section). While Spanish sees consistent enrollment at all levels, French, German and Russian often have smaller numbers of students enrolling in upper-division courses. Fewer students major in French or German than in Spanish. A typical upper division course in French (or German) has between five and 10 students.

**The Students**

The current study describes the experiences of eight female students enrolled in the course, “Francophone Literature and Culture” (French 453), which I taught during the fall semester of the 2005-2006 academic year. Students eligible for an upper-division course such as this are required to have completed at least 4 semesters of French at the college level. Alternatively, students who receive sufficient placement test scores can also enroll in a course above the intermediate level. The eight students enrolled in this course were equally divided among seniors and freshmen. The seniors had taken many courses in French at the college level, whereas the freshmen, while having had previous French study, had not had any experience with French courses at the university level. All of the freshmen tested into the course through the placement test. The placement test measures students’ abilities in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar. There is no speaking assessment. As is the case for many universities, once students complete the initial course sequences (elementary and intermediate French), they can choose any course offered at the upper-division level. Therefore, students in these courses frequently have varying levels of proficiency. Additionally, some students in upper division courses
are majoring in French, and others may be completing a minor if they transferred in courses from other institutions.

At the beginning of the Francophone literature course, each student wrote an essay in English describing herself and her experiences with language learning and culture. In these essays, students were asked to provide three adjectives that described themselves best, which I include in each student’s introduction below. In the first week of the course, I also asked the students to share any goals, hopes or fears they had regarding the class. I compiled a brief description of each participant based on their essays and other general information they submitted. The descriptions are below.

**Alison** - Alison described herself as “passionate, quirky and fascinating”, and she arrived at the third adjective through “much reflection and discussion among my close friends.” The latter phrase accurately represents how Alison approaches the world; she processes ideas and problems through discussion with others. She is an outgoing, talkative, fun-loving student interested in learning about the world around her. In her language learning autobiography, she shared that her love for learning about other countries developed as a young child. She remembered circling around the kitchen table to look at the globe so she and her brothers and sisters could see where their father had traveled for work. She studied Spanish as a child and French in high school and traveled to France as a sophomore. While in high school, her family welcomed Laurent, a French exchange student, into their home for a year. Once at college, Alison studied French and German, and she spent a semester abroad in Vienna, Austria. Alison saw her future in politics, and she would like to work on issues related to improving conditions for women in developing nations.
Her goals for this Francophone literature course included improving her speaking skills and forming a French club. When speaking about her fears, she said that she was frustrated that “I can’t communicate at the level I want to be at, the level that should correspond with my understanding.” Prior to taking this course on Francophone literature, she took “Advanced Conversation and Phonetics”, as well as “Survey of French Literature I”, “Advanced Grammar and Composition”, “French Civilization”, and “French Culture”.

Alison was a strong student and participant in this course. She was always prepared for the discussions and was eager to share her opinions and interpretations of the stories. Alison was able to talk about a variety of topics and often related her understanding of the text to other subjects. She drew extensively on background knowledge to make sense of the texts. Regarding her proficiency in French, Alison correctly assessed that she had a hard time expressing herself accurately. She was not short on ideas, but her vocabulary was sometimes limited in discussions of specialized topics. Nevertheless, she never gave up when she wanted to get a point across.

April - April was double-majoring in English and French. She chose the following three adjectives to describe herself: “curious, melodramatic, and funny”. April grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, and she and her family have lived in the same house for the past 15 years. She openly shared that she came from a White, upper-middle class, Protestant family who did not encounter people with backgrounds different from their own. However, she recently had the opportunity to travel to France with friends. Following this trip, she decided to study abroad in Vienna, Austria. She participated in this program with Alison, another student in this course. April was dramatically
impacted by the study abroad program and shared the following observation: “I will never be able to capture the profound impact that experience had, and is still having, on my life. I was finally surrounded by people who neither talked like me, nor looked like me, nor thought like me…Vienna lifted the inhibitions and constraints that I had been subjected to my entire life.”

Clearly, April was eager and willing to discover and study new perspectives. Regarding her goals for the Francophone literature course, she shared that she would like to improve her grammar and her ability to conjugate verbs correctly while speaking. She noted that she was comfortable discussing a variety of topics, but she wanted to extend her vocabulary. She also noted she wanted to improve her fluency in reading but “especially in speaking.” Prior to taking this course on Francophone literature, she had taken the intermediate French course sequence (grammar and composition, and conversation) as well as “Survey of French Literature I and II”, “Topics in French Film”, “French Culture”, and “Advanced Conversation and Phonetics”.

As a student in this course, April had a strong love for literature. In some ways, she felt that being an English major gave her an advantage over other students in the course because she was used to going beyond the surface when reading and had a lot of experience reading and analyzing texts. As a result, she felt prepared to do the same in French as was confident in her ability to understand texts. Regarding her French speaking skills, April communicated messages effectively and generally narrated in various time frames correctly. She was a strong participant in the course and was always prepared for discussions.
Audrey – Audrey described herself as “fun-loving, easy-going, and blonde”. In her essay, she focused on how similar she was to everyone around her while growing up. All of the families in her subdivision were White, upper-middle class, and religious. She had attended private, religious schools since the 6th grade. As a result, she said that she was not exposed to other cultures, or even to beliefs that differed greatly from her own or her family’s. Audrey started studying French in high school. Although she was a very strong student in English courses and enjoyed studying and analyzing her native language, she quickly recognized that learning a different language was challenging. In her essay she wrote, “Starting from scratch was hard, and very scary. Once I started catching onto conjugations, tenses, accents, and some vocabulary, I began feeling more and more at ease… [but] I knew that a major factor in my comfort level was the fact that I only had to speak French in a very controlled environment.” To challenge her speaking skills, Audrey signed up to go to France for a week with her French club. While in France, she said, “I was able to carry on understandable conversations with Parisians in their own language. I knew that they knew that I was an American, but I believe I earned just a little of their respect by relentlessly trying out my French.” Audrey’s concerns for this course related to discussing assigned readings. She wrote, “A lot of times when I’m speaking I get flustered when I can’t think of a certain word or phrase, or an accurate way of describing something. I have a basic vocabulary but I would like to increase it. Also, it’s hard for me to generate conversation about an unfamiliar topic; I usually try to feed off of what others are saying.” Audrey had not had any previous university French courses prior to the French 453 course.
Audrey was probably the strongest freshman student in the course. Although she was not the most vocal, she was accurate when she spoke, and her written work was consistently accurate as well. Although she was hesitant to talk in whole-class discussions, she participated strongly when she was in a group made up of the instructor and the other freshmen. Audrey occasionally lacked confidence in herself, even though she was a capable student. She probably could have challenged herself more in this course, but she preferred to stay at a level where things were comfortable and familiar.

**Christine** – The three adjectives Christine chose to describe herself were “artistic, intelligent, and silly.” Her interest in French began in the 2nd grade, and she later combined her love for French with art. Christine felt that her love for French separated her from other kids and made her special. She continued studying French in middle school and at her academically oriented high school. However, in this specialized setting she realized that other students also loved French. She also realized that other students were talented language learners. She said of this experience, “In high school I was no longer the smartest in the class…there were students who learned faster than I did or who were better at conversation than I was. This was discouraging and I began not to work as hard.” After completing the AP French course in her junior year of high school, Christine gave up French for a year because she “began to associate French with disappointment and very hard work.” The summer before her senior year, however, she went to France for an Art History tour. Discovering art and finding herself in the French culture reignited her interest in French. She loved the challenge of communicating with “actual French citizens”. This trip encouraged her to pursue French studies in college in
conjunction with her goal to become an architect. Christine had not taken any previous university French courses prior to the course investigated in this study.

Christine was nervous coming into the course because it had been a year since she had taken a French course. Perhaps because of this, Christine found the course especially challenging and she, of the freshmen, seemed most frustrated by the pace and the independent nature of the course. The readings were somewhat challenging for her. Although she began the course with a lot of enthusiasm, she did not maintain that level throughout the course. There were points in the semester where she seemed to lose her focus and her momentum. As a French speaker, Christine was not timid when it came to participating in discussions, and she did a good job communicating her message even though she struggled at times to do so.

**Ginny** - Ginny described herself as “intelligent, excited and personal”. Her essay also revealed how she perceived herself in relation to others. She wrote, “I’m not sure there was ever a time where I felt I truly fit in.” She elaborated on this by adding that she did not like mainstream culture and did not share the religious or political beliefs of most of her peers. Her desire to study other cultures began with a trip to Honduras as a high school junior. Though she did not know Spanish, with the help of a friend and through gestures and music, she was able to communicate. Later, in high school, she also had a friend from Belgium, who inspired her to study French and reflect on American ideals and her American identity. From these conversations she concluded, “[English] is not the language I desire to speak. This isn’t the society I fit into, nor do I want to fit in. I have no problem with my abnormality, and in fact, I take pride it in probably more than I should.” When asked to share her hopes and fears for the Francophone literature course,
she wrote, “This class excites me hugely…I hope to improve my vocabulary. I feel like I use a lot of the same words over and over again which is obnoxious.” Ginny had not had any previous university French courses prior to this course.

As a student, Ginny struggled in this course. Though she was excited at the beginning of the semester, she did not seem prepared for the amount of time and effort a literature course would require. Ginny had always associated learning French with something that was enjoyable and made her feel unique. Thus, it appeared that she did not view French as a serious subject. Ginny did not speak frequently in the discussions, and when she did, it was usually in response to what others said; she rarely initiated conversations.

Lisa - Lisa chose “reserved, thoughtful and trustworthy” to describe herself. Like April, her family still lives in the house in which she grew up. Lisa traveled outside of the country for the first time the year before the study when she spent a week in Paris with a group of students. She described the experience as “overwhelming” and “frightening”. However, she also noted that she enjoyed reflecting on cultural differences. Lisa struggled to learn how to read and write as a child, but overcame her difficulties in middle school. She had high expectations for herself and strove for perfection. In describing her experience in school, she explained that “I have enjoyed it when I am in a class that sparks an interest in me or if I am in a relaxed environment. But it is when I place too much pressure on myself to succeed that I tend to lose enjoyment from school.” Lisa’s goal for this class was to “develop a better understanding of French culture and to become better at discussing French literature but also any general topics in French.” Although Lisa’s goal was to become better at discussing things in French, her
fear for the course was in direct opposition to achieving her goal. She shared that she
was not always “talkative or open to discussing things in French.” Prior to enrolling in
this course, Lisa transferred credits from another institution, including the elementary and
intermediate French sequences as well as “Survey of French Literature I”, and “Quebec:
Life and Letters”. At this university she had taken “Advanced Conversation and
Phonetics”.

Lisa was a conscientious student who always completed her assignments carefully
and accurately. In my estimation, she put a lot of time into the various assignments in
this course. Because she was reserved and quiet, it was difficult to tell how Lisa felt about
the course. She was not passionate, but she was dependable. She was also reserved in
discussions. She was hesitant to speak because she feared making mistakes and because
she was such a private person. Though she was a good student, it was not always easy to
engage Lisa personally in the course on a regular basis.

Sandra – Sandra described herself as “sarcastic, friendly and small”. She spent
the majority of her childhood in Illinois, although she also lived in Louisiana and
Oklahoma. Sandra started studying French in junior high and said that she chose French
over Spanish because “French was a much more eloquent language and I liked the idea of
being able to speak and understand it.” Although she had had few experiences with
people from other cultures, she did take a ten-day trip to France while in high school.
She enjoyed experiencing the culture of Paris but added that “there were very few
opportunities to actually speak the language because as soon as we were identified as
Americans no one wanted to speak French to us.” Befriending a German exchange
student in high school added to her interest in language learning, especially when she saw
how fluently he was able to speak English after only ten months in the U.S. This observation motivated Sandra to continue studying French in college so that she could “put the years she has been studying French to use” in the future.

Sandra did not list any hopes or goals for the course, but she did identify some fears. She noted she had trouble comprehending what she read in French and was afraid that she would not understand all of the stories we would read in class. She also shared some apprehension regarding speaking: “I am not very good at discussing complex ideas or topics in French. I feel like I do not have a strong enough vocabulary or enough grammar comprehension to have a well-worded logical discussion in French”. Sandra had not had any previous university French courses prior to this semester.

In this course, Sandra was usually positive. She seemed to enjoy reading the literary texts, even though she said she found them challenging at times. Toward the middle of the semester, she seemed to be negatively impacted by Ginny and Christine, whose attitudes had become less enthusiastic. As a result, her level of preparation dipped. Nevertheless, when she participated in small group discussions, she did not hesitate to take a leadership role, and the other members benefited from her presence. She offered interpretations and possibilities to consider during small group discussions and did well in the course overall.

Teresa- Teresa’s three adjectives for herself were “quiet, sincere and dependable.” She grew up in Dallas, Texas and remembered hearing English and Spanish as a small child. The schools she attended were in diverse communities, and she had many friends from various backgrounds who spoke languages other than English. She also traveled to various places with school or missionary groups, including Mexico,
London and Paris. As a junior majoring in French, she participated in a month-long immersion program in Chicoutimi, Québec. She described the program as intense and frustrating because of the challenges involved in communicating with others. In her essay she elaborated on her feelings while in Québec: “When my host father picked me up from the university that first day, he tried to hold a conversation with me on the way to the house, but I was so nervous that I had no idea what he was saying. I could not even form a sentence to respond or explain that I was nervous.” She went on to say that she thought the program was very hard and very tiring because of how difficult it was to communicate accurately, as well as how challenging it was to understand what was being said to her. Despite the frustrations she experienced, she said that she learned a lot about herself during the program and that she felt her speaking abilities improved.

Regarding her hopes and fears for the course, she shared that she was very excited about studying Francophone literature and culture, i.e. literature written in French produced by writers living in countries other than France, such as Sénégal, Cameroon, Québec, Vietnam, etc. As for her fears, she said, “I have horrible stage fright and holding discussions is very hard for me in French or in English. Teresa had a strong background in French. In addition to Beginning and Intermediate French, she took “Survey of French Literature I & II”, “Topics in French Film”, “Advanced Conversation and Phonetics”, “Advanced Grammar and Composition”, “French Civilization”, and “French Culture”. Teresa also participated in the immersion program in Chicoutimi.

Teresa was probably the strongest student in this course. Although she was very shy and did not like to speak, she was the most accurate speaker in the group. Her time in Québec had given her confidence in speaking ability, and she did not search for words or
tenses as many of the other students did. Despite her abilities, she was timid and recognized that she did not “get things going” in discussions. Nevertheless, she was always prepared for discussions and class meetings and was a diligent student.

Moving to the students as a group, Table 3.1 below summarizes their key features.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Years of French</th>
<th>Self-Rated ACTFL level</th>
<th>ACTFL level based on course performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 years of high school French 3 ½ years of college French</td>
<td>Advanced low</td>
<td>Advanced low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Curious Melodramatic Funny</td>
<td>High school French 3 years of college French</td>
<td>Advanced-mid or low</td>
<td>Advanced low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Easy-going Fun-loving Blonde</td>
<td>4 years of high school French</td>
<td>Intermediate-high</td>
<td>Intermediate high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Artistic Intelligent Silly</td>
<td>Middle school French High School French No French senior year of high school</td>
<td>Intermediate-high</td>
<td>Intermediate-high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Intelligent Excited Personal</td>
<td>High school French</td>
<td>Advanced low-Advanced-mid</td>
<td>Intermediate-mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Reserved Thoughtful Trust-worthy</td>
<td>Middle school French High school French 3 years of College French</td>
<td>Intermediate-high to Advanced low</td>
<td>Advanced-low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sarcastic Friendly Small</td>
<td>8th grade French 4 years of high school French</td>
<td>Intermediate high to Advanced-low</td>
<td>Intermediate high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Quiet Sincere Dependable</td>
<td>High school French 4 years of college French Study Abroad in Québec</td>
<td>Advanced-mid</td>
<td>Advanced-mid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Background Information about the Participants
From these brief descriptions, it is clear that each participant brought a unique set of experiences to this literature course. As is true for every class, the students’ backgrounds, personalities, and previous experiences in French classes shaped how they interacted during this semester. Thus, a useful way to analyze the students’ encounters with Collaborative Reasoning Discussions was to compare the first year and senior level students, as will be seen in Chapter Four. This section provides some comparative commentary on the students as two distinct groups in order to contextualize the results seen in Chapter Four. By level, the two groups were:

**Freshmen:** Audrey, Christine, Ginny, and Sandra

**Seniors:** Alison, April, Lisa, and Teresa

From the beginning of the course, it was clear that the freshmen and seniors would struggle to connect with each other. For example, it quickly became apparent that the students in this course were aware of academic and social differences and that these differences contributed to their status in the course. Given this development, an interesting question that arose in the study was whether their differences in status would impact on their interaction within the CR framework, a variable discussed in the next chapter.

Perhaps the biggest obstacle the freshmen faced in the course was a lack of experience and maturity. Because there were no sophomores or juniors to bridge the gap between freshmen and seniors, the differences between the two groups were more pronounced than might otherwise have been the case. Interestingly, Ginny (freshman) and Alison (senior) both referred to age when they described their hopes and fears for the course on the first day of class. Ginny wrote, “I tend to doubt myself a lot so I guess I’m
kind of afraid of not understanding when everyone else does, especially with the *older* girls in the class.” Meanwhile, Alison hoped that “the *older* girls will start a French club and go out speak French, watch films etc, together.” It is unclear whether Alison intended to include the “younger” girls in these outings, but it is obvious that she had already organized the members into two groups based on age.

The freshmen and seniors quickly perceived their differences, which also surfaced when they discussed their love for French and their reasons for studying the French language. Sandra, Christine, and Ginny (freshmen), for example, shared an idealistic view toward the French language. Sandra expressed an appreciation for the stereotypical romantic appeal of French by saying she would like to meet and marry a gorgeous French man. Ginny said that she was obsessed with “all things French”, and Christine shared that she wore a beret for a year in order to “be French”. With the exception of Audrey, all the freshmen in the course expressed these superficial views toward French study.

In contrast to the freshmen, the seniors expressed their reasons for studying French in less romantic terms. Their perspective on language study was more focused, and many specifically spoke about the relationship between language and culture. Teresa, for example, shared the following about her study of French: “My experiences have taught me to be observant and sensitive to what people are doing and how they feel in certain situations. I hope to continue to experience different cultures, and maybe even learn another language, so that I can keep adding to my understanding of the world around me.” Lisa expressed a similar idea. In her essay she wrote that “being around people from different cultures always presents some level of discomfort, but there is also
a sense of adventure and interest in trying to learn about their lives and connect on some level with individuals who are so different from you.” Alison’s interest in French began in high school. She describes how hosting an exchange student from France encouraged her to broaden her understanding of culture. She wrote: “In August, Laurent came to live with my family for an entire year. He shared a room with my brother, and took classes with me at the high school. It was one of the best years of my life, seeing America, and small town Ohio from the perspective of an entirely different culture.” Clearly, years of French study and diverse experiences had enabled the seniors to examine the relationships between language and culture more deeply than the freshmen. Their diverse experiences had also prepared them well for a course exploring culture from a Francophone perspective.

Though it would be unlikely for freshmen to begin their university studies with a similar level of knowledge and experiences as the seniors, these differences toward language learning affected how their perceived each other. For instance, Christine (a freshman) stated that “a lot of us think the seniors are intimidating.” Perhaps because of this perspective, seniors and freshmen tended to stick together: seniors with seniors and freshmen with freshmen. For instance, the freshmen did not look to the seniors for help even though, on some occasions, the seniors did try to extend it. Instead, the freshmen preferred the comfort of being together and did not want to seem as though they needed guidance or assistance from the seniors.

As the semester continued, the differences between the freshmen and seniors posed some unique challenges for me as their instructor regarding how to provide each group with a supportive learning environment. In the next chapter, I will deal more
specifically with how the differences between these two groups contributed to their expectations for the course and to their participation in CR discussions.

The Francophone Literature Course

Course Design

I designed the bulk of the syllabus (Appendix A) for French 453 as a project for one of my doctoral courses. While doing doctoral work, the university from which I had taken a leave of absence asked me to develop an upper division course focusing on literature from countries other than France. One of the purposes for this course was to enable students to develop an appreciation for the term Francophone and to encounter literature from diverse cultural perspectives. Traditionally, our department had only offered literature courses that surveyed literature from France, and these courses did not include writers from Québec, West Africa or Vietnam. Thus, I was asked to create a course that included literature from various countries where French was a dominant language.

For me, the course presented an exciting challenge because I had not taught a literature course dedicated exclusively to Francophone literature. As I was planning the course, I decided to use a textbook entitled Diversité: la nouvelle francophone. This anthology of short stories aimed at students at intermediate and advanced levels seemed to align well with my goals for the course. In the preface of the book, the editors explain that the text “reflects their current research on the Francophone short story, their commitment to communication-based reading strategies, and their effort to diversify and enrich the French language curriculum” (Gaasch & Budig-Markin, 2002, p. vii). As I
examined the text, I found it to be accessible to students at varying ability levels, as the authors had identified the level of study in years of French that corresponded to each story. For example, a story requiring two semesters of French received two stars.

A typical chapter in *Diversité* contains three stories, each of which has pre- and post reading activities. Pre-reading activities included activating students’ schema by giving background information about the country and the author (in English), by asking students to reflect on personal experiences related to the textual themes, and by presenting vocabulary unique to the story or likely to be unfamiliar to students. Post-reading activities ranged from reordering story events, rewriting passages of the story from the perspective of one of the characters, and answering short answer or essay format questions. Culminating activities at the end of each chapter asked students to compare and contrast the themes, characters, events and sometimes the language of each of the three stories.

The textbook includes short stories which are grouped into thematic units. Each unit contains three short stories. Table 3.2 below indicates how the book is organized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>La souffrance et l’éloquence</td>
<td>Suffering and Eloquence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>L’aventure et l’amour</td>
<td>Love and Adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>La culture et la différence</td>
<td>Culture and Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Les couples et la crise</td>
<td>Couples and Crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>La révolte et L’espoir</td>
<td>Revolt and Hope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Units and Themes for *Diversité: La Nouvelle Francophone.*
Each of the units contained three short stories. However, we did not always read every story in the unit because I incorporated a film and some student presentations into the course. This resulted in the students having less time to read everything in the textbook. In addition to the stories, students saw one film, “La Rue Cases Negres” which, in English, is “Sugar Cane Alley”. This film was viewed prior to the Culture and Difference unit. The course consisted of 15 weeks of instruction, and I organized the CR discussions around each of the chapter units. That is, at the end of every unit, there was a CR discussion, lasting between 25 and 40 minutes.

**Timeline for CR Discussions**

Throughout this project, I refer to the discussions by order of occurrence (Discussion 1, Discussion 2 etc.). If two groups were discussing the same stories, I refer to the Discussions as 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B and so on. Table 3.3 below summarizes the content of each discussion and the members who participated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 1</td>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>Teacher, April, Alison, Audrey, Christine, Ginny, Lisa, Sandra</td>
<td>Une Lettre, Bonjour, Maman, Bonne Fête Maman, L’ombre et L’absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(whole-class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 2</td>
<td>October 12</td>
<td>Teacher, April, Alison, Audrey, Christine, Ginny, Lisa, Sandra, Teresa</td>
<td>La Rue Cases Nègres, Pour empêcher un mariage/ La Montagne de Feu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(whole-class)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 3A</td>
<td>November 3</td>
<td>Teacher, Audrey, Christine, Ginny, Sandra</td>
<td>Pur Polyestre/ La Noire De…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Freshmen group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 3B</td>
<td>November 3</td>
<td>Teacher, April, Alison, Lisa, Teresa</td>
<td>Pur Polyestre/ La Noire De…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Senior group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 4A</td>
<td>November 17</td>
<td>Teacher, April, Audrey, Lisa, Teresa</td>
<td>Les Triangles de Chloé, L’Amertume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mixed group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 4B</td>
<td>November 22</td>
<td>Teacher, Alison, Christine, Ginny, Sandra</td>
<td>Les Triangles de Chloé, L’Amertume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Mixed group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 5A</td>
<td>December 1</td>
<td>Teacher, Audrey, Christine, Ginny, Sandra</td>
<td>Le Mur ou les charmes d’une vie conjugale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Freshmen group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 5B</td>
<td>December 1</td>
<td>Teacher, April, Alison, Lisa, Teresa</td>
<td>Le Mur ou les charmes d’une vie conjugale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Senior group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3: Discussion Dates, Participants, and Texts


**Texts used in the Francophone Literature Course**

The set of stories used in the first discussion was about suffering and eloquence. The story “Une Lettre” is a letter written from an elderly woman to her neglectful son. The second story, “Bonjour Maman! Bonne fête, Maman!” is the story of a young girl whose family has left her behind to pursue wealth outside of their homeland. The third story in this group, “L’Ombre et l’absent”, is based on a true event recorded in ancient Vietnamese literature. In the story, a father who has returned from war believes his wife has cheated on him because of a tragic misunderstanding with his young son. While he was away, his wife told their son that a shadow on the wall was his father. Upon his return, the young son refuses to acknowledge him because he does not know him as his father. The husband does not share this with his wife; instead, he accuses her of unfaithfulness, which leads her to commit suicide.

The second group of stories dealt with love and adventure. “Pour empêcher un mariage” is the story of a mother and daughter who make a long journey through Canada to try and dissuade the eldest daughter in the family from marrying. The other story in this unit, “La Montagne de feu,” takes place in Martinique. A young girl, Léona, becomes pregnant because her boss has abused her. She fights with a friend over some money which she wants to have in order to flee to Fort-de-France, a large city nearby. A young boy who loves her secures the money for her and follows her to Fort-de-France, where he then becomes the father of her young son. After they are safely in Fort-de-France, the volcano (the Montagne de feu) erupts and destroys the city from which Léona had fled, and to which she had promised never to return. The film, “La Rue Cases Nègres”, which was also discussed in this unit, is the story of José, who is a bright young
scholar who can overcome the sentence of working in the cane fields if he will accept the help of his grandmother and seek out a French education.

The next unit, Culture and Difference, included the stories “Pur Polyester” and “La Noire de…” “Pur Polyester” explores the feelings of belonging and exclusion in modern Québec through the eyes of families who have recently immigrated to Canada. “La Noire de…” by Ousmane Sembène begins with the discovery of a housekeeper’s dead body in the house where she worked. As the story unfolds, we learn that the housekeeper was Diouana, who had served the family as a governess before they relocated from Dakar to France. Upon relocating to France, Diouana is reduced to a maid and is mistreated by her employers, who constantly remind her of her racial inferiority. Her hope for a better future turns to despair, and she sees suicide as the only escape.

The stories in the 4th discussion dealt with the theme of Revolt and Hope. “Amertume” is the story of Nzuzi, a woman living in the Congo who learns that her husband is leaving their ten-year marriage and three children for his mistress. Despite the rules of her culture, Nzuzi, manages to eke out a living to provide for her children. The story is ultimately one of triumph when Zany, the ex-husband, has a desperate request that can only be granted by the son he abandoned. “Les Triangles de Chloé” is the story of Chloé who has spent 21 consecutive weeks visiting a therapist to help her overcome an infernal love triangle. In the waiting room each week, she is forced to study a painting of an abstract triangle, which only emphasizes her situation. After weeks of looking at the painting, she becomes enraged and destroys it with a letter opener she finds on the secretary’s desk. She claims she is cured. Upon leaving the office, she begins to regret her action and returns to the office to apologize. However, when she arrives there she
sees that the painting has already been replaced with another copy exactly like the one she destroyed.

The final story in our discussions was from the unit on Couples and Crises and was entitled, “Le Mur ou les charmes d’une vie conjugale”. This story is about a marriage of several years that has deteriorated to the point where the husband no longer talks to his wife. The story is told from the wife’s sarcastic perspective and consists of a description of 24 hours in their life.

**Instructional Procedures in the Francophone Literature Course**

**Presentation of CR to Students**

In the initial week of class, I explained to the students that I was working on my dissertation. I shared my interest in the literature classroom as a research site and gave some background information about the “split” between language and literature courses, and how these two sets of courses tend to emphasize different skills. I explained that I wanted to address both their language development and their knowledge of literature over the course of the semester. I did not share my specific focus for the project, but I did let them know I was interested in their language development in the context of a literature course. Likewise, I explained that we were going to use a specific framework to encourage speaking in this course, because speaking is often overlooked in literature courses. (I describe how I presented this framework to the class later in this chapter.) I also made them aware of the types of information I would collect (i.e. a pre- and post-course survey about literature, video and/or audiotapes of class sessions, and classroom essays or other assignments). Following this disclosure, all of the eight students enrolled
in the course gave their consent to participate in the study. Over the next several class meetings, I explained that I wanted us to work together to build an environment that encouraged discussion and student participation. I explained that we would talk about stories as we read them and would participate in various activities to promote their understanding of literature and culture.

Students’ participation in course meetings and in the chapter discussions contributed to a percentage of their grade in the course. The CR discussions at the end of unit counted as a participation grade for that unit. Students received a 0 for participation if they missed the unit discussion, unless an opportunity for a make-up discussion presented itself (as occurred with the fourth CR discussion). Because this was an addition to my course, I did not attempt to quantify participation in the discussions themselves. Participation takes many forms (e.g. listening, preparing for discussions, reflecting after discussions), so I did not want to dictate exactly what participation looked like. However, I did emphasize the importance of participation in CR discussions, and whether students were present for them accounted for 50 of the total 100 participation points possible for the semester. Thus, each of the five discussions offered the possibility of 10 participation points. For this course, the participation grade represented 15% of the total course grade.

In addition to the CR discussions, the course included two student presentations to provide opportunities for presentational communication. The first presentation required students to research the history and culture of one of the countries or provinces represented in our text. The second presentation required students to investigate a movement (i.e. la Négritude), or a particular author, or present a poem or song that
corresponded to one of the themes in the course. Of course, there were numerous other assignments over the course of the semester. Students wrote compositions, maintained reading journals, practiced various tenses, completed a translation project, participated in a WEBCT companion site, and completed many of the reading activities in the textbook.

At the upper-division level, it is generally assumed that students are able to complete all assignments in the target language. Regarding my expectations for target language use in this course, the students were expected to make presentations in French, to read all stories in French, to discuss the stories in French, and to do pre-and post reading assignments in French. I explained to the students that I viewed this upper-division course as a means to help them develop literacy in French, which required using French for the majority of the assignments. The only assignments the students completed in English were journals they kept to observe the reading process, and the essays they wrote at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, in which they described how the texts and the discussions were affecting their understanding of the relationship between language and culture. My reason for letting them use English for these two assignments was because they required a deep level of personal reflection and/or analysis, and I felt English would allow them to describe what and how they were thinking more clearly and accurately. The syllabus for the Francophone Literature course is included as an appendix.

**Goals for the Francophone Literature Course**

In designing the goals and objectives for this course, I considered the areas of language proficiency, literacy development, content, and community. Consider the following goal statement taken from the course syllabus:
The purpose of this course is to provide opportunities for students to reflect on the intersections of language, literature, and culture in the French speaking world. Students will develop critical thinking skills through contrasting knowledge of their native culture(s) with ways in which other cultures express their values and beliefs. Students will consider relationships of language and identity, and language and power as they consider the voices of writers from various parts of the French speaking world. Likewise, students will analyze and identify themes in the literature read in this course. Finally, this course will develop literacy in French by creating opportunities for students to connect reading and writing with speaking, culture, and reflection. Group discussion in French will play a significant part of the course as I believe meaning is constructed and created through dialogue and through active student participation.

This goal statement for the course embraces an approach that unites literature and language in an effort to build literacy in the foreign language. Likewise, it attempted to incorporate the additional goals of relationships between literature, culture, and identity.

The CR approach is designed to give students a space in which they can respond to literature in the target language in personal and meaningful ways. Consequently, the goals for this course directly related to CR are as follows:

- *To elicit spontaneous, extended discourse in French*
- *To promote student to student discourse thereby minimizing the teacher’s*
- *To encourage students to state and support their opinions*
- *To give students opportunities to actively participate as they respond to literary texts*
- *To allow students to make personal connections with literary texts*

First, because the CR parameters emphasize open participation, a goal for this course was for the students to talk more and to talk to each other instead of talking to the
teacher. Likewise, the parameters of CR should promote extended discourse as opposed to utterances of a few words. Moreover, when students talk they should feel as though they are contributing something new and valuable instead of participating in a question and answer session. In addition to generating more opportunities to speak, the parameters of CR emphasize sharing and considering diverse perspectives and alternatives. As such, students should be able to express and defend their opinions about literature and should, as a result of the discussions, come away with a deeper understanding of the texts.

**CR Discussions**

In this study, I was interested in examining whether a particular instructional framework for discussion, Collaborative Reasoning (CR), promoted extended discourse in French as students responded to literature in discussions. The parameters for this framework were presented in detail in the previous chapter. Likewise, I wanted to examine if this approach gave students opportunities to actively discuss literature in an upper-division course. Finally, I wanted to investigate students’ perceptions of the framework.

Carrying out a successful CR discussion requires a collaborative environment between students and teachers. However, there are some strategies teachers can employ to ensure successful classroom discussions. As McKeown & Beck (1999) said, “creating an environment in which students build their own knowledge is a much harder task than just asking questions and fielding answers” (p.25). They suggest several important strategies that teachers should use when shared inquiry is the goal. For example, the teacher should model his/her thinking process, should create opportunities for students to
expand and elaborate on their ideas, and should help students build on what other students are expressing. As a result, the way in which the teacher facilitates the discussion and the roles he or she takes on throughout a discussion are significant. For instance, the teacher will need to summarize the ideas the students present, develop students’ thoughts, clarify their thoughts, and provide linguistic support to students during the discussion. However, accomplishing these things without dominating the talk can be a challenging task.

Before the first group discussion, I explained the CR framework. I shared that we were going to use a specific model for our discussions about literary texts in order to make discussions in French more meaningful. I presented the parameters of the framework and I also explained (as Donato & Brooks, 2004, suggest) that improving oral proficiency in terms of providing opportunities to talk was an important goal for this course.

In presenting the parameters for CR discussions, I explained, for example, that students should feel free to talk to each other instead of responding directly to me. I also explained that they did not need to raise their hands before speaking, because our goal was to have more natural conversations. Furthermore, I provided some key phrases they could use in French. Some of these phrases were « Est-ce que vous êtes d’accord? » (“Do you agree?”); « Pourquoi est-ce que vous avez cette idée? » (“Why do you think that?”); « Je suis d’accord avec vous. » (“I agree with you.”); and « Je ne suis pas d’accord » (“I do not agree”); « Est-ce que vous avez un exemple? » (“Do you have an example?”). I encouraged students to add a reason when they did or did not agree by using the additional words “parce que” (because). I also explained that CR discussions
are founded on dilemmas or on topics that do not have specific right or wrong answers.

As Nystrand, Gamoran and Heck (1993) found, students respond positively to questions without “prespecified answers”, which they refer to as “authentic questions” (p.15). Authentic questions lead to dialogue that resembles conversation more than lecture, which is why these questions are essential to CR discussions.

I laid the foundation for CR discussions by creating a short list of novels with which everyone was familiar (i.e. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Little Prince*, etc.) and reviewing the types of questions that would promote discussion. We then generated a list of “good” and “bad” questions according to the goals for CR. Below, table 3.4 displays some examples the class generated for the book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>“Good” questions</th>
<th>“Bad” questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe</em></td>
<td>- What is the source of the “Deeper Magic?”&lt;br&gt;- Was Aslan right to sacrifice himself for Edmond?</td>
<td>- What is the name of the food the White Witch tempts Edmond with?&lt;br&gt;- Why is it always winter in Narnia?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4: Examples of effective or ineffective questions for CR Discussions.
After we had created a list of questions, we explored the questions as a practice activity. For example, one student would share her opinion and another student would respond using the phrases we had written on the board. In this activity, the students rehearsed sharing opinions, questioning each other, and exploring possibilities. At the end of the activity, I asked each student to summarize a view held by someone else in the group. Finally, we added phrases and expressions to the board that had arisen during the discussion. To close this activity, we analyzed the practice discussion by letting people share their observations (who talked, when people talked etc.) and their feelings about participating in the discussion. This debriefing session allowed students to consider how they had felt during the activity and how those feelings translated into the way they participated.

For the first CR discussion, we worked as a group to create questions that we felt the text did not necessarily answer in an explicit way. Through this process, the students developed a sense of the types of questions they should create when preparing for discussions as a part of this course. After the first discussion, I asked the students to bring in questions they had prepared outside of class. When CR is used in elementary school classrooms, teachers usually provide questions for their students or, in some cases, they may co-create a question with students. However, because of the age and experiences of these students, I felt they would be able to create questions independently and that doing so would serve as preparation for each discussion. I also slightly adapted the CR framework for the college classroom in other ways. For example, because we were using a textbook of short stories by Francophone writers, if a story did not include a
central dilemma (which is recommended for CR when used in elementary classrooms) I would end a discussion by asking the group to summarize either what they had gained personally from the reading, or by summarizing the opinions of the group. This allowed me to incorporate another trait of an advanced speaker which is the ability to summarize a text or another person’s position.

In this course, each CR discussion occurred as the culminating activity for our work with a chapter in the text. Most discussions included three stories. In one discussion (Discussion 2), a movie was also included in the CR discussion, and in another (Discussion 4a and 4b), two stories were read instead of three. The first two discussions were conducted with the teacher and the eight students together. I chose this organizational structure because I wanted to familiarize students with the CR framework. I also wanted to model strategies for communicating such as clarifying, probing, summarizing and providing vocabulary assistance that I hoped the students would begin to use as well.

After the first two whole-class discussions, I decided to let the students collaborate in smaller groups of four for the CR discussions. I made this decision based on feedback from the students and my sense of how the first two discussions had been. Essentially, I was not happy with how the students or I had participated in the second discussion. I felt that I had talked too much and that the students were not working with me very well. These feelings are documented by the entry in my researcher notes for that day’s discussion:

I did way too much talking today. I think I may try to sit out of the next one. I don’t know. I wonder if they could handle that. If I weren’t there to scaffold I think it would die even faster, but maybe I am wrong. I’ll
review specific phrases to use to get input from other people when talking to each other and we’ll also try to have more pre-discussion support. Overall, I think this discussion was worse than the last one. (RN, 10/11/05)

As a result of this reflection, before the third discussion we talked more explicitly about discussion, and I provided additional participation strategies to the students, such as asking people to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed, and why, sharing specific examples (personal or from the text), or summarizing opinions that had been expressed. I also encouraged them to think about the text and to use discussion as a way to clarify anything they had not understood. I also decided to split the students into two groups of freshmen and seniors to see if this organization would have an impact on the discussions. In addition, some of the freshmen specifically indicated they would be more comfortable with this arrangement.

The groups for Discussion 3A and 3B consisted of seniors with seniors and freshmen with freshmen. Discussion 4 consisted of a mix of freshmen and seniors. However, Audrey was the only freshmen in Discussion 4A, and Alison was the only senior in Discussion 4B. It was not my intent to have the students grouped this way for the fourth discussion, because the grouping of the seniors and freshmen together for the third discussion had, in my view, been successful. However, because of some unforeseeable circumstances some freshmen and some seniors were absent the day Discussion 4 was to take place. Although Discussions 4A and 4B were originally scheduled to occur on the same day, the absences of 4 students required a make-up session for Discussion 4B. For that reason, Discussion 4B occurred the following week. The postponement of the discussion affected the make-up of the groups and the time of
the discussion (afternoon instead of morning). Although I had intended to keep the make-up of the groups constant for Discussion 4, I had to group students according to who had been in class and who had not. Because the groups did not discuss the texts at the same time, I was a full participant in both discussions. For Discussions 5A and 5B, we returned to the same group make-up used for the 3rd discussion (freshmen with freshmen and seniors with seniors).

When two groups were discussing the same texts on the same day, I moved back and forth between the groups. My general process for this was as follows. I started the discussion with one of the groups (I alternated which group I started with), and after I could see they had a productive conversational thread to follow, I moved to work with the other group. I quietly entered the group and listened to gain a sense of what they were discussing. After listening and waiting for an appropriate moment (typically, a long pause), I asked the group to summarize what they were discussing and what had been said thus far. Because one of my goals was to have the students summarize ideas in French, I felt this was a good strategy. In addition, it was authentic because the students knew I had not been in the discussion to this point and that I needed them to tell me what had happened. Once I had been apprised of the topic, I listened to see how the students would continue the discussion. I provided a prompt if necessary, but I tried to leave as much of the discussion to them as possible.

As the course continued, the students and I developed a better sense of balanced participation. I relied on my instincts to decide when it was time to return to the other group. Once I was with the other group, I employed the same tactic, asking them to summarize what had been said. After the summary, I asked them to share their opinions
on the texts or to share what they had learned in the discussion. For example, for the fifth discussion, the seniors ended up discussing whether the husband acted compassionately or selfishly toward his wife. When I entered the group, I asked each student to share what her final opinion on the husband was and why she felt that way. This provided good closure to the discussion and allowed students to defend their opinions in French.

After each class discussion, I reflected on what I thought was working and what was not working and tried to make adjustments. I strove for discussions that involved everyone and encouraged participation in ways that did not detract from student learning. I also requested feedback from the class on a regular basis, and I analyzed their post-discussion rubrics after each discussion.

The discussions and the ways in which each member participated evolved over the course of the semester. In the next chapter, I present results from the study that describe in more detail the ways the students participated in CR discussions, the extent to which CR allowed me to simultaneously address language and literary goals, and students’ response to the CR framework.

**Research Perspective and Design**

*My role as a teacher/researcher*

My position as a French instructor at the university level allowed me the unique opportunity to design a course in which I could conduct and analyze CR discussions in the context of an undergraduate French literature course. As I noted in the introduction, my interest in this topic stems from my experiences as an undergraduate French student, from talking to and observing undergraduates in literature classrooms, and from a desire to provide a learning environment that emphasizes student knowledge and involvement.
Discussion provides an alternative to traditional classroom pedagogy because it includes students in the learning process by giving them an active role to play. Essentially, I wanted to examine a classroom setting dedicated to including and valuing the contributions of the learners.

My role as teacher and researcher in this study is one that must be examined and described in order to present the reader with an understanding of how I made choices during the study. Reflecting critically on my role as a teacher and researcher is part of the process of reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1997), which requires an analysis and interpretation of the impact my unique identity had on the context under investigation. As Reinharz (1997, as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1997) suggested, each researcher has three selves which fall into three categories: research-based selves, brought selves (the selves that historically, socially, and personally create our standpoints), and situationally created selves (p.183). For me, the research-based self is the part of me that was focused on investigating and interpreting classroom events in order to understand classroom life. This “researcher-self” had to plan thoroughly, keep careful records of thoughts and observations, and continually reflect on teaching practices. As a researcher in this project, I frequently talked into my digital voice recorder as I drove home in order to capture my impressions of what was happening in the classroom and how discussions were working. Likewise, during this study, I typed reflections into a journal and discussed my hunches and questions with colleagues. I read and re-read these reflections during the study and created new assertions as I went.

When I teach without this research focus, I am not dedicated to recording my impressions and reflections to see what patterns might emerge. Also, though I might seek
feedback from students in a class where I am not conducting research, I do not keep the feedback to see whether it changes or stays the same over the course of a semester of a year. I am more likely to react immediately to the feedback instead of analyzing it over time. Essentially, I am not as analytical. Moreover, the thoroughness my “researcher-self” requires is not the thoroughness I require of my “teaching-self”. My goal here is not to state that either stance is better, but to report that acting as a researcher changed my perspective and my focus.

In contrast to my “researcher-self,” my “teacher-self” tends to operate spontaneously. In my work with pre-service teachers, I have noticed that some student teachers are naturally creative, with an instinct for teaching. Other student teachers are planners. These student teachers write down exactly what they are going to say to their students, and they plan every possible detail. Both types of teaching can be quite effective. I bring up these types of teaching to reveal my “teacher-self” to the reader. As a teacher, I am spontaneous, flexible and creative. I have had great success with lessons that were spontaneous and unplanned, and I find this kind of teaching invigorating. For example, if students bring up something they want to discuss or do in class that I had not anticipated, I am usually in favor of abandoning my plan in order to do what interests them (as long as it is relevant). In general, as a teacher I am interested in big ideas, not small details. Nevertheless, over the years I have trained myself to focus on details when necessary, especially when it relates to communicating effectively with students.

In this study, I was less spontaneous than I usually am as a teacher because I felt it important to be consistent with the aims of my research. However, I was true to my “teaching-self” because I maintained my flexibility. If the students presented concerns
about assignments or other activities in this course, I adapted them or created alternative assignments in order to better meet their needs. I did this based on feedback I received from the students in class or on feedback forms they submitted.

Finally, as an experienced teacher, I am comfortable with making quick decisions. When situations arose in the classroom that I did not have time to sit down and analyze, I usually followed my teacher instincts. For example, when I learned that several students were going to be absent for one of the discussions, instead of considering whether it would be better to postpone both discussion groups, I decided to carry on with the students who were in class that day. This “teacher-self” choice had advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage was that the students who were in class and were prepared to talk about the texts were able to do so on the assigned day. This was an advantage because the stories were fresher in the students’ minds. The disadvantages were that the groups that had, in my view, been successful were disrupted because some group members were absent. Similarly, the students who discussed the texts in the second group had not read them as recently as the members of the first group. As a result, they struggled to remember details in the story to support their opinions.

The “third-self” I brought to this setting was the self that emerged in the unique context of this literature course. This “situational-self” is the one that reacted to the personalities and experiences of the students in the course. No two classroom dynamics are ever the same. I have found that my patience, my enthusiasm, and my leadership differ according to the social dynamics in the classroom. In this class, there was a unique dynamic because of the difference in status among the students. I simultaneously had to motivate and encourage the freshmen to work hard while also finding ways to challenge
the seniors. This class was a difficult one to unite, and at times, I felt like I had two separate groups of students. Nevertheless, the students felt I was approachable and eager to provide the type of support they needed.

**Research Design**

In designing this study, it was important to consider a research perspective that aligned well with my dual role as teacher and researcher. In my reading I came across the term “Exploratory Practice” (EP) (Gunn, 2003) which appealed to me and seemed to fit well with my teaching style and approach to research. I will define this term shortly. To be more specific, it was important for me to use a design that valued the input of the learners. Ethically, I did not want to subject my students to some sort of “experiment”, because I do not feel research should only benefit the researcher; Rather, I wanted to involve students in the learning process by allowing them opportunities to provide feedback and to reflect on classroom experiences as they occurred. Ethically, EP is dedicated to improving our understanding of what occurs in the classroom by valuing the learners and by investigating topics relevant to their development. This is one of several reasons why EP is appropriate for the current study.

To provide some background, EP is a research approach developed by Dick Allwright over the last fifteen years. He developed the approach in an effort to create a type of practitioner research devoted to understanding the quality of life in the language classroom. Instead of developing a set of classroom practices, in EP the focus is on working from a set of principles. According to Allwright (2005), “For EP, the ethical and epistemological dimensions are the most critical, with the emphasis on understanding rather than problem-solving” (p.353). He further argued for a “return to the traditional
research aim of understanding, and for focusing our work for understanding on quality of life (rather than quality of output) as the ultimate value” (p.353). In describing EP to others, Allwright (2003) has noted that the approach can be understood in terms of design criteria, practical steps, or research aims. In succinct terms, EP is:

an indefinitely sustainable way for classroom language teachers and learners, while getting on with their learning and teaching, to develop their own understandings of life in the language classroom. It is essentially a way for teachers and learners to work together to understand aspects of their classroom practice that puzzle them, through the use of normal pedagogic procedures (standard monitoring, teaching and learning activities) as investigative tools. http://www.letras.puc-rio.br/epcentre/

EP can be applied to many settings and is adaptable to different teachers’ purposes. For me, although I was undertaking an academic research project for a formal degree, the emphasis on understanding in EP was appealing as a teacher. When we investigate contexts thoroughly and provide a thorough description of what happens, we can learn more about that specific context. As Allwright (2005) noted, sometimes understanding a problem is enough to create change. He shared an example of a language teacher who was frustrated with a group of students who spoke English during group work. Instead of trying to solve this as a problem, she asked students to discuss why they spoke English with her and with each other. As they discussed the topic, everyone came to a deeper understanding of the challenges they faced. This understanding, in turn, led to an increased effort among the students to use the target language. Thus, in this instance, increased understanding accounted for the solution. In the same way, the current study gave me the opportunity (as teacher and researcher) to understand what happens when discussions are implemented in the context of a foreign language literature course.
In addition to the goal of understanding, the current study aligns nicely with the seven aims of Exploratory Research (Allwright, 2005, p.364). The table below describes these aims.

Aims for EP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aims for EP</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>A teacher will undertake research in an area that is relevant to him or herself and perhaps also to the learners in his/her classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Integrating research and pedagogy promotes reflection, by both teachers and learners and is a motivating for development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Integrating research and pedagogy is a continuous enterprise that teachers will have the desire to sustain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegiality</td>
<td>Integrating research and pedagogy are tools that can bring teachers together as well as teachers and learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Development</td>
<td>Research should be relevant to learners. Learners should have input into the questions being investigated and should have opportunities to reflect on their experiences in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Development</td>
<td>Integrating teaching and research should result in the teacher’s own professional development as well as to the more general professional development of the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory Building</td>
<td>The integration of teaching and research should develop our general understanding of classroom language teaching and learning by building upon the articulated understandings of teachers and learners who are working together to develop their own understandings of their own experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5: Aims for Exploratory Practice

The above aims reflect the goals of this research project. First, the topic (developing oral proficiency while simultaneously studying literature), is of personal relevance to me (Relevance) because of my experiences as a teacher and a learner. Also, I engaged in reflection (Reflection) during the entire process of teaching the course and in
analyzing what occurred during the course. Likewise, because my commitment to French teaching and to developing proficient speakers is strong, my interest in this topic is ongoing (Continuity). In order to understand the language classroom, teachers and learners work together in Exploratory Practice. In this study, there was collaboration in the discussions and in the way the course was conducted as a whole because I valued students’ contributions. I emphasized that I wanted them to be involved in their own learning, and I frequently solicited their feedback so that I could incorporate it into the course and reflect on my teaching practices (Learner/Teacher Development). This study also allowed me to share my thoughts and findings with colleagues in my department (Collegiality) as we discussed events that arose in our teaching. Finally, one reason for conducting a research project such as this is to share the findings with others in the profession and to extend our current knowledge (Theory Building).

The EP approach to research has been applied to dissertation research and to research conducted by scholars and scholar/practitioners (Allwright, 2005; Gunn, 2003; Miller, 2003; Perpignan, 2003; Wu 2006, to name a few). These academic researchers have found EP to be a useful framework to guide their research. EP values a thorough, ongoing and detailed approach to collecting and analyzing data and provides clear steps for researchers to follow. Likewise, it embodies a set of principles and aims to guide researchers as they plan and conduct research. I should point out that EP, as I understand it, was originally conceived as a way to make classroom research more manageable for teachers working full-time in the field who may not have had intensive graduate training in conducting research. Thus, in addition to its theoretical aims and principles, EP provides a step-by-step process to guide practitioners who may find the research task
Because of my experiences and training, I did not feel I needed to rely on these specific steps to organize or carry out my study. Instead, the ethical considerations, the eye toward theory building, and the set of research aims and principles, were the main features of EP that informed the current study.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

This study was guided by the assumptions of interpretive research (Lincoln, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which say that research “focuses on the construction or co-construction of meaning within a particular social setting” (Davis, 1995, p.433). Data were collected through video and audio-taped classroom discussions, transcriptions of CR discussions, pre-and post course questionnaires, reflective essays, post-discussion rubrics, feedback forms, and researcher notes. Each of these sources contributed to the analysis of CR in the literature classroom and is discussed below.

**Video/Audio Taped Discussions**

*Procedures*

I personally audio or video recorded all of the CR discussions that occurred over the course of the 15 week semester. In addition to the CR discussions, I also audio or videotaped class sessions, except during portions of the class where quizzes or tests were being administered. The audio recordings were obtained through the use of an Olympus digital voice recorder (model # VN-480PC) and a Crown Soundgrabber II PZM microphone designed to enhance the quality of the sound. After the recordings were captured, they were uploaded onto the computer and converted to wave files for storage. I uploaded the files from the digital recorder to the computer on a weekly basis. Once the
recordings were imported, I listened to the content, named the files accordingly, and stored them in a folder. I did not transcribe every class meeting that was recorded; instead, I used the software that accompanied the digital voice recorder (Olympus digital wave) to index the recordings. This feature allowed me to index segments of the audio from class sessions and to quickly locate important portions of the class meetings. For example, one day in class the students started discussing which courses they wanted to take next semester. This particular discussion offered insight into how the students were feeling about this literature course as well as their expectations for language learning and future literature study. As I listened to the audio file, I recognized that this section would likely be relevant, so I indexed it and marked it to be transcribed. I followed this procedure as I listened to audio files from class meetings after they were uploaded.

I also made video recordings of some CR discussions. Because I only had access to one video camera, on days where groups met simultaneously, I could only video record one of the groups. Over the course of the semester, eight CR discussions occurred. Earlier in this chapter, I presented the timeframe and the students who participated in each of the CR discussions. In general, the first two discussions (D1 and D2) were whole class discussions, and the remaining discussions (D3A and 3B, D4A and D4B, D5A and D5B) were small group discussions. I video-taped each of the whole class discussions (D1 and D2) and also videotaped D3A, D4A, and D4B. After videotaping discussion 3A, I realized that the video camera was not picking up the sound accurately, even with the added sound microphone. I also found that the camera and tripod were more difficult to work with than the audio recorders. As a result, when the last two discussions were
recorded I used only the audio recorders. Nevertheless, once I had captured the video files, I converted them into Quicktime video files using the Apple Imovie software.

Before transcribing each CR discussion, I assigned each student a pseudonym. I then transcribed each discussion. To transcribe each audio file, I used Windows Media Player. This allowed me to type what I was hearing into a WORD document as I listened to each recording. Once the transcript was complete, I reviewed and edited each transcript at least once for accuracy. I also employed an assistant to listen to and verify the accuracy of the transcripts. The goal for the transcription process was to provide a complete translation of what occurred during the discussion, which included correct identification of the speaker, interruptions, and overlapping speech. As I spent a great deal of time listening to the eight students in class, it was easy for me to identify each speaker on an audio recording. Also, because these students were adults in a classroom situation, who were speaking a foreign language, there were very few instances of students talking at the same time. Regardless of whether students talked at the same time (which did not happen very frequently), it was easy to identify who was talking, and when. While there are examples of students interrupting each other, no interruption made it impossible to identify who was talking. Despite the high quality of the recordings, there were inevitably certain words or phrases that proved difficult to transcribe and some words were occasionally inaudible. Nonetheless, I am confident that the fidelity of the transcriptions for the purposes of the current study is satisfactory.

As I mentioned earlier, although discussion 3A was video recorded, it could not be transcribed completely because of the poor sound quality. I was, however, able to visually note each speaker’s talking turns. In all, seven complete CR discussions were
captured and transcribed. The discussions ranged from about twenty to forty minutes, with most averaging about 27 minutes. Each transcript consisted of between 9-12 single spaced typed pages. After transcribing the discussions, I uploaded the transcripts and audio files into Nvivo7 for easy storage, retrieval and analysis. I finished the transcription process by the end of the spring semester, 2006.

**Questionnaires**

In the first week of the semester, all students enrolled in the French 453 completed the initial questionnaire which I designed. As Dornyei (2003) noted, questionnaires are exceptional resources for researchers in that they are versatile, easy to administer, and can generate a large amount of data quickly. The questionnaire for this course was designed to collect information regarding the students’ expectations for language learning in literature classes, their beliefs about literature classes, their view of the teacher’s role in literature course, their views toward speaking in class, and their views toward discussions. Each of these categories pertained to the research questions in this study. Multiple statements for each category were created because the general consensus among survey writers is that more than one item is needed per category in order to avoid the fallibility of a single item (Dornyei, 2003). Additionally, as recommended by Dorneyi (2003) the survey contained items that were written in a familiar style, were succinct, and addressed one category. A four point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree) was used in this survey. The rationale behind the even numbered response options was to eliminate the temptation for respondents to use the middle category. The questionnaire was administered twice: on the first day of the course and during the final week of the course.
To analyze the questionnaires, I compiled all of the responses on a copy of the survey and tallied the responses. I did this once at the beginning of the course and once at the end of the course. I then put together a table showing the summary of the responses to each item before the course (PRE) and at the end of the course (POST). Finally, I divided the seventeen survey items according to the targeted categories and made a new table.

**Open-Ended Feedback Forms**

Toward the end of the course, I decided to solicit additional feedback from the students about the CR discussions. I did this because I was interested in how the students prepared for the discussions and how they perceived the discussions in general. The form included five questions about the CR discussions and the literature we read. The five questions on the form were: 1) How did you prepare for the discussions we had in class? 2) Did your preparation for the discussions stay the same or change throughout the semester? 3) Were the discussions helpful to you? If so, in why what ways? If not, in what ways? 4) What did you find most challenging about the readings we did this semester? 5) Which story (or stories) did you enjoy the most? Why? Every student in the course completed this form. In total, I collected and analyzed eight forms.

To analyze the open-ended feedback forms, I first created documents that contained all of the students’ written comments. I then imported these documents into NVIVO 7 (QSR, 2007) for later analysis. Once the documents were imported, I read all of the documents and noted themes and patterns. I then created categories that emerged from the data. For these forms, I started with broad categories like (advantages to CR) and (disadvantages to CR). Once I had the broad categories in place I created
subcategories that were more specific. Any comments that did not fit into a subcategory or broad category were grouped into a third miscellaneous category.

Post-Discussion Rubrics

Immediately following each CR discussion, participants completed a rubric which they used to evaluate themselves. This rubric is included as an appendix. The inspiration for the rubric came from a self-assessment tool designed for teachers who were beginning to implement a framework for discussion in their classrooms (Reninger, Soter & Wilkinson, 2006). This rubric allowed students to evaluate their participation in the discussions according to five areas: listening, speaking, language, participating, and interest. Students were given descriptions on a scale of 1-4 to indicate their perception of their participation in that day’s discussion. Occasionally, students wrote additional comments on the rubric. These comments were compiled into a single document and added to the data files stored in NVivo7 for later analysis.

I always read the Post-Discussion Rubrics after students submitted them on the day of the discussion. This gave me a general sense of how the students felt they had participated in the discussions on the day the discussion occurred. I also made a form that summarized each student’s scores for each of the discussions. This enabled me to look at how students felt they had participated both over the course of the semester and in particular discussions. The post discussion rubrics gave me a sense of when students felt confident in their speaking and in their language and if this confidence (or lack thereof) could possibly be attributed to other factors (i.e. interest or members of the group). I analyzed the forms by examining the total responses for each student and by looking for patterns across students and across discussions. After I created a hypothesis, I re-
examined the rubrics to determine if my ideas could be corroborated or invalidated. For example, I included the “interest” category to see if students spoke more in discussions where they marked a high level of interest in the topic being discussed. Originally, I thought all of the students would participate more if they found the topic interesting, but this hunch was not confirmed by the Post-Discussion rubrics. To cite one example, Teresa indicated on the post-discussion rubric that she had a high level of interest in the stories used for the fourth discussion. However, this was not the discussion in which her participation level was highest. As a result, I could not infer that interest alone (as indicated on the rubric) was always going to result in greater amounts of oral participation. I therefore had to look more broadly at the data sources and had to consider other factors that might have accounted for higher or lower levels of oral participation in a given discussion.

**Reflective Essays**

Three reflective essays were assigned to the students during this course. The first essay, which the students wrote in English, was designed to elicit the students’ thinking about the relationships between language, culture and identity, as well as to help me get to know them better. The first reflective essay was called “My Language Learning Autobiography”. In this essay, the students were asked to choose three adjectives to describe themselves and were asked to reflect on experiences they had with language and culture as young children and as they grew up. They were asked to describe any interactions they had had with people who were different from themselves and to reflect on how these interactions had contributed to their current identity. The first group of
essays was used to create the descriptions of the participants presented earlier in this chapter.

The second and third essays were designed to help students analyze their learning as the semester progressed. These essays, like the first, were written in English in order to allow the students to express themselves easily and naturally as they reflected on their learning. In the second essay, the students were asked to consider how each author’s cultural experiences contributed to the themes in their work and how they felt their own culture had shaped their perspectives on interpreting what they were reading. The third essay was more like the first, in that it asked students to reflect again on the relationship between literature, culture and identity. I used these essays to gain a sense of what the students learned with regard to culture, language and identity at different points in this course.

**Researcher Log**

The data collected from the taped CR discussions was complemented by notes I kept throughout the study. As Nunan (1992) has argued, “human behavior cannot be understood without incorporating into the research the subjective perceptions and belief systems of those involved in the research, both as researchers and subjects” (p. 54). In light of this statement, I kept a journal in order to note my feelings and experiences while teaching the course. The journal served as a record of instructional choices and as a way to reflect on the study as it progressed. I kept entries to my researcher log in Word files that I usually created in the afternoon, after my teaching duties for the day were complete. In my journal, I entered ideas for the course, challenges I was facing, impressions I had, and questions or ideas related to the research. Sometimes, if something occurred to me when I was not at the computer, I
would record it on the audio-recorder I kept with me and would later upload and transcribe it so that it could be included with the other entries. To provide an example, consider the following entry to my log from October 13th.

We worked on essays today designed to incorporate the subjunctive. They discussed opinions in groups and worked on writing persuasive essays. I think asking them to defend their opinions in writing may also help them in our discussions. We also talked about our initial impressions of La Montagne de Feu. I asked students to translate portions of the text (especially the last paragraph) to help them refine their comprehension of the story. I notice their comprehension is sometimes fuzzy—they think they get it, but if you push them to explain it they can’t. I asked them to translate to encourage them to think carefully about language, about the tenses being used, and about the overall meaning of the story. Hopefully, translating that paragraph gave them a better grasp of the story. I will see how they respond to the activity and might consider doing other translation assignments in the future.

In addition to my notes, I asked the students to provide feedback regarding certain aspects of the class. Sometimes this feedback was informal (i.e., students shared an opinion about the course during a class meeting, or in my office during office hours), and other times it was more formal, as with the Post-discussion rubrics or the open-ended forms. One reason I encouraged the students to provide informal and formal feedback was to establish a sense of community and mutual responsibility. I wanted them to become involved in the learning process, so I frequently asked for their input and incorporated their feedback into the class in various ways. To give a specific example, consider the following entry from my log on November 1st:

Christine stopped in to see me after class. She talked with me about things and said that she and some others are just really intimidated by the seniors in the class. They feel like it takes them too long to say anything and they are afraid to speak up. They know it will take them longer to formulate what they want to say and they just feel uncomfortable in that environment.
While discussing the situation with her, she suggested putting the freshman and seniors together for discussions. I later incorporated this suggestion into the class because I had sensed that the freshmen were intimidated, and I wanted to be flexible when appropriate. I was also aware that Alison was very comfortable and talkative and that her tendency to talk in order to think things out was discouraging other students, particularly the freshmen, from participating.

In general, my “Researcher Log” enabled me to be more aware of my impressions and helped me gain perspective on the research and the life of the classroom. I often re-read entries in order to see if my ideas were changing or persisting. This was especially helpful during busy times of the semester, because the log helped me stay connected to the study. The journal also served as a place for me to record my questions and hunches, topics I wanted to discuss with colleagues, and to list topics I thought I might want to more carefully research. At the end of the study, I read and re-read my log and organized my entries into categories. I highlighted themes I found and matched these themes to other relevant topics as I conducted the analysis and the write-up of the analysis and results section.

Coding

After the transcription process was complete, I began the coding process. I analyzed the roles of the teacher and the students by examining who talked, how much, and whether students talked to each other or to the teacher. Focusing on interaction in the language learning classroom applies participation as a metaphor for acquisition as opposed to focusing solely on language structures (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).
Examining these aspects provides insight into the language dynamics in the class, the status of course participants and the culture of the classroom.

Because I was also interested in determining whether CR offered the students opportunities for extended discourse, it was important to note the length of each student’s turn. Similarly, because I wanted to analyze whether students were able to express themselves in French as they discussed literature, I also counted words in English and words in French to provide a picture of each student’s use of the target language.

Following precedents set by previous researchers analyzing speech, including video and audiotapes, talk turns were identified and used as a unit of analysis (Chinn, Anderson, and Waggoner, 2001; Mehan, 1979). A talk turn was operationalized as a set of consecutive words that a participant spoke (Stubbs, 1983). I counted every word that was uttered except for words used to fill space such as “uh” or “um” or in French, words like “bon” or “ben”. I counted contractions in French and English as a single word.

Regarding the coding of the talk turns and the length of the turns, a second rater analyzed all of the transcripts for reliability, and agreement was calculated at 94%.

Because data sources pertained to different research questions, I essentially organized the data accordingly and coded each group according to information that data source provided. To be more specific, each of the data sources provided different information-- when I was analyzing the students’ beliefs about FL learning and Literature courses, I was primarily working with the questionnaire items (the items on the questionnaire also fell into different categories), with the indexed portions of the class sessions I had marked during the analysis process, and with my researcher log. When I was looking at the students’ use of the target language during CR discussions, I analyzed
the transcripts both for extended discourse and for target language use. Essentially, I organized my data sources according to the corresponding research question.

In coding the data for this study, I followed two different processes. One is known as open coding (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). For example, as I coded the transcripts in order to identify student attitudes toward CR, I let ideas come and to let themes emerge as I studied the data. In this process, I read and re-read samples of text and identified potential themes from examples in the transcripts and other sources. To cite a specific example, as I read all of the data sources, I recognized that several students mentioned their status as a freshmen or a senior or referred to themselves as “younger” or “older”. Prior to the study, I did not anticipate that the students would divide themselves into these two groups, nor did I project that the students themselves would comment on the differences they perceived between the members of this class. In reading the data corpus, I became aware of the frequency with which this topic arose. As a result, I created the code “status” and coded instances where the students referred to their status (age/classification/experiences) either positively or negatively. This allowed me to consider the examples together in order to determine if the theme merited closer examination. Because status appeared in multiple sources, this became a theme I ended up working with and developing.

In addition to the open coding process, I also drew from my knowledge of language learning, literary goals, and other background knowledge to code the data according to some anticipated categories. For example, because I was addressing advanced proficiency, I knew I would search the data corpus for examples of advanced language functions specifically supported by CR. These functions included expressing
personal opinions about literature, supporting and defending opinions, and using extended discourse in the target language. These codes and others grew out of the goals for CR and the literature course.

As I analyzed the transcripts, I used the Nvivo software to create codes and to code lines of the text. I made an initial pass through all of the transcripts, creating codes as I went. I began with some codes in mind (as I mentioned previously, these included use of the target language, sharing personal opinions, defending opinions, etc.) and others (i.e. students refer to other texts, making comparisons, asking for help, offering help) emerged as I observed them in the transcripts. I then examined the codes I had and looked to see if I had created multiple codes for the same observation. In such instances, I merged the codes into a single code. For example, several codes became the single code “Students analyze literature”. I also discarded codes that were interesting but were beyond the scope of the study’s research questions. For example, at the beginning of the analysis process, I thought it might be helpful to determine what tenses the students were using in discussions. However, after coding several CR discussions and rereading my research questions, I found that which tenses students were using was not really a priority for this study, so I decided not to use the codes I had created regarding tenses. Table 3.6 offers some examples of codes related to the study’s research questions.
### Table 3.6 Examples of codes by category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples of Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| CR and Literary Goals           | • Making personal connections to texts  
|                                 | • Students analyze Literature                                                     |
|                                 | • Students make cultural connections                                               |
|                                 | • Students make comparisons                                                       |
| CR and Language Goals           | • Using English                                                                   |
|                                 | • Stating an Opinion                                                              |
|                                 | • Defending an Opinion                                                            |
|                                 | • Supporting an Opinion with Text                                                 |
|                                 | • Summarizing                                                                     |
|                                 | • Asking for Vocabulary help                                                      |
| Student Attitudes               | • Freshmen Expectations                                                           |
|                                 | • Senior Expectations                                                             |
|                                 | • Benefits of CR                                                                  |
|                                 | • Disadvantages of CR                                                             |

**Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Reliability within the qualitative paradigm is often evaluated through triangulation, which is the researchers’ use of multiple data sources and methods in order to provide corroborating evidence. According to Stake (2000), triangulation is the “process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p.443). This concept operates on the notion that examining an object for various perspectives will provide a more coherent, consistent picture of the object. Thus, triangulation reduces the likelihood of chance associations and also reduces systematic
biases. Eisner (1998) referred to this concept as “structural corroboration,” defining it as the term “to describe the confluence of multiple sources of evidence or the recurrence of instances to support a conclusion” (p.55). As Stake (2000) stated, “triangulation is a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (p.443). He also adds that no interpretations are perfectly repeatable, so this tactic also allows for meaning to be clarified because it is being seen in different sources and in different ways.

In this study, as I moved back and forth between the data sources, I found that comments the students made in class were often echoed by the comments made on their feedback forms. Likewise, if the students noted something on a post-discussion rubric (such as being frustrated by another member of the group), this concern also sometimes reappeared later in the course evaluations. To provide another example, the freshmen students consistently reported a desire for a stronger grammatical component in the course. They expressed this preference during a discussion in class, and they also pointed it out in comments to me outside of class (which I noted in my researcher log). Again and again, similar themes emerged from multiple data sources. Because various sources revealed similar phenomena, we can see congruence between sources and themes. The fact that transcripts, feedback forms, and questionnaires provided a consistent data picture adds strength to each individual source as well as to the study’s general claims.

Even as recurrent themes emerged, it was also important to search the data for evidence of cases or examples that did not align with the interpretations I was forming. For example, though I was looking for instances of extended discourse in French, it was just as crucial for me to look at what was happening when students did not use extended discourse
or when they used English instead of French. To gain a full sense of how students expressed themselves, I had to examine their use of English and French and look at what I or other students did during discussions that may have contributed to shorter as opposed to extended turns. This search for evidence provides a fuller sense of what happened during CR discussions regarding the use of both French and English in CR discussions, so that the results of this study can be interpreted more objectively.

Another important consideration in qualitative research is the idea of *trustworthiness*, a term proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) to function as the criterion for assessing qualitative research. Shenton (2004) summarizes many qualitative practices that give qualitative studies credibility. One such practice is prolonged engagement. This practice requires the researcher to involve him/herself in the research context over a substantial period of time. Over the course of several weeks (or perhaps years), a researcher who has prolonged engagement will have opportunities to build trusting relationships that could not be established if the researcher were only involved with the participants for a short period of time. In this study, I was able to develop rapport with the participants because I was familiar with the culture of the classroom and that of the university. I was engaged in the study as a teacher for a full semester and as a researcher for much longer. Another method for ensuring *trustworthiness* is to use frequent debriefing sessions with the participants (Shenton, 2004). Over the course of the semester, I consistently asked the students for feedback in order to offer them input as well as opportunities for reflection and debriefing. They were given opportunities to reflect on their participation in the CR discussions and to talk about the CR discussions and their role in the course. I also used these sessions to clarify goals. For example,
during one class session two students expressed frustration with the spontaneous nature of the CR discussions. I took that opportunity to give them suggestions for preparing for the discussions and to remind them that frustration is a part of the language learning process. Though the students did not necessarily like knowing that frustration (i.e. searching for words) is part of the process of becoming an advanced speaker, perhaps they appreciated knowing that the feeling and experience is normal.

In addition to noting exchanges that occurred in class, I also sought more formal feedback from students on forms and questionnaires. Gunn (2005) described gathering student feedback as a research activity in itself and explained that feedback has long been a part of language teaching. For example, popular teaching methods a few decades ago like The Silent Way and Community Language Learning emphasized feedback sessions with students after a learning event. Throughout the course, I maintained a cycle of obtaining feedback from the students, considering what was and was not working, and making appropriate changes. According to Reid (1994), soliciting feedback from students also helps them recognize that they are responsible for their own learning. The feedback I obtained from students in this study was essential to understanding how they responded to CR discussions and how they viewed CR as an instructional practice. It also provided me with opportunities to review how discussions occurred and refine them accordingly, to incorporate other activities into the course, and to offer opportunities for me to clarify my approach to teaching.

As mentioned earlier, during this project I kept a journal in which I recorded my initial impressions of classroom sessions and discussions. Keeping this log allowed me to consider emerging patterns, challenges I was facing, and the dynamics occurring in the
classroom. The commentary I kept has been referred to by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as “progressive subjectivity,” which is the monitoring of the researcher’s own developing constructions. The example from my log below illustrates how I used the log to reflect on the course and the study and to state hunches I wanted to follow up on. In this excerpt, I am considering the relationships between the students in my class:

I do not feel like this group of students has come together very well. I encourage them to talk to each other, and there was a lot of enthusiasm at the beginning of the year for doing things outside of class together, but I don’t think they have done very much of that….I wonder if these students just don’t like talking to each other. It is a possibility. My other class is much closer and they seem to trust and talk to each other more. Would the class/discussions be better if they liked each other more?  (Researcher Notes, October 20, 2002)

The hunch I express in this excerpt related to the dynamics between the students. I felt that there was a lack of trust between them, and that the intimidation the freshmen were likely experiencing was causing problems during the CR discussions. The idea I express here was later corroborated by a visit Christine made during my office hours, which I described earlier.

Based on this feedback, I made changes to the groups in order to further examine how trust/like among the students in the groups would impact the participation in the discussions. Before I made these changes, I addressed the class as a whole in order to see if my own thinking (and that of the particular student who came to see me) was in line with what the class as a whole felt. This is also an example of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which also adds trustworthiness to the current study. Making my thoughts transparent to the participants and giving them the opportunity to confirm or question that thinking, gave students a meaningful opportunity to participate in the
research. Moreover, this process ensures that researchers come to conclusions that resonate with and accurately describe the experiences of the participants.

Peshkin (1988) stated that it is important for all qualitative researchers to recognize their own subjectivity and to reveal that subjectivity when presenting research. In teaching, there are always situations and/or personalities that contribute to a teacher’s actions. Even when trying to remain impartial, there are always some classes and some students with whom teachers connect more easily. Along those lines, it is important to reveal that the participants in this course had a hard time uniting, which undoubtedly affected my relationship with them as a group. I had positive relationships with each of the students individually, but their relationships with each other affected how warmly I felt toward them as a group.

Similarly, though I tried to remain impartial to the groups that formed in my class, in general I empathized with the seniors’ frustration. Like the seniors, I was also frustrated with the freshmen, particularly when I felt that their immaturity was preventing them from interacting positively. I worked hard to address the needs the freshmen expressed (e.g., reviewing grammatical concepts and specific tenses) and to remain open to their requests. I tried not to reveal my frustration to the class, but it would not be fair for me to claim that I was never frustrated outside of the classroom. In all honesty, I was not upset by the fact that the freshmen wanted extra attention to grammar and language in general. In fact, it is important to incorporate grammar, vocabulary, and all the “skills” into literature courses. Rather, I was discouraged by the fact that the freshmen as a group did not take responsibility for their own learning. They wanted to be told when and how to complete every assignment, and this was something I had not encountered to the same
extent in other courses I have taught. This feeling on my part may also have been intensified by the fact that I had just completed three years of course work in a Ph.D. program, where I was surrounded by graduate students. In some ways, I struggled to remember the mindset of the undergraduate, especially an entering freshman’s.

In conclusion, one of my reasons for undertaking this study was because I wanted to know more about classroom life. I was interested in exploring a new pedagogical practice (CR discussions) so that I could gain a better understanding of how it would affect participation and discourse patterns in a foreign language literature classroom. More importantly, I wanted to see whether CR was an effective way to address the well-documented lack of student discourse opportunities in foreign language literature courses. Students in FL literature courses have reported that literature courses are dull and that they are not interactive, something the profession might want to address if enrollments and interest in these courses are to improve. Likewise, my role as a research assistant on a project that investigated the relationship between discussion and higher-level thinking, led me to consider the use of discussion in the foreign language university classroom and how it might connect to the development of language proficiency. This work provided motivation for the current study and led me to investigate the viability of CR in the context of a FL literature, university classroom as opposed to a native language, elementary school classroom.

The research questions I posed shaped the data sources and the design of the course and the study. Similarly, my experiences as a teacher and a learner informed the current study. As a teacher, I wanted to experiment with a pedagogical practice that students would find motivating. I wanted them to enjoy learning about literature and to
feel like they were actively involved in the learning process. As a former student of French, I wanted to provide opportunities to my students to discuss literature that I had not had. In short, I wanted to make sure that speaking skills did not go ignored in the literature classroom. At the same time, I wanted students to respond to literature by making meaningful personal and textual connections.

The results of this study are presented in the next chapter. Following that, in Chapter 5, I interpret those results by discussing them in terms of the research questions. I also discuss their implications, directions for future research and present a conclusion to the study. To situate the upcoming analysis in terms of the data sources and the analysis of those sources, the table below provides a summary of the data corpus.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audio from Class Meetings/Activities</td>
<td>18 audio files</td>
<td>Indexed portions were transcribed and analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio and Video from CR Discussions</td>
<td>7 audio files</td>
<td>All files were transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 video files (Discussion 1, 2, 3A, 4A and 4B)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Transcripts of CR Discussions</td>
<td>7 transcripts</td>
<td>All transcripts were coded and analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Reflective Essays</td>
<td>24 essays</td>
<td>Students’ first essays were used for participant descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Discussion Rubrics</td>
<td>54 rubrics</td>
<td>All rubrics were analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-Ended Feedback Forms</td>
<td>8 forms</td>
<td>All forms were coded and analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- and Post Course Questionnaires</td>
<td>16 questionnaires</td>
<td>All questionnaires were coded and analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Reflections (written)</td>
<td>27 entries, approximately 10 single-spaced typed pages</td>
<td>All entries were coded and analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Reflections (audio files)</td>
<td>3 audio files</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7: Summary of Data Corpus
This table shows the data that was collected during the course and how the data was analyzed. In the next chapter, I will provide additional information regarding how each of the data sources related to specific research themes as I present and describe the data elicited from this study.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, I will present data related to the four areas of analysis for the current study. The first area relates to the students’ beliefs and expectations about literature and language study. This section presents comments the students made during the semester and relevant items from the questionnaire given at the beginning and end of the semester. These comments provide a picture of how the students envisioned language learning and their expectations for a literature course.

The second section of this chapter presents a description of the relationship between CR Discussions and classroom discourse. Within this section are results related to how the open participation structure of CR influenced discourse patterns and participation. These patterns relate to the language goals for CR because extended student discourse is a trait of an advanced speaker. Also presented in this section are the amounts of French and English in each CR discussion, ways students maintained and provided assistance to each other during CR discussions, the number of turns and words per turn for each participant, student-to-student exchanges, and examples of extended discourse.

The third area describes the relationship between CR and literary goals. Data in this section relate to how students responded personally to the texts, how they saw culture
represented in the texts, and how they compared and contrasted ideas presented in multiple texts.

The final section describes how the students responded to CR in the literature classroom. This includes their perceptions of how they performed in the target language in CR discussions, the classroom environment CR provided, the role of the instructor in the discussions, how CR discussions promoted a personal response to literary texts and other general comments the students made regarding the usefulness of CR in the literature classroom.

The table below shows the relationship between each section in this chapter and the data sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Data Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Beliefs about FL learning and Literature courses</td>
<td>Questionnaire items, digital recordings of class meetings, class session transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR and Language Goals</td>
<td>Audio/Visual recordings, course transcripts, class session transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR and Literary Goals</td>
<td>Class session transcripts, course evaluation forms, student feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Attitudes toward CR Discussions</td>
<td>Course evaluation forms, Digital recordings of class meetings, Questionnaire items, Post-Discussion rubrics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Relationships between Data Categories and Data Sources

In order to remind readers of the questions guiding this study, below is a list of the research questions for the current study. Though I list the questions here as a means
to help situate the analysis, I do not discuss the results in terms of the research questions until the following chapter. The research questions for the current study are:

1. Does CR encourage spontaneous student discourse? More specifically, does the CR framework for discussion provide opportunities for students to produce extended discourse in French, one feature of an advanced speaker?

2. In what ways does the CR instructional frame influence students’ oral participation in the Francophone literature course?

3. To what extent do CR discussions promote response to literature through the target language in this upper-division Francophone literature course?

4. What are the students’ perspectives regarding the implementation of CR discussions in an undergraduate French literature course after one semester of exposure?

   **Student Beliefs about FL learning and Literature Courses**

   The attitudes of the students in this course toward literature study were investigated in order to determine how well the CR approach to discussion aligned with their expectations for a literature course. Because students are frequently given the choice between several tracks (i.e. literature track or culture track) in a foreign language department, it is worthwhile to examine which aspects of a course are viewed positively and negatively from the students’ perspective. Likewise, it is important to examine what students say about their experiences in a literature course (as well as in experiences leading up to literature study) in order to give instructors a better sense of what to consider when planning for instruction.
Freshmen and seniors

A student’s classification (freshman or senior) strongly contributed to the experiences, learning preferences, and expectations for literature study in this course. As presented in the previous chapter, all four of the seniors had spent time abroad, and three of the four had participated in intensive study abroad programs either in Europe or Canada. Likewise, they had all taken previous literature courses and had at least three years of experience with University learning. The freshmen, however, came from a high school environment and were participating in their first classes at the university level, as well as their first course in French literature. Though some had visited the target culture, they had done so with their high school peers for a short period of time.

One primary difference between the attitudes of both groups concerned the organization of the course. The freshmen, for example, found the course lacking in this area. In one classroom discussion, Christine shared that she was uncomfortable with the independent nature of the course, stating specifically that she missed the “structure” of her high school grammar class. When I asked her to explain what she meant by “structure” she said:

“We had this huge syllabus and huge packets for the whole year and everything was like we knew what we had to do and when we had to do it. It was just so very structured and this is just a lot more laid back…and I mean I guess that it’s I don’t know….and it’s not so much we were babied this is just like… everyone can do the writing assignments and can read it their own way…and you know….I don’t know…."

In this comment, it is evident that Christine wanted to know exactly what she had to do to succeed in a course. Also interesting is that she concludes her statement with the observation that this course is different because each student “can read it their own way”,

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something that seemed to trouble her. From the freshmen comments, I recognized that
the instructional approach was unfamiliar and frustrating for them. At the same time, I
was pleased that they recognized a difference in the pedagogy and that it challenged their
thinking.

Another important difference between the freshmen and seniors was revealed
when it came time to register for courses for the upcoming semester (a topic students
began discussing one day in class in mid-October). The freshmen expressed
disappointment when they learned that the only upper-division course options for the
Spring semester were other literature courses. During this discussion Christine asked,
“Can they change it to a grammar course?” and Sandra and Audrey quickly echoed her
sentiment and said that they were also ready to “go back to grammar.” In the following
excerpt from the class transcript, I gleaned more information from the students who
wanted to study grammar:

**Teacher:** Is it the reading part or what, it’s too much? You want to go
back to a language focus?
**Audrey:** I just wanna go back to language.
**Sandra:** Yeah. I need more grammar.
**Teacher:** So it’s not so much the subject itself, it’s just that you don’t feel
ready yet? Is that what it is…or is it the literature, do you think it’s
boring?
**Christine:** I don’t think it’s so much that it’s boring, I just think that it’s
everyone is just at a different place…it’s just that you’re reading so much,
but you’re not like practicing.
**Teacher:** How do you mean you’re not practicing?
**Audrey:** “Yeah, like in high school you would do 6 workbook pages and then
have a test….and then you’d go to another tense…It’s more just like…I liked it
better I think… It would be good to have like a refresher grammar course.
**Teacher:** Like it’s less comprehensive it sounds like is what you’re saying… in a
way.
**Sandra:** Yes.
**Christine:** Well, it’s more focused.
Teacher: More focused? You mean it wasn’t everything at once, whereas in this class it’s everything at once, reading, writing, and talking…?
Audrey: Yeah, Yeah….

Several comments in the above exchange stand out. First, Christine’s comment that “everyone is just at a different place” shows that there was a sense of incongruity among the class members. Her comment points to the fact that she and the other freshmen did not feel as prepared for this course as the other students were. She also says that “it’s just that you are reading so much, but you aren’t like practicing”, a view Audrey builds on when she says that she prefers learning “one tense at a time”. These statements reveal that the freshmen found it challenging to be in an environment where they were required to synthesize their linguistic knowledge. From their comments, I inferred that addressing literature comprehensively was uncomfortable for them, a conclusion with which they did not disagree.

In essence, the comments from the freshmen indicate a level of comfort with a skills-based approach to language learning as opposed to a literacy-based approach. This preference is not surprising given that most foreign language teachers approach language teaching from this perspective. Arens, Byrnes and Swaffar (1991) made the crucial point that a “typical goal of instruction in foreign languages has been to learn the language rather than to use the language to learn” (p. 29). This view toward language learning supports teaching skills in isolation and discourages integrated language use. If the freshmen in this course were used to approaching language learning in this way, it is understandable that balancing the demands of a literature class would be challenging. They would not be prepared for literacy based teaching which, as Kern (2003) made clear, overlaps the skills of reading, writing, and talking in a non-linear fashion.
Because these skills were integrated in this course, the freshmen felt the class was not providing enough direct language instruction. For example, Christine said, “I wish we spent a little more time on grammar [sic] and phrases to use when writing about literature.” Audrey also mentioned grammar in her course evaluation. She said, “I would have liked to have had more work on grammar and speaking and writing instead of focusing so much on the reading. I would also have liked to do more translations.” Audrey’s comment is interesting because she mentions speaking, and this course certainly offered more opportunities to speak than traditional literature courses would have provided. However, since the speaking was based on the reading, she may have interpreted the main focus of the course to be reading. Audrey also felt that there was a lack of vocabulary activities. Even though there was new vocabulary in the readings, and an opportunity to use it during the discussions, the freshmen were not completely satisfied.

On the whole, the freshmen expressed a desire for activities that emphasized one skill at a time. This is probably because these types of activities were familiar and provided a sense of comfort and success. The freshmen may have been looking for these features more because they felt they were behind the seniors linguistically, but they would certainly still have found the transition from high school to university courses challenging.

The seniors were less vocal about the need for explicit grammatical instruction, which likely indicates they were comfortable with the way readings were presented and approached in this course. In fact, while the freshmen might have felt the course did not provide enough organizational structure, the seniors felt that the course was too
structured. April, who was also majoring in English, expressed specific dislike for the post-reading questions. Consider the following comments from April and Alison in response to Christine’s comments above:

April: That's funny, because like after having my years of French and whatever, I feel like I've kind of gone back a little. I mean not regressed, but with the answer these questions from the story and stuff like that…like I'm an English major we DON'T answer questions from stories. I've kind of been like what? Answer questions and write? What? So, you know like it's really…it's just what you're comfortable with.
Alison: Yeah, a lot of this... for us, this really has been structured.
Lisa and Teresa: Yeah…

The seniors, particularly Alison and April, seemed surprised (and somewhat irritated) by the views of the freshmen. In fact, the video camera captured them rolling their eyes at each other when the freshmen brought up their desire for more language instruction. As this particular conversation unfolded, Alison and April both tried to influence the freshmen’s opinions by sharing what they loved about literature classes. The seniors positioned themselves as authority figures taking a “big sister” approach to the frustrations of the freshmen. They encouraged the freshmen to benefit from the variety of courses and from the sense of community among the foreign language students. Alison offered the following advice, “Don’t be afraid of the small classes either…I mean it’s good because in an intimate setting you start to learn where everyone else is, and you see that everyone has different strengths and it’s good.” Alison tried to motivate and reassure the freshmen to appreciate the challenge as well as other students’ abilities, but the freshmen, even at the end of the discussion, did not seem eager to take another literature course.
In response to the concerns of both groups, I explained my goals for the course and my view of the learning process. I expressed flexibility regarding the post-reading questions, and stated that my goal for all of them was to become independent, thoughtful learners capable of tailoring the classroom materials and discussions to fit their individual learning objectives. As a result of this discussion, I also created a translation assignment so that both groups could grapple with the texts in their own ways. Incidentally, this particular assignment was viewed quite favorably by all students. In the questionnaire which I administered both before and after the course, one item referred specifically to translation. Before the course, no students expressed strong agreement for the statement. However, after the course, three students did. Likewise, prior to the course, five students disagreed with the statement, whereas afterward only two students disagreed. The table below shows the total responses for this item on the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think literature professors should require students to translate passages into English.</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Students’ views toward translation in literature courses

Although I have not always been a proponent of translation exercises, most of these students agreed that it was beneficial. Thus, in this particular course, translation may have provided the language practice the freshmen needed while also providing a challenge for the seniors. Four other survey items also addressed the general views
students had toward the instructional organization/priorities of a literature course. These items are presented below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think a foreign language literature teacher should summarize (in</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the target language) what each reading was about in class so that</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/she is sure everyone understood it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it is important for my literature teacher to talk to me</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about language learning so that I can understand my strengths</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and weaknesses and how to make progress.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it would be helpful if my literature professor gave me</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific strategies to help me discuss what I have read (i.e.</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phrases to use, practice with verb tenses, related vocabulary etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I learn more in my literature class when my teacher</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discusses our readings in English instead of French.</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Students’ views toward instructional choices

The first item in this table refers to whether students think their literature teachers should summarize the readings in the target language to ensure comprehension. Initially, seven students agreed with this statement. However, at the end of the course only five students agreed. This movement could mean that the discussion groups implemented in this course helped them to understand what the texts were about through discussing them in the target language. We can only speculate as to why certain students felt differently
at the end of this course; nevertheless, it is still encouraging to note that some students felt they would not need to rely on the teacher for this purpose.

Students’ views toward whether literature professors should talk to them about language learning did not change at the end of the course. However, it is important to note that four students agreed and four students strongly agreed with the statement both times. This suggests that students do want their literature teachers to be aware that they are still language learners and that they want support as they continue to develop their foreign language proficiency.

At the beginning of the semester, seven students strongly agreed that providing strategies to students when discussing literature was important. After fifteen weeks, only four students strongly agreed. This shift seems odd at first glance, but it may indicate that students felt more competent as the semester progressed. Because specific phrases were provided to them to use during the CR discussions they had in class, they may not have felt the need for them. Because no students changed their minds that readings should be discussed in English, it is possible that students felt the opportunities for discussion that CR provided were useful for understanding what they read. If students had not been able to learn from the CR discussions or had felt that the teacher’s exclusive use of French during the discussions was a problem, it would probably have been expressed on this item of the questionnaire. Therefore, though it may present linguistic challenges, the findings from this survey suggest, at a minimum, that teachers should consider discussing readings in the target language in upper-division literature courses.

As the data from course sessions and the questionnaire show, the seniors and freshmen in this course had different attitudes, expectations, and reactions to this
literature course. These differences will resurface when their attitudes toward the CR framework are presented later in this chapter. As we have seen in this section, the freshmen were slower to embrace the independent nature of the course and the seniors were reluctant to have daily assignments. Essentially, the freshmen wanted more structure (i.e. workbook assignments) and more explicit language instruction, whereas the seniors wanted less structure and more content. Both groups indicated a preference for discussing literature in the target language and for literature professors to give them specific strategies to employ when talking about literature.

Though it is rare for a class to consist exclusively of freshmen and seniors, it is common that students will have had different experiences and expectations regarding language learning. For that reason, it is important for literature professors to engage in dialogue with their students so that they can adapt instruction where possible and when necessary.

**Analysis of Discourse in CR Discussions**

The students’ discourse in this upper division French class was analyzed to provide a picture of what happens when students are given a specific model by which to discuss literary texts. As we know from previous studies in upper-division classrooms (Donato & Brooks, 2002; Weist, 2004) students rarely have opportunities to speak in the literature classroom. Frequently, this occurs because teachers have their own agenda or because they do not have specific parameters in place to ensure that authentic, meaningful discussion is occurring. More often than not, teachers do most of the talking, which denies students the opportunity to develop advanced speaking skills. Implementing
a framework for discussion such as CR gives teachers specific aims and guidelines for discussion that they may otherwise not consider.

Before presenting the results in this section, I would like to note that CR discussions were not employed as a means to address the accuracy of the students’ language use. That is, my primary aim was to encourage students to talk and participate in ways they may not in the Recitation format, not to analyze how their language accuracy improved because of CR. In fact, it would not be reasonable to expect dramatic improvement in the short span of one semester, because language acquisition is a slow process. As Lee and VanPatten (2003) have put it, the implicit system that students construct as language learners is always evolving, but acquisition is not instantaneous. Students go through stages as they acquire language, and some learners take years to move through a given stage. Thus, it is important to view this course and the language the students produced as part of the evolutionary process for the developing linguistic system.

Though the study does not look at accuracy, it does focus on pushing students to develop one characteristic of the advanced speaker, which is extended discourse. Employing a specific model for discussion (such as CR) has been suggested by previous research (Donato & Brooks, 2004) as a way to support teachers wishing to provide students with opportunities for extended discourse. Thus, if extended discourse in French is elicited through CR discussions, students will be progressing in their language development.
**Students use French and English in CR Discussions**

The analysis of the student discourse in this study includes two important components. First is the extent to which the discourse elicited is in the target language, French. Second is the extent to which CR discussions elicited extended discourse from the students. Though it may seem obvious that students in an upper-division French course would speak French, we know from anecdotal evidence and previous studies (Donato & Brooks 2004; Weist, 2004) that students and teachers use English in some instances to discuss literature.

To examine how frequently I, the instructor, and the students used French (as opposed to English) to express their ideas during CR discussions, I counted the total number of words in each discussion. The percentage of French words (French words divided by total words) in each discussion is presented in the figure below. The percent of French for Discussion 3A could not be calculated because of the malfunction of the audio equipment used to capture that discussion. Turns (to be discussed in an upcoming section) were calculated by watching the video, but unfortunately the sound was not consistent enough to render a complete transcript.
As is evident from the above figure, the first discussion elicited the most English from the participants. Because it was the first discussion, the students may have been more hesitant to express their views in French and were not yet comfortable with the CR framework. As the instructor for the course, I was also nervous about whether students would talk about the big issues in these first three texts. The English in this 42 minute discussion took place in the 35th minute of the discussion, when I wanted students to summarize what they had learned or appreciated from the first group of readings. In the 32nd minute of the discussion, I prompted the students (in French) to share their thoughts and added that they could do so in French or English. At this point in the discussion, it is evident that I was willing to sacrifice French in order to encourage students to participate.

Interestingly, my willingness to accept French or English did not instantly elicit English from the students. In fact, Alison, April, Audrey, and Lisa continued to discuss the texts in French. However, after a long pause, Alison switched to English. She said, “I think there are a lot of themes that kind of came out after I … um… that I didn’t really
see the connection until we’d read all three of them…and I started connecting them to personal things in my life or other stories or other books or things of that nature.” I responded in English with, “What kinds of other stories or books?” Once the discussion has switched, English comments are elicited from Alison, April, Audrey, Sandra, and myself. The last six and half minutes of this discussion took place entirely in English. In fact, until Alison spoke English (three minutes after I first suggest they can use either language) the conversation continued in French. Thus, the majority of the students may not have felt comfortable until Alison spoke in English. In addition, the fact that I acknowledged her comments and responded in English likely also encouraged them to continue speaking English.

After reflecting on the first discussion, I decided that I was not achieving my goal for extended discourse in French if I encouraged students to communicate in English (even after extended periods of speaking French). Therefore, for all of the remaining discussions, I recommitted myself to speaking French exclusively. I think it is important to mention that my determination to stay in French was an important factor in how committed students were to speaking French. For me, it was not that speaking French was hard; it was that it was frustrating when students did not say anything. It is always a challenge to communicate so that students can understand, and when they do not it can be tempting to use English instead. In many cases, even if students are aware that speaking French is an important goal for a discussion they may abandon the goal if the teacher does. However, if students recognize that a teacher is dedicated to staying in French, it is more likely that students will try to do this as well.
Perhaps because of my recommittment to speak only French, the second discussion resulted in no English from the students or the instructor. Subsequent discussions elicited minimal English from the students. In fact, no discussion following the first was less than 95% French. Another point of interest is that the percentages of French and English did not change substantially once small groups were formed. This means that the freshmen, while less experienced than the seniors, were still able to participate in discussions and use the target language for a majority of the time. Of the freshmen, Ginny used English the most, opting for French about 86 percent of the time across all of the discussions. Sandra was the next student most likely to use English, yet her average across the discussions was 92%, meaning she used English just 8% of the time. The other freshmen were able to use French more than 97% of the time. Of the seniors, Alison used English the most (89%) followed by April (93%). These numbers will be interpreted further in conjunction with the data on turn taking and turn length, which is discussed in an upcoming section.

Although we can see that the students were able to maintain discussions in French, they did use English in two common situations: (1) when their vocabulary was deficient; and (2) when they were thinking through how to say something. To illustrate these situations, I have selected the following representative examples taken from the transcripts.

Students use English to Compensate for Linguistic Challenges

First, the students used English when their vocabulary in French was deficient. In other words, they resorted to English in situations where they could not think of the exact word they wanted in French. In many cases, the students would construct a sentence in
French and would insert an English word when they could not access the proper French word or expression. Christine does this in the following example from Discussion 3B, in which the students are discussing how immigrants should adapt to new cultural contexts. She says, “Aussi en Amérique dans les Etats-Unis… les filles changent leur apparence um tout le temps pour l’acceptation par autres et pour se semble comme les « celebrities ». (Also, in America, in the United States…girls change their appearance um all the time for the acceptance of others and to seem like celebrities.) Sandra, when discussing communication in relationships (Discussion 5A), also uses an English word. She says, « C’est normal d’avoir des silences et ce n’est pas «awkward ». (It’s normal to have silence and it isn’t awkward.)

There are many examples, particularly among the freshmen, of this type. Even though the students were encouraged to speak only French or to use circumlocution when uncertain of an exact word, certain students still resorted to English words occasionally. Though infrequent, the students’ tendencies to use English show that they fell back on their native language because they knew they could. If the students were in conversation with other students who did not speak English, they would be forced to explain themselves in French. Yet because these students knew they shared English as a native language, they occasionally used English words because they were more easily accessed.

*Students use English as a thinking tool*

The students also employed English when they were thinking through how to say something. For example, from the discussion mentioned above (3B), Christine says the following: C’est leur culture mais um les filles changent...um...Je ne sais pas...les filles changent…**I don’t know how to say it.** » Here, Christine stops and switches to English.
She may have done this to indicate she wanted help, or to invite another speaker to attempt to finish her thought for her. In a different discussion (5A), Ginny also uses English when she is unsure. She says, « Oui, mais…et je comprends qu’il est nécessaire pour elle de montrer, or monter ? I always get really confused… » Sandra then helps Ginny by clarifying that the verb she wants is montrer and Ginny goes on to complete her statement in French. Audrey, in discussion 3A, also uses English in this way. She says, « Je pense que les deux histoires montrent l’importance d’avant…of having….would that be avant? » She turns to the other students to check herself and uses English to show that she is not sure if she has used avoir correctly (which she has not). Instead of using avant, she should have used the infinitive form of avoir preceded by de. Audrey was probably thinking about ayant which she confused in her speed with avant.

The fact that the students used English words and structures to communicate their ideas shows that they were indeed still developing a linguistic system in French. Although recognizing students’ inability to express themselves well in French can be discouraging for literature professors, at the same time, it is encouraging to note that students are capable of analyzing their own speech. If we encourage them to analyze their use of the target language we may also be contributing to their development in the target language.

Students provide linguistic support in CR Discussions

In some instances, speakers acknowledged the use of English and addressed it by providing the correct French word, phrase, or grammatical structure. Other times, students anticipated through close listening what another speaker was trying to say. For example, sometimes a student paused, which indicated to the other group members that
she was searching for an appropriate word or structure. As I coded the transcripts, I came to refer to this type of exchange as an assisted turn. My reason for this is that the second student provides a word or phrase that enables the first speaker to complete her speaking turn. Once the speaker receives the assistance, she continues talking. Thus, an assisted turn was only coded when the first speaker continued her train of thought after receiving linguistic support from another member of the group.

In the following example of an assisted turn, Audrey helps Christine by providing both the appropriate verb and the past tense conjugation for her. Christine takes her assistance and goes on to complete her thought in French.

**Christine**: Je suis d’accord…la famille est importante…et dans la « Pur Polyestre » la narratrice a une famille qui um « encouraged » ...

**Audrey**: a encouragé

**Christine**: a encouragé à surmonter la différence et elle devenir médecin…mais dans « La Noir De… »um elle n’a pas un rêve.

*Translation:*

**Christine**: I agree…family is important and in “Pur Polyestre” the narrator has a family who encouraged (in English)

**Audrey**: encouraged (in French)

**Christine**: encouraged to overcome difference et she became a doctor…but in “La Noire de…” um she didn’t have a dream.

Other times, the speaker would directly ask how to say something by using the appropriate phrase in French « Comment dit-on…? » (How do you say…?) In this example, April provides the word Alison needs to complete her thought:

**Alison**: Pour moi, c’est une question de est-ce que ça c’est un relation qui est comment dit-on « healthy » bien ?

**April**: stable
Translation:

Alison: For me, it’s a question of is that the kind of relationship that is, how would you say it, « healthy » well?
April: stable

As mentioned above, assisted turns also occurred when students in the group anticipated another speaker’s need. The following exchange is an example of Teresa providing a word for Alison:

Alison : Ça c’est un vue plus négatif de le vue de Teresa avec (pausing)…
Teresa : les écouteurs
Alison : et est-ce que le mari utilise les écouteurs pour être sympathique ou pour être isolé ?

Translation:
Alison: That’s a more negative view than Teresa’s with (pausing)
Teresa: the headphones
Alison: and does the husband use the headphones to be considerate or to isolate himself?

This example shows that the students, in this case Teresa, were listening closely enough to each other to anticipate the appropriate word or phrase. Alison does not have to ask for the word specifically, nor does she insert an English word. Instead, her hesitation cues one of the other speakers to provide assistance and to help her finish her thought. This tactic occurs on occasion when native speakers communicate, but in my experience, it is not a very common strategy for students to use with each other. Instead, most exchanges of this sort occur between teachers and students, with the teacher providing the necessary linguistic assistance. In the analysis of the transcripts, these types of assisted turns occurred 28 times, which shows that students were able to help each other communicate more effectively.
The examples in this section reveal the collaborative nature of discussion and show that the students were able to provide the kind of assistance typically provided by the instructor for each other. The assisted turns in the transcripts indicate that the students were listening carefully and responding to other students during CR discussions. In *Recitations* these types of exchanges are less likely for several reasons. First, teachers do not frequently invite students to provide them with the words they need when they are lecturing about literature; in fact, they may not need this type of support from their students. Second, because the teacher is the authority figure, students may hesitate to offer a suggestion if a teacher does stop to pause for a word or grammatical structure. Third, students may not be listening closely enough to provide assistance to the instructor even if the instructor would not be opposed to receiving that type of support from his or her students. For all of the above reasons, CR provides more opportunities to students to provide linguistic assistance to each other than the traditional format. In short, the CR framework encourages students to listen and support each other as they try to communicate meaningful messages effectively.

**CR Discussions alter traditional discourse patterns**

As Cazden (2001) Mantero (2002a) and others (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Hall, 1995; Nystrand, 1997; Weist, 2004) have shown, teachers tend toward the IRE pattern in classroom discourse, which typically results in less frequent and less elaborate oral participation from students. The CR framework was implemented in the hopes that its open participation structure would have some effect on the frequency and length of student turns in literary discussions. To consider the participation and the discourse patterns in CR discussions, I will present information related to the number of turns, the
average length of student speaking turns, and the types of exchanges (student-to-student and instructor-to-student) in the CR discussions. I also provide responses from students as examples of the extended discourse elicited from students in CR discussions. The table below shows students’ participation in CR discussions over the course of the semester by presenting the number of turns for each participant in each discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>D1</th>
<th>D2</th>
<th>D3A</th>
<th>D3B</th>
<th>D4A</th>
<th>D4B</th>
<th>D5A</th>
<th>D5B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td></td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Absent</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>53</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Turns in Discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>147</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4: Number of Student Turns in CR Discussions.

Table 4.4 shows how students participated orally over the course of the semester as well as how the students were grouped for each discussion. The table reveals high levels of participation for the instructor, for Alison, and for April in the first discussion, a whole class discussion. All of the other students took fewer than ten turns, although all of the students did take at least one speaking turn. The exception was Teresa, who was absent for the first discussion. This discussion was fairly balanced among the students,
with the instructor participating slightly more than the student with the most vocal participation, Alison. Because this was the first discussion, the setting was new. This was exciting for the students, but it is also possible that some were hesitant to speak up until they had a better understanding of how discussions would occur.

The second discussion (also a whole class discussion) is similar to the first. However, there is a clear spike in teacher participation in this discussion, with strong participation from Alison and April as well. Also worth noting is that Christine was absent the day of this discussion. Christine’s absence may have dissuaded the other freshmen from participating, because her presence often bolstered their participation. Of the freshmen, Christine was the most likely to speak in discussions. In general, she was more confident, more passionate and more opinionated than the other three freshmen.

The third discussion shows an increase in participation for every participant, except the instructor. This difference may be attributed to the implementation of small group discussions as opposed to whole class discussions and to the fact that freshmen and seniors were grouped together. It was after Discussion 2 that the freshmen came to me with their concerns about being placed in groups with the seniors. They asked me to group them together, which I did. The fact that the students felt comfortable with each other likely produced more confidence, which resulted in more turn taking from each participant. For example, in Discussion 2 Teresa, a senior, only took one speaking turn. Yet, in Discussion 3, she had sixteen speaking turns. Her number of turns falls again in Discussion 4 (seven turns) and then rises again to 21 when she is back with the seniors in the last discussion. Likewise, for the freshmen Ginny, Christine and Sandra their
speaking turns are the highest in Discussions 3A and 5A, and the difference in the amount of turns is substantial.

Discussion 4, though also a small group discussion, did not result in such balanced participation. However, the members of these two groups consisted of a mix of seniors and freshmen, as opposed to all freshmen and all seniors. In Discussion 4A, Teresa and Lisa specifically mentioned that the ideas presented in these stories were new to them and that, consequently, they had difficulty expressing their thoughts during the discussion. Discussion 4B took place several days after Discussion 4A. This delay likely caused some students to participate less, especially if they had not re-read the text, as was the case for Sandra and Ginny. Their participation was minimal in this discussion, which I attribute to a lack of preparedness on their part.

In general, the greatest participation occurred in the two small group discussions in which freshmen and seniors were grouped together (Discussions 3 and 5). It is also clear from Table 4.4 that participation was more balanced in the groups consisting exclusively of freshmen and seniors. The table also shows that Alison and Lisa were the only students whose participation steadily increased over the course of the semester. With the exception of Christine, who had the highest number of speaking turns in Discussion 4, the students participated most when they were grouped with their peers in Discussions 3 and 5.

In terms of balanced participation, Discussions 5A and 5B were the best. It seems that, by the end of the semester, the instructor and the participants had grasped how to participate in the CR discussions. After 15 weeks the students were at their most comfortable and probably also at their most confident level. In addition, both groups
reported that the last unit was their favorite unit. Although the students also noted enjoying many of the stories in the other units, all the students concurred that the final story in the last unit was their favorite. This attitude toward the story, coupled with the experience and confidence that had developed over the semester, likely explains why the final two discussions had the most evenly distributed turns.

**CR promotes Communicative Exchanges**

The CR framework is designed to promote opportunities for participants to think and reason together. Thus, as Chinn et al (2001) have noted, a good CR discussion should include runs of discourse in which students are speaking to each other. The chart below shows the percentage of student-to-student discourse for each CR discussion. To calculate this percentage, I took the total number of turns in the discussion and divided it by the number of turns in which students spoke to each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCUSSION</th>
<th>Total Turns</th>
<th>Student to Student Turns</th>
<th>Percentage of the Discussion involving Student Exchanges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D1 (whole class)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2 (whole class)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3A (small group/freshmen)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3B (small group/seniors)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4 group1 (small group/mixed F and S)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4 group2 (small group/mixed F and S)</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5A (small group/freshmen)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5B (small group/seniors)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.5: Student Exchanges in CR Discussions
From the above figures, it is obvious that certain discussions contained more instances of students talking to each other than others. The primary factors accounting for this were: (1) the number of participants in the group, (2) whether the instructor was facilitating groups simultaneously, and (3) the relationships between the participants.

First, whether the discussion was a class discussion or a small group discussion played a significant role in how much students talked to each other. As we can see, the two whole class discussions (D1 and D2) had substantially lower percentages of student-to-student discourse than the small group discussions. Obviously, when there were fewer participants more discussion was likely among all participants. However, the whole class discussion also seemed to create a sense among the participants that the instructor was in charge of the discussion. As the instructor, I found it more challenging to encourage students to pursue lines of thought in front of the whole class (even with a small class of only eight students). The students tended to wait for someone else to say something instead of making an individual contribution.

The remaining discussions (the small group discussions) had varying degrees of success with regard to students speaking to each other. As I explained in the previous chapter, I moved between the groups for Discussions 3 and 5, which resulted in long stretches of students talking to each other. My absence for short periods of time encouraged the students to maintain the discussion independently. The group dynamics also played a part in these discussions; when all of the students liked each other there was better participation from everyone. The fourth discussion was difficult because the participants had never participated in a group together, and some students indicated frustration with this discussion’s readings. It is also important to remember that
Discussion 4B took place five days after the first discussion; thus, it had been longer since the students had read the texts, which may have made it harder for them to think of things to say. The percentage of student exchanges for Discussion 3 is higher than for Discussion 5, which may reveal that I was overcompensating for Discussion 2. That is, my instincts regarding participation levels in Discussion 2, led me to be less vocal in Discussion 3 than Discussion 5.

**CR Promotes Extended Discourse in French**

According to the ACTFL guidelines, one feature of an advanced speaker is the ability to narrate and describe using paragraph-length discourse. Therefore, if the CR framework is providing opportunities for students to express themselves, we should see examples of extended discourse in French in discussions among advanced students. Likewise, CR discussions should contain examples of discourse patterns other than the IRE pattern, which is so prevalent. As we have seen in the previous sections, the number of student-to-student exchanges and the average length of a student’s turn are higher than what are characteristic of the Recitation format.

The table below shows the average length of a participant’s turn as well as the average number of turns for all of the CR Discussions. This information shows that student speaking turns consisted of more than a few words. Regarding the number of turns, it is important to remember that the figure presented is an average. Table 4.4 presented earlier in this chapter offers a better idea of how a student’s participation varied according to the group she was in.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Average number of words per turn</th>
<th>Average number of turns</th>
<th>Average percent of discourse in French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>99.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6: Average Number of Words Per Turn and Turns in French

As the table above shows, Alison and Audrey had the longest average turns in the CR Discussions. Alison spoke frequently and at length, whereas Audrey did not speak as often. Audrey did, however, use extended discourse when she spoke. She was comfortable linking her ideas together to form paragraphs and was able to do so in French more of the time than Alison. Teresa, Sandra, Audrey, Lisa, Ginny took fewer turns in discussion, but when they did speak their turns were not limited to one or two words. In fact, the average length of turn for all students was just over 16 words per turn.

The differences between the students who took longer turns and those who took shorter turns may be due to both personality and/or proficiency. April was not shy and
did not hesitate to express herself if she had an opinion. Teresa and Lisa in particular were very conscientious and tried to avoid making mistakes. Because accuracy was important to them, they spoke nearly exclusively in French. This attitude may explain why they took fewer turns. In other words, though these students spoke less often, they carefully formulated what they wanted to say. Sandra tended to say more when grouped with her peers, as did Ginny. Christine also enjoyed expressing her views and opinions in French, and she readily shared examples and asked questions. She did not hesitate to clarify her ideas or the ideas of others. Although not the participant with the most amount of turns, I likely had more turns than the other speakers because I was asking questions, prompting students, and summarizing ideas presented by the students.

Regarding the average amount of turns, Alison, Audrey and I had a higher number of turns than the other participants. This is likely due to personality and to the roles these speakers claimed for themselves in discussions. For example, from the beginning of the course, Alison revealed that discussion was an important learning strategy for her. Consequently, she was comfortable and thrived in the CR environment. This resulted in both a high number of turns and longer turns than most of the students. This approach to language use may also explain why she had a higher percentage of English use than some of the other students. For Alison, fluency and expression were more important than accuracy. On the contrary, Ginny, who had the fewest turns, also had a low French percentage.

Ironically, the two students with the most and fewest number of turns (Alison and Ginny respectively) were also the two students who used the most English. In Alison’s case, this was because she emphasized fluency over accuracy. She commented in class on
at least one occasion that it was more important for her to get her words out than to be accurate. Ginny, however, had a very difficult time expressing herself in French. Thus, her use of English is more likely attributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy.

The above table also presents a general picture of participation which shows that participation in the CR discussions was balanced. That is, no one speaker had a significantly higher number of words per turn. It is particularly important to note that I, as the instructor, did not have the highest word per turn average. The average number of words per turn ranged from 11.2 to 31, which shows that the open participation structure in CR was effective for providing equal opportunities to speak, and for participants to elaborate on their ideas through turns that consisted of more than a few words.

**Examples of Extended Discourse**

As the instructor for this course, I employed different strategies to move away from the IRE pattern in CR discussions in an effort to increase student turns and the length of a student’s turn. First, I tried to implement strategies suggested by McKeown and Beck (1999) and Nystrand (1997), such as probing, analyzing, asking for clarification, and providing alternatives. I also tried to ask questions with a lot of possible responses, instead of questions that had a single correct response, or that emphasized my own interpretation. Second, I encouraged the students to talk to each other and to use discussion as a way to explore texts together.

To give a clearer picture of the discourse that occurred in CR discussions, I would like to provide some examples. These examples are representative of the strategies used to encourage elaboration and response to text. The first example comes from the first discussion on distance and communication.
on culture and identity. Both examples illustrate extended discourse and show how students are exploring texts with each other instead of listening to their teacher’s interpretation.

In the first example, I begin the exchange with an open-ended question regarding the similarities between the three stories in the unit.

**Teacher: Quelles sont d’autres similarités entre les trois histoires que vous avez remarquées ?**

**Christine:** Tous les protagonistes ont les obstacles, mais je pense qu’ils ne peuvent pas surmonter les obstacles. Um…La mère dans Une Lettre, um…l’obstacle d’elle est la vieillesse et pour Dauphina l’obstacle est la jeunesse et la pauvreté, et pour la femme dans « L’ombre et L’absent » je pense que l’obstacle d’elle est um…elle est une femme et dans le Vietnam les hommes dominaient les femmes et um si tous les protagonistes ne surmontent pas les obstacles il est impossible….et il est très triste.

**April:** Il y a des obstacles pour les autres personnages aussi. Je pense qu’il y a well, le fils de la mère dans L’ombre peut-être il a des problèmes avec sa mère peut-être il ne veut pas qu’elle habite dans la maison de retraite et aussi pour la famille on ne sait pas de Dolcina veut et peut-être ils veulent vraiment qu’elle habite avec elles, mais ce n’est pas possible.

**Teacher:** Oui, donc dans les trois histoires, dans les premières trois histoires, nous ne savons pas ce que les autres pensent. Nous ne savons pas si le fils veut être avec sa mère et il ne peut pas, et nous ne savons pas si la famille de Dolcina veut être avec elle. **Mais, dans le troisième est-ce qu’il y a ce même problème ?**

**Alison:** Elle ne parle pas de les problèmes et d’humiliation…

**Teacher:** L’humiliation, **Comment L’humiliation ?**

**Alison:** Quand le fils dit, oh ça c’est ma père, pas vous. et le père était plus «hurt » où quelque chose comme ça, mais il ne parle pas à sa femme … » pourquoi est-ce qu’il dit cá ?...ou quelque chose comme ça.

**Christine:** Il est trop fier de parler avec sa femme. Il préfère rester dans le silence.

*Translation:*

**Teacher:** What other similarities between the three stories did you notice ?

**Christine:** All the protagonists have obstacles, but I think that they can’t overcome the obstacles. Um. The mother in “Une Lettre”, um her obstacle is age and for Dauphina the obstacle is youth and being poor and for the woman in “L’ombre et L’absent”, I think that her obstacle is well,
she is a woman and in Vietnam men used to dominate women and um so all the protagonists can’t overcome the obstacles it’s impossible…and it’s really sad.

April: There are obstacles for other characters as well. I think that well, the son of the mother in “L’ombre”, perhaps he has problems with his mother, perhaps he doesn’t want her to live in a retirement home and also the family doesn’t know what Docina wants and perhaps they really want her to live with them, but it isn’t possible.

Teacher: Yes, so in the three stories, in the first three stories, we don’t know what others are thinking. We don’t know if the son wants to be with his mother and he isn’t able, and we don’t know if Dolcina’s family wants to be with her. **but in the third story, do we have this same problem [the problem of communicating]?**

Alison: She doesn’t talk about the problems and about humiliation.

Teacher: Humiliation? How so?

Alison: When the son says, “Oh, that, that’s my father, not you.” and the father was more hurt or something like that, but he doesn’t say to his wife, “Why is he saying that?” or something like that.

Christine: He is too proud to talk with his wife. He prefers to stay silent.

In this exchange, my first speaking turn generated extended discourse from the two students who responded. Christine, in particular, gave a lengthy response in which she asserted that three of the characters were similar because they could not overcome the obstacles they faced. After this response, I summarized what the students said and invited them to build on the ideas by asking them to consider whether a particular problem was also present in the text they had not yet mentioned. After this prompt, Alison shared that communication impacted the husband and wife in the third story, “L’ombre et L’absent”. Instead of completely agreeing with Alison’s assessment of the couple’s problems, I asked her to clarify why she chose the word, “humiliation”. If I had followed the IRE pattern by responding “Yes, that’s right”, or “Well, o.k., but what do the rest of you think?” Alison may not have elaborated on her response. Because CR provides an alternative to the Recitation format in which IRE patterns are prevalent,
examples of extended discourse like this support the use of CR as a means to provide students with opportunities to speak.

The second example of extended discourse in CR takes place between two students, Sandra and Christine, and occurs in Discussion 3A. Student questions often resulted in extended discourse. Here, Sandra is simultaneously constructing and considering a question, which resulted in extended discourse.

**Sandra:** Quelle est l’importance d’avoir une bonne famille si vous déménagez d’une autre pays où vous n’êtes pas complètement accepté ? C’est comme “Pur Polyester”…elle n’est pas acceptée par ses camarades mais elle a une bonne famille et elle est juste heureuse mais dans La Noire de elle n’a pas sa famille avec elle et elle n’est pas acceptée dans la culture ou dans sa maison et ça c’est pourquoi elle se suicidait… et est-ce que vous êtes d’accord que la famille joue un rôle important dans cette situation ?

**Christine:** Oui. Ma question était comme ça…ou um ta question, um mais est-ce que vous pensez que Diouwana était suicidé parce qu’elle n’a pas sa famille elle n’a pas or elle n’a personne pour parler ?

**Translation:**

**Sandra:** What is the importance of having a good family if you move to another country or if you aren’t completely accepted? It’s like in “Pur Polyester”…she isn’t accepted by her classmates and she has a good family and she’s just happy, but in “La Noire de…” she doesn’t have a family with her and she isn’t accepted in the culture or in the household and that’s why she killed herself…and do you…do you agree that family plays an important role in this situation?

**Christine:** Yes. My question was like that…or um your question, um but do you think Diouwana killed herself because she didn’t have a family or because she didn’t have anyone to talk to?

Here, Sandra is reflecting on the text by asking a question. She is interested in the differences in the lives of two main characters and asks the group to consider what resulted in the happiness of one woman and the demise of another. Her turn is long
because she is framing her question as she thinks about the alternatives. She does not just pose a question here; she makes comparisons (both women move to foreign countries to live) and provides a possible answer (family plays a role in one’s happiness). Her question resonates with Christine, who seems to have been interpreting the stories in a similar way. Sandra does not seem to pose her question because she already has an answer in mind; instead, she invites exploration of the issue from others in the group. As this example shows, asking and discussing questions was an effective way for the students to explore the texts more deeply. When the students talked to each other, they were attentive and they asked each other the kinds of questions that required elaboration.

This example shows that the CR discussions gave students a means by which to construct meaning from the texts. If they do not have opportunities to talk, they cannot interpret texts in this way. As Appel and Lantolf (1994) argued, “it is essential to incorporate into instructional programs post-reading activities that go beyond asking students questions about the content of texts…These activities should engage students in talking about texts…as a means of helping them to construct meaning from the text” (p.449-450). In the above example, Sandra is talking through it as she constructs meaning from it. Moreover, when a pedagogical approach emphasizes the value of student talk, it provides opportunities for students to construct meaning through speech as they talk about and respond to texts.

**Students share and defend their opinions in CR Discussions**

An important reason for selecting the CR approach to discussion in this upper-division literature course was that it encouraged the students to share and support their opinions. This ability is both a language and literary goal. As a language goal,
expressing and supporting an opinion shows a level of sophistication on the part of the speaker and demonstrates that he/she can actively participate in authentic conversations. As the current ACTFL speaking guidelines for the Advanced-low category (Breiner-Sanders, Lowe, Miles and Swender, 1999) state, students should be able to “participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations” (p. 15). Likewise, the first set of speaking guidelines, published in 1986, specifically mentioned that defending an opinion is a trait attributed to sophisticated users of the target language.

For most foreign language teachers it is important for students to use the target language in authentic ways, and this often includes sharing and defending opinions. Likewise, most literature professors expect their students to express and support their ideas with personal and textual examples. Because one goal of the CR approach is to encourage students to respond to literature by expressing and supporting opinions, if the approach was successful there will be examples of this in the transcripts.

In analyzing the transcripts, it is clear that the students were able to express their opinions in the discussions. The students frequently began sentences with the French phrase, “Je pense que/I think that” to introduce their opinions. They also used other phrases such as, « Je crois que/ I believe that », and « Je trouve que/I find that ». After presenting their ideas, the students often asked what others thought. They employed the phrases they had been given to use in discussions such as, “Est-ce que vous êtes d’accord que….” (Do you agree that…) or “Est-ce que vous pensez que…” (Do you think that…) or simply, « Qu’est-ce que vous pensez? » (What do you think?) These phrases allowed them to draw other participants into the discussion and gave them a way to enter into the conversation. Among the freshmen, there is a high frequency of statements beginning
either with, “Je suis d’accord” or “Je ne suis pas d’accord” which gave them a tangible way to preface sharing their opinions. It seems that having specific phrases to use gave them a comfortable way to take the floor when participating in CR discussions.

The students were also encouraged to defend or support their opinions by giving reasons from the text or supporting examples. I encouraged them to elaborate on opinions by using the word “parce que” (because) to explain why they thought something. Another common strategy was for the students to use the word “peut-être” (maybe/perhaps). This phrase allowed them to explore their ideas and possible interpretations with the other members of the group.

There are too many examples in the transcript to list how frequently the students used the above phrases/words. However, I will provide a few examples that represent how the students used CR discussions to express and/or support their opinions about literature. The first example comes from the first discussion, where the students are discussing the role of communication in relationships. The exchange begins with a question posed by April:

April: Est-ce qu’il y a une corrélation entre la communication orale ou écrite et l’amour ?
Sandra : Hmm, Je pense que ça dépend de combien de temps il n’y a pas de communication. Parce que s’il y a un très court temps, depuis quelques mois ou un..Je pense que c’est possible de rester en amour avec quelqu’un mais si’il y a beaucoup de temps sans communication je pense que c’était [serait] très difficile de rester en amour avec quelqu’un
Alison : Hmm. Je pense que peut-être il y a quelque chose um dans son âme (questioning?) qui « connecte » um deux personnes de temps en temps. Um..Un de mon favorite romans c’est Cold Mountain, et dans le livre l’homme et femme sont « separate » pour tout le temps mais l’idée de la femme aide l’homme avec beaucoup de problèmes
Teacher. Hmmm.
Alison : Je pense que peut-être de temps en temps il y a une connexion qui est plus fort que communication.
Audrey: Je pense aussi que pour continuer l’amour entre deux personnes la communication est essentielle.
April: Je suis d’accord avec vous. Um Je pense qu’on peut aimer quelqu’un mais s’il n’y a pas de communication on ne sait pas exprimer ça mais la communication améliorerait l’amour.

Translation:

April: Is there a correlation between oral or written communication and love?
Sandra: Hmm. I think that depends on how much time there is without communication. Because if it’s a very short time, I think it’s possible to stay in love with someone but if there is a lot of time without communication. I think it was [would be] very difficult to stay in love with someone.
Alison: Hmm. I think that maybe there is something in one’s soul that connects um two people from time to time. One of my favorite books, it’s Cold Mountain, and in the book the man and woman are separate for all the time but the idea of the women helps the man with many problems.
Teacher: Hmm.
Alison: I think that maybe from time to time there is a connection that is stronger than communication.
Audrey: I think that for love to continue between two people, communication is essential.
April: I agree with you. Um. I think that people can love someone but if there is not communication, people don’t know how to express that, but [so] communication would improve love.

In this example, Sandra considers April’s question and explains that she thinks that the length of time people are separated would have an impact on the success of the relationship. She begins her phrase with “Je pense que” and then later inserts “mais” which allows her to offer an alternative. April uses the expression “Je suis d’accord avec vous” but also uses the word “mais” to elaborate on the extent to which she agrees with Audrey’s statement.

The second example is from Discussion 4A about hope and revolt. In this excerpt, April, Lisa and Teresa are considering what prompted each of the main female characters (Nzuzi and Chloé) to change.
April: Est-ce que quelque chose vous avez frappé…frappe de les histoires?
Lisa: Je pense que tous les changements dans la vie de um Nzuzi elle avait beaucoup de la puissance et motivation pour changer sa vie et pour survivre quand elle n’a pas beaucoup d’éducation et um un métier…
April: Oui, je pense que… mais…je suis d’accord avec vous mais l’influence de sa responsabilité dans les vies de ses enfants c’est une grande motivation pour elle elle ne doit pas…ce n’est pas seulement elle…qu’elle doit survivre… parce qu’elle doit survivre… mais Chloé elle est seule avec son problème et peut-être…Ça c’est pourquoi… (loud talking outside) um…je m’excuse…C’est pourquoi nos réactions sont différents… on ne sait pas si Chloé est vraiment guérie, mais on sait sûrement que Nzuzi a réussi avec sa vie.
Teresa: On voit dans l’histoire…on voit la fin de l’histoire de Nzuzi mais pas la fin dans la vie de Chloé, et on ne sait pas ce qu’elle fait après.
April: Et peut-être aussi que Nzuzi change sans l’aide des autres mais Chloé a le thérapeute. C’est intéressant de voir comment une personne agit avec la puissance. Nzuzi fait des…a fait des choses pour ses enfants mais Chloé fait des choses pour elle.

Translation:

April: Is there something that struck you…strikes from the stories?
Lisa: I think that all the changes in Nzuzi’s life um she had a lot of strength and motivation to change her life and to survive, when she did not have a lot of education and um a profession.
April: Yes, I think that…but…I agree with you…but the influence of her responsibility on the lives of her children, that is a big motivation for her…She did not have to…it’s not just for herself that she has to survive…because she has to survive…but Chloé, she is alone with her problem and maybe that’s why (loud talking outside) um…excuse me…that’s why our reactions are different….we don’t know if Chloé is really healed, but we know for sure that Nzuzi has succeeded in her life.
Teresa: We can see in the story….we see how the story ends for Nzuzi but not how it ends for Chloé, and we don’t know what she is doing afterward.
April: And maybe it’s also that Nzuzi changes without the help of other people but Cholé had a therapist. It’s interesting to see how a person acts with power. Nzuzi does…did things for her children but Cholé does things for herself.

In this example, we can see that April uses the phrase “Yes, I think that, I agree with you” in order to gain the floor. However, after she has earned the speaking turn, she presents another perspective for the group to consider. She later also turns to the “peut-être” phrase in order to offer yet another possible interpretation of Nzuzi’s actions.
The final example in this section is taken from Discussion 5A. In this discussion, the seniors are considering the role of communication, which they note has been an important theme in many of the stories we read that semester. Again, this example shows how frequently the students relied on specific phrases to express their opinions. In this example, they pose questions to each other by using the recommended phrase, “Est-ce que tu penses que…” or by using other question words such as “Est-ce que” (Do) or “Pourquoi” (Why).

Alison: Est-ce que tu penses que ça c’est à la question de la liberté ? Et comment est-ce que la narratrice cherche la liberté. Est-ce qu’il y a la possibilité de liberté sans communication ?

April: Je pense que sans communication il y a plus de choses que qui manquent. Elle est entourée par le silence et c’est comme un prison pour elle, je pense qu’il n’y a pas de liberté dans cette histoire.

Alison: Je suis d’accord avec ça. Je dis ça aussi.

Lisa: Um. Je pense qu’elle essaie d’échapper et um la liberté parce que elle a des cigarettes et elle travaille beaucoup elle sait de penser aux autres choses mais elle a toujours beaucoup de la colère parce qu’elle ne comprend pas pourquoi son mari est assez tranquille.

Alison: Je suis d’accord avec votre question, Pourquoi est-ce que la narratrice n’a demandé ne demandait pas, « Parle à moi, quel est le problème »….Le mari est sage et fidèle et sérieux mais est-ce qu’il y a aussi peut-être un peu chauviniste ou est-ce qu’il a demandé beaucoup de sa femme ou peut-être il a des autres caractéristiques qui aident la silence de sa femme avec les problèmes.

Teresa: Je pense qu’il a du respect pour sa femme parce qu’elle dit quand il écoute les nouvelles il avait les écouteurs parce qu’elle n’aime pas écouter les nouvelles. Donc il a fait quelque chose pour elle mais en même temps elle n’aime pas non plus.

Translation:

Alison: Do you think that, that it’s a question of freedom? And how does the narrator look for freedom? Is freedom a possibility without communication?

April: Without communication, I think that there are more things missing. She is surrounded by silence and it’s like a prison for her. I think that there is no freedom in this story.

Alison: I agree with that. I say that too.

Lisa: Um. I think that she tries to escape and um freedom because she has cigarettes and she works a lot. She knows to think of others but she is always mad because she doesn’t understand why her husband is so laid back.
Alison: I agree with your question, “Why doesn’t the narrator ask, “Talk to me, what is the problem?” The husband is good, and faithful and serious, but is he also a bit chauvinistic or has he demanded too much from his wife? Or maybe he has other characteristics that help the silence of his wife with problems.

Teresa: I think that he has respect for his wife because she says that when he listens to the news he had headphones because she doesn’t like to listen to the news. So, he did something for her but at the same time she did not like it either.

In this example, it is clear that the students made use of the phrases they were given in class to express agreement, opinions, and to support their opinions. Alison begins the exchange by asking the group what they think about the role of freedom in the story. After listening to April’s response she says, “I agree with that, I say that too”. This phrase gave her a way to participate in the discussion and may have also encouraged Lisa to participate because Lisa takes the next turn. Specifically, she provides two examples from the text which, to her, show that the narrator was trying to escape her own life. Following that, Alison, by using the phrase “peut-être”, provides alternatives for the group to consider. She says, “Isn’t the husband also a bit chauvinistic?” and “Has he demanded too much from his wife?” These questions lead the discussion in a new direction and allowed the group to consider many possible interpretations concerning the relationship portrayed in this story.

In short, these examples show that the students often began sentences with expressions like, “I think” and “I agree with you”. Because of the frequency of this phrase as a way to take the floor, it seems probable that the students relied on these expressions in order to participate in discussions. Likewise, the words “maybe”, “but” and “because” were also useful for the students as they made interpretations, considered alternatives, or provided support for their ideas.
Analysis of Literary Goals

As the instructor for the course, I had several goals regarding literature I hoped CR would help me achieve. First, I hoped CR would provide a space for the students to respond to literature by connecting it to their personal experiences. By this I mean I wanted them to draw from the whole of their lived experiences in order to respond and make sense of the texts we read in class. I also wanted them to share their experiences and how those experiences helped them interpret the text in CR discussions. Davis (1989) argued that “the production of meaning requires an interaction between the textual instructions and the reader’s own life experience” (p.422). Therefore, students need opportunities to make connections between their experiences and the texts. Finally, Davis (1995) connected students’ positive attitudes toward literature with opportunities to express personal opinions. Therefore, if students have those opportunities they may enjoy literature study more. Another course goal was for the students to consider the relationships between literature and culture and culture and identity so that they could begin to conceptualize how these aspects interact. Finally, I wanted the students to compare and contrast the themes of the stories in each unit as well as to compare themes across units, so that they would read carefully and engage more deeply with texts.

As described in Chapter 3, each of the transcripts from the CR discussions was coded and analyzed to reveal ways in which CR enabled participants to respond to literature. In this section, I discuss examples from the transcripts that represent how the students achieved these goals. Although I will present three specific literary goals for the CR discussions, all of these goals support each other and are not mutually exclusive. All goals fall under the broader category of response. Essentially, the purpose of CR, with
regard to literature, was to give the students a place to explore the texts they read in class with their peers and with the instructor.

**Goal 1: CR facilitates a personal connection to literature**

In this course the CR approach to discussion gave the students opportunities to talk about what they had read. They frequently drew from personal experiences to make sense of the texts, and they often shared these experiences in discussion. In the following exchange from the Discussion 1, the group is discussing how distance affects relationships, and April expresses an opinion based on her experience abroad in Vienna.

The story is about a husband who returns to his family after months of fighting in a war.

April: “Pour moi les histoires um rétablissent beaucoup de choses que j’ai appris sur les rapports entre les personnes…La distance, c’est très difficile de surmonter um et J’ai apprendre ce leçon le semestre passé quand je reviens de Vienne et c’est très difficile.

Teacher: Tu veux dire que c’est difficile de maintenir le rapport

April: Oui.

Teacher: Même si c’est seulement trois mois ? À cause de…

April (interrupts): Well, beaucoup de choses ont changé pendant les trois mois…si c’est justement aller à Floride ou quelque place comme ça, mais à Vienne, j’ai changé.

Teacher: Uh huh.

April: So, il y a des nouveaux problèmes.

Alison: Et aussi il y a des nouveaux personnes…il y a des personnes qui changent les rapports, peut-être.

April: J’ai beaucoup de nouveaux amis aussi…mais surtout avec les parents. C’est difficile avec eux, pas très difficile…maintenant.

April: For me the stories um reestablish a lot of things I have learned about relationships between people…distance is very difficult to overcome um and I learned this lesson last semester when I came back from Vienna and it’s very difficult.

Teacher: You mean it’s difficult to maintain the relationship?

April: Yes.

Teacher: Even if it’s only three months? Because of…

April (interrupts): Well, a lot of things changed during the three months. If it were just going to Florida or some place like that…but in Vienna I changed.
Teacher: Uh huh
April: So, there are new problems.
Alison: And also there are new people...there are people who change the relationships, maybe.
April: I have a lot of new friends too...but especially with parents. It's difficult with them...not too difficult...now.

In this exchange, April posits that distance is hard on relationships because people change while they are apart. To support her opinion, she says that living abroad changed who she was. Consequently, it was harder for her to come back and connect with friends who did not understand or appreciate how her experience abroad had changed her. The parallel she draws here relates to the difficulty she had reconnecting with her family and friends after living abroad for three months. She brought that experience to the texts and shared that an intense experience in a different culture can cause problems when people interact again with people they knew prior to that experience. Undoubtedly her personal experience led her to draw the conclusion that “distance is difficult to overcome”.

In Discussion 4B, students are discussing the story, “Les Triangles de Chloé”. In this story, Chloé, the main character, has been visiting a therapist to help her recover from her husband’s infidelity. After visiting the therapist for weeks, she destroys the office’s painting of a triangle while waiting to see her doctor. After destroying the painting, she pronounces herself well and leaves the office before her appointment. In the following excerpt, Alison and Christine are discussing the significance of this action for Chloé. In this example, Alison connects how she handles problems in her life with the way Chloé acted in the story.

Alison: Peut-être ça aide parce que les actions sont extérieures. Tous les mots, les idées, sont dans sa tête et quand elle coupe la
toile ça, c’est une chose qui est visuelle qui est dans la main. Peut-être ça est plus réel, plus réaliste que les idées…

**Christine** : Elle ne peut pas détruire son mari et la toile est…peut-être son mari et la femme qui est un trompé avec son mari la toile peut être ces choses

**Teacher** : Alors, ça représente quelque chose pour elle.

**Christine** : Oui, oui.

**Alison** : Pour moi, dans ma vie je pense quand il y a des problèmes je sais important pour peut-être créer plus grand ou um jouer au basket ou fait quelque chose pour peut-être pour oublier peut-être pour…pour l’agression pour oublier l’agression ou pour fasse le problème… en réalité…et pour moi c’est la même pour toutes les personnes peut-être c’est un punching bag ou um le jogging,

**Christine** : yeah, le jogging.

**Alison** : la natation, mais toutes les personnes veulent un « outlet » comme l’art pour vous avec votre peinture quelque chose pour dit les petites idées dans sa tête…et je pense que c’est le même pour les deux femmes pour Chloé or pour Nzuzi et pour Nzuzi ça c’est le travail et um…(pausing)

**Christine** : et ses enfants.

*Translation :

**Alison** : Maybe it helps because actions are exterior. All words and ideas are in your head and when she cuts the canvas that is something that is visual that is in hand. Maybe it’s more real, more realistic than ideas.

**Christine**: She can’t destroy her husband and the canvas is…maybe her husband and the woman who cheated with her husband…the canvas can be these things.

**Teacher** : So, it represents something for her.

**Christine**. Yeah, yeah.

**Alison** : For me, in my life I think that when there are problems I know important for maybe to create something bigger or um to play basketball or do something that maybe helps to forget…maybe for…for the aggression to forget the aggression or the problem…In reality, and for me it’s the same for all people maybe, it’s a punching bag or jogging.

**Christine** : Yeah, jogging.

**Alison** : swimming, but everybody wants an outlet like art for you, with your painting, something to express the little ideas in your head…and I think that it’s the same for the two women for Chloé and for Nzuzi, and for Nzuzi it’s work and um…

**Christine**: her kids.
Though her ideas are coming quickly to her, and are somewhat disjointed, it is evident that Alison thinks it is important to take action to work through anxiety. She says that, for her, it is important to do something to help her forget about her problems. Because she thinks that this is a good way to deal with stress in her own life, she extends that belief to the character in the story. This is why she thinks it was important for Chloé to rip the painting. Undoubtedly, the similarities she saw between herself and the character strengthened her personal relationship with the text.

What the examples above suggest is that as the students discussed the short stories, they made numerous connections between their experiences with families or friends, their dating relationships, things they observed in their jobs, and other books they had read. The above examples are just two of many in the transcripts that show how the students analyzed and personalized the texts by relating them to their own experiences. Because the students were able to make sense of the texts through personal and textual experiences, it is possible they will feel more connected to these texts and will draw from them in the future. What this suggests is that the CR framework allowed the students to respond to literature personally because it provided a space for them to talk about what they had read with each other. Further, when the students brought questions and interpretations to share with the group in discussion, they were able to consider multiple perspectives, which is a goal of the CR framework. The students explored possibilities together and learned more about each other as they talked about the texts we read in class as a result of the opportunities for discussion generated by CR.
Goal 2: CR promotes the consideration of cultural perspectives

A second literary goal was for the students to consider the relationship between literature and culture and culture and identity. Trying to understand the cultural references in a text can be especially challenging for students of a foreign language. As Furstenberg (2003) wrote, “Reading between the cultural lines is indeed difficult, because it requires a double kind of translation: first a literal translation of the text and then the ability to transpose oneself and one’s imagination into the author’s or speaker’s foreign world” (p. 75). Nevertheless, part of analyzing literature requires understanding the members of the culture who are producing it. As a result, it is important for students to consider the characters’ words and actions through a cultural lens.

The majority of the texts used in this course were written by French authors outside of France. Many of the students had not read work produced by authors living in Canada, Vietnam, or Africa. Because the students had limited familiarity with these countries, it was challenging for them to consider the relationship between culture and identity. Nevertheless, the role of culture and its relationship to identity was certainly something the students wanted to talk about in CR discussions. The pre-reading activities in the book provided some background information for them as did other courses they had taken in college. Each discussion included some exploration of the relationship between culture and identity. The table below illustrates how the students considered culture in each of the stories, and is followed by examples. The role of culture is an important aspect to consider in a Francophone literature course, and again, CR enabled the students to explore the culture as it was presented in the texts. Although culture was considered before and after the students read in other ways, the CR discussions allowed
them to create their own interpretations. As the teacher, I never presented lectures about how I saw culture represented in the stories. Instead, I allowed the students to present questions, ideas, and theories as they talked in the CR discussions. I posed questions or asked them to elaborate but, as is the point in CR, I allowed them to present and defend their own opinions and asked them to use texts to support their claims. The table below shows examples of cultural themes students considered in each of the CR discussions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Examples of cultural themes considered in CR Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 1</td>
<td>Students examined how families communicate in different countries and in different eras.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 2</td>
<td>Students discussed the role of the oral tradition in Africa and compared and contrasted informal and formal education. Students also compared the values different cultures emphasize.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 3</td>
<td>Students discussed what to consider when integrating into a new culture. They considered the role of language and how it can connect or separate families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 4</td>
<td>Students discussed how the cultures of the female characters influenced their options and possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion 5</td>
<td>Students considered communication in relationships and the roles of men and women in relationships in different cultures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7: Cultural Themes in CR Discussions.

To provide a clearer sense of how the students discussed the above themes, I will present a specific example from Discussion 1 and will summarize key ideas presented in the 3rd Discussion between the freshmen. In the first example, participants are talking
about the film *La Rue Cases Nègres*, (seen prior to the unit on Culture and Difference) which in English is translated, *Sugar Cane Alley*. The film focuses on a young boy in Martinique whose grandmother encourages him to get an education so that he can find a better future than working as a slave in the cane fields. As the students summarized their feelings about the film, Alison specifically mentions the role of the spiritual world for the people of Martinique, especially for the sage who advises young José in the film. The students explored what they learned from this film by discussing education and by exploring the relationship between culture and education. Below, each student summarizes what they took from the film.

**Alison:** “Pour moi, c’est intéressant quand Medouze a dit l’histoire du peuple ou quelque chose de mystérieuse ou mystique, les choses d’Haïti, de Martinique… J’aime tout ça… Aussi l’idée de la fille Léopold que le père ne voudrait pas que le monde blanc continue avec son fils.

**Lisa:** Je dois apprécier l’éducation parce que des personnes comme José pour eux un l’éducation est très important pour leur vie.

**Teacher:** Ça vous mène à comparer les attitudes peut-être des américains envers l’éducation et les gens de notre pays ? Pour eux c’est plus sacré ?

**Alison:** et peut-être la force de la grand-mère avec l’éducation… c’est important. Pour nous c’est peut-être il y a des familles qui bataillent pour l’éducation mais pour tout c’est assez simple… pour aller à l’école pour les choses assez nécessaires … c’est différent de lire des personnes … les personnes qui tous les jours se disent que c’est important, c’est important, c’est important.

**Teacher:** C’est intéressant dans le film quand il ne veut pas travailler pour la maîtresse parce qu’il veut être à l’école. Normalement ici, l’envers est vrai, on veut faire quelque chose pour ne pas aller à l’école…

**Teresa:** J’aime le film parce que je peux voir un peu de la culture. Quand on lit c’est difficile pour une individuelle de savoir comment la culture est c’est bien de voir comment les choses sont.

**Audrey:** Le film me donne l’espérance pour la futur. Parce que je pense que si José a l’éducation et il partira les cannes de sucre et j’ai la bonne chance pour éducation… et je ne sais pas que je le fais avec ça mais ça c’est um je ne sais pas le mot, uh la futur est excité pour moi…
Translation:

**Alison:** For me, it was interesting when Médouze shared the history of the people or some mysterious thing or mystic things about Haiti or Martinique… I like all that. Also, the idea of the son Léopold that the father didn’t want the White world to continue with his son.

**Lisa:** I should appreciate education because people like José for them um education is very important in their lives.

**Teacher:** That leads you to compare perhaps the attitudes Americans have about education and people in our country and for them, it’s more sacred?

**Alison:** and maybe the strength of the grandmother with education, it’s important and for us it’s… maybe there are families fighting for education but it’s pretty simple…to go to school for necessary things. It’s different to read about people…people who everyday tell themselves that it’s important, it’s important, it’s important.

**Teacher:** It’s interesting in the movie when he doesn’t want to go and work for the woman because he wants to be at school…and normally, here, the inverse is true, you want to do something to avoid going to school.

**Teresa:** I like the film because I can see a little about culture. When you read it’s difficult for an individual to know what the culture is like, and it’s good to see how things are.

**Audrey:** The film gives me hope for the future. Because I think that if José has an education he’ll get out of the cane fields and if I have the good fortune for education and… I don’t know what I’m going to do with it but uh, I don’t know the word, the future is exciting for me.

From this example, we can see that the students understood the importance of education for José. They recognized that for this boy, in this country, education was a way out of the way of life his ancestors had known. José saw education in terms of the freedom it meant for his future. Later in this discussion, Alison also compares the two kinds of education that mattered to José: the education from the village sage, and the formal education he received at school. This led the students to compare their views of education and to consider how people in other countries and in other situations might view the importance of education. It also led them to reflect on their own opportunities for education. For Audrey, the film enabled her
to see the relationship between education and hope, a relationship stressed in the film and in the stories in this discussion.

The main question/theme of the 3rd discussion in the freshmen group concerned how people should adapt to new cultural situations. This question was introduced by Audrey at the beginning of the discussion. She specifically asked whether it is a better strategy to abandon one’s native culture to fit in (as one of the character’s in the story did), or whether it is more important to maintain your identity in a new culture (the choice another character made). This question was explored from the perspectives of the characters and the group members. As they explored this question, they compared the choices each character made. By the end of the discussion they had concluded that regardless of the choice you make when trying to fit in to a new culture, it is important to have the support of the people around you. They emphasized that the support of friends and family builds confidence and serves to reinforce decisions people make.

As has been said before, one reason for implementing CR is to give students interpretive freedom. Because they had the texts to draw from and central questions to discuss, the students were able to interpret the stories collaboratively, as seen above. With regard to culture and the other specific goals for literature, the CR framework gave the students a space to examine culture in these short stories and allowed them explore their ideas about culture and identity.

**Goal 3: CR encourages comparing and contrasting themes**

Another goal for this literature course and the CR discussions was for the students to compare and contrast themes that appeared in the stories. Likewise,
comparing and contrasting different stories reinforced the importance of making connections across texts (intertextual relationships). Because the units were grouped into stories of three, the students had a good starting point to make connections between them. Although the students were aware of the theme for each unit, the connections between the stories were often subtle. As a result, the students needed a good grasp on the content of the stories in order to examine how they were thematically tied. As they discussed the stories, they made connections between the stories in a unit, connections between other books or films they had encountered, or in at least one instance made connections between stories we had already discussed.

As the students talked, they were able to make thematic links between the stories. For example, in Discussion 1, Audrey compared the three stories by saying that, for her, the events in the stories showed that emotional suffering is more difficult than physical suffering, and recognized that emotional suffering is powerful because all humans experience it. In discussion 3A, Christine compared the differences between the two female characters in “La Noire de…” and “Pur Polyestre”. She notes that the narrator in “Pur Polyestre” had the support of her family, which enabled her to succeed in life, whereas the woman in “La Noire de…” had no support and saw no future for herself, which resulted in suicide. In Discussion 4A, April introduced an important comparison between the stories “Amertume” and “Les triangles de Chloé”. Both groups discussed how the characters went about finding the strength to change. They noted that Chloé found a new direction by visiting a therapist, whereas Nzuzi found the determination to change deep within herself. April also noted that the stories contained love triangles, and
she asked the members of her group to discuss how other sets of threes were presented. As they interpreted these “triangles,” she also asked whether the members of her group thought that people and societies subconsciously organize themselves into threes because of the Holy Trinity.

The students also frequently made connections between other texts they had read. Alison made use of this strategy the most, and in almost every discussion she referenced something else she had read. For example, in the first discussion she asked if “L’ombre et L’absent” reminded others of Plato or what they had studied about cave drawings. She also asked if others had read “Cold Mountain” because in both stories the main characters were absent as a result of war. When the students were discussing the final story and the relationship between the husband and the wife, both groups mentioned the popular American television series “Desperate Housewives” as they talked about the story. These few representative examples show that the students were connecting what they read to other texts, with CR providing the means to do so.

Although the students usually limited their comparisons to the two or three stories in a unit, there is one instance where they referred to texts read earlier in the semester. In the excerpt below from Discussion 5B, the students are talking about “Le Mur ou les charmes d’une vie conjugale”, which April connects to a story from the 1st Unit, “L’Ombre et L’absent”:

**Teresa:** Je me demande pourquoi est-ce qu’elle n’a pas demandé à son mari pourquoi il est silencieux. Je pense que sa réaction est un peu exagérée que les autres peut-être parce qu’elle cherche une réponse mais elle est silencieuse aussi.

**April:** et avec l’histoire quand on a lu, Oh….L’ombre et l’absent.

**Teresa:** Oui…Elle était silencieuse

**April:** Oui, l’histoire de Vietnam…elle est silencieuse et le pauvre mari.
**Teresa:** C’était la **même** problème avec la communication.

*Translation:*

**Teresa:** I want to know why she didn’t ask her husband why he was silent. I think her reaction is a little over exaggerated because she wants an answer but she is silent too.

**April:** and with the story we read, oh…L’ombre et L’absent.

**Teresa:** Yes, she was silent.

**April:** Yes, the story from Vietnam…she is silent and the poor husband…

**Teresa:** It was the **same** problem with communication.

In this exchange, the students discussed the couple’s marital problems caused by poor communication in a story from the last unit in the textbook. April was able to connect this to a story from the first chapter, in which the focal couple also had trouble communicating. This reference shows that the participants in this discussion were able to recall details from previous stories and were able to draw from their understanding of a previous text when interpreting new stories. This point is made when Alison adds that both stories relate to freedom and asks the group if it is possible to have freedom without communication. Her question highlights the relationship between freedom and communication in both stories, as the wives in the stories are each trapped by silence.

Though there is only one example of this kind of exchange in all of the transcripts, it is significant because the students were not prompted to make connections across stories. Perhaps because the students were already discussing multiple stories in each discussion, it was more natural for them to compare the stories they had most recently read. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that there is at least this example of students referring to previous units. This suggests that the students were internalizing the themes of the stories as a result of the level of engagement possible with the texts through
CR discussions. Because students were responding personally to the stories we read, they may have been able to access them more readily later in the semester because of the connection they made with them through CR. Perhaps if they had been encouraged or prompted to do this more, there would have been additional examples such as this one in the transcripts.

In every discussion transcribed, there are numerous examples of comparisons and contrasts the students made between characters and stories. Undoubtedly, the students were assisted in achieving this by the layout of the textbook, which grouped stories according to various themes. At the same time, however, they made astute observations and pushed each other to consider relationships between the texts. By asking each other questions about the relationships between the texts, they were able to engage at a deeper level with the texts in this course. This level of engagement with texts is not typically seen in classrooms where a traditional lecture format is employed. The CR framework encourages students to question each other and to explore texts together. If the students had not been free to discuss the texts in these ways, they may not have been able to recall information from stories read earlier in the semester.

**Student views toward CR in a Literature Course**

To determine how the students viewed the CR discussions as an instructional practice, they were asked to comment on the discussions throughout the semester. As stated earlier, the students completed post-discussion rubrics after each CR discussion. They also completed a pre and post course questionnaire and an open-ended feedback form at the end of the semester. This section compiles the results from these sources in order to provide a complete picture of the students’ response to CR in this literature
course. Their attitudes toward speaking French, toward the instructional environment, and to the CR discussions themselves are described.

**Students report CR Discussions build fluency**

The main purpose of the post-discussion rubric was to assess how well the students felt they communicated spontaneously in French. Two categories (speaking and language) on the rubric addressed speaking skills. The “speaking” category related to fluency and spontaneity, and the “language” category examined how accurately the students felt they communicated their ideas in French. For each category the students chose a number to represent their performance based on a scale of 1-4 (see Appendix B for the complete rubric), with 1 representing a student’s inability to communicate what they wanted to say when they wanted to say it and 4 representing a student’s clear facility to communicate what they want to say when they wanted to say it. The following graph shows the average speaking/fluency rating the students chose for each discussion.

![Figure 4.2: Average student rating for fluency by discussion](image)

Figure 4.2: Average student rating for fluency by discussion
For the first discussion, most of the students selected a three for speaking, with the exception of Audrey and April, who circled four. Teresa was absent.

Discussion 2, a whole class discussion, received lower scores overall. Audrey was the only student to rate herself a four, followed by April, Alison, Lisa, and Ginny who all selected three for their speaking ability. Teresa and Sandra both gave themselves a two for this second discussion. The third discussion was rated higher by participants in both 3A and 3B. The freshmen all rated themselves a three or four. The seniors also gave themselves good rankings, choosing either a three or four. Alison circled both three and four (thus, a 3.5 for the average) and added the following comment, “A few times it was difficult--new ideas came to me.” Participants in Discussion 4A were satisfied with their speaking skills, choosing either a three or four to represent their speaking. All of the participants in Discussion 4B gave themselves a three. The members of Discussion 5A also selected a three or four for their speaking abilities in this discussion. The seniors (group 5B) unanimously selected four.

Of interest from these results is the fact that (with the exception of Alison’s comment for discussion 3B) no student made a specific comment related to the challenge of speaking French in CR discussions after the initial discussion. This may suggest that students became comfortable with the CR framework and were not frustrated by the fact that it encouraged them to participate in literary discussions in the target language.

Another point to consider is that the student ratings for speaking for Discussions 3 and 5 were the highest. This suggests that the students felt more comfortable speaking in French about literary texts when they were grouped with other students they liked and by
whom they were not intimidated. As a result, professors may want to consider the relationships between students when forming groups and when determining whether to rotate group members or to keep the groups stable over the course of a semester.

Students report CR Discussions emphasize need for greater accuracy

The post-discussion rubrics addressed the students’ perceptions of their ability to communicate effectively in French. High scores in the language category of the rubric indicate that the students felt they were able to say what they wanted to say accurately. In general, the scores for language use were lower than the scores for speaking. This likely means that the students felt they had more difficulty expressing their ideas, using correct tenses and finding vocabulary than they did with fluency. Consider the figure below.

![Bar chart](image)

**Figure 4.3:** Average student rating for language skills per discussion

For Discussion 1, every participant chose a three to represent their language skills. The only student to add a comment to the rubric was Alison, who said, “I never feel confident in my tenses when I speak--much better written. I get thinking too fast to proof
read in my head before I speak--too excited to talk about something.” Their comments address both spontaneity and accuracy. Clearly, Alison felt that trying to speak quickly hindered her ability to speak accurately. Her excitement to share her ideas took precedence over formulating how she should say something.

In general, the ratings for the second discussion were lower than the first discussion. Ginny gave herself a one on the rubric, and Sandra gave herself a two. All of the other participants rated themselves a three. Ginny added to her rubric that it was difficult for her to express herself in any language, not just French. The fact that this discussion received the lowest ratings with regard to language may be attributed to the fact that students were discussing a topic with which they were less familiar (culture and cultural differences in Francophone countries) and to the fact that the teacher spoke more in this discussion, which again could have been because students were talking less because they were unsure of what to say. Also as the course progressed, students may have developed a stronger sense of how accurately they were communicating in French, which they may have begun to indicate on the post discussion rubric as early as the second discussion.

The participants in discussions 3A and 3B were more satisfied with their performance than they were in the previous discussion. It is possible that the students were more satisfied during these discussions because they were more comfortable in the smaller groups. This comfort may have made them less self-conscious and, as a result, may have given them greater satisfaction regarding their language accuracy in this discussion.
The rubric following discussion 4A revealed that April was unhappy with her language abilities that day. She gave herself a two and added the following comment to her rubric, “I was frustrated with myself because I didn’t express myself as clearly as I would have liked. I caught myself making way too many mistakes.” The students in Discussion 4B were pretty satisfied, as they unanimously selected a three on the rubric. Of course each student rated herself for her performance in that day’s discussion. April was the only student to rate herself poorly. As a senior and as a high achiever, April may have been especially hard on herself if she felt she was not able to communicate effectively and fluently. The post discussion rubric gave insight into how students felt they performed during a given discussion. In April’s case for discussion 4, she clearly felt she had communicated more accurately in other discussions.

Discussions 5A (the freshmen) and 5B (the seniors) had a range of ratings from 2 to 4. The seniors seemed content with their performance, choosing four to represent their abilities. The freshmen were not as satisfied. Christine, Ginny and Sandra chose a three and Audrey circled both two and three on the rubric, which averaged out to 2.5. Again, it is hard to know why students selected a particular rating for their language in a given discussion—especially if they did not elaborate in writing. However, it is possible that by discussion 5 (which was the final discussion occurring at the end of the semester) students had developed a stronger sense of how well they were able to communicate their ideas, thus they were more aware of the discrepancy between what they wanted to say and how well they were able to say it.

Looking at the discussions as a whole reveals that the students had mixed experiences with their language in CR discussions. The students’ perceptions of their
language abilities did not seem to fluctuate based on the members of the group, as they did in the speaking category. This may mean that fluency and speaking up in a group are more affected by comfort and familiarity than linguistic performance. That is, the students may have felt more confident and have taken more speaking risks when they were comfortable in a group than when they were not. Also of interest is that the total average for all of the discussions was 2.65, indicating that students were somewhat confident communicating a message in French, but were uncertain of their tenses and vocabulary. Some of the students’ comments indicate an awareness of mistakes and reveal frustration when communicating in French. Because the students were not likely to have experienced a teaching practice like the one in this course, it is not surprising that they found communicating in French challenging. At the same time, it would be unrealistic to think that students who had never had a literature course at this level would be more proficient than the scores they selected. In other words, the average of 2.65 is likely an accurate representation of the language abilities of these particular students, and it is supported by the transcripts which show that students did struggle at times with tenses and vocabulary. Nevertheless, the students were still able to communicate with each other in French, something the CR discussions were designed to support in this literature class.

Of importance here is that students were given the opportunity in the context of a literature course to use extended discourse in French. Without this opportunity, which the CR framework supported, students may not have had the opportunity to recognize that there was a difference between what they wanted to say and what they were able to say. Swain (1995) posited that this recognition is necessary for students if they are to
develop advanced linguistic proficiency. She further states that output (represented in this case by the messages students were able to create in French) provides a way for learners to try out the rules and modify them as needed. Speaking tasks allow speakers to engage in “pushed output” which allows them to move from what they want to say to how they say it. This output also helps them actively reflect on their knowledge of the linguistic system of the target language. Likewise, Ellis (1997) claimed that automatic use of one’s linguistic knowledge can only be developed in authentic communicative conditions. Put simply, without the opportunity to speak and the practice of speaking in communicative situations, students are unable to become more advanced in their ability to speak the target language.

**Students report speaking in CR Discussions builds confidence**

Certain questionnaire items also shed light into how the students felt about speaking French during discussions. These items show that the students became more confident speaking French during the semester. Since this questionnaire was given on the first day of the course and the last day of the course, it is likely that the students’ responses at the end of the course reflect their views after exposure to CR and to this literature course as a whole.

Consider the responses to the items shown in the table below:
I am nervous when I have to describe things in French.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am nervous when I have to describe things in French.</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty when I try to express complex ideas in French</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think literary texts are too difficult to discuss in French</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most things I have been assigned to read in my literature classes are too difficult for me to discuss in French.</td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8: Questionnaire Items related to speaking French.

All of these items address how students felt about thinking and communicating in the target language. The responses to the first item indicate that, with the exception of one student, the students grew less nervous when describing things in French. On the whole, the students reported less anxiety about describing things in French after this literature course. That is, their views changed in a positive direction. This shift may be due to the amount of opportunities the students had to express themselves in French while discussing literature as a result of the CR framework. Perhaps because they were talking a lot, they grew more accustomed to it and simultaneously became more confident. On the other hand, at least for one student, participating in this course and the discussions made her more nervous. This could be attributed to the pressure to talk created by the small groups or by a general frustration with the task.
This student’s reaction points out that some students may continue to experience anxiety when communicating in the target language. However, it is unknown whether more time and practice would have reduced this particular student’s anxiety. Although this student still reported feeling anxious after one semester, in general, because CR has an open participation structure, it may be less stressful for students than it would be to have to answer questions the teacher poses in front of the entire group. In other words, students do have more freedom to choose when to talk when they are in small group discussions than they might when participating in a whole class situation. However, at the same time, because the setting is smaller, students may feel they have to participate more than they otherwise would.

The second item, “I have difficulty when I try to express complex ideas in French”, shows that the students felt more comfortable expressing complex ideas at the end of the semester. At the beginning of the course, three students strongly agreed with the statement, whereas at the end no students expressed strong agreement. Also, at the beginning of the course no students disagreed with that statement, whereas after it two students disagreed. This could mean that the students felt that having opportunities to participate in CR discussions made stating complex ideas less difficult. Without such opportunities these students may not have been able to see the connection between their thoughts and the ability to communicate them. Thus, CR may help students develop the ability to communicate complex ideas because the framework encourages students to support and elaborate on their ideas.

The third questionnaire item in this section, “Literary texts are too difficult to discuss in French,” related specifically to discussing literature in the target language.
Before the course, seven students disagreed with the statement and one student strongly disagreed. However, at the end of the semester four students strongly disagreed. This movement suggests that at least three out of the eight participants felt more confident regarding their ability to discuss what they had read in a literature class in French. Again, without the practice and the opportunities to speak that CR affords, students may not have felt as competent to discuss literary texts.

The final item in this group refers to the perceived difficulty of reading and discussing literature in the target language. This item stated, “Most things I have been assigned to read in my literature classes are too difficult for me to discuss in French.” From the data, we can see that students felt more comfortable discussing what they read in French literature courses. Although only one student agreed with the statement initially, several students disagreed more strongly with the statement at the end of the course. This could mean that the students became more confident of their abilities to discuss literature in French because CR gave them an environment in which speaking skills could be cultivated.

The data compiled on student speaking skills suggest that the students benefited from the opportunities to speak French in literary discussions. Although this was likely challenging in different ways for all of the students, their self-ratings and the attitude changes reflected on the questionnaire suggest that the students viewed discussions and the opportunities they provided for speaking French positively. Collectively, these results suggest that CR played a valuable role in encouraging discussion and generating possibilities for more oral use of the target language, as it was intended to do.
Students review CR favorably as an instructional practice

The students also commented on the instructional environment in this course on the open-ended feedback form and on the pre-and post questionnaire. Several statements addressed the instructor’s role and the classroom atmosphere. For example, April wrote, “[The class] was a great opportunity to discuss ideas but didn’t feel instructive.” Christine agreed and wrote, “I loved the relaxed environment of the class. I felt like the professor was one of the students. She wasn’t intimidating and was easy to approach.” Other students also referred to the general instructional environment. One student wrote, “I really enjoyed the freedom of this class….we were always encouraged to discuss and explore our own opinions. I liked that there was not a set direction for each discussion; we could ask each other questions and let the conversation flow.” Because the CR approach encourages students to explore ideas and to consider diverse perspectives, these comments suggest it met this goal.

The students’ comments also suggest that they viewed CR discussions as authentic opportunities to exchange information with each other. They appreciated that the CR framework emphasized exploring their interpretations and did not position the teacher as the central authority figure. Similarly, their feedback shows they felt they could interact with the professor as a peer during discussions. Though April’s comment that “the class didn’t feel instructive” might at first sound negative, in essence this means that she did not feel like the instructor contrived discussions to fit one specific interpretation or to achieve only her own purposes. The issue of interpretive authority was also addressed by the survey. The table below shows that before this literature course, most of the students did not feel that their teacher’s interpretation of a work was
better than their own, although one student did feel that way. After the course, however, the students felt stronger disagreement, which suggests they were even more confident in their own interpretations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>PRE</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think my teacher’s interpretation of a story we read in class is better than my own interpretation of it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy talking with or listening to students in the class about what I have read more than listening to my professor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think listening to my teacher’s lectures is a good use of class time.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.9: Interpretive Authority in French 453

The “relaxed environment” Christine mentioned is also likely linked to the CR framework. Because of the group discussions, there is a collaborative environment designed to value each learner’s contributions. If students notice and respond positively to this aspect of discussion, they may at least find that aspect of the literature course appealing. Thus, CR may be a way to facilitate the creation of a relaxed learning community which students appreciate.

**Students Report Advantages and Disadvantages to CR Discussions**

*Students identify multiple benefits from CR approach*

Students’ specific opinions of the group discussions were elicited on the post-discussion rubrics and by an open-ended feedback form administered at the end of the semester. The specific questions related to discussion on this form were “Were the discussions helpful to you? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways?” and “Is there
anything else about the class or the discussions that you would like to share?” The answers the students provided to these questions show that CR is an effective way to allow students to respond to literature. This is the primary goal for using this approach to discussion. As students respond to literature in this approach they are also given interpretive authority, they are encouraged to participate freely, as in conversation, and they share control of the topic with the teacher. Further, they conjecture together and consider multiple perspectives. The table below provides some specific examples from the students’ responses to the open-ended questionnaire. Their comments have been grouped into the categories presented in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CR encouraged analysis and interpretation of text</th>
<th>CR facilitated comprehension of text</th>
<th>CR encouraged listening and multiple perspectives</th>
<th>CR promoted a personal connection to the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The CR discussions allowed me to think of the big ideas.</td>
<td>At the beginning, the discussions were really helpful in helping me to understand the stories.</td>
<td>Just listening to other people’s opinions and ideas is interesting.</td>
<td>I liked the discussions a lot. I have never had many discussions in a French class before and it was very interesting and helpful to have that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The CR discussions brought up ideas that I would never have thought of.</td>
<td>The discussions helped me understand the text better.</td>
<td>The discussions allowed me to hear other perspectives.</td>
<td>These stories will stick with me longer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The discussions forced me to think about the stories on a more complex level.</td>
<td>I think the discussions really helped me better understand the stories</td>
<td>The discussions really allowed me to see different viewpoints.</td>
<td>It made the stories more personal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They gave me time to think about things that I probably wouldn’t have spent that much time thinking about otherwise.</td>
<td>It’s good to hear other’s opinions in the CR discussions.</td>
<td>There was a deeper connection to the text, much more able to tie them together compared to other lit classes when we didn’t discuss and themes/big questions were lost.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They made me struggle with questions more.</td>
<td>The discussions were helpful in analyzing human behavior and looking at the deeper meanings behind some of the stories that we read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.10: Positive student comments after participating CR Discussions

These comments highlight the positive attitudes the students had toward participating in CR discussions. They also highlight the ways in which a specific instructional frame,
such as CR, can affect student learning. A close look at the students’ comments shows that CR was able to meet many of the goals it was designed to meet. They reported that CR allowed them to engage more deeply with texts and to identify and compare textual themes, and it facilitated their comprehension of the text. Interestingly, the students’ comments on this end-of-course evaluation form do not relate to speaking. This may indicate that they were not preoccupied with how well they were able to express their ideas, and were focused instead on the messages they were trying to communicate.

Students identify some disadvantages to CR

The students also listed ways that the CR discussions were not helpful, but there were substantially fewer comments regarding this question. The students who listed drawbacks named either 1) the make-up of the groups or 2) the spontaneous nature of conversation as problems. The difference in experiences between seniors and freshmen came into play again when students evaluated the effectiveness of the CR group discussions. Below is a table showing some specific comments the students made about CR discussions in this context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Many times discussions would be a little frustrating because of the obvious gap in comprehension/experience levels. Not that I was resentful of that, it just made discussions difficult sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>This was an excellent class. I loved the new and interesting topics, but I think some people weren’t ready to share/learn in a community and this affected class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>It was more enjoyable to discuss in groups of four people instead of as one large class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>When we split up into smaller groups, I found it much easier to talk and improve my spoken French and I liked that we were able to teach and help each other in discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>I liked the 2 groups better than having one big group. The four of us [the freshmen] are more comfortable with each other and are able to help each other out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.11: Student Comments Regarding CR Discussions

The above comments give a glimpse into the tension that existed between the seniors and the freshmen in the course. A close examination of the above statements shows that the seniors focused on what the freshmen were unable to do when they were grouped with them during discussions. Their comments emphasize that the freshmen were unprepared, inexperienced, and intimidated. In fact, the freshmen did express that they were intimidated by the seniors, which may explain why their comments emphasize that being grouped together allowed them to help each other and to relax. These preferences impacted the quality of the discussions as well as the attitudes the students had toward participating in the groups.
Though the survey responses cannot be grouped according to the responses of seniors and freshmen (it was designed before the course started) they do show that two students went from preferring whole class discussions to small group discussions. In fact, all students agreed that small groups were more enjoyable by the end of the course. The figure below shows the pre-and post responses to the questionnaire item on group make-up in discussions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like talking about readings with a small group of people instead of talking in front of the whole class.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POST</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.12: Student preferences for group format in CR Discussions

For these class members, each student’s participation in CR discussions was positively affected when grouped with peers of like status and when they were participating in small group instead of whole class discussions. As a result, it may be important to consider the abilities and relationships between students when forming groups for discussion. Each professor will have to monitor how groups are working and whether rotating groups or keeping them stable is best for all course participants.

The second concern related to the spontaneity of communicating in French during CR discussions. Lisa specifically stated that she had trouble forming opinions and statements during the discussions. She wrote, “I didn’t mind the discussions, but I never felt prepared for them...It takes me a while to form an opinion in English or French, so I
end up mostly listening to others in order to form my opinion instead of talking about the question.” Here, Lisa points out that it was hard for her to anticipate what other students might want to discuss, which made participation challenging for her. Ginny also addressed this issue. Following the first discussion she shared, “I have timing issues with discussions. Discussions are hard for me because when I finally get the courage to say what I have to say the discussion has moved on.” This aspect of discussion will be more challenging for some students, particularly those who are reflective or timid. If teachers are receiving and responding to feedback during the course, it is possible to make some changes to help speakers more comfortable. Still, there will always be those who are afraid. For these students, it is important for professors to emphasize the importance of this aspect of language proficiency. It may also be helpful to remind them that it is probably less intimidating to speak with other learners in the classroom setting than it would be to interact with native speakers in the target culture. If professors emphasize the benefits of practicing speaking skills, even reluctant students may recognize the usefulness of discussion in the literature classroom.

Summary of Results

In this course the CR approach to discussion was successful at offering students opportunities to practice and develop oral proficiency skills in the context of an upper-division French literature class. Below, is a list of the important findings presented in this chapter:

- CR provided opportunities for students to use extended discourse in French in a literature classroom
CR provided opportunities for students to talk to each other instead of responding only to the teacher’s questions

CR provided opportunities for students to provide each other with linguistic support

CR provided opportunities for students to respond personally to literature in several ways. These ways include:

- making personal and textual connections to events in the stories
- considering alternatives
- considering relationships between culture, identity and language
- stating and supporting opinions
- comparing and contrasting textual themes

Students viewed CR discussions as a positive way to interact with texts

**Conclusion**

From the results presented in this chapter, it seems clear that the students viewed CR group discussions to be a valuable learning tool, especially as they became more comfortable with each other. The framework provided specific parameters which made goals for discussion more tangible. Because it emphasized student discourse through open participation, the instructor’s discourse was minimized. This feature provided opportunities for and resulted in extended student discourse in the target language. Likewise, the emphasis on multiple perspectives encouraged students to explore their opinions and the opinions of their peers. In short, the results suggest that CR provides a space in which students can respond to literature and to each other. They were able to
consider alternatives, support their opinions, and consider cultural aspects of literature. Although the freshmen found the comprehensive nature of the course and the approach challenging, none of them opposed discussion as a pedagogical practice. In fact they were positive about discussing literary texts, especially as a tool to help them understand what they read, to consider other perspectives, and to express themselves in French.

Regarding the literature course as a whole, the results from this study strongly suggest that the students embraced a new perspective on literature study. This implies students are receptive to new methods and enjoy partnering with teachers in discovering effective practices at the upper-division level of language study. Most importantly, these results suggest that students appreciate being involved in their own learning and that they appreciate trying new approaches to literature. All of the data sources (survey, post-discussion rubric, or other feedback) show that these particular students enjoyed the collaborative nature of the course. The students appreciated the relaxed environment of the discussion-based classroom and found it refreshing to work with their teacher collaboratively.

The results from this study suggest that it is important to value students’ interpretations when discussing literature and to view them as contributors when making pedagogical choices. Moreover, in this study, the students appreciated having opportunities to use French to express their opinions about literature and to learn from each other. Thus, it appears that the CR framework is an approach worth employing if foreign language literature teachers value discussion and creating opportunities for the further development of students’ oral skills in the target language.”
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study investigated an implementation of Collaborative Reasoning (CR), a discussion framework, in an upper-division foreign language literature class. It sought to determine the extent to which CR creates opportunities for students to use extended discourse, one feature of advanced foreign language oral proficiency, and how it promotes responses to literature. As described in Chapter 2, the parameters for CR are as follows: (1) students share control of the topic; (2) students think critically, analytically and aesthetically about texts; (3) students have interpretive authority; and (4) students participate openly and freely as in conversation. These features of CR are intended to unite literary and language and goals in several ways. First, they create more opportunities for students to talk in the literature classroom, thus allowing them the chance to develop target language speaking skills. Second, these features encourage students to share and defend opinions about what they have read, which requires them both to think and express their ideas in French, which further enhances their connection with the target language. Third, the CR approach to discussion emphasizes critical thinking about text, which is often an important goal for literature professors. This goal is important because it allows students to think in sophisticated ways. According to Lazere (1987), critical thinking about literature encourages students to “unify and make
connections to one’s personal experience, to follow an extended line of thought through thematic or symbolic development, to engage in mature moral reasoning, to form judgments of quality and taste; to be attuned to skepticism and irony; and to be perceptive of ambiguity, relativity of viewpoint, and multiple dimensions of form and meaning.


The main purpose of the current chapter is to consider how the above features and parameters of CR relate to the research questions of this study and in the process examine the primary conclusions and contributions arising from the study. The chapter begins with a combined summary and discussion of the study’s findings relative to these research questions. Implications arising from the study for literature professors and researchers are then presented. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research, with a particular desire to promote ongoing interest in language acquisition in upper-division foreign language literature or content courses.

**Summary of Results**

**Research Question 1:** Does CR encourage spontaneous student discourse? More specifically, does the CR framework for discussion provide opportunities for students to produce extended discourse in French, one feature of an advanced speaker?

The first research question was inspired by studies documenting the lack of student talk and participation in upper-division foreign language literature courses. As Donato and Brooks (2004) showed in their study of advanced speaking functions, neither the instructor nor the students viewed the literature course as a space for improving oral proficiency skills. Additionally, students did not use extended discourse to discuss literature. From the results of this study presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that
CR discussions can provide opportunities for extended student discourse, in this case in French. Likewise, the results suggest that CR discussions have the potential to decrease the prevalence of the more restrictive IRE pattern and to increase the frequency and number of student turns. Achieving these goals requires teachers to consider two important practices in the literature classroom.

First, it is essential for the instructor to emphasize the development of oral proficiency skills in literature classes, such as by giving students specific words and phrases to use to communicate. The students in this study appreciated having specific phrases to use when trying to gain the floor or state an opinion. They also indicated that they benefited from practicing discussion strategies explicitly, and that they wanted their instructor to provide instruction in this area. Therefore, instructors need to practice discussion and reflect on it with their students. Instructors must not assume that merely talking about a text always makes for a productive discussion. On the contrary, students and instructors need to plan and employ strategies for participation and reflection in order to capitalize on the opportunities created by discussion. In this course, students benefited from brainstorming sessions prior to beginning CR discussions, as these sessions prepared them to understand and respond to the types of questions suitable for the CR framework. They also practiced specific phrases in French that helped them express their opinions or agreement and disagreement with others. Finally, they analyzed their participation in CR discussions by completing post-discussion rubrics and through regular reflection with the instructor and the other students. This process emphasized the importance of speaking skills as a focus in the literature classroom and thus enabled the instructor and students to talk to each other about language learning as well as literary
texts. This, in turn, enhanced the language learning process and increased literary competence.

Second, instructors need to monitor how well they are eliciting discourse from students as they participate in CR discussions in order to maximize the effectiveness of those discussions and the learning accruing from them. This requires careful monitoring of teachers’ own discourse and thus sharpens their awareness of how they present the target language to their students. Much has been written (Billings and Fitzgerald, 2002; Mercer, 2000; Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993) about strategies teachers should use to promote discussion. Based on this previous research, several recommendations have been given to teachers, and these have an impact on the use of CR. First, teachers should revoice what their students say. That is, they should give credence to students’ ideas by echoing their words. Teachers should also reformulate what students say because students will benefit from hearing their ideas expressed more succinctly. Finally, to elicit more student discourse, teachers should ask them to extend on what others in the discussion group are saying. For example, in the current study it was useful to make comments like “Alison has just shared her opinion about the husband in the story; how are the rest of us feeling about him?” By inviting the other students to weigh in on a question such as “What do we think about the husband?” students have a clear idea of how to participate. They have Alison’s comment as a starting point and are free to agree or disagree with what she has shared. This encourages them to express and support their opinions. This technique is useful because it encourages students to build on the ideas of their classmates and to explore ideas collectively.
The results from this study lend additional support for the above strategies. To be more specific, the data from this study show that I was most effective at eliciting extended discourse from students when I asked questions to which there was no obvious right or wrong answer, when I scaffolded student responses, pushed students to elaborate, or asked them to provide support for their opinions. Likewise, the development of other features of advanced speech, such as circumlocution and summation, were facilitated by modeling and by asking students to summarize points of view during and following CR discussions. Conversely, I was ineffective at eliciting extended discourse when discussion was used as a platform to editorialize or when student responses evaluated were according to my own understanding of the text.

Regarding my inconsistent use of effective practices, this study concurs with others (Billings and Fitzgerald, 2003; Chinn et al, 2002; Wood, 1995) which have shown that a shift in pedagogical practice is an evolutionary process. In other words, when instructors are implementing new pedagogy, there may be a discrepancy between what they are aiming to do and what they actually do. In this study, I was aware of the importance of facilitating extended student discourse. Despite this knowledge, there are a few examples in the transcripts that show I dominated discussion, contrary to the intentions of CR pedagogy.

The most obvious explanation for this is that I was more competent in the target language than were the students. This particular aspect of facilitating CR (or other dialogic) discussions is unique to the foreign and second language context, in that it may be more difficult for instructors to minimize their role as experts than instructors in other fields, when their language ability so clearly marks them as such. In foreign language
teaching, where it is necessary for students to gain meaningful experience in the target
language, instructor expertise may inhibit students’ willingness to speak the target
language. This is a particular challenge for CR in the foreign language context. Because
foreign language instructors will be comfortable in the target language (and students most
likely will not), it is even more imperative for these instructors to include pedagogical
practices that emphasize students’ oral proficiency development and de-emphasizes their
own role as expert speakers of the language. Instructors need to seek out ways to
courage students to express their understanding and appreciation of literary texts, even
when using the target language to do so may be challenging or frustrating for them.

In upper division foreign language courses, students must learn how to use the
target language to express their ideas; otherwise, they will never achieve advanced
proficiency. A teacher’s expertise in the language and the content can work as an
advantage or a disadvantage, particularly in literature courses. When it works as an
advantage, teachers are able to facilitate discussion in strategic ways by modeling their
thinking, summarizing the opinions of an individual or the group, and using prompts that
allow students to build on each other’s ideas. The skillful expert also uses knowledge of
the text to push students’ thinking and to lead them to a better understanding of the
various aspects of a text. When a teacher’s knowledge of language and content is a
disadvantage, the focus of the course is on the teacher’s own interpretation of the text and
on his or her ability to use the target language to express personal opinions. Students are
highly unlikely to engage in meaningful use of the target language under such
circumstances, thus undermining the course objective of improving target language
proficiency. Because language proficiency in foreign or second language contexts is such
an advantage for the teacher, it is crucial for instructors to evaluate their discourse to
determine if they are using their expertise in ways that are beneficial or detrimental to the
students’ learning.

In this study, analyzing discussions as they occurred helped to make me aware of
problems arising and encouraged me to revisit my teaching techniques in order to avoid
relying on tempting but counterproductive discursive patterns (such as the IRE pattern).
Because of this self-monitoring and analytic emphasis, over the course of the semester I
became more proficient at waiting for long stretches of time before speaking, at allowing
other students to answer a question before I did (even when students made eye-contact),
and at recognizing when my knowledge or opinions about the literature was dominating
a discussion. Implementing these strategies required constant reflection and conscious
effort on my part, as shifting from one pedagogical practice to another (in this case
recitation to discussion) is challenging. Discussion, in particular, calls into question
traditional classroom roles and behaviors which can make implementation of the CR
approach difficult for the instructor and the students.

One important caveat is necessary regarding the quantity of an instructor’s
discourse when attempting to employ CR. If a teacher has successfully created a
collaborative environment, it is possible for him/her to blend into discussions as a
participant (as opposed to facilitator or leader), which means he or she may take extended
turns that are not detrimental to the discussion. Traditionally, teachers dominate
discussions because they are lecturing or waiting for students to come up with the
answers they want to hear. However, in a collaborative environment there will be times
when the instructor takes an extended speaking turn but is participating in the discussion
as another member of the group who is equally engaged in exploring the text. In this study, more than one student noted that “the teacher felt more like one of us than an instructor.” This is what should happen in the CR pedagogy. In addition to allowing students useful opportunities to practice speaking the target language and engaging in critical thinking, teachers can remain involved participants in the course rather than bystanders observing student discussions. Thus, teacher engagement is ensured at the same time. Therefore, it is important to analyze the discourse of the teacher in order to see whether an extended turn is facilitating the group’s thinking or limiting it.

In the CR discussions analyzed for this study, there were discussions in which students introduced new ideas which enhanced and developed my own thinking about the texts. In such instances, if I elaborated on or expressed the connections I was making to the other members of the group, I was doing so not to manipulate the discussion but rather to share in the creation of new meaning with the other participants. Granted, the balance between facilitator and participant is delicate, but there is evidence from this study that instructors can successfully alternate between these roles. When a collaborative environment has been successfully established, it is possible for an instructor to participate in ways that allow his or her opinions to be considered and evaluated in the same manner as other members of the group.

Another issue the first research question investigated was the use of French by students in the CR discussions. Despite anecdotal and empirical evidence that suggests students and teachers opt for English during discussions in the literature classroom, the results from this study show that the students spoke French (instead of slipping into English) for the majority of the literary discussions. However, the students in this course
had varying levels of proficiency, and not surprisingly, those with more language
learning experiences were often more fluent, more accurate, and inserted fewer English
words when speaking. Though the students did insert some English words when
speaking, they never completely abandoned French for English except in the first
discussion, in which they were encouraged to speak in French or English to summarize
their views.

After the initial discussion, I emphasized the importance of using French
exclusively and modeled this for the students in all consequent discussions. The findings
of this study are contrary to those in Levine’s (2003), which surveyed instructors and
students of French, German and Spanish about their target language use. In Levine’s
study, only about 29% of respondents reported using the target language to discuss topics
or themes. However, the study did not specify how or the extent to which teachers
encouraged target language use. By contrast, in this study, I emphasized that discussions
were designed to provide speaking practice and modeled exclusive use of the target
language after the first discussion. On average, students used the target language 95% of
the time in the eight discussions that were analyzed. Therefore, this study suggests that
coupling a specific framework like CR with intentional and consistent use of the target
language, particularly with encouragement and modeling of the instructor, is an effective
practice to encourage use of the target language when discussing literary texts.

When considering the implications of students’ exclusive use of the target
language during discussions, it is important to appreciate and consider the language
acquisition process. It is easy for literature instructors to feel discouraged when they hear
students insert English words into their sentences or when they realize that students’
language accuracy is not where they think it should be. However, if literature teachers are aware that each student is building a linguistic system that takes years to develop, perhaps they will feel pleased to note progress instead of expecting perfection. As Brooks (1991) reminded us, “language acquisition is a process that allows language to become internalized…In this sense, language is much more than a finite corpus of grammar rules and lexical items” (p. 1122). This includes a feature such as code switching, in which speakers mix words from their native language and target language because they are still in the process of learning the target language and sometimes need support from the native language. Here they construct a kind of “interlanguage” that serves as an important intermediate step in the movement from the native language to extensive use of the target language (Selinker, 1974; Ellis, 1994; Gass, 1988). An understanding of interlanguage and the acquisition process may certainly help to balance the frustration instructors experience with their students’ language abilities.

On a similar note, it is also important for literature teachers to focus on what students are able to do instead of what they are doing poorly. However, this is not always easy to do. As teachers, and as products of our educational system, we have been trained to evaluate performance primarily in terms of mistakes, not successes. Personally, during this study, I was often frustrated with students’ performance in discussions. However, when I transcribed and analyzed the discussions as a researcher, I was able to see positive features in the discussions. During the analysis process, I realized that I had focused more on the negative than the positive while interacting in the classroom. Because many literature teachers report frustration with students’ abilities, I think it is important to point out the fact that systematically analyzing classroom discourse sheds light on each
Recognizing the positive skills students have can be encouraging to professors and will help students develop their strengths more fully as a result. In a classroom pedagogy built around CR, avoiding an emphasis on students’ shortcomings and instead looking at positive signs of their development is especially important, since one outcome of CR is the production of oral discourse.

**Research Question 2:** In what ways does the CR instructional frame influence students’ oral participation in the Francophone literature course?

The second research question addressed the ways in which CR impacted student oral participation in a literature class. This question was investigated for two major reasons. First, as explained in the introduction, students are not always given opportunities to participate orally in upper division FL classrooms (Brooks & Donato, 2004; Mantero, 2002a; Weist, 2004 etc.). Second, students have expressed positive attitudes toward literature courses when they are encouraged to express their personal opinions (Davis et al, 1992). Therefore, for this study, the viability of the CR framework was investigated as a means to improve the students’ oral participation.

In this course, the results revealed that target language proficiency, classification (that is, freshman or senior), discussion format (i.e., whole class or small group discussion), sense of community, and personality were the main factors that determined the degree of a student’s oral participation in CR discussions. When whole group discussions were conducted, the students with more experience in literature courses (the seniors) spoke more regularly and for longer amounts of time. These students were also more proficient because they were able to perform language functions easily and spoke more fluently. The freshmen were more reluctant to take the floor during whole class
discussions. This is not surprising, because students are generally not eager to display their weaknesses in front of an entire class (even when the class consists of only eight individuals), and that feeling is exacerbated when there is a mix of first year and senior students. For the first year students in this course, it was intimidating to speak in front of the whole class, particularly since several students were seniors in terms of progress toward graduation and experience in speaking French.

However, when small group discussions were conducted (and when the participants in the group judged themselves to be equally proficient) there was increased participation from all group members. This is likely true because the students felt more comfortable and more competent when grouped with students of similar status and proficiency. That is, when the freshmen were together their deficiencies were not highlighted to the extent that they were when they spoke with the seniors. When seniors were with seniors and freshmen were with freshmen, the perception that they were among equals enabled smooth discussions, whereas mixed discussion groups were more tense.

When students were in small groups but did not feel they were equally competent (as was the case when freshmen and seniors who were mixed in groups in Discussions 4A and 4B), the relationships between the group members came into play. Despite my efforts as the instructor to provide a sense of community, the participants in this class never managed to come together as a group. The discrepancies between the freshmen and seniors’ life and educational experiences prevented them from viewing each other as equals. The freshmen, for example, felt intimidated by the knowledge and abilities of the seniors and they did not enjoy being grouped with them. The seniors felt the freshmen were not focused on the content and did not prepare adequately for discussions. These
types of comments surfaced in the post-discussion rubrics and in the open-feedback forms students completed near the end of the course.

The discussion groups that were made up of only freshmen or only seniors (Discussions 3 and 5) had more balanced participation, deeper exploration of the texts, and more laughter. These discussions were rated as “the best discussions” by all of the students. As Matlin & Short (1991) noted, a strong sense of community is essential to creating potent discussions about literature. Though I did not anticipate that this small class of eight would divide itself into two distinct groups, the bond between the four seniors and the four freshmen facilitated trust and therefore resulted in more balanced and more enthusiastic participation in discussions involving only seniors or only freshmen. However, when all students were together in whole-class discussions, or when groups were mixed, the kind of trust that facilitates risk taking and sharing was absent. In most other courses I have taught, a sense of community has developed among all students because they are sharing the experience of the course and of learning French together. However, in French 453, while the students as a group felt positively toward me, they did not all feel positively toward each other (especially as their differences became more pronounced over the course of the semester). Thus, this study supports Short’s notion that a strong sense of community benefits discussion. However, in this study this sense of community did not develop between all students, but did develop within certain groups of students as they participated in CR discussions.

This finding suggests that instructors should monitor how well the members of a group are working together. Similarly, they should strive to create groups whose members contribute positive energy and facilitate trust. Inherent to this principle is that
trust is not likely to be established among students who feel inferior to other group members. Proficiency, then, to the extent to which it affects trust, becomes a significant consideration when organizing discussion groups.

The third factor influencing oral participation was the students’ personalities. In every class, there will be students who are more outgoing and talkative than others. In this class, Alison was the most eager to participate orally, and she often discovered her views on a text as she talked during CR discussions. April also enjoyed thinking aloud, and she and Alison commonly discussed texts outside of class together, especially when they both enjoyed a specific text. Other students, like Teresa and Lisa, were less likely to participate orally. Prior to the course, both of these students mentioned that they were anxious about speaking and reported that they did not like participating orally in class in any course. Although these students were not eager to talk, both indicated in their feedback that CR discussions compelled them to think in new ways about the texts. They were prompted to think about the texts differently because they were able to listen to the responses and ideas of the other students during the CR discussions. Although they did not always express their opinions during the discussions, they did continue to reflect on the texts following the discussions. Therefore, we should not limit the benefits of discussion to oral practice, as more reflective students may use discussions as a springboard to flesh out their thoughts independently.

Another factor to consider regarding CR and participation is its adaptability for use at the university level. When CR is implemented in elementary schools, peer-led discussions are not recommended because of the strong need to scaffold discussion and to keep students focused. While the same may initially be true for college students, it may
be possible for them to effectively lead peer CR discussions after several weeks of participating in groups with an instructor. Undoubtedly, students will not be as skilled as instructors who have been trained to facilitate discourse; however, this does not mean that they would be incapable of leading and maintaining a 15-20 minute productive CR discussion. For example, in this study, when I analyzed the two discussions I was facilitating simultaneously, I found that students were able to facilitate discussion independently. Specifically, they were able to open and bring closure to discussions, to summarize the group’s ideas, to invite other speakers to participate, and to introduce new topics. With time, the students would likely have become even more skilled at leading and facilitating peer discussions.

The type of support students are able provide to each other will vary according to the personality and the proficiency levels of each group member, but it is something instructors should consider. Of special interest in this study was the ability students showed to assist each other linguistically during CR discussions. As was noted in the previous chapter, students were listening closely enough to each other to provide vocabulary and grammatical assistance during discussions which enabled them to work within the zone of proximal development. Students will have more opportunities for this to occur if their teachers are absent. Encouraging students to lead their own discussions would be especially effective for instructors who struggle to minimize their own discourse. Student-led CR discussions would also provide more opportunities for students to learn effective ways to facilitate discussion and to practice advanced skills such as clarifying and summarizing. For these reasons, CR is a viable approach to discuss literature and to promote participation in the college classroom.
At the elementary school level, the main objective for CR is to teach students how to reason and think critically about texts. In a university setting, students will have had substantially more experience and opportunities to have developed these skills. This interpretation is in line with a study by Swaffar et al (1991), which pointed out that adult learners bring with them cognitive maturity and extralinguistic capabilities. They argued that adult students have the ability to reason beyond their capabilities in the L2 and that those abilities can compensate for the limitations of their language proficiency. Therefore, the primary focus of CR in a FL classroom at the university level is to help students become more proficient at expressing the thoughts they have in their native language into a comprehensible message in the target language as they respond to literature. These students may need less emphasis on how to formulate an argument, but they definitely need practice verbalizing it. In essence, students at the undergraduate level studying a foreign language will always wrestle with the tension between what they are able to think about in the native language and what they are able to express through the foreign language. This gap, and the fact that students need specific ways to minimize it, is a good reason to implement CR in a literature course.

As we have seen in this study, CR encourages students to discuss literature and places them in a setting where spontaneous communication in the target language is essential. Thus, CR provides a space where students can participate in the complex process of learning how to formulate and express ideas in the target language. As discussed in this section, CR is appropriate for the university foreign language classroom because it allows students to practice expressing their arguments in the target language. As was described earlier, in elementary schools, one of the main purposes of CR is to
help students learn how to reason. However, the college literature classroom may potentially be a better fit for students to learn how to facilitate peer-led discussions, because they bring with them more sophisticated reasoning skills than students who are in elementary school. Further, teaching students how to use CR in peer-led groups in the foreign language literature university classroom might offer students more substantial ways to practice the target language, especially if a teacher wants to emphasize the development of oral proficiency and speaking skills in an upper-division literature or content course.

Research Question 3: To what extent do CR discussions promote response to literature through the target language in this upper-division Francophone literature course?

The third research question investigated whether CR discussions can function as a way for students to respond to literature in the target language. Specific ways in which the students responded to literature included interpreting and discussing textual themes, sharing personal thoughts and opinions about literature, and exploring Francophone perspectives as portrayed in Francophone texts. The stories in the textbook provided the launching point for discussions which took place within the parameters of the CR framework.

From the data presented in this study, it is easy to conclude that implementing CR was an effective way for students to respond to texts. First, CR allowed them to analyze and discuss textual themes. A common focus of the CR discussions in this course was to identify and connect relationships they saw between stories. Although every story did not present a controversial dilemma, which is typical of CR discussions, the students were able to argue their position related to a character’s actions. For example, as the
students were discussing the first three stories, they talked about how each story dealt with loneliness. Though there was not a central question to debate, they were able to build ideas together by sharing how they thought loneliness was represented in each of the stories. The students were free to agree and disagree with observations made by other members in the group, and thus they were able to practice stating and supporting their opinions.

The students understood they were to discuss conflicting possibilities in CR discussions, and they learned to pose questions that enabled them to debate issues. For example, while discussing one group of stories, the students were talking about the role of distance in relationships. Some of them felt that it contributed to enhanced appreciation for each member of the couple, whereas others expressed that distance was a dangerous thing that caused couples to break up. Thus, the students were able to draw out the themes of the stories and discuss them on a more global level. They extrapolated a debatable question, in this case, “Is distance positive or negative for relationships?” and were able to support their response to this question with evidence from the stories as well as with personal or historical examples. Likewise, in the liveliest discussion for both groups (Discussion 5), the students created a central dilemma by asking whether the husband in the story was considerate or selfish. This story lent itself nicely to the CR framework, and the students enjoyed arguing about the husband’s intentions toward his wife. Because CR encourages students to defend opinions and give reasons, it aligns well with stories that have debatable points. Other frameworks may not devote as much time to teaching or modeling the kinds of questions to pose, and, as a result, discussions may be less lively or less thoughtful.
Although in elementary classrooms CR is designed to be used with stories in which a general dilemma is obvious (i.e. students discuss whether a character in a story made a right or wrong decision), for university students, it seems less important that a single moral dilemma be presented explicitly in the text. In this course, the students were able to create debatable questions and/or central dilemmas (as they did with the stories about distance), even if they were not clearly laid out in the text. In other words, the students were able to deduce important themes and topics to discuss and consider. They were also able to make connections between stories. This reveals the adaptability of the CR framework for adult students. This means that an emphasis on a single dilemma designed to build students’ reasoning skills is not necessarily a mandatory requirement for a successful discussion in the university classroom, as it might be for students in elementary school.

The students’ in-depth discussions also allowed them to consider the texts from multiple perspectives and to consider relationships between culture and identity. In the essays students wrote at three different points in the semester, I asked them to consider how their cultural experiences shaped their own identity. The students commented on each other’s essays on a discussion board which enabled them to learn about each other. As the course progressed, I posed questions in class to help them consider how their identity contributed to their understanding of the texts we were reading in class. We looked, for example, at how they used their personal experiences to make sense of the text and, in some post-reading writing and oral assignments the students were asked to address a situation or problem from the perspective of one of the characters in the story. Over the course of the semester, as students were weighing alternatives and possibilities
in CR discussions, and as they considered how a certain character might respond to a certain situation, they began to analyze how a character’s choices related to his or her cultural context. For example, students came to understand that a character’s culture influenced what was socially appropriate for him or her to do as well as the opportunities he or she had. As students read and compared themes in the short stories, they developed the understanding that culture often dictates opportunities. Likewise, they understood that culture and identity are inseparable. As a result, they were able to compare how the literature written by Francophone authors differed from literature written in France. Responding to literature in CR discussions and in class in these ways seems to have enhanced the students’ understanding of Francophone culture and likely made these texts more meaningful for them.

Another discovery which may be unique to this context was the students’ use of the CR discussions to compare and contrast textual themes across units. Incidentally, this skill was an important objective for the course. Though initially the students limited connections to the two or three stories in a specific unit, they later began to refer to texts read much earlier in the semester. For example, during Discussion 5B, one student referenced similarities between the current text and “L’ombre et L’absent”, a story from Unit 1, which had been discussed many weeks earlier in the semester. The other students quickly picked up on the reference and began adding to it. Several of the students reported liking the texts and noted that the CR discussions made them more meaningful. One student articulated the idea more specifically on the open-ended feedback form saying, “I feel like these stories will stick with me longer.” This was a benefit of
discussion noted by Sweigart (1991) who showed a positive relationship between small group discussion, retention of text, and comprehension of text.

To my knowledge, other studies of CR discussions have not indicated that students referred to texts they had discussed in previous CR discussions when discussing a new text. Although it is unclear why students in elementary classrooms tend not to make connections during group discussions between texts they have discussed earlier in the year, it is possible that the format encourages students to analyze one story at a time. In French 453, the textbook format was such that each discussion consisted of two or three stories, which seems to have promoted intertextuality. Because the students were dealing with more than one text in every discussion, they may have found it more natural to reference stories they had read and discussed earlier in the semester into current discussions. It would be interesting to know if students at the elementary level would be more likely to refer to previous texts in CR discussions if they became accustomed to discussing more than one text at a time.

To elaborate on the points raised above, the fact that the students made connections across texts over the course of a semester suggests that they were retaining information from the stories. It also suggests that they were able to draw from the knowledge they had created from discussing previous texts as they encountered new ones. Because CR discussions allowed the students to respond to texts personally, they were able to remember and later make use of important information. Beyond that, the students were able to develop an understanding of characters and themes which they likely would not have otherwise experienced had they not explored texts so deeply within
the CR framework. This finding should encourage literature teachers who want to know whether stories and their themes resonate with students in lasting ways.

Another benefit of the CR framework is that it encourages a personal response to literature, which can help students to connect with the texts they read. This personal response happens during CR discussions which in turn gives students opportunities to develop their oral language skills. Because students who are fluent, successful readers in their native language may experience disappointment when they struggle in the target language, it is important to help students develop confidence and enjoyment as they read. Without this confidence building, students may lose interest in foreign language study or may be less committed to developing their FL abilities further. As Davis et al (1992) reported in their survey of undergraduate attitudes toward literature study, there is a negative correlation between low speaking ability and enjoyment of literature. This is yet another reason to encourage students to develop speaking confidence because that confidence will help them as they progress their curricular sequences. Though some researchers claim that practice is the key to developing reading fluency, Gillet & Temple (2000) and Long and Gove (2004) claimed that fluency should be developed through engagement. They write, “We think the best way to develop fluency is not just by practicing reading and writing but by becoming avid and enthusiastic readers and writers” (p.359). Essentially, enjoyment is an important factor to consider when developing foreign language fluency and CR may be able to play a valuable role in promoting such enjoyment.

The survey of Davis et al. (1992) also showed that students enjoy reading more when they are able to discuss their opinions and feelings about texts. The CR framework
enabled them to do this in several ways. First, the open participation structure provided freedom by allowing the students to talk about what they had read without a rigid agenda. Likewise, this open structure gave more control to the students because the teacher was not selecting who would speak during discussions. As the results in the previous chapter showed, the students in this course talked to each other more than they would have in traditional classrooms. Finally, the students were able to personally relate to the texts because the framework required them to explore their own views of the text instead of listening to their instructor’s ready-made interpretation. As Nystrand et al. (1993) pointed out, when classroom discussions allow student opinions to shape the discourse instead of simply covering information, students are able to develop their thinking and then become more active participants. Similarly, when students are able to relate new information to personal experiences, they retain the new information better, as the results of this study suggest.

What we learn from this study is that allowing students the opportunity to make meaning from texts based on their personal experiences and the experiences of their peers in CR discussions enables them to form lasting relationships with texts and each other. In describing the reading experience, Sumara (1995) created the term *commonplace location*, which is “the space opened up by the relations among reader, text, and contexts of reading” (p. 4). For him this location recognizes that the reader’s relationship with the text does not end once the reading is complete. He argues, in contrast, that the relationship continues to evolve as the reader re-interprets it in light of new experiences. Thus, as students encounter new stories, or if students revisit these same stories again, they will take something different from each experience with the texts. As Courtland et
al (1998) pointed out it is useful to consider reader-text transactions “as a web rather than a line” (p.339) in order to expand our notion of how aesthetic experiences with text inform textual transactions. Therefore, what this study seems to indicate is that the relationship built with these texts through CR enriched their existing schema, which in turn may enhance their learning in future literature courses. That is, CR fosters deep engagement and personal connections with texts, which in turn strengthens the schema they draw from when they encounter new texts.

The findings from this study regarding CR and its ability to support literary goals reinforce the above claims and the viability of CR to achieve them. To sum up, CR provides a space in which students can respond to literary texts and to each other. In the process, it allows students to form relationships with the texts they are reading and to share their perspectives and experiences meaningfully in a collaborative manner, because the collaborative atmosphere encourages substantive exchanges of views and perspectives. Such exchanges have a lasting impact that increases their ability to take root in students’ memories of and relationships with texts, thereby creating stronger grounds for students to engage in intertextual encounters with texts and extend their proficiency in the target language. Consequently, key goals of a foreign language literature course are met via the CR pedagogy. These features are in contrast to a traditional format in which students receive impersonal, ready-made interpretations of literary works and teachers frequently determine who speaks.

**Research Question 4:** What are the students’ perspectives regarding the implementation of CR discussions in an undergraduate French literature course after one semester of exposure?
As community colleges and universities face dwindling enrollments in literature courses, it is becoming increasingly important to examine what students expect and experience in these courses so that departments can respond accordingly. With that in mind, the final research question addressed how students responded to the CR framework in a literature course. As Kern (2002) showed, one factor that contributes to dissatisfaction as students progress from language to literature classes is the dramatic change in the classroom environment. His work suggests that replicating the relaxed environment of elementary language courses in upper division content courses should result in more positive feedback from students. The data from this study support his conclusion, as discussed below.

The students in this study reported that CR provided a relaxed learning environment, one which they found beneficial for learning. The CR framework achieved this by encouraging equity between students and teachers via open participation and by emphasizing interpretive freedom. The students in this course noted an appreciation for the emphasis on exploring ideas collaboratively, which in turn validated individual interpretations. In this course, the students recognized their perspectives were valued. Because literature study can be intimidating for foreign language students (especially if it is the first literature course a student takes), a relaxed and collaborative environment is essential. An environment like this likely helps make the transition to literature study go more smoothly. As Courtland et al. (1998) found, when teachers are members of a reading community with their students (as opposed to lecturers) they “become partners engaged in genuine enquiry” (p. 340). This sense of partnership was created between me and the students in this course in terms of discussing literature. The students in this
course expressly stated that they felt like the professor was “one of them” and that they enjoyed the course more as a result, thus validating the adoption of the CR framework.

A second finding about the students’ attitudes toward CR indicates that some students may find the comprehensive nature of the approach overwhelming. Even though the students felt free to express their ideas in the relaxed atmosphere generated by CR, those who were first-time literature students found that the approach required them to merge language skills which they had previously treated as separate. Specifically, some students found it difficult to comprehend what they had read and then analyze and talk about it spontaneously with other students. For them, this melding of reading and speaking skills was excessively demanding. These students were accustomed to discrete point activities that did not build their overall literacy in the target language, but rather focused on a specific skill or type of knowledge, such as grammar. Because the CR discussions required the students to synthesize their knowledge of French, the students who were uncomfortable indicated a preference for working with one skill at a time. It is also probable that these students felt they were not prepared linguistically to do what the CR discussions required; thus, they felt they needed to go back and work on skills using a bottom-up approach to FL language learning.

In one sense, these students are justified in this complaint. The ability to discuss literary texts is an advanced ability, and these students had not had opportunities to see how language skills come together holistically. It was difficult for them to adapt to a different method of instruction so quickly, and they were less proficient than the other members of the course (i.e. the seniors), which likely added to their frustration. Because language acquisition is a slow process, students may also become frustrated when they do
not see immediate progress in their language abilities. In fact, it is not uncommon for students and teachers alike to be impatient with the language acquisition process. Nevertheless, a strength of the CR framework is that it enables students to learn language through literature as opposed to teaching specific skills in isolation. Still, as this study showed, some students will be uncomfortable with this approach because they are accustomed to more traditional, explicit approaches to language learning, the kind that dominate high school foreign language instruction, and even, in some cases, elementary language courses taught at the college level. In these situations, it will take time and patience for students to shift their expectations and to recognize the benefits of CR’s comprehensive approach to language learning and literary appreciation. Though a shift such as this can be difficult, current research shows that explicit approaches which tend to depend on drills for language learning are unnecessary for language acquisition (Wong and VanPatten, 2003). Currently, research supports teaching skills holistically so that literacy, as opposed to individual skills, is developed in the target language, (Kern, 2002).

As for the students’ views toward speaking French in CR discussions, the students in this study felt the framework was a good way for them to practice speaking French in a literature class. Despite occasional frustration, these students felt it was important to have opportunities to practice discussion in order to develop their speaking skills, something the CR framework supports. As the responses to the survey items showed, the students enjoyed sharing their own opinions, hearing the opinions of others, having the freedom to discuss the topics of their choice, and being able to make connections between texts. At the same time, many students felt they needed more time to develop
accuracy, and particularly noted a lack of vocabulary and familiarity with tenses in discussions.

The data regarding students’ attitudes toward the CR framework can be summarized as follows. On the positive side, the students preferred the small group format over whole-class discussions. They liked the relaxed atmosphere, the open participation structure, and the opportunity to share their personal opinions in CR discussions. They also felt that participating in CR discussions boosted their confidence when speaking French, enhanced their understanding of texts in the target language, and enabled them to make lasting connections between texts. However, they preferred using CR only when grouped with students of similar language proficiency and with whom they felt personally comfortable. Furthermore, some students felt that the CR framework was not instructive enough and that it did not allow for enough explicit grammatical practice. Because these students were adjusting to the independent nature of university life, and because they had not had previous French courses at this level, their criticisms of the framework may be unique to them. On the other hand, CR, and other approaches to discussion, emphasizes a way of teaching that might new for many students. When teachers give students more control and freedom it may present some stress for students who are unaccustomed to it. Nevertheless, exposing students to pedagogical practices that require them to participate and become engaged in learning is not something to abandon simply because it may present new challenges to learners.

Finally, CR discussions do provide a great deal of grammatical instruction, although it may not be in the form that students expect. It may be, in fact, that the comprehensive nature of CR discussions actually provides students with more
opportunities to use grammar and vocabulary than more explicit approaches would, and it is certainly a more direct application of the skills being learned. Rather than teachers conjugating verbs for students to copy in their notebooks, the students synthesize the vocabulary and grammar they have encountered in the texts they have read during CR discussions.

**Implications for Foreign Language Instruction**

This study is one of only a few in the field of instruction and second language acquisition designed to describe what takes place when a specific approach to discussion is implemented in order to facilitate students’ development of speaking skills and connection to literature. This study showed that, for this group of students, it was helpful to have a specific approach (CR) in place for literature discussions. If teachers set out to have discussions about literature without specific parameters in mind, it is unlikely that students will have substantial opportunities to talk (Donato & Brooks, 2004). Therefore, the parameters of the CR framework helped the students grasp what makes for a good discussion, enabled them to trust the value of their contributions, and provided a space for them to respond to literature.

The implication of this for teachers is that it is important to approach discussion in the literature university classroom with a specific plan and framework in mind. As we know, teachers often have good intentions regarding “discussion,” but without specific goals and parameters it is harder to judge whether discussions are meeting the expectations of the teacher and the students. Teachers might find it helpful to identify their goals for the discussion, and then research existing approaches to see which framework best aligns with these goals. After studying, choosing and implementing a
specific approach, it would be beneficial for teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their class discussions. For example, videotaping initial discussions would allow teachers to reflect on elements of the discussion. Specifically, teachers may want to note who participated in the discussion, whether students spoke to each other, and what kinds of questions were useful for promoting student discourse. Undertaking authentic, meaningful discussion takes work and dedication. However, if teachers are willing to examine and adjust their practice, it is likely that discussions will become more balanced in terms of participation and will be more engaging for students and teachers alike.

In terms of working with students, teachers also need to explicitly state their goals regarding speaking skills and to work with students to understand the dynamics of discourse in the classroom. Laying the groundwork for CR discussions by brainstorming questions, responses, and other appropriate discourse strategies is essential to providing an effective discursive environment. Put simply, good CR discussions do not happen without preparation, planning, and reflection.

In this course, some of the freshmen struggled with the freedom the CR approach provided and did not prepare appropriately for discussions as the semester progressed. Because I was not grading them specifically on what they said or how much they said, some students were not adequately motivated or prepared to discuss the texts, despite pre-discussion and other in class activities. When I recognized this, I designed a feedback form to find out how they were preparing for discussions outside of class. I discovered that the freshmen craved a more traditional testing approach. Because I did not want to assign a letter grade to each participant’s discussion, I decided to implement written, graded assignments or quizzes/examinations prior to the CR discussions. This strategy
was successful, in that most students were more prepared for discussions. In all honesty, it is unlikely that any approach will motivate and excite each and every student. Some students are experiencing or have experienced situations outside of a teacher’s control which hinder their engagement in a course. Nevertheless, this study shows that students appreciated sharing in the rationale for implementing CR and enjoyed the collaborative experience it afforded them.

Another important ingredient for teachers who want to implement CR is an awareness of the interpersonal dynamics between the students. The sociocultural nature of this study revealed that the students in this course were not comfortable when they were grouped with students whom they perceived to have more or less power than they did. Research with a sociocultural focus (see Norton, 2000 for a specific example) has shown that a second language learner’s motivation to speak the target language is not a fixed trait. In this study, if a student felt that she was unequal to another participant she was less likely to speak. However, when students were grouped with speakers whom they viewed as equals, there was more cooperation and positive interaction. Instructors need to recognize that students’ perceptions and attitudes toward each other can impact CR discussions both positively and negatively. Therefore, instructors should monitor how these relationships are affecting participation and adjust accordingly. Once good combinations of abilities and personalities are found, it is beneficial for teachers to keep groups stable in order to help students develop a sense of community and trust, both of which foster good CR discussions.

Regarding students’ attitudes toward literature study, the current study underscores the need for variety in literature classrooms. Students expressed an
appreciation for assignments that allowed them to read, discuss, translate, research, write and make presentations to the class. Thus, while CR was at the center of this course and discussion was an essential teaching tool, the students also had opportunities to interact with content in other ways. For instructors, this implies that variety maintains motivation by allowing students to find and emphasize their strengths. If discussion had been the only means for language practice students who were frustrated with their speaking abilities may have become uninterested. However, these students noted that listening to music and poems, making presentations to their classmates, writing essays, preparing translations, and other activities enhanced their appreciation for the course as a whole.

Finally, the results from this study stress that literature professors should not automatically view students of literature as proficient users of the target language. All of the students in this study, regardless of their proficiency, were still language learners. Because departments move students quickly through course sequences, it is likely they will face material that is challenging for them in the target language. As a result, literature professors need to become more familiar with language learning processes and to incorporate strategies that support language learners’ development in literature courses. Similarly, it is important for literature professors to be understanding and patient with the learners in their courses. Though at first glance it may seem that students are struggling, it is important for professors to emphasize what students are doing well, instead of emphasizing errors.

Regarding CR specifically, teachers can use students’ performance in CR discussions as a way to address language development by debriefing students after each discussion and by integrating supportive measures as needed. Showing students how they
performed (either through transcripts or video clips) would also help students develop a sense of their own strengths and weaknesses. Other supportive measures may include providing students with reading strategies, giving students specific phrases and terminology to practice in discussion, or using compositions as a way to further develop their literacy in the target language. In this study, students were given terminology to use in discussions, and on some occasions we talked about reading strategies in class. Aside from explicitly talking about and practicing for discussions, other supportive measures were built into the course because of my own awareness of their importance but I did not deal with them extensively or attempt to measure their effectiveness. Though this study did not analyze the types of linguistic support literature teachers could provide to their students, it does make clear that students in upper division courses are still developing language proficiency and that they would appreciate having linguistic support.

Directions for Future Research

This study provides a good starting point for the viability of CR as a specific model for literary discussions. From this study, we know that that implementing CR as a framework for discussion provided opportunities for students to talk about and respond to literature, something rarely true of the traditional lecture format. We also know that students were able to support each other during conversations in French, to share and defend their opinions, and to connect to the texts on a personal level. In the future, it might also be useful to specifically analyze the usefulness of CR discussions in other content courses, such as Civilization or Culture.

The survey in this study revealed that students want their instructors to talk to them about the language learning process and to support them in their linguistic
development. Therefore, future investigations in this context may want to investigate how or if implementing a specific discussion framework improves student accuracy over a longer period of time. One angle to explore is the analysis of video and audio samples from class discussions. In this study, the students were asked to evaluate their perception of their performance in each CR discussion, but they were not asked to evaluate actual samples from the discussions. Along these lines, the next step for using discussion in the literature classroom may be to investigate the usefulness of a specific feedback approach in which students watch, rate, and discuss their performance with each other and their instructor. Although some students in this study reported becoming more confident as their discourse opportunities increased, student accuracy was not a primary concern. Providing a forum for speaking as well as for the evaluation of accuracy may meet the need students have for more explicit instruction and feedback, and may also result in improved performance over time. A study that specifically investigates accuracy over time would also provide more evidence regarding the usefulness of CR in improving oral proficiency and accuracy in the target language.

It would also be fruitful to explore the relationship between CR and skills other than speaking. One of the main goals for CR in this course was to provide opportunities for students to develop oral proficiency skills through increased oral participation. This study did not analyze in detail how CR contributes to students’ written abilities or to their comprehension of text. More specifically, this study investigated Communication Standard 1.1 (Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions) of the ACTFL Standards. It would also be relevant to thoroughly analyze the extent to which CR discussions enabled students to
develop their understanding of the target culture. An analysis of the relationship between culture and CR discussions would relate directly to Connections standard 3.2 (Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures).

Finally, there is an ongoing need for investigations of language learning in advanced contexts. This study has shown that students need literature teachers to intentionally create speaking opportunities and to create a collaborative environment in which oral skills can be cultivated. Future studies should identify and investigate other needs specific to this audience. As more information about students’ needs in upper-division contexts is produced, we should continue to provide instructors and learners with pedagogical practices that make the language acquisition process more rewarding.

This study has introduced a new line of research investigating the adaptability of the CR framework to a second language context. One benefit of CR in a second language setting is that it allows students to develop their linguistic skills while also building their content knowledge. This study revealed that students in literature courses appreciate knowing that their language development is acknowledged and supported. When FL departments take strides to focus on literacy by implementing pedagogical practices that merge language and literary goals, we may then see more favorable attitudes toward literature and may also see students attain the advanced proficiency level upon graduation from college.

**Final Remarks**

A broad goal of this study was to examine whether implementing an approach to discussion, CR, would provide opportunities for students to develop advanced speaking
skills in the context of a literature course. As we know from research previously conducted (see Donato and Brooks, 2004; and Weist, 2002 for specific examples), students rarely have opportunities to talk in the literature classroom. In these studies, teachers dominated discussion and there were few to no opportunities for students to use extended discourse in the target language. This study extends the work of Donato and Brooks (2004) by implementing some of their recommendations, namely to make the development of speaking skills an explicit goal in the literature classroom and to implement a specific framework for discussion.

The results of this study suggest that if teachers are intentional about discussions (by planning for them, learning how to facilitate them, and teaching students how to participate in them) that the literature course can indeed provide a space for students to develop advanced speaking skills through using extended discourse in the target language. Likewise, this study showed that the CR framework allowed students to respond to literature personally and to meet additional goals literature professors have for their courses. While it may seem overwhelming for literature professors to address language and content simultaneously, the CR framework does support both goals. CR supports students’ language learning by providing opportunities for them to formulate and express their thoughts orally, to practice listening comprehension, and to verify reading comprehension. CR supports content goals by allowing students to analyze and make textual connections, to interpret and respond to literature, and to develop critical thinking skills.

As opposed to focusing solely on reading and writing, this study recommends that literature professors examine the opportunities their discipline provides for the
development of advanced speaking skills. Because literature courses (and other courses like culture and civilization) present interesting ideas and concepts, these courses provide rich topics for discussion. Discussion, as a pedagogical tool, offers rich possibilities for students to engage with content, to develop critical thinking, and to actively participate in the learning process. As this study showed, students benefited from discussion in several ways, one of which was that they were able to connect personally with texts. They also reported positive feelings toward open participation.

Sadly, some universities have experienced enrollment drops in literature courses. These drops can result in the elimination of course offerings, faculty, and funding. Consequently, it is important to consider why students are opting to take other courses offered at the upper-division level. If students are avoiding literature courses because they do not have opportunities to share personal opinions (as Davis et al., 1992 suggests) or interact in ways they might have in elementary language courses (as Kern, 2002 suggests), then implementing specific frameworks for discussion may be a way to enhance and personalize the instruction of literature. The students in this course reported an appreciation for the opportunities CR provided for them to respond to literary texts and to each other. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to consider participation and discourse patterns when planning for instruction at the upper-division level.

The results of this study show that the literature classroom can provide a place for students to develop advanced speaking skills. The next step for the field is for professors who have an interest in this area to continue to research describe the process of implementing discussion in literature or other content courses. Furthermore, if we accept that advanced speaking skills can and should be cultivated in upper-division courses, it
will be important to address ways to improve accuracy in speaking the target language. Finally, because upper-division courses focus on content, we should continue to examine and describe practices that simultaneously address a student’s language development with his or her knowledge of a specific subject, such as literature, history, or culture. In terms of a research agenda, it is essential to recognize that students in upper-division content courses are also language learners. Consequently, professors of language and literature alike need to work together to examine and describe pedagogical practices that address language and content simultaneously.

Implementing a specific framework such as CR into upper-division FL content courses represents a significant shift in current pedagogy. The artificial divide between language and content has already existed for too long. If literature teachers embrace the idea that language skills can and should be continually developed in their courses, they will need specific ways to unite these skills. Because CR is able to support language and content goals, this study encourages literature professors (and professors who teach other upper-division courses) to reconsider their classrooms as a context in which literacy in the target language can be developed holistically. Likewise, professors of beginning and intermediate language courses should also consider implementing discussions in their classrooms. Though the focus of this study has been on upper-division classrooms, there is also a need for beginning course sequences to emphasize authentic communication. CR is certainly one discussion framework that could be adapted for use at earlier levels of instruction, and language professors can prepare students for upper-level study by facilitating purposeful discussions in their classrooms as well. In this study, the general goal was to develop speaking skills through literary discussions. Though CR discussions
are an effective teaching practice for all subjects, there may be other methods that successfully merge language and content. Therefore, it is our profession’s challenge to continue to identify, examine, and describe classroom practices that can achieve that goal.
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Routledge.


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APPENDIX A

COURSE SYLLABUS
Course Syllabus for French 453

Instructor:  Kelly L. Kidder     Office Hours: M,W, 2:00-4:00
Telephone: 279-6617    E-mail: kelly.kidder@lipscomb.edu

French 453
Course Title:  Exploring Francophone Culture through Literature

Course Objectives:

The purpose of this course is to provide opportunities for students to reflect on the intersections of language, literature, and culture in the French speaking world. Students will develop critical thinking skills through contrasting knowledge of their native culture(s) with ways in which other cultures express their values and beliefs. Students will consider relationships of language and identity, and language and power as they consider the voices of writers from various parts of the French speaking world. Likewise, students will analyze and identify themes in the literature read in this course. Finally, this course will develop literacy in French by creating opportunities for students to connect reading and writing with speaking, culture, and reflection. Group discussion in French will play a significant part of the course as I believe meaning is constructed and created through dialogue and through active student participation.

What you can expect to do and learn in this course: As a student of this course you will be asked to reflect on ways in which culture has contributed to your identity. You will also be asked to apply this reflection to your understanding of francophone culture. Likewise, you will be expected to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the readings through discussions with your classmates. These discussions will allow you to explore your personal reactions to the texts we read and to make sense of them with your classmates. There will be outside reading and writing assignments in addition to at least five quizzes, a midterm and a final. Finally, there will be two presentations in this course. Your first presentation will be on one of the countries or authors featured in our text. The second presentation will be a deeper investigation of the cultural themes or movements represented in the works we read. Details for these assignments are included at the end of the syllabus.


Course Elements:
Attendance:  15%
Quizzes:      15%
Participation in course activities 20%
and CR Discussions:
Presentation related to major course theme: 15%
Written assignments: 15%
Exams 20%

Class Grading Scale: The grading scale for this course is as follows:

91-100  A
81-90   B
71-80   C
61-70   D
0-60    F

Attendance and Grading Policies: It is, of course, imperative that you attend class regularly. Failure to do so will result in the lowering of your grade. If you must miss class at any time, you are responsible for obtaining the assignments that were missed. I do not accept late work or assignments. If you miss a quiz, you will not be given the opportunity to retake the quiz unless I am notified prior to class that there is a legitimate reason (illness or other school commitment) for your absence. Each student will have the option to drop one of the quizzes from his or her final grade.

COURSE SCHEDULE: This schedule is tentative and is subject to change as the course progresses.

Semaine 1  MARDI  
A discuter  
L’introduction au cours.  
Organisation du cours, discussion de vos expériences du passé dans un cours de littérature.

A faire  
On fera un sondage qui traite vos expériences des cours littéraires, et vous identifierez votre but pour ce cours.

Pour la prochaine fois :  
Réfléchissez aux questions données. Ecrivez votre autobiographie culturelle.

JEUDI  
Introduction au pays francophones
A discuter :
Introduction au concept de la francophonie, de la culture, et de la colonisation. Exploration des thèmes de la langue et l’identité.

A faire :
Partagez vos essais. Lisez quelques extraits de Negotiating the Self. Comparez les points de vues diverses.

Sites à consulter
http://130.212.41.61/PEF/1931a.html

Pour la prochaine fois :
Pensez a votre réflexion culturelle # 1

Semaine 2  MARDI  
La souffrance et l’éloquence

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A discuter :
On parlera de vos connaissances du monde francophone.

A faire :
On fera des activités pour préparer la lecture de Bonjour, Maman et Une Lettre.

Pour la prochaine fois :
Lisez, Bonjour Maman, Bonne fête, Maman. pages 9 à 11.

JEUDI.

A discuter :

A faire :

Pour la prochaine fois :

La souffrance et l’éloquence
Bonjour Maman et Une Lettre.

Discussion du texte en réfléchissant à quelques questions. Activités pour préparer la lecture de la semaine prochaine.
Préparez L’ombre et L’absent (directions donnés en classe).

Semaine 3: MARDI
La souffrance et l’éloquence
L’ombre et L’absent,
Comparaisons et connexions des trois histoires lues. Réponse écrite de trois histoires. (à préciser en cours)
* A voir. Réflexion 1

JEUDI
La souffrance et l’éloquence
Présentation de La Martinique et la Guadeloupe
FILM. La rue cases-nègres.
Guide du film

Semaine 4
MARDI
La souffrance et l’éloquence
Le film, La rue cases-nègres
DISCUSSION EN GROUPE (FILM)
Questions préalables à la page 38. Pour empêcher un mariage.

JEUDI
L’aventure et l’amour
Pour empêcher un mariage.
Lisez et discutez en classe.
Questions préalables pour La Montagne de Feu
Semaine 5: MARDI
A discuter :
A faire :
Pour la prochaine fois :

JEUDI
A discuter :
A faire :
Pour la prochaine fois :

L’aventure et L’amour
La Montagne de Feu
Nos idées de l’amour, Le cours jusqu’à ce point.
Préparez pour la discussion.

Semaine 6:
A discuter :
A faire :
Sites à consulter
Pour la prochaine fois :

JEUDI
A discuter :
A faire
Sites à consulter, possibilité de présentation orale
Pour la prochaine fois :

La culture et la différence
Le Québec
Questions avant de lire Pur Polyester
Portail Québec
Lisez Pur Polyester

Semaine 7
****Il n’y a pas de cours cette semaine ****Bonne fête***********************

Semaine 8: MARDI
A discuter :
A faire :
Pour la prochaine fois :

JEUDI
A discuter :
A faire :
Sites à consulter, possibilité de présentation orale
Pour la prochaine fois :

La culture et la différence
La Noire de…
On va lire ensemble en groupes en cours.
Continuez avec La Noire de… et Le cauchemar.

La culture et la différence
La Noire de….Le cauchemar
Questions du texte
Présentation orale d’une camarade
Continuez
Semaine 9: MARDI
La culture et la différence
A discuter : Le cauchemar
A faire : Questions du texte. Possibilité de présentation orale
Pour la prochaine fois : Réflexion 2

*Last day to turn in Reflection 2
JEUDI
La culture et la différence
A discuter : Les idées de la culture et la différence
A faire : Rattrapage Sondage de vos idées concernant les hommes et les femmes.
Le mur ou les charmes d’une vie conjugale
Pour la prochaine fois :

Semaine 10 MARDI
La culture et la différence
A discuter : Le mur ou les charmes d’une vie conjugale
A faire : DISCUSSION EN GROUPE
Pour la prochaine fois : Amusez-vous bien. Il n’y a pas de devoirs.

JEUDI
Une si longue lettre
A discuter : Introduction du texte et de l’auteur
A faire : Présentation du livre et du Senégale.
On parlera de ce site en cours. Si on n’arrive pas à tout lire, vous allez être responsable pour le contenu.
Pour la prochaine fois : Lisez chapitres 1 à 6

Semaine 11 MARDI
Une si longue lettre
A discuter : Chapitres 1 à 6
Pour la prochaine fois :

JEUDI
Une si longue lettre
A discuter : Chapitres 7 à 10
A faire :
Pour la prochaine fois :

Semaine 12 MARDI
Une si longue lettre
A discuter : 11 à 18
A faire : On va écrire une réponse et un essai d’une perspective différente. On le précisera en cours.
Présentation Orale :
Pour la prochaine fois :

Lisez 19 à 21
**JEUDI**
A discuter :
A faire :
Pour la prochaine fois :

**Semaine 13**
**MARDI**
A discuter :
A faire :
Pour la prochaine fois :

**JEUDI**
A discuter :
A faire :
Présentation Orale
Pour la prochaine fois :

**Semaine 14: MARDI**
A discuter :
A faire :
Présentation Orale
Pour la prochaine fois :

*Last day to turn in Reflection 3  **JEUDI**  RECAP
A discuter :
A faire :
Présentation Orale, si nécessaire
Pour la prochaine fois :

**SEMAINE 15: Les examens finaux**  (Nous aurons une discussion finale au lieu d’un examen)

**Major Assignments:** Below are the major assignments for the course. Additional written assignments will be assigned as the course progresses. These assignments will include pre and post reading questions, translations, and other assignments that address questions or challenges that arise during the semester.

**QUIZZES**
Quizzes will be announced throughout the course. Specific quiz dates are not in the syllabus, as the syllabus will change according to our needs and experiences throughout the semester. You will be made aware of quizzes in advance.

**Specific Projects you will complete during this course:**

**GROUP DISCUSSIONS**
Throughout the course there will be group discussions related to the readings and the topics of the course. These discussions will enable you to reflect on the text and to explore your questions. They will also help you refine your ability to express your ideas in French. We will work together to create these conversations, and will evaluate the success of these discussions throughout the course. Each of you will have one turn leading/getting the discussion started. When you are a leader or a co-leader you will be responsible for preparing a thought provoking question about the text for your group. Examples of such questions will be provided and discussed in class. You will evaluate your participation in every group discussion.

**WRITTEN JOURNALS  50 points**
As we read this semester, you will keep a journal of your reading experiences. You will discuss what aspects of the course are facilitating your comprehension of the text and will also discuss areas where you would like more support. In your journals you can discuss the content of what we are reading, how you are going about doing the reading, and any frustrations or successes you may experience with the reading. You will be given suggestions for keeping these journals in the first week of the class. However, there is no specific form you will have to follow. The journal is to help you become more aware of your strengths and weaknesses as a reader of French. **You will turn in one entry for each Unit we read.**

**ORAL PRESENTATION (40 points):** You must choose your topic by the third week of the course so that you have ample time to prepare your topic. If possible, you will present your topic in conjunction with a story or film that connects well with your work.

**OPTION 1:** You may choose to share a poem, fable, or short story written by a Francophone author with the class. (You may not choose an author from France) You will discuss the significance of the work in light of the themes we are studying and will also present how this theme (or themes) is unique to that part of the francophone world. You should also be prepared to discuss how the author’s culture contributed to his/her interest in the topic (if possible) and to discuss your rationale for choosing this particular poem or story.

**OPTION 2:** You may choose a song, film, painting or sculpture by a francophone artist and discuss what the work communicates in light of the themes we are studying in class. You should be prepared to discuss the cultural context of the artist’s work and should prepare a thoughtful critique of the song, film or painting. If you choose a film, you will
need the watch the film in its entirety outside of class and write a brief summary of it and its key ideas. Your critique of the song or film should contain the following: 1) Your feelings about the selection. Express what you appreciated about your choice as well as what you may not have liked (if there is something). Reflect on your reaction to the piece. How do you think your particular cultural background and experiences played into your appreciation for your selection? If you didn’t like your choice, what background knowledge, historical or cultural experiences do you feel you would need to appreciate this selection?

OPTION 3: You may choose to discuss a specific literary movement (i.e. Négritude) or philosophical idea represented in or by the work of a Francophone writer. You will present this concept in light of its relationship to what we are reading and discussing in class and will address its contributions to the field both for those who do and do not support the author’s ideas.

Written Cultural Reflections: 75 points (25 points per reflection)

You will write at least three cultural reflections in which you analyze your reaction to what you have been learning, reading, and discussing in class. For your first reflection you will be using the things we discuss in Weeks 1 and 2 to think about how your culture has helped to shape your beliefs and your identity. Specific suggestions for this first reflection will be provided and discussed in class. (TURN IN WEEK 3)

In the middle of the course, you will reflect on how you are processing what you are learning. You will consider the ways in which the cultural contexts of the authors and their surroundings have contributed to the themes of their work as well as what you are learning about culture and language. (TURN IN WEEK 9)

At the end of the course, you will write a third reflection in which you will analyze how the aspects of culture we have studied (geography, family, language, music, politics, religion etc.) have influenced your life. How do you feel now about the role of culture in contributing to your identity and to your beliefs? (TURN IN WEEK 14)
APPENDIX B

SUGGESTED TOOLS FOR STUDENTS IN CR DISCUSSIONS
## Suggested Tools for Students to use during CR Discussions

| Phrases to use During CR Discussions when you want to share something with the group | Je suis d’accord avec (nom d’étudiant) parce que…  
Je ne suis pas d’accord avec (nom d’étudiant) parce que…  
Je trouve que c’est (intéressant, troublant, etc.).  
J’ai une autre perspective à partager.  
Je pense que…  
A mon avis…  
(Nom d’étudiant), qu’est-ce que tu penses? |
|---|---|
| Phrases to use to draw other students into the discussion | Est-ce que tu es d’accord (nom d’étudiant) ?  
Est-ce que tu trouves que… ?  
Qu’est-ce que tu veux dire?  
Je ne comprends pas très bien.  
Est-ce que tu peux expliquer ton idée ? |
| Phrases to use when you have not understood something | Est-ce que tu peux répéter ça ?  
Tu veux dire que…  
Dans le texte, je n’ai pas compris la partie où…  
Dans le texte, je n’ai pas compris si…  
Pourquoi est-ce que tu penses ça ?  
Pourquoi est-ce que tu as cette idée ?  
Est-ce que tu dis que ?  
Listen carefully to what others are saying.  
Respond to ideas.  
Present alternatives if you disagree with someone or see something differently. |
| Phrases to use to question |  
Use the text to help you make your point.  
If you have not understood something in the reading, ask the group about it. |
| General things to consider |  
Listen carefully to what others are saying.  
Respond to ideas.  
Present alternatives if you disagree with someone or see something differently. |

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APPENDIX C

POST-DISCUSSION RUBRIC
## Post-Discussion Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>I was able to follow the discussion easily. I understood everything that was said in the discussion.</td>
<td>I had some trouble following the discussion, but I think I understood most of what was said in the discussion.</td>
<td>I was unsure about what the topic was for much of the discussion. I didn’t understand very much of the discussion.</td>
<td>I stopped listening because I didn’t know what the topic was. I didn’t understand what people were saying in the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong></td>
<td>I was able to communicate my ideas easily. I was able to say what I wanted to say when I wanted to say it.</td>
<td>I was able to communicate most of my ideas. It took me awhile to think of what I wanted to say.</td>
<td>I shared an idea or two, but most of things I wanted to say were too hard to say. By the time I had my ideas together, people were talking about something else.</td>
<td>I didn’t say much at all because I couldn’t put my thoughts into French. There isn’t enough time for me to say what I want to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>I felt very confident about my French today. I used a variety of tenses and formulated my thoughts easily and spontaneously</td>
<td>I felt pretty confident about my French today. I was able to get my point across but I might have messed up some tenses or vocabulary.</td>
<td>I didn’t feel that confident about my French today. I struggled to communicate my ideas and there were tenses and vocabulary that I couldn’t think of.</td>
<td>I didn’t feel confident at all about my French today. It is overwhelming for me to try and express myself in French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participating</strong></td>
<td>I participated fully in the discussion. I listened attentively and shared my thoughts and ideas.</td>
<td>I participated well in the discussion. I listened to what others were saying most of the time and shared some of my ideas.</td>
<td>I had a hard time concentrating today. I was mentally “in and out” of the discussion. I said one or two things during the discussion.</td>
<td>I didn’t participate well today. I didn’t listen to what others were saying and I didn’t contribute anything to the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest:</strong></td>
<td>The discussion was great. I thought the topic was really interesting. I am glad we did this!</td>
<td>The discussion was good. I thought the topic could have been more interesting. I liked having the discussion.</td>
<td>I was pretty bored during the discussion. I don’t think the topic was that interesting. I didn’t really like the discussion.</td>
<td>I was really bored. The topic of this discussion didn’t appeal to me at all. I don’t think we should have discussions in class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>