

Connecting reading and writing using children’s literature in the university L2 classroom

Priscila Leal
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
United States

Abstract

This article investigates the potential benefits of using children’s literature in adult second language (L2) classrooms. A short-term, intensive university course for English reading and writing was designed incorporating children’s literature into the curriculum. The author describes the course and discusses how children’s literature can be used to improve students’ linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. Both the teacher’s and students’ perceptions and attitudes towards the use of children’s literature in such a context are addressed. The author concludes that, with adults in the L2 classroom, children’s literature can be used as a model for student writing, can engage students in critical thinking, and can be a springboard for meaningful discussions and creative composition. Finally, the author provides suggestions of how language teachers can integrate reading and writing instruction, as well as critical thinking, using children’s literature with adults in L2 classrooms.

Keywords: reading and writing, children’s literature, critical thinking, adult learners, creative writing

Ask any language student what their least favorite class is, and chances are they will answer writing or grammar classes. Most language students associate writing classes with grammar drills, repetitive assignments, and rote memorization. If we take into account the East Asian context, students’ experiences are most likely similar to Chen’s (2006) description of English language classes in Taiwan, where “writing is often practiced for practice’s sake in the university composition class [and s]tudents do not see a need or purpose for their writing.” (p. 219). As an English learner myself, I can empathize with these students.

How can we change students’ perspectives about writing and motivate them to engage in the learning process? In preparation for teaching English writing to a group of Japanese university students, I decided to incorporate children’s literature as the base of the curriculum. My assumption was that by explicitly linking children’s literature and students’ writing, the students would improve their linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. My hope was to relight students’ interest in both reading and writing.

This article addresses Paran's call for more teachers' narratives and reflections "on what they do in class" (2008, p. 470). I begin by reviewing the main arguments for the use of literature in the second language (L2) classroom, followed by arguments specific to the use of children's literature with adult learners. Next, the study's methodology is presented followed by its findings. A reflection of (a) the benefits of integrating children's literature, (b) students' perceptions, and (c) pedagogical implications concludes this article.

Using Literature in the L2 Classroom

Why Literature in the L2 Classroom?

The role of literature in the L2 classroom has been a long-standing topic of debate in the field (see Paran, 2008 for a discussion of its pros and cons). Recent studies have discredited some of the most common arguments teachers, administrators, and publishers use to justify the exclusion of literature from the L2 classroom. Some argue that students can develop high levels of language competence without any language production (Krashen, 1994). However, the students enrolled in my course were more interested in opportunities for output than input. In Japan, their English learning experience involved mostly listening and reading (input, Krashen, 1984); in this course, their expectation was to focus on speaking and writing (output, Swain, 1985). Literature can serve both purposes: as input, it presents authentic language communication to students; as output, it can serve as a prompt and stimulate students to discuss, share, and write (Chen, 2006; see Belcher & Hirvela, 2001 for theoretical and practical perspectives on L2 reading-writing connections). Weber-Fève (2009) addressed how an input-to-output approach can be combined in an introduction to literature course, concluding that by building a continuum from pre-reading activities (input), to oral interactions with peers and written reactions to texts (output), students could effectively explore stylistic and rhetorical writing conventions.

Another common argument is that literature is only appropriate for advanced language students (Gower, 1986) due to its length, vocabulary difficulty, and complex plots. Several scholars have provided evidence that counters this belief. Walther (2007) proposed that literature be given a greater role in beginner courses as a model of how language works in context and to draw students' attention to connections between language and communicative events.

Sivasubramaniam (2006) addressed how literature can promote an elementary grasp of English to internalize vocabulary and grammar patterns. Its use can also promote critical thinking. As Vandrick (1996) argued, "a thinking person must analyze, question, interpret, synthesize what she or he hears and reads" (p. 27).

Literature can serve as an alternative to using personal topics and life experiences as prompts for discussion and writing. Literature can provide purposeful and meaningful topics which "allow us to create the level of emotional involvement that we have been seeking in more personal, subjective topics without sacrificing the distance and objectivity that will encourage reader-based prose" (Gajdusek & vanDommelen, 1993, p. 198). Therefore, literature can be a springboard for students to reflect on their lives, learning, and language.

The fact that literature is virtually absent from English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks (see

Gümüřok, 2013 for analysis of 22 ELT course books of different levels and different series) may discourage teachers, since the responsibility of selecting appropriate materials and designing a meaningful course falls entirely on them. Even if teachers are up to this challenge, they may feel discouraged by the difficult, old, and outdated vocabulary present in some literary texts (Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011) and feel like literary English is not practical English. That should not stop teachers from using literary texts because (a) students should not be expected to speak or write in the same way as literary texts, and (b) literary text “displays a broader range of communication strategies than any other single ESL [English as Second Language] teaching component” (Sage, 1987, p. 6). Teachers may also feel discouraged from using literature because they think they lack the knowledge to teach it. Perhaps, like many students, teachers may feel discouraged because of their own negative experiences with literature in their academic lives. However, if used meaningfully and purposefully (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991), literature can revive students' motivation (Donceva & Daskalovska, 2014; Sivasubramaniam, 2006; Van, 2009) and provide opportunities for creative work (Türker, 1991).

Some scholars have focused on different approaches to teaching literature in the L2 classroom. Van (2009) classified these approaches into six categories: new criticism; structuralism; stylistics; reader-response; language-based; and critical literacy. Fernandez (2011) summarized Carter and Long's models (cultural, language, and personal growth) and advocated for an integrated approach of the three. Although scholars may disagree on which approach is the most appropriate, they agree that when using literature in the L2 classroom, tasks should focus on process instead of product, on negotiation of meanings and interpretations instead of pre-determined answers, and on students' analysis instead of the teacher's (Mourão, 2009). Thus, teachers should act as facilitators rather than lecturers. Van (2009) stated, “[the] teacher's role is not to impose interpretation but to introduce and clarify technical terms, prepare and offer appropriate classroom procedures, and intervene when necessary to provide prompts or stimuli” (p. 7).

Other scholars investigated students' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of literature in the L2 classroom. A potential critique of this research is that the use of literature in language courses has no practical relevance since the focus of the research is mainly on students' perceptions. Nevertheless, because we are teaching students, we should know what they think about the content we teach and about how we teach it. Çiraklı and Kiliçkaya (2011) were interested in how senior, pre-service language teachers in Turkey felt about the use of literature to improve language skills, academic and occupational goals, and individual and cultural awareness. According to the participants, the instructor presented and analyzed most of the readings assigned, and although they felt the nature of the course did provide a platform for discussion, the participants did not believe they had benefitted from it. Yılmaz (2012) also investigated undergraduates' attitudes towards the study of literature in Turkey and provided more insights into the factors most likely to affect students' opinions. In Yılmaz's study, 87.6% of the students reported ‘small group work’ to be the most useful approach for using literary texts in the classroom; lecture was the least useful.

Several studies have considered how teachers interact with students in the classroom, and how it may affect students' participation during whole class discussions about literary texts (Donato & Brooks, 2004; Mantero, 2006; Nance, 2002; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Thoms, 2011). Nassaji and

Wells (2000) explored literature classroom discourse in Canada and concluded that when teachers showed genuine interest in students' comments and asked them to expand on such comments, students were more willing to participate in whole class discussion. Donato and Brooks (2004) investigated an undergraduate Spanish literature class. They concluded that providing opportunities for discussion was not enough; teachers must structure the discussions in a way that stimulates students to speak at their level of language proficiency. Similarly to Nassaji and Wells, Donato and Brooks also encouraged teachers to present opportunities for the students to elaborate on their responses and promote participation in whole class discussion. A more recent study by Thoms (2011) observed a Latin American literature college classroom in the US conducted in Spanish. Also similarly to Nassaji and Wells, Thoms found that the teacher's reformulations have the potential to afford students the ability to understand the ongoing talk during whole-class discussion. Thoms grouped teachers' reformulations into three functions: (a) access-creating, when teachers make students' comments accessible to all by repeating it to the whole class; (b) funneling, when teachers ask students questions that move from very broad to specific references; and (c) content-enhancing, when teachers make linguistic corrections while at the same time demonstrating appreciation for the students' contributions.

Why Use Children's Literature for Adult Learners?

Since many of the arguments for the use of children's literature in the L2 classroom overlap with the arguments discussed in the previous section, this section will focus specifically on the arguments directly related to the use of children's literature with adult learners. First, children's literature can provide comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) through content and style. Its shorter length, simpler language, less complicated plots (Ho, 2000), and predictable, repeated language patterns (Smallwood, 1992) "can [help students] read and discuss in a reasonable amount of class time and students can get a feeling of achievement and satisfaction quickly" (Vandrick, 2003, p. 273). Teachers may associate these characteristics with the children's literature often depicted in picture books targeted to younger learners, but that is not always the case.

Most folklore was originally written for adults. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in fairytales, a sub-genre of children's literature (Knowles & Malmkjaer, 2002). Fairytales have been made popular again by TV shows and big production films, as is the case with *Little Red Riding Hood (LRRH)*—the story discussed in this article. The 1987 Broadway musical *Into the Woods* (which features *LRRH* among other fairytales) was adapted in 2014 and is now a motion picture. In 2005, the computer-animated film *Hoodwinked!* was released; its plot retells *LRRH* as a police investigation, using flashbacks to show multiple characters' points of view. In 2011, one motion picture and two TV series featured versions of *LRRH*'s plot: the film *Red Riding Hood*; the pilot episode of NBC's *Grimm*; and, ABC's *Once Upon a Time*. Such TV shows and film productions are not targeted at children but at adults.

Two recent studies in particular address the use of children's literature with adult learners. Ho (2000) used children's literature with three groups of twenty freshman undergraduates from China. Ho addressed the issue of adult learners not relating to child protagonists but, in spite of that, children's literature was still effective in teaching linguistic skills and improving language acquisition. In addition, she noticed that students often found academic text discussions

intimidating because they felt they lacked the language skills to participate spontaneously, but they felt more comfortable discussing children's literature. Ho stated, "using children's literature has succeeded in encouraging them [students] to voice their opinions compared to other classroom group discussions that use academic texts" (2000, p. 264). In a different context, Davidheiser (2007) used children's literature in college level introductory German courses. He presented an instructional sequence focused on students' language development: from true/false and yes/no questions for listening development, to sentence creation for grammar development, to retelling activities for oral and written language development.

Connecting Reading and Writing with Children's Literature

The Course

The data in this article are part of a larger study. The data were produced and collected during the course *English Reading and Writing*, which I taught in the spring of 2014 as part of an intensive, short-term program at a university in Hawai'i. The data for the larger study included 30 hours of audio recordings, the teacher's reflective journal, questionnaires, and student artifacts (such as journals entries and writings) collected during the four-week course. The data were collected as part of my professional development and their use approved by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB). The goals of the course, as reflected in the syllabus, included: improving reading and writing skills; working cooperatively with others in whole class, small group, and pair discussions; and, developing and demonstrating analytical and critical thinking skills.

Participants

The Intensive Language Program (ILP)¹, within which this course is situated, is designed for international university students who come to Hawai'i temporarily to learn English and then return to their home countries. The eight Japanese university students enrolled in the course expressed that the main reason for them learning English was to 'talk to foreigners' and 'to work abroad.' Initial questionnaire responses revealed (a) preference for working in small groups, (b) preference for speaking opportunities, and (c) dislike for studying grammar. All students were in the low-intermediate level based on the institutional placement test. There were four female and four male students between the ages of 21 and 26. Their majors ranged from the natural sciences, to education, to tourism.

Initial students' journal entries showed that these students were not accustomed to any forms of experiential dialogical pedagogy. Students described having had classes where they had discussed comprehension questions (e.g., 'what does the writer mean in this section?') but had not shared their own opinions about the text.

Materials

The materials for this course included two different versions of the fairytale commonly known as *LRRH*. The selection of this particular story was based on the assumption that studying a familiar

story, one which had been (re)interpreted in movies and TV shows, would help students understand that literature is neither useless nor faraway and that literature is part of our life. Because the plot would be known to all, students would not need to worry about understanding its content. Instead, they would be able to focus on its form and on improving their critical thinking skills.

The first version introduced was Charles Perrault's, often deemed the first published version from 1697. In Perrault's version, the story ends with the grandmother and LRRH being eaten by the wolf. The second version introduced was Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's (aka the Brothers Grimm). This version was published 150 years after Perrault's and is perhaps the most popularly known version. In the Brothers Grimm's version, the story picks up where Perrault's ends, when a huntsman comes to LRRH and her grandmother's rescue and finds the wolf asleep. The huntsman then cuts open the wolf's belly, saving the two women, and fills the wolf's belly with large stones.

Curriculum and Lesson Plan

The curriculum included scaffolding tasks that would progressively prepare the students to engage in discussing texts, author's perspectives, and each other's opinion. These tasks would also serve to foster a safe place and a welcoming community. Another purpose was to awaken students' critical thinking capacities since, as previously mentioned, these students had yet to experience dialogical pedagogy. Laying the foundation to achieve such goals meant introducing the curriculum in a low-anxiety way and using content with no controversial topics. Because of the length of this course, these foundational tasks needed to be carried out in a manner in which students would not spend too much time learning the content but would instead practice the skills that would gradually lead them to experiencing critical thinking. Therefore, the order of the tasks was relevant for this course (see Figure 1).

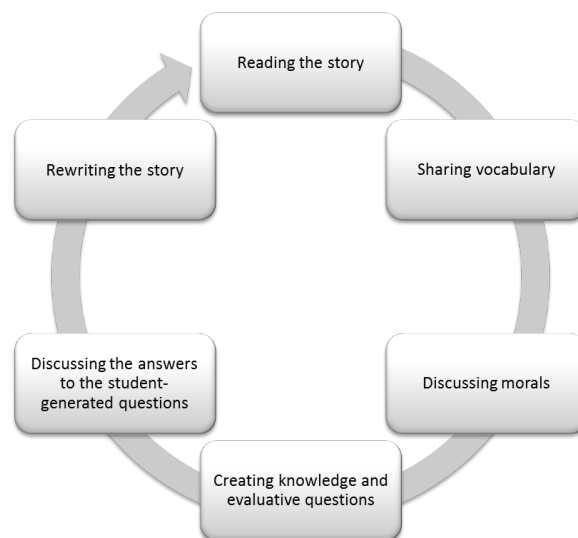


Figure 1. LRRH tasks' cycle

Pre-reading tasks had the purpose of activating students' schemata, during-reading tasks focused on text's content and form, and post-reading tasks gauged students' comprehension and

encouraged critical thinking and creativity. The task order was also important in promoting the use of both oral and written languages to inform, discuss, question, negotiate, and communicate with others. Lessons proceeded in the following way (see Table 1):

Table 1. Lesson progression

Phase 1	<p>LRRH by Perrault</p> <p>Teacher and students take turns reading aloud each paragraph</p> <p>Students identify unfamiliar words in the text</p> <p>Students write one word per sticky note and post them on the white board. Same unknown words go on top of each other. Students familiar with a word are encouraged to explain to classmates its definition related to its use in the text.</p> <p>Fill in vocabulary log</p> <p>Using the new vocabulary, pairs generate and discuss knowledge questions</p> <p>Questions are exchanged with another pair and discussed</p> <p>All questions are posted on the white board and pairs report to the whole class</p> <p>My favorite character activity</p> <p>Draw favorite character and describe three reasons why it is your favorite</p> <p>Rewriting grammar, rewrite the first paragraph of Perrault's version</p> <p>Change verbs from the past tense to the present tense; check/review your partner's</p>
Phase 2	<p>Little Red Cap by Brothers Grimm</p> <p>Student-pairs take turns reading aloud each paragraph</p> <p>Students identify unfamiliar words in the text</p> <p>Students write one word per sticky note and post them on the white board. Same unknown words go on top of each other. Students familiar with a word are encouraged to explain to classmates its definition related to the use in the text.</p> <p>Fill in vocabulary log</p> <p>Using the new vocabulary, pairs generate and discuss evaluation questions</p> <p>Questions are exchanged with another pair and discussed</p> <p>All questions are posted on the white board and pairs report to the whole class</p> <p>Rewriting grammar, rewrite the last two paragraphs of Brothers Grimm's version</p> <p>Change verbs from the past tense to the future tense; check/review your partner's</p>
Phase 3	<p>Compare and contrast stories</p> <p>What are the similarities and differences between the two versions?</p> <p>With a partner, complete the comparing table and then a Venn diagram</p> <p>Vocabulary review/worksheet</p> <p>In pairs, create as many sentences in the least amount of time using the 22-word list</p>
Phase 4	<p>Retelling LRRH</p> <p>Choose between writing an alternative ending or writing from a character's perspective</p> <p>Share your version with a partner. Then, interview each other by asking two evaluative questions and reporting your partner's answers in your journal</p>
Phase 5	<p>Japanese Tale – Part I</p> <p>Select a Japanese tale of your choice to modify the end. In your journal, write the name of the story, its original version, and how you plan to change it</p> <p>Short story structure instruction (diagram)</p>

Japanese Tale – Part II

In your journal, explain why you chose this story and why you want to change it

Write your story until the climax

Japanese Tale – Part III

Write the end/conclusion of your story

Japanese Tale – Part IV

Read your partner's story. **Evaluate** her/his story based on (a) organization, (b) plot (story), and (c) goal (moral) by using the following point system: 1 = needs improvement; 2 = so so; 3 = good

Share your own story with the whole class

How Can Children's Literature Be Used in the L2 Classroom?

This section presents the findings from the reading and writing tasks based on the three versions of LRRH discussed during the course: Charles Perrault's, the Brothers Grimm's, and each student's version. I present evidence of how children's literature has the potential to improve students' linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. I interweave teacher and student perceptions and attitudes into the analysis.

Enhancing Linguistic Skills

As students participated in the vocabulary task of identifying unknown words and sharing their knowledge with others, they learned word definitions from each other and a comfortable environment began to form. Students understood early on that (a) in this class everyone spoke, and (b) everyone had something to learn from someone else, just as everyone had something to teach others. This sharing of vocabulary was viewed positively by most students, as Makoto's comment illustrates:

Sharing unknown words is matching to me. I can find it and I can know other people's unknowing words. Also we explain each other words so it is very beneficial to me.

Each new vocabulary word was logged in the students' individual logs along with its part of speech and a sentence created by the student. After Charles Perrault's and the Brothers Grimm's versions of LRRH had been studied, I prepared a vocabulary review containing 22 words, which had been previously identified by the students as unknown. In this task, students, with a partner, were to create as many sentences as possible using the words in the worksheet in the least amount of time. By pairing students with lower vocabulary fluency with students with higher vocabulary fluency, the results among the pairs were comparable: three pairs scored 15 points, and one pair scored 14 points out of 22 possible points.

Final questionnaire responses reflected students' perception of vocabulary increase. Using a 5-point scale, students were asked whether they agreed with the statement, 'I believe the group work in this course helped me understand more about English reading texts.' The response was overwhelmingly positive. Of the eight students, seven strongly agreed and one agreed. Their anonymous commentaries reflect such perception:

We learned a lot of vocabulary.

We checked unknowing words so I could understand texts smoothly.

I became happy with friends so I believe that group work connect understand more about English.

With regards to which tasks better supported the students in such vocabulary gain, Makoto's comment represents most of the students' beliefs:

And then, sharing own opinion is also like [that] because I always finish just thinking I have to share my opinion so I consider 'what should I say?' 'what words should I use?'; it is important for me.

Makoto saw this task of sharing opinions as an opportunity to expand her vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, by searching for expressions that would better represent her thoughts in English. She continued:

... it is difficult for me to express my opinion in English so this assignment is good practice. If I don't know words, grammar and expression, I try to search a correct. This process is important and beneficial to me.

Children's literature can be used as a model for writing as evidenced by the students' retellings. Text structure, grammar, and vocabulary were appropriated by the students based on the version of the LRRH version they used as the base for their rewriting. Kanta's retelling began with the last line of Perrault's version but with a change in verb form—from 'the wolf ate her all up' to 'the wolf was going to eat her.' In Kanta's retell, LRRH was a 'judo fighter and very intelligent' and defeated the wolf with a powerful punch which led him to vomit grandmother. Following Perrault's version, Kanta appropriated words like 'belly' and 'woodcutters,' whereas students who used the Brothers Grimm's version used words like 'body' and 'huntsman.' Sumiya also used Perrault's version as the springboard for his story. Sumiya began his story after the wolf had eaten grandmother and LRRH, and went outside to eat the woodcutter. The wolf then went to LRRH's house and pretended to be LRRH. Her mother was not fooled and killed him as the wolf opened the door. LRRH's mother opened the wolf's belly and saved LRRH, grandmother, and the woodcutter. Sumiya used some of the new words from the vocabulary log such as: belly, counterfeit (as in the wolf counterfeiting his voice), doted (e.g., 'The grandmother doted but the mother didn't dote'), and bobbin and latch (e.g., 'Pull the bobbin and the latch will go up'). It was evident that students' vocabulary choices were based on the story they selected as the model for their rewrite.

It is also possible to find evidence of appropriated structure. Kimie narrated her story based on Perrault's version from the moment 'Little Red Riding Hood pulled the bobbin, and the door opened. The wolf, seeing her come in, said to her—I haven't seen you in a long time!' What followed was a story rich in imagery and dialogue. Sometimes, almost bordering on plagiarism, students appropriated the whole structure of their selected version. Hoshihiko used the same structure as the Brothers Grimm's version and the word choice was almost verbatim, but it was not. It was possible to still recognize the original story in light of Hoshihiko's adaptation. His version began by repeating the Brothers Grimm's sentences but exchanging the qualities and

imageries into antonyms (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Comparison between student's and original versions*

The Brothers Grimm's version	Hoshihiko's version
Once upon a time there was a sweet little girl.	Once upon a time there was an ugly little girl.
Once she gave her a little cap made of red velvet.	Once she gave her a little cap made of brown velvet.
When Little Red Cap entered the woods a wolf came up to her.	When Little Red Cap entered the woods a wolf came up to her.
'Good day to you, Little Red Cap.'	Good morning
The wolf thought to himself, 'Now there is a tasty bite for me. Just how are you going to catch her?'	The wolf went on his way minding his own business

Hoshihiko's plot began to distance from the original version when LRRH and the wolf met in the forest, and the wolf went on with his business uninterested in LRRH. The rest of the story was uneventful, and LRRH arrived at grandmother's home unharmed and they have a good time together. This uneventfulness and lack of climax led me to explicitly discuss the elements of the short story's plot prior to the final assignment (rewriting a Japanese tale) with the hope that students would create more interesting and catchy storylines—and they did (see *Enhancing Socio-Emotional Skills* section).

The students' journals were another area where it was possible to witness significant improvement in their linguistic skills. Students were given prompts during class to be completed as homework. This was so they would feel more in control of the content and quantity of their entries. Most students' entries were initially very short. They were composed of either loose sentences without paragraph structure or just bullet points. As I grew to know the students through their journals and encouraged them not to hold back, the increase in the quantity and quality of content was apparent. The entries seemed genuine and open, and it gave me pleasure to read them.

While I saw that they wrote more and more fluently, my approach to grammar correction appeared to not be well received by the students. My responses on students' journals did not focus on grammar and style but prioritized content and their most frequent patterns of deviation. In the final questionnaire, three students expressed disappointment in me for not correcting their grammar. Their comments of disappointment included:

I wrote a lot so I am convince to improve my writing skills. However, I wanted to be corrected my sentence.

Japanese can't grammar check oneself so I want teacher to more grammar check.

I needed more your grammar check against my writing. I don't know my writing is correct.

Nevertheless, we did have a couple of grammar-focused tasks, such as the grammar rewrite. One anonymous response said, regarding grammar exercises, 'we do enough of that in Japan.' Ironically, two of the students who perceived rewriting grammar to be the least valuable activity also voiced lack of interest and appreciation for grammar exercises. The same anonymous student who said 'I needed more your grammar check against my writing' wrote:

Rewriting grammar [was the least valuable activity]. Maybe most Japanese studied grammar very well.

Enhancing Cognitive Skills

During the reading comprehension task, students were given a blank page to write their own comprehension questions with a partner. Although traditional reading comprehension exercises comprise of a number of pre-set questions directly related to and about the text, this alternative way of assessing students' ability to read the text, process it, and understand its meaning provided the students with the opportunity to go beyond surface level reading. After pairs had created two comprehension questions, they exchanged them with another pair of students, answered the other pair's questions, and finally reported their answers to the whole class (see Table 3).

Table 3. Student-generated comprehension questions for version #1

-
- How did she walk?
 - What did wicked wolf have, for example?
 - Why did the wolf ask the girl her purpose?
 - Why was wolf counterfeiting?
 - What should the mother learn from this text?
 - How did she feel when she heard grandmother's voice?
 - Why did wolf choose LRRH?
 - Who is dead at first?
 - Where is the girl going?
-

Certainly, more time was invested in this alternative comprehension assessment than if I had asked yes/no or true/false questions. Nevertheless, the time was well spent as students' anonymous feedback demonstrated their motivation and persistence:

If I couldn't understand texts, I couldn't make a question. Therefore I tried to read harder than before.

This activity is very hard but it's connecting all skills. Hard activity makes me more genius and excited.

In addition, students recognized the value of this task as helpful in improving their interpretative abilities. As Makoto's comment suggested:

I felt most valuable and helped topic is creating comprehension questions because in Japan I didn't about this topic so this topic was difficult, but I thought this topic was very useful.

Although students felt that creating questions about the text was the hardest task, they also acknowledged that the difficulty was not related to language fluency but to their lack of exposure to this type of task.

Analyzing author's perspective is more difficult than other subjects. Maybe, if I do it in Japanese,

also it is difficult. However, that's exactly why I gain knowledge. (Makoto)

While students felt that generating comprehension and evaluation questions about the texts was difficult, they expressed it to be the most valuable activity. In the anonymous final questionnaire, one student shared excitement at realizing how this task helped improve fluency:

Creating comprehension questions is good. When I make question, I think in English. I could gradually think in English because of creating comprehension questions.

Children's literature can also engage students in critical thinking. As student pairs pondered on what evaluation questions to create, they moved from low-order to higher-order thinking (see Table 4). While the former could be characterized by answering text comprehension questions (e.g., What color is LRRH's hood?), the latter relates to text evaluation questions whose answers are not found in the text but in one's mind and heart (e.g., Why was LRRH's hood red?).

Table 4. *Student-generated evaluation questions for version #2*

-
- What do you think about the huntsman?
 - What do you think about LRR Cap's behavior to wolf?
 - What do you think what the girl should answered the wolf?
 - What do you think about putting stone into wolf's body? Do you agree or disagree?
 - Explain: do you agree that LRR Cap and huntsman filled the wolf's body with large heavy stones?
 - What solutions would you suggest for wolf to eat more a lot of people?
 - Who decided to put in stone into the wolf's body? Why do you think?
 - Why do you think she was running after flowers?
 - How did the girl answer the wolf? → How should the girl have answered the wolf?
-

Again, although the students underscored the difficulty in accomplishing this task, they highlighted their motivation for taking on the challenge.

It is difficult for me to explain my opinion but this activity make me genius so if I have a chance, I want to continue doing this activity. (Kanta)

Kanta reflected on his initial (in)ability to share his opinions with his classmates and how the task of generating evaluation questions progressively 'made him genius.' The fact that he wanted to 'continue doing this activity' displayed his current motivation to continue learning English and his confidence to continue expressing his opinions and beliefs. Makoto highlighted her transition between thinking levels and the reasons why she believed this task to be valuable:

Evaluating texts is also difficult but I like it... I like it because I can think deeply more and more... I think deeply and find an answer myself when I make a question, I can understand the text and I can find own answer and I can make a question so this method has many advantages.

By being encouraged to 'think deeply more and more,' she was able to 'understand the text' and 'make a question' on her own. This realization motivated her to persist with the task regardless of its difficulty ('difficult but I like it').

Enhancing Socio-Emotional Skills

From generating questions, to contrasting readings, to sharing their own versions, the mood was upbeat and the room filled with lively chatter. Students seemed not only engaged but also like they were actually enjoying either the topic or the activity, or both. (Teacher's reflective journal)

My reflective journal and audio recordings attest to contrasting moments where students moved from looking disengaged to acting lively and happy. There were also moments when students spoke quietly in their L1 to each other, not in a disengaged way, but in a struggling-with-the-task way. During these times, I could hear them whispering the word *muzukashi* ('difficult' in Japanese). Perhaps not surprisingly, tasks that reflected institutionally imposed activities—such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) practice and completing questionnaires—had a low mood level (I use the term 'mood' instead of engagement to indicate that this subjective assessment takes into account not only the students' behavior but also the teacher's behavior, the nature of the tasks, and the physical environment). Contrastingly, creative tasks such as sharing rewritten stories and peer reviewing their short stories had the highest mood level. Critical thinking tasks, such as the generation of evaluation questions, rated in between.

When students were asked what their experiences were like while analyzing the author's perspectives, evaluating texts, and sharing their opinion, their responses revealed interesting patterns. While all students shared difficulty in expressing opinions in English, they also recognized the benefits of sharing their opinions. Kanta wrote, 'To discuss is connecting, knowing each other.' One of the purposes of having students rotate pairs when discussing the texts was so that the students would get to know each other. By getting to know each other, they would feel confident to speak up during whole class discussions.

Children's literature can be used as a springboard for meaningful discussions. As the teacher moves to a more student-centered classroom, students can discuss freely with each other without worrying whether they are providing a (in)correct answer to the teacher. It gives them the opportunity to think through, confidently share their thoughts with a partner, consider others' thoughts, and reassess their own impressions before addressing the teacher and the whole class. Kanta and Rieko perceived discussing opinions as helping them to expand their viewpoints and to take others' opinions into consideration.

I think that sharing everyone's opinion is most interesting. I could know that everybody have a variety of opinions and I could expand my perspective for everybody's opinions. (Kanta)

I could analyze author's perspectives by many ways, especially, my favorite analyzing is consultation about author's perspectives with my partner, because I can hear partner's opinion. It is possible for me to expand viewpoint. Conversely, my weakest analyzing is to make a question from author's perspectives, because I must find a question and an answer at the same time (Rieko)

As I reviewed comments similar to Reiko's, where students expressed struggling with generating questions, I noticed that these were the students whose levels of fluency were the lowest compared to the other students. I modified my approach of randomly assigning pairs to a more thoughtful approach where lower vocabulary fluency students could benefit from being paired

with a higher vocabulary fluency partner. One example is Kimie (lower vocabulary fluency) and Hoshihiko (higher vocabulary fluency) who were paired together during the student-generated evaluation questions.

I can't help but notice that Kimie might be struggling. She has that puzzled look in her face, looks at neighbor's activity before doing her own, and copies things from the board verbatim... Today Hoshihiko was her partner and when she did not understand my instructions for Reading Comprehension, he went on to explain while others began working on theirs. (Teacher's reflective journal)

The use of children's literature in the classroom also served as a springboard for creative composition. After becoming familiar with Charles Perrault's and the Brothers Grimm's versions of LRRH and their contrasting elements, students were asked to choose between (a) writing an alternative end to the story or (b) rewriting the story from a character's perspective. Most students selected the first option. This task was left relatively open, unstructured, and with low stakes so that students would feel less anxious about writing, have a positive experience with literature, and actually enjoy the writing process. Students also interviewed each other by creating two evaluative questions and reporting the answers in their journals. I highlight some of the new stories and their twists below.

As her mother got even with the wolf, she cooks him. She was known to the cook. So they could eat him very delicious. (excerpt: Katsuaki)

In Katsuaki's retelling, which began at LRRH's home, the mother decided to accompany the daughter, LRRH, to grandmother's house because she was 'the only daughter.' The retelling followed Perrault's version where the wolf ate the grandmother and LRRH, but in this retelling the wolf also ate the mother. A hunter heard loud snoring coming from grandmother's house and decided to check it out. He found the wolf with 'a huge belly,' cut the wolf's belly open with a pair of scissors, and saved the three women. The excerpt above is his conclusion.

[LRRH] took out a knife that she was concealed, and she killed the wolf... and found her grandmother and saved her. [LRRH decides to] carry wolf's dead body to the forest and buried in the soil. (excerpt: Kimie)

Kimie's retelling began as LRRH was about to be eaten by the wolf. Nevertheless, LRRH was prepared: she was carrying a hidden knife, which she used to kill the wolf. LRRH was a strong female character, who did not need to wait for the huntsman to save her nor her grandmother. Besides LRRH being heroic, Kimie recreated this character as someone caring who went through the effort to 'carry wolf's dead body to the forest and buried in the soil'—certainly a more humane way of dealing with the dead body than cooking and eating it as in Katsuaki's retelling.

The little girl had been doing judo since she was two years old and she was very intelligent so she could win the battle... She punched [the wolf] on the belly many times. Her punch was powerful and actually, the wolf was weak. In the next moment, he vomited [sic] everything which was including her grandmother... the wolf felt deep regret. The wolf changed good mind and said to her 'Thank you for changing my mind. I don't eat people from now on.' (excerpt: Kanta)

In Kanta's retelling, the 'little girl' (LRRH) was empowered not only by her physical abilities

(‘had been doing judo’) but also by her intellect (‘she was very intelligent’). Similarly to Kimie’s retelling, in Katan’s retelling LRRH did not need to be rescued; she could take care of herself. In fact, not only could she take care of herself, she also saved her grandmother. LRRH was intelligent and affective as demonstrated by her ability to persuade the wolf to not eat people anymore. Yet, feeling remorseful did not change the wolf’s fate—we learn from Kanta’s retelling that shortly after the wolf’s apology, hunters barged in and killed it.

For the final project, students were again asked to rewrite a short story—this time a Japanese tale of their choice. First they translated the story into English and explained in their journals why they chose this particular story, and why they wanted to change it. Then, after being instructed on short story plot (see *Enhancing Linguistic Skills* section), they wrote the story in two phases: beginning and climax; and the end. The goal in writing the story incrementally was so that students would not feel intimidated or overwhelmed with the amount of writing they were expected to produce, but confident that this task was doable. Student-selected stories included Peach Boy (*Momotaro*), Repayment of a Crane (*Tsuru no Ongaeshi*), Rolling Rice Ball (*Omusubi Kororin*), Three-Year Mountain Pass (*Samnyeongogae*), and The Fisher Lad (*Urashima Taro*). Due to space constraints, students’ versions are not addressed in detail in this article.

On the last day of class, the students had the opportunity to share their versions with the whole class. Sumiya, like some others, had come a long way from the first few days of class and was lively, animating his characters and giving them life by assigning them distinguishing voices. Makoto, who was seemingly shy during classes, now invited her classmates to stand up and take on her characters’ role by repeating their lines after her. Students listened attentively, cheered for each other, and laughed wholeheartedly. At that moment I knew: children’s literature can support language students’ personal growth.

Discussion

Laying the Foundation

This study provides suggestions of how teachers can integrate reading and writing instruction, as well as critical thinking, using children’s literature with adults in L2 classrooms. As the data show, laying the foundation for such tasks is a fundamental step, which should not be ignored or taken lightly. Although it was necessary to plan extra time at the beginning of the course to account for scaffolding opportunities, this constraint was remediated with the planning of tasks that would introduce known content to the students, such as the story of LRRH. By presenting students with content with which they were already familiar, they could then focus on the new strategies and mechanics of reading and writing. Hence, reading was not solely an act of comprehension of meaning.

Once students had demonstrated understanding of *what* was expected of them and *how* it was expected of them, these tasks were performed more effectively and affectively—in other words, more comfortably and confidently. By having students share their unknown vocabulary with each other, their confidence was boosted as they realized that other students were also unfamiliar

with the same words as they were. Such a low-anxiety and nonthreatening context provided the students with the opportunity to help each other, learn from each other, and build a community.

Questioning the Questions

A major task in the reading, interpreting, and constructing of texts was the student-generated questions. Through this task, students were able to engage in higher levels of thinking more often than the usual superficial comprehension questions commonly found in textbooks. They were able to do so by creating their own knowledge-based and evaluation questions. These questions in turn allowed me to assess their text comprehension. Furthermore, by not imposing my own textual interpretations and instead focusing on the schemata the students brought, it was possible for me to learn much about how the stories affected the students. The reflecting, questioning, and discussing of their own interpretations were the beginning of the process of composing their own texts.

Retellings

Recognizing that the composition of a text begins even before its actual writing, provided students with opportunities to articulate and perform their own texts. The products were the retellings of *LRRH* and a Japanese tale of their choice. The former was a freewriting task in the sense that students were not explicitly instructed on textual models or rhetorical strategies. This allowed the teacher to gauge their current linguistic levels. Freewriting tasks may help students to feel confident in writing *what* and *how* they are most comfortable and thus “extend their composing processes as writers” (Hirvela, 2004, p. 68). The irony was that students expressed disappointment in the lack of grammar correction and at the same time regarded grammar-focused tasks as the least valuable tasks. Not explicitly instructing textual models or rhetorical strategies did not hinder their retellings. Some of the retellings were rich in scene description, while others demonstrated clever dialogue. While some students chose to defy stereotypical gender roles (e.g., the LRRH who knew judo and fended for herself), some invited peace and forgiveness (e.g., the wolf who apologized, was forgiven and became best friends with LRRH), and others called on animal abuse (e.g., the LRRH who buries the wolf's dead body in a humane way).

However, due to space limitations, this report presents only the data and findings related to the use of *LRRH*, excluding the students' retelling of a Japanese tale of their choice and the processes involved in it. This report also excludes the analysis of the audio recordings. Analyzing L2 classroom discourse could provide a more complete picture of the course and students' progress, the actual explanations by the teacher, and the interaction among students.

Conclusion

The current study presents pedagogical implications for the field of L2 instruction to adult learners. First, the use of tasks that naturally promote the use of both oral and written languages to question, discuss, inform, negotiate, and communicate with others about the text is a powerful way to engage students not only in language learning but also in critical thinking. Critical

thinking skills are valuable in certain classroom contexts as well as in certain professional contexts. Second, investing the time to lay the foundation and to scaffold the tasks is a fundamental step to motivate students' engagement and classroom collaboration, and it should not be overlooked. Third, student-generated questions, whether knowledge-based or evaluative in nature, can serve as an alternative way of assessing students' abilities to read the text, process it, and understand its meanings.

In order for adult language learners to benefit the most from the use of children's literature, teachers should plan meaningful, purposeful, creative, and affective tasks. Other tasks that could motivate students but were not used in this course include watching a movie with LRRH's plot and discussing how the story was (re)interpreted by the director and what visual elements seemed characteristic for this story. Whichever tasks are planned, they must be designed in a way that encourages students to work together and promotes the use of both oral and written languages to question, discuss, inform, negotiate, and communicate with others, thus connecting reading and writing.

Using children's literature as part of a reading and writing course in contexts other than short, intensive programs may require some adaptation. One suggestion would be to make children's literature part of the larger curriculum in which other literary genres would also be introduced. Teachers could design tasks that allow the students to discuss the similarities and differences they notice between genres and stimulate students into making personal connections between the different styles. Providing students with opportunities to compose relatively open and low-stake texts in the beginning of the course could address their anxiety and writer's block. With continuous teacher and peer feedback on both content and form, students may feel increasingly competent and confident in their writing abilities. Whether this confidence in writing could in turn be transferred to other genres, such as the academic genre, would be an interesting question to be investigated.

The use of children's literature in adult L2 classrooms has great potential: it can positively affect students' linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills. Teachers can use it as a springboard to effectively integrate reading and writing as well as critical thinking into their lessons. Its text structure, grammar, and vocabulary can be used as a model for writing and for exposing students to different uses of language. By creating their own questions, students have the opportunity to move beyond surface level understanding to critical thinking. Children's literature can also be used as a springboard for meaningful discussions and creative composition. Students in this study felt motivated and increasingly confident to share their interpretations and reinterpretations with each other. Children's literature can support language students' personal growth.

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Notes

- Names of people and places have been changed.

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About the Author

Priscila Leal is an instructor of English as an Additional Language at the Hawai'i English Language Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She holds an M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction with emphasis in English as a Second Language from Arizona State University and is currently working on a Ph.D. in Second Language Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her research interests include critical language pedagogies, critical consciousness and privileged students, language teacher education, teacher beliefs and practices, and underserved migrants' informal language learning. E-mail: p.leal@hawaii.edu