An Interactive Reading Journal for All Levels of the Foreign Language Curriculum

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Abstract: This article introduces an innovative approach to teaching texts at every level of the foreign language curriculum through the use of an interactive reading journal. The article describes how the journal can address the interpretive communication standard at the secondary level, as well as the challenges of integrating lower-level “skills” courses with upper-level “content” courses at the post-secondary level. The journal format itself is discussed in detail, along with examples of how it can be implemented with specific texts at the intermediate and advanced levels. The conclusion offers student reactions and suggestions for putting the interactive reading journal into practice.

Key words: foreign language, interactive, journal, literacy, reading

Language: Relevant to all languages

Introduction

In introducing an interactive reading journal for use in foreign language courses at all levels of the curriculum, this article addresses both curricular and methodological questions facing foreign language departments and faculty today. What do foreign language instructors want students graduating with foreign language majors to be able to do? What role should literature and the act of textual interpretation have in foreign language curricula? Finally, if the members of a foreign language department can agree that students completing a program of study should have the ability to read, speak, and write critically about sophisticated texts from a foreign culture, how does one design courses and activities to help students achieve that goal?

At the root of these questions lies a divide in many departments between lower-level language (or “skills”) courses and upper-level literature (or “content”) courses. The divide between these two levels of the foreign language curriculum is familiar to nearly everyone in the profession and it has been the subject of much discussion and debate in the scholarly literature for years. (See, for example, Hoffmann & James, 1986; McCarthy, 1998; Rice, 1991). All of the authors in the recent volume SLA and the Literature Classroom: Fostering Dialogues, edited by Virginia Scott and Holly Tucker (2002), addressed the problem of the split between language and literature faculty and sought to bridge the gap by advocating courses which integrate language learning and the transmission of knowledge through texts. The integration of skill building and knowledge acquisition requires that foreign language reading (long and short texts, literary and nonliterary texts) play a vital role in courses at the beginning and intermediate levels and that explicit instruction in the reading process continue in upper-level courses. The articles in the Scott and Tucker volume offer a number of interesting ideas and models for integrating linguistic skill building and the interpretation of texts at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels (see Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Frantzen, 2002; Katz, 2002; Swaffar, 2002).

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T: Can you tell me about the Olmecs and the Romans?

N2: La civilización hace el católico la religión, la comida, el comercio y los gobiernos/ los olmecas hacen muy dioses/ los romanos gobernantes es republica/ los olmecas la comida es la maíz/ los romanos hacen muchos dioses [the civilization have Catholicism/the religion, the food, the exchange and the governments/the Olmecs make many gods/the Romans govern is republic/the Olmecs food is the corn/the Romans make many gods]

T: ¿Qué más? [what else?]

N2: Los niños romanos go to un casa/ los niños olmecas studies [the Roman children go to one house/ the Olmec children studies]

T: estudiaron . . . [studied]

N2: estudiaron un padres. [studied one fathers.]

T: ¿Algo más? [Anything else?]

N2: No.

T: ¡Muy bien! [Very good!]

Note. Underline indicates grammar mistakes or errors in pronunciation that cannot be translated.

ELL = Early language learner; N = New student.
At the precollegiate level, the importance of reading and interpretation emerges through the communication standard, specifically Standard 1.2: “Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics” (Phillips, 1999, p. iv). In an article on the communication standard, Hall (1999) emphasized the interactive nature of the interpretive domain as defined by Standard 1.2. More than a simple decoding of a set of symbols or sounds, the interpretive act draws on students’ past knowledge and experiences in fostering their understanding of a text. Furthermore, by opening up new perspectives on the world, the interpretation of a text can subsequently reshape a reader’s past knowledge and experiences in profound ways. The interpretive communication standard is also inextricably linked to the cultures standard in that, by creating a community of foreign language readers in their classrooms, instructors facilitate both students’ comprehension of the target language community and their eventual entry into it. In Hall’s words, one of the questions foreign language teachers must answer in addressing the standard for interpretive communication in their curricula is “what kinds of interpretive activities can teachers and students use to nurture the community of language learners they are developing in their classrooms?” (1999, p. 42).

The interactive reading journal described here offers an innovative approach helping students learn to read and become literate members of a community of foreign language readers, a process which must begin in lower-level classes and continue at all levels of the curriculum. The journal offers a concrete way of helping students develop their reading abilities and of integrating the negotiation and interpretation of texts into all levels of the foreign language curriculum. Rather than treat reading as an isolated “skill,” the journal requires that students engage with a text through reading, writing, and—in a classroom setting—speaking, thereby combining language learning with cultural content and critical thinking. In this way, the goal of the language course and program lies not simply in skill building (at the lower level) or the transmission of a body of knowledge (at the upper level), but in the development of students’ literacy. “What is needed,” wrote Kern (2003), “is a reconciliation between the emphasis of face-to-face verbal interaction and the development of learners’ ability to read, discuss, think, and write critically about texts” (p. 47). This understanding of literacy as the goal of foreign language education has informed the way the interactive reading journal has been structured as a means of addressing some of the difficulties students face when confronted with sophisticated foreign language texts.

The Challenge of Reading for Foreign Language Learners

In her article “Literature: A Quintessential Content,” Holten (1997) recalled the difficulties she faced in her first French literature course in college. Like so many other students, she was shocked to discover that 5 years of “skills training” in French had left her completely unprepared to read literature: “I can’t remember the reading list largely because I didn’t understand much of what I read,” Holten wrote (p. 377). The frustration Holten faced when confronted with a work of literature in a foreign language characterizes the experience of many students and, unfortunately, the encounter with literature often signals the end of a student’s career in a foreign language. In a study of undergraduate attitudes toward the study of literature, Davis, Gorell, Kline, and Hsieh (1992) described four factors that may account for the typical drop in upper-level foreign language enrollments: (a) “the gap separating the language and literature components in many departments”; (b) “the mismatch of student objectives and language department curricula; students’ practical concerns with careers and travel may be at odds with a major dominated by the study of literary texts”; (c) “traditional teaching and learning styles do not appeal to students”; and (d) “students’ inability to respond to culturally-charged texts” (p. 321). Foreign language instructors, individually and departmentally, must consider the extent to which these and other factors may be affecting their programs in a negative way. The problems are connected both to curricular design, or lack thereof, since, as Byrnes (1998) explained, foreign language curricula more often exist as a set of independent courses rather than an integrated and progressive course of study, as well as to a disconnect between the goals and methods of beginning and intermediate courses and those of upper-level courses at many institutions.

Research into this situation has revealed three key issues that foreign language teachers must acknowledge and address if their programs are to survive and thrive. Although these issues do not play a role in every foreign language curriculum and course, they point to some of the ongoing challenges of fostering students’ linguistic and cultural competence in a foreign language. As discussed below, the interactive reading journal, as a component of foreign language curricula at all levels, addresses each of these issues.

1. The student in an upper-level course, usually a foreign language major, is still a language learner. Unfortunately, once students have reached upper-level courses, it is often assumed that they have “arrived.” Students in these courses are often treated as fully proficient speakers, readers, and writers of the foreign language, and instructors see no need to didacticize texts in order to facilitate students’ comprehension of them (by pro-
viding prereading activities or an overview of the text, for example). As Byrnes (1998) wrote, "Only the erroneous assumption of nativelike, socioculturally anchored linguistic competence of readers can explain the almost total absence of an intellectually rich pedagogy of foreign language literatures that truly considers the nonnative learner of a language as a reader of literary texts" (p. 277–78). And although the vast majority of instructors would quickly acknowledge that very few students meet this assumed standard for proficiency in upper-level courses, in many cases, little is done to remedy the situation.

Both faculty and students are therefore often frustrated in upper-level courses when students are unable to comprehend the assigned texts, much less discuss and interpret them with any degree of sophistication. Blame is sometimes placed on lower-level instructors for failing to teach the necessary grammar and vocabulary, or on students for failing to devote the necessary time and effort to reading. But what the students often lack is experience with literary language or training in the reading process itself. Byrnes and Kord (2002) commented on the longstanding assumption that students' reading proficiency will automatically improve when they are confronted with increasingly sophisticated texts, with no need for explicit instruction in how to deal with those texts. As a result, when students find themselves unable to comprehend an assigned reading, many instructors either revert to a discussion in English or ignore the content of the text in favor of the students' personal responses and associations with it. Rather than assume that students can function as nativelike readers, then, instructors must treat students in literature courses as "readers in training" (Barnes-Karol, 2003, p. 26) and devise activities and assignments to help them become proficient readers. The interactive reading journal provides a framework for ongoing practice of the reading process for beginning, intermediate, and advanced foreign language readers.

2. Language skills are not all that is needed if students are to read successfully.

From the earliest stages of language study, students must begin working with texts of all kinds in order to become proficient readers. Initially, this involves extracting information from the text, usually through assigned comprehension questions. However, when it comes to tackling more sophisticated texts, texts in which the context, purpose, and author's intent are not immediately obvious, many teachers assume that beginning foreign language students are incapable of excavating layers of textual meaning. As Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes (1991) pointed out, at the beginning and intermediate levels "a verbal chasm seems to exist between discussion of facts involving content questions such as 'How old is the heroine?' or interpretive or analytic questions such as 'Why does she decide to leave home?'" (p. 1). The goal of foreign language education, the authors argue, must be to bridge this gap, a move which requires teachers to rethink their understanding of foreign language literacy. Rather than simply demonstrating "formal competence with another language's structure," literate students should be able "to use the other language's structure to mediate the comprehension or expression of meanings outside their immediate experience" (Swaffar et al., 1991, p. 2). This requires early and ongoing practice with texts of increasing sophistication and the interactive reading journal can facilitate this process.

3. Foreign language courses should focus on multiple student interactions with a text, rather than on the text as a fixed object of study.

Random sampling of the online curricula of a number of undergraduate German programs at both public and private institutions around the country reveals that, despite all of the developments in language instruction over the last three decades, very little has changed at the upper level. As common course titles such as "The Age of Goethe," "German Classicism and Romanticism," and "Realism and Naturalism" reveal, many departments still adhere to the idea that the goal of a degree in German should be to acquire broad knowledge of German literary history by reading representative works from various periods. In reflecting on the state of the traditional literature curriculum, Rice (1991) asserted that, although the value of such knowledge is undeniable, its "position as an organizing force for the way we deal with literature" is questionable. Rather than asking what we want students to know about literature, he wrote, we should be asking what we want them to do with it (p. 13).

When the focus of a course is on the text (especially within the context of a literary period), students frequently come to believe that there is but one possible interpretation of a given work, that the teacher is the only one able to arrive at it, and that he or she will deliver it in class. As Barnes-Karol (2003) wrote, "Such traditional text- and teacher-centric mode of instruction is frequently reinforced by the behavior of the students, who are comfortable in their role as consumers of received knowledge" (p. 23). In this type of classroom, students do not enter into dialogue with a literary text, but rather wait for the teacher to tell them what it is about. In many cases, Kramsch's assertion in Literary Texts in the Classroom: A Discourse, written in 1985, still holds true today: "Literary texts continue to be taught as finished products, to be unilaterally decoded, analyzed, and explained, or they are used to illustrate grammatical rules and enrich the reader's vocabulary" (p. 356).

Foreign language students are hampered by linguistic difficulties and gaps in their cultural knowledge that come with being outside of the community of readers of a literary work. In order to address this situation, the foreign language classroom should function as a place where a community of readers emerges, one which is able to fill in cultural and linguistic gaps in the text through discussion
of how individual members of the community (including the teacher) have understood and been affected by what they have read (Kramsch, 1985).

When language teachers place texts at the center of their curricula, they can transform classrooms from places where students mimic the contexts of authentic language use to places where they speak about something real—the text before them—and together try to arrive at its various meanings. In this way, a group of students becomes a discourse community, different from the one that the author of a literary work had in mind, but just as authentic. The difficulties that students experience as "nonintended" readers of the text provide opportunities for cultural exploration that are far more meaningful than the "culture capsules" found in most textbooks. Indeed, Kramsch and Nolden (1994) believe that the culturally determined gaps in students' knowledge, gaps which interfere with their understanding of a foreign language text, provide a valuable opportunity for "oppositional practice" in the classroom.

Oppositional practice is not resistance, dissidence or contestation. It just claims the right of the readers to position themselves at equal par with (i.e., in (op)position to), the text, by virtue of the very linguistic and conceptual power that the text has given them. By becoming aware of their oppositional stance, readers can enter into dialogue with the text and with other readers and eventually, through this dialogue, experience "changes in desire" that potentially lead to social change. (Kramsch & Nolden, pp. 29-30)

When students enter into dialogue with the text and one another, thereby transforming the text from the position of outsider, they begin to develop what Kramsch and Nolden have described as "cross-cultural literacy." They apply this term not to the exchange of products or ideas across cultures, but to the "relational process of border crossing itself" (p. 30). In this way, the very act of reading—the struggle to comprehend and respond to a foreign language text—allows students to travel into and participate in another culture while still maintaining a sense of otherness and difference.

The act of textual interpretation, students make connections between language and the contexts of its use, between form and content, and between language and culture. But the question remains: How does this goal translate into practice? What can we as teachers do to help students read, understand, and discuss meaningful texts in a meaningful way? As Schulz (2002) wrote, we must deal with the difficult question of "how to teach literature effectively within its dynamic context to students whose language skills are in process and avoid at the same time the cognitive overload that might make the reading and discussion of texts a disconcerting experience" (p. 17). The interactive reading journal, when integrated into courses across the foreign language curriculum, provides one possible answer.

The Interactive Reading Journal: A Tool for Developing Literacy

The interactive reading journal offers students constant and consistent training in the foreign language reading process in that it asks them to engage with texts in the target language in ways that they would automatically and naturally in their native language—by activating background knowledge and experiences related to the subject of a text, by constructing a summary of what they read using key words from the text, by reflecting not just on the "what" of the text, but also on the "why." These are not revolutionary activities for foreign language readers, but what makes the workbook and journal unique is that students use it consistently for all readings in all foreign language courses, from beginning to advanced-level courses. In this way, it provides learners with a sense of their own expanding language proficiency over time, as well as their increased ability to engage in a sophisticated manner with texts.

The reading journal provides students with a place to interact with the text, and, in that sense, it becomes a concrete version of the "mental text" that an individual develops when reading. Students complete journal assignments in the target language in preparation for class, they refer to their journal entries in discussing texts in class with other students, and they record and reflect on those discussions in the journal after class. The reading journal is intended to support students as they negotiate the meaning of a foreign language text and develop an awareness of how reading (i.e., their own reading process) takes place.

As already stated, the idea of a reading journal is not new or unique. Knutson (1997) described her students keeping a reading journal in which they recorded their reactions to a text and wrote predictions and questions about what would happen next, as did Burnett and Fonder-Solano (2002), whose students reacted to assigned texts, posed questions, recorded new vocabulary, and reflected on their own comprehension strategies in their notebook journals. Reading journals figure prominently in the "Teaching Reading as Design" chapter of Kern's (2000) book under the section title "Situated Practice." In his description of a reading journal entry for independently chosen texts, students "(1) cite a full reference of the text, (2) indicate why they chose it, (3) summarize the text, (4) express their personal response to the text, (5) reflect on the process of reading it" (p. 143). Although the interactive reading journal described here is structured differently, it is in keeping with Kern's (2003) understanding of how the tasks of reading, writing, and discussing texts should overlap in a literacy-based curriculum. Through the journal, students "use writing to represent their thoughts and interpretations of texts as they read" and "write reflections on their own reading processes" (Kern, 2003, p. 53). They subsequently communicate those thoughts and interpretations orally to other members of their classroom reading community through class discussions.
The interactive reading journal for use in foreign language courses takes the form of a workbook that is photocopied and combbound for students, although they can also follow its format in a ruled notebook. For each reading assignment, which might be a short story or poem, an article, a chapter or a certain number of pages from a longer book, or even a film, students prepare two pages of the journal in conjunction with reading a text for class (see Appendix: Before You Read, Summary of the Text, Vocabulary, Questions for In-Class Discussion). Students also make notes in the journal during class (Appendix: In-Class Discussion), and afterwards, they record in the journal their responses to the day's discussion (Appendix: Response to Critical Question(s)). In other words, the journal has three distinct sections (completed before, during, and after class) with separate tasks in each section. These sections correspond roughly to the three-phase sequence suggested by Harper (1988) for dealing with a literary text: (1) pre-interpretation (establishing background knowledge and comprehension); (2) interpretation (in-class activities “that provide for the expression of amorphous student interpretations and their multiplicity of differences” (p. 405)); and synthesis/summary (viewing the work as a unified whole) (pp. 403–407). The complete journal format can be found in the Appendix and each individual section of the journal is described below. Note that although the journal format in the Appendix is in English, the students complete their journal entries in the target language. An exception might be made for beginning students, who may need to complete some of the sections in English.

Before You Read

Students may complete this part of the journal in class or at home before beginning a reading assignment. In class, teachers can use this section in conjunction with other activities designed to “mobilize personal schemata” (Schulz, 2002, p. 18), that is, the background knowledge that students already have that will help them comprehend the text.

For example, before beginning the German children's novel Im Land der Schokolade und Bananen [In the Land of Chocolate and Bananas] (Gündisch, 1987), a story written in the 1980s about a Romanian-German family that moves to West Germany, students in a third-semester German class speculated about how the children pictured on the cover might be feeling, discussed what the title might mean, and shared their own childhood experiences of moving from one town to another. The instructor gathered their associations with Romania as a country and with life in Eastern Europe before 1989, and she supplied information about the Romanian-Germans and the status of “Spätaussiedler” (emigrants of German heritage from Eastern Europe) in Germany. In an upper-level class, students about to embark on Franz Kafka's Die Verwandlung [The Metamorphosis] (1915) read the first sentence of the text (“As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect”) (1994, p. 7), drew pictures of what they thought the insect might look like, and brainstormed possible reasons why the metamorphosis might have taken place. All of these initial activities are fairly time consuming, but once students find their way into a longer text such as those mentioned here, their responses in the prereading section of the journal for each subsequent assignment can take the form of brief predictions of what might happen next.

Summary of the Text

This section, along with the questions for discussion (see below), is the most important part of the journal. Here students summarize the contents of what they read, thereby becoming authors of the text in a new form. The summary stands in for the mental representation of the text that a reader easily and automatically creates (depending, of course, on the subject matter) in his or her native language. By completing a summary for each and every reading, students eventually become very proficient in distilling the main events from the text while actively using in context some of the key words they encountered within it. At all levels of the curriculum, students should receive instruction on how to write an effective summary, including the key target language words, phrases, and discourse markers usually found in that type of text. Over time, for example, students learn not to begin with the first detail on the first page of the reading, but to write an opening sentence that draws together the key events and overall themes of the reading passage. In this way, the journal requires that students do a great deal of writing, but the writing practice is always fully integrated with the reading process.

In the reading journal workbook, the space allotted to the summary is purposely limited, so that students are forced to make choices as to what the most important details were, and they are not permitted to quote at length from the text. In addition, after completing the summary, students provide a one- or two-sentence description of what they found most important or interesting in the text. This is a difficult task, one which requires them to interpret the events they have just summarized and decide on an overriding meaning. In describing the value of summary writing, Kern (2000) explained that “when learners condense their expression by deleting, reorganizing, and reshaping their ideas, they are engaged in an act of transformation that allows them to integrate the development of both their language and interpretive skills” (p. 158). This “act of transformation” positions students to engage in a personal dialogue with the text in the target language.

During class time, students read their summaries aloud or exchange them with others. Sometimes students put together a class summary, recorded on the blackboard or an overhead, to which each student contributes a sentence in
turn. In this way, students' dialogue with the text begins on an individual basis and extends to the classroom community. The class as a whole establishes the facts of the text, and in comparing their readings, students experience firsthand the various ways in which different individuals can understand or interpret the same text. Most importantly, this summary is student-generated (the teacher intervenes only to correct misunderstandings arising from linguistic or cultural gaps), as Bernhardt (2002) wrote, "The point of departure must be what the student understands is in the text, not what the teacher tells him or her it is about." (p. 206).

Vocabulary
In this section, students draw up a list of 10 words or phrases from the assigned reading that they consider most important. These need not be words that are unfamiliar to the student (although they often are), but rather those that are most central to the text's meaning. Limiting the list to 10 important words serves as a reminder to students that while reading they should avoid getting bogged down by unknown words that may not be essential to understanding the text. Instead, they should focus on choosing those words that they believe to be most relevant to the main events of the text. The vocabulary list functions as a place for students to record and thereby readily access important words and phrases from the reading, and, like the summary, it stands as a form of interpretation of the text.

The process of evaluating the importance of the vocabulary words does not necessarily present as great a challenge to students as one might think. For example, in the aforementioned story Im Land der Schokolade und Bananen, the first two chapters are titled "Der Abschied" (farewell, parting) and "Die Grenze" (border). In one class, these words appeared on every student's vocabulary list, and the discussion moved easily from the concrete meanings of the words to their metaphorical implications—that the children in the story are saying goodbye to their old life and crossing the border to a new world in which everything is strange and different. Even with their limited language proficiency, students were able to speculate on how the children and their parents felt and they related those ideas to times in their own lives when they knew things were changing irrevocably. In the first part of Kafka's Die Verwandlung, students naturally listed the words die Verwandlung (metamorphosis) and das Ungeziefer (insect), but the other words on their lists tended to center around Gregor Samsa's job as a traveling cloth salesman and his various work-related problems. The nature of this student-generated semantic field revealed a connection between the central event of the text and what it might mean on a symbolic level.

Occasionally, students may consult the vocabulary sections of their journal to draw up a list of words on which they will be tested. Mittman (1999) described how class-generated vocabulary lists can help students "develop a sense of autonomy over the texts" (p. 485). The vocabulary quizzes can take the form of cloze tests that are summaries of the assigned readings with key words missing. Alternatively, on a quiz, students may generate sentences based on a given list of vocabulary items, or provide target-language definitions.

Questions for In-Class Discussion
Like the summaries, the critical questions for in-class discussion serve as one of the most important and useful aspects of the interactive reading journal. It is, however, vital that the instructor discusses how to formulate critical questions with students. One approach involves explaining to students that the goal is to come up with "good" questions, that is, questions to which there is no clear, unambiguous answer to be found on a particular page of the text. To return to the example given by Swaffar et al. (1991), "How old is the heroine?" is not a "good" question, but "Why does she leave home?" (p. 1) is. The questions students pose might be related to the motivation and development of characters, the meaning of particular images, the implication of certain events, or how the story will progress.

For the book Im Land der Schokolade und Bananen, students learned to avoid questions like "Where is the family moving to?" in favor of "Why is the family moving to West Germany?" For beginning students, it is helpful to provide model questions for the first few chapters of a longer book, until students become acquainted with its plot, characters, and main themes. In one class, students commented on how challenging the discussion questions were, for they had to think about the answers, rather than find and copy them from the book. In a sense, traditional lists of comprehension questions serve only to measure students' ability to transcribe words from a text, not their critical thinking skills.

In class, students share discussion questions they have written, which the instructor can record on the board, and students should be allowed to decide which questions they would like to discuss. The instructor might also prepare some questions in advance to insure that students have an opportunity to discuss aspects of the text that their own questions may not address, but he or she should be careful not to privilege his or her own questions over those of the students.

With the critical questions for in-class discussion, the individual reading process becomes a group activity. It can be compared to the brainstorming described by Kramsch (1985) in which students respond to open-ended questions about the text with the goal of using "the multiple perspective [sic] and life experiences of the readers to reach an understanding of the multifaceted world of the narrative" (p. 361). In their discussion of Die Verwandlung, student questions tended to center on the relationships among the members of the Samsa family. It was clear that each student
could relate to the pressures brought to bear on the eldest son, Gregor, and many reflected on their own difficulties—or lack thereof—in dealing with unreasonable parental and societal expectations. At the same time, information provided by the instructor about Kafka's life as a member of a minority, German-speaking culture in early 20th-century Prague shed light on Gregor Samsa's feelings of isolation and estrangement from others.

How Was the Reading?
In this section, the last that students complete in preparation for in-class discussion of the text, they make note of the reading process itself. In thinking consciously about how easy or difficult a text was for them to read and why, students become aware of their use of reading strategies and how genre influences the reading process. As Carrell (1989) has shown, students' knowledge of their own cognitive resources, as well as their conceptual awareness of what they are doing while they read, contributes to comprehension and independence of thought. In reading students' comments in this section, the instructor learns about the students' individual reading processes and can address some of their problems one-on-one. This is particularly important given the diverse levels of proficiency that one usually encounters in intermediate and upper-level courses.

In-Class Activities
The third page of each journal entry is reserved for in-class activities. Once the students have compared summaries, established the facts of a text, and discussed vocabulary and its meaning in context, additional in-class work helps students develop and improve their interpretive skills, both orally and in writing. During class time, students might reread particular passages and analyze them in semantic terms (speculating, for example, on the effects of word choice) or syntactic terms (mapping out how sentences relate to one another or how a passage is structured). A "mapping" activity (see Kern, 2000) can provide students with a visual representation of the ideas in the text and how they are related to one another. As part of our discussion of *Im Land der Schokolade und Bananen*, students created semantic maps of "Germany" and "Romania" that helped them conceptualize the differences between the two countries. The fact that both countries carried positive and negative associations within the story helped counter the widely held belief in the United States that, prior to the end of the Cold War, life in the West was in every way superior to life in the East.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for students in learning to read and interpret literature lies in learning to support what they feel or know about a work with evidence drawn from the text itself. Swaffar (2002) cautioned against allowing students to react to a text without making reference to what it actually says. She advocated that students learn to identify "macropatterns" in the text through grid or matrix assignments—for example, on one side of a grid, students list important events, scenes, or details from a text (who, what, and where of a text), and on the other side they analyze those events (how and why). This allows students to identify in the text those words, phrases or passages that support its main ideas. When students complete the first sections of the reading journal before class, they are well prepared to undertake and benefit from in-class exercises such as Swaffar's matrix assignment, or transformative activities such as rewriting an expository passage and performing it as a dialogue (Kern, 2000, p. 159). For example, one in-class activity for *Die Verwandlung* asked students to recount events from the text in the form of a journal entry written by Gregor Samsa's sister. Because the students had already completed a summary from the point-of-view of the third-person narrator, they were readily able to recast the events of the text in a way that accounted for the sister's unspoken but interpretable feelings, desires, and motivations.

Response to a Critical Question
The final page of the journal entry asks students to reflect on what they have learned about a text before moving on to preparation for their next assigned reading. At the end of each class period, students hold a vote to choose a question from the collective list of questions prepared by the class, or each student decides which question he or she wishes to address in writing in this section of the journal. In so doing, students once again enter into dialogue with the text, but at a deeper level. They return to what they have read, but their approach to the text is now informed by the in-class discussion of the assignment. These short interpretive writing assignments prepare students for longer essays that they periodically complete in multiple drafts. As Byrnes and Kord (2002) suggested, it is helpful to provide students with lists of vocabulary and phrases (such as how to talk about a text or character, how to express an opinion, and so on) that they can draw on in formulating their statements in a sophisticated manner.

Personal Response
Finally, this is the place for students to record their personal feelings about the text: whether they liked it and why, what they were able to identify with and what they found strange or puzzling about a given reading assignment. With longer texts, students often comment that they like the text more as they progress through it and come to understand it better, a situation which seems to point to a connection between comprehension and enjoyment of what one reads (as in the old adage "I like what I know, and I know what I like").

Conclusion: Using the Interactive Reading Journal at All Levels
The interactive reading journal, modified by each instructor according to the needs of his or her class, can assist students
Appendix

Format for the Interactive Reading Journal

[Note: For students, this format would be provided in the target language. In a workbook, each section would be followed by space for students to write their responses.]

PREPARATION FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

Date: ____________________________

Title: ____________________________

Author: __________________________

Before You Read

What do you think this text is about? What do you think will happen?

Summary of the Text

What do you think was most important or significant in this text?

Vocabulary

What 10 words or phrases were important in this text? Note the page number(s) where the word appeared! If you had to look up any of these words, include the English equivalent.

Note here any words, phrases, or passages that you could not figure out.

Questions for In-Class Discussion

Remember, these are questions to which you can’t find an easy answer in the text!

1. 

2. 

How was the reading? How long did you spend reading the text? Did you reread all or part of it? What made the reading difficult (or easy) for you?

IN CLASS

In-Class Discussion: Activities, Critical Questions, and Notes

AFTER CLASS

Response to Critical Question(s)

Personal response: Did you enjoy reading this text? Why or why not? What did you find most interesting or meaningful?
Nonlinguistic Variables in Advanced Second Language Reading: Learners’ Self-Assessment and Enjoyment

Cindy Brantmeier
Washington University

Abstract: The present study on second language (L2) reading and individual difference variables (IDVs) examines learners' self-assessed ability level and enjoyment and the effects of these factors on two different measures of comprehension. The investigation controls for topic familiarity differences by gender and the study utilizes the authentic short story Aniversario by Luis Romero (Virgilio, Friedman, & Valdivieso, 1998). During regular class period, 88 participants from advanced grammar courses completed the following: (a) a questionnaire about general L2 reading abilities and enjoyment, (b) a reading passage, (c) a written recall task, (d) multiple-choice questions, and (e) a questionnaire concerning topic familiarity. Propositions in the text were analyzed for pausal units and recalls were scored for such units (Bernhardt, 1991). Results revealed that students believed they were satisfactory readers of Spanish and they generally enjoyed reading in Spanish. As predicted, levels of self-assessed abilities positively correlated with levels of enjoyment. The study yielded significant effects for both self-assessed ability and enjoyment on written recall (an open-ended assessment task), but no such effects were found on the multiple-choice questions (a task including retrieval cues). The study revealed that at the advanced levels of language instruction learners' self-assessment of their L2 reading ability was quite accurate, in terms of written recall. The findings suggest that the study of the variables self-assessment and enjoyment, in association with other L2 reading factors such as metacognition, anxiety, and motivation, may contribute to a better understanding of L2 reading comprehension.

Key words: advanced learners, comprehension, individual learner differences, second language reading, self-assessment

Language: Spanish

Introduction

Understanding second language (L2) reading with advanced readers offers important implications and considerations for readers from intermediate levels of instruction. The present study was motivated, in part, because of the lack of reading research conducted with students from advanced L2 university courses. In a recent discussion about new directions in L2 reading research, Bernhardt (2003) contended that more research is needed on the “ephemeral” dimensions of literacy, including affective variables such as engagement, interest, and purpose. She claimed that half of the variance in L2 reading is accounted for by first language (L1) literacy (20%) and L2 knowledge (30%), and that 50% of the variance remains unexplained. With students from third-year university level Spanish courses, the present investigation is a preliminary attempt to examine learners' self-assessed L2 reading ability along with a more transient variable.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Bernhardt</td>
<td>Stanford University</td>
<td>2003–2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carine Feyten</td>
<td>University of South Florida</td>
<td>2005–2008</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carmen Chaves Tesser</td>
<td>University of Georgia, Emerita</td>
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<td>Ray T. Clifford</td>
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<td>2002–2005</td>
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<td>Benjamin Rifkin</td>
<td>Temple University</td>
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<td>James Davis</td>
<td>Howard University</td>
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<td>Galal Walker</td>
<td>Ohio State University</td>
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<td>Isabel de Valdivia</td>
<td>Pittsburgh (PA) Public Schools</td>
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<td>Suwako Watanabe</td>
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*Foreign Language Annals* (ISSN 0015-718X) is published quarterly by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Inc., 700 South Washington Street, Suite 210, Alexandria, VA 22314 • (703) 894-2900 • Fax (703) 894-2905 • http://www.actfl.org • E-mail: headquarters@actfl.org.

FLA is a refereed journal dedicated to advancing all phases of the profession of foreign language teaching. Manuscripts to be considered for publication and all other editorial correspondence should be sent to Sandy Cashall, Managing Editor, *Foreign Language Annals*, P.O. Box 391837, Mountain View, CA 94039-1837. Advertising inquiries should be addressed to Advertising, ACTFL, 700 South Washington Street, Suite 210, Alexandria, VA 22314, or e-mail, sackley@actfl.org.

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Printed by Allen Press, Inc., Lawrence, KS 66044.

Periodicals postage paid at Alexandria, VA and at additional mailing offices.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Inc., 700 South Washington Street, Suite 210, Alexandria, VA 22314.