Questioning the Text: Advancing Literary Reading in the Second Language Through Web-Based Strategy Training

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Abstract: *This study assessed language learners' perceptions of an instructional approach to literary reading in the second language. The approach under investigation is based on a Web tutorial that teaches questioning strategies. Seventy-eight German students enrolled at a state university in the United States participated in the study. Questionnaire data suggest that most of the learners perceived the approach positively in regard to its impact in facilitating the development of literary reading competencies in the second language. Students with positive perceptions about the Web tutorial were more likely to report a positive affective response to the literary texts and a higher motivation to continue the study of German beyond the university's foreign language requirement.*

Key words: *literature instruction, reading strategies, second language reading, Web-based instruction*

Introduction

Communicative language classrooms of the 1980s and 1990s tended to emphasize interpersonal spoken exchanges rather than interpretive or presentational modes of communication. Since that time, educational objectives that address critical interpretive reading have gained an increasingly central role in major curricular guidelines, including the Framework for 21st Century Skills (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010), the Common Core State Standards (Kendall, 2011), the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1996), and the MLA Report (MLA, 2007). As the emphasis on interpretive reading has increased, a greater focus on literature has reemerged as a significant component in foreign language curricula. However, despite a broad consensus regarding the importance of critical reading in language instruction at all levels, few concrete approaches guide instructors in helping students to develop literary reading competencies. This article

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reports on the implementation of a Web-based, strategy-oriented approach to literary reading in a second-year university language program and presents data from a question-naire study that assessed learners' percep-tions of this teaching approach.

Literature Review

Literary Reading and the Second Language Learner

Prior to the 1990s, the authentic texts that were included in commercially published teaching materials were accompanied by either extensive glosses or vocabulary lists, both of which encouraged word-for-word translation rather than reading for meaning (Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991). This implies that many practitioners at that time found it either impossible, or unneces-sary, to have language learners at the beginning and intermediate levels read authentic texts without significant support from the native language. Critical reading skills, if present in the first language, were largely assumed to transfer into the target language only after the learner had passed a particular linguistic threshold (Clarke, 1980; Cummins, 1985). When this transfer failed, literature instructors blamed insuffi-cient linguistic preparedness in lower-level language courses for their students' inability to read and understand literary texts in upper-level courses. This flawed under-standing partly contributed to the two-tiered curriculum in North American university language programs during most of the second half of the 20th century—a curricu-lum that consisted of two years of basic language training focusing primarily on oral skills and often fulfilling the institution's language requirement, followed by two years of courses focusing on literature and culture for majors, minors, or students with deeper intrinsic motivation.

Partially in response to an increasingly dramatic enrollment crisis in university foreign language departments, this curricu-lar structure was increasingly questioned during the second half of the 1990s. As a result, a number of language departments began to reform their undergraduate pro-grams, resulting in new curricula that integrated the study of language, literature, and culture at all levels of instruction (Bernhardt & Berman, 1999; Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Kern, 2000; MLA, 2007; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). These reforms were also informed by a surge in literacy-oriented and culture-centered second language acquisi-tion research published since the beginning of the 1990s. The following three research clusters were largely responsible for inspir-ing the development of curricula in which learners at all levels would critically interact with literary texts in the second language:

1. The idea that first language reading competencies transfer fully into the second language once the learner had passed a certain threshold of language abilities—one of the views that legiti-mized the two-tiered curriculum—had been cogently refuted by Bernhardt in the monograph *Reading Development in a Second Language* (1991) and a subse-quent series of empirical studies (Bernhardt, 2000, 2005; Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). Based on extant research, Bernhardt (2005) outlined a model that quantified the impact of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge on second language performance in languages that share a large number of cognates and have similar alphabets. She concluded that only 30% of second language reading competence could be attributed to the reader's knowledge of the second lan-guage. Twenty percent of what readers comprehend results from their back-ground knowledge and first language literacy. The remaining 50% encom-passes what Bernhardt (2005) called "unexplained variance: comprehension strategies, content and domain knowl-edge, interest and motivation, etc." (p. 140). The study described in the present article was theoretically an-chored in Bernhardt's model of second language reading insofar as it related to

the 50% of second language reading that remains unexplained.

2. In their book *Reading for Meaning* (1991), Swaffar et al. developed a reading-centered approach that viewed the learner's evolving understanding of a text's meaning as the central mechanism of language acquisition. Language learners generate higher-order understanding through their own formulation of textual implications. These ideas were further developed in Swaffar & Arens's *Remapping the Foreign Language Curriculum: An Approach Through Multiple Literacies* (2005) and in Maxim's (2006) concept of "textual thinking." The approach discussed in the present article evolved from this research cluster, as its goal was to establish a pedagogical procedure that encouraged learners to focus primarily on meaning when interacting with second-language texts.

3. It is hard to overestimate the impact of Kramsch's *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993) on the profession's views on the role of culture in language learning. This monograph not only promoted approaches that situated the study of language in rich cultural contexts, but also provided a critique of the unreflective use of literary texts in a communicative language classroom. Further, the text introduced a model to engage students in literary reading processes through interactive techniques "to help students identify the different voices that make up the texture of a story or play" (p. 154). The study described in the present article relates to Kramsch's approach as it intended to help learners develop a more complex understanding of literary texts with greater independence.

More recently, three extensive review articles have documented the effects of literacy-based foreign language curricula and the role of literature in foreign language education. Carter's (2007) and Paran's (2008) review articles documented a broad spectrum of research activities on the role of literature in foreign language learning and teaching in work conducted in ESL/EFL and secondary school contexts as well as in research from a variety of international sources. The studies documented in Paesani and Allen's (2012) review of research on learning environments that merge language instruction with literary-cultural content considered the North American university teaching-learning context.

The present study grew out of the basic research clusters of the 1990s outlined above and was stimulated by the U.S.-based professional organizations that have been advocating for the integration of language, literature, and culture (MLA, 2007; National Standards, 1996). While these three articles documented the resurging interest in the role of literature in foreign language education, notably absent in each of the three reviews of current pedagogical practices was the role of strategy instruction to foster literary reading competencies in the second language.

Questioning as a Reading Strategy in L1 and L2 Contexts

Reading strategies are procedures that readers consciously apply to texts while reading in order to enhance and monitor comprehension. Initially, reading strategies received attention among researchers and practitioners working with children who were learning to read in first language contexts. The National Reading Panel concluded that teaching students to generate questions is the most effective single-strategy approach (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Rosenshine, Meister, and Chapman's (1996) meta-analysis offered three explanations for the effectiveness of generating questions to improve reading comprehension in first language contexts. They suggested that generating questions (1) stimulates learners to participate actively in the reading process, (2) activates existing background knowledge, and (3) helps students monitor their

comprehension. More recently, Taboada and Guthrie (2006) identified a fourth explanation by postulating that questioning helps the reader discover and process multiple conceptual levels of a text. The effectiveness of self-generated questions has inspired teaching approaches to first language reading at both the elementary and secondary levels. Most notably, Beck's approach, "questioning the author," encourages learners to develop questions that they would directly address to the authors of a particular work if learners were offered the opportunity to interview them (Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan, & Worthy, 1996; Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997).

Because proposals and research on self-generated questions to second language contexts have been conducted in the first language context using expository texts, their relevance has yet to be substantiated. To date, foreign language studies have focused on the transfer of metacognitive knowledge and, while these findings suggested that approaches to reading comprehension instruction based on strategy training may be effective in second language contexts, they did not identify instructional interventions designed to help learners employ a range of reading strategies (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003; Groebel, 1980; Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1995; Klingner & Vaughn, 1996; Padron, 1992; Royer & Carlo, 1991; Schoonen, Hulstijn, & Bossers, 1998; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). Equally important, these studies were not concerned with literary reading. Thus, there is very little direct evidence regarding the effect of self-generated questioning techniques on second language reading comprehension. An exception is Urlaub's (2012) study on the impact of questioning strategies on literary reading in the second language. This study reported performance data collected in an experimental setting for a relatively small group of foreign language learners who were not enrolled in a language program and demonstrated the effectiveness of questioning strategies on literary reading in the second language. However, the study did not assess learners' perceptions and therefore was unable to provide important insights regarding pedagogical and motivational variables that relate to the implementation of this approach.

Research Questions

The present study investigated an instructional approach to teaching literary reading in the second language. This approach trained learners to generate questions about the text and addressed the following questions:

1. Perceived impact: How do language learners perceive the effectiveness of a strategy-oriented and Web-based approach to second language literary reading?
2. Affective response to literature and motivation: To what extent is a positive perception of this approach associated with a positive affective response toward the assigned literary texts and an increase in overall motivation to continue language study beyond the intermediate level?

Methods

Participants

In spring 2011, 100 students were enrolled in four sections of an accelerated second-year German class that fulfills the language requirement at the University of Texas-Austin. Eighty-three learners completed a questionnaire at the end of the semester. Five questionnaires had to be removed because participants submitted invalid or incomplete questionnaires. Therefore, 78 university language students participated in this study.

Strategy Training Module

A four-part, 60-minute, Web-based training module that focused on strategies for understanding a literary narrative was developed to facilitate the acquisition of the reading strategies (http://wikis.la.utexas.edu/rcst/). The Web tutorial was presented

mostly in English. Sample questions were in German and English.

- The first part of the tutorial, Basic Content and Interpretative Questions, taught students to generate questions about the text's characters, settings, actions, and objects (e.g., "Who are the main characters? What do they do? Where and when does the story take place? Why is the person talking about…? Why is he interested in…?").

- The second segment, Cross-Cultural Questions, focused learners' attention on the literary work's intercultural dimensions and helped learners decide if their response to the story might display a failure to understand a cultural reference or context due to their own linguistic and cultural distance from the text (e.g., "Is there the possibility that the meaning of an action, object, or symbol has a different significance in the text's original culture?").

- The third part of the tutorial illustrated how learners could use the insights gained through these lines of questioning when developing a written response to a literary text. Students were presented with an excerpt from Borchert's text *Die Küchenuhr* [*The Kitchen Clock*] (2007) and a short written-response essay. Additional visual materials illustrated the cross-cultural differences between postwar German and American concepts of what it means to be a war veteran returning home.

- The fourth part of the online training, Global Questions, asked learners to use questioning strategies to explore the social and historical implications of the text and to address those issues in their written interpretations as reflections of that cultural history.

Procedures

During the second week of classes, learners completed the strategy-training tutorial, and a class meeting was held in the third week of the semester during which the instructor helped students practice using the strategies. Students had access to the Web tutorial throughout the remainder of the semester and were encouraged to consult it when reading and reflecting on all assigned texts. In addition, every week throughout the remainder of the semester, learners practiced generating Basic Content Questions when reading short reading passages (200–500 words) from the textbook *Stationen* (Augustyn & Euba, 2008). In this context, learners also posted questions of all four types described in the previous section on a discussion board before they discussed the texts in class. The accessibility of these questions helped learners practice formulating questions and provided instructors with a window into the difficulties that students faced. Instructors used the questions that participants generated to design activities that facilitated learner-centered interactions with the texts during the class meetings.

Analysis of Literary Texts

On three occasions during the semester, longer literary texts were assigned: (1) Borchert's short story *Die drei dunklen Könige* [*The Three Dark Kings*] (2007), 770 words, originally published in 1946; (2) Böll's short story *Ankedote zur Senkung der Arbeitsmoral* [*Anecdote Concerning the Lowering of Productivity*] (2006), 790 words, originally published in 1963; and (3) a fictional letter from Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks Verfall einer Familie* [*Buddenbrooks*] (1989), 440 words, originally published in 1901. Students were required to practice generating all four question types introduced in the tutorial. After working with the texts in class, students had to write a two-page essay about a topic that related to the readings. Students could choose between creative and expository genres. The work based on the three longer literary texts accounted for about 15% of the course's 100 contact hours.

Data Collection

Participants completed a questionnaire at the end of the course. Questions elicited information about the use of the Web

tutorial, the perceived benefits of working with the Web tutorial, students' affective responses to the selected texts, and their motivation to take German classes beyond the university language requirement (see Appendix).

Data Analysis

Response distributions for individual survey items were established, and several pairs of responses were cross-tabulated. Due to the relatively uneven distribution of some responses, the statistical significance of relationships between pairs of items was assessed using Fisher's Exact Test. In contrast to Pearson's chi-squared test, Fisher's Exact Test does not require more than five expected responses in each individual cell of the contingency table. As the data analysis in this study also used 2×3 contingency tables, significance tests in these cases required the Freeman-Halton Extension of Fisher's Exact Test. All tests were based on a two-sided hypothesis for which there was no a priori expectation of the direction of an association.

Findings

Tables 1 and 2 report data on students' use of the Web tutorial and their perception of its effectiveness. Data in Table 1 show that 95% of the students used the Web tutorial at some point during the semester, including about 20% who used the Web tutorial every time

they were assigned to read a text in German. Only 5% of the learners indicated that they had not used the Web tutorial at all. In addition, 60% of the learners indicated that use of the Web tutorial had a positive effect on their ability to critically read a literary text.

Table 2 provides a cross-tabulation of the responses provided in Questions 1 and 2. Thirteen of the 16 students (81%) who consistently used the Web tutorial felt that the strategy-based approach had a positive impact on their ability to read a literary work in a second language, as did 34 of the 58 occasional users (59%).

The next set of analyses addressed students' enjoyment of the readings and the relationship between students' enjoyment and use of, and perceptions about, the Web tutorial. Slightly more than 40% of the students (32 of 78) indicated that they enjoyed the readings for the course. A cross-tabulation of the responses to Questions 1 and 3 was conducted in order to determine whether the intensive use of the Web tutorial was associated with a positive response to the literary texts. There was no statistically significant association between the two variables ($p = 0.285$); using the Web tutorial was not associated with enjoying the selected literary texts.

Table 3 provides a cross-tabulation of the responses provided in Questions 2 and 3. Almost two thirds (64%) of those learners who felt that the Web tutorial had a positive effect reported that they enjoyed the read-

TABLE 1

Use and Perception of Web Tutorial

Questionnaire		Subject pool ($n = 78$)	
Question	Answer	Absolute	Percentage
Q1 Did you use the Web tutorial?	Yes, every time	16	20.5%
	Yes, occasionally	58	74.4%
	No	4	5.1%
Q2 Do you feel that the Web	Yes	47	60.3%
tutorial had a positive effect?	No	31	39.7%

TABLE 2

Association Between Use of Web Tutorial and Perceived Effect

Use of Tutorial?	Perceived Effect?		
	Yes, I feel that the Web tutorial had a positive effect.	No, I don't feel that the Web tutorial had a positive effect.	Total
Yes, I used the Web tutorial every time.	13	3	16
Yes, I used the Web tutorial occasionally.	34	24	58
No, I did not use the Web tutorial.	0	4	4
Total	47	31	78

Note: Association statistically significant ($p = 0.008$), Fisher's Exact Test, Freeman-Halton Extension.

TABLE 3

Association Between Perceived Effect of Web Tutorial and Affective Response to Texts

Perceived Effect?	Response to Texts?		
	No, I did not enjoy the readings.	Yes, I enjoyed the readings.	Total
Yes, I feel that the Web tutorial had a positive effect.	17	30	47
No, I don't feel that the Web tutorial had a positive effect.	29	2	31
Total	46	32	78

Note: Association statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), Fisher's Exact Test.

ings. Although use of the Web tutorial did not correlate with positive attitudes about reading the assigned literary texts, a positive perception of the Web tutorial was associated with a positive affective response to the texts.

From these data, one can conclude the following: *Using* the Web tutorial was not associated with enjoying the literary texts, but *liking* the Web tutorial was associated with a positive response to the selected texts.

The final set of analyses addressed the relationship between students' intention to continue taking German courses and their use of, and perceptions about, the Web tutorial. Of the 78 students who submitted a ratable questionnaire, 28% (22 students) indicated that they were interested in taking an upper-level German class, while more than 70% (56 students) reported that they were not interested in taking upper-level German classes after having passed the current class and fulfilled the language requirement.

Table 4 provides a cross-tabulation of the responses provided in Questions 1 and 4, to determine if consistent use of the Web tutorial was associated with an intention to continue enrolling in German courses after the completion of the university language requirement. The table shows that nearly half (45%) of those intending to take more German classes had used the tutorial all the time they read a literary work during the semester (10 out of 22 students). In contrast, only about 10% of those not planning to take more German classes had used it consistently during the semester.

Table 5 provides a cross-tabulation of the responses provided in Questions 2 and 4. This analysis addressed the question of whether a positive perception of the Web tutorial was associated with a plan to continue the study of German beyond the language requirement. Of the students planning to take more German, nearly all (91%) said the module had a positive effect (20 out of 22). Of those not planning to take more German, fewer than half (48%) thought it had a positive effect (27 out of

56). Thus, a positive perception of the effect of the Web tutorial was also associated with intent to continue the study of German beyond the language requirement.

This section concludes with a summary of the main findings as they relate to the stated research questions:

1. Perceived impact: Approximately 95% of the students used the Web tutorial. Twenty percent indicated that they used the Web tutorial with every reading assignment throughout the semester. A large majority of the learners who used the Web tutorial consistently throughout the semester had a positive perception of its impact on their development of literary reading abilities in German.
2. Affective response to literature and motivation: Although use of the Web tutorial was not associated with a positive affective response to the literary texts, the data indicate that those users who had a positive perception of the Web tutorial were more likely to enjoy the assigned readings. Consistent users of the Web tutorial were also more likely to enroll in future German language classes after fulfilling the language requirement compared to students who did not use the Web tutorial consistently. Students who were most likely to enroll in future German classes were those who used the Web tutorial, had a positive perception of its impact, and enjoyed the literary texts assigned in the class.

Discussion

A significant number of students had positive perceptions of the Web tutorial, although they did not use it consistently throughout the semester with every assigned text. This finding suggests that the Web tutorial provided a model even for those students who did not use it consistently. Possibly, generating questions in response to literary texts was intuitively appealing to some learners who internalized the strategy after consulting the Web

TABLE 4

Association Between Use of Web Tutorial and Intent to Take German in the Future

Use of Tutorial?	German in the Future?		
	Yes, I intend to take German in the future.	No, I don't intend to take German in the future.	Total
Yes, I used the Web tutorial every time.	10	6	16
Yes, I used the Web tutorial occasionally.	11	47	58
No, I did not use the Web tutorial.	1	3	4
Total	22	56	78

Note: Association statistically significant ($p = 0.003$), Fisher's Exact Test, Freeman-Halton Extension.

TABLE 5

Association Between Perceived Effect of Web Tutorial and Intent to Take German in the Future

Perceived Effect?	German in the Future?		
	Yes, I intend to take German in the future.	No, I don't intend to take German in the future.	Total
Yes, I feel that the Web tutorial had a positive effect.	20	27	47
No, I don't feel that the Web tutorial had a positive effect.	2	29	31
Total	22	56	78

Note: Association statistically significant ($p = 0.001$), Fisher's Exact Test.

tutorial only a few times. A rapid learning effect may have prompted these learners to report a positive perception at the end of the semester despite inconsistent use. This interpretation of the data is consistent with insights from Urlaub's (2012) experimental study, which showed that more advanced students, who are more likely to have already successfully transferred effective first language reading strategies into the second language, benefited less from explicit reading strategy training. Further, this study and Urlaub (2012) suggest an uneven distribution of critical reading skills within what appear to be otherwise linguistically homogeneous learner cohorts and therefore stress the importance of developing more individualized approaches to teaching critical reading in the second language.

Even in the context of a curriculum that promotes a systematic approach to teaching literary reading in the second language, literature is far from being universally liked among collegiate language learners. This finding is consistent with general attitudes among undergraduate foreign language students toward literature (see Davis, Gorell, Kline, & Hsieh, 1992). The lack of interest in literature is a concern considering the centrality of critical reading in contemporary curricular guidelines (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; Kendall, 2011; MLA, 2007; National Standards, 1996). Learners who had a positive perception of the Web tutorial's effectiveness were also more likely to enjoy the assigned texts. While this may appear encouraging, the data from the present study cannot indicate a causal relationship between these two variables. Therefore, it remains unclear if exposure to the Web tutorial actually caused the positive attitudes toward the assigned literary texts. Further, the lukewarm reception of literary texts among second language learners questions both the privileged position that literature occupies in the upper-division courses of the traditional foreign language undergraduate curriculum as well as the position it has regained in the lower-division language classrooms in recent years. The

fact that many second language learners dislike literary texts must prompt language programs to offer a broader variety of texts and genres that nevertheless provide opportunities to develop critical reading skills in the second language. This appears to be particularly valuable for the majority of learners in lower-division language courses who do not intend to study the language beyond the university's language requirement.

Findings from the questionnaire study suggest that those students who used the Web tutorial had a positive perception of its impact, and those who enjoyed the literary texts assigned in the class were most likely to be motivated to continue studying the language beyond the university's language requirement. However, even the presence of a systematic approach to literary reading did not reverse the general trend that language learners discontinue their studies at the end of the requirement. Future research could investigate language learners' attitudes to literary texts and critical reading to better understand enrollment patterns at the threshold between lower- and upper-division university courses.
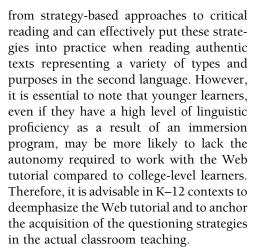
Like most studies that rely on self-reported data obtained from surveys, the present study has a number of limitations. Although participants knew that their anonymity was protected, positive answers may have reflected a bias in favor of providing desirable responses. The major limitation of the statistical analysis relates to the fact that, although the analysis can show interdependency between variables, it cannot indicate causality.

The Web tutorial assessed in the article can only be regarded as one concrete manifestation of a strategy-based approach toward critical reading. It was developed not only for a specific institutional context, but also with a particular genre in mind. Therefore, instructors in a variety of contexts are urged to not only find inspiration in the Web tutorial, but also to modify their implementation and explore alternative ways to offer strategy-based reading instruction that addresses the particular needs of

their students and the characteristics of the texts that these learners are reading.

Although this study is based on data from U.S.-based university-level learners of German reading literary texts, there are a number of reasons that suggest the effectiveness of the reading strategy of generating questions in a wide variety of languages and educational contexts. First, Bernhardt's (2005) model of the second language reading process, which serves as a theoretical foundation for this teaching approach, was based on empirical data collected in a variety of Western languages. More recent research has also suggested that the core tenets of this model can be applied to language pairings that include logographic and syllabic scripts (Ehrich, Zhang, Mu, & Ehrich, 2013; Jiang, 2011). Moreover, the reading strategy of generating questions investigated in this study does not directly relate to the decoding process. Instead, it focuses on the interaction between reader and information. All this strongly suggests that this approach can yield similar results in a wide variety of linguistic and orthographic contexts.

Advanced language learners in languages-for-special purposes courses have also used elements of the strategy training. When these elements were adapted for reading expository texts in the contexts of a business language classroom, students learned to use questioning strategies in order to increase their criticality in response to passages on topics such as consumer debt, labor disputes, or environmental issues. Preliminary findings are encouraging, but future research must clarify the effectiveness of questioning strategies in increasing the critical reception of expository texts among second language learners. Given the lack of enthusiasm for literary reading among many undergraduate students, approaches for developing critical reading competencies with expository texts on other topics will remain highly relevant for future curricula.

Considering the success of strategy-based reading instruction in elementary and secondary education, it is clear that language learners in K–12 settings will also benefit

from strategy-based approaches to critical reading and can effectively put these strategies into practice when reading authentic texts representing a variety of types and purposes in the second language. However, it is essential to note that younger learners, even if they have a high level of linguistic proficiency as a result of an immersion program, may be more likely to lack the autonomy required to work with the Web tutorial compared to college-level learners. Therefore, it is advisable in K–12 contexts to deemphasize the Web tutorial and to anchor the acquisition of the questioning strategies in the actual classroom teaching.

Beck et al. (1997) and Palincsar and Brown (1984) offered best practices from first language reading instruction to help K–12 foreign language instructors to modify the approach presented in this article. Both articles outlined implementation models for questioning strategies that encourage young learners to challenge the notion of the expert through the incorporation of role-playing scenarios. In Beck et al.'s (1997) approach in *Questioning the Author*, students generate questions that they would ask if they had the opportunity to interview the author. By assuming the role of critical integrators in an imaginative interview, learners not only challenge the expert role of the author but also create classroom interaction that changes "the role of the teacher to facilitator of discussion" (p. 68). As a result, "students gave longer, more elaborate answers that reflect original thought"; the text "became a working reference for connecting ideas" instead of merely serving as "a place to check the facts against [the students'] own memory"; and the "discussion tended to promote student-to-student interactions as well as student-to-teacher exchanges" instead of the traditionally dominant instructor-to-student pattern (p. 70).

In Palincsar and Brown's (1984) multi-strategy approach to critical reading, the questioning strategy is embedded in classroom interaction that reverses the roles of

teacher and student. By mimicking the roles of their educators, young learners raise questions that display "a concentration on main ideas […] and a check of the current state of understanding […]" (Palincsar & Brown, 1984, p. 120).

Conclusion

Literary works continue to play a central role in language programs. While reading activities help students develop vocabulary and grammatical competencies as well as a deeper understanding of culture and communities, literature stimulates learners' imagination and is a great source of pleasure to some of the most enthusiastic students. In addition, a central function of a text in the language classroom is its virtue to act as a site for the development of critical reading competencies. This potential can be optimized through a strategy-based approach. The literary genre has great potential to help students develop critical reading competencies, but engaging and provocative expository texts that inspire critical reading process need to play a significant role in virtually all second language learning contexts, including both lower- and upperdivision courses at collegiate foreign language departments, the strongest bastion of second language literature instruction.

Language instructors and program directors in K–12 and higher education that subscribe to the tenets of the general and discipline-specific curricular standards understand that language learners need to gain not only cultural knowledge and practical communicative proficiency in the target language, but also a high level of critical literacy that allows them to become sophisticated readers who find enjoyment in critical interpretive reading. After all, critical reading competencies are not just skills that language learners need to refine and apply in advanced-level foreign language classrooms; more important, they are key qualifications that help students make intellectual contributions in domains far beyond the modern language classroom.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire Items

1. Did you use the Web tutorial in order to help your reading and writing of second language texts in GER 612?
   ( ) Yes, every time I was assigned something to read in GER612.
   ( ) Yes, occasionally.
   ( ) No, I never used it.
   ( ) No, I never used it and I've never heard of it.

2. Do you feel that the questioning strategy presented in the Web tutorial had a positive effect on your ability to critically read literary texts in GER 612?
   ( ) Yes   ( ) No

3. Did you enjoy the readings selected for this course?
   ( ) Yes   ( ) No

4. Do you intend to take German classes at UT in the future?
   ( ) Yes   ( ) No