

TEACHER TO TEACHER

Adapting and Creating Reading Materials for the Elementary World Language Classroom

Suzanne Pesa

Skokie Middle School Spanish Teacher supesa@winnetka36.org

Alisa Shapiro-Rosenberg

Greeley Elementary School Spanish Teacher alisashapiro@winnetka36.org

Carla Tarini

*Skokie Middle School French Teacher carlatarini@winnetka36.org
Winnetka Public Schools, Winnetka, IL*



Note: This article is based on “Expanding Your World Language Class Library in Grades 1-6,” our 2015 and 2016 presentation at IFLT and NTPRS (www.ntprs.info) summer conferences. Our slide presentation and ancillary resources website can be accessed here: Adapting and Creating Reading Materials for the Elementary World Language Classroom (<https://drive.google.com/drive/search?q=Adapting%20and%20creating%20reading%20materials%202017>)

Introduction

Reflecting the research on the power of reading to provide essential comprehensible input, reinforce language, expand vocabulary, and bolster

retention, this article focuses on choosing and adapting existing elementary reading material, as well as authoring original texts based on student interest and/or class-spun stories.

Considerations in adapting and creating reading materials for the young learners' classroom include: story types and elements; book appeal and format; length & complexity; and linguistic considerations, such as high-frequency language, grammatical concerns, and proficiency level.

We will also discuss guided and independent self-selected reading, often referred to as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR). Extensive independent reading additionally benefits students by offering literary choices to young readers, as well as boosting confidence through successful reading experiences.

It is our hope that readers of this article will learn to:

- Evaluate existing literature, and adapt it as necessary to the level(s) they teach;
- Author or collaborate with students to create developmentally appropriate comprehensible and compelling stories;
- Utilize the Embedded Reading model to level and differentiate reading.

Choosing Existing Texts

Native speakers are the intended audience for the vast majority of commercially published texts written in the target language (L2). This, of course, poses a problem of comprehensibility for the young novice language learner. Even the simplest and most inviting picture books are usually too complex for the beginner to understand. Some specific obstacles that young readers encounter with age appropriate native texts are:

- Low frequency or theme-specific vocabulary
- Advanced / poetic 'out of bounds' language
- Inadequate repetitions of foundational language
- Wordy passages and dense pages
- Rhyme and meter is lost in translation (for books written in verse)

Some exceptions to these onerous L2 book options are illustrated *wordless* books, which the comprehensible input-based teacher can "book walk" with her students, and then script herself, as well as high-frequency word books for emergent readers. Occasionally, teachers find "just right" L2 illustrated trade books, though they are rare.

Adapting and Writing Texts for Grades K-3

While the trade books mentioned directly above might meet the literacy needs of our early elementary language learners, this youngest group does present particular L2 reading challenges:

- Some students are still pre-literate
- Classes may present a wide range of decoding ability
- Entry level readers can seem babyish and un compelling

To address the dearth of linguistically appropriate L2 resources for this age group, we recommend exploiting entry level readers by adapting their text for more interest and comprehensibility.

This is easily accomplished by adding sticky notes to extend, change, or streamline text. An added speech bubble, for example, provides character dialogue, so a narrative story now more easily lends itself to dramatization.

It should be noted that while our youngest learners may not have the literacy skills to participate in self-selected Free Voluntary Reading, a thorough CI treatment of such a book (circling, PQA, dramatizing, choral reading, etc.) will render it comprehensible, so that it can eventually be moved to the FVR (independent reading) library shelves.

Often the early elementary homeroom is abustle in thematic studies, such as The Moon, Immigration, or the Chick's Life Cycle. These are opportunities for the World Language teacher to capitalize on student excitement, to connect and incorporate the content in language class, ensuring of course, that the language is brought in bounds and the text is comprehensible. Redacting tape and/or sticky notes, shaped like speech and thought bubbles, etc. can ease the task of adapting text for our young novice learners while preserving an appealing format.

Writing Collaborative Texts for Grades K-3

Story-asking is a key feature of such CI-based strategies as TPR Storytelling®, in which teachers elicit character/s, locations and plot from student-generated ideas and interests. We can do this with our youngest learners, however some adjustments make the written language more accessible.

A. Line-At-A-Time (LAT) Stories

Fashioned from the Language Experience Approach (see resource page link at the end of this article), LATs control the pace of exposure and complexity of written text for our young readers. We do this by eliciting simple story details from our students and writing them on the board/screen, one line or sentence at a time, as they are established. Once the teacher circles the sentences, students then ‘practice’ chorally reading the accruing text from the beginning, building familiarity and reading proficiency within the context of their customized story. In this strategy, pre-literate students and readers alike are exposed to L2 text and map meaning/sound to the written word.

B. Detail-Swapping to Create New LAT Stories

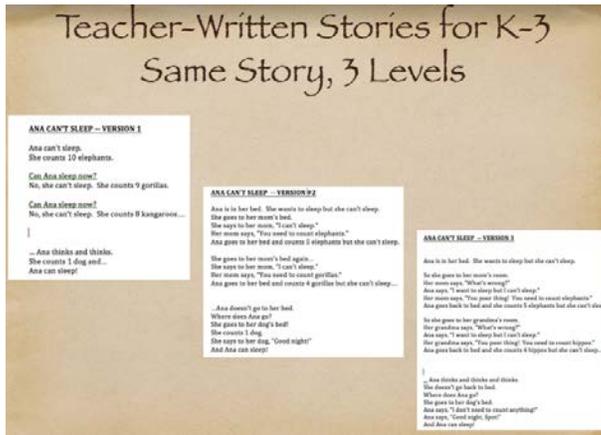
By changing a few story details, such as characters and locations, but keeping the high-frequency verbal structures constant, resulting ‘new’ stories feel fresh and novel to young learners. The process is easily accomplished electronically through the Find & Replace functions on your word processor. In this way, more stories are created for instruction and FVR, and more children get to share the excitement and satisfaction of seeing their story contributions in print.

Teacher-Written Stories for Grades K-3

Authoring original stories that employ acquired language from your classroom is a great way to fill your FVR shelves, and encourage extensive comprehensible reading. The process for teachers is simple, keeping in mind the following guidelines:

- Start with a simple, compelling idea;
- Limit the number of verb-containing structures;
- Check for high frequency word usage, true cognates, and repetitions.

Optional/recommended: Write two more versions (scaled up or pared down) for other class levels. Elementary teachers often teach several grade levels per day, so minimize the workload by modifying your basic story for older or younger learners.



Harder versions are longer and contain more complex clauses and sentences. Do this by adding more characters, rejoinders, transition words, etc. to the plotline, while insuring that the number of verbal structures does not go out of bounds. This is the process of Embedded Reading, however our purpose is different: The scaled stories are intended to differentiate reading for *different audiences* at different reading and grade levels.

Adapting and Writing Texts for Grades 3-6

With older elementary audiences, the same issues apply. These students require high-interest / low-language texts, rendering emergent-level trade books inappropriate. In order to exploit commercially produced books, yet meet the developmental needs of this group, we can further modify existing text passages for greater interest and complexity by:

- Adding character dialogue;
- Adding parallel character/s (i.e., with craft sticks, such that characters 'walk onto' the story);
- Changing the point of view;
- Switching/adding tenses.

Upper-elementary-level text can be further extended by:

- Describing or captioning page illustrations within the story;
- Inserting rhetorical questions and rejoinders (e.g. transcribing circling and PQA sequences);
- Adding sound effects and onomatopoeia;



- Personalizing versions of the same trade book with each class group (resulting in several versions of the exact same book/story).

Prompt-Based Collaborative Stories

While teachers often drive early elementary stories with leading questions and circling, older learners often delight in developing the plotline themselves. A simple storyboard can invite diverse responses from group to group, resulting in multiple versions of stories. Students can even re-order the frames. Teachers write up class and swapped-detail versions, and story collections can be bound and later moved to FVR shelves. Sharing peer stories with groups is not only fun but gets massed repetitions on high-frequency targets. The same story-spinning process can also be applied to any interesting image, generating countless original classroom texts.

Teacher-Written Stories for Grades 3-6

While the same basic guidelines apply (as those for early elementary stories), older students have a stronger linguistic foundation upon which to build stories (if they've had more instructional hours in the target language). Older kids often enjoy stories with famous figures, a cultural or humorous setting, and/or a cultural tidbit. One teacher-written story told of a sweaty and frustrated Serena Williams at the Café de Flore, who, after repeatedly requesting an ice-cold lemonade, learned that ice isn't served in Paris restaurants!

Injecting Novelty

As teachers, we search for ways to repeat the same words and verbal chunks without our students sensing the repetition. By devising a reason for repetition within the plot (i.e., the character is hard of hearing; the music is loud and the listener can't decipher the message; the message has been garbled or misinterpreted and needs clarification; etc.), we create opportunity to repeat our targets in a humorous context. Similarly, difficult-to-pronounce vocabulary can simply become a character name, in order to transliterate for easy pronunciation and repetition. For example: The bird in the French story is named, '*Wa-Zoh*, l'oiseau' (Wa-Zoh, the bird).

Insuring Comprehensibility

Since teacher-generated stories at the 3rd through 6th grade level can include broader language, it's critical that we check and revise for comprehensibility.

Guidelines include:

- Comb through and eliminate words that are new, low-frequency, or have fewer repetitions;
- Aim for true cognates;
- Focus on high-frequency, practical structures;
- Recycle previous structures;
- Insert plenty of Q & A for more repetition.

‘Publishing’ Class and Teacher-Generated Stories

Reading on screen or from a photocopied handout are basic ways to ensure that our elementary students read comprehensible and compelling material. However, by illustrating and binding our stories, we boost their appeal and durability for other classes and for years to come. In this section, we offer practical ideas for how to prepare and present teacher and class-created work.

Student Hand-illustrated Stories

Simply type up the class story with an illustration box, assign a volunteer student (or group of artists) to illustrate, at home or in class, and staple or bind the pages.



Advertise in IJFLT and support this free journal. Send complete half or quarter page .pdf ads to ijflteditor@gmail.com
Advertisements that are consistent with IJFLT’s mission will be charged half page = \$200.00 or quarter page = \$100.00.

‘Publishing’ Electronic Books



Web-based (i.e., Storybird), computer-based (iBooks Author; Book Creator) and device-based publishing software (i.e., Creative Book Builder, Scribble Press, Story Creator or any other device-based apps that might also be free) are great options for creating and sharing collaborative or teacher-authored stories. Completed projects can be exported as a PDF and printed/bound, or enjoyed on screen. On-screen versions often include exciting interactive elements, such as media (images, audio/video files, maps), review questions or quizzes, or simple practice activities. Files created this way can be shared with or without the interactive elements, in PDF form (electronically) or in paper format, bound as books. When shared electronically, students may conveniently access from anywhere on their devices. You can also put the "pages" from your newly created books into a slide-sharing application (such as Keynote or Powerpoint), record the text with your voice, and export as a movie. Students enjoy listening to their teacher read them these stories as the pages turn.

Displaying Reading Materials and FVR

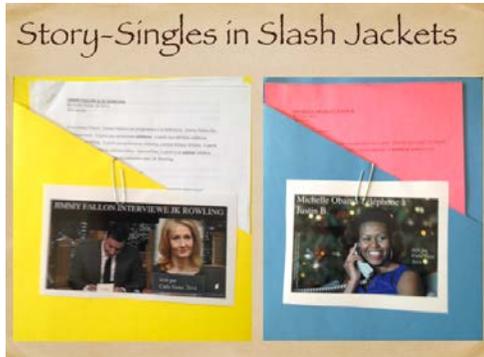
In our experience, independent reading in the World Language classroom is not recommended before 3rd grade. Since most early elementary programs allot limited instructional minutes, precious time is better spent on auditory input and guided reading until students enjoy solid decoding and reading skills.

As previously mentioned, commercial and class-produced texts can migrate to the FVR shelves once teachers have ensured that they are comprehensible. Books can be leveled and rotated on or off display, depending on class language in use.

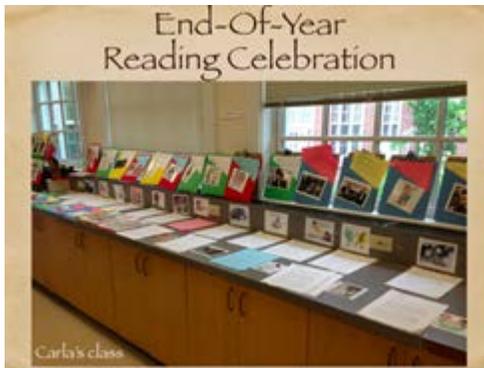
Story Singles

As an alternative to trade books and student-illustrated stories, the teacher may choose to author a collection of short, compelling and comprehensible texts (e.g.,

“Story Singles”). By attaching a Google image to the folder containing multiple copies of each reading, she can advertise and build interest in that story. Story collections can rotate after all students have read the entire collection.



In lieu of book summaries, reports or lists, students can simply recommend a reading to classmates by choosing whether or not to affix a star sticker on its folder.



Here, parents and school administration were invited to an end-of-year World Language reading celebration!

Summary and Conclusion

In this article, we have explored adapting and creating texts for the elementary grades 1-6 World Language classroom.

Options for adapting existing texts might include, but are not limited to:

- Teacher-scripted wordless picture books;
- Adapted picture books;
- Adapted emergent readers;
- Adapted content-related books;
- Class-specific rewrites (multiple versions).

Options for creating original texts might include, but are not limited to:

- Line-At-A-Time stories (LAT);
- LAT with swapped details;
- Multilevel teacher-written stories;
- Illustrated collaborative stories;
- E-books (on-screen or printed);
- Story Singles.

We invite IJFLT readers to explore our original slide presentation for additional photos and images, as well as our resource website:

<https://sites.google.com/a/winnetka36.org/expanding-elementary-fvr/resources>
and contact us with any questions or concerns.

While the ever-changing educational technology landscape allows for countless possibilities in how we ask, tell, embellish, ‘publish’ and share our stories, it is the bottomless well of student imagination and inventiveness that will keep new stories flowing and our classroom communities of all ages enjoying them, group after group, year after year.

NEW SPANISH BOOK!



Don Quijote, el último caballero is a novel for intermediate and advanced beginners in the Fluency Fast series of readers. It uses a vocabulary of fewer than 200 different Spanish words to tell a 1,400 word story in the present tense and the same story also in the past tense. It is repetitive and simple and uses many cognates to make the story comprehensible to adults and children. The stories are intentionally written to be acted out in class, but also to serve as independent reading in either the present or past tense.

Don Quijote, el último caballero is an amusing, ironic and - at the same time - tragic story. Don Quijote is an ordinary Spaniard with an extraordinary imagination who believes the he must achieve great feats to honor a lady. He falls in love with a waitress that he considers to be the ideal lady. He and his companion Sancho Panza have adventures in which Don Quijote is always mistaken about what he finds along the way while Sancho sees what is really there. The story is based on Miguel de Cervantes' *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, published in the 17th Century. Many consider it to be the best book of fiction ever written.

\$6 ORDER NOW