USING SIMPLIFIED TEXTS IN LITERATURE TO ENCOURAGE EFL LEARNERS' CREATIVE WRITING

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ABSTRACT

This present article examines the possibility of encouraging non-English majors to write by guiding them to read simplified[3] versions of literary works and then to produce creative writing stimulated from reading the text. It also explores the effects of reading the literature on students' use of language and reflections of personal values. The method adopted in this study utilizes "categories for text analysis" suggested by Murdoch (1992), together with one-to-one conferences for comprehension problems and response sharing, guiding the subjects (beginning literature-readers) to access a literary work. Data was collected from the students' written response entries, creative writing and interviews. Results show that learners' reactions to the use of literary text (simplified version) for language learning are positive. Evidence confirms that literature in EFL learning benefits learners not only in linguistic development (i.e. spurring their imaginative writing), but also in personal growth. It is worth a further study to investigate whether the other beginning readers, particularly, those with low motivation and low proficiency level, can be motivated by

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[3] HEINEMANN ELT GUIDED READERS and PENGUIN READERS are simplified texts from the literature designed by the world famous educational publishers (i.e., HEINEMANN ELT and Longman) to provide EFL learners a choice of enjoyable reading material.

the literary texts and write as the three participants in the study did.

1. INTRODUCTION

As language teachers, we hope to train our students to be efficient language users and to aid them on their journey toward becoming critical readers, writers, and thinkers. Yet, we are inevitably confronted with students who do not have enough knowledge and experience of the L2 language and the cultural context of an assigned reading. Moreover, it can be intimidating to be required to write in the L2 language. Their lack of interest may also stem from inadequate learning material that is unrelated to their life.

Many researchers emphasize the benefits of using literary texts as the basis for promoting language development (Carter & Long 1991; Hill 1994; Long 1987; Lazer 1993) and appreciating different cultures (Carter & Long 1991; Lazer 1993; Murdoch 1992). Some researchers believe that literature can be a special resource for personal growth (Carter & Long 1991; Hirvela 1996; Lazer 1993). Literature helps learner grow as s/he connects herself/himself with characters in the story. Moreover, through reading literature, learners "extend their language into the more abstract domains associated with increasing language competence." (Brumfit & Carter 1987:15)

Schema theory underscores the close connections between reading literary work and writing responses. Schema theory is based on the belief that "every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well" (Anderson et al., 1995:73). Thus, in the process of reading, "comprehension of a message entails drawing information from the message and the internal schemata until sets are reconciled as a single schema or message (Hudson 1995:187). Carrell (1983a) divided reader's schemata into two main types: 'content schemata' (background knowledge of the world) and 'formal schemata' (background knowledge of rhetorical structure). That is, schemata refer to the reader's preexisting concepts about the world and about the text to be read.

In order to achieve the maximum comprehension, the readers have to assimilate text information into their existing schema (Noyce & Christie 1989). Noyce and Christie (1989), in particular, indicate that writing utilizes the same schemata that are used for reading comprehension. In order to write about a topic, the writers need to recall their prior knowledge of that topic, which serves as the source of the content of the writing. In other words, reading plays an important role in the writing process by providing learners with schemata to write about.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the use of literature in the language classroom. Those proponents proposed that literature is language in use (Hill 1994; Icoz 1992; Lazer 1993). That is, literature should not be separated from language learning. As Brumfit and Carter (1987) state, a literary text provides language resources with which the reader plays actively and interactively in working with and making sense of the language. Reading literature enhances language learning. As teachers, we need to open our students' eyes to the wonders of such an experience. Carlisle (2000) particularly emphasized that EFL readers need to learn to attend both to the meaning of the words on the page and to the feelings, ideas, images, and characters being evoked.

Teaching literature in EFL classroom for English-majors has been widely investigated in Taiwan in terms of film (Dilley 2001), novels (Anderson 2000; Hsieh 1998; Wu 1998), as well as poetry (Lin 2000; Wang 2001). These studies revealed positive results in supporting using literature in language classroom. However, none of these studies have examined whether reading simplified literary works has an impact on non-English majors in terms of producing creative writings and reflecting on personal growth. It is hoped that this study can add more evidence to the research topic relating to literature and language learning.

This study addressed the following questions:
First, is it possible to encourage non-English major student writers at a technical college by guiding them to read simplified literary work and produce creative writing from the text? Second, how does reading such work have an impact on the

non-English learners?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 Reading-to-Writing Model

The value of reading as a pre-writing resource has been demonstrated in many studies (Noyce & Christie 1989; Murdoch 1992; Falk-Ross 2002). Reading serves as a stimulus, arousing the reader's feeling and generating ideas in response to the reading texts. These responses can be transacted into expressive writing. In this way, reading is used as a source of motivation to stimulate writing.

Reading can do more than serve as a stimulus for writing. Smith's (1983) "Reading Likes a Writer Theory" also underpins the explanation that reading has its positive effects on writing. Smith (1983) has proposed that one will unconsciously learn the rules and conventions of writing while reading given certain conditions, such as absence of anxiety, a clear understanding of the text being read, and the perception of self as a writer. In other words, given these factors, the reader subconsciously becomes sensitive to the style and mechanics of the text, and reads like a writer. Noyce and Christie (1989) reemphasize that reading also plays an important role in helping students acquire the rules and characteristics of skilled writing. Reading various models of texts, such as novels, expository or poems, can "expose students to models of different types of writing" (Joyce & Christie 1989:105).

Moreover, Corden (2000) argues that "interactive discourse" has an impact on the connection between reading and writing. He illustrates how children are able to discuss and evaluate texts and to transfer the knowledge and insights gained to their own writing. Through "interactive discourse," the learners' attention is called to particular story elements of setting, characters, plot, and style. As a result, children develop their awareness of how texts are constructed and eventually transfer their knowledge and understanding to their writing.

There is evidence indicating learners transfer words, content

and structure from their reading to use in writing. Eckhoff (1984) analyzed the writing of two-graders who had been trained to read two different basal readers series: one read books with simple structures and the other with a more complex style. She found that the learners transferred certain characteristics of the passages they had been reading on their writing. In her study, learners who read stories with more complex sentence patterns used more complex syntax in their writing, while the other learners wrote with simpler structure after reading the stories with simpler patterns. Butler and Turbill' (1984) study provided another evidence indicating that an 8-year-old boy's nonfiction writing resembled the narrative stories to which he had wider exposure.

Other researchers have indicated that a large amount of reading can have a positive effect on learners' overall writing ability. Krashen (1984) compared six correlational studies and found that good writers tend to do more reading outside of class than poor writers.

2.2 Literature As a Model for Reading and Writing

Theories of reader response (Rosenblatt 1985) and constructivism (Brooks & Brooks 1993) have laid foundations for much of the work with regards to the teaching of literature. Reader-Response Theory, based on Rosenblatt's "transactional theory of literature", defines reading as a transaction between a reader and a text (Rosenblatt 1985). While reading a text, the reader responds to the passage, creating a personal interpretation of the text. Readers play active roles in the process of creating meaning from the text (Beach 1993; Hirvella 1996). Constructivism posits that "learners must consistently weigh new information and insight against previous understandings and that meaning can not be taught but can only be discovered by the learners." (Cited in Kelly et al., 1996:141). Learners are viewed as active participants and meaning creators in the learning process.

The above theories imply that in the process of constructing meaning, the readers are not only interacting but also transacting with the text, in which readers both transform and are

transformed (Many 1996). That is, as Hirvela (1996) suggests, the readers' interpretation of the text emphasizes not the text itself but how the readers re-create and reconstruct meaning while reading it. The poem or story is, for instance, a by-product of reader's own interpretation of the text together with the meaning embedded within the text (Hirvella 1996).

With regards to the role of literature in writing, Murdoch (1992) points out the richness of language in literature as examples of writing. Unlike the traditional isolated writing assignment in which students feel a lack of personal involvement, literature provides the needed context (schemata) to write about (Bushman & Bushman 1993). Through literature, students see the use of colorful metaphors, simile, dialogue, imagery, and many other connections that the authors use effectively. Students can carefully examine the conventions the author has followed and transfer them to their own writing. In addition, literature also presents a wealth of vicarious experiences for readers (Murdoch 1992). In this view, literary text offers students opportunities to experience vicariously the actions and emotions of the characters in the text and compare and contrast these experiences with their own. Thus, the literary text is the initial blueprint from which the readers work to construct their writing (Rosenblatt 1985).

As opposed to the traditional literature teaching, which requires students to read and to revere the opinions of literary critics, the proponents of the reader-response approach, however, look into students' personal interpretations of the literary texts. Some recent applications of Reader-Response theory include those described by Oster (1987), Shook (1996), Many (1996), Kelly (1996), Carlisle (2000), and Liaw (2001). The teaching methodology included using response journals (Kelly, et at., 1996; Liaw, 2001), reader-response prompts (Kelly et al. 1996), field notes (Gerla 1996), and reading logs (Carlisle 2000; Rass 2001). For instance, Oster (1989) suggested the task of rewriting short narratives from another character's point of view. Many (1996) suggested that teachers direct their students' attention toward the events in the reading texts to make relevant associations. Kelly (1996) adopted Reader-Response prompts as a vehicle for helping

students to think, analyze, and reach high levels of comprehension, i.e. critical thinking. Carlisle (2000) introduced the activities of student-written logs as students read a novel. Liaw (2001) analyzed students' response journals and the interview data after they read five American short stories.

In sum, these studies lend support to the use of literature in the reading and writing classes. Readers can experience the actions and emotions of the characters in the text through their imagination by reading about other people in literary works and creating a personal interpretation of the text. When applied in a writing class, reading literature serves as the initial blueprint from which the writers can construct their work.

3. METHODOLOGY

A case study approach was adopted in an attempt to explore the effect of use of simplified literary works in reading and writing class on non-English major learners' performance with a focus on their linguistic development as well as their personal involvement in connection with the texts.

3.1 The Participants

The participants were three non-English major students at a technological college in the central part of Taiwan. The two girls, Annie and Tiffany, were second-year students in a five-year college program and Ivan was a fifth-year student. Prior to taking the English lessons given by the researcher, these students had already had four to seven- year's exposure to English reading in schools (i.e., English textbooks compiled by National Department of Compilation), but had never had formal writing instruction. None of them had ever had any writing experience in writing longer texts, e.g., stories. They were all academically successful and loved English. Tiffany and Annie were the top three and top ten students, respectively, compared with others in their class. Ivan, although not successful in his major, showed his enthusiasm in English by making English-speaking pen pals, talking to English native speakers often and listening to the English-teaching program every night. The teacher made an

announcement in class inviting her students to join the study. The three students were willing to take the extra work---to read and write—after their regular course work.

The background of each of the three participants is as follows:

Annie was an active, bright, 18-year-old student. She had a good command of oral communication, i.e. a representative in her class for speech contest, which made her confident in English language learning. She was determined to continue further study in the Department of English, although her major was mechanic design.

Academically, Tiffany was the most able of the three students. She was a hard worker, and cared about making good grades. She said that she had a wide interest in what she needed to learn, believing that being involved in the reading-to-writing task would help her learn writing in English.

A quick-witted, sensitive, and confident individual, Ivan was particularly an English enthusiast, spending most of his time in studying English. It was obligatory for him to have a very good command of English to be admitted by the Department of Foreign Languages. He enjoyed the cross-cultural relationship with girls from other countries.

3.2 Text Selection

All three students chose literary texts from the Heinemann ELT Guided Readers Series, according to either their own interest or language proficiency levels. Annie chose an elementary work, "*A Christmas Carol,*" written by Charles Dickens at a 1200-vocabulary level. Tiffany chose a beginner's work, Nick McIver's love story, "*Dear Jan…,*" with a 600-basic word vocabulary level. Ivan, a higher proficiency learner, chose "*Wuthering Heights*" written by Emily Bronte, with a 2000 word vocabulary range.

3.3 Procedures

In this 8-week study, the students had to read the text they chose and then write a piece of creative writing in English. They

were free to write what they wished, for instance, a continuation of the story, a change of ending, or a rewrite of the story, with at least two pages in length. In the present study, reading was done outside of the classroom in the students' free time to ensure a tension-free environment. Brainstorming writing within limited time was challenging to the beginning writers. It was assumed that the simplified texts could be the blueprints for writing (Rosenblatt 1985) and made the participants write with less pressure..

This study adopted Murdoch's "categories for text analysis" which includes (1) plot and suspense, (2) characters and relationships, (3) major theme, (4) the method the writer uses to communicate his/her attitudes, (5) reader's response (Murdoch, 1992). Murdoch's (1992) categories made students aware of the relationship between the reader and writer.

Additionally, one-to-one conferences were conducted for comprehension problems and response sharing, guiding the subjects to understand a literary work. During the 8-week period, each student was assigned 6 sessions of one-to-one conferences with the teacher, with one and a half hours each time. For the first three weeks, the conference focused on the grammar, vocabulary and comprehension problems, together with the guided categories of text analysis. During the teacher-student conference, the teacher sought to ensure (1) if the students could readily follow and sequence the events, (2) if they could grasp the basic plot structure, and (3) if they were alert to the way the writer created suspense. The students' attention was also guided to analyze the roles of the different characters and their relationship to one another, and to identify the main themes of the story, and so on. Each student read his or her own book and kept notes in any format he or she liked. The intention was to help them recall details when they started to write.

To support the students' engagement with the story, a reader-response prompt with questions shown below was given to each student for the discussion on the fourth week. They were requested to respond to the questions on the prompts and write a short essay in 100 to 150 words for each question for discussion

on the fourth week. This was considered to help the students construct meaning from the text by rethinking the plot, characters and themes in a more critical way. Those prompts, guiding the students' thinking after they read, are listed as follows:

1. Which characters do you like / dislike most? Why or why not?
2. Do you share any feelings of characters in the story? Explain.
3. What does this story (characters, incidents, or ideas) remind you of in your own life?

From the fifth week, the students started to write. They planned their stories based on the framework they had chosen. During this stage, they were allowed to meet the teacher any time for their writing problems, in addition to the one-to-one conference for revision and informal interviews.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

This study examines the students' creative writing and written entries collected from the one-to-one conferences. The written entries included the responses to the four reader-response prompts. To find the effects of reading the literary works, the results of the informal interviews also served as data sources.

The data analysis first focused on how students transferred words, contents, and structures from their reading to their writing and then examined how the students were transformed by the text in terms of personal reflections on sharing and evaluating their feelings towards the characters and plots in the stories.

To examine the transfer of vocabulary and structures from the reading texts, the repetitive comparisons between the students' creative writing and the texts were conducted. The students' self-reported use of words was required during the one-to-one conferences, thus facilitating the comparison processing. They circled the words they borrowed from the stories for writing and underlined the words they looked up in the dictionary. The repetitive comparisons also involved examining the rules and structures (e.g., use of title, the use of the first or third person) in the students' writing and the reading texts. The

similarities revealed in the comparisons were marked for further analysis.

Two raters analyzed the students' responses to the reader-response prompt, following the process of qualitative analysis which involves identifying, coding and categorizing (Patton 1990). The analysis centered on the descriptions of the students' preference to the characters, feelings shared with the characters in the story and personal reflections on their own experiences. The researcher examined the collected written entries, marking and listing the needed results. Another teacher scrutinized the first results and provide questions for further examination. All the responses could be written in either Chinese or English. Then the data were translated into English for a consistent use of language use in this paper. The English version of response was reconfirmed with the students to avoid misunderstanding. The researcher and the teacher compared the Chinese and English versions to reconfirm that these data were examined and compared several times before final conclusions were drawn. The major themes emerged from the analysis for discussion.

The interview data were recorded, transcribed and analyzed following the procedures as described above.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented as (4.1) *Results from the Written Production Entries,* including the students' creative writing (4.1.1 & 4.1.2) and the responses to the reader-response prompt (4.1.3), as well as (4.2) *Results from the Interviews.*

4.1 Results from the Written Production Entries

The findings showed in the participants' written production entries are categorized and discussed as follows.

4.1.1 Evidence of Vocabulary Use, Transfer of Rules and Structures from the Text

Each participant finished reading his or her own chosen story and then wrote creatively based on the story he or she read.

Some of the words they used were borrowed from the simplified version of one work they chose to read. Most of them were looked up in the dictionary when they found it necessary to describe the feelings of the characters and the major theme.

Annie wrote a seven-page (single space typing) continuous story, reacting to the story about a cold, hard man, Scrooge. Annie hoped to create a changed character, by using compound words such as "love-giving," "heart-warming," "the orphanage administrator," etc. Annie wrote a Chinese version before looking up the words she needed to translate her story.

Tiffany chose a very beginning-level book with a cliché love story but she managed to rewrite the plain ending into a more intricate denouement. In her three-page story (single space typing), she used several words and compound sentences beyond her current proficiency level. Tiffany borrowed the verb "arrange" in the story and expanded her vocabulary use into the phrase "burst into tears" and "with tears flooding down his face" by looking up the dictionary reading for "tear" intending to describe a character's reactions toward an arranged marriage. Tiffany also asked the researcher for help during the one-to-one conference for more descriptive vocabulary for her characters, such as "a look of desperation," and "in desperation." She employed the new words to describe the character's emotional reaction.

Some of the excerpts indicating the expansion of vocabulary are as follows.

> "Ruth <u>burst into tears</u> when she knew she would be <u>arranged</u> to marry a man she doesn't love (*sic*)."
> "Ruth screamed <u>hysterically</u> when she was lost <u>in desperation</u> (*sic*)."
> "Ruth's father rushed to the airport only to see his daughter leaving. He stood there with <u>a look of desperation </u>in his eyes and <u>with tears flooding down his face</u>."

Ivan finished his story in (single space typing) fifteen pages. He demonstrated a great potential to be a fluent and efficient reader and writer. One possible reason might be that he was

exposed to English by devoting himself to studying English most of time, as described in the previous section. Compared with the other two participants, he used more adverbs and adjectives to describe his intricate plot, such as "disapprovingly," "admirable," "unbearable, and "obedient," etc., which made his sentences more complex. A learner's language proficiency might be a factor that influences the use of words and sentence structures in writing. In this study, the three participants chose the texts with different difficulty levels; therefore, it was difficult to compare the use of sentence structures in their creative writing. However, the reading texts they chose indicate different difficult levels with different vocabulary sizes. in this case, we might claim that reading served not only as a stimulus for expansion of ideas but also as a linguistic model for the use of words and sentence structures. This finding lends support to Eckhoff's (1984) which indicated learners who read stories with more complex patterns use more complex structures in his writing.

There is more evidence indicating learners transfer words from the reading to use in writing. Table 1 presents sample vocabulary used in the student writers' creative writings.

Table 1: Vocabulary in the Student Writers' Creative Writing

	Words in reading*	New words expanded from reading**
Annie	*A hard man (p.1); clerk (p.2); shut (p.5); sat down by the fire (p. 5); put an arm around him (p.13); round the fire (p.29); watch with open eyes (p.21); cold money-lover (p.22)*	*Continuation; orphanage; wooden crutch; creak; destination; administration; mean; miserable; knock; allocated; urged; sobbed; flowing; leant; departed; rush; distributed*
Tiffany	*Lonely (p.10); repeated (p. 10); notice (p.11); knocked on the door (p. 17); lay on her bed (p. 20); shouted (p. 20); run upstairs (p. 20); miserable (p.22); hall (p. 22); leant out of the window (p. 24)*	*Armchair, response; tragedy; sob; scream; allow; force; disappear; reluctantly; hysterically; inquisitively; deep in though; burst into tears; in a fit of panic*
Ivan	*Evil-looking (p.2); admit (p.3) remark (p.3); Admirable (p.5); fiercely (p.5); with a trembling lip (p. 30) ;remained unconscious of (p.41); look scornfully at (p. 45); consciousness (p.63); grief (p.63); obedient (p. 124); disapprovingly (p. 127); ashamed of (p. 128); unbearable (p. 141); came unexpectedly (p. 122, 126)*	*Successor; consciousness; appearance; treatment; governed; depart; escape; inherited; mention; prohibited; betray; persuaded; convince; retorted; immigrated; promised; bullied; disobey; fantastic; splendid; unfair; rational*

*"Words in reading" refers to the words shown in the reading texts, but borrowed by the student writers in their creative stories. Annie chose, *"A Christmas Carol,"* written by Charles Dickens; Tiffany, *"Dear Jan…,"* by Nick McIver; Ivan *"Wuthering Heights"* by Emily Bronte. Page numbers indicate where these words appear in each of the reading texts.

** "Words expanded from reading" refers to the words the student writers looked up in a dictionary to describe the characters and themes in their creative stories.

With regards to the text structure, the three participants transferred certain characteristics of the passages they had been reading (Eckhoff, 1984). They demonstrated in their writing a transfer of story structure from the reading text in the use of title, person, and dialogue, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Transfer of Story Structures from the Reading Texts

	Title		Person		Dialogue	
	Reading Text	Creative writing	Reading Text	Creative writing	Reading Text	Creative writing
Annie	v	v	3rd	3rd	v	v
Tiffany	v	v	3rd	3rd	v	v
Ivan	v	x	1st	1st	v	v

For example, Annie started with one chapter followed by another chapter with a title, respectively. Her first chapter was titled as, "A Brand New Life," followed by "The Little Angels," "The Very Miserable Thing," "A Surprised Visitor," and ended with "A Plan." It might be possible that she created her own story following the structure in the story she chose. Moreover, as the narrator did in *A Christmas Carol*, Annie adopted the third person to begin her creative story and introduced the main character Scrooge. In each chapter, she began with a short introduction followed by dialogues between characters. It indicated a transfer of the story structure from the text she chose.

In contrast, Ivan introduced each chapter without a title, although *Wuthering Heights* begins its chapters with titles. A possible explanation might be that his story was structured with a

sequence of time rather than with a topic or event. However, it seems that Ivan followed the structure in *Wuthering Heights* by introducing the setting and background as Bronte did. Additionally, like *Wuthering Height, Ivan* began his creative story directly with a first person narrative, the servant who took care of one boy and one girl. The use of dialogues also demonstrated a transfer of story structure from the text he chose.

Tiffany rewrote the ending of the reading text with "A Different Ending." She didn't structure her story with several sections due to the reason that she focused on the ending instead of some other plots. Tiffany adopted the third person to tell her story as the original story did. The dialogue-driven style in her creative writing demonstrated the influence from the original story. In her creative writing revealed a large amount of dialogue as similarly employed by the author of the original literary work. In this way, literature benefits students in developing linguistic knowledge, both on a usage level and a use level (Mckay 1987).

These findings lend support to previous research by Noyce and Christie (1989), and Butler and Turbill (1984), showing that reading texts can be more than a stimulus for writing. It also acquaints students with the rules and characteristics of skilled writing. As Smith (1983) proposed, a reader will be subconsciously sensitive to the style and mechanics of the reading text, and unconsciously acquire the rules and conventions of writing while reading. Through "interactive discourse," the reader's attention is called to particular story elements of setting, characters, plot and style and "he or she reads like a writer" (Corden 2000). In this study, each of the participants' attention was called to the dialogue-driven style in the reading text and presented his or her story with dialogues. Tiffany particularly paid her attention to Ruth's emotional reaction toward love and rewrote a different ending for her. Ivan focused his attention on Heathcliff's rage and revenge on his enemy's family. He structured his creative story by describing the complicated relationship between a Taiwanese orphan Te and two families, the Maruyamas and the Suzukis.

4.1.2 Literature As Imaginative World

Another finding from the students' written production was that the students, by using their own imagination, involved themselves with the character's world in the story. Students showed that reading the simplified literature text helpful as they made connections between the reading text and their creative writing. Annie wrote a continuation of the ending for the original story, *An Christmas Carol*, in which Scrooge, a rich but mean old man, changed his attitudes toward his own life and people around him after four ghosts visited him on Christmas Eve. In Annie's continuation of the original story, Annie described Scrooge as a kind man who visited his employee's house and the orphanage to show his kindness and care. She imagined that both Scrooge's sister and the orphanage administrator died and came to visit him in his dream. Instead of frightening Scrooge as the four ghosts did in the original story, the two visitors in the continuation of the story came as angels urging Scrooge to help the poor.

Tiffany, in her love story, rewrote the clichéd and plain ending into a different one. Instead of accepting the arranged marriage, the character Ruth became a brave girl who chose her true love. Tiffany designed more intricate plots, including more detailed illustration. She imagined Ruth sitting in deep thought, bursting into tears when informed about the arranged marriage, and screaming hysterically. Furthermore she described Mommy's dream and secret arrangement, the sad departure of Ruth and finally, at the airport, a sad father with a look of desperation in the eyes and with tears flooding down his face. Based on the original story, Tiffany expanded and visualized her ideas in a deliberate way.

Ivan created a more complicated plot for his story. He adapted the story from the original text, the *Wuthering Heights,* but moved the setting from England to Taiwan during the period of Japanese colonization. All the characters belonged to two Japanese families. The student, imagining himself as an adopted orphan, could see in the literary situation some analogy to his own problems---an entangled relationship with his Japanese girl friend in the real world. There is obvious evidence that reading

literature may promote our students' own creativity (Mckay, 1987).

As this research has indicated, literature offers opportunities for personally gratifying experience through the use of ones' imagination, participation in vicarious experiences of adventure, and involvement with human behaviors in many different situations (Barton & Booth 1990). The reader needs not have lived with the Earnshaws and the Lintons in *Wuthering Heights* to experience the sufferings of the two unfortunate families. By interacting, and transacting with the reading text, the students came to the world in which the characters existed.

The major theme emerged from the students' reflections in responding to the reader-response prompt is as followed in 4.1.3.

4.1.3 Literature As Vicarious Experience for Personal Growth and Evaluation of Value

In responding to the second prompt question "Do you share any of the feelings of the characters in this story?" Annie wrote:[4]

> *"I can feel how happy Scrooge is when he was surrounded by a group of orphans. He never cared the poor people before. Scrooge changed from a mean, unkind and unhappy man into a man who showed love to people around him. I think he must feel happiness he never experienced before (sic)." (Annie, A Christmas Carol)*

> *"Scrooge was too stingy before. He should be nice to Bob, because he is a boss. Bob has five kids and is a poor man. I think Scrooge can finally understand that money can not bring him happy. For me, I found I was a stingy person too. I found I am too mean to my younger brother. Maybe I need to be nice to my brother. I think help others make us happy (sic)." (Annie, A*

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[4] The responses could be written in Chinese if the students found it difficult to express in English. During the one-to-one conference, the instructor clarified the sentences and helped translate them into English without changing the original meaning. The English translation

Christmas Carol)

"I think people should choose their true love. It is stupid to get married just because the man is rich. We know the cases from many movie stars or TV actresses who marry with a rich family. They usually have a unhappy marriage. They divorced finally (sic)." (Tiffany, Dear Jan…)

"Well, Ruth is a brave girl who chose her true love. But, I am not sure whether or not I can do so if I meet the same problems. I'm afraid I will hurt my parents (sic)" (Tiffany, Dear Jan…)

"I feel sympathy for Heathcliff, the center character in this story. From childhood on, he was planning revenge. How terrible!   But in some way, I can understand why he did the revenge because his heart is filled with hatred.   I remember when my father died, my aunt didn't want to lend money to my family. At that time, I hated my aunt and even people around me. I still can recall the hatred in my mind (sic)." (Ivan, Wuthering Heights)

Ivan's response to the whole story was particularly in-depth. His responses implicitly reflected his life experience and personal growth. *He wrote:*

"In fact, I chose this book, Wuthering Heights, because the characters and their individual personality strongly touch my heart. They become what they are like because they came from different living backgrounds. Think of Cathy Linton and Hareton Earnshaws… Their childhood is different. The childhood and their family backgrounds affect their   personality (sic)." (Ivan, Wuthering Heights)

In the study, the students encounter the values the characters live by. Annie and Tiffany judged the characters' behaviors and

furthermore compared those behaviors with theirs in the real life. Through sharing and evaluating different images of life, each student reader felt sympathy and antipathy for persons quite different from himself or herself and built his or her own sense of values. Annie, for example, was able to experience vicariously the emotion of Scrooge and compared these experiences with hers, recalling she shouldn't have been mean to her brother. Tiffany reflected back her own feelings when compared with Ruth in the story. Ivan expressed his feeling "How terrible!" to show his reaction to the character's method of revenge. Through reading the literary work, he was offered a chance to evaluate moral values. Based on his own experience in childhood, Ivan was able to understand what the main character Heathcliff faces by sharing Heathcliff's problems and showing his concerns. He helped formulate reasons for their personal dilemmas of one character: the upbringing of each affects their characters. In this case, literature, as vicarious experience, can reveal the significance of our emotion and actions, and self-understanding (Loban et al. 1961).

4.2 Results from the Interviews[5]

Three major themes were identified from the interview data, as shown in 4.2.1, 4.2.2, and 4.2.3.

4.2.1 Literary Work Serves As a Resource for What to Write.

To further understand the students' reaction to the reading-to-writing activity, informal interviews were conducted at the end of the study. When asked what benefit they gained from reading a literary work, all the participants said that the literary work had served as a resource for what they had to write. They also responded that for them, the reading-to-writing activity was meaningful because they were able to find something to write. They also found it helpful as they made connections to ideas and

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[2] All quotations are presented in English for a consistent use of the language use in this paper, although the interviews were conducted and transcribed in Chinese. The English version of transcript was reconfirmed with the students in order not to change their original meaning.

themes expressed in what they read.

> *"I've never believed that I can write so much. You know….I often write one or two sentences and I just stop there without any idea to write…" (Tiffany)*
>
> *"When I read the story, I couldn't t help but have something to say. So many characters, so many things happen…I found there was a lot in my mind." (Annie)*
>
> *"You didn't tell me how many pages I needed to write. In the beginning, I doubt I could write. But, when I started to write, I was caught by the intricate plot and setting. Wow…I kept on reading and found more to write. It is not difficult to write a story based on a novel." (Ivan)*

Additionally, they realized that the act of writing is thinking about reading which in turn produces writing. As the above statements, they were amazed with their written production as this was their first experience of writing formally and at length.

4.2.2 The Literature Work Helps the Students Become More Reflective and More Perceptive.

With regards to the question of if they had learned something from the text they had read, the students claimed that they had become more reflective about their ideas and more perceptive about the people or events around them. When asked if they were willing to read more, the answers were all positive. They have ordered further copies of same simplified novels for the coming summer vacation. Annie promised to write another story for the text she would read.

4.2.3 The Use of Simplified Literature Text Motives the Learners To Read and Write.

The students reported that reading the simplified novels was much more interesting than reading other genres of text such as the expository text. They enjoyed learning language in the way they did in this study. They suggested the instructor use the short stories in class instead of the traditional expository texts in the

reading textbooks for ESL or EFL learners.

> *"I'm okay with any materials you brought into the class. But, if you let us read the short stories, there will be fewer classmates sleeping in class. We can also discuss the story and the characters, and try to solve the problems the characters meet." (Tiffany)*
>
> *"I hope you can let us read the novels like this. I love story and would like to read more. I found it easier and more fun to learn and use the vocabulary in the story." (Annie)*
>
> *"To tell the truth, reading novels is more interesting than reading the other articles you provided us in class. I hate the way that we went over the article and then had to remember the vocabulary. It's more exciting to read the story and immerse myself in the world which the characters are in." (Ivan)*

5. CONCLUSIONS, CLASSROOM IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

Underpinned by the Reading-to-Writing Model (Corden 2000; Smith 1983)**,** this study aimed to investigate whether it is possible to encourage non-English major student writers at a technical college by guiding them to read simplified literary work and produce creative writing in responding to the text. It also sought to examine how reading literature work has an impact on the non-English learners, based on the theories of reader response (Rosenblatt 1985) and constructivism (Brooks & Brooks 1993).

This study adopted guided categories for text analysis to help beginning EFL literature readers become involved in the plot, characters' relationships, major themes, reader's responses and so on. The results indicate that reading the simplified literary works can not only be a stimulus for creative writing, but also acquaint students with the use of words, as well as the rules. Additionally, the students also became aware of the text structure, the skills and characteristics the author deliberately used to begin the story and then subconsciously transferred them to their own writing, as described in 4.1.1.

Evidence for this transformation can be seen in the three students' pages of creative writing, within which the students transferred the imaginative energy from the literary text (4.1.2). That is, literature can be a stimulus to spur readers' imaginative writing (McKay 1987). Thus, in EFL learning, reading literature may promote the students' creativity. These findings in this present study are consistent with those from previous studies (Noyce & Christie 1989; Butler & Turbill 1984), proposing that literature is not separable from language learning.

Moreover, as shown in the findings (4.1.3), literature presents a wealth of vicarious experiences for readers (Murdoch 1992). In this study, literary text offered students opportunities to experience vicariously the actions and emotions of the characters in the reading text. The participants compared and contrasted these experiences with their own and showed their responses to what they read and felt. In this way, a literary work can be vicarious experience providing students important insights about themselves and the world around them. Through the guided reading of literature, they were able to experience vicariously the actions and emotions of the characters in the story and shared their problems and concerns.

The results of this study implied that EFL students have to learn to read beyond the words and beginning EFL readers need guidance from the teacher. They can read the simplified literary texts assigned by their teacher or bring their own for story sharing with the other learners. What the teacher does is to bridge the gap whenever student readers meet difficulties in understanding the text. The teacher then comments on the story's organization, the characters, and the plot. The world of students and the world of the novel will be connected, too. Thus, the classroom discussions help to develop the reflective thought processes and writing skills in the students. Also, through more access to literary works and evaluating different modes of construct, students gain valuable experience to deepen and expand their consciousness of the richness of life.

The study shows positive results with the non-English-major students in term of their linguistic development and personal

growth. However, this study was confined to just three students, and they were all volunteers with high learning motivation. The results are unknown if in implementing the same task with other non-English majors with poorer academic achievement and low motivation toward language learning. It is worth further study to investigate whether the other beginning level readers, particularly those with low motivation and low proficiency level, can be motivated by the literary texts and write as the three participants in the study did. It would be a valuable contribution in English learning and teaching if using simplified literature works can greatly motivate the less able students to read and write.

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