(Re)Learning to Read

Teaching with Literature in the Novice and Intermediate Level Italian Classroom

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INTRODUCTION

In a review of the professional literature from the early 1990s to present, it is clear that the question is no longer *if* literature should play a role in L2 pedagogy, but instead *what type* of literature, *how* much, and *when* and *how* to best introduce it in the L2 classroom. Many questions have been raised by educators over the past two to three decades. How can teaching literature contribute to the development of L2 communicative competence? To what extent can learners effectively engage with literature in the L2? In what way can literature be used to create meaningful language (and life) experiences? As we reflect on the challenges our students face as they attempt to engage more fully with their study of Italian, yet another question comes to mind: Why is it that students today (members of the so-called Google generation) are having so much trouble learning to read in the L2? Is it because they do not set aside enough time to read? Or is it because we are living in a constant state of disrupted concentration? Have students become so indoctrinated in a world where reading refers to tweets, texts, Snapchat posts, and online articles with hyperlinks that they never learned how to read deeply (in any language) and become personally engaged with a text?

Definitions of reading abound. One that correlates to the above questions regarding the role of reading in the lives of our students comes from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): "Much more than decoding and literal comprehension, reading involves understanding and reflection, and the ability to use reading to fulfill one's goals in life … to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (26). This definition of reading correlates to one of the many goals of a liberal arts education: that of producing graduates whose ability to interpret cultural expression affects their ability to contribute to

society as a whole. Many university students do not yet know what their life goals are, nor are they sure how they will actively participate in society upon leaving the bubble that characterizes the four years of their college experience. However, this definition perhaps resonates well with us as instructors as a way to connect to the meta-goal of many a course: what do we want you, the student, to get out of this course? The OECD definition also ties nicely to Louise M. Rosenblatt's definition of two different types of reading, which she defines in her 1978 publication, *The reader, the text, the poem*. In her writing, Rosenblatt differentiates between what she refers to as "efferent reading" and "aesthetic reading." In efferent reading, "the reader's attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue *after* the reading," the take-away message, whether it be practical information, solutions to a problem, or instructions to follow; conversely, in aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is focused inward, "on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (25). Aesthetic reading taps into a reader's sentiment, attitude, and ideas. More than a simple perusal of a text, it is a deep reading that involves contemplation, transaction between reader and text, and an awareness of both text and lived experience.

As language teachers, we are all too well aware of the first impulse of many L2 learners to try to read every text efferently, especially in the age of the Google generation. The learner keeps an online dictionary open alongside the text, translates entire sentences at a time using an online translator, reads word to word and becomes caught up in grammar and vocabulary comprehension in an attempt to "understand," all the while missing the point and eventually emerging frustrated. Reading aesthetically in the L2 is certainly a difficult and perhaps impossible challenge in the novice and intermediate years of language study, yet this type of reading can have great value for students. Aesthetic reading encourages knowledge *of* literature and not just *about* it, is a skill that, once acquired, is more apt to result in a pleasurable reading experience, and it falls into the category of the "personal growth model" as defined by Carter and Long (see Carter and Long 1991, chapter 1 for further discussion of these points).

As Claire Kramsch eloquently sums up, readers must "distance them-selves from their native culture and the educational discourse with which they are familiar. [This] requires a gradual move from communicative to cross-cultural activities, from discourse to metadiscourse and aesthetic reflection.… Through dialogue and each other's understanding, each per-son tries to see the world through the other's eyes without losing sight of him or herself" (231). Although these are lofty aspirations for an L2 stu-dent, certainly they are worth striving toward, for isn't this the hope of any L2 learner, to be able to "see the world through the other's eyes with-out losing sight of him or herself," to embrace cross-cultural competence and to understand, perhaps even to feel accepted into another culture?

THE GOOGLE GENERATION

In order to even attempt aesthetic reading, students must strive to let go of their instinct to translate every word; they must attempt to interact with the text even from the novice level, and to try, when possible, to read between the lines and comprehend the implicitness of a text. In short, members of the Google generation must reject their natural in-stincts when they encounter a literary text. Today's teenager has grown up in a "permanent state of distractedness," a state in which at any one moment, multiple factors compete for time and attention. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics time use survey, American teenagers spend an average of over 15 hours per day on personal care and leisure (includ-ing sleep), and less than four hours per day on "educational activities," which includes classroom time and study time (Bureau of Labor Statis-tics). The median number of text messages sent per day by teens was 100 in the year 2011; today's teen lives in a world of non-stop texting, thanks to social media services such as Snapchat and Instagram (Lenhart 2). Re-search done over the past 10 years shows that, not surprisingly, rather than encouraging in-depth, concentrated reading, online reading encour-ages "power browsing" or "power scanning" (Carr 137). One study illus-trates that the dominant reading pattern of online readers as their eyes scan a screen is in an "F" shape – two horizontal movements and one ver-tical movement forming the general shape of the capital letter "F" (Niel-sen 1). Users do not read texts thoroughly; their eye movements concen-

trate on the first two paragraphs of text and the first words of subsequent paragraphs. While counter studies show that online reading does present advantages for a certain type of information seeking (and for older users), fluency in online reading handicaps today's students as they attempt in-depth, uninterrupted reading (see Champeau and Small et al. for counterargument).

THRESHOLD CONCEPT

A threshold concept is a tool that can help students understand how people think in a particular discipline. In their definition of threshold concept, Meyer and Land conclude that it can be considered "as akin to a portal, opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something," a type of transformative and irreversible "ah-ha moment" (2008). Notably, prior knowledge (in this case, the relationship that students of this generation have with reading) can hinder the passage from one side of this portal to another. As we assign literature readings and activities at the novice levels of L2 instruction, it is important to question: To what extent does this activity require (or assume) threshold knowledge? What knowledge do our students possess prior to embarking on this task, and what do we hope them to gain from it? As instructors, if we strive to define the threshold concept for each level of L2 study, we can better equip our students with the tools necessary to cross each threshold and to experience the transformative moment when they do.

VALUE OF AUTHENTIC TEXTS

A major challenge for any language teacher is that of authenticating the L2 learning experience. The language classroom, however stimulating, interactive, and engaging it may be, is ultimately an artificial rendering of another culture created, if the teacher is successful, in a limited block of time. Authentic texts are tools that can potentially transport students beyond the four walls of the classroom and a bit closer to the cultural and social norms and practices of the C2.

As defined by Purcell-Gates et al. (2006), authentic texts are "identical or very similar to those texts that occur in the lives of people outside of an instructional setting designed to teach reading and writing skills" (13).

The fewer skill books and the more *realia*, newspapers, journals, novels, poetry, and short stories incorporated into a course, the more highly authentic the course becomes. Studies done by Purcell-Gates et al. confirmed their interesting hypothesis: "the more authentic and real life the texts and purposes for reading […] the more the students will report change in their literacy practices outside of school" (143). By *literacy practices*, Purcell-Gates et al. refer to the "socioculturally related ways of using written language, [involving] values, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and social relationships" (32). Highly authentic texts can be beneficial to L2 students on more than just a linguistic level and can certainly transcend the medium of written language; the use of these texts can be constructive to students on a personal and sociocultural level as well (see McRae 1991 for a discussion on the definition of text).

In her work, Kramsch also grapples with the authenticity of texts and contexts, asking how, in the "artificial and standardized environment of a classroom," learners can have access to the central code of another culture (177). By central code, Kramsch is referring to Nostrand's definition (1989), whereby the central code consists of a culture's "system of major values, habitual patterns of thought, and certain prevalent assumptions about human nature and society which the foreigner should be prepared to encounter" (as quoted in Kramsch, 177; see Kramsch for additional discussion on cultural authenticity as a relational concept). Whether students are simply "prepared to encounter" or are able to understand and comprehend these systems depends on both the individual and on the linguistic and cultural preparation she or he has received prior to being exposed to the C2. In the framework describing the importance of the study of cultures as one of the 5Cs, or goal areas, of the World-Readiness Standards, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) highlights the learner's ability to "develop sensitivity to the perspectives, practices, and products of others" while remaining open to new possibilities as they seek to interact with cultural competence (62). Interaction with authentic texts is a means by which learners can begin to gain access to the central code of the C2, and strive toward cultural competence.

WHY LITERATURE?

A literary text must quite often be interpreted by the reader for hidden or implicit meaning. Tying back to the idea of aesthetic reading, this type of interaction with a literary text also requires that the reader "understand the silences" and pay attention not only to what is said, but what is left unsaid (Kramsch 128). Words that the author chooses to use in the text are important and weighty, but what about the words that are left unsaid, purposefully omitted? For an L2 reader, reading between the lines adds yet another layer of challenge to the task of aesthetic reading, for it is contingent on both a certain amount of understanding of the C2 and a sense of comfort with the L2. Linguistically, the ability to understand and also interpret what is unsaid encourages creativity of thought and, eventually, leads to a more natural style of speech in the L2 learner (Zingier 7). Culturally, while it is true that a missing frame of reference can lead to misunderstanding of the text on various levels (Kramsch 125), a text can also be an open window for a student learning about the C2. Comprehension is the first step toward interpretation. The latter implies the capacity to read between the lines; learners' ability to interpret a text is based on a "complex combination of the content and context of the message" and focuses on the "appropriate cultural interpretation of meanings that occur in written, spoken, or visual form where there is no recourse to the active negotiation of meaning with the writer, speaker, or producer of the message" (ACTFL 53). As language educators, we are constantly helping students make sense of what is implicit in a foreign language, both culturally and linguistically. Ask any language student what he or she strives for in the attempt to become bilingual and the answer will likely incorporate to some degree the desire to understand the nuances of both the second language and culture, and to be able to participate in natural and unscripted conversation about a variety of topics in the L2. Interaction with literature is but one of the means by which students can achieve these goals of literacy practice.

Literature not only also serves as a valuable source of language input for the L2 student but also serves as a valuable prompting mechanism to "stimulate students to discuss, share, and write," ultimately enriching student output (Chen 2006). Zyngier underscores the value of using liter-

ary texts as a means of "sensitizing students to the creative and pleasurable experience of reading and as a springboard to language manipulation, to an experience of alternative worlds and unexpected uses" of the L2 (10). In addition to the three major tendencies in the use of literature in language classes as outlined by Carter and Long in 1991 (cultural, language, and personal growth models), Zyngier adds a fourth model, a mixed one in which students examine the language of the text, compare it to other texts, and evaluate the text and its cultural implications according to their own cultural model. This approach essentially mirrors the language of ACTFL's description of the "Comparisons" standard, particularly the "cultural comparisons," which comprises one of the goal areas of the 5Cs.

> As learners expand their knowledge of cultures through language learning, they gain a deeper understanding of perspectives, practices, and products that are similar to and different from those in their own culture. […] Additionally, they learn to analyze and hypothesize about cultural systems in general and they develop a level of global awareness in which they become open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives (ACTFL 87).

Zyngier goes on to explain that in this way, "students would be working interculturally, bringing to consciousness the ideologies underpinning both the culture which produced the text and the reader's own forms of social behavior and interaction" (9). By engaging in cultural exchanges with a text, learners strive to understand to a greater extent their own culture, the culture of the L2, and the meaning of culture in an all-encompassing sense.

Finally, it is important to remember that just as there is no single type of text, there is no single type of reader. In Kramsch's view, an important argument for using literary texts in the L2 classroom is literature's "ability to represent the particular voice of a writer among the many voices of his or her community and thus appeal to the particular in the reader" (131). The student who is presented with a variety of authentic texts written by diverse authors will be more apt to feel a deeper connection to one of them, and in the process discover more about her or himself. It is per-

haps during this process that students can happen upon what Kramsch characterizes as a "third place;" a place inhabitable only by them, a place which represents neither their own culture nor the culture that they are studying (236). This concept ties to the original definition of reading presented in this article, whereby the reader is personally affected by what she or he is reading, takes part in understanding and reflection, and eventually arrives at the point where reading becomes fulfilling and life-enhancing.

USING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE L2 CLASSROOM

Recent publications focusing on the use of literature in the L2 classroom highlight children's and young adult literature, especially in the EFL classroom. The use of children's literature in the university classroom can be effective on many levels and illustrates "the broadening of the concept of literature to include nursery rhymes and children's books" (Paran 488). According to Chen (2006), children's literature fulfills three important factors that must be considered when selecting appropriate literature for the L2 classroom: language (natural), content (engaging), and length (short). Simple stories and recognizable plots incentive students to read (Swaffar 1992) and perhaps encourage aesthetic reading from the novice level. Coupled with a recent renewed interest in fairy tales in the media, student familiarity with the characters, plot, and contents of fables makes it an accessible and authentic genre.

Another consideration in the use of children's literature in the L2 classroom is the extent to which product-based and process-based teaching, or literature for study and literature for resource, can "complement each other as necessary continuities in the development of learning to read literature" (Carter and Long 1991 xxiii). The two approaches are not mutually exclusive. A teacher can use a fairy tale to both introduce students to the cultural and historical context of its publication, and as a resource for language development. Language-based, student centered activities (key components of process-based teaching) aim to invite students to converse with the text and overcome the tendency to see reading as one-way communication. Consequentially, language-based approaches often end up serving literary goals, even at the novice level. Students can

begin to understand that literature represents experience, can begin to situate the literature of the C2 in its cultural, historical, and societal context, and eventually connect personally to the experiences of the C2 through literature in the L2.

ITALIAN 101: BACK TO BASICS

During AY 2015/2016, faculty in our Italian Studies Program at Bucknell University noticed that students were experiencing progressively more difficulty reading in Italian; they were unable to experience a transformative moment because they seemed to lack the disciplinary tools required to undertake this new form of learning. Beginning in fall 2016, we chose to introduce reading workshops in both our Italian 101 and Italian 102 courses in an attempt to instill a culture of reading literacy in our students by teaching them how to read in Italian. A key component of these reading workshops is the definition: what am I, the instructor, looking for when I assign a reading? What is the threshold concept, or disciplinary tool, that is required of students so that they might succeed in this reading task? In Italian 101, the workshops introduce students to a step-by-step process in which they are encouraged to think about how they read in their first language as kindergarteners, and to apply the same tactics to their reading in Italian (see Appendix A for full instructions to students). In our courses, we use these workshops as a way to teach the short readings that appear at the conclusion of each chapter in the textbook *Parliamo italiano* (fifth edition), but the same approach could be applied to any authentic material (a poem, a song, an advertisement). Our workshops begins with an instruction as simple as, "read the title." What can the reader infer from the title? What is the reading about? After an initial skimming for general comprehension, students are asked to complete a second, closer reading of the text for deeper meaning. Often, the entire text is read aloud in class. As they complete the close reading, students are asked to write down the main idea and topic sentence of each paragraph, thereby producing a written outline of the reading. Students are encouraged not to read word by word, but rather sentence by sentence and eventually paragraph by paragraph; to identify cognates; to look up only a few key words in the dictionary; and to avoid online translating sites. These strat-

egies are tools that students can use to overcome their handicap as members of the Google generation and ones that, we hope, will direct them toward a more aesthetic reading practice in their subsequent semesters of language study.

ITALIAN 102: FAIRY TALES

The second semester Italian course at Bucknell University presents an ideal opportunity to introduce students to literature in Italian. Smaller class size (six to twelve students) allows for extended discourse (student-to-student, and student-to-faculty) during class. Since 2007, the fairy tale unit has been included in our second semester Italian class. The goal of the unit is to instill a culture of reading in our students from an early point and through an accessible genre. Within the parameters of improved communicative ability at this level, we observe improvements in all aspects of communication: written and spoken communication both at the interpersonal and presentational modes, and reading comprehension, both in terms of efferent and aesthetic reading. As shown in this study, additional positive outcomes of the literature unit are increased student creativity, increased student comfort level with reading in Italian, and increased student motivation to continue with their study of Italian.

In Italian 102, we have adopted the book *Fiabe in italiano* by Maria Cecilia Luise. Students are familiar with the characters, plot, and morals of the fairy tales we read as a class, the stories are short (700-800 words), and the selection of stories in this collection is varied. In the beginning of the fable unit, much of the teaching is process-based by necessity. Students in the course are still being introduced to basic grammar and vocabulary. While the dialogue in the stories can generally be described as "easy," the fables do present some challenges at the linguistic level: each fable introduces new vocabulary, and the stories are written in the historical past, or the *passato remoto*, a verb tense that beginning Italian students initially find (or fear they will find) challenging. The *passato remoto* is briefly introduced about one-third into the semester with a focus on the first and third persons (those most commonly used in stories).

In Italian 102, six class "experts" are assigned to guide small group discussion and in-class activities tied to each fable (experts are assigned

two days before the reading is due). The following activity is an example of in-class writing assignments used with *Cappuccetto Rosso*, in which each small group was guided by the expert.

Cappuccetto Rosso – riflessione

1. Perché si chiama Cappuccetto Rosso la protagonista?

2. Cosa dice la mamma quando Cappuccetto Rosso esce di casa?

3. Perché Cappuccetto Rosso va a trovare la nonna? Secondo te, cosa le porta per merenda?

4. Descrivi il bosco. Perché si ferma nel bosco Cappuccetto Rosso?

5. Secondo te, come sarà la casa della nonna?

6. Come si sente il lupo quando Cappuccetto Rosso arriva a casa della nonna?

7. Cappuccetto Rosso dice, "Nonna, che bocca grande hai." Cosa nota Cappuccetto Rosso nell'aspetto della "nonna"?

8. Leggeresti questa fiaba ai tuoi figli? Cosa imparano i bambini da questa fiaba?

Fiabe a rovescio (adapted from *Fiabe in italiano*, p. 15)

In questa fiaba Cappuccetto Rosso è una bambina buona. Inventa una fiaba intitolata, "Il feroce Cappuccetto Rosso, mangiatore di lupi, e il povero lupo buono." Com'è Cappuccetto Rosso? Com'è il lupo? Cosa succede nella tua fiaba?

In short, the fable unit provides a springboard for creative composition. Additional examples of creative exercises tied to the fable unit include: using costumes and props to act out scenes from the fable, reinventing the conclusion of a fable and describing it to the class, switching the characters and rewriting a scene from a fable, rewriting the fable in contemporary time. As a final project, students (in groups of three or four) compose an original fable in Italian. Students have use of costumes, props, and other *realia*, and are encouraged to showcase their own talents (they often sing, play instruments, or dance during the final fable presentation). They are asked to either rewrite an existing fable, changing the characters, setting, year, or moral, or to invent an original fable. Students are asked to include at least one reference to Italian culture in their fable. These activities correlate to the sample progress indicator for the intermediate lev-

el according to ACTFL guidelines, whereby learners "dramatize short plays, original skits, recite selected poems and anecdotes, and perform songs in the language for a school-related event" (59).

ITALIAN 103: *LE AVVENTURE DI PINOCCHIO*

The third semester Italian course at Bucknell University, while similar in size and structure to the second semester course, is the level which pushes students to begin to make the leap from novice-level learners toward intermediate-level learners (according to the ACTFL proficiency scale). This is also a time when we see students become increasingly invested in the study of Italian and often decide to pursue a major or a minor in Italian Studies. The abridged version of Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* is our students' first introduction to Italian literature. The unit lasts three weeks, and students are asked to read one chapter (about eight pages) in preparation for each class session. *Le avventure di Pinocchio* introduces students to the concept of product-based learning (literature for study) while adhering to the guidelines of process-based learning. The instructor aims at contextualizing the novel so that students can grasp how its publication relates to the time period in Italian history in which it was written. In reading their first novel in Italian, our hope is that our students might begin to move toward reading aesthetically. Students are also introduced to language play through their study of *Pinocchio*, as Collodi often employs the use of puns, metaphors, similes and irony. While students at first skip over any sense of playfulness and irony in Collodi's writing, once they are aware of the author's use of language they begin to have more meaningful interactions with the written word.

Much of the class time dedicated to *Le avventure di Pinocchio* revolves around discussion and reflection, short writing-to-learn exercises, and interpretation of language at the textual level. At the conclusion of the unit, students write a 500-word essay in which they are asked to reflect upon a theme presented in the novel (i.e., the relationship between fiction and reality, the narrative function of animals in Collodi's text, good versus bad behavior, the novel's pedagogical value).
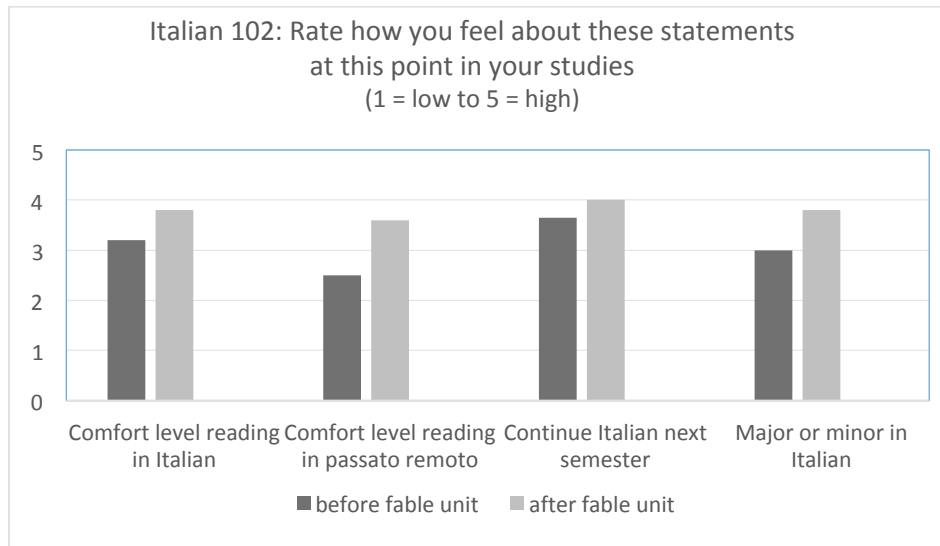
OBSERVATIONS

Students enrolled in both Italian 101 and Italian 102 were asked to complete two surveys, one prior to the literature unit and one at the conclusion of the unit (see Appendix B). Both groups of students involved in this study (Italian 102, spring 2017, and Italian 103, fall 2017) had participated in reading workshops in Italian 101. While self-reporting cannot be considered a direct assessment of course outcomes, the results of the surveys illustrate student perception of the outcome of the unit in relation to the course goals. Student responses in the surveys reflect their belief that the literature unit had a positive effect on their learning throughout the semester, and responses showed positive trends for the aftermath of the course. When asked at the beginning of a reading workshop how long they believe that a typical novice-level reading will take (four short paragraphs one month into language study), many students replied, "one to two hours." When students realized that they could read, understand, and interact with the text after twenty to thirty minutes of concentrated study, they felt empowered and less fearful of the task at hand. While not every student felt more comfortable reading in Italian after the literature unit, many did, and others felt the same as they had prior to the unit (no student felt less comfortable reading in Italian). One can imply from the results of these surveys that some students are at least moving toward a more aesthetic mode of reading, and that for some, reading in the L2 might be becoming more pleasurable.

ITALIAN 102, SPRING 2017

The class size of Italian 102 in spring 2017 was twenty students. As a class, when asked how they felt about reading in their first language, the average response was just over four on a scale from one (very negative) to five (very positive). This result would indicate a class of students who are more positively inclined, on average, toward reading in their first language. Both before and after the fable unit, students were asked how they felt about reading in Italian, how they felt about reading in the *passato remoto*, how likely they were to continue taking Italian the following semester, and how likely they were to major or minor in Italian Studies. As seen

in the results in Table 1, the general trend for all questions was that the responses improved after the fable unit (increased comfort level reading in Italian and heightened interest in continuing with language study).

TABLE 1

Italian 102: Rate how you feel about these statements
at this point in your studies
(1 = low to 5 = high)

Twelve out of twenty students felt that the fable unit helped improved their writing skills in Italian, and when asked to name their favorite writing activity associated with the unit, ten out of twenty students responded "writing the original fable."

When asked to name the most challenging aspect of unit, students responded: "reading vocabulary I didn't know," "understanding the meaning without actually translating," "understanding and learning the *passato remoto*," and "memorizing the skit." Three students felt that the most challenging part was writing their own fable. When asked to name the aspect of the unit that came most naturally, two students mentioned class discussions, while ten students responded that a "broad or general understanding of the storyline of the fables" was most natural since they had read the fables in their first language. Notably, when asked to consider their challenges during the fable unit, students focused on tasks associated with process-based learning and decoding, while many of them pointed to a characteristic associated with aesthetic reading as one of their successes. When asked if the unit had changed how they felt about read-

ing in general, one student mentioned understanding how much harder it is to learn to read in a second language, one student mentioned realizing how much he/she had learned, two students stated that they "feel a little bit more comfortable" reading in Italian, six students commented that they "feel more confident reading and understanding concepts in Italian," and ten students commented that the unit did not change how they felt about reading in general. When asked to imagine how they would feel if while in Italy an Italian student approached them and began to discuss Italian fables with them, the most common adjectives students used were: *interested*, *nervous*, *confused*, *excited*. Finally, when asked to list their life goals, eight out of twenty students mentioned "travel / love of languages / become fluent in a language" as a lifelong goal.
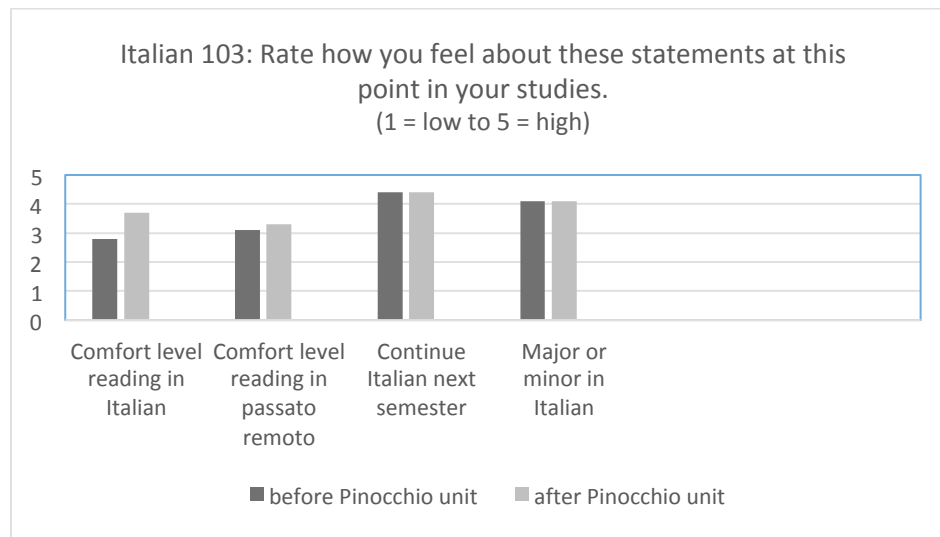
Student comprehension of the *passato remoto* was tested with one grammar exercise on the Italian 102 final exam. While a final exam presents only a limited source for measuring students' proficiency gains, the results were as follows: the average score on the *passato remoto* exercise (recognizing the verb form) was 78%, and the average grade on the final exam was 93%. This result maps to student self-assessment that one of the more challenging aspects of the fable unit was "understanding and learning the *passato remoto*." Students were encouraged to use the *passato remoto* when applicable in their original skits (i.e., when the narrator spoke), but the instructor noted that this use was neither consistent nor accurate. However, the instructor did notice that students made strides in spoken communication at the presentational level when considering the overall success of the original skit (writing, memorization, and performance).

ITALIAN 103, FALL 2017

In fall of 2017, we tracked the progress in strides made toward aesthetic reading of Italian 103 students. This was the first group of students that had taken part in the reading workshops in Italian 101 (in fall 2016). As in Italian 102, students in Italian 103 were administered surveys before and after the reading unit. As in Italian 102, both before and after the *Pinocchio* unit, students were asked how they felt about reading in Italian, how they felt about reading in the *passato remoto*, how likely they were to continue taking Italian the following semester, and how likely they were

to major or minor in Italian Studies. Again, while student self-reporting cannot be considered a direct assessment of course outcomes, we were pleased to see that responses to all questions either improved after the literature unit (increased comfort level reading in Italian and increased comfort level reading in *passato remoto*) or remained the same (interest in continuing with language study and interest in majoring or minoring in Italian).

TABLE 2

Italian 103: Rate how you feel about these statements at this point in your studies.
(1 = low to 5 = high)

	Comfort level reading in Italian	Comfort level reading in passato remoto	Continue Italian next semester	Major or minor in Italian
before Pinocchio unit				
after Pinocchio unit				

When asked to name the most challenging aspect of unit, students responded: getting used to the *passato remoto*, moving at a fast pace, and understanding the specific details of each chapter. A number of students mentioned the difficulty of not being able to understand the details of the book:

> "The most challenging part was the frustration I felt from not being able to understand all of the details of the book."
> "The oral exam was difficult because, although I felt I was very aware of the major points and arguments, it made me realize I lacked specific details about chapters."

About one third of students surveyed responded that the easiest part of the unit was participating in class discussions about the novel.

When asked if the unit had changed how they felt about reading in general, one student commented that if he/she put effort into the reading, he/she could understand it very well, one student stated that it helped his/her reading skills by practicing without a dictionary, eight students commented that it helped them feel more comfortable or confident as a reader, and one student said, "I am not as reluctant to read in Italian, but I still have a very long way to go before I am comfortable." One student reflected that reading *Le avventure di Pinocchio* was fun and helped expand his/her vocabulary. Two students commented that the unit did not change how they felt about reading in general. When asked to imagine how they would feel if while in Italy an Italian student approached them and began to discuss the text *Le avventure di Pinocchio* with them, the most common adjectives students used were: *excited*, *nervous*, and *prepared.*

At Bucknell University, students in Italian 103 participate in an oral exam at the conclusion of the *Pinocchio* unit (with comprehension and reflection questions based on the book), using the presentational mode of speaking as defined by ACTFL. While we do not have official data on the results of this exam, the instructor noticed that during the exam some students began to show the leap between novice and intermediate-level speech, using "sentences and series of sentences" as opposed to "words, phrases, and sentences that have been practiced and memorized" (ACTFL 59).

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Given the challenges our current generation of students faces as they relate to reading in general, and more specifically to deep and reflective reading, future study in this area is timely. While in this particular study the instructor perceived improvement in the oral and written ability of the students throughout the semester in both Italian 102 and Italian 103, the question that arises is whether or not students' strides can be attributed to the literature unit alone, or to a combination of factors of which exposure to literature is one.

A future study might utilize a control group. A course such as Italian 102 at Bucknell University could be paired with a similar course at a similar institution in which students are not introduced to literature to com-

pare levels of student engagement, and student strides in both written and spoken Italian. Another suggestion for further study is to correlate student perception of life goals to their study of the L2. Additionally, further study is needed on the approach to teaching literature in the L1 to students of this generation.

CONCLUSION

As we endeavor to engage our students in their study of the L2 and encourage them to embrace the C2 from the distance of a traditional classroom, we should continue to look toward literature as a valuable source. Clearly, the study of literature offers unique benefits to language learning as early as the first semester of study. As multiple studies have shown, the study of literature can be motivating and engaging for students; it can encourage creative output; it can lead to a more natural style of speech; and it can open a window onto the C2. Furthermore, learning to understand and reflect upon a reading connects directly with the overall goals of a liberal arts education. A graduate who can relate to a text in a second or third language will be better prepared to utilize the crucial skill of cultural interpretation as she or he strives to become a member of our increasingly globalized society.

APPENDIX A
READING WORKSHOP GUIDELINES (ITALIAN 101)

General Instructions:

1. Take your time. Reading in Italian takes longer than reading in English.

2. Read the title of the text. Think: What is the text about?

3. Skim the whole text for the main idea.

4. Read the first paragraph sentence by sentence. Think about how you started reading in English when you were in kindergarten.

5. Try to answer the question: What is the main idea of the paragraph? If you can answer the question, write your answer down. If you can't answer, read the paragraph again.

6. Repeat steps 4-5 as you read the rest of the text.

Useful Tips:

• Don't read word by word, but sentence by sentence, and eventually paragraph by paragraph.

• Try to guess the general meaning of a text or a paragraph first. Then read the paragraph very slowly to get the details.

• You don't have to know every word to understand the meaning of a sentence or the main idea of a paragraph.

• Look for cognates (i.e., *penisola* = peninsula)

• You may want to look up a very limited number of key words with a dictionary.

Reading Exercise, La geografia del Bel Paese (*Parliamo italiano*, 5th edition, p. 54)

Test your skills with the short and informative reading at the end of *Unità 1*. After skimming each paragraph, write down the main idea (one or two words), and after the second reading, write down a topic sentence, which should summarize the paragraph.

APPENDIX B
SURVEYS (ITALIAN 102 AND ITALIAN 103)

ITAL 102 / 103 – Pre-literature unit survey

1. On a scale of 1 (I dislike it) to 5 (I love it), rate how you feel about reading in English (or your first language).

2. On a scale from 1 (very reluctant) to 5 (very excited), rate how you feel about reading in Italian at this point in your study of Italian.

3. When you read for pleasure in English (or your first language), what genre do you typically choose? (i.e., novel, newspaper, short story, poetry, comic book, online article) Why do you choose this genre?

4. What experience have you had reading in Italian up until this point? If you can remember what you have read, please list it here.

5. How comfortable are you reading a text in the *passato remoto*? (1 = not at all comfortable; 5 = very comfortable)

6. How do you feel about writing in Italian? Are you more comfortable doing creative writing exercises or critical / analytical writing exercises?

7. How likely are you to continue your study of Italian next semester? (1 = not likely; 5 = very likely)

8. At this point in your college career, how likely are you to major or minor in Italian Studies? (1 = not likely; 5 = very likely)

ITAL 102 / 103 – Post-literature unit survey

1. On a scale of 1 (very reluctant) to 5 (very excited), rate how you feel about reading in Italian at this point in your study of the language.

2. On a scale of 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly), rate how you would react to this statement: "The fable / *Pinocchio* unit expanded my Italian vocabulary."

3. How comfortable are you reading a text in the *passato remoto*? (1 = not at all comfortable; 5 = very comfortable)

4. Do you feel that the fable / *Pinocchio* unit helped improve your writing skills in Italian? What was your favorite writing activity associated with this unit?

5. What was the most challenging aspect of the unit? The easiest?

6. Has this unit changed how you feel about reading in general? If so, how?

7. Imagine that you are in Italy and an Italian student approaches you and begins to discuss fables / *Le avventure di Pinocchio* in Italian with you. How do you feel? List at least three adjectives.

8. Now imagine that the same student begins to discuss Italian culture and society with you. How do you feel? List at least three adjectives.

9. How likely are you to continue your study of Italian next semester? (1 = not likely; 5 = very likely)

10. At this point in your college career, how likely are you to major or minor in Italian Studies? (1 = not likely; 5 = very likely)

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