A case study of the use of short stories in a junior secondary ESL classroom in Hong Kong

Short stories are considered as good resources that can be used in language classrooms. Laine (1997) suggests that in foreign language classes where there are children who are not motivated and who are low achievers, a story, if it is well-chosen, can help change their attitudes to the language. And, the narrative (or storytelling) approach is believed to help students understand the story easily. The present study was conducted in a small class of junior secondary school students in order to investigate if they became more interested and more confident in English with the use of short stories. The findings of the study show that using short stories will not automatically make students become more interested in English unless the stories are interesting and the language used meets the level of the students. Regarding storytelling, the investigated class of students, in general, favoured this approach as it helped them understand the stories easily, though their confidence in using English could not be boosted within a short period of time.

Keywords: short stories, narrative approach, storytelling, motivation, attitude

Background

English has been an important language in Hong Kong for a long time. It has been one of the official languages since Hong Kong was a British colony before 1997. However, many students in Hong Kong do not like learning English. According to a survey conducted by Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (2003) about Hong Kong students' attitudes towards learning English, based on the students' self perception, less than half of them were strongly or very strongly motivated to learn English. Based on teachers' perception, the situation was even worse. The percentage of students strongly motivated to learn English was only about 10%. These figures were very discouraging to English teachers. However, they revealed an important fact that it is important to change students' attitudes towards learning English. Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (2003) emphasizes that students will have a stronger motivation to learn English if teachers can arouse their learning interests or if the teaching content is interesting to them.

Apart from the low motivation of Hong Kong students towards English, they also lack confidence in English. In the survey done by Yu, Liu, and Littlewood (1996), 32% of the respondents indicted that they are not confident in using English, especially in speaking English.

The present study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of the use of short stories, with the use of the narrative (or storytelling) approach, in changing students' attitudes towards learning English and boosting their confidence in using English.

Purpose of the study

Short stories are considered as good resources that can be used in language classroom. Wheeler (2001, p. 37) thinks that "s(S)tories are a natural part of a child's life". Good stories can draw the child's attention, stimulate his/her imagination and his/her desire to use the language (Wheeler, 2001). One more important advantage of the use of a story suggested by Laine (1997) is that in classes where there are children who are not motivated by the foreign language and who are low achievers, a story, if it is well-chosen, can change their attitudes to the language. The present study was conducted in a small

class of junior secondary students to investigate if they became more interested in learning English with the use of short stories. Also, students' confidence was investigated to find out whether they would become more confident in using English with the use of different activities in the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages, which included predicting the content and main characters involved in the stories, rearranging the events of the stories, designing a new book cover, and rewriting the ending of the stories. It is hoped that the results of this study will give other teachers some insights when they consider using language arts in an English class.

Research questions

According to the purpose of the present study, the following research questions were answered:

1. Will the students become more interested in English with the use of short stories?
2. Will the students become more confident in using English with the use of different activities in the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages?

Rationale behind using stories in a language classroom

Willis suggests a model which can explain the rationale behind using stories in a language classroom. In the model, Willis (1996, cited in Wajnryb, 2003, p. 6) suggests that in the process of language learning, "what is essential is that the learner has exposure to accessible language, has opportunity to use language, and has the motivation to learn".

Exposure

If the language used in a story is within the level of the students, it is a good source of 'comprehensible input' to them (Willis, 1996, cited in Wajnryb, 2003, p. 7). For 'comprehensible input', it refers to something that students can understand. It can be achieved by several ways, for example, by a teacher reading aloud, students reading silently, etc. When a teacher reads aloud a story, he/she can facilitate students' understanding by using a variety of ways such as using some body language (Wajnryb, 2003). Students will benefit if they are exposed to a large amount of 'comprehensible

input'. Language acquisition will occur incidentally if they are supplied with large quantities of interesting stories that they can understand because "a wide variety of natural language rich in vocabulary and grammatical complexity" is provided in stories (McQuillan & Tse, 1998, p. 21).

Use

The tasks done before, while and after reading the story can provide students with many opportunities to use the language (Wajnryb, 2003).

Motivation

The story itself - its content, is interesting that can motivate students and make them involve in the class (Wajnryb, 2003).

Godwin and Perkins (1998) also suggest three major benefits of stories in terms of the personal, linguistic and conceptual development of children.

Personal development

"Stories enable children to develop their own feelings and emotions by identifying with story characters and plots" (Godwin & Perkins, 1998, p. 25). In other words, it means that stories can offer children with an "imaginary world, created by language, that children can enter and enjoy" (Cameron, 2001, p. 159).

Linguistic development

Using stories can expose students to different language patterns (Wright, 1997; Garvie, 1990, cited in Cameron, 2001), for example, the creative use of language to express imagery (Godwin & Perkins, 1998), and new vocabulary can be learned in a natural context (Laine, l997). All these can facilitate students' language development.

Conceptual development

Children can be introduced with some new ideas and knowledge through stories, which can facilitate their conceptual development. They are also introduced with the cultural

traditions and values of the society they live (Godwin & Perkins, 1998).

One other benefit of using stories suggested by Laine (1997) is that for those students who are not motivated to learn the foreign language, or the low achievers of that language, stories, if they are carefully chosen, can change their attitudes towards the language as they will think that learning language is interesting and not difficult as they previously think.

Choosing stories for language learning

Teachers should be careful when they choose stories for their students because, as Wheeler (2001) emphasizes, a good story can hold children's attention, stimulate their imagination and also their desire to use the language. When teachers choose stories, they should consider the content of the stories and the language used.

Content

Morgan and Rinvolucri (1983) stress that the content of a story is the major criterion to be considered when we choose stories for language teaching. We seldom base only on linguistic factor in our choice. The content of a story is considered to be good if it involves interesting characters, a clear plot and an ending which can make students feel surprised (Cameron, 2001). Also, the values and attitudes conveyed in the story should be appropriate to children (Cameron, 2001).

Language used

A story is good if it contains a repetition of the same language pattern (or parallelism) in a natural context (Laine, 1997; Wheeler, 2001). It should contain simple language so that students can understand easily. The story can include some new language but that new language should not be too much to affect students' understanding (Cameron, 2001). For junior secondary students in Hong Kong, Wheeler (2001) suggests that the books which are designed for the native speaking primary students can be chosen because the language used is simpler and therefore, students can understand the story easily.

Illustrations

Apart from considering the content and the language used, the stories should be chosen if they are full of illustrations. This is particularly important for the low motivated learners and the low achievers because all children love interesting pictures (Wheeler, 2001) and they are attracted by the colourful pictures. Students can also understand the story easily if it is well illustrated with pictures (Laine, 1997; Tyrrell, 1997).

Methods and procedures

The participants

The participants of this study were a class of Form 1 students (aged 12 to 14) in a Band 3[1] secondary school in Hong Kong. There were 20 students in the class, with 16 males and 4 females. Their mother tongue was Cantonese. Many of them had learned English for many years, since they were in kindergarten or lower primary (i.e. Primary 1 to 3). However, the English level of these students, in general, was rather weak.

The stories chosen

In this study, two storybooks were chosen for investigation. The first one is called "Pooh's Honey Tree" which was adapted by Isabel Gaines and was published by Disney Press, New York in 1998. It is a short story which has 34 pages for the whole book, with many attractive, colourful pictures accompanying the content. The story is very simple but interesting. It is about Winnie the Pooh found honey in the hole of a tree. The other storybook is called "Pinocchio" which is a famous tale retold by Linda M Jennings and was published by Ladybird Books Ltd. in 1993. It is also a short story because there are only 24 pages for the whole book with colourful illustrations in each page. It is about an old woodcarver who wanted to have his own child and so he made a wood puppet called Pinocchio. Since it is a famous tale, it is expected that most of the students have heard or read the story before in Chinese. Laine (1998) suggests that if students already know the

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[1] According to the Information Leaflet on the Secondary School Places Allocation System 2005/2007 Cycle, the scaled marks of all students in Hong Kong in their internal assessments at the end of Primary 5, and both in mid-year and at the end of Primary 6 will be put into an order of merit. Then students are equally divided into three Territory Bands, each consisting of 1/3 of the total number of primary students in the territory.

story in Chinese, they will be eager to know about the story in English.

The rationale behind using short stories in this study was that for short stories, they have the advantage of short that they could be finished within one or two lessons (Collie & Slater, 1987). Another reason was that the language patterns and vocabulary used in short stories are usually simple (Parkinson & Reid Thomas, 2000) and therefore, are suitable for young students or those who do not have high level in the foreign language.

The approach used

The method of presenting the two stories to the students in this study was the narrative approach (i.e. storytelling). It is considered that this can help students understand the story easily through varying the voice and the use of different body language (Corden, 2000), and develop their listening skills (Colon-Vila, 1997). What's more, by telling students the stories, teacher can adjust the stories a little in terms of the language used to meet the level of the students (Laine, 1997; Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983).

Methods of data collection

The data collection methods that were used in this study included quantitative and qualitative methods. In quantitative methods, the pre- and post-test questionnaires were used whereas in qualitative methods, class observations and a semistructured group interview were done.

Procedures

At the beginning of the study, the pre-test questionnaires were distributed to the students to find out their initial perception towards English and their confidence in English. Then the two chosen short stories were told to the students. Since only one double period (i.e. two lessons) each cycle was allocated to this study and each story needed about two lessons to be finished, this study lasted for two cycles (i.e. four lessons). During the teaching phase, the students' responses to the lessons were observed by the researcher and recorded based on the observation checklist (see Appendix I) at the end of the lessons. After using the storytelling approach of two short stories for two cycles, the post-test questionnaires were distributed to the students to investigate if they became more

interested and confident in English. A semistructured group interview (refer to Appendix II for the interview questions) of 6 students (2 high level, 2 medium level and 2 low level) was also conducted so that more information about the participants' attitudes towards English could be obtained.

Analysis of data

After collecting all the returned questionnaires, the percentages of responses in each item of the pre- and post-test questionnaires were calculated and compared to see if there were any differences in the students' interests and confidence in English, with the use of short stories for two cycles. Also, the students' responses to the storytelling lessons were analyzed based on the teaching diary (refer to Appendix III) kept at the end of each lesson, and the data recorded in the group interview were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

Limitations of the methods

There are two major limitations in this study that need to be acknowledged and addressed:

The first limitation relates to the participants involved. As this study investigated a small class of 20 junior secondary students only, the findings obtained may apply only to this particular case and generalizability may be a great problem. The number of male and female participants in the selected class was also uneven, with 16 males and 4 females in the class. Then in the semistructured group interview, the 6 chosen students were all males. All these might cause bias to the results. Lastly, the participants were a class of Form One students in a particular school. Will the same results be produced with students in other classes, grade levels or schools with similar banding?

Another limitation involves the duration of the study. The time spent on the study lasted for only two cycles (two double periods) which was really too short to draw firm conclusions of the effectiveness of using short stories in enhancing students' interest and confidence in English.

The results

Results of the questionnaires

The return rates of both the pre- and post-test questionnaires were 100%. However, only 19 pre-test questionnaires were distributed to the selected class because one of the students was absent, while 20 post-test questionnaires were distributed to all the 20 students in the class. The findings of the questionnaires are summarized in Appendix IV.

Students' interest in English

In the present study, it was found that not many participants have strong interest in English. From the results of Item 1 of the pre- and post-test questionnaires, it is shown that before using short stories in the English classroom, more than half of the students (58%) responded neutral in the statement "I like English". 26% of them even disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Only 16% of them indicated that they like English. However, it is out of our general presumption that after the use of short stories, more than half of the students (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they like English. Only a small number of them (20%) indicated that they like English.

Students' interest in English is closely related to their interest in having English lessons. This can be shown in the results of Item 2. Before using short stories, 37% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I like having English lessons", while only 22% of them indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. But on the other hand, nearly half of the students (41%) responded neutral to this statement. However, after the use of short stories, the students who indicated that they dislike having English lessons and those who like having English lessons are the same (45%).

Not many students in the investigated class like English because many of them do not find English an interesting subject. As can be seen in the results of Item 3, before introducing short stories in the English classroom, slightly more than half of the students (52%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "English is interesting". Only a very small number of them (5%) thought that English is interesting. However, after the use of short stories in the classroom, it is rather surprising that there were more students (60%) expressed that English is not interesting. Only a few of them (25%) thought that it

is interesting.

Students do not like having English lessons because they do not find the English lessons interesting either with or without using short stories. This phenomenon can be illustrated in the results of Item 4. Before using short stories in the classroom, nearly half of the students (43%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "English lessons are interesting". Only 16% of them agreed with it. However, after the use of short stories, more than half of the students (60%) still thought that English lessons are not interesting. Only a few of them (25%) agreed that English lessons are interesting.

Lastly, students' interest in English is believed to be related to their sense of satisfaction in their learning. The findings of the questionnaires show that the use of short stories did not make the students feel satisfied in learning English. As can be seen in the results of Item 5, before the use of short stories, there were slightly more students who disagreed or strongly disagreed that learning English is satisfying than those who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (32% and 21% respectively). However, after using short stories in the classroom, there were even more students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "Learning English is satisfying" than those who agreed with the statement (65% and 20% respectively).

Students' confidence in English

In general, the students involved in the present study did not have confidence in English. Many of them did not think that English is easy no matter the storytelling approach was used in the classroom or not. The results of Item 6 of the pre- and post-test questionnaires show that before the use of storytelling, only a very small number of students (5%) thought that English is easy. Nearly half of them (42%) just responded neutral, and slightly more than half of them (53%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "English is easy". However, it is surprising that after the use of storytelling, none of the students thought that English is easy. Most of them (80%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item.

Regarding the students' confidence in reading in English, the results of Item 7 show that before using the storytelling approach, only 16% of the students indicated they are confident to read in English. Nearly half of them (47%) either disagreed or strongly

disagreed that they are confident in reading in English. However, surprisingly, after the use of storytelling, more than half of the students (65%) indicated that they are not confident to read in English. Only a very small number of them (10%), which is even smaller than before the adoption of the storytelling approach, thought that they are confident to read in English.

The participants in this study also lacked confidence in writing in English. Before using short stories in the classroom, none of them felt confident to write in English. More than half of them (58%) even disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are confident to write in English. After the use of short stories, though 20% of the students indicated that they are confident, 60% of them still disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are confident to write in English.

With the use of storytelling, it is expected that students will become more confident in listening. However, as can be discovered in the results of Item 9, the percentages of students who agreed and strongly agreed that they are confident to listen to English before and after using the storytelling approach in the classroom are similar (26% and 30% respectively), while the percentages of students who disagreed and strongly disagreed that they are confident to listen to English before and after the use of the storytelling approach are 58% and 55% respectively.

As the students in general were not confident in using English, they did not participate actively in the activities of English lessons. As can be seen in the results of Item 10, before the use of short stories in the English lessons, only 11% of the students indicated that they participate actively in English lessons. Nearly half of them (43%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the item. However, after using short stories in the classroom, though half of the students (50%) indicated that they do not participate actively, the number of participants who indicated that they participate actively in the activities of the English lessons increased to 40%.

For the last item of the questionnaires "In English lessons, I am willing to try even when I face some questions I do not know how to answer", before using short stories in the classroom, only 26% of the students agreed or strongly agreed, while 31% of them disagreed or strongly disagreed with it. However, after the use of short stories in the classroom, the number of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the

statement was still very small (only 25%), whereas the number of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement comprised half of the total number of participants.

Results of the class observation

As can be seen in the teaching diary, the observed students' responses in the two storytelling sessions were totally different. In the first session, most of the students found the story interesting. They were very attentive to the lessons and laughed happily. They also participated actively in the lessons in guessing the content of the story and the main character involved. The use of body language (gestures and facial expression), varying the teacher's voice for different characters and pointing to the relevant pictures in the story book helped the students to understand the story without having to use any Chinese explanations. These also made them feel enjoyable to listen to the story. However, in the second session, many students were not attentive to the lessons and found the story boring. One of them even fell asleep. Only a few of the students (those brighter students) participated actively in the post-reading activities.

Results of the semistructured group interview

Students' views about English and English lessons

From the group interview, it was discovered that students in general had a positive view about English. Only one of them expressed that he does not like English because he thought that English is difficult. The examples of students' responses are as follows:

- *Quite good. I perform better than others in the class.*
- *I like English because I will have a strong sense of achievement if I can understand what the teacher says.*
- *Yes, I like it.*
- *No. It's too difficult. I can't be successful no matter how hardworking I am.*

It was also found that some students like having English lessons because they can learn something. However, some of them expressed that they do not like having English lessons because of their low English level. For example:

- *No. I don't like having English lessons because I don't understand what the teacher says.*

- *No. Because I can't speak English well. If I could speak English well, I would like having English lessons.*

Students' views about the use of short stories and storytelling

In the semistructured interview, one student indicated his great interest in the use of short stories.

- *I like it so much. I hope you (the English teacher) can tell us more stories.*

Also, in general, the students involved in the present study had more positive views about the storytelling approach than reading silently by themselves because storytelling helped them understand the stories easily. Some examples of the students' responses are as below:

- *We don't understand what the story is about if we read it by ourselves.*
- *I can understand the story easily.*
- *I like storytelling because I can understand the story easily.*
- *The story can be deeply understood.*

Only one student preferred reading stories by himself:

- *I prefer reading the story by myself because I can predict the content of the story from the pictures if I don't understand the story.*

Though many students had positive views about storytelling, two of them did not find that they become more confident in reading, writing and listening in English:

- *No. I don't think I am more confident than before.*
- *It's just the same.*

However, four of them mentioned that they become a bit more confident in writing and listening, and have some gain in vocabulary:

- *I am a bit more confident in writing.*
- *A bit more confident in listening. But very often, I could guess the meaning from your (the teacher's) gestures.*
- *I can learn some new vocabulary through the teacher's storytelling.*

Discussion of the major findings

Students' interest in English

Regarding the first research question "Will the students become more interested in English with the use of short stories?", the data collected in the questionnaires and the semistructured interview of the present study were contradictory. The results of the post-test questionnaires showed that after the use of short stories, there were still more than half of the students indicated that they do not like English. There were also nearly half of the students indicated that they dislike having English lessons. However, in the group interview conducted after the use of short stories for four lessons, it was found that the students in general had rather positive views about English. Only one of them expressed that he does not like English. This contradiction of the results may probably be explained by the weakness of the questionnaire design. With the availability of the "neutral" option, the participants who did not complete the questionnaires seriously might just select "neutral" in each item and so the results will be inaccurate. This phenomenon is evident in Item 1 of the pre-test questionnaires in which more than half of the students (58%) responded neutral. If this is really the case, then the results obtained in the questionnaires could not truly reflect the students' real attitudes towards English, either before or after the use of the short stories.

One should also be cautious in drawing conclusions from the data obtained in the questionnaires because the total number of collected questionnaires was different, 19 and 20 pre- and post-test questionnaires respectively. This difference would strongly affect the percentages of responses of each question item because of the small sample size.

One more aspect is that students' interest in English is not a straightforward issue that can simply be explained by whether short stories are used or not. From the results of the present study, it was found that there are some other important things that may affect the students' interest in English and English lessons. One of these is the choice of the stories. As can be discovered in the two class observations, if the story is interesting and the words used are simple (like the first story "*Pooh's Honey Tree*"), the students would be more attentive to it and become more interested in the lessons. On the contrary, the story which involves a lot of difficult vocabulary and there are many words in each page of the book (like another story "*Pinocchio*" used in the present study) may make the

students, especially those weak students, lose interest no matter how interesting the story actually is and no matter the story is full of illustrations.

Students' confidence in English

For the second research question "Will the students become more confident in using English with the use of different activities in the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages?", the data collected in the present study show that the students did not become more confident in reading in English. In reading, after the use of the storytelling approach in the classroom, the number of respondents who indicated that they are confident to read in English was even smaller than before the use of storytelling (10% and 16% respectively). This phenomenon can easily be explained. With the use of short stories in the English classroom in which the storytelling approach was used, different strategies were used by the teacher such as using a lot of gestures and facial expression, or varying the teacher's voice for different characters to help the students understand the story. The students did not have many opportunities to use reading skills such as predicting the meaning of vocabulary from the context and so, they would not become more confident in reading English.

For the confidence in writing and listening to English, though there were still more than half of the students indicated that they are not confident, there were slightly more students who either agreed or strongly agreed that they are confident to write and listen to English after the use of different activities in the teaching phase of the two storytelling lessons, though the difference was not so evident. Some students interviewed also mentioned that they became a bit more confident because they had a little improvement in English writing and listening. Previous studies (e.g. Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Elley, 1991; Elley & Foster, 1996; LeRoux & Schollar, 1996, cited in McQuillan & Tse, 1998) suggested that with the use of short stories, students' language proficiency could gain significantly. However, with the very short duration of the present study (four lessons only), it is impossible for us to expect the students to have significant gain in their language proficiency.

Conclusion

Short stories are considered as good resources that can be used for language teaching, and the storytelling approach is believed to help students understand the story easily. A story, if it is well-chosen, can change the attitudes of children who are not motivated or low achievers in the foreign language. The findings of the present study show that using short stories will not automatically make students become more interested in English unless the stories are interesting and the language used meets the level of the students. The story can include some new vocabulary but that should not be too much to make the students lose the reading interest. Regarding storytelling, the investigated class of students, in general, favoured this approach as it helped them understand the stories easily, though their confidence in using English could not be boosted within a short period of time.

Pedagogical implications and suggestions for further studies

Based on the findings of the present research study, it is considered that using short stories will not make students become more interested in English unless the stories are carefully chosen in terms of the content and the level of difficulty of the vocabulary used. Teachers should be very careful when they select stories for their students, especially those who have low level of English and those who have low motivation. The story should be interesting and not involve too much difficult vocabulary. As Cameron (2001) emphasizes, the story can include some new language but that new language should not be too much to affect understanding.

Due to the limitations of this study suggested previously, further studies should be conducted.

First, a larger number of participants should be involved, which includes a more balanced number of male and female students so that a less biased conclusion can be drawn. If time is allowed, a larger-scale study should be conducted in other Form One classes, other grade levels or even other schools with similar banding. By this way, the data obtained would be more representative and generalizable.

Apart from conducting a larger-scale study, if more time is available, a longitudinal study which lasts for a longer period of time, say a year, should be conducted, with more

different titles of short stories used. Then a firm conclusion of the effectiveness of the use of short stories in enhancing students' interest and confidence in English could be drawn.

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Appendix I　　　Observation Checklist

1. What evidence was there that the students found the story interesting / boring?

2. Did the students participate actively in the lessons? Why?

3. What evidence was there that the tasks and activities helped students to understand and enjoy the story?

4. Were the aims of the lessons achieved? Why?

5. What other things, if any, should be done to improve the lessons?

Adapted from:

Lazer, G. (1993). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix II　　　Group Interview Questions

1. Do you like English? Why?

2. Do you like having English lessons? Why?

3. With the use of short stories in the classroom, do you like English more? Why?

4. With the use of storytelling in the classroom, do you think you like English stories more than before? Why?

5. Do you think you become more confident in English than before, especially in reading, writing and listening? Why?

Appendix III　　　Teaching Diaries

Session 1

No. of lessons:　　　2 (40 minutes × 2)

Story used:　　Pooh's Honey Tree

1. What evidence was there that the students found the story interesting / boring?

   In general, most of the students found the story interesting because they were very attentive to the lessons and they laughed happily.

2. Did the students participate actively in the lessons? Why?

   The students participated actively in the lessons. When I showed them the cover of

the story book and asked them to guess what the story was about, some of them shouted out the name of the major character "Winnie the Pooh" and the word 'honey' actively. Maybe because the students were very familiar with Winnie the Pooh (one of the famous cartoon characters) and the story.

3. What evidence was there that the tasks and activities helped students to understand and enjoy the story?

The use of body language (gestures and facial expression), varying my voice for different characters and, pointing to the relevant pictures in the story book helped the students to understand the story without having to use any Chinese explanations. These also made them feel enjoyable to listen to the story.

The first post-reading activity, rearranging the story, was a good activity that summarized the whole story. However, some of the weaker students found this activity rather difficult, especially the words appeared in the sentence strips.

4. Were the aims of the lessons achieved? Why?

In general, the aims of these two lessons were achieved. The students could understand the story without having to use any Chinese translation. They enjoyed the story very much because they were very attentive to the lessons and many of them participated actively in the activities.

The major weaknesses were that the students did not response more and write more about their feelings about the story in the task sheet.

5. What other things, if any, should be done to improve the lessons?

If time is enough, students should be encouraged to retell the story.

Session 2

No. of lessons: 2 (40 minutes × 2)

Story used: Pinocchio

1. What evidence was there that the students found the story interesting / boring?

Many students found the story boring because they were not very attentive to the lessons and one of them even fell asleep. One reason that might explain this was that there is a lot of difficult vocabulary in the story. Also, there are more words in each page of the book.

2. Did the students participate actively in the lessons? Why?

Only a few of the students (the brighter ones) participated actively in the lessons. When I showed them the cover of the story book and asked them if they have read or listened to the story before, it was out of my expectation that only one of them told me that he had read the Chinese version before. Maybe because the title of the book "Pinocchio" is so difficult to the students that they did not know it is actually the very famous tale they have read or listened to the Chinese version before.

3.   What evidence was there that the tasks and activities helped students to understand and enjoy the story?

The use of body language (gestures and facial expression), varying my voice for different characters and, pointing to the relevant pictures in the story book helped the students to understand the story. These also made the students more concentrated to listen to the story.

The second post-reading activity, rearranging jumbled pictures, was helpful. It summarized the plot of the story before asking the students to rewrite a new ending of the story. However, the last activity (rewriting the ending of the story) was not successful. Many students did not create a new ending but designed a new cover which was not what I expected.

4.   Were the aims of the lessons achieved? Why?

The aims of these two lessons were partially achieved. It seemed that the students did not fully understand the story though I used a lot of body language because the vocabulary in the story was rather difficult to them. Therefore, one of the students fell asleep. Also, the aim of rewriting a new ending of the story was not achieved. Maybe because the students have a limited range of vocabulary, their endings were very similar with the original one without having any very creative endings. Some of them even wrongly wrote their responses to the story or designed a new book cover which was not what I expected them to do.

5.   What other things, if any, should be done to improve the lessons?

The Chinese title of the tale should be told to the students so that they can know which story it is. Also, when necessary, Chinese meaning should be given so as to help the students understand the story much more easily.

Appendix IV

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
Students' interest in English					
1. I like English.					
Pre-test	0%	16%	58%	5%	21%
Post-test	0%	20%	20%	40%	20%
2. I like having English lessons.					
Pre-test	21%	16%	41%	11%	11%
Post-test	5%	40%	10%	30%	15%
3. English is interesting.					
Pre-test	0%	5%	43%	26%	26%
Post-test	0%	25%	15%	30%	30%
4. English lessons are interesting.					
Pre-test	0%	16%	41%	32%	11%
Post-test	0%	25%	15%	35%	25%
5. Learning English is satisfying.					
Pre-test	5%	16%	47%	16%	16%
Post-test	0%	20%	15%	40%	25%
Students' confidence in English					
6. English is easy.					
Pre-test	0%	5%	42%	11%	42%
Post-test	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%
7. I am confident to read in English.					
Pre-test	0%	16%	37%	21%	26%
Post-test	0%	10%	25%	40%	25%
8. I am confident to write in English.					
Pre-test	0%	0%	42%	32%	26%
Post-test	0%	20%	20%	45%	15%
9. I am confident to listen to English.					
Pre-test	5%	21%	16%	42%	16%
Post-test	10%	20%	15%	35%	20%
10. I participate actively in the activities of English lessons.					
Pre-test	0%	11%	46%	11%	32%
Post-test	10%	30%	10%	30%	20%
11. In English lessons, I am willing to try even when I face some questions I do not know how to answer.					
Pre-test	5%	21%	43%	5%	26%
Post-test	0%	25%	25%	40%	10%

Summary of the findings of the pre- and post-test questionnaires

Notes:

SA = Strongly agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly disagree