

USING CHILDREN LITERATURE FOR TEACHING ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract

Almost all language teachers share typical opinions that literature is oftenly seen as complex and difficult. Thus, it is almost neglected and has not been given much emphasis in EFL classroom until recently. Many EFL teachers often wonder how to utilize literary works in their teaching of language. Used appropriately and chosen carefully, some literary works, especially children literature, can work very well in ELT classroom, especially in writing class. The paper is aimed at sharing some knowledge on the characteristics of children literature, the characteristics of academic writing, what types of children literature that can be used in ELT writing class, and how to use those literary works for teaching that fit into the academic writing class. There are three stages that should be taken to use literary work to teach writing: a warmer stage, prewriting stage, and the writing stage. In the warmer stage, the learners are made ready for the topic through discussions about the works, such as about the writer and their prior knowledge of the work. In the prewriting stage, they are exposed to the work either by audio visual media or paper-based material, followed with a short discussion about the work. Finally, in the writing stage, they are given to write about their opinion in relation to the poem or short story presented earlier. Using literary works for teaching writing for adult learners enhances not only the their writing ability but also their critical thinking.

Key words: Children literature, academic writing, teaching writing

Introduction

Some writing teachers have problems with finding and bringing attractive topics for the students to write in class. They often stuck with writing course book and use it until the end of the semester. It is widely acknowledged that writing is complex. The complexity lies in the involvement of language and literacy skills, document-creation and document-management skills, and critical-thinking skills (Deane et al, 2008). When the complexity of writing is mixed with unattractive write activity, the result will be unmotivated learning.

Research have shown that topic attractiveness has been viewed as a fundamental motivational source of writing, an independent variable which affect the quality of the composition (Boscolo et al, 2007: 74). However, Boscolo et al point out that being interested in a topic does not mean one is interested in writing about that topic. Therefore, they redefine the term 'interest' in writing. Based on the study conducted by Hidi, Berendorff, and Ainley (2002 in Boscolo et al, 2007), writing interest does not necessarily refers to the topic, but it refers to writing as an activity. For them, the source of interest does not lay in the attractive topic or theme, but the various forms or functions of writing as realised in particular modes such as arguing, narrating, reporting, etc., which are related to meaningful classroom activities. Because of this, writing teachers have some kind of obligation to provide interesting writing activity in the classroom.

One way to provide interesting writing activity is by using children literature material to learn academic writing in college. Literary works in general are authentic material. The works are created by the authors not for the purpose of learning or analysis. They were created for the sole pupose of enjoyment. There are some reasons why teachers should use literary works in the classroom. First of all, it is good to expose learners to this authentic materials in the classroom because outside the classroom, they will be required to have skills in dealing with difficult or unknown language. Literary works can also encourage participation in which it is rich in multiple meanings of interpretations. Students can interact one another to share their opinions, feelings and values about the story. Literary works are also rich in values that can educate the readers in terms of manner, attitude and behaviour without being told what to do and should not do. The last but not least, the use of literary works in the classroom can trigger cultural awareness. The students can learn that different country has their own cultural value. In the end, they can respect diversity.

Children literature offers the benefits of those reasons. In academic writing, one will be able to write if they have something to write with an interesting writing activity. College students are basically adults learners. However, they are still fascinated with children stories as it offers lively imaginations, dreams and

fairly tales. Some bed time stories are still memorable to them, such as *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White*, *The Trilogy of Narnia*, etc. Some of them are even turned into movies. Students can learn to compare and contrast two short stories under similar theme by using comparison and contrast paragraph organization. They can also state their opinion whether the story is appropriate for particular age only. Thus, it is really reasonable to use children literary works to teach academic writing.

Children Literature and Its Characteristics

There is no clear consensus on the definition of children literature. Lynch-Brown, C. & Tomlinson, C. (2005 in Chen, 2014) define children literature as "good quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interests to children of those ages, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction." (p. 3). Mean while, Mitchell (2003: p.4) defines children literature as any book children read which have appealing content and clear writing; the characters are often children, people familiar to children, or animals in which the setting generally are familiar to children or places children would love to go to, and in which the themes speak to children and their concerns. Another definition is provided by Oberstein (1999: p.16). She has more concise definition of what it means by children literature in which she defines children literature as books which are good for children in terms of emotional and moral values. All those definitions basically has the central idea that children's literature seems to be defined based on its targeted audience, namely children and young adults in which the contents of the literature itself (books) are related to children's life, either it is fiction or non fiction, which has rich emotional and moral values.

Having defined the term, it is important to discussed the characteristics of children literature. Nodelman (2008) provides the characteristics of children literature. Some characteristics which are distinctive, namely are 1) the texts imply an audience of child readers ; 2) the style used in the reading is simple, especially in comparison to texts targeted for adults; 3) The focus on actions use straight forward reports of what people do and say with not much detailed descriptions of people, places, or emotions; 4) the protagonists are either children or childlike animals or adults; and 5) the texts deal centrally with questions of desire and questions of knowledge, such as what children or other childlike beings want and whether or not it is wise to want it; also, what adults want children to be (or to seem).

In addition, Chen (2014) provides more characteristics of children literature in terms of its content and quality. In terms of content, children literature usually tells topic of 1) experiences during childhood set in the past, present, or future, such as enjoying holidays, getting a new bike, anticipating birthday party, or dealing with other family situations, and 2) things that are of interest to children such as new toys, pets, games. The stories are in the manner of straightforward, humorous, or suspenseful which emphasize the hope for a better future rather than the hopelessness and despair of the moment. In terms of quality, children literature uses originality and importance of ideas with imaginative and beautiful use of language.

The narrative elements of children literature are basically similar to what is so called "adult" literature. The elements include characters, point of view, setting, plot, theme, style, and tone Mitchell (2003: pp. 33-34). She further states that there are "several common themes in traditional literature" they follow along the lines of "Triumph of good over evil, trickery, hero's quest, reversal of fortune, and small outwitting the big". In addition to the elements of literature, Mitchell (2003: p. 34-35) believes that the characteristics of children's literature can also be evaluated on emotional impact, imaginative impact, and vision. The purpose of literature is to make an impact, so if the reader felt nothing, the book does not meet the criteria. If the reader was moved by the beauty of language, by the character's personalities, by the ideas and issues dealt with, or by the actions of the characters, then the book has something. Literary works can spark imagination, show possibilities, stretch thinking, trigger curiosity, and make the reader think in different way. Sometimes, this sparking imagination can be attributed to plot, character, or theme. But it is much more than these parts. The imaginative impact comes from the overall quality of the story.

There are several types of children literature. Mitchell (2003) categorizes children literature into seven broad categories, namely 1) Picture books: books which have artistic quality at both the text and the art. Books which fall into this category are ABC books, counting, and concept books; wordless books, books for earliest reader; and transitional or chapter book; 2) poetry book for children. In this kind of book, the text and the pictures closely wed. Its themes range from friendship, family, feelings to historical events and the nature world; 3) traditional literature which include folk tales, fairy tales, myths, and fables; 4) realistic fiction and historical fiction; 5) modern fantasy and science fiction (for example J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series); 6) non fiction and informational books for children; and 7) biography which is often seen as genre to be read only for reports, also offers much variety in the way stories are written and the kinds of people written about. This paper, however, will focus only three types of children literature subgenre, namely the poetry for children, traditional literature and the realistic fictions.

Academic Writing

College students are indispensable from academic writing tasks. Many subjects in college requires students to write something for their assignments, whether it is an essay, an article, a paper, or a research project. Good writing skill enable the students to accomplish their writing task satisfactorily. Among the many types of writing genre, opinion essay, or usually called argumentative essay, is the most widely used for academic writing because in college, "everything is an argument" (Irvin, 2010).

Academic writing is usually a form of evaluation in which requires the students to perform knowledge and proficiency of particular subject matter with certain disciplinary skills of thinking, interpreting, analyzing and presenting. Writing any papers or assignments in college is never 'just' writing. Irvin (2010) further states that there are three common types of college writing assignment, namely 1) closed writing assignment in which it resembles the yes-no questions (for example, 'do you think "The Ugly Duckling" is more appropriate for children or for adult?' Or 'In your opinion, do you think the princess will lead her lover to open the door with the girl or the tiger?'), 2) semi open writing assignment in which the assignments ask the students to explain, analyze, discuss about the topic. This type of writing assignments requires the students to dig and explore the topic. And 3) open writing assignment in which requires the students to decide the writing topic and the claim (thesis). The writing prompt might ask the students to, for example, compare and contrast two Hans Cristian Anderson short stories, or analyze one of the two main characters of "The Giving Tree".

Looking at the types of writing assignments in which mostly are in the form of argument and analysis, there are certain characteristics of academic writing. The characteristics can be seen from 1) the linguistics feature, like the use of passive voice and the use of the third person rather than the first person (Monash University, 2007), 2) the content of the essay in which its development of the body requires facts, evidences, tables, graphs, and figures (Irvin, 2010; Monash University, 2007) to make the writer's reasoning convincing, and 3) information from other sources by using citations (Monash University, 2007). As a result of those characteristics, all academic writing are in the form of an argument and an analysis.

Using Children Literature for Teaching Academic Writing

There are three learning phases that a teacher should take to use literary works for teaching writing, namely preparation phase, prewriting phase, and writing phase.

1. Preparation Phase

The preparation phase aims to provide basic knowledge about the topic discussed. The knowledge base is the author of the work. There are several ways to prepare the background knowledge of the students, for example conducting a short discussion in pair, in small group, in class discussion, or in the form of a guessing game about the vocabulary that will be used by the author in his work. Materials for discussion could range from the authors's life and the characteristic of works written, and whether they are familiar with the work and the writer. If students are not familiar with the work and the author, the discussion can be about predicting the content of the work based on its title. Teachers are often trapped in the preparation phase that it goes long and boring. Therefore, the preparation phase should not take longer than 10 minutes.

2. The Prewriting Phase

At this stage, students are given exposure to the text to be read, either paper-based or by using audio-visual media. It is important for teachers to allow students to read silently and enjoy the works for a few minutes without giving any tasks other than reading. After they read, discussions about the work can be carried out either in pairs, small groups (2-3 people) or in the form of a class discussion. This discussion aims at determining how far the students' understand the text being read. Discussion at this stage includes the main idea, characters, setting, sequence of events, the climax, anti-climax (if any), and messages that can be taken from the work. To make the discussion on track and efficient, all the materials and tasks should be prepared in advance. When students have shown sufficient comprehension, the teacher can move on to the next stage. The prewriting stage should take no longer than 15 minutes.

3. Writing Phase

At the stage of writing, students were asked to express their opinion in their essay. To enable them write an opinion essay, the writing prompt should clearly state the demand. As stated by Irvin (2010), there are three types of writing assignments, namely 1) closed writing assignment in which it resembles the yes-no questions, 2) semi open writing assignment in which the assignments ask the students to explain, analyze, discuss about the topic, and 3) open writing assignment in which requires the students to decide the writing

topic and the claim (thesis). The following writing prompts which have been practiced are the closed writing assignments and the semi open writing assignments.

Writing prompt #1 (Closed writing assignment)

1. What do you think about short story that you have read? Do you think the short story is appropriate for children? Do you think it is appropriate for adult?
2. Write a 250 words essay stating your opinion on the issue.
3. State your position if you agree or disagree by giving sufficient examples and details from the short story

The writing prompt can also ask the students to compare and contrast two different version of literary work. The movie version and the original version of the work are presented to the students, and they are asked to compare and contrast the work based on its intrinsic elements, namely plot, setting, characters, tone, and theme.

Writing prompt #2 (semi open writing assignment)

- There are some differences and similarities between the two short stories.
1. Compare and contrast the first short story and the second short story based on its intrinsic elements (plot, setting, characters, and theme).
 2. Choose two out of four intrinsic elements to be developed in your 250 words essay
 3. Give sufficient detail and examples from the story to strengthen your argument.

difficult text when reading a classic short story. The prompt sample such as follow.

Writing prompt #3 (semi open writing assignment)

- When you read a difficult short story, sometimes you find difficulty to understand it. Read the following short story, identify your problems in comprehending it, and offer suggestion to overcome your problems.
1. Write a 250 words problem solution essay
 2. Give sufficient details and examples to develop your essay

In the writing phase, adequate time should be given to the students to explore their ideas and to finish their writing. The approximate time probably around 40 minutes for College EFL learners. When the students are done with their writing, the teacher can ask them to reread their essay and edit it, and presumably to revise it for about 15 minutes before it is finally submitted.

The students' Writing Product

The children literature that has been practiced are poetry book for children, traditional literature and the realistic fictions. The poem chosen was "The Giving Tree" by Shell Silverstain, the second was the short stories in the sub genre of fable by AESOP "The Ant and The Dove" and "The Bear and the Two Travellers", and the third was H.C Anderson' "The Wicked Prince".

The following are some samples of the students' product during their academic writing class. Each sample are chronologically presented in terms of the its writing prompts (product #1 is a respond of writing prompt #1, and so on). The students' writing product can be seen in the appendix.

The students' product shows us that children literature, eventhough this type of literature are not meant for them in terms of age and cognitive development, can trigger their awareness about life in general and their critical thinking. The children literature has taught them about the moral values that they can take from the story although most of the values are not said aloud in the class discussion. In their process of writing, they have discovered what it means to be grateful and thankful, how to appreciate friendship, and how find solution to their problems.

Conclusion

Utilizing children literature for teaching academic writing can enhance not only the students' writing ability in terms of their reasonings and critical thinking, but also enhance their self-improvement as human being. Literature should not be seen as something difficult and complex. When it is chosen and used carefully, it can help the teacher to achieve the learning objective of the day. Just like the proverb "throwing two birds with one stone", using children literature for teaching academic writing helps the students sharpen

their critical thinking, raise awareness of life, and improve their English skills in terms of reading comprehension and writing ability. The stories of children literature with its fantasies, fairy tales, and imagination still fascinate us. After all, we are basically children who grow older.

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uct #1 Examples and Details Essay

"The Giving Tree"

In my opinion, the poem "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein is appropriate for adult because it can educate us about not to be greedy, and it can change our mindset about life.

Firstly, the poem "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein teach us not to be greedy. The content of the poem shows us life examples when the boy asks for money to the tree. But the tree does not directly give the boy money because, as you know, the tree cannot produce money. The tree gives apples to the boy to sell. The tree feels happy when it can help the boy, but the boy is not thankful, and he always ask and ask to the tree. Although the elements of the tree will be run out, the tree is still happy because the tree loves the boy so much. But the boy never cares even when the tree has only branches. Beside that, the boy want to ask again and again until the tree has nothing left.

Secondly, it can change our mindset about life. The "Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein makes us care about our life. Just like the boy, we just ask for money to our parents. If our parents cannot give us money, we will get angry at them. Actually, our parents do not give us money because they do not have much money. We do not know how our parents get the money because we do not care. We just ask and ask, like the boy to the tree. We will be parents and we will feel it. But we will not follow the boy in the poem. We must care and say thankyou to others who have helped us.

So, that's all my thinking about the poem "The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein. It is appropriate for adult because of several reasons, namely, it can educate us not to be greedy, and it can change our mindset about life. Beside that, adult can think about the content and adult can take themoral value from the poem. But children cannot think like this because they are still a child. (Setyanti 2013 B Essay Writing Class, 356 words)

Product #2 Comparison and Contrast Essay

Eventhough the stories entitled "The Dove and the Ants" and "The Bear and the Two Traveller" be AESOP are considered fables, they differ in at least two ways; their seting and characters.

The first difference is about the setting. "The Dove and the Ant" take the setting on the side of the river. When the ant flows on the river and then the dove helps him, after that when the hunter brings a stone and takes an aim, the ant comes and hits the hunter. But the story by the title "The Bear and the Two Traveller" takes the setting on the tree on the side of the road. That is when the two traveller walks on the road and meet the Bear, one of them climbs up the tree and the other lays flat on the land. So the setting of the both stories are different.

The second different is about character. The story entitled, "The Dove and the Ant" has three characters, namely The Dove, the Ant and the Hunter. The story entitled "The Bear and the Two Traveller" also has three characters. They are a boy who climb up on the tree, a boy who is lying flat on the land, and the bear.

Though they have differences, they also have one similarity, that is about the theme. Both stories have the same theme, that is friendship. But the story entitled "The Dove and the Ant" has the theme friendship like a true friend. Based on the story, they help each other when the ant flow on the river the dove help him by giving a leaf. And when the dove on a dangerous situation because of the hunter, the ant help him by biting the hunter, then the dove flew away and saved. So the story entitled "The Dove and the Ant" and "The Bear and the Two Traveller" have differences in seting and characters and they also have similarity in theme. (*Abqoriya Rosyida, Essay Writing Class, 2013 B, 329 words*)

Product #3 Problem Solving Essay

When I'm reading my book that my friend and I bought in Gramedia two weeks ago, entitled "My Collection Story", I found my difficulty to understand many short stories in that book. So, when you have the same problem like me, there are several things that you can do to solve your problems, such as you can guess difficult words from the context and you can do skimming and scanning so that you can find the main idea of the story.

First, you can guess a difficult word from the context. It means, you must not open your dictionary everytime you find difficult words. You just guess the meaning. For example, When I read the short story "The Wicked Prince" by H.C Anderson I found many difficult words, but I did not open my dictionary. I just guess that words. For example *gnat, chariot* and many other words. I just guess the meaning of that words without opening my dictionary, although sometimes I guess wrongly.

And then, you can do skimming and scanning. It means you must read quickly without thinking of the meaning of every words. You must read quickly untill the end of the story to find the main idea. And if you have time, you can reread it, until you can find the main idea, the plot, the characters and other elements of the story.

Based on my explanation above, I suggest that if you find difficulty to understand the story, you must not open your dictionary too often. Guess the difficult words, do skimming and scanning, read again and again until you find the idea of the story. (*In Khoiriyah, 2013 A, Essay Writing Class, 273 words*)