

The Simply Cracking Good Stories project: Pathways to pleasure reading for unschooled immigrant adults

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On-going collaborative work by Young-Scholten & Wilkinson

- Aims
 - Instill the habit of pleasure reading in low-educated second language and literacy (LESLLA) learners, i.e. immigrant adults with very low levels of oral proficiency who are also just learning to read for the first time
 - “We learn to read by reading” (Krashen 1988); for second language learners, reading expands vocabulary and furthers linguistic competence for L2 learners (Krashen 1985; Nation).
 - Provide a selection of books appropriate for these readers by equipping the average person to write narratively sound and linguistically accessible fiction for immigrant adults

Extensive reading programmes to foster pleasure reading

- A good starting ratio of books per student on an ER programme is student is 4:1
- Teachers rely on
 - Publishers' series
 - The majority of such books are at too high a level
 - Books at a low level tend to be non-fiction
 - Children's literature, teacher-written stories, student-written stories
- There are insufficient appropriate fiction books for LESLLA learners to support ER programmes

Addressing the need for generating LESLLA fiction by working with writers and non-writers

2008-present

Non-writers: Young-Scholten's undergraduate module (Low-educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition): students write books for immigrants as their assignment; all books written are made available to local ESOL students (at e.g. Angelou Centre; Gateshead College; Middlesbrough College; Newcastle College, Westgate College and Stockton International Family Centre)

Non-writers: workshops in the UK, USA, Spain, German and Turkey for teachers

2010

Writers and non-writers: Catherine Cookson Foundation project resulted in 25 books submitted of which six best were selected for professional production/wider distribution

Students and workshop participants are given guidance in writing linguistically accessible fiction

- **Syntax:**

- Main verbs, with little or no functional morphology
- Proper nouns instead of pronouns
- Single-clause SVO sentences

- **Phonology:**

- Mono- or disyllabic words with CV(C) syllables
- Focus on onset/rime through textual use of alliteration and rhyme

- **Vocabulary**

- Concrete verbs and nouns relevant to LESLLA learners' lives (98% of which they should know for a readable text; Hseuh-Chau & Nation 2000; currently unclear how many words low-level immigrant adults know)

- **Discourse**

- Avoidance of deixis (Whiteside 2008)
- Awareness of reader's background for underlying meaning

- **Orthography**

- Regular spelling or sight words learned in class

Appropriate fiction conforms to principles of narrative structure

- Stories require a beginning, middle and end.
 - Beginning: trigger/desire
 - Middle: obstacles
 - End: something has changed (desire not necessarily fulfilled)
- A story starts with a status quo
 - It's disrupted by a trigger which could be anything that alters the main character's circumstances
 - Change of circumstance creates a desire that the main character pursues despite rising obstacles
- Stories involve change in the protagonist's
 - circumstances
 - relationships
 - understanding/world view

Drama

- A character we care about + desire that builds + obstacles that build = drama
- By building desire, adding obstacles and delaying resolution, the story can be endlessly sustained

Linguistic simplification dovetails with good fiction

Linguistic simplification: avoid dependent clauses

Show don't tell: use direct speech

Use of direct speech

- allows the writer to get across complicated ideas in a linguistically simple manner.
- requires the reader to make inferences, engaging with the text at a higher level

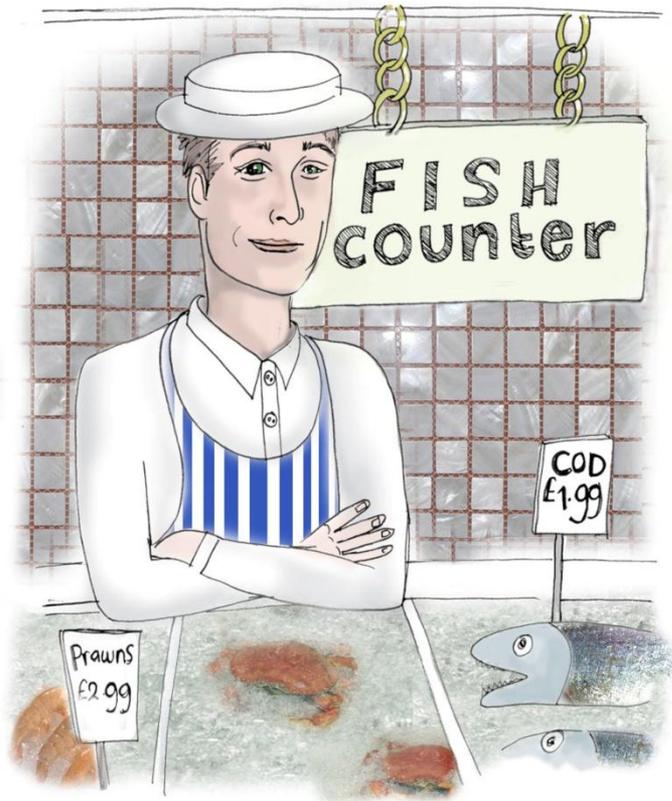
Readers' engagement with text

- When readers are required to interpret text in order to enhance what they are reading, the text becomes more rather than less involving.
- Writers are therefore encouraged to leave things unsaid, to underdescribe or to describe in such a way as to invite the reader to envision the situation, characters and/or emotion for him/herself.
- Open-ended fiction that does not draw conclusions, nor spoon-feed information even when linguistically simplified, results in enhanced reader involvement. This is particularly appropriate for adults who have a wealth of life experience to bring to the text.

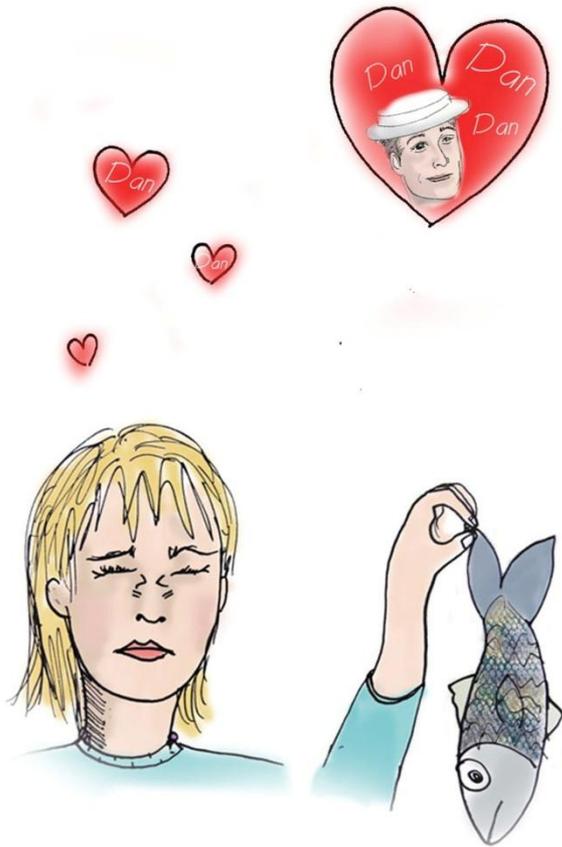
Engaging text involves

- Immediacy/writing in scenes (show, don't tell)
- Cliff hangers, surprises and twists of narrative (reversals)
- A sympathetic protagonist

...and the reader needs to figure out what is implied (the unstated); in *Fishing for Love* (one of the six Cookson-funded project books selected), the reader must infer why the cat is fat.



Dan works at the
supermarket.
Dan sells fish.



Emma hates Fish.
Emma likes Dan.



Emma has a fat cat.