

Using Big Books: A Standards-Based Instructional Approach for Foreign Language Teacher Candidates in a PreK–12 Program

Susan Colville-Hall
University of Akron

Barbara O'Connor
University of Akron

Abstract: *Foreign language teacher candidates learn to bring literacy in second languages (L2s) to children through a standards-based task in which they develop a thematic instructional unit, implement the lessons in foreign language enrichment classes in an urban school, and reflect on student learning. To teach reading in an L2 requires knowledge of literacy theories, first language (L1) reading practices, L2 reading practices, second language acquisition (SLA), and Standards for Foreign Language Learning (National Standards, 1999). For the last several years, teacher candidates developed “big book” units after studying current literacy theory and practice. The task of designing and implementing a big book and teaching unit afforded them experience that had pedagogical benefits. As they gained knowledge of techniques for learners’ acquisition of interpretive skills, candidates expressed the value of their learning experiences and opportunities. These teacher candidates also articulated an appreciation that reading, as a tool within a familiar and meaning-based context (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004), is essential in L2 learning.*

Key words: *big books, foreign language literacy, foreign language teacher education, foreign language shared reading, interpretative skills*

Language: *Relevant to all languages*

Introduction

In this article, we describe an approach for preparing foreign language teacher candidates in a PreK–12 licensure program to develop effective skills for teaching reading and to use context- and standards-based instruction in all levels of their foreign language classes. This approach involves the development and use

Susan Colville-Hall (PhD) is Associate Professor in Foreign Language Teacher Preparation, College of Education, University of Akron, Ohio.

Barbara O'Connor (PhD) is Assistant Professor in Early Childhood, College of Education, University of Akron, Ohio.

of an instructional unit involving a “big book”—or text that uses enlarged print and illustrations. We discuss emergent literacy theory, literacy in a new language, characteristics of big books, and the task: the big book and teaching unit. In addition, we provide teacher candidate feedback about the value of their learning experiences, some of the opportunities that have come to them as a result, and extensions they have developed.

Bringing literacy to the foreign language classroom is an elusive task for the teacher candidate. In many instances, teacher candidates have not had optimal reading instruction in the target language themselves. They are often unaware of how one reads in a foreign language or even how they learned to read in their first language (L1). In today’s L1 learning environments, a balanced approach to literacy is advocated (Vacca, Vacca, Gove, Burkey, Lenhart, & McKeon, 2003), one that includes a combination of both skills-based instruction and a more holistic literature-based approach. This balanced approach to literacy learning can also apply to working with children who are beginning to demonstrate emerging literacy abilities in their second language (L2).

To provide the most current theory and practices on the teaching of reading or literacy in a foreign language education program requires knowledge of L1 reading practices, research in reading, literacy theories, second language acquisition (SLA), and standards for foreign language learning. Cooperation and collaboration between the literacy and foreign language education faculty members can result in a stronger, more balanced approach to preparing teacher candidates. Such collaboration has provided foreign language teacher candidates the opportunity to learn more about shared reading and the use of big books at the University of Akron. The term *big books* describes large format books with big print texts and illustrations that are highly visible to learners as their teachers read them to the entire class. Using big

books in the classroom usually involves a shared-reading experience. *Shared reading* refers to a teacher-centered activity with the teacher pointing to and reading a big book or other enlarged text visible to students in the classroom or in a small group, followed by inviting the students to participate as they feel able to do so.

Research indicates that shared reading and the use of big books, which are now an integral part of many primary grade classrooms, are effective ways to teach L1 reading to children (Anderson, 1995). Evidence also exists to indicate that strategies used with young children as they encounter the world of print are also appropriate to use with learners who are developing new language literacy (Nambiar, 1991). Foreign language and English as a second language (ESL) professionals recognize these approaches to be effective and advocate their use in learning a new language (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004).

One Institution’s Foreign Language Teacher Education Program

At our institution, teacher candidates take two foreign language methods courses in addition to their general education classes and target language requirements. The first course, *Instructional Techniques: Modern Languages PreK–8*, is designed to prepare teacher candidates for language learners in PreK–8; the second, *Instructional Techniques: Modern Language–Secondary*, prepares them for secondary language learners. In each course, candidates have a supervised field experience of 35 hours. They work with mentor teachers at every level: both early childhood and middle childhood in the first course, and high school in the second course. In addition, during the first course, candidates teach early childhood learners in an after-school language enrichment program for six weeks (one day per week) in urban elementary schools. A standards-based task designed to guide foreign language teacher candidates as they design the big book unit facilitates their understanding

of and capacity to conduct holistic instruction centered on the text of a big book they create for early language learners.

Each candidate develops a unit of instruction. Later, in teams of two, they design and implement six lessons in the after-school language enrichment program based on one of their big book units. (See Appendix A for instructions.) Using big books makes L2 learning a fun and meaningful experience for both children and teacher candidates alike. Teacher candidates emerge from this hands-on experience with a great deal of practical knowledge and satisfaction as both authors and language teachers.

Addressing the goal of communication is one of the primary tasks of foreign language instruction. *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (National Standards, 1999) specifies that communicative modes of interpersonal, interpretative, and presentational skills be part of every foreign language curriculum along with goals of culture, connection, comparison, and community. In past decades, many teachers placed an emphasis on interpersonal skills or the oral aspect of language, often slighting the importance of reading and writing, while others emphasized a grammatical framework resulting in students knowing about the target language, but not developing the capacity to use it. The National Standards have clearly stated that the interpretive mode is a primary goal, and therefore, an essential component in language learning (Standard 1.2). This standard sends out an obvious call for attention to literacy. Early in the foreign language education program, teacher candidates realize that integrated foreign language instruction even at the early language learning levels should include aspects of reading and writing as well as speaking and listening. After all, reading is one of the greatest sources of input for learning an L2 (Barnett, 1989; Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Candidates learn to approach these skills through the three modes of the communication standard: interpretative, interpersonal, and presentational.

Looking at ways to teach reading to early language learners forces foreign language teacher candidates to think creatively about how to organize instruction at appropriate interest and developmental levels. It also allows candidates to examine closely the holistic learning process and gives them experience with an integrated learning approach. Since much of the reading process used can be applied to older learners as well, the task serves as a basis for learning how to conduct standard-based instruction in a contextualized manner.

Addressing standards at the program level is crucial as well. *ACTFL Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (2002) directs teacher candidate outcomes. Program Standard 3 requires candidates to understand the language acquisition process and create a learning environment in which they develop instructional practices that “reflect language outcomes and learner diversity” (p. 37). Finding a way for teacher candidates to “draw on their knowledge of theories,” and apply it to PreK–8 learners is essential for a successful program. Candidates benefit from providing meaningful classroom interaction. They must “negotiate meaning with students during interactions that include ‘spontaneous communication’” (p. 39). Working with early language learners, candidates learn more about learners as individuals, learn to adapt instruction to their needs, and find ways to promote critical thinking. Program Standard 4 focuses on candidates’ ability to integrate standards into planning and instruction by designing and adapting instruction according to the standards and curricular goals of communication, exploring the target culture, connecting to other disciplines, drawing comparisons, and linking learning to the community.

What Teacher-Candidates Need to Know About Emergent Literacy Theory

Aligning reading instruction in foreign language with reading techniques in the L1 is crucial. Our foreign language teacher can-

didates need to be aware of current reading practices. Emergent literacy theory states that learning to read and write encompasses both social and cultural features of language learning, as well as children's interactions with and understandings about print (Clay, 1991; Morrow, 2001). Emergent literacy begins with children listening to stories being read aloud, initial writing experiences, and noticing signs and labels in their surroundings (Tompkins, 2001). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) state that emergent readers generally begin learning to read by interpreting the story from pictures and then noticing that the print carries the actual storyline. They may notice some aspects of the print, such as spacing and directionality (left-to-right and top-to-bottom), recognize some words, and be able to repeat the language pattern of the text. Being able to relate their own experiences to the meaning of the story, as well as their own language to the print indicates comprehension of both the story and the function of print. The goal of the teacher is to focus on rereading easy familiar texts to and with the children, encouraging them to begin to read independently. The initial reading of books often starts with shared reading of big books or other enlarged texts.

Big books typically use predictable texts, allowing readers to use their prior knowledge to identify words that come next in a sentence, as well as rhythm, rhyme, and repetition, all of which aid word recognition and identification. Shared reading is a teaching strategy that is intended to replicate the intimate effects of lap-reading in the family by sharing big books with groups of children, especially texts that the children cannot yet read independently (Vacca et al., 2003; Holdaway, 1979). An important component of a balanced early literacy program, shared reading consists of using an enlarged text, or big book, an overhead projector, or even multiple copies of smaller books to share a favorite story, poem, song, rhyme, or other text with a group of children. The enlarged format allows children to be able to see the print

while it is being pointed to and read by the teacher so that they can begin to make the association between oral and written language and note the process of reading left to right across the page. Following this, children participate in the shared rereadings at the level of their particular abilities. After prereading activities that activate learners' prior knowledge, the text is read aloud often, over several days, to allow the children to memorize or learn the words so that they can begin to associate the print with the spoken words. "Memory reading" helps children to understand that print should sound like spoken language (Vacca et al., p. 87). As the teacher points to and reads each word aloud, the children focus on specifics such as where the print starts, left-to-right and top-to-bottom directionality, the return sweep to the left side of the text, and word-by-word matching, as well as other print-related concepts. These repeated shared readings then form a collection of known texts that children use to practice reading independently and use as writing and word study resources (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

Allen (2002) advocates shared reading in L1 for older children in middle and high school settings who struggle with conventional print materials. As with younger readers, this supported reading practice enables them to engage with the "voice support of other fluent readers" (p. 4) in texts that might be too challenging for them to read and understand on their own. It gives all students the opportunity to feel a part of a community of readers and to appreciate the enjoyment of fluent reading. Allen also endorsed shared reading as a strategy for increasing exposure to and competence with vocabulary.

According to Samuels (1997), repeated readings of the same texts, a feature of shared reading, have been shown to be very effective in developing L1 fluency. Faster and more accurate, fluency is defined as an increase in reading speed and a decrease in word recognition errors or miscues. Each successive rereading of the same text

results in increased reading speed and fewer miscues. There are added benefits as well. Comprehension increases with each repetition (or rereading) as the decoding challenge diminishes. With less attention focused on decoding and pronunciation, more attention is available for comprehension. Moreover, with each successful mastering of a reading passage, reading speed and word recognition are increased for new text passages, that is, there is a “transfer of training and a general improvement in reading fluency” (p. 377). Alternately, Rasinski (1990) demonstrates that listening-while-reading (a teacher reading aloud while students visually track the text) provides an equal benefit to that of repeated reading. This listening-while-reading can avoid the common pitfall of loss of interest in reading the same text continually.

Shared reading offers learners acquiring a new language certain advantages. In describing what reading teachers should know about ESL learners, Drucker (2003) states that shared reading provides English language learners with the opportunity to not only hear written language but also examine its corresponding phonological spellings.

Awareness of and curiosity about graphic forms of communication compel language learners to explore how written words convey meaning and how certain letters represent sounds. In addition, learners construct knowledge of the language literacy as they engage in the process of reading and writing in holistic and meaningful ways. Finally, competence at using symbolic representation increases as learners learn to read by reading and to write by writing (Schwartz, 1988).

Through discussion and research about reading theory, holistic reading demonstrations, and reading specialist speakers, teacher candidates learn several important principles:

1. In emergent literacy, language learning emerges continuously from the child according to his/her available developmental capacities and ongoing

experiences.

2. Literacy is learned in social context and in ways learners see as natural, meaningful, and purposeful.
3. Emergent readers intuitively try to make sense of the written language in a similar manner to the natural way they have constructed understanding of the spoken word.
4. Oral language is learned most naturally when the student experiences immersion or a language-enriched environment.
5. The written word is best learned in a print-rich environment.

These same principles of immersion in language and print-rich environments apply to learning a new language as well (Hayes & Schrier, 2000).

Literacy in a New Language

Goals of new language learning are similar to three goals for emergent literacy learners:

1. To increase learners' abilities to communicate (through the written word) and to enjoy this interpretive mode of communication.
2. To facilitate the learners' acquisition of language from the use of personal inventions and approximations to the use of correct social conventions of L2.
and
3. To help learners develop a self-efficacy in their own capacity to understand and use the written language.

In addition, foreign language learning is most effective when language itself is not the purpose of instruction (Louton & Louton, 1992). *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (1999) recognizes this concept. As stated in the connection goal in Standards 3.1 and 3.2, students acquire and reinforce knowledge about other disciplines through the foreign language. Thus, reading a story in the new language to understand the content or action of the story follows the recommendation that language learning be embedded in reading instruction.

It is an inductive procedure that allows the internalizing process of acquiring new language to take place. Louton and Louton (1992) recommend instruction designed to capitalize on the learner's "innate curiosity that originates from the sensori-motor stage," instruction that "involves the student physically and emotionally, and offers opportunities for challenge, success, discovery and creativity" (p. 5). In this way, shared reading instruction facilitates language acquisition.

In the big book unit project, teacher candidates learn to use a holistic approach to language instruction through meaningful engagement with real stories. For most teacher candidates, this is their first experience with instruction where language learners are generating their understanding of a text, in lieu of being told what they are learning. Candidates approach language learning in context, which is essential for meaning-focused language instruction. They teach story structures, conventions of print, and graphophonemic awareness. Language learners become aware of words and sentences through visual tracking in the meaningful context of stories (Anderson, 1995). Holistic language instruction using big books provides learners with integrated experiences in the four language processes—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and the communication goal directed to interpretive skill development. According to Hayes and Schrier (2000), focus on meaning provides integration of linguistic and cognitive development. Attention is brought "both to what students bring to a text and what they get from it, with an emphasis on reading and writing as thinking processes that require the same kind of problem-solving skills as those required outside of the classroom" (p. 289).

Fostering Literacy Techniques for Foreign Language Learning

In 1997, Colville-Hall observed a demonstration of the use of big books by a FLES teacher. Intrigued by the reported success of the learners and the FLES teacher's enthu-

siasm for this technique, she explored the concept of big books more thoroughly. She consulted with early childhood colleagues in literacy in her institution. Because both research and colleagues indicated that big books were an effective way to teach early literacy (Holdaway, 1979; Nambiar, 1991; Nicoll-Hatton, 1992), she worked collaboratively to develop an approach to foster literacy teaching in the PreK–12 foreign language teacher education program.

An examination of what teacher candidates should know about big books and literacy placed an emphasis on the teacher's role and the text itself in preparing teacher candidates. The teacher's role is crucial in first selecting reading content, creating the book, and presenting the reading lesson. The text must consider the learners and what they like to read. It should reflect effective techniques to attract readers, such as colorful and esthetically pleasing drawings and images, a clever storyline, developmentally appropriate vocabulary, words learners can pronounce, repetition and/or phrases that "hook" students, and big print (Pirto & Pirto, 1988). Certainly, teacher candidates could greatly benefit from creating and publishing big books for young language learners, a process during which they analyze and synthesize information about teaching and learning. The goal is to create a book tailored to the abilities of the learners that teaches what they are ready to learn. In short, teacher candidates need to be able to "customize" a book to the learners and to their instructional needs.

The method of shared reading borrowed from the holistic language approach works well in teaching learners a new language. The use of big books for shared reading is particularly appropriate because they provide opportunity for demonstration as the adult models pronunciation, intonation, and phrasing. The introduction of new vocabulary is facilitated by the use of visuals, cues, and gestures. Early language learners are invited to, and successfully engage in, an interactive performance through rereadings of the story. Scaffolding

provided by the teacher assists beginning readers (and early language learners) to actively engage in meaningful shared reading. Meaning is gleaned from the context. Children gain confidence in their ability to read aloud the language they are learning in an enjoyable social context. The use of repetitive phrases tends to reduce the amount of new and overwhelming vocabulary and concepts. Children learn to be predictors of repetitive phrases with certain texts; others teach them the subtle co-patterns of language and illustrations and how to interpret the story (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Unsworth, 1993).

Characteristics of Big Books

According to Karges-Bone (1992), there are several essential characteristics to a successful big book learning experience.

Big books

- are short stories (10–15 pages) that immediately engage learners' interest,
- contain a rhyme pattern that children notice and learn,
- are “big on pictures” which assists in the construction of meaning,
- have repetitive phrases and a controlled vocabulary that help with vocabulary learning,
- have a simple, but interesting storyline, and
- contain elements of humor (p. 742).

Books in which (partial) texts are easily learned from the repetitions and that access student prior knowledge are preferred. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) state that using big books enables early language learners to learn to read first by “reciting and memorizing, recognizing sight words, and decoding the text . . . and to begin matching oral language with the written word” (p. 91).

Nambiar (1991) recommends texts for big books that are a rich source of activities to activate prior knowledge, model the thinking process, encourage predictive skills, and provide creative linguistic activi-

ties for all major curriculum objectives. The shared reading atmosphere should be relaxed and mirror the family's reading experience at home, building on both the child's home and school experiences (Anderson, 1995).

In addition, “think-alouds,”—in which the teacher talks about how to solve problems in reading—can easily be used for teaching reading and decoding strategies. The teacher's use of questions, or scaffolding, helps children become self-regulated learners through the modeling of meaning and comprehension questions that readers will, in turn, learn to ask themselves when reading independently. In other words, big books are ideal for teaching beginning reading in a new language to learners in the primary classroom.

Shared reading through big books, however, should not be limited to young learners. Reed (1991) endorses them not only for the emergent reader, but for “big kids” as well. Townsend (1996) observes the effectiveness of shared reading instruction with older students with disabilities. Deaf learners appeared enthusiastic about lessons with big books as their teacher shared text and pictures simultaneously with the students gathered around. According to Wadlington and Hicks (1995), adult learners also find big books an effective means to begin L1 adult literacy. By using motivating books in a shared reading experience, older learners can observe letter-sound relationships, sentence and paragraph structure, and story grammar. The teacher models reading strategies and decoding strategies. Interestingly, some of our own teacher candidates have reported successful use of big books in both their middle school and high school field assignments with L2 learners.

The Task: Big Book and Teaching Unit for Teacher Candidates

Following class discussions on holistic learning and reading theory, a reading specialist demonstrates teaching behaviors of the shared reading experience with a

model big book such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Martin, 1983) and *La Hamaca de la Vaca (The Cow's Hammock)* (Ada, 1999). Prereading strategies may consist of piquing the interest of the learners for the subject, accessing prior knowledge, predicting the storyline, and introducing unfamiliar vocabulary. During reading for beginning readers, the focus is on techniques such as use of pointing to aid visual tracking, use of visuals to bring meaning to the text, choral repetition of sounds, words, sentences, and refrains, as well as reading for understanding and comprehension questioning. Postreading activities include a variety of follow-up or response tasks including discussion, comprehension activities, writing, art, drama projects, and additional related reading. In acquisition literacy, the goal is learning how to read. However, the ultimate goal is independence; that is reading to learn. Learning to read can be considered processing of both print and meaning because learners have to process unfamiliar words in addition to reading for understanding. While learning to read goes hand in hand with reading for meaning, the ultimate goal of reading is always to learn.

The big book unit compels candidates to address national and state standards for foreign languages, specifically the Communication Standard 1.2: "Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics." According to Curtain and Dahlberg (2004), this standard addresses the interpretive mode in which the learner is the audience in one-way communication and is involved with listening, viewing, or reading. Reading is interpretive communication and as such needs to be done for a purpose, as a tool within a familiar and meaning-based context. The big book lessons provide the beginning steps in interpretive communication and reinforce literacy skills that children are learning in their L1.

Goals of the Big Book Unit

Creation of the big book unit serves several purposes. As a result of the unit, teacher

candidates are able to describe the holistic learning approach to the interpretive mode of communication (or reading) and justify its use in the foreign language classroom, as well as identify the procedure and techniques for using the shared reading/big books approach. Inherent in the lessons are elements of the interpersonal and/or presentational modes, as well as goals of culture, connection, comparison, and communities. Candidates are engaged in materials development as they actually create a big book and an integrated teaching unit based on standards-based instruction, shared reading instruction, and the interest and developmental level of early language learners. In the process, they acquire the ability to apply theory to practice by teaching several lessons using the big book and parts of the unit to elementary school children in a language enrichment field assignment with the goal of communication in the interpretive mode, and reflect on the degree of success of student learning based on set objectives of each lesson.

Procedures

Teacher candidates work in groups to brainstorm possible topics for a thematic teaching unit. They select one topic and working together devise a concept web or semantic map to link the topic to related concepts and other fields of study for early language learners (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). Then each candidate selects a topic that relates to one aspect in the web and independently creates a big book and unit based on unit criteria and national and/or state standards. Examples of big books created by teacher candidates have included contexts that focus on teaching primary concepts such as colors, numbers, animals, daily routines, holidays, opposites, special events (birthdays and other holidays), versions of folk tales, games children play, locations, and translations of books published in English.

Criteria for Shared Reading of Big Books

The Story

Teacher candidates create an original story that has a simple storyline, preferably a pattern or predictable story, or adapt a published book. An example of a familiar story with a pattern that can be adapted to a big book format is *The Little Boy Who Cried Wolf*.

Construction

After creating the story, teacher candidates may use poster board or heavy paper for the covers and pages of the big book. The use of clip art has given new meaning to authors as the non-artists learn to illustrate text with technology. Gifted sketchers create big, uncluttered pages to illustrate their texts. Teacher candidates share their stories in draft form with one another to obtain feedback for error correction. The final product is laminated and attached with large rings so that turning the pages is easy. Teacher candidates may choose to use an easel for presenting the text to the students. Finally, they design their units following guidelines for the following five-step approach to shared reading.

Teaching the Lesson

Step One. The teacher candidate asks learners to look at the book cover illustration and asks, “What do you see?” and “What do you think this story is about?” Children may use their native language to predict if vocabulary mastery is an issue. At this stage, the focus is not on accuracy, but on establishing meaning. As learners predict what the story may be about in the new language, they are using their emerging oral language skills to answer yes/no questions, or give one-word or open-ended responses. The teacher candidate may record predictions on a chart for easy checking after the first reading.

Next, the teacher candidate reads the title and the name of the author and asks children to add to their predictions. The teacher candidate also activates student prior knowledge by relating the title and text to what students have learned previously. Then the candidate reads the story

aloud with enthusiasm and expression, just for enjoyment, generally making no pause for comments or questions, but makes it meaningful by indicating visuals that give meaning to text. Children should listen to the entire story without interruptions. The learners are able to see the print as the teacher candidate reads and runs a pointer or hand under the text the learners hear.

Finally, the teacher candidate asks learners to express their own reactions or interpretations of the story. Careful to use “caretakerese” (or simple language structures at the skill level of the learners) they scaffold or support understanding in the target language and build meaning from context. The candidate might ask, “Do you like this story? Why? Do you like ____ (referring to an aspect in the story)? Do you have . . . ? Do you do . . . ?” This type of probing is designed to help learners consider their own related experiences.

Step Two. The teacher candidate rereads the story aloud, using a pointer to follow the story print. Referring to the chart of student predictions, the candidate then asks which of their ideas were similar to the author’s: “How well did we predict? Are we correct in our predictions?” Next, the candidate has the learners recap the story by using yes/no questions followed by either/or questions that help learners with limited vocabulary acquire language. This process checks how well learners understood the meaning and sequence of the story and provides them the opportunity to use oral language to express their comprehension. Then the candidate rereads the story inviting learners to read along or “chime in” when there are repeated words, phrases, or dialogue. Afterwards, the candidate invites learners to tell about their favorite parts or favorite characters in the story: “What do you like about this story?” The candidate offers instructional support or scaffolding and questions for clarification, and then models language that learners need to express their feelings.

Step Three. The teacher candidate invites learners to read along in a choral

reading approach for fluency practice using the pointer to indicate the corresponding words. Because fluency practice (or choral reading) is important for emergent readers in their own native language at this stage, fluency practice would appear to be important for readers learning an L2 as well. Then the candidate reviews the story pointing to clues and examples that help learners become aware of and focus on any of the following: conventions of print, syntax, letter-sound relationships, language structures, new vocabulary, and word recognition. The teacher candidate can now focus on these components within the context of the story, to assist learners in reading and comprehending the text better.

Step Four. After a number of whole group readings, learners may volunteer to reread individually and, because they are now familiar with the story, they are more likely to succeed. Teacher candidates accept approximations if learners are unable to read the story exactly as written, since approximations are considered beginning steps in literacy learning. While doing this, the candidate continues to provide a linguistically enriched environment appropriate to learners' levels by modeling the target language.

The rereading task is followed with comprehension activities to ascertain whether the learners are able to understand the actual story or are only able to recognize and identify words. These activities are a form of retelling the story with some information missing and, depending on the learners' level, may include some of the following tasks: place the pages in order, explain the action on one of the pages, write missing information in the blanks, make a page from the book, match a page with the script, tell about a character or retell part of the story from a different character's perspective.

Step Five. Teacher candidates also develop extension activities to engage the learners in memorable learning experiences and integrate other skills such as literacy acquisition through writing, visual inter-

pretation, self-expression, and interpretation. Acquisition is facilitated through the output means of impromptu or informal dialogue, creative writing, and drama and art appreciation. Extension activities serve to develop presentational and interpersonal communication skills and to reinforce the language and concepts children have just learned. A frequent activity is retelling the story in the learner's own words, more extensively than in Step Four, relying on dramatic representation, art, music, and creative writing. Examples include use of felt board stories, creative dramatics, puppetry, character masks, or headbands to encourage oral language usage. In addition, art provides opportunities for using pictures and the written word. Children can create their own publications: a class book or individual books, pop-up stories, dictated or written stories, the story with a different ending, another story using the pattern of the book, and retelling the story from a different point of view.

Additional ideas come from the specific type of book used. Depending on what teacher candidates create, some stories may lead easily to teaching about nutrition, daily routines, science (teaching about plants and plant growth), or math (counting, learning fractions, or geometric shapes) activities. Because many of these extension activities do not fit in the time frame of the field experience of the teacher candidates, they are therefore, just included and explained in their lesson plans.

This holistic approach to L2 learning integrates speaking, listening, reading, and writing processes in both relevant and meaningful ways. With the big book unit, teacher candidates are more likely to promote the initial desire for learners to read and a disposition of enjoyment of reading in the new language. This method of teaching with big books results in increased knowledge about materials development, lesson planning, and hands-on instruction for candidates' learning techniques for teaching foreign language in early and middle childhood levels. Their experiences

are rich sources of information about the teaching/learning process.

Candidates Report on Using Big Books

As previously mentioned in the description of the PreK–12 program, teacher candidates have a 35-hour field assignment in which they work collaboratively with PreK–8 foreign language teachers. Candidates are often able to use the big books in their field assignments; however, there is little opportunity for them to teach the entire unit. In the separate six-week field task of enrichment language teaching in urban K–5 schools where candidates working in teams are supervised, candidates provide instruction using the big book unit. Observations conducted by the professor in the field during actual teaching offer teacher candidates feedback about the development of lessons accompanying their big book instruction. In addition, candidates reflect on their experience in journal evaluations of their teaching.

Following the course, candidates are asked to reflect on the value of their experience in creating and teaching the big book unit through an informal survey (Appendix B). Their reflections have been gathered over the last six years. As there was no initial intention in making this project a formal study with a systematic tally of the results, comments from teacher candidates are reported here.

For the most part candidates found the experience to be positive and said they benefited greatly. Most created their own stories, while a few translated or adapted stories from English. For example, one student adapted a Japanese folktale to the ability level of her students, while another adapted the main theme from *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969), using numbers, colors, and different kinds of foods in Spanish. Others created their own texts or innovations. One candidate “used flip-ups to make [reading] more fun for the students,” while another made an interactive book out of felt “with counting,

shapes and colors that could be touched.” In responding to the question about writing a text that was culturally appropriate, none of the candidates reported addressing culture specifically, although one stated that she wished she had. A French teacher candidate who lived in French-speaking Africa asked to be allowed to use naturally found materials to create the text and book since technology would not be available in the locale to which she would return. She used a culturally authentic setting with the theme of location. Another teacher candidate created a story with a twist about animals that go to the zoo to see people and learn about their professions and careers. (See Appendix C.)

In the process of making their big books and units, teacher candidates stated they learned (a) that much work is involved, (b) how to accommodate the age and interests of learners, (c) the important role literacy and literature play for early language learners in the foreign language classroom, and (d) how to design a standards-based unit with multiple lessons from one text, the big book. From their experiences in the classroom, candidates reported on the importance of a familiar story to increase vocabulary acquisition and the value of interaction or shared reading with children for both motivation and learning, in addition to the effect of repetition and reviewing to reinforce new concepts. They also reported on the value of proofreading and checking one’s work before publishing.

As big book units were used with children in the elementary K–5 grades, teacher candidates found that language learners responded very positively. Their self-reporting included, “They loved it because they knew the story in English and were able to understand the book and that made them feel good.” Also mentioned, “The children loved the storyline, they enjoyed the animals and animal sounds and really loved the last page with the glitter spider web and enjoyed touching it.” Another candidate explicitly stated, “All of the children enjoyed it and loved acting out the action

verbs (they had to swim, dance, sing, run, etc.). I also used Pokemon characters who had been transformed into 'boys and girls just like them with new names' so that really got their attention." Others commented about the effectiveness of the repetitive phrases and rhyme patterns that Karges-Bone (1992) listed as essential characteristics of big books, "They loved the rhyme and repetition. We were able to use it corresponding to our animal unit." Evidently, rhyme and rhythm helped learners remember words. One candidate commented on learners' satisfaction in the interpretive mode or making sense of print, "They LOVED it! They were excited to learn that they could actually read [Japanese characters], and that it made sense. They also enjoyed the activities that I had created as extension activities." (See Japanese book in Appendix C). Candidates spoke of the techniques they used, "The children responded very positively, better than I had expected. They were able to follow the storyline and make predictions. The repetition in the story helped them not to become overwhelmed by the many new Spanish words that were introduced." In addition, this candidate discovered the cloze strategy for drawing children's attention to vocabulary:

The children were excited that they could understand the main ideas on each page, even though they may not have understood each individual vocabulary word. One technique that I used was to cover up the color word that appeared on each page. Students could see the color from the picture, and then instead of reading the word off the page, they would have to tell me in Spanish which color each fruit or vegetable was. Different vocabulary words can also be covered during different readings so that students can test themselves and see how much vocabulary knowledge they have retained.

Candidates used a variety of techniques overall. Meaning orientation provided stu-

dents with the opportunity to bring their prior knowledge to a text as well as derive meaning from it. As problem solving, it involved the same type of thinking skills used outside of the classroom and in the learning process as recommended by Hayes and Schrier (2000) for L2 literacy in the early grades.

In a few instances, teacher candidates did not have the opportunity to teach their big book lesson. They may have worked with partners whose big book units were selected rather than their own for the after school enrichment program. These candidates responded with the following ways they might use the books in the future: (a) with K-3 or elementary aged children, (b) with elementary to middle school and high school, especially to introduce a unit of study, (c) having students create small versions for themselves, and (d) to introduce a certain context that would focus on specific verb tenses such as preterit, imperfect, and/or subjunctive. These candidates were involved in teaching from a big book; it was just not their own. One suggestion made by a teacher candidate who reported the big book too cumbersome to travel with, was to convert it to a PowerPoint presentation.

When asked the benefits of creating the unit, teacher candidates recognized the effectiveness of using the big books for teaching foreign language literacy. They listed the following: value of visuals, relevance of repetition to assist in learning, need for interaction to check meaning, importance of keeping the students' interest, and using the book as a starting point for language lessons. Knowledge of material development was evident in this candidate's evaluation:

I could "custom-make" a story that had an appropriate level of vocabulary and an appropriate selection of vocabulary. I could make the story as short or long as I needed it to be. The big book provided a nice base for a unit because it could be used several times to review new concepts/words.

In general, candidates' comments illustrated their knowledge about learning processes and their understanding of the need to assess learners' developmental characteristics in order to give direction to their teaching (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). One candidate addressed the pedagogical knowledge gained:

What I learned the most about teaching with the big book is that you need to prepare students for the reading of the book by engaging in a prereading lesson consisting of providing background information, activating prior knowledge and teaching vocabulary pertinent to understanding the story line. I decided not to [pre] teach the students the verb vocabulary associated with the actions of the animals; however, the mistake I made when I first used the book, was I did not provide gestures for the verbs to facilitate understanding. But once I corrected this, and used gestures, the students understood the story with no problems.

Candidates benefited by drawing on theory and matching it to their practice. Teacher candidates were also asked if the project of making big books was worth the effort. Several candidates expressed frustration with the great amount of time required to do the job well. For those who used their big books with students in a classroom, all reported that the benefits were definitely worth the time required for construction. One student found the project valuable for learning more about the process:

The benefits of creating a big book outweighed the time spent creating it due to the fact that I was able to truly understand how reading should be introduced to a novice language learner, and what components are essential at the beginning level in order to provide comprehensible input.

In assigning value to the project, actual use of the big book and interaction with children was often the deciding factor. Candidates noted that physical interaction during the shared reading with students was invaluable because it made the assignment of making the big book and unit plan authentic and more realistic. According to Hayes and Schrier (2000), "Literacy can be thought of as the ability to recognize, understand, and participate fully in the social relationships among language, self, others, and environment" (p. 288). Observing and interacting with children as they participated in the social relationships among language, self, and others provided by the big book proved to be a rewarding experience for many. Most of the candidates also claimed to be willing to create another big book for their teaching, especially if they were to teach in the elementary grades: "YES. I am currently storing away my son's and daughter's books to turn into Spanish books that I can use in my classroom."

Teacher candidates made the following suggestions for improving the big book unit: (a) make previous candidates' products and feedback available when candidates begin to design their own first big book, (b) tailor the text or even the assignment for older students, (c) reduce other course assignments so more time can be dedicated to the big book unit, and (d) integrate the project with technology. Although they found that the construction of big books was very time consuming and, for some, costly, candidates felt the benefits far outweighed the time, effort, and cost involved after using them with actual students in classrooms. The project gave candidates the experience of providing instruction directed initially to the interpretive mode in which the learner is the audience in one-way communication. Then candidates learned to make the lesson an interactive learning experience with the scaffolding they provided as they involved language learners in predicting, listening, viewing, responding to questions, and reading. In this manner, candidates learned how

to teach reading as a tool in the meaning-based context furnished by the big book.

Beyond the University Course

Knowledge gained from creating the big book unit goes beyond the university instructional course. The following two cases demonstrate the value of the big book unit and showcase the relevance of the instruction of this literacy task. The first case resulted from a job interview for a K–2 position. The second case is the narrative of a new teacher’s instruction during the first year of teaching.

In talking about his interview, one teacher candidate said that his interviewers were impressed with his “depth of knowledge” on topics such as K–5 foreign language instruction, cognitive development and processes, characteristics of learners including special needs and minority children, social development, and standards-based lesson planning. In addition, the interviewers judged his portfolio, collection of journals, resources, lessons, and materials to be ample and well-developed. The candidate stated that the school officials were impressed that, as a starting teacher who had never been in his own classroom, he had such a “large, well-organized set of materials,” including his big book and unit plan which they found “attractive . . . and [other] well-designed tools.” He said the time spent creating materials and integrating standards into planning was “exactly what these public school officials were seeking.”

Benefits of the big book unit follow candidates into their actual classrooms when employed as foreign language teachers. In the second case, Angie Garritano, a new Spanish teacher at Hudson Middle School in Hudson, Ohio, worked with her colleague, Blanca Pascher, on a literacy and language awareness project. With their eighth grade students, they used lessons from Ms. Garritano’s big book unit, modifying instruction for middle school learners. Following the model reading lessons, Spanish students became classroom pub-

lishers for second grade learners much in the same way that Pirto and Pirto (1988) advocate big book construction for older readers. In this middle school project, these eighth grade publishers considered first their audience (second graders) and what they like to read. Then they analyzed aspects of the books children like such as colorful drawings, easy-to-sound words, repetition of phrases or a “catchy” refrain, large print, and vocabulary appropriate to early childhood learners. Following the development of a big book in teams of three or four, these eighth grade Spanish students learned how to teach a reading lesson and then implemented those lessons with the second graders. They shared enthusiastically their appreciation of Spanish with the early language learners, an experience that contributed to feelings of accomplishment and pride in their work. (See Appendix C for an example of their big book.) Thus, the middle school teachers provided a linguistically enriched learning environment for the acquisition of both Spanish and literacy and extended lessons from the big book unit to the elementary level. These teachers also stated, that by instilling the desire to learn Spanish as early as second grade, the project would have an enormous benefit for their Spanish language program.

Addressing Teacher Education Program Standards

Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers was approved in 2002 by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Institutions accredited by NCATE must address these standards in their programs. The task of completing the big book unit addresses teacher preparation standards 3 and 4 of the *ACTFL Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (2002). The big book unit specifically requires candidates to apply language acquisition theory and target language input as they “draw on their knowledge of theories,” applying

it to PreK–8 learners at various levels, and in “designing teaching strategies that facilitate language acquisition” (p. 38). While designing and implementing the lessons, candidates used “a variety of strategies to help students understand oral and written input” and “they use the target language to design content-based language lessons” (p. 38). Candidates experienced and “provided meaningful classroom interaction” and “negotiated meaning with students” during interaction including “spontaneous communication” (p. 39). In implementing these lessons, the candidates learned the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment. They “check[ed] information about learners,” “implement[ed] a variety of instructional techniques to address these student differences,” adapted instruction to address “students’ multiple ways of learning” and “students’ special needs” (p. 40). They also “use[d] activities that promote critical thinking and problem solving” (p. 41).

Working in an urban school, candidates learned to adapt their lessons to diverse learners, and meet the challenge of different learning styles and classroom behavior. The big book unit provided candidates the contact necessary “to value the diversity of their students” as they learned to address each learner’s special needs (p. 42). Candidates expressed both pleasure and satisfaction in enabling children to use the target language. Prior to this assignment, few of the candidates had the opportunity to work in an urban setting.

Throughout the big book unit, candidates demonstrated their ability to integrate standards into planning and instruction in designing and adapting instruction using national and state standards and curricular goals. They designed ways for the learners to communicate by using interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes. They created lessons in the big book unit that develop communication, explore the target culture, connect to other disciplines, make comparisons, and are tied to the community goals. The big book unit proved

essential not only as a valuable learning experience for teacher candidates; it is a means of addressing many of the program goals in the PreK-12 foreign language education program.

Conclusion

The reports of candidates and observations of their practice in the field point to the success of the big book unit in bringing literacy awareness and tools to foreign language teacher candidates described in this program. These candidates developed effective skills in teaching reading that include the development and use of a big book and the thematic unit that accompanied it. Candidates created context- and standards-based instruction and implemented their lessons in a real world instructional setting. To do this effectively they had to understand emergent literacy theory, literacy in a second language, second language acquisition, and characteristics of big books. The task of designing and implementing a big book and teaching unit afforded them experiences that had additional benefits. The value of their learning experiences and opportunities was expressed in their own words. As such, teacher candidates became well aware of the importance of learners’ acquisition of interpretive skills. They learned that reading, as a tool within a familiar and meaning-based context (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004), is essential in L2 learning.

Two aspects of the unit that will be changed in the future deal with inclusion of culture and technology. We will make a concerted effort to have teacher candidates incorporate to a greater degree elements of the target culture in their story or unit. The pedagogy of culture in language learning is essential to standards-based teaching. Using or creating texts that are culturally specific will improve culture learning. In addition, candidates will be asked to enhance the project with technology and make electronic versions of their work.

To conclude, the big book project ensures that teacher candidates make prog-

ress toward achievement of at least two of the six standards in a PreK–12 foreign language education program. Candidates are not only able to discuss the process of getting learners to communicate using the interpretive mode, they are able to develop instruction, apply theory to practice in a class setting, and reflect on student learning. Additionally, the teaching experience with big books in the urban school helps them build confidence and a sense of self-efficacy for the student-teaching phase of their program.

References

- ACTFL program standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers.* (2002). Yonkers, NY: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.
- Ada, A. (1999). *Una hamaca por la vaca*. Miami, FL: Santillana USA Publishing Co., Inc.
- Allen, J. (2002). *On the same page: Shared reading beyond the primary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Anderson, J. (1995). Sharing big books in two grade one classrooms: A case study. *Reading Improvement*, 32(4), 236–255.
- Barnett, M. (1989). More than meets the eye: Foreign language reading. *Language in Education: Theory and Practice*, 73. CAL/ERIC Series on Languages and Linguistics. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar*. Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company.
- Clay, M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Curtain, H., & Dahlberg, C. (2004). *Languages and children making the match: New languages for young learners*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Drucker, M. (2003). What reading teachers should know about ESL learners. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(1), 22–29.
- Fountas, I., & Pinnell, G. S. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hayes, N., & Schrier, L. (2000). Encouraging second language literacy in the early grades. *Hispania*, 83(2), 286–296.
- Holdaway, D. (1979). *The foundations of literacy*. Sidney: Ashton Scholastic.
- Karges-Bone, L. (1992). Bring on the big books (in the classroom). *Reading Teacher*, 45(9), 743–744.
- Louton, Z., & Louton, R. (1992). *Flesh out your FLES program: Developmental sequencing in teaching units*. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 375 636)
- Martin, B. (1983). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Morrow, L. (2001). *Literacy development in the early years: Helping children read and write*, 4th ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Nambiar, M. (1991). *Big books for little readers: Works in the ESL classroom too*. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 333 736).
- National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. (1996). *Standards for foreign language learning: Preparing for the 21st century*. Yonkers, NY: Author.
- National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. (1999). *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century*. Yonkers, NY: Author.
- Nicoll-Hatton, V. (1992). *Big books revisited: An interview with Don Holdaway*. Newtown, Australia: Pen 86 - Primary English Teaching Association. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 351 662).
- Omaggio Hadley, A. (2001). *Teaching languages in context*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Pirto, J., & Pirto, C. (1988). Spotlight on big books for little readers. *Instructor*, 97(9), 30–32.
- Rasinski, T. (1990). Effects of repeated reading and listening-while-reading on reading fluency. *Journal of Educational Research*, 83(3), 147–150.
- Reed, V. (1991). Big books—big ideas. *Instructor*, October, 20–22.
- Samuels, S. (1997). The method of repeated readings. *The Reading Teacher*, 50(5), 376–381.
- Schwartz, J. (1988). *Encouraging early literacy: An integrated approach to reading and writing in N-3*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Tompkins, G. (2001). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach*. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Townsend, J. (1996). Big books: Links to literacy for everyone. *Perspectives in Education and Deafness*, 14(3), 23–26.

Unsworth, L. (1993). Multiple semiotic sources as scaffolding for young children's emergent reading of picture-story books. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 16(2), 1–14.

Vacca, J., Vacca R. T., Gove, M., Burkey, L., Lenhart, L., & McKeon, C. (2003). *Reading and learning to read*. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Wadlington, E., & Hicks, K. (May-June 1995). Using the big book experience with adult literacy students. *Adult Learning*, 6(5), 14–16.

APPENDIX A

Big Book Lesson

Instructions for teaching a big book

Steps

1. Adapt a big book or create your own, one that has a subject of interest to which elementary learners can easily relate. Make the story simple.
2. State objectives and each national standard that will be addressed. Be specific by addressing the sub goals. Indicate the ODE Content Standards Indicators you will address.
3. Tell what prior knowledge learners have acquired.
 - Develop prereading activities that make learners aware of the setting and prepare them to understand vocabulary. You may use a language experience approach to accomplish this.
 - Tell how you would teach vocabulary necessary for comprehension.
 - Use visuals, contextual cues, gestures, etc., and limit your use of English for instruction. Use caretaker language. Children may use English.

Introduce the book. Use an advance organizer. Have children predict what the story is about. (Who has been to a rain forest? What did you see there?) Talk about the author and illustrator. Read the book aloud. You will model the language. Take time to point to new vocabulary words as they are illustrated visually, but don't interpret the storyline. Then ask children how they like the story.

6. Check the predictions. "How well did we predict?"
7. Read the book aloud again. You will model the language. Take time to point to new vocabulary words as they are illustrated visually. Point to the words as you read them.

8. Ask comprehension questions. Use *who* / *what* questions and other interrogatives that require one word answers, *yes* / *no* or *either* / *or* questions until learners are comfortable producing the language needed. Lead into a discussion with questions about the children, what they like and how the story applies to them.
9. Reread together as a group; choral reading.
10. Create additional activities that emerge from the story. Develop two or three post-reading activities that engage learners in the interpersonal and presentational modes. They need to communicate using the vocabulary and storyline interpersonally, eventually involving them in a presentational mode.
11. Create vocabulary cards (visuals) for this story. Have learners add vocabulary to their dictionaries.

APPENDIX B

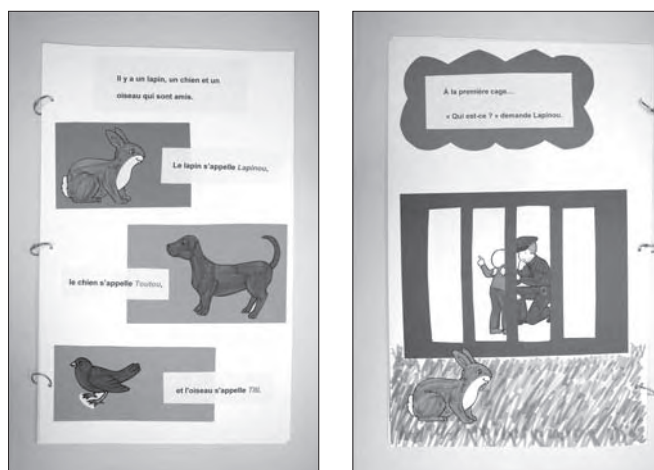
Big Book Questionnaire

1. What kind of big book did you make? What inspired your big book? Did you translate a story written in English? Create your own story? Adapt a story to be more culturally appropriate?
2. What did you learn from the process of making the big book?
3. What did you learn from sharing the big book with your classmates? How did your classmates respond?
4. How successful were you in teaching the big book to children. What did you learn from using it with children? At what level? How did the children respond?
5. If you did not get to use it with children, when and how would you use it in the future?
6. What were the benefits to you of creating a big book? Did the benefits offset the amount of time you put into creating it?
7. Would you ever create a big book again in your teaching?
8. Do you recommend that I continue with the big book unit?
9. What recommendations do you have with regard to big book materials, lesson and unit for future teacher candidates?

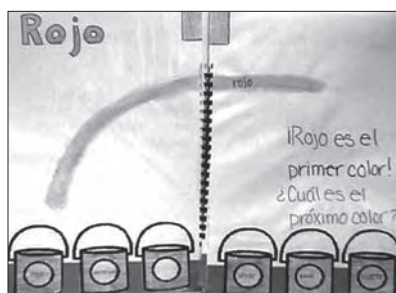
APPENDIX C

Examples of Big Books

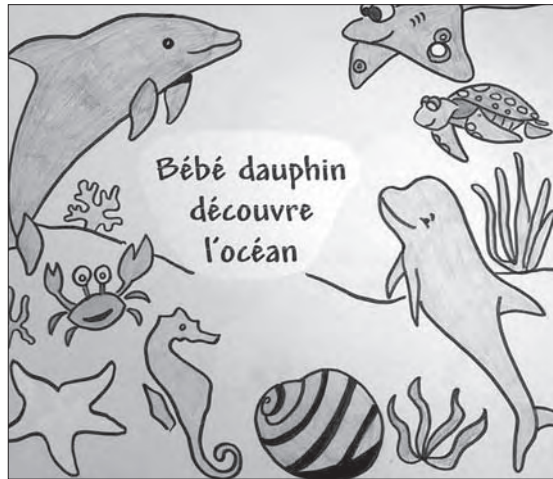
The big book, *Une visite au zoo*, is a story about professions and careers that has a clever twist. Children learn from the context as they laugh at the concept of seeing human beings in cages in a zoo and learn what each does: a policeman protects people, a fireman puts out fires, a teacher teaches and students learn and play, etc. Here are a few pages:



The *¡El pintado del arco iris!* is a big book made by eighth graders at Hudson Middle School. Their teachers Angie Garritano and Blanca Pascher presented a unit using a big book which inspired students to develop a lesson that they were to teach in the second grade. This book presents a very clever way for eighth graders to teach the colors, introducing each color on a page, and presenting the image of the rainbow. Working in groups, these eighth grade students designed their own book and illustrated it. Here is one of the first pages:



In another example, children follow as a baby dolphin discovers the ocean world by asking, “*Qu’est-ce que c’est?*” (What’s that?) each time he encounters a new life form. The repetitive element is in that question and the refrain, “*Ils ont continué.*”



This hand-drawn big book is an excellent example of adapting authentic literature for teaching Japanese.

