How Visual Thinking Strategies Using Picture Book Images can Improve Korean Secondary EFL Students' L2 Writing

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This research aims to explore whether guided visual artwork discussions called Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) using picture book images can benefit and enhance Korean EFL secondary students' L2 writing. Incorporating content analysis, this research examines how carefully guided artwork discussions can enhance visual understanding, critical thinking skills and interpretive L2 writing skills. The L2 writing samples of the focal students revealed that they were able to think based on visual clues. The discussions were led by the teacher who pointed out significant visual elements and allowed time for the students to explore diverse ideas. The focal students were able to piece together the jigsaw of the images and articulate their thoughts in English, during which time they learned to take risks and to make mistakes in using a foreign language. Their critical comments and improved L2 writing suggest how critical/aesthetic thinking skills can be developed through continued visual practices in a secondary EFL setting.

Key words: picture book, visual literacy, visual thinking strategies, secondary EFL, L2 writing

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite its role as an important communicative tool (Brown, 2007), writing activities seem to be neglected in many Korean secondary EFL classrooms (Yi & Shim, 2011). Even if writing activities are implemented into English classes, they are composed mostly of error correction and grammatical knowledge tests which may hamper students' critical thinking skills and writing fluency (Yang & Son, 2009). Moreover, writing researches in Korean EFL settings are aimed mostly at teachers'

perception of writing (Yi & Shim, 2011; Yang & Son, 2009) and university students' writing performance (Huh & Hwang, 2011; Huh & Kim, 2013; Kim, 2006; Lee, 2013; Pae, 2008). There is little research concerning Korean secondary EFL students' writing performance and writing activities (Lee & Lee, 2013; Lee & Lim, 2010; Park & Ahn, 2013).

Even when they are aimed at secondary students, most writing research in Korean EFL looks primarily at verbal components, while ignoring the visual nature of the current image-saturated society. As the texts that students encounter are composed of visual images including SNS images and media coverage, students should be encouraged to "expand their repertoire of strategies of making sense of these multimodal ensembles" (Serafini, 2014, p. 2). Thus, our instructional approaches should emphasize discerning meanings in visual images (i.e., visual literacy) (Yenawine, 1997) so that students have an opportunity to be more successful in their everyday lives and in academics (Eilam, 2012). Unfortunately, it is difficult to find studies that integrate visual practices into English teaching for Korean secondary EFL students. Instead, grammar and translation are emphasized (Kim, 2014), as the absence of a writing section in the Korean college entrance exam shows (Jwa, 2007).

In actuality, a higher level of visual literacy exerts a favorable impact on writing enhancement (Tan, Randi, Barbot, Levonson, Friedlaender, & Grigorenko, 2012), for "visual skills may nurture mental imagery which enhances writing descriptions or idea generation in creative writing work" (Barbot, Randi, Tan, Levonson, Friedlaender, & Grigorenko, 2012, p. 168). In other words, visual perception, thinking skills and language development go hand-in-hand while viewers make sense of what they see through their words. Empirical studies prove the positive influence of visual artwork discussions on critical thinking skills which can be transferred to the students' composing abilities (Ernst, 1997; Shivers, Levenson, & Tan, 2017; Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000). In the art education sector, visual thinking through artwork, and its influence on critical thinking have been studied extensively; and have shown a synergistic relationship between aesthetic understanding and writing skills. For instance, an easily applicable artwork discussion strategy named the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) yields positive results in improving critical thinking and interpretive writing (Curva et al., 2005; Housen, 2001; Yenawine, 2013).

It must be noted, however, that these studies were conducted in collaboration with art museums. For language classrooms, where visual artwork is not readily accessible, picture books can be an ideal medium "for embracing visual literacy for the purposes of developing literacy foundation; and they are readily available visual art for the teachers with limited experience as well as for the schools with no original artwork" (Read, 2013, p. 21). Picture books could serve as a suitable medium to incorporate

visual literacy in order to improve verbal literacy in that "students have to understand the words and the story by examining and visually interpreting the illustrations" (Nicholas, 2007, p. 21). Therefore, visual artwork discussions, using picture book images, may reap benefits for enhancing students' critical thinking skills and interpretive writing.

Many studies show that the extensive reading of picture books has a positive impact on EFL students' writing quality (Birketveit & Rimmereide, 2017; Chen, 2009; Huang, 2009; Huh & Ha, 2017; Wu, 2012). However, they lack an important factor – a visual understanding of picture books brought by artwork discussions. Despite the reported benefits of picture book images on verbal literacy development (Arizpe & Styles, 2016; Kiefer, 1993; Nicholas, 2007; Read, 2013; Sipe, 1998), there has been little research regarding their use in visual artwork discussions to improve L2 writing at a secondary level.

There may be some concern that EFL teachers have not received formal training in visual artwork discussions and they suffer from time constraints. For those teachers who do not specialize in the visual arts, efficient and easily applicable teaching strategies would be helpful. The strategy should also include training to encourage students' critical thinking skills, which could be then transferred to their L2 writing. As previously mentioned, there is a teaching strategy that meets all of these needs – Visual Thinking Strategies or VTS (Housen, 2001; Yenawine, 2013). Although it was originally designed for art education, VTS could also be a helpful strategy for enhancing writing skills. Instructors would follow a specific process to facilitate student–centered discovery that would involve students in examining, discussing, and reasoning about the images. With enhanced aesthetic understanding and conversation fresh in their minds, students would then write their final thoughts on images. These activities promote creative and analytic thinking, and critical thinking skills allied with reflection. Those thinking skills promote language development, which would be reflected in subsequent interpretive writing (Housen, 2001; Yenawine, 2013). Hence, incorporating VTS into discussions on picture book images can yield benefits for improving interpretive L2 writing skills.

If developmentally appropriate and easily applicable VTS is incorporated, it will bolster students' comprehension of picture books, enabling them to progress from direct observation to critical thinking and eventually, to interpretive L2 writing, a frequently neglected skill in the Korean secondary EFL classrooms. This study, thus, aims to explore the effect of VTS artwork discussions on Korean secondary EFL students' L2 writing using picture book illustrations. To this end, the current study will be guided by following questions:

1) In what ways do the teachers' VTS questioning and discussions aid the improvement in visual understanding of a picture book?
2) What kinds of thinking processes appear during VTS discussions while the students decode messages embedded in pictures?
3) In what ways do the improved visual understanding and critical thinking skills transfer into subsequent interpretive L2 writing?

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and Writing Skills Improvement

VTS were developed at MOMA (Modern Museum of Art) as a means of teaching art in a more engaging manner. VTS teachers carefully craft questions and stimulate the students to discuss throu art. The questions are comprised of (Yenawine, 2013, p. 25):

1. What's going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What more can we find?

The questions gradually lead students from observation to interpretation and then expression, from what it conveys to reasoning and deep meaning-making, such as inferencing, reasoning and drawing conclusions (Yenawine, 2013).

Vocabulary and expressions are also practiced in VTS and can help students with reading and writing in other subject areas. Anecdotal reports from teachers suggest that students start to use VTS in their other subjects (Housen, 2002). This implies that visual literacy has a positive influence on critical thinking skills in general. To specify, students should be able to draw conclusions and make inferences supported both from texts and images. They must incorporate critical thinking skills in order to analyze what they are reading and apply that to a variety of situations. These skills can be cultivated by VTS with visual artworks. Empirical studies of the school-museum partnership (Adams, Foutz, Luke, & Stein, 2006; Curva et al., 2005; DeSantis & Housen, 2007) also prove a positive correlation between visual literacy and critical thinking enhancement, which are transferred to subsequent interpretive writing.

More importantly, complex thinking skills nurtured by VTS sessions are reflected in student writing. Yenawine (2013) argues that "the increasing complexity of thought is what causes the significant changes in writing, which are the result from engaging, thoughtful, extended discussions" (p. 91). When visual prompts are combined with

discussions, students' writing abilities reach further potential. Writing samples from VTS research indicate that "the discussions themselves have a further, direct benefit on the capacity to write" (Yenawine, 2013, p. 109), since the collaboration of peers and paraphrasing by the teacher provide direct access to new words and ideas.

2.2. Picture Books for Visual and Verbal Literacy

2.2.1. The value of picture books in developing visual and verbal literacy

Nodelman (1988) argues that young people who are "provided with both the general information that symbols exist and specific information about the meanings of particular visual symbols will have the tools to appreciate the otherwise hidden subtleties of many picture books" (p. 107). And this is "what makes picture books unique and is precisely why picture books are an ideal avenue to use when developing visual literacy" (Read, 2013, p. 27). To nurture visual literacy through picture books, teachers should encourage students to become more articulate interpreters of the words as well as the illustrations. As Eisner (2004) notes, engaging students in activities that allow them to slowly perceive both texts and images helps them "learn to ask not only what someone is saying but how someone has constructed a text and a visual image" (p. 5).

There are a growing number of researches that capitalize on cultivating visual and verbal literacy through the use of picture books (Arizpe & Styles, 2016; Pantaleo, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Walsh, 2003). Several scholars argue that for secondary-level students' literacy development through the use of picture books has the potential to teach language, thinking skills, and visual elements (Burke & Peterson, 2007; Murphy, 2009; Pantaleo, 2012c). Pantaleo (2012c) argues that contemporary picture books can offer an excellent venue for teaching and learning visual literacy. According to Pantaleo (2012c), a number of contemporary picture books encompass complicated ideas and mature themes. Moreover, she posits that postmodern characteristics of picture books can provide students with the opportunity to think more critically. Burke and Peterson (2007) also suggest that "picture books offer a medium for teaching visual and critical literacy across the curriculum in secondary classrooms" (p. 74).

2.2.2. Picture books for L2 writing improvement

Much of the research concerning L2 writing through the use of picture books delve into correlations between extensive reading and enhanced writing quality. (Birketveit & Rimmereide, 2017; Chen, 2009; Huang, 2009; Huh & Ha, 2017; Wu, 2012). Studies regarding Korean primary EFL report that reading picture books has a positive impact

on children's reading and writing skills development (Cho & Kim, 2016; Kwon & Kim, 2012; Park, 2011; Shin & Kim, 2017), as well as their general English ability (Lee & Koh, 2011; Park & Park, 2007). However, the researchers do not participate actively in teaching students to analyze both visual and textual components. They also dismiss the effect of visual understanding on the students' critical thinking skills and writing abilities. Furthermore, the studies targeted either elementary students or college undergraduates.

It is difficult to find research that examines the use of picture books that incorporate visual literacy into verbal literacy education in a secondary EFL setting. One study (Kim, 2016) reveals that a comparison of picture book illustrations can help students develop critical literacy. While the study tries to capitalize on the significant role of picture book illustrations in conveying messages, it does not tap into *how* the focal students' critical literacy develops by interpreting illustrations. In addition, the research does not explicitly mention visual literacy per sé. The study does not explore the students' growth in visual literacy and its influence on the quality of writing, but merely illustrates which messages the focal students retrieved from the different pictures.

3. METHOD AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Context and Participants

Data were collected from after-school book club activities that the teacher-researcher was actively involved with. The study took place in a suburban middle school in a metropolitan city in South Korea. At the beginning of the semester, I made an announcement to the second graders that a club would be launched in which they could actively engage in book club discussions. Eight second graders applied for and were admitted to the club. Seven third graders had originally been involved with this club since last year, and also attended my regular English courses since 2015. Hence, the third-grade members were familiar with book club discussions and my discursive teaching style. I made it clear that the club would not be included in or related to any regular curricular courses, thus would not affect their grades. With the exception of offering snacks and soft drinks, the book club did not provide any forms of incentives.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with the 15 book club members before the first book club session. The interview questions were whether the participants (book club members) enjoyed reading and discussing literature, were willing to commit to constant observation and interviewing, and were willing to discuss a range of topics in

literature. This interview became the pre-interview for the current inquiry. All of the participants showed a great deal of interest in reading English literature and discussions, which was a prerequisite for the book club activities. I assumed that the students who showed a strong willingness to participate in cognitively demanding book club activities would be more likely to remain as participants during the study.

For their first book, the students chose *the Tale of Despereaux* (DiCamillo, 2003) and discussed how the characters fight against injustice, prejudice and inequality. After the completion of the first book, I showed them various books to choose from, among which there was *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001). The students were instantly attracted to the exquisite visual contents of the picture book. Of the 15 members, 12 agreed to work on the picture book rather than novels without visual images. *The Name Jar* depicts a young Korean immigrant who suffers from an identity crisis on foreign soil. The book presents questions regarding cultural assimilation and minimizing differences, and encourages consideration of maintaining cultural identity. On the second week in May, we embarked on a new journey into multiple layers of selves. The activities that were pertinent to the current inquiry spanned nearly two months, and were composed of seven VTS discussion sessions with subsequent writing tasks. Specific book club schedules are presented in the following table.

TABLE 1
Book Club Schedule

Date	Activities
March 23rd	Individual Pre-Interview
March 27th ~ April 17th	*The Tale of Despereaux*
May 1st	Short-Term School Vacation (May 1st ~ May 5th)
May 8th ~ June 19th	*The Name Jar* (Discussion 1~7, Writing tasks 1~7)
July 17th ~ July 21st	Individual Post Interview
July 24th	Informal Final Group Interview

3.2. Data Collection

Before the first meeting, I received consent from the participants to audiotape the book club sessions only for research purposes. The meetings were held every Monday after school at the English Cafe and were audio recorded, and were later transcribed for analysis. After the whole group discussion with the teacher, the students wrote their final thoughts on a worksheet that contained the same questions that were discussed. When writing their responses, the students were asked to use English since the central aim of this research was to examine the effect of visual practices on L2 writing quality.

However, for more dynamic interaction, the discussions were done in their mother tongue, Korean. Using L1 at the right time can help less proficient EFL learners because L1 can "create a social and cognitive space where learners can work effectively to enhance their learning" (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998, p. 335).

For the book club meetings, I recommended that they sit in their preferred seat with close friends. The participants volunteered to sit in groups of five or six, composed of close friends where the power distribution was relatively equal in peer-peer interaction. In this way, students felt free to talk about their own real-world experiences in order to create links to literary worlds. As Bean and Rigoni note (2001), "intertextual connections are influenced by the nature of the classroom context and its inherent power relationships" (p. 235), thus justifying the need to create interactive and student-centered classroom environment so that the students were able to freely generate and express ideas. Following the last book club meeting, I conducted semi-structured follow-up interviews with each of the participants. A final informal group interview was held with all participants for triangulation after their final exam. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing and recursive. From the beginning, in order to find ways to generate descriptive codes on my findings, I intensely read the focal data – participants' written responses, transcripts from the book club discussions and interviews. Contextual data included the literary texts, classroom observation during regular curriculum courses and notes from consulting sessions. I used the contextual data to assist me in understanding and interpreting the focal data.

The transcripts of the book club discussions and interviews were examined through four separate analyses – teacher-student dynamics, students' verbal responses, student-student dynamics, and student writing, all with the sentence serving as the primary unit of analysis. It was an inductive process focusing on the content of the writing and the discussions. Before initiating the coding analysis, I thoroughly studied the transcripts and student writing. I incorporated content analysis, a method of "making inferences from texts and making sense of these interpretations in a context surrounding the text" (Hoffman, Wilson, Martinez, & Sailors, 2011, p. 30).

When analyzing the transcripts from the book club discussions that incorporated VTS, I identified examples of the teacher's use of facilitation to calculate how the teacher's VTS questioning can help students refine their ideas. I color-coded the teacher's responses that corresponded to the facilitating skills used in VTS: "pointing, paraphrasing and linking" (Yenawine, 2013), to which I added extending, modeling and prompting. Based on the focal

students' verbal responses to the teacher's questions, a second sentence-level analysis was conducted to identify the patterns of the participants' intra-/inter-textual connections and other response patterns, by combining it with the results of the first analysis.

VTS divides the verbal responses into five categories ‒ observations, inferences, evidence, speculation, elaboration, and revision. I found these categories useful for analyzing and corroborating my findings. However, more codes emerged from my own data, which were modified through further analysis. Specifically, I developed the codes as follows: observing visual images, pinpointing factual information from the texts, inferences based on past experiences, inferences based on visual and/or textual contents, evidential reasoning based on visual and/or textual contents, speculation based on visual and/or textual contents, elaboration and revision. The dynamics shown in the students' discussions were also analyzed. The emerging codes were unconscious/direct facilitation, direct question, explanation, negotiation, merging different ideas and revising original ideas.

FIGURE 1

Description of the Codes

Teacher Facilitation		Students' Thinking Process		Student - Student Dynamics
	→		←	
1. Pinpointing 2. Paraphrasing 3. Linking 4. Extending 5. Modeling 6. Prompting	Facilitates and generates	1. Factual responses 2. Inferences 3. Evidential reasoning 4. Inter-textual reasoning 5. Speculation 6. Elaboration 7. Revision ↓ Bring changes to	Facilitate and generate	1.Unconscious facilitation 2. Direct facilitation 3. Direct question and Explanation 4. Negotiation - Merging different ideas - Revising original ideas
		L2 writing Changes in L2 use Changes in sentence structures Changes in logical flow		

To analyze students' written responses for the features of visual/ critical literacy development, I broke each writing sample into parts in order to measure changes in thinking and aesthetic understanding, and examined whether improved thinking skills were reflected in L2 use and writing quality.

4. RESULTS

The following result illustrates how visual artwork discussions can be used for

verbal literacy program. Because of the limitation of space, the findings will include representative examples of teacher facilitation techniques using VTS, student responses, student dynamics and student L2 writing. Teacher's facilitation techniques and related student verbal responses will demonstrate how VTS group discussions led by the teacher can improve students' thinking skills, and how these thinking skills are transferred to subsequent L2 writing. Student dynamics and related L2 writing samples will illustrate how students refine their ideas in a communal setting, and how these ideas are reflected in their L2 writing.

4.1. Teacher Facilitation and Students' Verbal/Written Responses

To better understand the correlations between VTS strategies and students' verbal and written responses, the teacher-researcher's facilitation and students' responses will be described together in the same section. Student writing samples will be cited without correction.

4.1.1. Paraphrasing and modeling: Assisting EFL learner's language development

For accuracy, the teacher-researcher often rephrased the student comments. Since VTS sessions were conducted in Korean, the teacher's questioning and paraphrasing were more about showing that the teacher fully understood and respected each student's comments. However, I (teacher-researcher) was able to facilitate the participants' English language learning during the follow-up writing sessions. As the focal students were required to write their final thoughts in English, they sometimes thought out loud in English and asked each other if the expressions were correct. If the student's question was directed toward other peers, I did not interrupt their interactions. If the participants asked me for help, I rephrased their sentences to be grammatically correct ones. In this way, I was able to model English usage for the students, as shown in the following transcript:

Sue:	So, about question number four, I would like to write a sentence like this: "I think Unhei's mom helps her."
Teacher:	Yes, moms support their kids physically and emotionally.
Sue:	Ok, how about this one? "Unhei's mom helps her choosing a name."
Teacher:	Yes, "Unhei's mom helps her make a wise choice."
Sunny:	Teacher? How about "Unhei's mom helps her realize the difference?"
Teacher:	Good choice of words!

While feeling understood, the participants were able to take time to think and listen, and they were able to reflect back on what they originally thought. Sunny could then figure out how to write her own thoughts down as she was listening to Sue's conversation with me as seen in the following example:

FIGURE 2
Sunny's Written Response

Question: Which role does mom play in Unhei's decision-making regarding her name?
Unhei's mom helps her with her identity construction. Also, Unhei's mom helps Unhei realize that difference. It is not wrong but special and Unhei should get confidence and cherish her name.

Last year, when current third grader participants were second-grade book club members, I taught them the expression "identity construction." Sunny may have remembered that expression and applied it to writing her first sentence. In her second sentence, she wrote down the exact words that she had formulated during the discussion. For her third sentence, she added her own thoughts. Combining the messages from the text and her visual analysis, she concluded that Unhei's mom celebrated cultural difference. In the story, Unhei's mom encouraged maintaining cultural identity by suggesting she keep her given name instead of changing to an easily pronounceable English name. Unhei's mom said, "You are different. That's a good thing!" This remark might have reminded Sunny of words, such as "confidence" and "cherish." From this, we can see that discussion might trigger the use of background knowledge as well as model English usage.

With the conversation fresh in her mind, Sunny moved from speaking to L2 writing, from communal activities (developing ideas in L1) to individual works (expressing her ideas in her own English words). This type of continuous activity could serve as a platform for language development, since further language development should be preceded by an ability to articulate one's thoughts into his/her own L2 words. Although the writing sample did not tap into visual analysis per sé, it is important to note that the preceding VTS discussions played a crucial role in allowing the students to look and think about a topic, which then allowed more time for conscious word choice and sentence construction for subsequent L2 writing.

4.1.2. Linking and extending ideas to search for new ideas

One of the most vibrant discussions took place when they discussed on the mother-daughter relationship depicted in the illustration. In the picture, mom is placed at the

center and described as a much larger person than Unhei who sits at the very left rim of the picture. It was not difficult for the students to feel that emphasis was placed on Unhei's mom as an authority figure:

Teacher: What do you see in the picture?
Hwan: Mom is serving dumplings.
Teacher: Yes, they may be dumplings.
Sunny: Unhei is sitting on the chair and waiting to be served.
Teacher: Maybe she's waiting for the food. What more can we find? What about Unhei's emotions?
Sunny: She might be devastated.
Teacher: Yes, the first day of school can be frustrating. How does her mom react to Unhei's worries?
Jin: I think her mom pushes her so hard.
Teacher: Maybe. What makes you say that? Are there any clues that make you say that?
Jin: Well, she said "You must study hard and get good grades." It's too demanding. If she were my mom, I would become timid and unconfident. My mom makes me lots of food, but does not coerce me to become a certain person (1).
Teacher: So, you figure out that her mom is so controlling based on the text, and the picture reminds you of your mom. That's good. The illustrator also placed a visual metaphor signifying their relationship.
Sunny: I know. Mom is much bigger than Unhei.
Teacher: Yes, she is much bigger than Unhei. Let's observe the use of colors. Whose clothes are in a darker color?
Students: Mom's.
Teacher: Yes, mom's clothes are darker than Unhei's. Usually, darker colors look heavier. Can you guess what this picture might be trying to say?
Sunny: I guess more weight is placed upon Unhei's mom. It implies that mom might have more power than her daughter. (2)

Discussion on the visual metaphor in relation to the concurrent text lent a helping hand in reorganizing the participants' thoughts. They learned the whole meaning is bigger than the sum of its parts. Jin's comment showed how visuals and texts triggered inter-textual reasoning (1), and how they caused opposition or rejection from the viewer. Jin's affective response was an example of empathy with the character, which was linked to personal analogy. Sunny's responses displayed how the teacher's questioning can expand the students' thinking process (2). The teacher pinpointed the role that colors played in the picture and

linked it with previous comments. Thus, Sunny was able to move, step by step, to infer meanings from the visual elements in order to fit them into the bigger picture.

The psychological impact influenced by visual elements helped the participants think more deeply about the meaning that the image brought, stimulating them to reflect on their own life experiences. The impact is shown in the following samples. The students used subsequent writing as tools for reviewing their own stances and the characters' actions. The impact is shown in the following sample. Sora used subsequent writing as tools for reviewing their own stances and the characters' actions:

FIGURE 3
Sora's Written Response

Question: Based on the visual image, what could you guess about their relationship? What kinds of visual elements create these meanings? *First distance of relationship between Unhei and her mother looks so far. And her mother seems to oppress her daughter strongly, so Unhei feels really small and lost her self-esteem.*

In the writing, language played a significant role in elaborating Sora's thinking. It was also noticeable that Sora used conditional language such as "looks~" and "seems to~," which she might have learned in regular language arts classes. It appeared that the thinking processes nurtured during the VTS discussions were transferred (or reflected) in her L2 writing. Housen (2001) referred to this as speculative thinking and considered holding a number of ideas at a time as one of the cornerstones of critical thinking. In other words, Sora's written response showed that she began to "engage thoughtfully with ideas, made connections and interpreted symbolic and thematic messages in a picture book" (Pantaleo, 2012c, p. 67). Although not dramatic, Sora's speculative thinking and evidential reasoning might have been more enhanced through a series of visual practices.

The transcript above showed how details were combined to make sense of the theme of a whole picture. The teacher linked each comment by building on the participants' observations, and extended the observations into an analytic level of thinking to deal with more mature issues. The teacher nudged the participants toward new perspectives by posing questions that called for interpretation. When the teacher posed such questions, student discussions displayed an increase in interpretive responses.

4.2. Student Dynamics and Student L2 Writing

In this section, participants' verbal exchanges and their written responses will be discussed together to illustrate the interrelationship between the two.

4.2.1. Unconscious facilitation

More experienced peers tended to unconsciously help their mates with their understanding as they talked about their interpretations and explained the logic behind them. Sunny and Sora were two of the top students at the school and they were affectionate and caring throughout. Their unconscious contribution to the book club discussions was also evident, as shown in the following transcript:

[talking about the stamp in the insert cover]

Sunny: Last year, we talked about how important one's name is in "Tea with Milk." At that time, the main character refused to be called Masako because she was already familiar with her English name May, which she was known by in the U.S. So, I guess the stamp appears at the beginning, since the story might be about the significance that a name carries.

Teacher: Great! You remember the book that we read last year. I feel so thrilled. So, can you guess the meaning of the stamp?

Sunny: I think the stamp stands for Korean cultural identity. Putting a stamp on something means making a permanent deal.

Sora: Oh, so the Korean name doesn't go away but it solidifies her Korean identity.

The two girls exchanged their opinions on the meaning of the stamp, while the other members "presumably" listened to the conversation and built their own ideas up on the two girls' ideas. They might have been cognitively engaged with the conversation and might have reorganized their thoughts into their written responses. On the worksheet containing the same questions that were covered during the discussion, Jin wrote her own thoughts with an addition to Sunny and Sora's opinions as follow:

FIGURE 4
Jin's Written Response

Question: Why do you think the stamp appears in the insert cover? Which role might the stamp play in the story?
The stamp means Unhei's identity. She will live with new people, foreigners. So, she can forget her identity.
This stamp prevent losing identity. "Seeing stamp" → "I am Unhei."

Jin linked the permanent nature of the stamp with maintaining one's identity, and added her own opinion to the meaning of seeing the stamp which was inscribed with an original Korean name.

For a more experienced reader like Sunny, the conversation may have served as a tool to reorganize her thoughts. During the conversation, Sunny said that the stamp appeared in the insert cover because of its significance. She extended her original thoughts to the role of the name jar. She wrote that, "The meaning of the stamp was hidden inside the book," indicating she was capable of making a more mature literary interpretation:
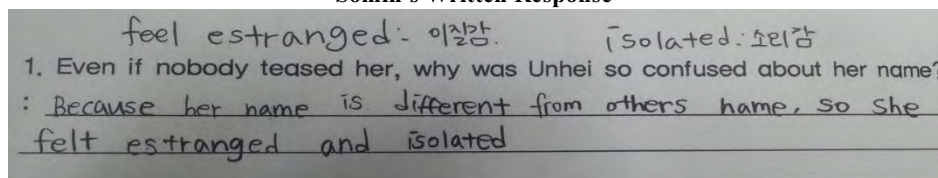
FIGURE 5
Sunny's Written Response

Question: Why do you think the stamp appears in the insert cover? Which role might the stamp play in the story?
I think the stamp is the key of the story which is hidden inside the book. When we read book, we might know the stamp is the key of the story, not the name jar. So stamp is located in the insert cover.

The group discussions provided a means by which the students could use the pictures to speak for observations, reflective thinking, and critical understanding. Even if they were guided by the teacher's questions, the image reminded them of a certain metaphor, and helped them extend their previous knowledge into understanding the story.

4.2.2. Direct facilitation

At times, some of the more capable participants supported their struggling peers, moving their thought processes forward to more profound levels. Direct help also occurred when the students sought for the right English words to convey the meaning of Korean expressions. To exemplify, Somin was struggling to write her thoughts in English regarding the marginalization of immigrant youths. Somin did not hesitate to ask for help from her friends. Sora provided her with examples of how it might be expressed in English. As Sora provided the examples, Somin jotted them down the expressions in the margin of her paper (Figure 1). The notes that she scribbled down were taught by the teacher-researcher during the book club discussions of the previous year. Sora remembered the difficult words and helped her friend choose suitable expressions.

FIGURE 6

Somin's Written Response

feel estranged: 이질감.   isolated: 소리감
1. Even if nobody teased her, why was Unhei so confused about her name?
: Because her name is different from others name, so she
felt estranged and isolated

It is important to note that Somin was not as proficient in English compared to other participants. If it had been regular language arts classes, which tend to focus on reading comprehension in preparation for the SAT, I would not have been able to observe her working at a higher conceptual level than her current English proficiency would have suggested. With emotional and cognitive support from caring peers, an engaging picture book and group discussions occurring within her "zone of proximal development", it had been possible for her to work at a higher conceptual level. In the post-interview, Somin commented on the book club as follows: "Analyzing pictures with friends stimulated me to think twice upon hidden messages within the images and to examine my deepest thoughts." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Her comment implies that sociocultural activities and visual practices go hand-in-hand in nurturing critical thinking skills, which were reflected in her more sophisticated L2 language use.

4.2.3. Negotiation

The group discussions provided a means through which the focal students use conversation to stimulate more detailed observation and critical understanding of the visual text. During this time, they were able to explore a wide variety of meanings embedded in the visual images and reconsidered their first observation and hypotheses. For example, I asked them whether there was a direct one-to-one match between the words and the pictures when we discussed the scene where Unhei receives a letter from her grandmother. Some students originally said "Yes." However, they revised their answer during the group discussion. After the discussion, they revised their first observation regarding the role of the two different sign systems and the combined messages these sign systems created together:

[discussing on whether the words and the pictures have a one-to-one correspondence]
Teacher: I would like you to take a good look at the picture in which Unhei receives
                a letter from her grandma. And carefully read the corresponding text. Do
                the verbal components and the visual components tell the same story?

Bum:	I think they do.
Teacher:	Do you think there is one-to-one match between the two components?
Bum:	Yes, I guess they do.
Sunny:	Well, technically, the picture tells more than the words in this case.
Teacher:	What makes you say that?
Sunny:	The text says, "her little brother ran to give her a letter." However, there are more objects that are not included in the text.
Teacher:	Then, could you tell me what they are?
Sunny:	There are a desk, Korean alphabets on the wall, and a basket case.
Teacher:	All right, what more can we find in this picture?
Bum:	Knock sign is on the door and grandma's picture is on the desk.
Teacher:	Right. Do you still think the two components have a one-to-one correspondence?
Bum:	I guess not. The image contains something that the text does not. Also, I just found out that the text tells something that the image doesn't. The text says she filled the letter with the stamp but the image does not show the stamp.

Bum quickly revised his first observation as soon as he heard Sunny's explanation. On the worksheet, Bum wrote his revised and more refined idea regarding the meaning of the visual text:

FIGURE 7
Bum's Written Response

> Question: Why do you think Korean cultural objects appear in the image while the text does not mention any of these objects?
> *The Korean object says that Unhei can't fake her true identity. For example, she put grandmother's picture on her desk. And her grandmother is her anchor and I think she doesn't want to forget her grandmother in her live.*

Although he made small grammatical mistakes, Bum reached an understanding of the details, and constructed meaning at a more critical level. The visual practices and discussions forced him to look more carefully and reach a higher understanding of how the two different sign systems worked together.

4.3. Increased Visual Understanding and its Contribution to L2 Writing

In this section, I will analyze the participants' written responses in order to examine the

students' L2 writing improvement and to understand how improved visual understanding enhances L2 writing. Emphasis will be placed upon the thinking processes since "increasing complexity of thought is what causes the significant changes in writing" (Yenawine, 2013, p. 91). In the context of the current study, critical thinking skills nurtured in L1 are presumed to bring changes to L2 writing.

The texts of two students, June and Sunny, will be analyzed to demonstrate development in visual analysis, associated thinking skills, and L2 writing. June and Sunny were the most active participants of the study, and their verbal responses gradually demonstrated more detailed observation and speculation. The writing tasks that specifically required them to synthesize words and images were selected to show students' improvement in visual thinking and L2 writing skills. Extracts from these texts are cited here without any correction.

For both the first and sixth writing tasks, the students were asked to speculate on the characters' feelings based on visual clues. Even though the writing task was preceded by group discussions, in the first writing task, many of the students' responses revolved around factual descriptions. By the sixth writing task, the participants showed improvement in combining visual and verbal messages to back up their speculation. The focal students read the entire book before the first discussion, and that they knew the storyline.

4.3.1. Texts by June

Text 1 is descriptive without any explanation. The text shows that June was capable of observation and inference, although on a limited basis. She was not yet able to provide illustrative details to back up her argument. Specifically, June did not mention why she came to the conclusion that the character felt "fresh and amazing." On a linguistic level, she needed to practice using an appropriate adjective form as seen in the use of "amazing" instead of "amazed."

In Text 2, the sentence structures are more advanced as she used compound sentences, adjectives, and that-clause. Her text shows an increase in the use of the simple verb form and more complex sentences, like the passive voices. June clearly developed her L2 writing skills, especially in terms of sentence structure. She now frequently uses compound sentences, where she employed two main clauses linked by the conjunction 'and,' and includes that-clauses. Her L2 writing shows her ability to view images and read texts at the next level. For example, her sentences start with "I think," indicating her personal opinion and open to various interpretations. More importantly, her sentences exhibit evidential reasoning by finding clues in the text to explain her hypothesis, which was continuously practiced in the group discussions. The visual practices during the group discussions may have nurtured the habit of backing up her assertions with evidence.

FIGURE 8

June's First and Sixth Writing

Text 1: Writing Task 1	Text 2: Writing Task 6
On page 1, Unhei is sitting behind the school bus window. Describe how she might be feeling based on visual evidence.	What do you think Unhei is feeling or thinking in the picture where she is gazing at the name jar?
She is staring at outside. She feels fresh and amazing.	*I think she feels interesting about name jar. Because she unfolds name paper again and again in the text. I think invisible feelings that something interested about name jar is contained in the text and the picture.*

4.3.2. Texts by Sunny

Text 3 displays observation ("her face is flushed"), evidential reasoning ("because") and speculation ("she seems") are combined into two short sentences. Although VTS discussion preceded, Sunny did not incorporate any of the detailed observations that were made during the discussion. It could be assumed that her visual thinking skills were not in full bloom, and the skills were not yet embodied in L2 use.

FIGURE 9

Sunny's First and Sixth Writing

Text 3: Writing Task 1	Text 4: Writing Task 6
On page 1, Unhei is sitting behind the school bus window. Describe how she might be feeling based on visual evidence.	What do you think Unhei is feeling or thinking in the picture where she is gazing at the name jar?
She seems nervous and excited. I think so because her face is freezed and flushed.	*Name is a modifier that represents one's identity and who truly I am. In the text, Unhei is trying to change her name which was decided by other people. Also in the picture, Unhei is looking at the name jar interestingly like the other person is looking even if it's her name jar. With placing this text and image together, we can guess that Unhei has identity crisis.*

However, by text 4, Sunny's enhanced visual understanding, higher-level thinking and improved L2 word knowledge are reflected in her L2 writing. She described Unhei's inner thoughts and feelings at length. In addition, she showed her ability to take her thinking

skills to the next level by discerning embedded meanings within the illustrations based on the texts – immigrant child's identity crisis, straddling the line between acculturation and assimilation. She also included Unhei's inner conflict and fathomed how the character coped with the emotional agony. For a more experienced reader like Sunny, visual images provided the access to deeper layers of meaning through the interpretation of both words and images, or multimodal ensembles. Increased visual understanding, textual understanding, and previous knowledge went hand-in-hand to pull more meanings from the image and generated more seasoned interpretive writing.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study points to the significance of visual artwork discussions that can serve as springboards for secondary EFL students to become active readers of visual ensembles and interpretive English writers. To discover the meanings from the images and texts, the focal students showed that they were bringing a significant amount of resources to the book club, including previous experiences, schema, and L2 knowledge. Over the course of the research, they grew from casual viewers to reflective interpreters, while finding meaning based on what they knew. Throughout the research period, they became as interested in how the pictures worked as they were in the content. This result represents their "savoring of texts" (Pantaleo, 2012c, p. 52), which was achieved through the VTS instruction and practices on how to read visuals and texts above a literal level of understanding. Thanks to the VTS method, the participants became more observant, and were able to give detailed descriptions about the images. It should be noted that it is not the level of visual literacy that made the difference, but the process of becoming visually literate through VTS.

More importantly, the group discussions showed that the participants were able to make complex thinking, and transfer that to their L2 writing. When the teacher-researcher introduced the participants to visual images and let them explore the images, it boosted the students' capacities far beyond what the teacher-centered method might have achieved. Through discussions, the students learned to express their opinions and grasped the value of paraphrasing. They saw their ideas were linked to others, and understood the beneficial effect of listening to disparate opinions in a respectful manner. As the conversations went back and forth, the participants worked the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) into deeper thinking. As Vygotsky (1978) notes, language plays an indispensable role in mediating internal thought processes, and social interaction through language is crucial for developing knowledge and thinking. In this sense, VTS discussions mediated students' improvement in their thinking skills and L2 writing.

With enhanced visual understanding and newly learned L2 expressions fresh in their minds, the participants reorganized their thoughts in subsequent L2 writing, exhibiting higher-order thinking and more sophisticated L2 use. There seems to be a strong correlation between the critical thinking skills developed in L1 and L2 writing enhancement. Their L2 writing samples revealed that the participants made significant progress as they moved from a single idea and patterned sentences to more detailed text, including descriptive elements. Their L2 writing showed the evidence of how they learned to engage with the text and interpret the visual images at a symbolic level. The visual practices captivated their attention, group discussions allowed them time to study the meanings of the pictures, the teacher paraphrased each comment and modeled L2 language use, and the continuous activity of discussion and L2 writing became its own support for their L2 writing improvement. The meanings they made from the visual images were formed into L2 language, which grew to be more complex and refined in nature.

However, the current study is not without its limitations. Being both their teacher and the researcher, I acknowledge that I may have exerted a great deal of influence on the participants' learning during the research period. Additionally, there are other variables that might have affected the focal students' development in observation and interpretation. Therefore, the three-months of practices cannot be the sole factor that made a difference. Their responses could also have been influenced by their literary and life experiences as well as classroom practices of other subject areas. The result of this study could be more validated if it provided the results of pre/post-tests, a control group in the same process, a larger sample, and a longer period of experimentation. Moreover, the current research did not look specifically at the mechanism behind how improved L1 knowledge is transferred or "code-switched" (Bista, 2010) to a more refined L2 language use. Further research regarding this mechanism might reap benefits in developing an EFL curriculum that incorporates L1 VTS discussions and L2 interpretive writing, and thereby creating more student-centered and creative L2 writing activities with artistic infusion.

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