

Teachers' Scaffolding Roles during Picturebook Read-Alouds in the Primary English Language Classroom

Maria Nilsson

Abstract

Despite the overwhelming consensus about the benefits of using authentic picturebooks to teach English in primary school, studies from various contexts indicate that this resource is not capitalized on to any large extent (Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Mair, 2018). One reason appears to be that teachers feel insecure about choosing and planning for such work, but also that they lack confidence in the actual process of reading aloud in class. To help remedy the lack of research on picturebook mediation in English instruction, the current study set out to investigate read-alouds orchestrated by three Swedish teachers of English, based on observations in their classrooms, with seven groups of year 5 learners. Findings reveal that the five scaffolding roles identified by Sipe (2008) in majority language classrooms, with teachers of younger learners, were applicable to the current setting as well. One more category was added to Sipe's grounded theory model, to account for instances of explicit language focus. The paper discusses patterns and differences in the teachers' mediating approaches, which may be related to context, personal experiences and beliefs, as well as objectives. Systematizing and clarifying the scaffolding roles, and the affordances that they contribute, is valuable to uncover and concretize the complex classroom interactions at play. The paper hopes to inspire teachers to explore the potential of picturebooks, and for teacher educators to prepare and empower student teachers to use multimodal narratives in order to bring in meaningful content and engage young learners in collaborative and authentic meaning-making.

Keywords: picturebooks, read-aloud, young learners, ELT, scaffolding, authentic literature, classroom interaction

Dr Maria Nilsson is a language teacher and researcher in the Department of English at Uppsala University, Sweden. Her thesis in language education dealt with young learners' beliefs and experiences in relation to English language teaching. Her research interests include approaches in English for young learners, using children's literature, teacher education and teacher cognition.

Introduction

Thinking back to their own time in primary school, students in teacher education generally have fond memories of read-alouds in their first language (L1). However, in my experience as a teacher educator in Sweden, hardly anyone seems to remember a teacher reading aloud from any kind of children's literature in English. Nowadays, there is overwhelming consensus among scholars in the field of primary English Language Teaching (ELT) as to the benefits of using picturebooks in class (for example, Bland, 2023; Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Ghosn, 2019; Mourão, 2016). For instance, such multimodal narratives foster various kinds of literacies, including visual and critical, boost engagement, and inspire joint negotiation of meaning and target language interaction for communicative purposes. Nevertheless, although teachers seem to be well aware of these affordances, English-language picturebooks and read-alouds are surprisingly rare in primary classrooms (Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Garton et al., 2011; Mair, 2018; Schröter & Molander Danielsson, 2016).

While there are many tips regarding titles and activities online and in teaching literature, studies suggest that many English teachers feel unprepared to use picturebooks (Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Mair, 2018). Moreover, as pointed out by Bland (2019), scholars have focused on either children's literature *or* ELT, leaving a gap to be filled concerning the processes involved in picturebook read-alouds. Therefore, the current study set out to investigate the varying scaffolding and mediating roles that primary English teachers take on as they read aloud from picturebooks. Hopefully, such explorations will inspire teachers, but also help advance teacher education by functioning as a springboard to discuss read-aloud strategies with student teachers, and make the process of mediating picturebooks slightly more transparent.

The Role of Picturebooks in Primary Education

Picturebooks are not a genre, but a format (Sipe, 2008, p.14), where the story is mediated through the interaction of text and illustrations (Malu, 2013; Mourão, 2019). Unlike illustrated books, the images not only accompany the written text, but are necessary for sense-making (Sipe, 2008, p. 14), and the visual features can either complement, enhance, or contradict the written text (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013). Furthermore, peritextual elements, including covers, title page and endpapers, which surround the multimodal narrative in the double-page spreads of the book, and

also the fonts and layout, function as semiotic signs that set the tone and carry meaning (Sipe, 2008, p. 94). Generally, picturebooks are written with dual audiences in mind, the child and the adult, as they are meant to be read out loud and enjoyed together (Birketveit, 2015; Malu, 2013).

In L1 education, the importance of read-alouds is well established, related to cognitive, socioemotional, linguistic and literary aims of primary education (Fisher et al., 2004; Sipe, 2008). Read-alouds are a resource to advance higher order thinking skills, such as predictions and inferences, that afford interaction and negotiation of meaning while also offering amusement (Pantaleo & Sipe, 2012). Moreover, the visual elements have positive effects on attitudes, memory, and comprehension, and are helpful for learners who have not yet acquired functional literacy (Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003).

The picturebook read-aloud in primary English Language Teaching

Likewise, there is a solid theoretical foundation for the use of picturebooks in ELT. Communicative language teaching, which has had tremendous impact on English instruction worldwide, revolves around functional language use. However, as underscored by Ohashi (2015), key expressions such as *meaningful*, *authentic* and *interaction* must be framed in age-appropriate manners. Arguably, such considerations summarize some of the arguments for designing teaching around children's literature in primary ELT.

Picturebooks add content and meaning to English lessons. As in the L1, authentic multimodal narratives encourage active meaning-making, creative and critical thinking, and contribute with emotional and aesthetic experiences (Bland, 2023). Nowadays, there are picturebooks for all ages that explore topics related to hopes, fears, aspirations, social and moral issues, intercultural awareness, democratic values and profound dilemmas of the human experience (Bland, 2016, 2023; Malu, 2013; Mourão, 2017). Foregrounding content over language, picturebooks stand in stark contrast to many coursebook materials, that are usually void of sensitive and complex topics that relate to learners' own lives, and that may therefore fail to engage them (Bland, 2023). In addition, coursebooks are developed to teach specific vocabulary or grammar (Birketveit, 2015; Ghosn, 2013, 2019), and encourage learners to find answers to rather closed questions, that consolidate the idea that there are right and wrong answers. Conversely, picturebooks are meant to stir reflection and meaning-making. Hence, picturebook read-alouds can

promote various literacies apart from the functional and literary, such as visual, emotional and critical, also in ELT (Birketveit, 2015; Bland, 2016, 2023; Ellis, 2016).

As for language development, young learners benefit from rich and meaningful language input, where comprehension is supported by the interaction between the text and the illustrations (Bland, 2019; Kaminski, 2013). Carefully crafted illustrations also help focus learner attention (Malu, 2013), and further scaffolding is provided through peer interactions and the read-aloud itself. Moreover, in a safe and supportive atmosphere, multimodal narratives can foster a spirit of joint exploration. Less confident learners can make use of all the situated affordances offered by the book, the teacher and peers, to follow the narrative. In fact, interactive read-alouds have been found to counteract language anxiety (Ghosn, 2013). Furthermore, listening to a whole, authentic story in English can contribute to a strong sense of accomplishment among young learners (Birketveit, 2015; Ellis & Mourão, 2021). Meanwhile, more advanced learners can benefit from more complex linguistic structures and vocabulary within the same story. Since picturebooks are made to be used and reread several times, they offer plenty of opportunities to recycle language. As for interaction, collaborative meaning-making promotes learners' willingness to engage (Mourão, 2016, 2019), and has been found to increase learners' oral target language communication (Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Ghosn, 2013; Li & Seedhouse, 2010).

Other aspects that speak to the benefits of working with multimodal literature relate not only to multiple literacies but also metalinguistic awareness. With authentic picturebooks, teachers can introduce literary devices, model how to use visual tools and make predictions, emphasize vocabulary, and include language structures, while offering learners language input slightly above their current level (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Malu, 2013). Joint meaning-making, where the teacher encourages learners to reflect on their strategy use, raises learners' meta-linguistic awareness and their 'learning literacy' (Ellis, 2016). According to Sipe (2008), literary understanding is cognitive and individual, but also has social and cultural dimensions and 'is best developed in intense social interactions with expert others and peers' (p. 195). Such read-aloud interactions allow the teacher to assess and scaffold meaning-making in the process. For this to happen, teachers should encourage learners to voice predictions, reactions and thoughts throughout the activity (Fisher et al., 2004).

In conclusion, picturebooks create premises for holistic learning conditions well in line with

the intentions of content-based communicative learning, and allow learners to make use of their varying linguistic and literary abilities (Bland, 2019, 2023; Mourão, 2019).

Teachers' picturebook read-alouds

For teachers, read-alouds are less challenging than oral storytelling (Ellis & Mourão, 2021), and most teachers prefer to read, rather than tell, stories (Fojkar et al., 2013). This way, the story does not need to be memorized, and although any story mediation requires adapting to the audience, the text remains rather unchanged throughout the readings, while illustrations scaffold learners' comprehension. Nevertheless, for read-alouds to be successful, teachers need to be skilled to adapt their approach and be sensitive to the responses and reflections of their learners (Bland, 2019; Ghosn, 2013). Hence, a read-aloud itself is a pedagogical resource, where meaning-making is scaffolded by the multimodal affordances and the teacher's gestures, dramatization and use of voice.

Given the consensus around the advantages of read-alouds in ELT, it may be surprising that picturebooks are not used much (Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Garton et al., 2011; Mair, 2018; Schröter & Molander Danielsson, 2016), which may in turn explain the scarcity of studies on picturebooks as reading material (Birketveit, 2015). Teachers appear to lack confidence in how to conduct read-alouds, and findings also suggest that teachers are afraid language will be too difficult for learners and that unfamiliar vocabulary will frustrate them (Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Mair, 2018). However, teachers with actual experiences of read-alouds affirm that stories contribute with motivation and a relaxed atmosphere (Fojkar et al., 2013). Moreover, storybook work impacts classroom interaction, prompting teachers to work more with repetition and paraphrasing, and increases the number of open questions (Ghosn, 2013).

A recent intervention study in Switzerland found that pre-service teachers who had prepared and practised to work with read-alouds were surprised at the amount of target language they elicited from primary learners (Fuchs & Ross, 2022). Picturebook lessons had positive effects on motivation and concentration and, furthermore, activated learners with varying proficiency levels. Interestingly, picturebook read-alouds thus have the potential of addressing the major challenges reported by primary teachers across the globe, namely to encourage learners to speak the target language, to maintain their motivation and to deal with mixed-ability groups (Copland et al., 2014).

The actual processes and strategies involved in picturebook read-alouds are not very clear-cut (Fisher et al., 2004; Garton et al., 2011; Ghosn, 2019; Mourão, 2017; Sipe, 2008). Apart from the actual reading, accompanied by gestures and voice adaptation, teachers engage in 'read-aloud talk' that may fill varying purposes (Ellis & Mourão, 2021, p. 25). Based on studies of literacy development among young learners, aged 5–8, in the L1 classroom, Sipe (2008) introduced a grounded theory of teachers' scaffolding roles during read-alouds: as *reader*; *manager and encourager*; *clarifier or prober*; *fellow wonderer or speculator*; and *expander or refiner*. In response to Sipe's call for the model to be validated in other contexts, this study aims to shed light on picturebook read-alouds in an ELT context, in Swedish year 5 classrooms. The analysis focuses on determining whether Sipe's framework is relevant to describe the teachers' read-aloud practices and how these are enacted to facilitate meaning-making and literacy in ELT.

Thus, the context of the current study is different from Sipe's (2008) study in many regards. Firstly, the read-alouds were conducted in English, which was not the L1 of the learners. Secondly, the learners were older. Thirdly, the participating teachers, although experienced, were not used to reading picturebooks aloud, and fourthly, the aims of ELT differ to those of K–2 in the L1. In ELT, read-alouds may serve various purposes: to practice listening strategies and tolerance of ambiguity; to increase target language communication, fluency and talk time; to cover relevant content and/or teach certain language elements. Such varying objectives are likely to impact the read-aloud.

The Study

The participants

Three experienced and certified primary generalist teachers of English, not previously known to the researcher, were recruited for the study. All three, who have been given pseudonyms, had Swedish as their L1 and taught in year 5, with learners aged 11–12. Anna taught English in three groups in a large urban school where the great majority of learners had Swedish as their L1. Eva worked in a suburban school, teaching English in three groups, where approximately half of the learners were multilingual and were offered home language instruction after school. Finally, Sara taught most subjects, including English, in a more rural area. Some learners in her classroom were multilingual, and the group was also neurodiverse, as almost half of the learners had, for example, ADHD, autism or dyslexia. Group sizes varied between 23 and 31 learners in the seven classrooms

observed.

Data collection and analysis

Each teacher was introduced to a selection of picturebooks and asked to choose books to work with in their respective classrooms. All learners, principals and parents were informed that read-alouds would be observed. Teachers were encouraged to make use of the books in any way they wanted, but they were also invited to meet me online to discuss the content of the books and brainstorm different activities around them.

Three different picturebooks were used (see Figure 1). Anna worked with *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole* (referred to as SD in the excerpts below) written by Mac Barnett and illustrated by Jon Klassen (2015). It is a mind-bending story where the fascination lies in the humorous interaction between the illustrations and the brief text, as well as the intriguing end that leaves the reader having to make sense of the story. Eva and Sara used *Perfectly Norman* (PN) by Tom Percival (2017), which is an empowering picturebook about celebrating individual uniqueness and embracing diversity. The story invites discussions about how it feels to be different and what it is to be normal. Finally, Anna and Eva also worked with *The Heart and the Bottle* (HB) by Oliver Jeffers (2010). This is a touching story of a girl dealing with loss. The picturebook requires learners to make inferences beyond the literal meaning of 'putting your heart in a bottle' and use the limited text and the rich illustrations in their meaning-making.

Each read-aloud was observed, and audio recorded. All the read-alouds were conducted within one lesson, apart from *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole*, which was divided in two, as the teacher decided to stop midway through the book to allow learners to draw and write their own endings. As each title was read once in each group, there were 13 observed read-alouds in total (see Table 1). Each teacher had a physical copy of the title in question. In her first read-aloud, Eva read from the picturebook, held it up and circulated the classroom. During all other observations, the book spreads were projected on the whiteboard, and the teachers read from either the book or the screen. Language use varied, but all three teachers spoke predominantly English. Sara made flexible use of both the target language English and Swedish, the language of schooling. Eva spoke less Swedish during the read-alouds than while working with pre- and post-listening activities. Anna spoke almost exclusively English.

Teacher	Titles used	Groups taught	Observed read-alouds
Anna	<i>Sam and Dave Dig a Hole</i> <i>The Heart and the Bottle</i>	3	6
Eva	<i>Perfectly Norman</i> <i>The Heart and the Bottle</i>	3	6
Sara	<i>Perfectly Norman</i>	1	1

Table 1. Overview of data

The recordings were transcribed. A deductive analysis was performed on all the teachers' utterances in full class during the read-aloud. Lesson introductions and pre- and post-reading activities were not included in the analysis. Each utterance, either a whole turn or part of a turn, in English or Swedish, was sorted based on Sipe's (2008, p. 200) conceptual categories. In search of the most likely function of each teacher utterance, the recordings and the observational notes offered valuable context; each teacher utterance was considered in relation to the interaction in a particular situation, as well as the use of voice, pitch, stress and gestures. Sorting was conducted in a slow, iterative process to arrive at consistent, rather than clear-cut, categories. One scaffolding function was added, for reasons related to the ELT context, as described below.

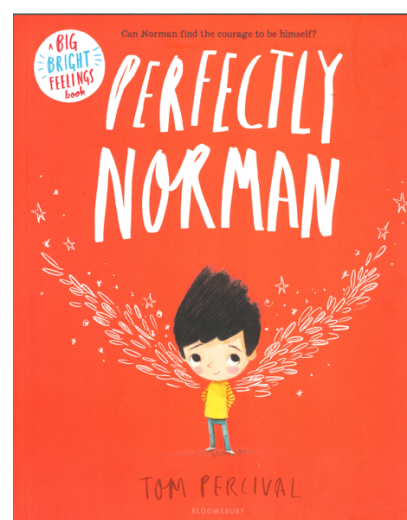
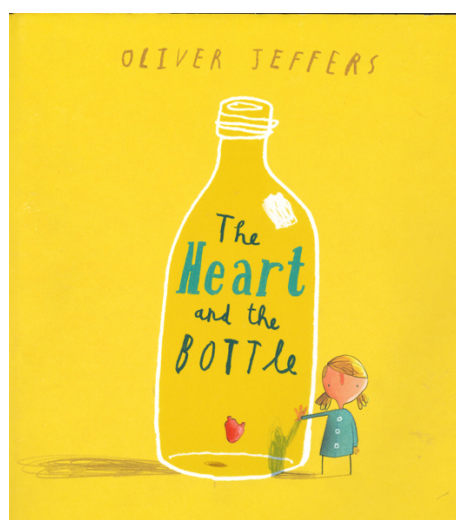
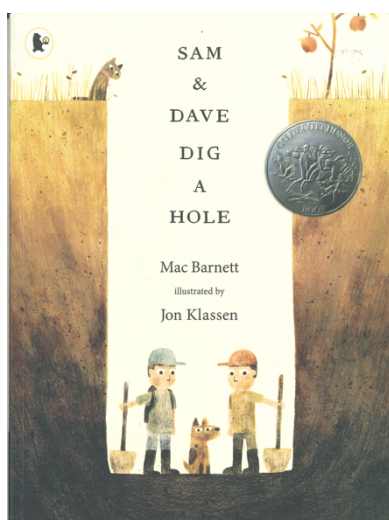


Figure 1. The three picturebooks used by the participating teachers

The Teachers' Scaffolding Roles during Read-Alouds

The analysis revealed that the categories introduced by Sipe (2008) were applicable also in the current upper primary ELT classrooms, as all three teachers made use of each of the scaffolding strategies. In what follows, these functions are described, based on Sipe's framework, with examples from the classrooms. (Following each example is the first letter of the teacher's pseudonym and the abbreviation of the book title, in parentheses. For instance, E: PN refers to Eva working with *Perfectly Norman*.)

Reader

In the first role, the teacher functions as *reader*. This includes reading of the actual print, but also acting as 'tour guide' for the book as a whole (Sipe, 2008, p. 201), by reading publishing information, focusing attention on peritextual elements, pointing at illustrations, and so on.

The teachers were all well prepared, had familiarized themselves with the respective books and read them fluently. Prior to reading, all three introduced the author and the title. One of the teachers spent time on the cover, to read the blurb and point out that the book had won an award (A: SD). Different amounts of time were spent on other peritextual features, such as title page and endpapers. Sparingly, they would describe illustrations, for example: *Here you can see Norman* (S: PN) or *It's quite deep. It's quite deep. You can still see the apple tree* (A: SD). As teachers read, they made use of voice and hand gestures.

This category accounted for a little more than a fifth of the data, and mostly consisted of the teacher reading the written narrative.

Manager and encourager

The second role is that of *manager and encourager*, which involves everything the teacher does to structure and lead classroom work (Sipe, 2008). For example, the teacher calls on learners, upholds an orderly classroom and controls interactional modes. Moreover, acknowledging learner contributions, with praise or repetitions, belongs to this category. Thus, managing the class while also inviting learners to speak requires a balance between, on the one hand, leading and controlling, and on the other hand, following and being responsive to learner initiatives (Mourão, 2019).

In this role, teachers gave instructions and asked questions to initiate learner interaction.

Anna would often engage learners in a few minutes of oral pair work: *Ok, talk to the one next to you. What do you see?* (A: SD) or *When was the last time you dug a hole?* (A: SD), where the latter can be regarded as a slight detour from the story. Similarly, a question like *What would you do if you had wings?* (S: PN) was most likely meant to spark imagination and compel learners to share their thoughts. The teachers thus led the groups and invited oral participation without necessarily having them engage with the actual narrative. Occasionally, comments or closed questions also appeared to serve the purpose of directing and maintaining learners' attention: *Look at... look how he looks, in his face* (E: PN) and *What's the title of the book? Who wants to say?* (E: HB).

Perhaps the most noticeable feature of the *manager and encourager* category was the practice of restating learner utterances, to show agreement and acknowledge contributions. In ELT, such repetition, with or without error correction, is very common and serves varying purposes (Ellis & Sheen, 2006); teachers may want to enhance and consolidate certain vocabulary, make sure everyone heard or confirm and praise an utterance. In the current context, contributions in Swedish were often repeated in English by the teacher. At times, teachers' intonation rose at the end of the repetition, which conveyed that more responses were expected. Occasionally, teachers would correct errors in their restatements or recasting. Nevertheless, it seemed that they focused only on meaning and repeated utterances to confirm understanding. For instance, mispronunciation of the word 'bear' in: *It's a beer* was followed by the recast *It's a bear* (A: SD), in a validating rather than a corrective tone of voice.

Many forms of utterances were used to manage the classroom. With lots of non-verbal attention markers from learners, teachers' utterances often consisted of just a name, calling on volunteering learners. Teachers would instruct the class to quiet down with a '*Shh*', or ask learners to wait. Furthermore, repeated questions, used to elicit more responses, were allocated to this category. Sometimes, teachers would comment on language use, reminding learners to try to speak English or by asking *Could you explain in English?* (A: SD). Finally, within this category, teachers would add comments to signal a move ahead: *That's a good question. Shh. So, we'll see what happens* (S: PN).

The role of *manager and encourager* was by far the most common function, comprising almost half of teacher utterances.

Clarifier or prober

In the third role, the teacher acts as a *clarifier or prober*, for the purpose of helping learners explore the story and develop their thinking (Sipe, 2008). Teachers react to learners' utterances, prompt them to elaborate and encourage them to better explain their ideas. Explanations and elaborations can also be added by the teacher.

To different extents, the teachers weaved in clarifications while reading the text, as in the following examples:

Ok, so people might think that he's weird or odd or something. And he just wants to be normal. (S: PN)

So, the small girl is asking the question, and our girl, the girl that we know, does not know how to answer. (A: HB)

Such elaborations may have been added to facilitate comprehension and interpretation, or simply to offer more language input to learners, as the actual texts were quite brief. Learners' contributions could also generate clarifications from the teacher, as on this occasion, following a comment about a 'flat-earther':

And you know that earth is like this [gestures a globe], but she thinks it's like... like a pancake, and you can go by boat and oh, no... I'm falling down from earth. They used to think so, a long time ago. (E: HB)

As *probers*, teachers elicited speculation, either before they started to read, by asking learners to make predictions about the story, or by asking them to guess what would happen ahead. Some questions were also posed to guide learners' attention to interesting details and certain elements in the story, probing them to explore the illustrations and visual clues: *And where are they? Have they been here before?* (A: SD).

Moreover, the teachers reacted to learners' contributions by asking them to expand and deliver longer responses. Sometimes, such prompting questions were rather closed and simple: *What colour are the apples?* (A: SD). Most often, however, they were more open, asking learners to interpret and explain:

They're going to begin to dig a hole. How do you know? (A: SD)

Save the heart? You're looking at the picture? Tell me more. Tell me more about what you're thinking. (E: HB)

Why do you think he does that, B? Why does he put the coat on? (S: PN)

Utterances within the *clarifier or prober* category were thus meant to encourage meaning-making, prompt learners to make inferences and predictions, achieve more elaborate responses or have learners notice specific features of importance in the multimodal narrative. The category made up a sixth of teachers' utterances. The three categories accounted for so far dominated the data, whereas those described below were much less frequent.

Fellow wonderer or speculator

In the fourth role, labelled *fellow wonderer or speculator*, the teacher takes a step back, seeking to make meaning together with learners (Sipe, 2008). This involves really listening to the learners and joining them as readers, to react to the story, and speculate together with them in search of sensible interpretations. In this category, teachers posed questions that handed over the initiative to learners to interpret key aspects of the story, with a deeper level of inference than in the *clarifier or prober* role:

Who's the man? (A: HB)

Vad tror ni, vad tror ni har hänt? Varför är stolen tom? [What do you think, what do you think has happened? Why is the chair empty?] (E: HB)

Teachers also joined their learners' speculative stance with expressions of wonder and surprise, such as *Mm, Aha, Or is it...?* and *We don't know*, and validated learners' guesses and interpretations:

Oh, maybe! Yes, dogs, they have a good nose. So maybe the dog is helping out. (A: SD)

Oh? So that's why the heart gets bigger. Oh, that's lovely! Mm. (A: HB)

Occasionally, comments from learners caused the teacher to join in laughter, which contributed to a sense of community and enjoyment: *No! Ha-ha. That's correct. I didn't see that before, Emma. Ha-ha. (A: SD)*. As in this example, it was clear that learners explored the illustrations to make

meaning, and often took notice of details that the teacher had not noticed, despite repeated readings. Utterances in this category speak to the dialogic process of joint meaning-making and the potential of different interpretations.

Extender or refiner

In the fifth role, the teacher functions as *extender or refiner* and makes use of 'teachable moments'. The purpose is to explicitly develop learners' literary skills, by, for instance, introducing concepts, encouraging generalizations or summarizing learners' conclusions about a story, to expand their 'literary tool kit' (Sipe, 2008, p. 214).

All teachers in the current study encouraged learners to pay attention to peritextual elements and illustrations. Eva introduced the book by saying: *This is the cover. It gives some... some clues* (E: HB). Anna pointed out that the illustrations in a picturebook are as important as the written narrative. They all drew attention to endpapers, or invited learners to consider the choices made by the publisher and illustrator:

First, inside the book, what can you see? It's like before it has even started. (E: HB)

Look at the last page, why is it there? (A: HB)

Eh. Why do you think all the pictures were black, or grey? (S: PN)

Such comments underscored that picturebooks are complex artefacts where all multimodal features carry meaning.

A comment like *But now they're back to some sort of beginning* (A: SD), to finish the read-aloud, was likely meant to summarize and achieve reflection as to the composition of the narrative. A few times, learners made comparisons to other texts or films, and received praise for such intertextual associations: *You found a connection, to something else. That's great* (E: HB).

Teachers asked learners about their interpretations of the book as a whole, and what they believed the story was about. As *extenders or refiners*, they built on learner contributions to sum up and amplify responses. In the following excerpt, the teacher first acknowledged legitimate interpretations of a central idea, by repeating contributions as *manager and encourager*, and then summarized to achieve closure, as *extender or refiner* (S: PN).

Learner (L) 1: Everybody's different.

Teacher (T): Everybody's different. Good point. C?

L2: Everyone is normal in their own way.

T: Everyone is normal in their own way. Very good. L?

L3: Nobody's normal but it's ok.

T: It's ok not to be normal. So, in real life, you can't grow wings. But you can be different. You can look different, or... you can sound different. Maybe someone has dyslexia, dyslexi.

In the current ELT context, there were also instances where the teacher made use of teachable moments beyond the scope of the story and literary aspects, related to factual knowledge, for example, talking about a price label on the cover: *Pounds, vilket land är vi i då?* [*Pounds, what country are we in then?*] (A: SD). On another occasion, the teacher made a detour to discuss weathervanes, clarify their purpose and highlight the name of this object in both Swedish and English.

Language enhancer and facilitator

While mediating the stories, all teachers made use of voice, animated reading, gestures and repetitions, which may all have been deliberate choices for the purpose of scaffolding comprehension. The fact that the same strategies were found in Sipe (2008) suggests that they are generic to teachers' classroom read-alouds, in any language. In the ELT setting, however, the target language is both the content and a means of communication. Story mediation may also involve the language of schooling, or other L1s, not only to facilitate language learning, but also for socioemotional and organizational considerations (Nilsson, 2022). For example, in the current study, Swedish may at times have been used to invite hesitant learners to speak and to maintain order. Communication thus involved the occasional use of Swedish and Swedish translations, in passing. For the most part, the participating teachers sought to uphold interaction in English, for instance by repeating learners' Swedish contributions translated into English. Judging from the observations, teachers promoted a focus on the narrative and the gist rather than aspects of language, acting to effectively mediate the narrative and inspire interpretation. Therefore, these instances were sorted into Sipe's (2008) categories above. However, an additional category,

language enhancer and facilitator, was developed to account for instances where the teacher offered explicit linguistic support to scaffold comprehension of the narrative and enhance language learning.

According to the teachers, their language choices followed familiar routines. To varying degrees, they would make use of what Eva referred to as 'double talk', where direct translations into Swedish were added, before or after the word or phrase in English: *What does a heart symbolize, vad symboliserar hjärtat?* (E: HB) or *Författaren, the author* (A: SD). This facilitates understanding but may also have been meant to consolidate vocabulary by emphasizing certain words or phrases. Teachers would also ask learners for translations:

What's 'ancient objects' in Swedish? (A: SD)

So, maybe you're curious about the book now. And I have written, actually, the word curious here. What does that mean? Help me out. What is curious? (E: HB)

Support could also be offered by using reformulations and explanations in English: *It was not comfortable... it was UNcomfortable* (E: PN), *So, he took the jacket, right, or the coat* (E: PN), and *Norman, it's a name. That's his name* (S: PN). In this role, the teacher would also assist learners in search of a specific word:

L: The man has drop out a, vad heter det... a... ankare. [what do you call it... a... anchor]

T: Anchor. (A: HB)

Although there were words in each of the books that the teachers assumed would be unfamiliar to many learners in their classrooms, there was not a single occasion when a learner asked about the meaning of a word in the narrative, at least in full class. Anna commented that she had planned to stop and explain certain words, but decided against it in the moment, as it did not feel right to her to interrupt the flow of the story. She was surprised that learners never asked.

To summarize, Table 2 offers an overview of the six roles enacted by the participating teachers during picturebook read-alouds.

Scaffolding role	Teacher actions
Reader	Introduce the book, show and read from the cover. Read aloud the printed narrative. Comment on illustrations.
Manager and encourager	Manage the classroom and call on learners. Activate learners in target language interaction. Acknowledge and praise contributions.
Clarifier or prober	Elaborate and explain to enhance understanding. Ask for more elaborate responses and thoughts from learners. Draw attention to important and interesting elements in the story.
Fellow wonderer or speculator	Join learners in meaning-making and speculation. React to the story, as a reader.
Extender or refiner	Draw attention to literary strategies and skills. Help learners interpret the theme of the story. Make use of teachable moments to bring in factual knowledge.
Language enhancer and facilitator	Teach English and facilitate target language communication and learning.

Table 2. Summary of scaffolding roles

The Impact of Scaffolding Roles on Classroom Discourse and Interaction

A salient finding was the widespread use of the scaffolding roles as *reader*, *manager and encourager* and *clarifier or prober*, which comprised 86 per cent of all teacher utterances. Interestingly, the distribution resembles the findings by Sipe (2008). The remaining roles of *fellow wonderer or speculator*, *extender or refiner*, and *language enhancer and facilitator*, thus accounted for about 14 per cent of teacher contributions, altogether, but were nevertheless identified in each of the 13 observations except one (where an instance of *extender or refiner* was missing). These similarities suggest that some choices come naturally to English teachers, across classrooms, even though the participants were not used to picturebook read-alouds. In addition, the distribution across categories implies that the teachers kept the focus on the story and meaning-making, with only occasional comments on general literacy skills and linguistic elements. At the same time, teaching approaches varied between the participants, and the two teachers who taught in three

groups each employed the scaffolding strategies in rather similar ways across their respective classrooms. The analysis thus reveals basic structural patterns, and also differences.

However, for reasons related both to context and to Sipe's conceptual categories, quantitative measures do not communicate much about the actual classroom interaction. Needless to say, the teachers' enactment of the roles and their ways of adapting and responding to learners were impacted by a number of contextual variables, including their respective groups, the range of language proficiency within each group and the group dynamics. Furthermore, teachers' own experiences and beliefs related to teaching and learning influence their approach to read-alouds (Li & Seedhouse, 2010), as well as classroom routines to regulate turn-taking and language use. There is thus a reciprocal relationship where the teachers and learners respond to each other and create a classroom climate together. The picturebooks, depending on the content and the narrative, the verbal text-illustration interaction, the level of language and the degree to which meaning has to be inferred, also affect the read-alouds. Finally, and with these considerations as backdrop, teachers may have had different lesson objectives in mind, such as increasing talk time among learners, either during or after the read-aloud, fostering tolerance of ambiguity, or focusing either on aspects of content or language. Consequently, rather than contrasting teachers and classrooms, the excerpts in the current study serve merely as examples from varying lessons and contexts.

Moreover, the teachers' flexible moves between scaffolding roles impact any quantitative measure; for instance, weaving in more language support or clarifications results in a higher number of reader instances, as the written text is distributed over more utterances. At the same time, functioning as *manager* or *encourager* may be very different things; a quiet group may generate more teacher questions and prompts as *encourager*, whereas a talkative group may bring about more comments related to turn-taking and order. In both situations, the teacher utterances fall into the *manager* and *encourager* category, although for different reasons. Similarly, as indicated by the 'or' in *clarifier* or *prober*, this role can be enacted either by teachers adding explanations themselves, or by scaffolding and probing learners to elaborate.

Hence, an examination of the teachers' choices within each category is necessary to understand the qualitative differences that may speak to varying purposes and consequences, and that carry implications for classroom discourse. Below is an example illustrating how the role of *clarifier* is woven into the reading of the printed text (in bold; Percival, 2017, unpaginated),

together with closed questions, to which learners responded with a single word or by shaking their heads (E: PN). (The following abbreviations are used to indicate the categorization of teacher utterances: *reader (R)*, *manager and encourager (ME)*, *clarifier or prober (CP)*, *fellow wonderer or speculator (FWS)*, *extender or refiner (ER)*, *language enhancer and facilitator (LEF)*.)

T: As he went in, Norman covered himself up in a great big coat. Like this (R).

*T: So, he had wings, he had wings, didn't want to show them (CP), han ville inte visa vingarna [he didn't want to show his wings] (LEF). So he put a coat on. Can't see his wings, can you? Just normal person, with a coat, right? He went inside (CP). **His parents, they didn't notice the wings, but they did think it was a bit odd wearing a coat indoors (R).***

T: Have a coat indoors. Do you have a coat, when you have dinner, K, at home? Do you have your coat on? No, I don't think so (ME). Man har ju inte på sig jacka inomhus, det är ju lite annorlunda, eller hur? [You don't wear a coat inside, that's a bit unusual, right?] (CP).

*T: Ah, **bath time was problematic (R)**. Taking a bath with the, with the coat on. Do you take a bath with a coat? (ME).*

Ls: No.

*T: Do you shower with a coat? No, you don't, he-he (ME). **The coat was hot**, [pants], **and uncomfortable** [gestures], **but Norman decided that no one** [waves a finger] **should ever see his wings. Ever! (R)**. He didn't want anybody to see them (CP).*

Here, the teacher keeps the floor, possibly elaborating to offer more language input and make sure learners follow the story, for the purpose of clarifying, while making use of both languages, sounds and gestures. However, acting as *prober*, in the same category, the same teacher encourages learners to go on speaking and elaborate on their interpretations (E: HB):

L1: She's maybe just grow, grown up and have other interest in things.

T: Maybe she's growed up and have... other interests (ME). Why do you think so? What makes you think...? (CP).

L1: I don't know how she can just forget about stuff, when she's put her heart in a

bottle.

T: You, you mean you cannot do that? She must have grown up, or? (CP).

L1: I don't know WHY.

T: Of course you don't know, and it's just a story, but I'm interested in your thoughts. (ME). Do you think she has grown up? (CP).

L2: Yeah.

T: Yeah? (ME).

L2: Yes, but she's lonely now.

T: Yes? (ME).

L2: Yeah, I think, that she, she, she, ignored the stars because she has her heart in a bottle, and she can't be interested and she's sad or something, and also she's growing up, cause if you look at the picture with the tree and the stars, you can see that she's quite tiny, but if you look at the sea picture, she's much bigger.

In this example, the teacher opens up for more communication. According to Sipe (2008), the scaffolding done as *clarifier* or *prober* serves the purpose of exploring the story and adding elaborations. Conceivably, teachers elaborate themselves in order to help learners interpret the narrative, while keeping the initiative and the role as *reader*, maintaining the attention of the learners and getting on with the story, as in the first example. The choice to open up and invite or probe learners to elaborate and make inferences may instead be a way of increasing talk time for learners and engaging them in meaning-making, as in the second excerpt. In ELT, where content and language need to be considered, both choices may have a place, to practice listening and comprehension skills, or inspire and motivate learners to join in meaning-making and language production. Moreover, in the moment, teachers' decisions may, of course, depend on how they perceive and assess the engagement and comprehension in the group.

Discussion

The findings, based on thirteen observations in seven classrooms, reveal that the framework resulting from Sipe's (2008) examination of read-alouds with lower primary learners in the L1 is applicable as description of the varying roles adopted by Swedish teachers of English with older

primary learners. Moreover, Sipe's claim that only a small part of the teacher-learner interaction consists of the actual reading of the written narrative, is echoed in the current study. Teachers make flexible use of the strategies to mediate stories, foster literacy and comprehension and motivate and inspire learners to listen and interact.

As discussed in the section on the role of picturebooks, authentic literature brings a lot to primary education. Yet, the teacher's careful mediation is paramount, since learners may respond to the teachers' performance, rather than the picturebook itself (Sipe, 2008, p. 205). To advance ELT pedagogy, it is crucial to enrich our understanding of how these scaffolding functions can be used effectively, and the implications that they carry. To this end, the findings illustrate the scaffolding strategies that teachers have at their disposal as picturebook mediators in ELT. Although all functions were identified in each of the classrooms, teaching approaches and choices within each category varied substantially. However, this does not mean that such categorization is therefore pointless. Rather the opposite; the model can help illustrate enactments of these functions that may serve to achieve different purposes.

The orchestration of read-alouds affects the classroom discourse and interaction. Not only is the teacher in control of talk time and turn-taking in class, but the read-aloud approach affords opportunities for engagement, speculation and meaning-making. In the English language classroom, it also has direct impact on learners' comprehension of the story, language learning and target language use. Thus, the quantity and quality of teachers' questions and prompts in the different categories are critical. As pointed out by Ghosn (2013), teacher questions that can be answered in one or two words usually are. Yet, although such interaction may seem rather unsatisfactory, in heterogeneous ELT classrooms, a closed question posed to a learner may be a way of lowering the threshold for that learner to contribute in English, whereas eliciting more elaborate answers from other learners is possible with more advanced learners. Allowing for sections of interaction in Swedish may also have been meant to facilitate learner engagement and maintain learners' attention. For genuine interaction to take place, and also to promote bilingual identities among students, the language of schooling (and possibly other L1s) may have a role to play (Ghosn, 2013), also in year 5.

The read-alouds were content- rather than language-centred, focused on the narrative and possible interpretations. Hopefully, the fact that no learner asked about an unknown word in the

narratives suggests that they were content with grasping the overall gist and that the illustrations were useful in this regard. Arguably, authentic literature may signal another approach to ELT than regular coursebooks, where learners know they will be expected to learn certain vocabulary. Participating as *fellow wonderer and speculator* also positions the teacher in a significantly different role to that of coursebook chapter instructor, and has the potential to contribute with another kind of atmosphere, in a joint classroom experience.

The current study comes with limitations. Using authentic English picturebooks was a new experience for these teachers. Being observed, and possibly attempting to comply with their own interpretation of what would be expected of them, may very well have influenced their choices. As for the analysis, the educational settings in the current study and that of Sipe (2008), with younger learners in smaller read-aloud sessions interacting in the L1, are rather different, which possibly affected the interpretations of the categories to a certain extent.

The fact that picturebooks remain rare in ELT must be interpreted as a call for teacher education to engage more. As pointed out in previous studies, highlighting the benefits of using authentic literature is obviously not enough (Fuchs & Ross, 2022; Mair, 2018). Pre-service and in-service training must address approaches and mediation strategies, and model how read-alouds can be manifested, and for what purposes. The present findings hope to inspire teachers to explore the affordances of picturebook read-alouds and to experiment with scaffolding roles and possible pathways. This way, the gap between classroom practices and ELT literature can decrease and teachers may be empowered to put theory into practice and create premises for joint meaning-making and engagement in authentic target language interaction, that lies at the core of communicative language teaching.

More research is needed to probe deeper into the actual processes involved in engaging primary language learners with multimodal narratives. For instance, while the current analysis focused on teachers' utterances, interestingly, not saying anything can be a strategy to invite learner initiatives. The way in which teachers create interactional spaces by using questions, invitations and language, would be an interesting avenue for further research. It would also be valuable to investigate whether and how teachers develop their approaches to read-alouds with more experience.

Conclusion

This study illustrates how read-alouds of authentic picturebooks were conducted by experienced English teachers in Sweden, and the scaffolding strategies that were spontaneously enacted to assist learners' comprehension, meaning-making and interaction with the story. The findings illuminate the complexity involved in orchestrating interactive picturebook read-alouds, and the range of potential objectives at play. Similarities and differences across participating teachers' practices in their classrooms suggest generic elements in read-aloud approaches, but also an intricate interplay between the teacher, the learners, the context and the story; all these factors may impact the way in which the teacher chooses to read, elaborate, explain language, ask questions, invite responses and speculation and use the picturebook as a springboard for interaction in ELT. Systematizing and clarifying the affordances that these different roles contribute may be helpful for teacher educators, to concretize the process of picturebook read-alouds in English. The study hopes to inspire in-service teachers to make more use of authentic literature in primary English teaching, and to reflect on the process. A more nuanced understanding of how to mediate multimodal narratives may help empower more teachers to capitalize on the potential of picturebooks in ELT, for the purpose of fostering multiple literacies, and activating learners in oral interaction and authentic meaning-making around engaging content.

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