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How can picturebooks and stories transform the way children learn languages and navigate digital spaces in the primary classroom?

Abstract

The research presented in this chapter demonstrates how picturebooks and stories can open up possibilities for more sustainable, creative and multimodal approaches to learning new languages in the primary classroom. We look at the importance of children's literature, stories and CLIL in creating welcoming learning environments for languages and how multilingual literacy can be developed using digital technology, including multilingual digital storytelling. Fostering teacher agency is key to this story-based approach and developing deeper motivation to teach primary languages. We describe the context for teaching primary languages in England and show how a new story-based pedagogical approach is vital to enhance the confidence of primary teachers. We adopt a critical ethnographic approach towards language planning and policy and the research focuses on action research carried out in a London primary school. The new whole-school primary languages curriculum analysed in this chapter has been developed from the ongoing collaborative research between the teacher educator/researcher, Sahmland, and lead German teacher/researcher, Hackney, and the school is part of the Critical Connections Project co-directed by Macleroy. We conclude with research findings from a year-long study using a picturebook to teach German that reveal the impact of using stories in the primary languages classroom.

1. Introduction

The research presented here clearly shows how children's literature, picturebooks and stories can draw children into new ways of thinking and create paths into literacy across languages and cultures. Stories have the power to surprise and captivate children and help them to imagine how a character is thinking, feeling, and speaking (in this case in a different language). Stories often set out dilemmas that unravel in unexpected ways but need to be solved and bring children hope and resilience. Our research examines the way that stories enable children to develop multilingual literacy and is part of a wider 'Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project' (2012-ongoing) working with children and young adults (6-18 years old). Creating a primary languages curriculum that embeds a picturebook/novel across the year's work runs counter to the fragmented topic-based approach that has been adopted in many schools in England in recent years (Sahmland 2019). Devaluing the centrality of narrative in the way children learn raises the concern that children's lives in school are becoming a line-up

of tasks and no longer feeling like stories (Basar et al. 2015). This fragmented approach to language and literacy learning is becoming more apparent in primary schools where time to read fiction is being diminished. Library spaces are being closed in schools, disappearing from children's lives, and literacy is becoming detached from pleasure, excitement, and curiosity to know. A recent report on 'The Future of Primary School Libraries' (Todd 2021) found that a quarter of disadvantaged primary schools in England do not have a library even though 'for the 1 in 11 children growing up without any books at home school is often the first opportunity for children to discover the magic of reading' (8).

In this research we examine what happens when teachers bring a story into the language classroom for a whole year. How does this change the dynamic of the language classroom and how do children develop multilingual literacy? Research studies on childhood and childhood multilingualism are beginning to recognise the key role that digital technology plays in children's literacy, language and culture (Macleroy 2022). Children's cultures are becoming more associated with on-screen and digital spaces and children's reading includes 'words on screens, still or moving images and words interacting on pages or screens, and the interpretation of a range of semiotic resources in different media' (Taylor 2022: 224). Multimodal literacy is still a contested concept for the development of multilingual literacy and Bloch (2021) believes there 'remains a pedagogical question of whether multimodal literacies should be considered alternative literacies or as bridges aiding the developing traditional print forms' (64-65). In our research we look at how multimodal literacy is interwoven into children's literature and developing multilingual literacy.

We build on our previous research which found that placing stories at the centre of the curriculum and experimenting with multimodal literacy in the form of digital storytelling provided teachers with 'opportunities to be creative, to use stories to give language teaching a meaningful purpose, and to employ digital technology to structure and stretch their creativity' (Macleroy et al. 2021: 13). The research presented in this chapter examines how and why teachers and children start to value this way of learning. We review the shift in language pedagogy towards a story-oriented curriculum and how this has improved learner outcomes. We focus on research conducted in a mainstream state primary school in London (part of the Critical Connections Project since 2018) and explore how young learners (8-9-year-olds) engage with the story, *Edward und der letzte Baum* (Carnavas 2011 *The Last Tree in the City*). German is introduced as a new language for most children in this primary school from Year 1 (5–6-year-olds). We examine the thinking and critical design principles behind this

pedagogical approach towards learning German and the effects on learner and teacher motivation, agency, and engagement across the primary languages curriculum.

The research in this chapter recognises the importance of sustained, long-term partnerships between university researchers, teacher educators, and language teachers and how these collaborations can lead to change through a bottom-up approach to language planning and policy. We argue that this more dialogic approach towards research and fieldwork is fundamental in bringing about lasting and beneficial change and 'opening up a two-way dialogue between educators and researchers where researchers listen more and respect the role of educators as knowledge generators' (Cummins 2021: 256). We address the main research question, 'how can picturebooks and stories transform the way children learn languages and navigate digital spaces in the primary classroom?'.

2i. Children's Literature, stories and CLIL

Educating children through the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply affected the way we view schools as sites of learning. Schools had to move beyond testing and achievement and think of ways to engage children in the process of learning. In reflecting on creating teaching resources during lockdown, the key priority identified by primary teachers was giving children activities that they would enjoy (Moss et al. 2020). Literature, the arts and music have been squeezed out of the primary curriculum in recent years and this needs to change. Andrews and Almohammad (2022) examine a series of research projects that demonstrate how using creative arts methods in language classrooms can create welcoming learning environments for children. Almohammad (2022) focuses on our research in the 'Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling Project' as one of two fascinating projects that use filmmaking in language education and concludes that these projects create welcoming spaces where 'filmmaking can shift the focus to the learners' agency; learners can speak, use languages, perform, sing and write about what matters' (33). Imagining and creating stories with others helps children to find pleasure in learning languages.

Children's literature and stories are integral to welcoming children into school classroom spaces, but picturebooks and stories have somehow become detached from learning a new language and are largely absent from the primary languages curriculum (DfE 2013a). This is part of a wider research gap and tendency for adults to view children's literature as lesser exemplified by a recent critic of *Treacle Walker*: 'He [Alan Garner] has never been just a

children's writer, he's far richer, odder and deeper than that' (Guardian 2021). Thus, a continuing challenge to researchers working in the field of children's literature, is the 'relative marginalization of children's books as literature, and of children as readers' (Butler & Reynolds 2014: 2). This is particularly apparent with children's picturebooks which are left behind as children move up the years in primary school.

What happens when teachers bring picturebooks and stories back into the primary classroom? Research into children's picturebooks and storytelling interrogates why outstanding picturebooks have such a powerful effect on children: 'I'm impressed by the strength of the children's desire to make meaning of these texts, and the pleasure they take from them is infectious' (Salisbury & Styles 2012: 103). These researchers examine how the pictures in picturebooks enable children to 'interpret ideas in a more sophisticated way' (109); how reading picturebooks can encourage children to 'think deeply' (122); and how picturebooks provide a 'safe space in which children can explore emotional relationships, including some of the big issues of life – love, divorce, death, violence, bullying, environmental issues, and so on' (122).

In their introduction to *Children's Literature in Action,* Hope and Rosen (2022) comment that 'no matter how concerned critics, authors and academics have been with children, it is not easy to find children's thoughts, voices and responses to children's literature' (12). They are interested in seeing the child as a responder and interpreter of books and in foregrounding the child in children's literature studies recognise the value of using dialogic methods and artistic interpretation in researching reading including 'painting, music, performance, film, powerpoint, photography, sculpture, ceramics etc.' (13). They return to the fundamental argument that writers want readers to engage with their books and 'want readers to feel, wonder and think about what they're reading so they carry on reading' (13). Research on the concept of reading for pleasure recognises the importance of developing sustained reader engagement. Reader engagement is key to learning with and through picturebooks/novels and recognising the power of fictive imagining (Meek 1991). Cremin and Hendry (2022) reflect on the power and role of narrative in equitable literacy development and the potential of literary texts for 'imaginative and aesthetic engagement' (214). Bringing picturebooks and fiction into the language classroom builds on the argument and evidence that narrative fiction requires sustained engagement, interpretation and meaning making. Although substantial research reveals the benefits of 'reading picture fiction, classroom practices today … are not always aligned with this' (Cremin & Hendry 2022: 215).

How can the benefits of reading picturebooks be interwoven with how children learn languages in the primary classroom? Our research recognises the value of combining content and language integrated learning (CLIL) with project-based language learning (PBLL) and seeing texts as dynamic and open to interpretation and reimaginings. Coyle (2018) in revisiting the place of CLIL in education believes that CLIL holds a 'pivotal position for reframing its potential as a pedagogic, rather than a linguistic, phenomenon' (168). CLIL is viewed as being perhaps the most important approach that brings together content and communicative skills in the context of PBLL using digital technologies (Thomas & Yamazaki 2021). This approach requires more planning and training, but researchers have seen a 'transition from tasks and projects focused primarily on linguistic outcomes, to those which have a wider social and values-based dimension as well' (Thomas & Yamazaki 2021: 9).

2ii. Multilingual literacy and multilingual digital storytelling

Using digital technology to transform and remediate stories opens up new possibilities for language, literacy and learning. Hunt (2014) talks about how the electronic revolution is turning children's texts into 'sites of interactive, democratic play' (p. 11) and these new literacies give children a great deal of pleasure, 'the kind of pleasure that fosters literacy' (Genrich & Janks 2013: 463). Why is it that children's digital skills are often left behind at the school gates along with their languages and cultures? The Critical Connections project (2012-ongoing) integrates digital technology into language learning, and we recognise the time and dedication needed to enable children to develop digital skills and expertise in creative ways. It can be challenging to create creative digital spaces within schools and these spaces need careful structuring, support, and guidance. These digital spaces are often sites of creative collaboration and so it is harder to assess individual children and their progress. Children also have to learn how to create collaboratively and listen to other points of view. Digital technology can be hard to manipulate and editing, in particular, needs careful planning, patience and creative skills. However, research demonstrates the transformative effect digital technology can have on the way children learn new languages and their deep engagement with these more flexible, dialogic and interactive forms of learning (Gee & Hayes 2011). Craft (2011) sets out how the digital revolution is having a deep effect on childhood in terms of the 'plurality of identities; possibility awareness; playfulness of engagement; and participation' (33). Possibility awareness is useful in thinking about how stories work and the inventiveness of children.

Rosen (2022) talks about how children need to feel and experience what he thinks is the most important thing about story, 'the presentation of possibles - possible behaviour, possible scenes and possible worlds. And you need to feel the sensation of how these possibilities work out, to get it' (160). This is about creating spaces in classrooms where children are encouraged to respond to what stories feel like to them, daring and experimenting with what a story might be about, investigating all its possibilities. The Critical Connections project views story in this way arguing that it takes imagination to learn a language and investigating how multilingual literacy is learnt through engaging in the process of multilingual digital storytelling (Anderson & Macleroy 2016). In learning how to compose stories multimodally and create their digital stories, children 'make choices of mode and imagine new ways of presenting knowledge and experiences' (Macleroy 2016a: 164). Opening up these creative digital spaces to imagining, hypothesising and transforming stories is key to this approach towards language learning and producing bi- and multilingual stories 'enables children to hypothesise about language and reveals what they understand about the relationship between their languages' (Sneddon 2009: 148). In our project, we define multilingual digital stories as a short bi-/multilingual story (3-5 minutes) made using photographs, moving images, artwork, objects, animation, poetry, dance and drama. The voice-over is in the language(s) the children are learning and the subtitles tend to be in English.

Multilingual digital storytelling brings together multilingualism and literacy to develop children's multilingual literacy. In our previous case study together, we concluded that 'writing and producing a digital story reinforced their language learning, as pupils were encouraged to bring in new words and imagine the story together' (Macleroy et al. 2021: 13). In recent research into multilingual literacy, Stavans and Lindgren (2021) conceptualise the importance of building a multilingual literacy bridge so that while 'standing at any point on this bridge, the twin 'villages' of literacy and that of multilingualism will always be connected and their interrelationships dynamic, depending our location on the bridge' (261). In thinking in more depth about building the bridge of multilingual literacy, these researchers recognise technology as 'perhaps the most important supplier of multilingual literacy' (275) and that this literacy is not about separate skills but 'a social act in which people engage within a community' (280). In our project, building multilingual literacy is a social act as the children become part of a wider multilingual digital storytelling community across a range of languages, countries, and educational institutions (primary, secondary, community-based complementary).

In discussing how to create digital spaces for multilingual writers, Bloch (2021) looks at the implementation of digital storytelling into a multimodal literacy space and how 'digital storytelling can be used as both a bridge and an alternative form of literacy' (65). He reflects on the implications on pedagogy in designing digital literacy spaces and how these 'spaces allow students to continually cross boundaries across different spaces and different kinds of texts' (221). These digital literacy spaces can integrate new and traditional literacy practices and open up classrooms to the 'multiple languages used in these digital spaces' (233). Multilingual digital storytelling uses these digital spaces to connect children across languages, cultures and countries.

2iii. Teacher agency, motivation and engagement

Teacher agency is key to changing the way that primary languages are taught in schools in England and developing the confidence, skills, and willingness of primary teachers to implement a more sustainable creative approach towards the teaching of primary languages. It is 20 years since the National Language Strategy (DfES 2002) stated that every primary school child had the entitlement to learn a language, and this was seen as a 'crucial step in embedding language teaching within schools in the UK at an early stage' (Anderson & Macleroy 2015: 247). However, the implementation of the primary language policy came up against many barriers including a lack of professional development opportunities and a fragmented approach to teaching languages across primary school and transition into secondary school. In our previous research, we noted that 'while pupils in primary schools tend to be enthusiastic about learning a new language, it is often the class teachers who experience anxiety around delivering the language lessons' (Macleroy et al. 2021: 3). Holmes and Myles (2019) recommended the way forward for primary languages policy in England should be a 'whole school policy and curriculum planning' (13). Our research investigates how a change in whole school language policy and curriculum planning can be implemented in a London primary school.

Designing and implementing a new primary languages curriculum across the whole school enables teaching to be planned in dialogue with others and 'it is the nature of the pedagogical dialogue that frames learning' (Macleroy 2016b: 188). Fostering teacher agency is a vital aspect of this pedagogical dialogue and Ushioda (2011) in her research on learner autonomy and motivation recognises the need to focus on the 'agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, with goals, motives and intentions' (13). In our research, we investigate whether building on

teachers' deep understanding and experience of how stories work can motivate and engage primary school teachers in teaching languages. The new languages curriculum has emerged from ongoing research and collaboration between the teacher educator/researcher, Sahmland, and lead German teacher/researcher, Hackney, since 2018.

The Critical Connections pedagogical model was developed through continuous discussions between researchers and teachers and 'this space for dialogue and discussion was crucial in developing expertise and confidence in what for most represented a new approach to language teaching' (Anderson & Macleroy 2021: 241). Lead project teachers have played an active role, in collaboration with researchers, in interrogating the multilingual digital storytelling data collected in their school contexts and this collaborative and dialogic way of approaching the research project has allowed space for a 'deeper, more nuanced understanding of how and why MDST motivates and engages young people in language learning' (ibid. 244). We believe that a collaborative research approach where different voices are listened to and acted upon is key to embedding a new pedagogical approach to teaching languages.

3. A New Pedagogical Approach to Teaching Languages

Language teaching in primary schools became statutory and part of the Key Stage 2 (KS2) curriculum (7–11-year-olds) in England in 2014. The curriculum was published less than a year before schools were required to teach languages at KS2 and the very short time frame left a lot of schools grappling with the implementation of a languages curriculum. The Language Trends report from 2015/16, a year after the implementation of the curriculum, indicated that 'just over one third of schools now have access to specialist expertise in the teaching of languages within the school. However, there is evidence that some schools are finding it challenging to provide the kind of systematic and consistent language teaching envisaged in the national curriculum' (Language Trends 2016: 8). This meant that two-thirds of schools were not able to provide adequate language education. The report pointed out that one of the key challenges was to improve the confidence of classroom teachers to teach languages in the primary classroom (Language Trends 2016). The lack of confidence stemmed from a lack of language expertise and translating the two-page curriculum into a school curriculum with a tangible content.

The curriculum purpose of study starts with 'learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world' (DfE 2013a: 1). The curriculum clearly 'emphasises attitude over content' (Ambrossi & Constant Sheppard 2018:

41) which allows schools to be flexible with the implementation of the curriculum, but also challenges those schools where there is a lack of expertise. Consequently, many schools have resorted to buying in readymade schemes of work accompanied by a video, which allows teachers to fulfil the criteria of teaching languages at KS2 without being experts and spending a lot of time planning lessons. The rigour of these schemes has been demotivating to learners and teachers alike because the content of these schemes is very linear, modelled on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination expectations, and not relevant to the primary school context, so children are often dispirited by the experience. Additionally, where the curriculum has been delivered by colleagues from secondary school, this has shown to 'create unfavourable learner engagement' (Driscoll 2014: 264) due to the lack of understanding of the primary context.

Some schools, where there is expertise, use a much more creative and focused approach to teaching languages through other subjects such as using stories. The emphasis on content, purpose, and the wider context of language learning such as 'learning new ways of thinking' and 'reading great literature' (DfE 2013a: 1) has facilitated a shift in the way language teaching is mapped onto the language curriculum in a school. Using stories to teach languages steps away from the idea that primary languages should be preparatory for assessment at GCSE and harnesses the idea that language teaching should actively promote creativity, literacy and curiosity and it can open doors to endless possibilities.

Bruner (1977) considers the relevance of some subjects taught in primary schools and argues if 'it is worth an adult's knowing, and whether having known it as a child makes a person a better adult' (52) then it should be part of the curriculum. Teaching pointless linear lists of vocabulary does not have real relevance to the child or the child as an adult. Most adult language learners in England do not remember much of their language learning at school. Bruner warns that many curricula 'lose their original form and suffer a relapse into a certain shapelessness' (54). On the other hand, in relation to the spiral curriculum, Bruner states that when materials are carefully chosen, children can be introduced to literature at a very early stage. Bruner suggests that the teacher is the judge of 'what seems to be intuitively right for children at different ages, correcting as he goes' (53). The teacher then adjusts and revisits the same kind of literature but in a more complex way. A focus on literature allows for a real purpose and creative meaningful output. Planning stories carefully where the complexity increases each year and the vocabulary use becomes repeatedly progressive rather than taught in a linear fashion ensures newly learned language is not forgotten and 'through frequent

revisiting of a range of material, students are able to form ever more well-connected networks of ideas – more extensive schemata' (Sherrington 2019: 37). Rosenshine's principle of 'Reviewing material' (Sherrington 2019) can be applied to the rhythmic and repetitive nature of stories as through reading stories and producing creative outputs, key language is 'recycled'. Thus, curriculum knowledge spirals throughout a school year. Using a similar approach to teaching stories across the different year groups allows knowledge to be reused each year. This applies to reviewing vocabulary and increasing children's skills to approach literature. Children are introduced to more complex literacy texts to gain confidence to approach literature in a new language, 'learn new ways of thinking' and 'express their ideas … in writing' (DfE 2013a: 1).

In primary languages, stories can be presented using a similar approach to teaching English, considering grammar and new vocabulary in meaningful contexts, which is motivating for learners as well as classroom teachers (Ambrossi & Constant Sheppard 2018). This encourages teachers to feel more competent as they can transfer their pedagogical skills from English and other subject areas (including music, art, maths) to teaching languages. In English lessons, stories are often read out loud with the whole class or pair reading, and then followed up with questions. Children's reading skills develop through 'high-quality discussion with the teacher, as well as from reading and discussing a range of stories' (DfE 2013b 4) and reading a story 'feeds pupils' imagination and opens up a treasure-house of wonder and joy for curious young minds' (4). This corresponds with parts of the Primary Languages curriculum which states that children should 'read great literature in the original language' (DfE 2013a 1) and be taught to 'appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes in the language' (2). Recent research shows children can learn a language better in chunks (Ashby 2019) and stories provide a 'rhythmic and intriguing' stimulus' (Ambrossi & Constant-Shepherd 2018: 173) that can be learned in chunks 'unconsciously and almost effortlessly' (Kirsch, 2016: 33). This happens when children read familiar stories or where the context is relevant and relatable. However, using a story to teach languages requires careful planning and is more complex than just reading the story out loud to the children.

Although many skills of teaching a story in English are transferable to teaching a story in a new language, the timeframe does not correspond. While English is taught every day for at least an hour, teaching languages is usually reduced to 30-60 minutes per week. Therefore, teaching stories in the primary languages curriculum needs to be planned over a much longer period. Using just one story to teach a language for a whole year is a possible approach with creative outputs. Choosing a book for each year group is the first step is to consider. Children

engage with books that are targeted at a younger age group if the outcome or the work that results from it is more age appropriate and also 'linguistically manageable' (Hood & Tobutt 2015: 119) Children, aged 5-8, do not mind reading a familiar story. They enjoy hearing the same story again and again, even in English, joining in with the repetitions and joining in as the story is read. Older children, aged 9 -11, build on their previous learning and stories they have read to engage with an authentic unfamiliar story. This allows them to connect with a new language and they are encouraged to 'live another life' (Ashby 2019: 87).

Once a book is chosen depending on the context and level, the first term is spent in preparing for the book, setting the scene, which means introducing the vocabulary with a clear purpose to access the book. Launching straight into the book might be a little overwhelming for teachers and children alike. Therefore, for example, if the chosen book is *Die kleine Raupe Nimmersatt* (Carle 1985 *The Very Hungry Caterpillar)*, it is helpful to focus on food items and days of the week in the first term. Food can be considered in the context of a harvest festival or Kwanzaa to provide a cultural context. Once the vocabulary is established, the book offers revision and scaffolding of key vocabulary in the reading of the story.

Having learnt and worked with the foundations of new vocabulary and phrases, approaching the topic with a story allows children to use the new language in authentic contexts. The introduction of the topic and new vocabulary does not only scaffold the work for the children but also for the teacher. While new vocabulary is considered to be new information and is processed in the working memory, the content of the story (if it is a familiar story) is stored in the long-term memory as it is processed at an earlier stage (Dideau 2019). Combining the process of both memories can support learners with easier acquisition and also confidence. Taylor (2019) considers 'The Forgetting Curve' and points out that in order to have better long-term retention we need to review new information at least three times. Most children's stories, especially for younger ages, contain lots of repetition which reinforces the new language in different ways. Stories offer high retrieval strength and key vocabulary and ideas can become part of children's long-term memory in the context of the story.

Primary School teachers, who are non-specialist teachers of languages, might be slightly apprehensive about teaching a story. However, learning the language alongside the children in a familiar engaging story allows them to use their skills of teaching stories. Most stories are freely available online and accessible to children to read along (Hood & Tobutt 2015). Exploring the story with a clear aim to a creative output, such as writing their own story in a

similar style (similar pattern or rhythm), writing as one of the characters, review of a story (similar to writing tasks in English), or multimodal outputs enables reading with a clear purpose. Vocabulary and phrases are recorded for manipulation to create their own writing and multimodal outputs. Key language has been reinforced through speaking about and reading a story before writing or designing a multimodal story. Language is revisited and new learning reviewed before children approach the written output. This approach to writing and multimodal outputs gives children confidence in developing multilingual literacy and provides space for creativity.

Reading a story gives children and their teachers a clear purpose and direction for the whole year. When language teaching is organised in discreet topics, mirrored by how subject content is organised in examination specifications, it is irrelevant and demotivating to primary educators and learning is not memorable. Children soon forget what is covered in a topic, if it is not retrieved and used regularly (Bentley-Davies 2021). A story-based pedagogical approach to teaching languages provides a clear focus for language lessons and language planning becomes connected across the whole-school curriculum.

4. Action Research within a Critical Ethnographic Paradigm

Building on our previous collaborative research (Macleroy et al. 2021), we adopt a critical ethnographic approach towards language planning and policy which involves sustained dialogue and negotiation in the implementation of a new pedagogical model. The research process is viewed as a dialogical performance (Madison 2005). The turn in critical ethnography towards 'greater flexibility in the design and conduct of research projects' (Martin-Jones & Da Costa Cabral 2018: 85) has seen a move to more dialogic and collaborative approaches to fieldwork.

Action research was a key part of the research design in the implementation of the new pedagogical model in this primary school and integral to the critical ethnographic paradigm of the Critical Connections project. The space for dialogue and discussion is crucial to 'developing expertise and confidence in what for most represented a new approach to language teaching' (Anderson & Macleroy 2021: 24). This complex, dynamic and dialogic approach towards language planning and policy making relies on close collaboration between researchers and practitioners as envisaged in the Educational Language Policy Engagement and Action Research (ELPEAR) initiative (Johnson 2013).

In the Critical Connections project, we use a range of data collection methods (Anderson & Macleroy 2016: 142). The research methods used to collect the data in this case study included questionnaires with pupils and teachers; observations of classroom teaching; field notes/research journal; samples of children's work; photographs; and the group digital story. The data was collected across the school year (September 2021 – July 2022). The research project had full ethical approval and signed consent from all the research participants that their work and digital story could be used for educational purposes.

5. Research context for teaching languages in the primary classroom

This research was carried out in a state primary school (two-form entry) located in South-East London. Since its establishment in 2013, German has been a key part of teaching and learning, with Years 1 to 6 (5-11 years old) receiving weekly German lessons of 45-60 minutes. Initially, a high proportion of the teaching staff were German specialists (fluent German speakers or with A-Level or degree experience). Though the number of German specialists has reduced over recent years, the school has maintained strong links with the Primary Languages educator at Goldsmiths and trainee teachers have been trained and employed at the school. German is usually taught by the class teacher or by one of the year group class teachers and the use of German is encouraged throughout the school day for practical purposes. Previously, German language schemes were used at the school but proved challenging to fit and adapt into an already time-constrained primary curriculum. It was also found they did not allow for creativity and ownership of the language from the pupils.

After reflection from the school principal, German lead, and teacher educator, a new year-long story curriculum was developed building on an already successful term-long literature unit. Initial text choices included these well-known picturebooks, *Die kleine Raupe Nimmersatt (*Carle 1985 *The Very Hungry Caterpillar)*, *Der Grüffelo* (2002 Donaldson *The Gruffalo*), *Wir gehen auf Bärenjagd* (Rosen 2013 *We're Going on a Bear Hunt!)* and *Elmar* (McKee 2017*, Elmer*) for Years 1 to 4 respectively. Following reflection with class teachers after the initial year of using literature texts to teach German, changes were made to the base texts, with *Der Katzentatzentanz* (Heine 2000 *The Cat Paw Dance*) being used for Year 2 in place of *The Gruffalo* and *Edward und der letzte Baum* (Carnavas *2*011 *The Last Tree in the City*) being used in Year 4. These choices were made based on the structure and content of the stories, with the two new texts acting as a more practical basis to scaffold pupils' language use, whether through repetitive sentence phrasing or theme. The texts chosen for the upper Key Stage 2

classes were *Emil und die Detektive* (Kästner 2018 *Emil and the Detectives*) for Year 5 and *Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl* (Kerr 1987 *When Hitler stole Pink Rabbit*) for Year 6. A graphic novel of *Emil und die Detektive* is used, to act as a bridge between the picturebooks in earlier years and the extended prose of *Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl,* with pupils looking at extracts from the authentic text. These more extended texts link in with other curriculum elements, such as pupils' study of the Second World War in Year 6, or the cultural study of Berlin in Year 5.

As mentioned in their response to the *Research Review Series: Languages* (Ofsted 2021), Porter et al (2022) reflect that young learners should be supported by 'rich and plentiful input' (211) as well as being given the opportunity to engage with 'cultural artefacts and authentic content' (208). They conclude that the three Cs of 'creativity, challenge and culture' (210) are 'likely to increase motivation' (214) and support wider and longer-term language learning. By using an authentic literature text for one year in our new curriculum and using this as a basis to allow pupils to write their own stories, experimentation with output is encouraged. Pupils are able take ownership of the target language as well as using it for a communicative purpose. Visual literacy and film clips are used across the school in teaching English and both pupils and staff are familiar with taking an image or short clip to use as a prompt and scaffold for writing. Using a similar framework with the story as a stimulus is intended to act as the gateway for children to explore further creative possibilities, as well as building on their skills and knowledge within the target language of German.

6. Research focus on bringing a picturebook into the primary languages classroom

In the previous academic year, the text *Elmar* had been used with Year 4 and whilst this had proved engaging for pupils, who enjoyed creating and describing their own elephants for the text, opportunities for expanding creativity of language use seemed more limited. A chance encounter with the story, *The Last Tree in The City* (Carnavas 2010), led to the language lead reflecting on the links between this story and the environmental theme of the Critical Connections project (2021-22) the school was taking part in. Initially, the language lead planned for this to involve children translating aspects of the English text but given the availability of the text in a German translation, *Edward und der letzte Baum* (Carnavas *2*011), and the sentence structures and vocabulary content, it became clear that the text could be used as a framework and stimulus for more creative multimodal outcomes.

The story teaching was planned across the year and after an initial term engaging with intercultural understanding and the story's wider themes, the spring and summer terms were focused on the story. The research presented here looks at the focused story work.

6i. Using Picturebooks and CLIL

Initially, pupils were presented with the front cover of the story, showing a child gazing up at a large brightly coloured tree in a grey and colourless city setting, and were given the chance to reflect on what they could work out from this, what key details about the text or key ideas or vocabulary that might be covered. Using a viewpoint thinking pattern, which children are familiar with from other curriculum areas such as geography and history, sample pupil responses can be seen below (Figure 1). Pupils were also encouraged to ask questions about the story, which could then be addressed in later lessons, for example 'Why is it the last tree?' and 'Where is the city?', which also became later stimuli for elements of the digital story.

Figure 1: Initial viewpoints and thoughts on the story

In the next lesson, pupils were presented with key vocabulary connected with the story and its opening pages, such as *Stadt* – city, *Baum* – tree, and *Auto*(s) – car(s). Images, gestures, and action were used to reinforce this before pupils recorded vocabulary in transfer points, as seen below (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Vocabulary transfer points connected with the story

Pupils were then able to add to this transfer point, using either words or their own image ideas to support their retention of the vocabulary. Pupils enjoyed coming up with key images, with some using images clearly inspired by the text to represent the vocabulary items central to the story, and this acted as a good preparation for understanding key sentences and phrases from the story as it began to be read.

So far, only the initial pages of the story had been read, but pupils were already engaging with the images and text, especially with the clear distinction between Edward and the colourful tree and the otherwise bland and colourless urban setting around him. Pupils were also able to combine language knowledge from the initial vocabulary lessons to create their own sentences, summarising action or illustrations so far (Figure 3). Pupils were keen to extend each sentence, or write multiple sentences for each image, building in new adjectives and also beginning to come up with their own ideas of nouns and adjectives that they wanted to find out in German, for example, *skyscraper* or *boring*.

Figure 3: Sentences describing illustrations in the story

In later lessons, these sentence frames and building blocks were used as a scaffold for pupils' own ideas. Pupils used bilingual dictionaries to generate their own ideas for nouns and adjectives to build sentences describing both the tree and the city in the story. Vocabulary ideas were recorded as shown in Figure 4. Using the bilingual dictionaries offered pupils a sense of freedom and possibility to investigate their own interpretations of the story. Using these strategies also meant that the outcome was accessible for all pupils, with a real sense of pride and enthusiasm coming through from pupils, perhaps due to a sense of ownership and control over the language and content being used.

Figure 4: Vocabulary gathering using the picturebook and bilingual dictionaries

6ii. Emerging multilingual literacy through designing a digital story and CLIL

Though previous studies, including Kirsch (2016), have looked at the impact of using stories to teach vocabulary, here the aim was to use the story not only to reinforce vocabulary, but also to expand pupils' creativity as they began to reinterpret and rebuild the story to their own design. These ideas formed the basis for the stills from the digital story seen below (Figure 5), with pupils having eagerly found out German equivalents, such as *Wolkenkratzer* for skyscrapers and adjectives such as *riesig* (gigantic).

Figure 5: Slides from the digital story *Edward und der letzte Baum*

Components from the story were used to help pupils build sentences using a frame and dice activity, as shown below, where they could come up with activities for Edward to do in the tree or in other locations in the city, using phrasing from the story. One aspect that proved especially engaging in this task was when pupils generated sentences, which although grammatically correct, were fantastical, for example *Edward spielt Fußball in dem Baum* (Edward plays football in the tree) or *Edward schläft am Ende der Straße* (Edward sleeps at the end of the street) (Figure 6). This activity acted as a highly productive stimulus for pupils' creative language use, with great amusement arising from producing ever more ridiculous sentences, whilst all the time rehearsing and reinforcing language structures.

Figure 6: Sentence building using dice activity and story plot

The story was also used to provide context for practical communication, such as directional language. When Edward cannot find the tree later in the story, pupils were encouraged to give

him directions, by using counters to represent Edward and the tree. Pupils worked in pairs to give directions to each new location (Figure 7). They responded incredibly positively to this activity and the context provided by the underlying plot of the story.

Figure 7: Directional language in context of the story

6iii. Emerging learner and teacher agency

One interesting aspect of working on the story (and perhaps one of the most challenging) was how pupils' ideas moved away from the structure originally envisaged by the classroom teacher and how medium-/long-term plans had to be adapted, without moving away from overall goals and at the same time still allowing pupils creativity and ownership of the digital story. When it came to writing reinterpreted versions of the story, it had been loosely envisaged by the teacher that pupils would revisit work on weather and German cities (from the beginning of the school year), with pupils using German city names and weather as an environmental influence and component. However, once pupils began reflecting on the story and their perceptions of it, as can be seen below, a major concern was the environmental impact of trees and how these need to be protected. At this point, there was a shift in control over the content and language integrated into the digital story. As the classroom teacher, I came to realise the importance of being flexible to allow pupils ownership over their story and provide opportunities to explore possibilities in creative ways.

Although pupils could be critical of the picturebook story, as shown by the response below (Figure 8), they were deeply engaged with coming up with alternative endings and adapting the story.

Figure 8: Pupil responses to the question *What do you think about the story?*

Pupils were asked to reflect on the key plot or message of the story and these responses began to shape the final outcomes of the class story as well (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Pupil responses to the question *What do you think is the key message or plot of the story?*

As a quick early morning work activity, pupils were encouraged to reflect on the importance of trees to our everyday life, to which a variety of responses were given, including emphasising the importance of oxygen and carbon dioxide conversion especially (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Pupil reflections on the importance of trees to everyday life

These ideas then fed into the final, open-ended question of the digital story, 'what should we do when trees and environments are being destroyed?' (Figure 11). This final question occurred at a time when pupils were engaged with planting seeds within the school's Edible Playground as part of their outdoor learning sessions, so a positive outcome was hoped for through their actions and story!

Figure 11: Final slide of the collaborative digital story

The pupils exhibited their collaborative digital story at the global Critical Connections 'Our Planet Digital Storytelling Festival' (2022), shown across nine countries, and their story became part of a wider multilingual digital storytelling community.

Und Der Letzte Baum – And The Last Tree: https://vimeo.com/753397529

A lead project teacher in Italy shared her pupils' responses to our digital story.

> The film made my pupils think about a future without trees. What would happen if we just had one tree left? They also said that it was interesting to see how they learn German. This film was very easy to understand because it was bilingual German-English and most of my pupils speak German as L1.
>
> The film 'the last tree' made them think a lot. They got a different view on the tree.
>
> (Critical Connections Questionnaire, June 2022)

7. Research findings on a story-based pedagogical approach to teaching languages

Reflecting on pupils' outcomes and the findings of the study over the course of the year, and also after the end of the academic year, has raised key points concerning motivation of both teachers and pupils, as well as the impact that using this pedagogical approach has on pupils' language learning as a whole.

- Making creative decisions about content and language in a digital story

Creating their own version of the story and making creative decisions regarding the linguistic content of their digital story acted as a highly positive stimulus for language learning in both Year 4 classes, with pupils especially engaging with creating their own descriptions for both the tree and the city using familiar sentence frameworks, but also developing dictionary and linguistic skills and knowledge. This was also reflected on by pupils in a questionnaire at the end of the school year, as seen in the response below (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Questionnaire response about learning German

Responses to the question of what pupils found the most effective element in their language learning was captured visually in a word cloud (Figure 13) where words of a larger size and closer to red indicates a higher frequency of response. The word *story* occurring so prominently reflects the memorable impact of this element of language teaching, whether this was in structuring language use or in producing a creative outcome.

Figure 13: Word cloud about effective language learning

In creating the outcome of a digital story, pupils and teachers had a shared sense of progress and achievement. This endpoint of creating their own stories was a clear purpose for both pupils and teachers to strive towards which can be seen as a vital element in language teaching (Sahmland and Shanks, 14).

- Enthusiasm and motivation for using picturebooks and stories to teach languages

Discussions with Year 1 colleagues also reflected an enthusiasm for using a picturebook or novel as the basis for teaching. Though Year 1 were not involved in the digital storytelling project, they had used *Die kleine Raupe Nimmersatt* (Carle 1985 *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*) and had created their own mini books at the end of the school year. Reflecting on German lessons over the course of the year, a Year 1 teacher reported that the impact of using a story on pupils' engagement in Year 1 was immediate, with classes joining in with class retellings in the early stages of working on the text. These choral retellings could be seen as helping pupils build knowledge of sentence structures that were then explicitly taught when children were writing their own stories and were also reflected in Year 4, with pupils joining in with the sentence structures as they became more familiar. Pupils were enthusiastic about recording audio for the digital story and were confident in doing so, being familiar with the sentence structures from the text, but also proud of the added elements they had contributed.

- Using stories as a structure for children's developing literacy in a new language

Using stories to provide a basis for pupils' written outcomes proved effective in garnering the enthusiasm of both pupils and teachers across the school. Response to the intention and implementation of this curriculum design has been positive when discussed at both international conferences (Language World 2022 ALL) and within Trust School conference days. During the latter, language leads from across the Trust's five primary schools were involved in a presentation led by the co-author of this study centred around curriculum design. Some of the non-specialist language teachers expressed interest in using other stories as a curriculum basis, for example, fairy tales and this will be reflected on when selecting stories

for different ages. During the research and implementation of this new pedagogical approach to teaching languages, it has been wonderful to observe the engagement that specialist/non-specialist teachers have demonstrated with using stories and the positive impact on staff and pupils.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at how picturebooks and stories can transform the way children learn languages and navigate digital spaces in the classroom. This research has uncovered key research findings that have major implications for the way primary languages are taught in England and could influence language planning and policy nationally and internationally. In addressing storytelling in primary CLIL we have investigated the power of using a picturebook/novel over the whole school year to counter the current fragmented approach towards teaching languages in the primary classroom (Sahmland 2019). Our research has found that implementing this story-based pedagogical approach to teaching languages in the primary classroom enables both primary teachers and children to build on their language skills over time in sustainable and rewarding ways. Children enjoy being able to make decisions about content and language during the process of creating multimodally and making meaning in a new language. Both teachers and children become enthusiastic and motivated to learn and experiment with the language in the picturebooks and the pictures draw children into the creative world of the story (Salisbury & Styles 2012). The picturebook, with its story and plot, gives children the confidence to structure their writing and develop an engaging and meaningful multilingual digital story.

To conclude, we make the following recommendations for language planning and policy in the primary classroom:

- Primary teachers are provided with opportunities to build on their wider primary pedagogical skills when teaching languages.
- Primary teachers broaden their approach to developing a whole-school languages curriculum for a primary context.
- Carefully selected picturebooks/novels are integrated into language planning to build confidence and stimulate creativity in teaching languages.
- Children are encouraged to use new language in creative multimodal outputs including digital stories.
- Children develop multilingual literacy through stories.

Acknowledgements

Critical Connections Project Website: https://goldsmithsmdst.com/

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