

1.3 Picturebooks and Reading Aloud in the Early English Language Classroom

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This chapter presents the vehicle for intercultural citizenship: the picturebook as aesthetic object. It then goes on to discuss the read-aloud and the role of mediation. Finally, it describes how picturebooks are integrated into the ICEPro Professional Development Course (ICEPro Course).

Defining Picturebooks

The seminal definition of a picturebook we have used for the ICEPELL Project is by Barbara Bader (1976, p. 1):

A picturebook is **text, illustrations, total design**; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; **a social, cultural, historic document**; and foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the **interdependence of pictures and words**, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page. On its own terms its possibilities are limitless.

The labels ‘Storybook’ and ‘RealBook’ are sometimes also used in English language education to refer to picturebooks, which are authentic forms of literature; that is, they have not been created specifically for language learning. ‘Picture book’ and ‘picture-book’ are also ways to write ‘picturebook’, but the ICEPELL Consortium use the compound form, ‘picturebook’. This recognises the interdependence of pictures and words, two modes of communication which interact upon each other.

A picturebook is the sum of this multimodal relationship. Pictures and words communicate information differently. Pictures show and words tell, but neither picture nor word are read in isolation; they interanimate, i.e. influence each other and work together. Pictures can mirror or clarify the words; in a symmetrical relationship, they show and tell the same information. However, pictures often do more: they can complement, extend, contradict or even replace words, which is one of the reasons picturebooks have fewer words (or none at all). When pictures go beyond the symmetrical relationship, gaps are left between

the pictures and words, which prompt personal interpretations. These picturebooks involve learners in interrogating the picture–word relationship and reaching more sophisticated understandings of what is being conveyed and shared.

Bader’s definition includes design alongside pictures and words. The design of a picturebook – that is, the parts of the book considered peripheral in most literature – is deliberately made use of, so that a picturebook becomes an integrated whole. A picturebook is the result of cooperation between the creator(s), an author and/or illustrator, a designer (who may also be the illustrator) and an editor. Together they produce what we hold in our hands, ‘a unique art form’ (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018, p. 4) where all the designated parts – the peritext (front and back covers, endpapers, title page, and copyright and dedication pages), as well as the body of the book with its illustrations and typography – combine to create a unified, aesthetically pleasing end-product.

Picturebook Read-Alouds and Their Relevance for Intercultural Citizenship in the Classroom

Picturebooks are a unique form of children’s and young adult literature. They come in many genres – fiction and non-fiction, mysteries, thrillers, biographies, poetry collections, traditional stories, ABC books, and so on. They also cover a myriad of themes, which can provide a variety of socially, culturally and historically appropriate material for the classroom. The topics found in picturebooks include those that are relevant for intercultural citizenship, e.g., migration, climate change, gender equality, anti-bullying, sharing, inclusion, equality and diversity. It is often through the pictures, and careful mediation by the teacher during the read-aloud, that children access other interpretations of what might usually be taken for granted in their own social group(s). Through picturebooks, learners are equipped with tools to begin challenging social constructs and exploring the world around them. Each of the ICEKits in Part 2 of this ICEGuide is a testament to the potential of picturebooks for bringing intercultural citizenship into the early language learning classroom.

Picturebooks have been part of the early language learning classroom for decades in some contexts as they provide authentic language learning opportunities through the shared social experience of a read-aloud. Picturebooks provide a meaningful context for

natural, lexically rich language exposure, which develops and expands children’s range of language. However, when supported by careful teacher mediation, picturebooks, importantly, provide authentic opportunities for language use resulting from children interpreting the pictures and words through engaging in real meaning-making and dialogue. When picturebooks are the vehicle for intercultural citizenship themes, they enable teachers to plan for language learning, intercultural and citizenship objectives, and they offer an important stepping-stone towards action taking.

Children should be encouraged to transact with the picturebook, i.e. construct meaning based on the knowledge of the world they bring with them to the picturebook read-aloud. However, this process of transaction depends on the community of readers that develops in the classroom, as each individual child and their teacher(s) will be part of the knowledge sharing and negotiation that contributes to active interpretation and meaning making. Ellis and Mourão (2021, p. 24) identify three situational factors in this transactional process:

- a) the picturebook as aesthetic object – how the peritextual features and the pictures and words interanimate and contribute to meaning;
- b) the children – their age, their knowledge of English, the languages they speak, their knowledge of the world, their interests, their individual and collective personalities, etc.; and
- c) the teacher – the expressive techniques used during the read-aloud.

These are illustrated in Figure 7 and show how the three factors interact during the transactional process of participation, interaction and interpretation.

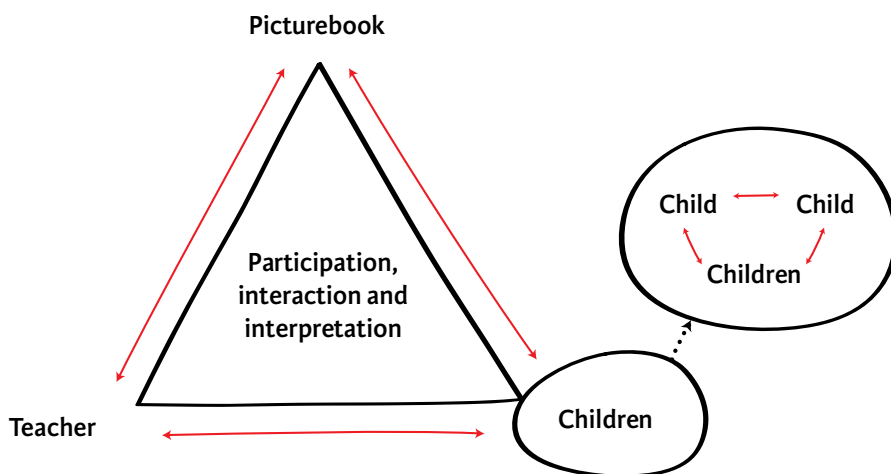


FIGURE 7
The Transactional Process
in the Picturebook Triangle
(Ellis & Mourão, 2021, p. 24)

When using picturebooks for intercultural citizenship, teachers are responsible for selecting picturebooks with relevant intercultural and/or citizenship themes (see Chapter 1.4) and for navigating through the picturebook, as every part is relevant and should be considered when planning for a read-aloud. This requires that they are skilled in the following:

- » setting the context and activating children’s schemata and curiosity around a particular topic;
- » thinking about, or pondering, with the children around the peritextual features to generate predictions and further curiosity;
- » planning to enable the children’s transaction with the picturebook on multiple levels, taking into consideration language, intercultural and citizenship objectives;
- » during the read-aloud, being able to effectively use their expressive techniques (i.e. their body, eyes and voice); and
- » managing children’s interactions and interpretations and scaffolding their meaning making by asking questions, clarifying and commenting on the picturebook – in essence, using what Ellis and Mourão refer to as ‘read-aloud talk’ (2021, p. 25), any talk which goes beyond reading the picturebook verbal text aloud.

Picturebooks in the ICEPro Course

A description of the ICEPro Course can be found in Part 3 of this ICEGuide. It outlines the approach the ICEPELL Consortium adopted to providing effective training and development. This was with the aim of developing participants’ competences to undertake a comprehensive approach to language teaching with picturebooks and develop intercultural citizens through an early English language learning curriculum.

During the face-to-face phase of the ICEPro Course, which consists of trainer-led and group work sessions supported by a mentor, picturebooks play an important role in introducing content, and in the activities and tasks the participants engage in.

1. Picturebooks for training content

Most of the trainer-led sessions are developed around a picturebook and begin with a picturebook read-aloud. This ensures that participants experience a variety of picturebooks, become familiar with effective

classroom practice and engage in active learning. Each picturebook was selected for its affordances to highlight a particular aspect of the training content. Examples of these selected picturebooks (📖) and their focus are listed in Table 2.




	Focus of the read-aloud:
<p>Session topic: Introductions</p> <p> <i>My Map Book</i> by Sara Fanelli (Harper Collins, 2007)</p>	<p>This picturebook read-aloud introduces the concept of personal identity maps. Participants are then invited to create their own identity maps and share them with their colleagues. In the next session, this concept of identity is associated to cultural practices and social groups.</p>
<p>Session topic: Culture and ICC</p> <p> <i>The Queen's Hat</i> by Steve Antony (Hachette Books, 2014)</p>	<p>This picturebook read-aloud represents the cultural products of one nation (see Chapter 2.1), symbolising a stereotypical perspective of culture. Activities follow which challenge this perspective and involve participants in recognising culture as a fluid concept, associated with social groups and communities.</p>
<p>Session topic: Citizenship & action taking</p> <p> <i>Welcome</i> by Barroux (Egmont Press, 2016)</p>	<p>This picturebook read-aloud is used to represent the ICEPELL picturebook canon and supports reflection on the potential picturebooks have for citizenship education and taking action.</p>
<p>Session topic: Discovering picturebooks</p> <p> <i>The Truth about Old People</i> by Elina Ellis (The Hoots, 2019)</p>	<p>This picturebook read-aloud introduces participants to the picturebook peritext and is also an example of a picturebook where the pictures contradict the words.</p>
<p>Session topic: Mediating picturebooks</p> <p> <i>Bully</i> by Laura Vaccaro Seeger (Roaring Brook Press, 2013)</p>	<p>This picturebook read-aloud introduces participants to the importance of using the typography to guide the way they read aloud. It then leads into categorising relevant read-aloud strategies.</p>
<p>Session topic: ICEKits (all sessions)</p> <p> <i>Perfectly Norman</i> by Tom Percival (Bloomsbury, 2017)</p>	<p>This picturebook read-aloud introduces another picturebook and its potential for taking an intercultural perspective to citizenship education. The ICEKits developed around this picturebook and <i>Welcome</i> (Barroux, 2016) are the models for the sessions around materials development.</p>

TABLE 2
The ICEPELL Picturebooks
and Their Training Focus

2. Picturebooks for book browsing

The face-to-face phase of the ICEPro Course runs over a week. Picturebooks are on display during this time, so that participants can browse at their leisure during their breaks and discover the details in their preferred picturebooks as the week progresses.

3. Picturebooks for activities and tasks

Participants are asked to select or use picturebooks for multiple activities and tasks over the face-to-face week. Such tasks include:

- » selecting and sharing a picturebook for its intercultural citizenship potential;
- » selecting a picturebook to discover and present its peritext;
- » practising a picturebook read-aloud; and
- » developing resources based on a picturebook.

4. Picturebooks as vehicles for Intercultural Citizenship

The outcome of the face-to-face phase of the ICEPro Course is a drafted teaching resource, an ICEKit (see Part 2). These teaching materials are co-created by participants from different ICEPELL partner countries and developed around a selected ICEPELL picturebook. The draft ICEKits are then taken into the classroom and tried out with a group of children in the practical implementation phase of the ICEPro Course. An ICEKit supports teachers in using a picturebook to integrate intercultural citizenship into their classes of early language learners. Picturebooks then, are the foundation of the ICEPELL project – they are the vehicles for intercultural citizenship.

References

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