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# Response during picturebook read alouds in English as a foreign language

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**Abstract**

This paper begins by discussing the picturebook and its picture-word dynamic and follows with a discussion of their relevance to teachers in a foreign language classroom. Thereafter, a theory of literary understanding is suggested, as a way to support foreign language teachers to interpret their learners' responses to picturebooks and to help them recognize the relevance of response to the storytelling experience. The final section describes two picturebooks with concrete examples of the different ways that they enable and promote authentic responses, using the children's linguistic repertoire, and through both the pictures and the words.

***Keywords:*** *pre-primary, foreign language education, picturebooks, reader response, authentic responses*

## 1. Introduction

Over the years, I have worked with dozens of English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in professional development sessions about storytelling and picturebooks. During this time, I have noticed a propensity for many to focus almost entirely on selecting a picturebook for the words it contains, mainly with the objective of contextualizing lexical items around a particular topic, such as clothes, colours, food etc. (Mourão 2015). This is a natural tendency, as the written word is seen as the governing system of meaning, especially in educational contexts (Serafini 2009). What is not sufficiently recognized, however, is that pre-literate children read images for their meaning making, and my own experience with Portuguese pre-primary children learning EFL prompted me to challenge this tendency amongst teachers to focus on written words when selecting picturebooks.

This eventually became the topic of my doctoral research, which investigated children's response to picturebook illustrations and language development (Mourão 2012). This article is not a report of a specific piece of research, but instead is an account of a particular context: foreign language education, and the potential of picturebooks to providing authentic contexts for language use and meaning making within the foreign language classroom (see also Mourão 2013a; 2013b; 2016).

I will begin with a brief overview of EFL in pre-primary education and in particular in Portugal, the context of my experience and where I have undertaken most of my teaching and empirical research. I will then define and discuss the multimodality of picturebooks and present the focus of this chapter: response to picturebooks using examples from a picturebook read alouds with *I'm the best!* Lucy Cousins (2010) and *Shhh! We have a plan* by Chris Haughton (2013).

## 2. English as a foreign language in pre-primary education

With the growing recognition of the importance of pre-primary education and provision for early childhood education on the rise, it is not surprising that English is also being introduced into this sector. It is an area of English Language Teaching (ELT) that John Knagg has described as 'the final frontier in the rush to teach and learn English at ever younger ages' (2016, p. 3). The most recent Eurydice report (2017, p. 30) shows that just over a third of the European community officially implements early language education for children at six years and under. These include Cyprus and Poland, which both have statutory pre-primary education laws for five-year-olds and where English has been a compulsory part of their pre-primary programme since September 2015. Nationwide surveys and related publications confirm that English is well established in other countries, in both state and private sectors, often without the support of official legislation, and resulting in a variety of learning experiences and varied quality in programming. In many countries, the private sector is leading in these initiatives — private mainstream education and private language schools alike — which regrettably suggests inequality in opportunities based on region, student socio-economic status and ethnic/linguistic status.

Models for early language learning range along a continuum of low–to high–exposure. The foreign language (FL) model, or 'language exposure model', prepares and helps children to learn a new language, "exposure differs in focus and duration according to the language and one language, the

actual language of instruction, is dominant" European Commission (2011, p. 15). These programmes differ quite considerably from immersion or bilingual models, in which many children receive a restricted amount of exposure to the FL in a school setting, which can be as little as thirty minutes, once a week. There may be little or no access to this language outside of the classroom, and there are rarely opportunities for interacting with peers who speak the FL, for children share a majority language in the classroom.

### *2.1. English as a foreign language in pre-primary education in Portugal*

Pre-primary education in Portugal, as in the majority of countries around the world, is non-statutory. Provision is made for children between the ages of three to six years and attendance is around 95% for 5-year-olds. Just under 53% of the pre-primary institutions are state run and thus incur no attendance fees (GEPE 2017). Children begin primary education in the September of the year they turn 6 years old, and English becomes part of the primary curriculum in grade 3. While there is no official early language learning strategy for pre-primary education a nationwide study (Mourão & Ferreirinha 2016) recently substantiated that early English initiatives were underway in both the public (23%) and private (70%) sectors, confirming the European trend toward English language preparation in the early years.

## 3. Picturebooks in English language education

According to Ghosn (2013), authentic children's literature has been used in English language education (ELT) methodologies for over four decades. English language education is well-known for its graded literature, written specifically for language learners. However, in picturebooks, the words (if they exist, for some picturebooks are wordless) have not been abridged or altered for language learning purposes and the illustrations are created by illustrators who use their art creatively with neither a care for, nor an interest in, the confines of language learning.

It is important to state here that 'picturebook' is written as a compound noun, reflecting the 'compound nature of the artefact' (Lewis 2001a, p. xiv). A picturebook is a multimodal text (Kress 2003), dependent upon pictures and words (together with design) to create meaning, and it is the interdependence of what the pictures show and the words tell (Lewis 2001b) that makes a picturebook so special. A picturebook "could not be read over the radio and be understood fully" (Shulevitz 1985,

p.15), for the visual text is essential to the understanding of the message: as it can clarify, complement, enhance, or even contradict the verbal text (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006; Nodelman 1988). The relationship between pictures and words has been discussed at length by picturebook scholars (e.g. Lewis 2001a; Nikolajeva & Scott 2006; Nodelman 1988). In the context of ELT, Mourão (2012) has referred to this interdependence as ranging along a continuum from a simple showing and telling of the same information to a more complex showing and telling of different, even contradicting information (see Figure 1).

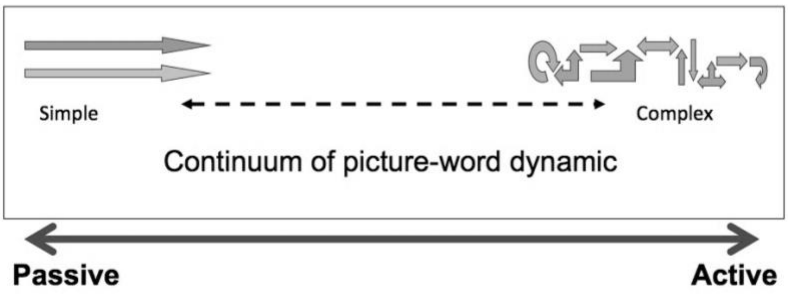


*Figure 1: Continuum of picture-word dynamic (Mourão 2012, p. 118)*

In ELT contexts, picturebooks tend to be selected with a simple picture-word relationship, with illustrations that synchronize (Ellis & Brewster 2014) with the text providing a secure, supportive learning context. These picturebooks are often concept books that contain predictable and repetitive (Linse 2007), sometimes cumulative refrains, and pictures that please the eye but give little extra information (Mourão 2017). Children look at the illustrations and the meaning is immediately apparent: an example would be the well-used *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin Jr & Carle 1995), which shows the animals in the illustrations and tells us what they are in the words. This supportive context is important in language learning, especially with very small children. However, while this context allows them to gain confidence in their learning experience, they are not encouraged to be active learners, as meaning is apparent immediately.

Titles that move towards the complex end of the picture-word dynamic leave a gap between what the illustrations show and the words tell. For example *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins 1968) uses the verbal text to tell us about Rosie the hen's plodding, uneventful evening walk around the farm, and the visual text to show us what happens to the fox, who is following her. The gap created between the

showing and the telling in picturebooks at the complex end of the picture-word dynamic "challenges young learners to search for and, in the classroom, negotiate understanding and meaning" (Bland 2013, p. 32), and provides 'realistic opportunities for interaction and talk, instinctive in children at this age' (Halliwell 1992, p. 5). Children in my study involving *Rosie's Walk* speculated in Portuguese (L1) as to whether Rosie was deliberately leading the fox into traps – the spread showing Rosie passing the mill with a cord caught around her leg, prompted a child to say, '*Isto é uma armadilha da galinha'* [This is the hen's trap] (Mourão 2012, p. 238). It goes without saying that these picturebooks encourage a more active learner, who needs to make sense of what the pictures show and the words tell.

To summarise, picturebooks are not *just* authentic texts because of the words they contain; rather, they enable language use through the learner's interpretation of the pictures, words and design, as these elements come together to produce a visual-verbal narrative which is disregarded when there is a focus on the words only. Taking the stance that picturebooks provide authentic opportunities for learners to interpret and respond in English, it is important to acknowledge the different responses to be encouraged in EFL classes with pre-primary children. The next section looks at response with a view to situating its role in an EFL context.

## 4. Response to picturebooks: a definition and response categories

### *4.1. Approaches to response*

For the last fifty years, literary theory has recognized the reader as a meaning maker, extracting meaning from texts, and theories of reader response are numerous, while 'embracing a wide range of attitudes toward, and assumptions about, the roles of the reader, the text and the social cultural context shaping the transaction between reader and text' (Beach 1993, p. 2). I would like to touch on three theorists associated with reader response theory. The first is Wolfgang Iser (1978), who describes an 'implied reader', one that is expected to have the knowledge and background to fill the gaps or indeterminacies left by an author. Communication begins between reader and text when the former starts to fill the gaps. The gaps left between pictures and words at the complex end of the picture-word dynamic within picturebooks can be seen as examples of this. Another seminal theorist is Louise Rosenblatt, who referred to a transactional approach, wishing to "emphasize the reciprocal importance of both reader and text" (Karolides & Rosenblatt 1999, p. 167). As such,

Rosenblatt focuses on the reader's engagement and involvement in meaning making through the text and her notion of 'aesthetic reading' (Rosenblatt 1995, p. 31) requires that readers direct their attention towards the affective aspects of the reading experience, coming to a book 'from life' (1995, p. 34), creating a 'two-way "transactional" relationship' (1995, p. ix). The result is a third text, which emerges from the reader's personal reactions and experiences in relation to the original. Finally, Stanley Fish, influenced by the socio-constructivist theories of Vygotsky, proposes the creation of 'interpretative communities' incorporating Rosenblatt's idea of aesthetic reading. In his view, it is the context, the interpretive community, which is responsible 'both for the shape of the reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce' (Fish 1980, p. 322).

These three approaches to responding to literary texts can direct our understanding of how to use picturebooks in the classroom with language learners. They provide suggestions for teachers to encourage learners to think about what the pictures show and the words tell, and actively fill the gaps, when they exist, with their personal interpretations. These interpretations can be co-created with their peers, through discussion and sharing of personal experiences, as such creating their own texts – ones that reflect their community of learning. In so doing, the very act of interpretation with others creates a real reason for the learners to use English in the classroom.

### *4.2. Response and picturebooks*

Response to picturebooks has been the focus of researchers since the 1990s (e.g. Arizpe & Styles 2003; Evans 1998; Sipe 2000, 2008) and there have been a number of attempts to categorize responses to picturebooks, (e.g. Arizpe & Styles 2003; Sipe 2000). In relation to FL learning, there are no such typologies and as I have outlined above, response is rarely considered, due to a focus on the verbal text of the picturebook and the learners' low level of L2 competence. I have, nevertheless, adapted the categories from Sipe's grounded theory of literary understanding (2000; 2008), and shown that they are useful for teachers to take into consideration as they share picturebooks with groups of children (Mourão 2012; 2016). Children respond spontaneously to the words and the pictures and it is this spontaneity that these categories cater for and enable teachers to consider when sharing a picturebook. In addition, it is the children's responses that we should be encouraging, as they are personalized and therefore meaningful to them as learners.

According to Sipe, there are three literary impulses, which contain five response categories or enactments: an analytical response, an intertextual response, a personal response, a transparent response and a performative response. All responses are oral and spontaneous and younger children learning a FL are likely to use the L1 in their spontaneity; however, teachers can rephrase their L1 comments into English when suitable. As children get older, they will have more English with which to comment or respond in, so they should be able to respond more spontaneously in English. Figure 2 gives a visual overview of the responses and those highlighted in grey have been added based on my own research.

| Literary impulse | Enactment | Sub-categories |
|---|---|---|
| **Hermeneutic** | **Analytical response** | 1. Analysis of narrative meaning<br>2. Analysis of visual code<br>3. Analysis of verbal code<br>4. Analysis of book as object<br>5. Analysis of relationship between fiction and reality<br>6. Analysis of (linguistic) codes |
| | **Intertextual response** | Relating to other texts in L1 world<br>Relating to other texts in L2 world |
| **Personal** | **Personal response** | Sharing personal preferences<br>Using personal experience |
| **Aesthetic** | **Transparent response** | Responding emotively<br>Interacting with picturebook characters |
| | **Performative response** | Pre-meditated response<br>Platform for creativity |

*Figure 2: An adapted version of Sipe's grounded theory of literary understanding (Sipe 2000; 2008)*

A description of the response categories in Sipe's theory follows (see also Mourão 2016), summarized according to my own empirical research (Mourão 2012). These responses have been selected for their pertinence to an ELT context when sharing a picturebook with pre-primary FL learners.

4.2.1. An analytical response – narrative meaning

- Making predictions usually based on what children see in the illustrations during their first exposure to the picturebook
- Describing plots during subsequent exposures to the picturebook. Children know what will happen and enjoy retelling parts in their own words, this is often prompted by an illustration
- Making inferences about the characters seen in the illustrations

4.2.2. An analytical response – the illustrations

- Identifying and labelling illustrations, especially younger children, as they are not reading yet
- Describing the action in illustrations involves describing something in the illustrations that is meaningful. Children of all ages may do this.

4.2.3. An analytical response – the words

- Savouring the words involves children '[savouring] the language of the story by repeating words and phrases after the teacher had read them aloud, or chanting during familiar and repetitive parts of the story' (Sipe & Bauer 2001, p. 336). This is something that is encouraged in an ELT classroom, as it supports memorization of the verbal text (Bland 2013; Linse 2007).
- Recognizing and responding to the graphic features of the verbal text on the pages. Small children begin to notice that speech bubbles represent speech; older children may notice punctuation or different spelling. All children recognize that a small typeface represents a quiet noise and a bigger typeface represents a loud noise.

4.2.4. An analytical response – the book as object

Talking about parts of the picturebook, e.g. the peritextual features, the picturebook creators, the publishers etc. This happens to an increasing degree when the teachers begin to include reference to these parts of the book in their shared story reading and it becomes more complex as children get older and are able to make narrative connections and verbalise them.

4.2.5. An analytical response – linguistic codes

This response is not part of Sipe's original typology, for his learners were all L1 English learners (at least they were in English-speaking classes). However, I observed that children actively considered one or other, or both of the codes at their disposal as they listen to a picturebook read aloud in English (Mourão 2013b). This demonstrates a developing metalinguistic awareness as children begin to make connections within their linguistic repertoire and involves such things as:

- Spontaneously translating an English word or expression into the L1, thus showing understanding
- Spontaneously translating a peer's L1 comment into English
- Correcting peers when they mispronounce or use a wrong English word
- Recognizing that words sound or look similar to others, either English to L1 or English to English
- Having opinions about how difficult or easy an English word or expression is to say or remember

4.2.6. An intertextual response

This response shows children making connections between other texts, such as another picturebook, a film or a DVD, a television programme, or another culturally recognized product like a rhyme, or a chant in their L1 world or their English world (L2), which may expand beyond the classroom. The most common intertextual response with younger EFL learners in my research has been an associative one, 'characterised by an unelaborated statement of likeness' (Sipe 2008, p. 131), e.g. 'This is like …' said in the L1.

4.2.7. A personal response

Personal responses are clearly evidence of engagement for, as Rosenblatt (1995) suggests, the child brings their whole self to the text, through their 'personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition' (p. 30), as well as acquired knowledge of the world which they naturally want to share. The personal responses I observed involved:

- Making personal connections based on a response to an illustration, an event in the picturebook or the theme of the picturebook
- Giving opinions based on personal preferences as a response to an event in a picturebook, sometimes agreeing or disagreeing with characters' choices or actions

4.2.8. A transparent response

This response involves children 'becoming one' (Sipe 2008, p. 182) with the picturebook, as though they were living the story for real. In my observation this includes:

- A genuinely emotional response like an intake of breath, a squeal, a laugh, or shocked silence
- A physical response imitating something in the illustrations
- Interacting with story characters, for example by calling to them, warning them or reprimanding them
- Reliving the experience by requesting repetitions of parts of a story that are particularly engaging or funny

4.2.9. A performative response

This response also involves engagement, but it is premeditated and thought through. It involves a child using the story illustrations or words for a personal creative response, often by making a joke or doing something they think might entertain their peers. Sipe refers to this as the picturebook '[functioning] as a platform for children's creativity, becoming a playground for a carnivalesque romp' (2008, p. 182).

These two latter responses are often chastised by teachers and considered inappropriate, but in fact they demonstrate that a child is completely engaged through unconstrained behaviour. If these responses are made in English, which may eventually be the case with repeated readings of a picturebook, it shows that children are very skilfully manipulating English for their own personal enjoyment. What more could we want from a learner?

## 5. A Picturebook and Examples of Response

The intention of this article is to highlight the importance of response, but also to provide some brief examples from sharing picturebooks in pre-primary EFL sessions in Portugal. In my research I observed that children were mostly analytical in their responses and Sipe and his colleagues (e.g. Sipe & Bauer 2001), in L1 contexts, came to identical conclusions, which suggests that response is not hindered by the FL.

The analytical response is part of the hermeneutic stance showing a tendency for interpretation. Picturebooks at the simple end of the picture-word continuum, especially those containing repeated refrains and cumulative language, naturally prompt analysis of the verbal code. However, if it is recognised that the five enactments and their response categories exist, and that they will occur when sharing English-language picturebooks, then EFL teachers should ensure that their selection of picturebooks enables children to respond in different ways, and that they are prepared to incorporate children's responses into their shared reading activities. Using two picturebooks, I would like to demonstrate the different responses I have observed. The examples are taken from my experience with different groups of pre-primary children responding during storytelling sessions over several years, either as the storyteller or as an observer. In all cases, the context is one of low exposure (one hour of English per week), with mainly monolingual Portuguese children from four to six years old, and in groups of between 18 to 26 children.

### *5.1. Response to 'I'm the best!'*

This first description is more general, based on observing multiple groups of Portuguese children (between 18 to 26 in number) aged five to six years old, learning English as a FL over several years of sharing this picturebook. *I'm the Best* (Cousins 2010) is suitable for five- to six-year-olds in an EFL context, where the illustrations expand on the words and provide additional visual information to support the development of emotional intelligence through the depiction of different characters' emotions. The story is about Dog, and his four best friends. Upon showing the front cover, children want to tell the teacher if they have a dog (a personal response), 'Yes? You've got a dog', the teacher of English says. Dog introduces his friends and tells them he's the best. The children respond to the illustrations, commenting on the donkey's funny jumper (an analytical response – the illustrations) using a mix of L1 and English, and the teacher of English replies, 'Yes, Donkey's wearing a jumper'. Upon hearing one of Dog's friends is a ladybird, one child reminds everyone in the L1 that he might not remember 'ladybird' in English but he can say 'butterfly' (an analytical response – linguistic codes), showing he is aware that one word is more difficult than the other to remember in English.

As the narrative unfolds, Dog boasts he can run faster than Mole, 'I win, I'm the best' he says. This refrain is repeated throughout the book and the children quickly pick it up and chant along with the

teacher of English as she tells the story (an analytical response – the words). Dog digs holes better than Goose, he's bigger than Ladybird – here the children laugh at Dog's size in comparison to tiny Ladybird in the illustration (a transparent response). He can swim better than Donkey, and we see poor donkey paddling awkwardly, splashing profusely, prompting a child to comment on the water illustrations in L1 (an analytical response – the illustrations).

The illustrations are naïve-like, and clearly support children's understanding of Dog's delight as he outdoes his friends, but they also extend the children's understanding of the situation by showing the friends' emotional responses to Dog's boasting. Eventually, the friends show Dog that in fact Mole can dig deeper, Goose can swim faster, Donkey is bigger and Ladybird can fly. "In fact you don't even have wings", she says. Dog's surprise, dismay and finally tears clearly connect with small children and the response from most groups of children is one of quiet empathy (a transparent response). Some use the L1 to say they think Dog has been taught a lesson, others agree the friends were right, still others think Dog might lose his friends (all personal responses), but smiles return to their faces (a transparent response) when they see the friends hugging and telling Dog not to worry, "You are the best at being our best friend". Dog learns his lesson and the children want to talk about how silly Dog was, so the storytelling session often ends with a little reflection, mostly in the L1, with the word 'Dog' inserted every now and then (personal responses).

### *5.2. Response to 'Shh! We have a plan'*

The description of response here is more detailed, as it is based on specific storytelling sessions that I give at a local preschool. The children have one hour of English a week with a visiting teacher of English and I visit for a further 30 mins once a week to share some English picturebooks. The examples come from different sessions, with two different groups of children. In both sessions I was retelling the picturebook after a period of several months during which the children had not seen it. Group A was made up of 24 children who were between four and five years old and the session was filmed (not for research but for use in teacher education), so I was very easily able to return to the film and analyse the different responses. This session took place in October, at the beginning of the children's second year of English (one year is equivalent to around 30 hours of English). Group B was made up of 26 slightly older children, five- to six-year-olds, with whom I shared the book very recently. This session took place in May, at the end of their second year of

English. The session was not filmed, but their responses were so pertinent to this paper that I made notes of them to aid my memory. Group A had heard the story twice and though I cannot remember the exact number of times for Group B, they had heard it at least five times, as it was a favourite book for our storytelling sessions. I will begin by describing the picturebook.

*Shh! We have a plan* (Haughton 2014) is an entertaining story of four friends, three bigger ones and one little one, who decide to hunt a bird. It is repetitive in nature, showing and telling how the friends move through a wood, as they try different ways of catching the bird. Each time little one says 'Hello birdie' and his friends respond, 'shh SHH! we have a plan'. They tip toe, climb and paddle towards the bird, then 'ready one ready two ready three GO', and each time the bird flies away. Eventually the little one tries feeding the bird and subsequently is surrounded by dozens of birds, who end up chasing the hunters away. The final double spread shows the four friends pointing at a squirrel; the little one says, 'LOOK a squirrel' and the three big ones reply, 'SHH! we have a plan'.

Upon taking *Shh! We have a plan* from my book bag, a personal response was immediate from a child in group A, reminding me we had shared this book on his birthday the year before. Because this picturebook has already been experienced this has an effect on the children's analytical response, for prediction will be absent (they have already seen the book!). Instead, the children showed a tendency to describe the plot, retelling parts they remember and have enjoyed. As such on showing the book's cover, Pedro (a pseudonym) in Group A immediately retold the plot in Portuguese, *Eles queriam apanhar o passaro e só faziam disparates* 'They wanted to catch the bird and they only did silly things'. As he did this, he waved his hands. Not only was he using his voice, but his whole body represented the bird flying off (a physical response).

Group B responded differently when first seeing the book cover. They chorused, 'Hello birdie', which prompted others to confirm *Sim, o pequeno falava alto e assim tinha de calar* 'Yes, the little one spoke loudly and so he had to be quiet'. In both cases, this indicates that the children are making sense of the narrative meaning, providing succinct summaries of this entertaining picturebook. This group also joined in when I read the title, echoing 'Shhh' and '… a plan' which led to others repeating 'Shhh' and 'Hello Birdie' several times, almost provocatively, accompanied by giggling.

Here I interpret this not only as the children savouring the story language (analytic response – the words), but also as an example of a performative response. Remember this group have heard this story at least five times: I was pleasantly surprised at how they were able to remember and use its verbal text like this.

As the story unfolds, each group continued to respond slightly differently. Group A was less confident about the verbal text as they had not experienced it often enough to help them memorise their favourite bits. But they soon began to join in counting, saying the numbers when I paused. They eagerly added 'Go' before I turned the page, a 'foretelling of information', or 'giving away the punch line' (Mourão 2012, p. 255). Each time Pedro would accompany the page turn with a loud 'GOOOO' and his hands would go up imitating the flying bird, a transparent response, showing Pedro was "living" the story (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Pedro living the story*

Certain children in Group A made their own inferences about the characters seen in the illustrations - one child gave his opinion, *Assustaram o passaro* "They frightened the bird". Figure 4 shows Ana (a pseudonym) pointing at the bird as she says, *Ele é muito esperto* "He is very clever". When all the birds appear and chase the people away another child interprets this by suggesting *Eles querem comer* "They want to eat them", and Ana using animated gestures agreed, *Eles iam comer-los porque eles só queram apanhar os passaros* "They were going to eat them because they kept trying to catch the birds". Many children muttered quietly to themselves on the last page when the squirrel appears, *Vão caçar-lo* "They are going to hunt it", again showing their interpretation of narrative meaning.

*Figure 4: Giving an opinion in the L1*

Group B was more confident about the verbal text and focused on using it to accompany the storytelling session. They were insistent in "foretelling" information, immediately after a page turn, chorusing "Hello birdie shhh" (analytic response – narrative meaning). This gave them lots of pleasure, despite being at times disruptive, as they would most often follow this with a giggle. 'We have a plan' also came easily to them and they enjoyed helping me say this. This group also seemed more confident about using English to label and talk about the pictures (analytic response – the illustrations), this I can only presume is due to the fact that they were at the end of a year of English and not at the beginning. They happily completed the verbal text, using such words as 'bread' and 'squirrel', or labelled illustrations in English using 'Red bird' or 'Big bird'. On the last page a child added *Agora vão caçar o* squirrel "Now they are going to hunt a squirrel" (analytic response – narrative meaning).

## 6. The role of the adult

The children featured here had English just for one hour a week, so they produced sentences in their L1 and sometimes inserted English nouns, adjectives or formulas as they responded spontaneously to a picturebook on these occasions. This particular school and their approach to

learning English is one that values the children's linguistic repertoire, for the children all speak a common classroom language, and their teacher of English speaks Portuguese too. As storyteller I also understand Portuguese, so the children happily use the L1 or code-switched within sentences – intra-sentential code-switching, to communicate their intentions. My role as storyteller was to ensure I recognised these responses and when possible build on them, often this implied rephrasing comments into English. Sipe (2008, p. 201-02) stipulates a number of roles for adults as picturebook storytellers. As *'readers'*, we not only read the words, but act as '*tour guides'* for the book. Our role is to be aware of the parts of the book (e.g. endpapers, title pages) and to ensure we share these with the children and help them make connections (Sipe 2008), it is also important to use the metalanguage of these book parts (Mourão 2013a).

As '*managers and encouragers'* teachers ensure the storytelling session moves forwards but also to allow for response, so here there is a need to maintain a balance between encouraging and discouraging, praising and controlling and leading and following. Highly relevant is our role as '*extenders or refiners'*, using 'teachable moments'. In a FL context like this, teachers of English may do more of this. Children can be reminded what they know and what they can say and also how to say it. Bland (2013, p. 39) describes teachers of English as developing a repertoire of scaffolding strategies e.g. facial expression, gesture, eye-contact, rephrasing L1, pausing before known language, open and closed questions.

The role of '*clarifiers or probers'* involves helping children to develop or connect ideas, as well as requesting explanations. Picturebooks can be enigmatic, leaving both reader and listener wondering what happened. As '*fellow wonderers or spectators'* teachers let the wondering happen, but also join in by 'playfully contributing to the creative flight of the children's imaginations' (Sipe 2008, p. 201)

Many readers will recognise the different responses I have described here, as they are typical of those made by small children when experiencing a picturebook. However, after my doctoral research, identifying what each response might actually mean regarding a child's literary understanding has been a revelation for me, and the different responses have become so much more meaningful. It has also helped me as a storyteller and teacher of English to acknowledge the

relevance of repeated readings of picturebooks to give children the opportunity to hear the verbal text and see the images, as well as to develop a deeper understanding of the narrative meaning. The second example also shows how responses change over time through repeated encounters with a picturebook.

## 7. Conclusion

In this article, I have described and defined the picturebook and encouraged teachers to select picturebooks at the more complex end of the picture-word dynamic, so that learners are challenged to think and fill the gaps between the pictures and the words. I have presented a categorization of response to picturebooks adapted from Sipe (2000; 2008) and then shared two picturebooks with a view to focusing on the storytelling act itself to demonstrate how response, even if in L1, can be valued and shows that children are engaging in a transactional sense and using their linguistic repertoire as a bridge to English, especially when sharing picturebooks that show and tell different things. I have focused on the storytelling event and recommended that children's response be taken seriously. This is especially important when a picturebook goes beyond requiring a repetition of the words only and the teacher values the picturebook as a compound object where both pictures and words afford opportunities for interpretation.

The picturebooks I selected to share are appropriate for children learning a FL from four to six years old, and demonstrate how, through authentic responses in English and the L1, picturebooks can promote affective, sociocultural, aesthetic and cognitive development as well as develop language and literary skills. This, I believe, is especially the case if response is better understood and valued by the teacher sharing the picturebook. The examples have also shown how valuing response can contribute to the affective aspects of the shared storytelling experience, for it allows for a personally meaningful involvement, due to the recognition that the reader comes to a book 'from life' (Rosenblatt 1995, p. 34).

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