

Paper: Intercultural learning for young learners through picturebooks - a case-study in the primary English classroom in Denmark

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Abstract:

English language education plays an important role for the development of intercultural understanding (IU) which includes respect for and empathy with cultural others, as well as understanding of one's own cultural affiliations (Byram, 2021). IU is needed to navigate an increasingly interconnected and complex world skillfully, including for primary age children. This sentiment is reflected in the inclusion of IU in FL-curricula across many contexts, including for young learners, and is also evident in the Danish curriculum for English. Still, the field remains under-researched for the age group.

One way schools can foster IL for YLs is to engage them in encounters with cultural others based on non-essentialist views of culture (Barrett, 2018). Such encounters need not be face-to-face but can also take place through texts or when reflecting on the encounters of others depicted in texts (Dypedahl, 2022), including for young learners (Søgaard, 2024). Picturebooks are known to have several educational benefits in the primary EFL classroom and can support integrated language- and intercultural learning (Bland, 2022).

This paper presents selected findings from a doctoral study exploring intercultural learning through picturebooks in the Danish context. The implementation of two teaching sequences based on the picturebooks *Ali's Story* and *Gorilla*, and developed in collaboration with teachers, constituted the cases in the multiple case study. Learner data were collected in two Copenhagen schools with 8–10-year-old learners and analyzed drawing on qualitative content analysis. Findings indicate that 1) the selected picturebooks were appropriate for supporting intercultural learning and 2) the teaching sequences created affordances for intercultural encounters and for the development of a foundational aspects of interculturality, namely empathy.

Keywords: intercultural learning, intercultural encounters through picturebooks, cultural empathy

Picturebooks:

Browne, A. (2013). *Gorilla* (A. Browne, Illus.; 30th anniversary ed.). Walker Books. (Original work published 1983)

Maldonado, S. (2014). *Ali's Story - a journey from Afghanistan*. (A. Glynne, illus.). Wayland.

References:

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Bland, J. (2022). *Compelling stories for English language learners: Creativity, interculturality and critical literacy*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Revisited*. Multilingual Matters.

Dypedahl, M. (2022). Exploring the systematic use of intercultural encounters in the English classroom. In M. Dypedahl (Ed.), *Moving English language teaching forward* (pp. 91–115). Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

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