




The Potential of Picturebooks in Primary ELE: Fostering Language Skills and Addressing Pressing Concerns of Modern-day Society

Michelle Zirkel  0000-0002-1783-2589

Abstract

Picturebooks can be of great potential for primary English language education (ELE) since they can promote English language skills and address pressing concerns of modern-day society, such as the climate or the refugee crisis. This contribution illustrates which types of picturebooks are suitable for primary ELE, which skills can be promoted when using picturebooks, and what their potential is. It also provides concrete examples of how to use picturebooks to achieve general educational goals, such as critical environmental literacy, empathy, and kindness towards peers, refugees, and animals while simultaneously fostering learners' language skills development.

Keywords: picturebooks, primary English language education, language skills, critical environmental literacy, empathy, and kindness

1. Introduction

With Putin's war in Ukraine and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, an increasing number of refugees arrives in German classrooms. Therefore, it is essential to address the influx of refugees in an age-appropriate way at schools, to teach children empathy and kindness, and thus create a positive and welcoming learning environment, where all students can thrive. To achieve this, teachers can use picturebooks such as *Kind* by Alison Green (2019) in primary English education to promote learners' language skills development and help them achieve general educational goals, such as educating them on being kind towards their peers, refugees and animals. In the light of climate change and other threats to our planet, another crucial general educational goal that ties in with this is the development of critical environmental literacy on a basic level. To foster basic critical environmental literacy, picturebooks like *The Tale of a*

Toothbrush: A Story of Plastic in Our Oceans (2020), written by M. G. Leonard and illustrated by Daniel Rieley, can be used in primary English language education (ELE).

This contribution seeks to demonstrate how picturebooks can be used to foster English language skills while also addressing pressing concerns of modern-day society by defining which types of picturebooks are suitable to achieve these educational goals, illustrating their potential for the EFL classroom, and providing concrete examples of how to work with them in primary English classrooms.

2. Definition of the term *picturebook* and selection criteria

Various definitions of the term *picturebook*, also referred to as (*picture*) *storybook* (Binder, 2021; Ellis & Brewster, 2014), have been outlined and discussed in numerous publications (e.g., Bader, 1976; Binder, 2021; Burwitz-Melzer, 2013; Mourão, 2015 and 2016). For this contribution, I would like to draw on Bader's frequently cited definition of this term:

A picturebook is a text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historic document; and foremost, an experience for a [reader]. 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. (Bader, 1976, p. 1)

Hence, picturebooks are multimodal, authentic books that use both words and (usually double-page spreads of) pictures to narrate a story and create meaning. They are “more than the sum of its parts” (Nodelman, 1988, p. 200), and they provide an insight into cultural traits, the society, and the history of other (English-speaking) countries. Various researchers have described and categorized the complex relationship between pictures and words (e.g., Binder, 2021; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Mourão, 2016; Schwarcz, 1982; Golden, 1990 – for a detailed description and analysis of the relationship between pictures and words see Binder, 2021, pp. 137–145). For the purpose of this contribution, Golden's distinction of three different types of picture-word-relations will serve as a basis: According to

her, the illustrations can enhance or elaborate the text; the text can depend on the pictures for clarification; or the text and pictures can be symmetrical (i.e., the pictures mirror what is happening in the story or the meaning of the words). Picturebooks with a symmetrical picture-word-relationship are also called *illustrated books* (Binder 2021, p. 108; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001, p. 6). According to numerous researchers (e.g., Alter & Frisch, 2021; Ellis and Brewster, 2014; Linse, 2007; Opitz, 1995), they are especially suitable for primary ELE.

Another noteworthy aspect is that Bader's definition excludes what Binder (2021, p. 108) considers to be subcategories of picturebooks, namely "exhibit books" (picturebook dictionaries without any narrative), and "picture narratives" (picturebooks without words/with hardly any words). These kinds of books might also be helpful in other TEFL contexts; nevertheless, I would argue that in primary schools, young learners especially need authentic linguistic input in order to learn the English language. Moreover, compelling stories can spark learners' motivation and interest in the English language (Krashen, 2021), which is why (story) picturebooks, as Bader defines them, can be of great value for primary school learners of English.

3. The potential of picturebooks in primary English language education

The rich potential picturebooks hold for young learners has been demonstrated by various scholars and will be summarized in this section. As Loder-Buechel (2020, p. 34) puts it: "There's nothing better than a good picture book to get started on a new topic, to get children involved in other worlds – and to teach them language in a low pressure-relaxed setting." Krashen (2021) and Ghosn (2002) also highlight that authentic and compelling stories can spark learners' motivation and interest in the English language. Moreover, Böttger (2020, p. 119) points out that picturebooks are usually amusing and can thus help to develop a positive attitude towards the foreign language and stimulate learners' imagination. Hence, picturebooks can be used to attract learners' attention and foster their confidence and a positive mindset.

When it comes to specific English language skills, which can be promoted by using picturebooks in class, Hughes (2006), among others, has outlined that working with picturebooks can promote all receptive and productive skills. According to him, they “can be used to introduce, recycle and re-use vocabulary and structures and make them meaningful and memorable through the story context” (Hughes, 2006, p. 153), especially if these lexical items get repeated throughout the book (Bland, 2019, p. 90; Hughes, 2006, p. 153; Ellis & Brewster, 2014, p. 6–7). Bland (2019, p. 90) emphasizes that due to their rich linguistic potential, picturebooks can be considered high-quality input in ELE: Not only do they tend to contain lexical repetition, but also syntactic repetition (e.g., parallelisms, phrasal repetition), phonological repetition (e.g., rhymes, alliteration, assonance), dynamic rhythm, onomatopoeia, typographic experimentation, and creative word choices, which can expand both learners and teachers range of vocabulary, and inspire children to get creative themselves (Bland, 2019, p. 90–91; Bland, 2013, p. 8, pp. 122–124; Bland, 2015, p. 151; Ellis, 2012, p. 29). In addition, by listening to the story or re-reading it themselves, students can train their receptive skills, and if the pictures accompanying the text illustrate the words or the ongoing action of the story, this visual support can help students understand unknown words and the gist of the story of an authentic picturebook (Mourão, 2016, p. 27–28; Bland, 2019, p. 90). This can positively impact their self-concept, and it can help them learn basic words so that they can talk or write about different basic topics. Once they have acquired new words and chunks from the text, they can practice and use them in basic speaking and writing activities, although speaking activities generally play a more critical role than writing tasks in primary English education (Böttger, 2020, p. 65). Additionally, they can be used to train basic mediation skills, for instance, when students are asked to summarize the book’s content in their L1. Hence, picturebooks can be used to train all communicative skills and enhance students’ foreign language proficiency in terms of vocabulary and grammar, spelling, pronunciation, intonation, and according to Böttger (2020, p. 67), also their language awareness when they compare what they learn about English with what they know about their native languages.

However, although many educators primarily use picturebooks to foster communicative skills and contextualize words and chunks of a specific semantic field in order to expand learners' vocabulary (Mourão, 2015), picturebooks can also promote far more skills than that, as numerous researchers have shown:

For instance, using picturebooks in class can foster literary competences, which include empathic competence, aesthetic and stylistic competence, cultural and discursive competence, interpretive competence, as well as reading competence, and general linguistic competence in English (processing texts) (Alter & Ratheiser, 2019, p. 384). Among others, Alter and Frisch (2018), Burwitz-Melzer (2013), and Ellison (2010) have shown how picturebooks can be used to foster these competences in primary ELE.

Since picturebooks consist of both pictures and text, both modes should be decoded and interpreted to understand the multimodal text, i.e., picturebooks can be used to promote visual literacy as well as creative and artistic skills if students produce their own multimodal texts (Ellis, 2016, p. 28). Researchers like Burwitz-Melzer (2013) have shown how picturebooks can be used to foster visual literacy. Furthermore, moving image literacy can be fostered using picturebook animations, and digital literacy can be fostered when using picturebook apps (Ellis, 2016, p. 28). Brunsmeier and Kolb (2017) also provided a practical example of using story apps in primary ELE.

Moreover, picturebooks are cultural artifacts and thus provide an insight into different cultures. Therefore, they can help stimulate intercultural learning, which comprises the following skills in primary ELE according to Kubanek (2008, pp. 6–7): language awareness, acting appropriately in intercultural encounters, showing respect, openness, and the willingness to perceive culture-specific and transcultural aspects of conversations and the ongoing action in different texts, reflecting on one's beliefs, finding a new position in-between the different cultures, and learning about and comparing differentiated, non-stereotypical facts about English speaking countries to one's own culture and other cultures. Eickhorst (2007), for instance, has outlined how picturebooks can be used to foster

intercultural learning in primary school education, and Alter (2013) has demonstrated how intercultural competence can be developed by using First Nations' children's picturebooks.

Other researchers have demonstrated how picturebooks can be used to achieve general educational goals in primary ELE, such as acquiring social skills and moral attitudes (e.g., Binder, 2021, p. 315), and promoting (mental) health literacy (e.g., Ellis, 2019b; Traverso, 2013; Nikolajeva, 2013). The latter encompasses the ability to recognize, manage, and prevent mental health problems (Jorm et al., 1997), as well as the ability to recognize one's potential, to cope with the normal stresses of life, to be a productive member and contribute to society (WHO, 2018). It also entails emotional literacy, and the positive effects on learners' well-being picturebooks can have (Binder, 2021, p. 315).

In this contribution, I would like to demonstrate how picturebooks can be used to achieve two different general educational goals: basic critical environmental literacy as well as developing empathy and kindness towards peers, refugees, and animals, since these two issues are of pressing concern for today's society and should therefore be addressed in primary schools.

4. Picturebooks in practice

4.1 Fostering critical environmental literacy

Ludwig and Summer's Ladder Model of Critical Environmental Literacy (2021) encompasses five components: having a general awareness of the relationship between the environment and human life, having an understanding of human and natural systems and processes, appreciating nature, and feeling empathetic concern for the environment, developing problem-solving- and critical thinking skills in order to make informed decisions, and having the capacity for personal and collective action, as well as civic participation (Summer & Ludwig, 2021, p. 26). Hence, children should not only learn about threats to the environment, but they should also reflect upon their actions, learn to lead a sustainable lifestyle, develop a sense of responsibility towards the environment, and protect it.

These general educational goals for environmental learning are also part of various primary school curricula, e.g., the Bavarian curriculum (ISBa). Even though children are not expected to fully comprehend the concept of global warming, the science behind it, and the complex interdependent relationship between people's actions and the environment at primary school, they should still learn to appreciate nature and to protect the environment as well as they can. This is shown in the Bavarian curriculum: In their science lessons at primary school, learners are expected to learn about the characteristics of the local flora and fauna, using water and energy in an environmentally conscious way, water contamination (e.g., through detergents, solvents), and about how environmental factors (e.g., temperature, exposure to light, soil) influence where certain plants can grow and animals can live (ISBb). In addition, they should reflect on the food production in their region (e.g., hen's egg, grain), food prizes, where groceries come from, and whether one should buy imported food (ISBb). As this section will show, picturebooks about these topics, which are adequate for primary school learners of English, can be used to encourage environmental learning on a basic level.

A practical example of a picturebook that can promote basic critical environmental literacy in primary school education is *The Tale of a Toothbrush: A Story of Plastic in Our Oceans* (2020), written by M. G. Leonard and illustrated by Daniel Rieley. It is a humorous story written from the perspective of Sammy, an old toothbrush that gets thrown away, subsequently travels the world, and meets other plastic items in the ocean while trying to find its way back to its previous owner, six-year-old Sofia. On its journey home, an albatross mistakes the toothbrush for food and tries to eat it, but then realizes its mistake and helps take the toothbrush to its previous owner. When the toothbrush is reunited with Sofia, both are very happy, and Sofia convinces her mother to keep the toothbrush and use it for other purposes rather than throwing it away.

Seeing as this topic and basic environmental learning goals are also part of various primary school science curricula (e.g., ISBa, ISBb, ISBc), it can be a suitable topic for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) projects at primary schools (for further information on CLIL at primary schools see Steinlen & Piske in this volume). Drawing on CLIL lesson

examples by Ball (2016) and Steinlen and Piske (in this volume), I would suggest that the following educational goals can be achieved by using *The Tale of a Toothbrush: A Story of Plastic in Our Oceans* in a CLIL context:

Children learn which products are made of plastic, how plastic items get into the ocean, why plastic is detrimental to our environment, what we can do to cut down plastic waste, and how to creatively re-use plastic (conceptual focus, i.e., the content they will learn). They can achieve these educational goals by listening to, reading, and interpreting the illustrations in the picturebook *The Tale of a Toothbrush: A Story of Plastic in Our Oceans*, identifying and writing down relevant lexical items to talk about plastic, and producing four different posters focusing on what plastic is (which items are made of plastic), how plastic waste gets into the sea, how plastic affects us and our environment, and how to avoid producing more plastic waste (procedural focus, i.e., the skills they will practice, and linguistic focus, i.e., the language they will need).

Content-wise, this book is suitable for this purpose since on the last two pages of the picturebook, there is explicit yet age-appropriate information on why plastic is detrimental to our planet. For example, there is a picture of a turtle trying to eat a plastic bag in the ocean, and the accompanying text says: “On average, eight million pieces of plastic enter our oceans every single day. This is very bad for the sea creatures who live there.” Hence children learn that some animals sometimes eat plastic by mistake, which can have disastrous effects both for the animals and the entire ecosystem. In addition, children learn about recycling and think about creative ways to use plastic they do not need anymore. At the end of the story, for instance, the child decides to use the toothbrush to brush her doll’s hair, clean her football boots, and paint with it instead of throwing it away.

Language-wise, this book is an appropriate medium to achieve the above-mentioned educational goals since it contains various lexical items of the semantic fields of *waste* and *plastic*, e.g., *throw away*, *bin*, *dustmen*, *wrappers*, *plastic straws*, *plastic bag*, *rubbish sack*, and *shampoo bottle* (see Figure 1). Moreover, the last two pages of this book actively encourage learners to go through the book again and look for the right words for the

structures so that they can “learn the whole spectrum of linguistic structures of language” (Piske, 2013). Several researchers (e.g., Schmid-Schönbein, 2001, p. 112; Elsner 2010, p. 120; Krashen, 2021; and Reckermann, 2021) also advocate for using picturebooks whose language goes slightly beyond learners’ current level of English, as long as the content is suitable to achieve the desired educational goal, unknown words are limited to an appropriate number, and teachers use scaffolding and storytelling techniques to facilitate understanding. Furthermore, it is essential to point out that, although the picturebook contains some words and grammatical forms that learners might not be familiar with, students should still understand the gist of the story by looking at the pictures.

Figure 1 illustrates that the symmetrical relationship between the pictures and the written text of the story aids understanding: All the plastic items mentioned in the written text (a shampoo bottle, a toothbrush, and a plastic bag) are shown in the picture, and most of them have their name written on them. In addition, the plastic objects not only have their name on them, but they also have faces that mirror their feelings, which facilitates students’ understanding of lexical items which express emotions. For example, the meaning of the noun phrase “the grumpy shampoo bottle” can be deciphered by looking at the angry expression of the shampoo bottle in the picture, and the verb “to wail” can be comprehended by looking at the sighing plastic bag. Moreover, the dark colors underline the general depressing and sad atmosphere inside the plastic bag, which can also help students understand the gist of the lexical chunks. In addition, analyzing the different facial expressions of the plastic objects and thus learning to read emotions can help foster children’s emotional literacy. Although plastic items are inanimate objects that do not have feelings, the facial expressions drawn on them humanizes them and this can help students sympathize with these objects. Seeing that being thrown away distresses the plastic objects in this picturebook might also lead to students not wanting to throw away any more plastic items and may lead to a more responsible and considerate use of plastics in the long run. Moreover, various pre-, while- and post-storytelling activities can help students explore the picturebook’s rich linguistic and thematic potential.

Pre-storytelling

When using this book in the classroom, teachers could start by showing the book's cover and asking students what they think the book is about. Then teachers could show a plastic item they have to the class (e.g., a pencil) and ask students if they have any plastic items with them and if they can show them to the rest of the class and name them in order to collect words for plastic items. Hence, they can make students aware that plastic items surround them and that plastic still plays a significant role in our lives.

While-storytelling

In a reading circle, teachers should tell the story two times, applying storytelling techniques such as using facial expressions, gestures, elements of theater performances, individual voices for the different characters, the imitation of typical sounds of animals, and pauses to reflect in order to secure understanding (Böttger, 2020, pp. 121-122). Furthermore, there are various videos of native speakers reading out all of the books mentioned in this contribution on YouTube; hence, teachers could also incorporate these videos if they use sufficient scaffolding techniques to ensure students understand the content. Moreover, they should focus on the comprehension of the gist first and then on specific aspects of the story by using yes/no questions or questions which require short answers (Böttger, 2020, p. 121) on the following aspects: whom the toothbrush meets, why it ends up in the ocean, what it is trying to do, why the albatross tries to eat it, and what Sofia is planning to do with the toothbrush when it returns. Another possible task would be to alter specific details in the story and have students find out what was altered to train their ability to listen closely (Böttger, 2020, p. 122); for example, have the toothbrush meet other plastic items or other animals which are not in the story to expand their vocabulary in that lexical field. In addition, they could use an actual toothbrush and have it tell the story or let students act out some scenes using the toothbrush to make them engage with the story. Moreover, according to Bland (2021), using finger puppets or realia, such as a toothbrush, to tell a story and practice language is also a valuable method in primary ELE (see interview in Grund et al. in this volume).

Post-storytelling

Having listened to the story two times, students should create mind maps on essential lexical chunks and ideas from the book in groups, and then use them to design four different posters focusing on what plastic is (which items are made of plastic), how plastic waste gets into the sea, how plastic affects us and our environment, and how to avoid producing more plastic waste. Depending on the learners' level of proficiency, they may need some additional language-focused activities.

Lastly, in a CLIL setting, this book can be used in combination with *A Planet Full of Plastic: And How You Can Help* (2019), written and illustrated by Neal Layton, which provides more explicit information on the topic of plastic: It gives even more examples of which items are made of plastic, who invented plastic, what *biodegradable* means, garbage patches in the ocean, ways to recycle plastic, and how we can all help solve the plastic problem. However, when planning a sequence on plastic in primary education, teachers should first use *The Tale of a Toothbrush* to introduce students to this topic, as it does not focus on mere facts but embeds them in a humorous story told from the perspective of a living being with whom students might sympathize. Hence, this book might be more likely to spark students' interest in the topic. *A Planet Full of Plastic* might be helpful as a follow-up for students who want to learn even more about this topic and can thus be used as a tool for differentiation. It goes without saying that there are various other picturebooks about the detrimental effect plastic has on our planet, e.g., *Rocket Says Clean Up!*, written by Nathan Bryon and illustrated by Dapa Adeala, which is narrated using only present tense forms, and for which you can find teaching material online on the website of *PEPELT* (Picturebooks in European Primary English Language Teaching) (see links). In conclusion, *The Tale of a Toothbrush: A Story of Plastic in Our Oceans* can enhance students' understanding of the topic, expand their vocabulary in this lexical field, and thus promote their English language skills.

4.2 Promoting empathy, kindness, and a positive learning environment

Saving our planet is not the only pressing concern our societies have to face nowadays, but so is welcoming those who had to flee their countries due to natural disasters, wars, or persecution. Therefore, it is essential to address this topic in an age-appropriate way at schools, to teach children empathy and kindness, and thus create a positive learning environment. As Nikolajeva (2013, p. 249) points out, picturebooks can be an ideal medium to foster empathy since they “evoke our emotional engagement through images as well as words and, moreover, through amplification of words by images.” In addition, by looking at the emotions portrayed in the pictures, children can learn to understand the emotions of people surrounding them in real life, and according to extensive empirical research (e.g., Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Evans, 2009; Sipe & Pantaleo, 2008), even very young children can comprehend and respond to these emotions shown in picturebooks (Nikolajeva, 2013, p. 249). Therefore, picturebooks such as *Kind* (2019), written by Alison Green with pictures by 38 illustrators, can help develop empathy and kindness towards other children who have fled from war-torn countries for various reasons: First, the story provides children with concrete examples of what they can do to be kind to both animals and people and to welcome and integrate new students into their community. Second, the picture-word relationship in this book is symmetrical, and hence the facial expressions as well as the lighting mirror the feelings portrayed by the characters, and thus help children understand and sympathize with them. For example, when characters are sad, they are painted with dark colors, and those who try to cheer them up are painted with light colors and sometimes even carry a source of light (e.g., a candle).

Furthermore, the book is easy to understand for primary school learners of English since the meaning of the words can mostly be deduced from the pictures. Hence, children should be able to get the main idea by looking at the pictures. However, some words are not illustrated in the pictures and may need further elaboration by the teacher (e.g., *marble*, *button*, *patient*, see Figure 2) – nonetheless, the meaning of the majority of words as well as the gist of the story can be understood by looking at the pictures. Moreover, with regard to tenses, almost all verbs are in the

simple present form. There are only a few exceptions: the will-future is used three times (e.g., “I bet you’ll soon fill it up”, see Figure 2), the present perfect two times (e.g., “They’ve had to leave their homes and their countries because of danger”; “Have you ever made a kindness jar”, see Figure 2), and the present continuous only once (e.g., “And let’s make sure no one’s left out when we’re playing a game”). Nevertheless, the meaning of these phrases is also mainly depicted in the illustrations. In addition, there are barely any subordinate clauses, only three conditional clauses (e. g. “If they’re trying to learn our language, perhaps you can tell them new words?”, “We can give them a hug if they’re feeling lonely”, “if you don’t let people in, you’ll never know what you’re missing”), however, the meaning of these clauses can be deduced by looking at the illustrations, and the vast majority of clauses only consist of a main clause or two main clauses linked together by coordinating conjunctions, such as *and*, which makes them easy to read and easy to understand.



Figure 2: Kindness Jar – Excerpt from *Kind* (2019) by Alison Green

What is more, the picturebook includes many direct questions for the reader (e.g., “Imagine a world where everyone is kind. How can we make that come true?”, “How can you welcome them?”, “What can you do to be kind today?”, “Have you ever made a kindness jar?”, see Figure 2), which

is ideal for having students engage actively with the story, think about these questions, and respond to them. In summary, the language of the picturebook can be considered adequate for using it in primary schools, and children can learn about ideas of how to be kind to their peers and their surroundings, as well as essential lexical chunks to express their ideas in English, all of which can be explored by using different pre-, while-, and post-storytelling activities.

Pre-storytelling

On PEPELT 21's YouTube channel, Ellis suggests a promising task to introduce the picturebook to young learners: Asking the two questions the picturebook starts with: "What can you do to be kind today?" and "Imagine a world where everyone is kind. How can we make that come true?" (PEPELT 21, 2019). To answer these questions, children should be provided with lexical chunks to start their sentences, e.g., *I / You / We / They can ...*, and some students may express their ideas in their first language(s). However, teachers can recast what they said in English and thus prepare them for different words and ideas they might encounter in the picturebook (PEPELT 21, 2019). Hence, students become familiar with lexical items to express acts of kindness and brainstorm ideas on what they can do to be nice today.

While-storytelling

As mentioned in the previous example, teachers should use storytelling techniques to facilitate understanding and ensure children get the gist after reading the story once. When reading the picturebook for a second time, teachers could use the Total Physical Response method, which Bland (2021) also deems a valuable method in ELE, in order to foster text comprehension and practice acts of kindness: They can encourage children to do exactly what the picturebook proposes since it provides concrete examples of how to be kind to their peers. For instance, children could practice giving someone a smile, asking someone to hold their hand when they are frightened, showing interest in new students by asking them about their favorite game or hobby, finding out about what they have

in common, and helping them learn their language by teaching them new words and learning words from the new student's L1 in return.

Furthermore, when using the illustration of the kindness jar (see Figure 2) in class, teachers can conceal the verbal explanation of what a kindness jar is and have the children speculate about what it is by looking at the illustration (either in their L1 or with language support in English). The bright colors and the happy faces of the children in the picture indicate that the kindness jar creates a pleasant (classroom) atmosphere where everyone is having fun while building an environment in which everyone feels comfortable and in which everyone can thrive and blossom like the plants in the illustration; hence, students work towards achieving an atmosphere that is conducive to learning and to their personal development. Moreover, this illustration demonstrates that showing kindness is something that enriches and embellishes the classroom, and which should be treasured, like the castle they are building in the illustration.

Post-storytelling

As a post-storytelling task, children can then create their own kindness jar. However, rather than having them put a marble or a button into it every time someone is kind to them or their peers (see Figure 2), teachers can have students write down something nice someone did for them or they did for someone else on snippets of paper, fold them and put them in the jar (see also Ellis' suggestion on PEPELT 21, 2019). This way, students can practice the new words they gained from the picturebook and collect more ideas on how to be kind. Ellis recommends having the teacher read out what the students wrote at the end of each week or month (PEPELT 21, 2019). I would suggest having the students read out the sentences so that they can practice their speaking skills and creating an incentive that makes children want to actively contribute to filling the jar, for instance, working with rewards such as playing an English game or asking them which activity they would like to do as a reward every time they manage to fill the jar with meaningful content. Moreover, teachers could place the picturebook right next to the jar and a list of all the ideas which have been collected in class so that children can go through these

materials again at their own pace and use them to find lexical chunks they would like to use when writing their acts of kindness on a snippet of paper. The PEPELT team mentioned previously also provides additional teaching material and other activities which can be carried out when using this book in a primary school setting or primary teacher education.

These accumulated acts of kindness can help create a positive learning environment, which can have a positive effect on students' self-image and personal growth (Traverso, 2013, p. 183), and this can also facilitate learning processes, as many studies have shown (e.g., Helmke & Weinert, 1997; Helmke, 2017; Meyer, 2017). Hence, by using this picturebook in class, children can learn how to be kind and welcoming towards their peers and new students/refugees, which can then also be conducive to creating a learning environment in which students can grow, learn English in a pleasant atmosphere, and which can increase student motivation to participate in class, and take an interest in the language.

5. Conclusion

Although this contribution might not make students end wars and solve violent conflicts and the climate crisis, it provides concrete examples of how primary English language teachers can equip children with the necessary skills to deal with these pressing issues our modern-day society faces. To be precise, it demonstrates how picturebooks can be used to foster critical environmental literacy, empathy and kindness on a basic level while simultaneously promoting their English language skills.

Evidently, these are not the only challenges our society has to tackle. Education for democracy, gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, diversity, body safety, consent, and what Summer and Ludwig (forthcoming) call taboos and challenging topics (e.g., violence, bullying, racism, and losing a loved one) are also issues of great importance, and there are numerous picturebooks about these topics and the general educational goals linked to them, whose potential for primary ELE is yet to be explored (see lists on Educate2Empower Publishing and PEPELT).

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