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MA TESOL Research Dissertation

**Scaffolding during the initial reading of picture books
in Japanese elementary school EFL classrooms: a
qualitative study investigating how teachers and
learners co-construct meaning during whole class
picture book reading.**

September 2016

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated how an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and two Home Room Teachers (HRTs) co-constructed meaning with beginner 6-8 year old learners during whole-class picture book reading sections of EFL lessons in a Japanese elementary school. The study was qualitative, involving analysis of transcripts made from video and audio recordings, which were cross-referenced with the researcher's reflective log.

The study posed two research questions, exploring how teachers provided support using different types of scaffolding and investigating whether learners provided collective scaffolding support to each other.

It was found that the ALT mainly provided support by 'contextualising' using gestures, pointing at pictures and verbal L2 explanations and also by 'bridging', providing links to students' previous knowledge. The most common type of support provided by HRTs was 'showing interest', by laughing at students' comments, responding with sounds of affirmation and repeating learner and ALT utterances in acknowledgment. The data suggested that collective scaffolding rarely occurs during whole-class picture book reading with these 6-8 year old Japanese elementary school learners.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of research

The current study was conducted at a small elementary school in rural Japan. This school is within a 'Special English Zone', meaning the students have more English lessons than at a standard school and English has the status of a school subject, rather than being taught within 'foreign language activities' where English is primarily selected (MEXT 2011). From the year 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) plans to reform English education in Japan (MEXT 2013). The Elementary School in the present study already meets the 2020 requirements, teaching English lessons at least 20 times a year for 1st to 2nd grade, once a week for 3rd and 4th grade and three times a week for 5th and 6th grade, in addition other English activities are also conducted at the school.

English lessons at the school are taught with a Japanese Home Room Teacher (HRT), who teaches the same class for almost all of their lessons, and a native English speaking Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), also the researcher in the current study, who teaches English to all students in the school as well as joining arts and crafts lessons for students in the 1st to 4th grade (aged 6 to 10). The fact that the ALT also joins arts and crafts lessons may mean that students are more used to the teacher and open to communication.

English is taught by team teaching between the HRT and ALT. Each person's role in the team teaching dynamic can vary across different classrooms and

even across sections of the same lesson. For the purposes of the current study, which focuses on scaffolding and the co-construction of meaning during whole-class picture book reading, the roles of the ALT and HRT can be summarised as follows:

- All picture book reading was done by the ALT, who also responded to learner comments.
- The HRTs listened and reacted to the story with the students as well as responding to comments, asking questions and dealing with any classroom management issues.

The participants in the study were a 1st grade class of 22 students aged 6 to 7 years old and a 2nd grade class of 15 students aged 7 to 8 years old, along with the HRT of each class. Signed consent was requested and approved by the principal of the school and the two participating HRTs (Appendix 1), who gave permission on behalf of the participating students.

1.2 Justification of the research

Due to the recent increase in English lessons in preparation for the 2020 reform in Japanese elementary schools (MEXT 2013), more research is needed to help teachers make choices in their classrooms that enable learners to feel comfortable using English. Teaching English in elementary schools is still quite a recent development in Japan. Foreign language activities, where English is primarily chosen, have only been mandatory in elementary schools since 2011

from the 5th grade (aged 10 and upwards), although many schools have been teaching the subject for longer than that and to students of a younger age (Tahira 2012). Some researchers feel that research in the field is limited. Studies have been conducted in areas such as motivation (eg. Matsuzaki Carreira *et al* 2013), corrective feedback (eg. Mori 2011) and classroom interactions (eg. Nishida and Yashima 2010). There have even been studies incorporating the use of stories in the classroom (Uchiyama 2011, Ohashi 2013). However, Ohashi (2013) feels that research relating to processes in the classroom and how learners engage with activities is lacking and more is needed.

In Japanese elementary schools, activities such as songs, games, greetings and conversations are often used by teachers (Matsuzaki-Carreira *et al* 2013). In the experience of the research practitioner, such activities can be very motivating, encourage students to speak English and have a major part to play in English lessons. They can also be rigid and bound by the framework of set target language that is difficult for learners to break free from. Conversely, picture books can open up new English language opportunities for learners and can also encourage communication between learners and the teacher about different topics than those that may be encountered in a lesson that is based solely on set target language. This was shown by Ohashi (2013) in a Japanese elementary school and also by Lugossy (2012) in her Hungarian young learner study, which the design of the current study owes a great deal to.

On a local level, the current study should benefit the teachers of the selected

elementary school, as insights gained from the study will be shared with all teachers in the school and will hopefully help clarify what role can be played by the HRT and ALT during whole-class picture book reading. Findings will also be shared with all other ALTs working for the same local Board of Education as the research practitioner.

Previous research in the field of scaffolding during storytelling suggests that teachers can support learners in creating meaning by responding to their spontaneous comments (Lugossy 2012). The increased linguistic participation encouraged by storytelling has also been found to stimulate questions and comments that help learners create understanding with a HRT and ALT (Ohashi 2013). It is hoped that the current study can build on previous research and gain further insight by breaking down the scaffolding observed during whole class picture book reading into categories, hopefully suggesting ways in which a HRT and ALT can act in their team-teaching dynamic.

1.3 Outline of research problem

The aim of the current study was to gain evidence that suggests whether or not an ALT reading picture books to the whole class provides opportunities for scaffolding, which in turn should help learners construct meaning and support their language learning. It was hypothesised that the role of the teachers would be to scaffold spontaneous comments made by learners during whole-class picture book reading to help them understand the language they encountered in stories and allow learners to react linguistically and emotionally to picture books.

It was expected that most comments made by learners would be in their L1, as was the case in Lugossy's (2012) study. Due to the age of the learners and their limited amount of time learning English, it would be unreasonable to expect all comments made during English class to be in the L2. In the current study, L1 comments were treated with equal importance to those made in L2. It was predicted that learner comments would include the following functions:

1. Labelling of things seen in pictures (Lugossy 2012)
2. Repetition of language heard in the story (Ohashi 2013)
3. Predicting what will happen next in the story (Hughes 2010)

Comments from learners and their responses from teachers or peers could contribute to a 'co-construction of meaning', a term that is key to the aims of the current study, along with the ideas of 'scaffolding', 'collective scaffolding' and 'whole-class picture book reading'. Whilst these terms will be discussed in further detail in the Literature Review, it seems appropriate to discuss their definitions and specifically how they are interpreted in the current study here.

As Schmitt (2010) explains in general terms, language is mainly co-constructed with other people, rather than individually, and meaning is constructed through social interaction. If this is the case, then why should the co-construction of meaning in the classroom be any different? Whilst in practice it is necessary for teachers to have plans and expectations of how lessons and activities will materialize, allowing learners to contribute and interact may replicate how

language is used and developed in the social world outside the classroom. For the current study, 'co-construction of meaning' specifically constitutes the comments that learners make and if and how they are acknowledged and developed upon by teachers, using 'scaffolding' and peers participating in 'collective scaffolding'.

'Scaffolding', as defined in the current study is derived from the work of Vygotsky (1978) and, in turn, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), who believed that scaffolding constitutes an adult or more capable peer helping a child complete a task they would not be able to do independently. In the current study, the task is understanding the meaning of a story, or more appropriately considering that meaning is co-constructed, taking one's own meaning from the story.

As far as 'collective scaffolding' (Donato 1994) is concerned for the current study, any response to a comment made by another student that may have contributed to the original comment maker's understanding was considered collective scaffolding.

The term 'whole-class picture book reading' refers to a teacher reading a picture book to all students in the class while they are sitting on the floor gathered around the teacher. Before the reading of the stories, no rules were given to the students about making comments during picture book reading, they were neither told to listen silently or to make comments if they did not understand. Therefore the picture book reading environment was one that naturally emerged, with the

children only guided by their previous expectations of how to behave during whole-class picture book reading and how they were stimulated by the picture books that were chosen.

The current study is qualitative in nature and hopes to look at comments that were actually made during picture book reading, analyse the comments and consider what they suggest, aiming to answer the following research questions:

1. How does a teacher co-construct meaning with learners by responding to spontaneous comments during whole class picture book reading?
2. Does collective scaffolding occur between learners when co-constructing meaning during whole class picture book reading and if so how does it occur?

Whilst I attempted to analyse the data in an objective way, it is acknowledged that qualitative studies can, to a certain extent, include a degree of interpretation from the researcher (Dörnyei 2007). Therefore, the current study does not aim to be prescriptive about its views on scaffolding, the way teachers should act during storytelling or the way they should co-construct meaning with learners. It aims to describe an actual educational setting where the research was conducted and show what kinds of interaction took place in that particular educational setting. Hopefully the findings could be useful and pose questions to other teachers about how they act during whole-class storytelling and whether acting differently could be of benefit to their learners.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Picture Books

2.1.1 Why picture books?

Picture books can have holistic benefits if they are used to support language learning. As Cameron (2001) points out, they bring texts that exist in the outside world into the classroom. Picture books can allow learners to have access to language that is beyond the everyday English and formulaic question and answer patterns they may often encounter in the EFL classroom. Bland (2015) even goes as far as suggesting that storytelling may be the most powerful educational tool, as it can:

1. Support empathy
2. Support creativity
3. Train our thinking.

In his literature based study in the field of storytelling, Mart (2012) concluded that, for young children, stories are motivating and accessible, creating an enjoyable learning environment. One benefit of storytelling is thought to be the ability for young children to learn vocabulary incidentally. Elley (1989) found this to be the case and vocabulary gains more than doubled if teachers gave additional explanations when new vocabulary was encountered. In the Japanese elementary school context, Uchiyama (2011) had similar results and impressive comprehension test scores. However, tests were completed by students immediately after storytelling, with no follow up tests at a later date. It could be

argued that any way of teaching vocabulary, such as drilling or brainstorming on the blackboard would lead to gains if the tests were done immediately after the vocabulary had been introduced. In any case, as Vygotsky (1978) explains, the point at which a child learns the meaning of a word is only the beginning of the development process.

It may be the social benefits of whole-class picture book reading outweigh linguistic benefits such as vocabulary gains. Hsui-Chih (2008) interviewed EFL teachers in Taiwan to see how they perceived the educational value of picture books. One interesting finding was that around half of the teachers saw their role during picture book reading as an encourager of participation and interaction, rather than as a transmitter of the meaning of the book.

2.1.2 Choosing appropriate picture books for EFL young learners

As with any educational materials, it is clear that picture books must be engaging, be linguistically accessible and provide learning opportunities suitable to the age and level of learners. Cameron (2001) suggests that picture books should combine comfortable familiarity with the correct blend of surprise and change. She puts forward the following key traits as part of the make up of a quality story:

1. An engaging plot and characters for children
2. Artwork that plays a similarly important role to text in telling the story
3. A strong feeling of satisfaction at the end

Lwin (2015) also sees the importance of familiarity, a feature of folktales, which she discusses in her study. She suggests that familiar themes, such as honesty, kindness, jealousy and greed, along with other moral issues and familiar narrative structures can motivate learners to listen or read with confidence.

The familiarity of predictable stories may also motivate learners. Linse (2007) proposes the popularity of predictable stories with L1 learners is due to the fact that it is possible to predict words and determine patterns, something that is enhanced by the use of rhyme by picture book authors. Linse (2007) believes that the repetition of predictable stories is also suitable for L2 learners, pointing out that whilst repetitive stories can resemble audiolingual substitution drills, they can be far more interesting and enjoyable for learners. The repetition of the predictable stories used in the current study hopefully provided support that helped to compensate for any deficit in L2 knowledge.

A final point to consider when choosing picture books is the differences between learners within the whole class. Hughes (2010) points out that learners have a wide range of intelligences and interests and that stories should be varied to suit individual needs. On reflection, the themes of *eating* and *animals* featured heavily in the books chosen for the current study. Despite this, the stories hopefully had a range of styles of illustration and tone that appealed to a wide variety of interests.

2.1.3 Learner response to picture books

Some researchers in the TESOL field have called for teachers to concentrate on constructing knowledge with learners, rather than relying too much on what is set in stone in curricula and textbooks. Thornbury (2000), an advocate of the 'dogme' approach, believes that like conversation, teaching should focus on the concerns and interests of the people in the room. This may seem like an unusual point to bring up in a study about picture books, a field where studies often focus on vocabulary gains, motivation or other linguistic benefits that stories may have. However, some studies have looked at student-teacher interaction during whole-class picture book reading.

In a Hungarian young learner context, Lugossy (2012) looked at how teachers responded to 5 to 12 year old learners' spontaneous comments during picture book reading. The following assertions were made based on the data collected:

1. Children spontaneously comment on what they see and hear while sharing picture books in English
2. These comments are most often in the learners' L1
3. Comments indicate learners' willingness to interact
4. They also indicate what has been understood from visual and linguistic input

A study such as this may not seem as clear cut as some of the quantitative studies mentioned previously (Elley 1989, Uchiyama 2011). The conclusions may also appear to be less impressive than 'evidence' that learners have

increased the amount of English vocabulary that they know. However, the conclusions made by Lugossy (2012) are valid and have clear implications that pose the following questions teachers can consider in their own classrooms:

1. When should learner comments be responded to during whole-class picture book reading?
2. In what way should teachers respond to learner comments?
3. What can be understood from spontaneous comments, whether they are made in the learners' L1 or L2?

The use of L1 and how much it should be used in EFL lessons by either teachers or students is often a contentious issue and one where there is seemingly no clear answer. Moon (2000) suggests the following reasons that teachers or students may use the learners' L1:

1. A child knows the answer to a question, but not how to say it in English
2. A child wants to share an experience or information, but they have limited English ability
3. A teacher or pupil wants to joke
4. A teacher wants to check if children have understood
5. A child wants to show that they have understood a question

All of the above reasons seem to be legitimate and reasonable uses of L1 in the EFL classroom. Expecting young learners of a foreign language to exclusively

use the L2 is unrealistic. One of Lugossy's (2012) key findings was that teachers were able to build on learners comments if they responded to them, even if the learner comments were in their L1.

2.2 Scaffolding

It is generally accepted that 'scaffolding' originated from the work of Vygotsky (1978), who created the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the zone between a child's actual level of development and what they can achieve with help from an adult or a more capable peer. Scaffolding, in its simplest definition, is the help from an adult or more capable peer that helps a child achieve more. Vygotsky (1978) made the following two points about the ZPD that are also relevant to scaffolding:

1. A person can only learn things that are within their development level.
2. Learning and development are never accomplished in equal measure, as there are highly complex relations between learning and development.

The first point begs the question, 'How do we know what development level learners are at?'. According to Lugossy (2012), spontaneous comments made by learners during whole-class picture book reading can be seen as a resource for teachers to gain access to the ZPD. They can show not only what learners understand about a story, but also about the way they think and cognitive relations that they make. The following extract is taken from Lugossy's (2012, p114-5) study:

- ① **T:** And what did they do in the house?
- ② **S1:** Watched TV.
- ③ **T:** Maybe they watched TV. What else did they do?
- ④ **S2:** Megették a malacot. [They ate the pig.]
- ⑤ **T:** Oh no! They didn't eat the pig. They were friends; you don't eat your friend, do you. Who's your friend? Is Tamás your friend?
- ⑥ **S2:** Yes.
- ⑦ **T:** And do you eat him for dinner?
- ⑧ **S2:** No. Csupa csont és bőr. [He's only skin and bones anyway.]
- ⑨ **T:** Oh, is this why? Because he's only skin and bones?
- ⑩ **Ss:** (laughter)

In the above extract, the children clearly understood the questions posed by the teacher, giving relevant answers either in their L1 or in English. From this, the teacher could ascertain a level of comprehension of the story and ability to contribute to the co-construction of meaning in the class. The teacher also saw an example of cognitive relations that learners made, suggesting '*Watched TV*' or '*They ate a pig*' when predicting what characters in the story did in the house. The second learner comment showed the teacher that some learners like to joke during storytelling, which was accepted by the teacher, made light of and probably became a memorable part of the meaning that learners took away from the story.

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) are often credited with coining the term 'scaffolding'. They describe it as a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal, which would be beyond his or her unassisted efforts. They go on to state that 'well executed scaffolding begins by luring the child into actions that produce recognizable-for-him solutions' (Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976, p96). In other words, scaffolding is not just giving answers and solutions to students, but giving assistance that will enable them to solve problems on their own in the future.

2.2.1 Teacher-student scaffolding

The notion of handing over from teacher to student is seen as an integral part of scaffolding to Walqui (2006), who points out that assistance should be given in just the right quantity and at just the right time. In a similar vein, Gibbons (2002) argues that learners need to be engaged with tasks that are authentic and cognitively challenging, rather than simplifying tasks and risking a reductionist curriculum. Using 'real books' (Cameron 2001, Ellis and Brewster 2014), as the current study did, rather than ones specially written for EFL learners, hopefully engaged and challenged learners and provided opportunities for scaffolding to occur.

A clear example, explaining the difference between 'help' and 'scaffolding' is given by Hammond and Gibbons (2005). When considering how teachers might help a student who is struggling to spell a word, they describe providing the learner with the correct spelling as 'help', whereas 'scaffolding' might be

encouraging the student to think about the sounds of the word and how they could be represented. Of the two examples, it seems that scaffolding is more likely to result in an improvement in the learner's spelling ability. If the learner is provided with the correct spelling, they may be able to spell the same word again, but they may be less likely to apply that knowledge when trying to spell other words. Here is an example from a storytelling study (Lugossy 2012, p112) showing a teacher encouraging a learner to use English by giving a prompt:

- ① **S2:** Itthon van anyukád? [Is your mummy home?]
- ② **T:** In English, Tomi. Is ...
- ③ **S2:** Is mother ... home?
- ④ **T:** Is mother, or: Is your mummy home?

If the teacher had translated the phrase '*Is your mummy home?*' into English, it could be classed as help rather than scaffolding. Instead, the teacher gave the prompt, '*In English, Tomi. Is..*', which encouraged the learner to draw on L2 knowledge and think about how to say the comment in English. Techniques such as direct translation could be more appropriate in other situations, as eliciting is only possible if learners know the English. This is a point that is particularly salient with 6-8 year old Japanese elementary school pupils, as most students are low level learners.

One of the aims of the current study was to add to the findings of studies such as Lugossy (2012) by breaking down scaffolding into categories. Six basic types of

scaffolding were used as an initial framework to assist with coding and align the study with current literature. As far as I am aware, there are no studies that list types of scaffolding specifically related to storytelling with young EFL learners. Therefore, the scaffolding types were taken from a study by Walqui (2006) focussing on adolescent English Language Learners in America. Whilst the age of learners and educational context are different to the current study, it was thought that using the scaffolding categories as a starting point and allowing any other codes to naturally develop in the data would mean the framework would be relevant to a different context. The six main types of scaffolding described by Walqui (2006) that were applied are: modelling, bridging, contextualising, schema building, re-presenting text and developing metacognition. The definition of each scaffolding type is outlined below (based on Walqui 2006):

1. Modelling

- Giving students clear examples by modelling tasks, activities and language use that meets the function of the task at hand.

2. Bridging

- Activating students' prior knowledge and understanding about a topic and linking subject matter to learners' lives.

3. Contextualising

- Making language accessible by using visual aids like pictures, realia or video and verbally contextualising by providing analogies relevant to learners' lives.

4. Schema building

- Providing learners with the skeleton of a text by encouraging them to skim read for heads, subheads, illustrations, captions, etc. The most important pieces of information could also be provided verbally before reading a text.

5. Re-presenting text

- Transforming text from one genre to another, which begins with asking learners about what has occurred in a text, what is currently happening and encouraging prediction of future events.

6. Developing metacognition

- Encouraging learner autonomy by teaching strategies and learning routines that help students complete academic tasks.

Rogoff (1991) pointed out that most research on the ZPD and scaffolding at the time was conducted in North America and Britain with middle class families, which may not always fit with cultural variations around the world. In the Japanese elementary school context Nishida and Yashima (2010) looked at interactions between teachers and pupils during practice sessions for an interesting musical play project. In the later stages of the project, cues such as 'you had a little more to say...' (Nishida and Yashima 2010, p486) encouraged students to think about lines they were struggling to remember. Other studies discuss prompting from teachers by using gestures (Ohashi 2013, Uchiyama

2011) and pointing at pictures (Ohashi 2013, Ellis and Brewster 2014). This kind of prompting could be described as 'bridging' or 'contextualising' depending on the situation. Throughout most of Nishida and Yashima's (2010) study, the 'scaffolding' provided by teachers was saying or whispering lines for students to repeat. Whilst this does not seem to fit with Walqui's (2006) six forms of scaffolding, the researchers argue that at least this enabled the students to say something. The dialogue seems to be fairly simple, for example, 'I'm Pumba', 'I'm Timon', 'nice to meet you', 'who are you?' (Nishida and Yashima 2010, p484). However the teachers may have decided that providing lines for repetition was the most appropriate form of 'scaffolding', which could be an example of the cultural variation discussed by Rogoff (1991). The current study also allowed other forms of 'scaffolding' to present themselves during data analysis.

2.2.2 Collective scaffolding

As previously mentioned, in addition to adults supporting child development, Vygotsky (1978) included the help of a more capable peer as a path to development in the ZPD. Donato (1994) suggests that collaborative work between peers can provide the same scaffolding opportunities as those provided when the relationship is of an expert-novice nature.

It could be argued that this viewpoint places pressure on learners to teach themselves, when 'teaching' in a more traditional sense is the job of the teacher. This is not a view held by Takahashi (1998), who places responsibility on the teacher to create an environment where learners can partake in social

interaction and mutually guide each other in the ZPD. In this way of thinking, the teacher still has responsibilities, albeit ones that are different from the traditional transmitter of information role and even the main provider of scaffolding. If collective scaffolding is as effective as expert-novice scaffolding, there could certainly be practical benefits in classrooms in the Japanese elementary school context, where one teacher can teach up to 40 students at a time, making individual expert-novice scaffolding difficult.

Collective scaffolding is only likely to occur if students feel comfortable speaking during storytelling. Fassler (1998) voiced concerns about children in pre-school who are often made to read stories in a hushed atmosphere, not disturbing peers. It was deemed that teachers could be missing the chance to encourage peer support and collaboration that happens when they read books in groups. Admittedly, in Fassler's (1998) study, children were observed reading books by themselves rather than taking part in whole-class picture book reading like in the current study. However, if peer support habits were not begun in kindergarten for the 6 to 8 year old learners in the current study, collective scaffolding may be less likely. That said there was evidence of spontaneous comments during picture book reading in studies such as Lugossy (2012) and even collective scaffolding during whole class storytelling in Ohashi's (2013) study.

Similarly to teacher-student scaffolding, I searched the literature for types of collective scaffolding to use as an initial framework during data analysis. Again, I was unable to identify any studies that described collective scaffolding

categories specific to storytelling or EFL young learners. In an American elementary school context, Gnadinger (2008) applied Tharp and Gallimore's (1988) six means of assistance to peer-mediated instruction: modelling, contingency management, feeding back, instructing, questioning and cognitive structuring. Gnadinger (2008) found that questioning, feeding back and instructing were the main types of peer scaffolding used during collaborative activities by small groups. Definitions of each category are not given here, due to a lack of instances of collective scaffolding in the current study. This point will be revisited in the 'Presentation of Results' chapter.

2.3 Co-construction of meaning

The idea of a co-construction of meaning between the teacher and learners is one that is crucial to the current study. For Gibbons (2002), the classroom is a place where teachers and learners jointly construct knowledge together. Roche (2014) believes that children achieve a sense of meaning on a higher level when they are given the time to absorb pictures and discuss them in a safe environment during whole-class picture book reading. Lugossy (2012) found that when teachers responded to learner comments and created an environment that encouraged them, this indicated a willingness to involve learners in the construction of knowledge. The conditions were then set for language to emerge in interaction, rather than formulaic language use that does not always resemble English as it is spoken.

One teacher in Li and Seedhouse's (2010) young learner EFL study in Taiwan,

had volunteer students retell a picture book story after it had been read by the teacher three times. Where the volunteer student struggled to continue with the story, the teacher and other pupils provided scaffolding in the form of questions and hints. The breakdown in communication and repair initiated by the teacher and peers was seen as a break away from traditional classroom discourse that is often rigid and regulated in its form. The co-construction of meaning in the classroom could help to prepare learners for negotiating meaning with other people, which is something they will hopefully do when using English outside the classroom in the future. Worrying about producing perfectly formed sentences, a potential bi-product of rigid classroom discourse and an impossible goal given the collaborative nature of authentic speaking, could hinder communication.

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of the current study was to explore how meaning is co-constructed between teachers and learners during whole-class picture book reading with 6-8 year old Japanese elementary school learners. Within the sphere of co-construction of meaning, two specific elements were considered:

1. How teachers responded to learner comments and particularly if their turns could be considered as scaffolding.
2. If there were any instances of collective scaffolding between learners and how they occurred.

It was decided that a qualitative approach was the most appropriate, with teacher and learner comments and their analysis forming the basis of the study. A quantitative study focussing only on how many times scaffolding occurred would not have allowed for the in-depth analysis required to suggest if and how scaffolding was occurring.

Dörnyei (2007) points out several benefits of qualitative research, including its exploratory nature, flexibility and rich material to draw upon from a variety of sources. In the current study, several sources were used. Whole-class picture book reading sessions were recorded by video camera and an audio recorder, from which detailed transcripts were made, constituting the main data set. In addition, reflective logs were kept during data collection and analysis phases to keep a record of ideas, thoughts and justification for decisions made as they

occurred throughout the project.

Dörnyei (2007) also points out several weaknesses of qualitative research including the time and labour involved in the transcription process, which was followed in the current study. Conversely, he notes this 'allows us to get to know our data thoroughly' (Dörnyei 2007, p246). I found the time spent on transcription and reflection aided making connections and spotting patterns in the data analysis phase. Small sample sizes and problems of generalizing findings that may not apply to different contexts are also mentioned by Dörnyei (2007) as a potential problem. Whilst this point is acknowledged, it is hoped that ideas presented here could be tested in the classrooms of teachers working in a variety of contexts.

The researcher could be considered as the instrument in qualitative research, which Dörnyei (2007) sees as a potential quality concern, with issues such as bias and the researcher only choosing to analyse quotations that support the arguments they want to make. Hopefully I avoided bias by including analysis of a range of transcript extracts, including examples that did not go according to plan, such as learners not understanding the intentions of teacher questions. Furthermore, presenting passages from transcripts in the report, which the current study does, hopefully gives the chance for readers to agree or disagree with the researcher.

As I was observing my own teaching, the current study also entailed reflective

practice. The main source was a reflective log (extract shown in Appendix 2) kept during data collection and analysis. On keeping journals, Farrell (2013) points out that teachers can compare their beliefs in writing with recordings taken from the classroom, to check for any inconsistencies in the data. The reflective log was constantly compared with transcripts to see if there was any evidence to back up my beliefs. To give an example, after the reading of *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Westcott 1980), I commented that the HRT seemed to be more involved in co-constructing meaning due to a discussion about the book before the lesson. Upon checking the transcripts, the amount of HRT turns classed as teacher-student scaffolding had increased to 21 from 8 in the previous lesson.

3.1 Participants

I played the role of researcher and Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in the current study. Farrell (2013) explains that a common criticism of reflective practice is that teaching and researching are not compatible due to high-speed decisions that must be made in the classroom. In this view, teachers who spend time reflecting may lose control of their class. With this in mind, I chose to record my teaching, meaning most of the reflection was done post-lesson. In any case, as I was reading the picture books, taking notes during the lesson was not possible. Reflective log entries were made before and immediately after lessons.

I had worked as an ALT, mainly in elementary schools, in rural Japan for around six years when the research was conducted. All other participants worked at or

attended the elementary school the researcher worked at on a full-time basis. Two experienced HRTs took part in the study, for the sake of anonymity, they are referred to as HRT1 and HRT2. The children participating in the study are the classes which the participating HRTs taught at the time of the study. HRT1 taught a class of 22 1st grade students, aged six to seven and HRT2 taught a class of 15 2nd grade students, aged seven to eight. Each student was given a number to protect their anonymity, in HRT1's class the numbers ranged from 1-S1 to 1-S22, in HRT2's class, they ranged from 2-S1 to 2-S15. The numbers are random and give no indication of any student attributes, including gender or ability.

There is certainly an element of 'convenience sampling' (Dörnyei 2007, p129) in how participants were selected, in that they were available at the school the researcher worked at. Convenience sampling may lack credibility, but in this case, I could apply anything learned from the study directly to the classrooms of the participants, hopefully having a positive impact. Furthermore, Pinter (2015) recommends some observation before working with child research participants, so appropriate research tools can be chosen. As I had been working at the school for around 10 months prior to the study, the students had been observed many times even before the research design stage. The students were also used to the researcher as an ALT and were therefore likely to act naturally and without pressure, where a class unknown to the researcher may not. 1st and 2nd grade classes were chosen, due to availability and a willingness to participate from the HRTs. Due to this narrow age range, conclusions drawn from the study

were made solely about classroom interactions of 6-8 year old children.

The main source of data was classroom observations recorded using a video camera. Richards (2003) points out the attention in video cameras is usually given to picture quality, over sound quality, therefore an audio recording device was also used as a back-up. It is often cited that video cameras can be intrusive (Bell 2010, Dörnyei 2007, Richards 2003). Richards (2003) makes the point that their obtrusive nature can affect observees' behaviour. In the current study, the HRTs explained to the students that the presence of the camera was to help me decide how to use picture books in English lessons in the following school year. The camera was put on a tripod in a prominent place at the front of the classroom, as hiding the camera seemed unethical. The camera did not seem to affect the behaviour of the students, although it is acknowledged that the actions of some students and the teachers may have been affected to some extent.

I decided to observe whole-class picture book reading, which was a familiar activity for the participants, so would be less disruptive and less intrusive than testing students or subjecting them to interviews, which would take up their time outside of regular English lessons. I decided not to observe group or pair work in follow up tasks, due to concerns I was trying to observe too much and this would result in collecting an unmanageable amount of data.

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school principal and participating HRTs, who gave their signed consent (Appendix 1). The basic aims

of the project were summarised, explaining that I planned to make video recordings of lessons and analyse transcripts of the recordings, observing interactions between myself, the HRTs and students. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the study or request any individual recordings be discarded for any reason. I also guaranteed that I would handle the collected data carefully and keep the identities of participants anonymous. The explanation was done in writing in English, but also verbally in Japanese and English, as the participants are L2 English speakers. Following discussions with the principal and HRTs, it was decided that they could give permission on behalf of the children. Dörnyei agrees that permission can be granted by teachers if 'the research is neither aimed at sensitive information nor involves extensive participant engagement' (2007, p71). The current study met these criteria, as learners were taking part in a regular English lesson activity, the only difference being the presence of a video camera.

Six whole-class picture book reading sessions lasting around five to ten minutes each were recorded over a period of around three weeks in February and March 2016. Ideally the data collection period would have been undertaken over a longer period of time, but it was decided that the data should be collected by the end of March, to coincide with the school year in Japanese elementary schools, which runs from April to March. The start of a new school year brings with it some disruption, including new HRTs for most classes. Also, teachers are often transferred between schools in Japan at the end of a school year, so data was collected where working relationships between the HRTs and ALT were in place

and permission could be obtained.

3.2 Data Collection

Picture book selection was a main consideration before and during the data collection period. The following six picture books were chosen, all of which were deemed to fit Cameron's (2001) traits of a quality story: engaging plot and characters, strong artwork and a satisfied feeling at the end. An extract from each book is provided in Appendix 3 for reference:

Lesson 1-1* - *Green Eggs and Ham* (Seuss 1960)

Lesson 1-2 - *Not Now Bernard* (McKee 1980).

Lesson 1-3 - *Monkey and Me* (Gravett 2007)

Lesson 2-1 - *A Color of His Own* (Lionni 1975)

Lesson 2-2 - *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Westcott 1980)

Lesson 2-3 - *Bark, George* (Feiffer 1999)

* This number indicates the grade and lesson number in the order in which it was taught with that grade (grade-lesson number).

It is thought authentic tasks and language should be used with the aim of challenging students and focussing on scaffolding to support learners (Gibbons 2002, Walqui 2006). The books used in the current study were all deemed to be slightly above the learners' current English level, with the possible exception being *Monkey and Me* (Gravett 2007). It was commented in the researcher's reflective log that a 'simple book' was purposefully chosen to enable comparison,

despite concerns about this negating the need for learners to make any comments. Efforts were also made to choose books that are, in the experience of the researcher not commonly read in Japanese elementary school English lessons. It was thought that reading books unfamiliar to students could present scaffolding opportunities.

All of the picture books used in the study were of a predictable nature, which hopefully provided support to students that made up for any deficit in L2 linguistic knowledge. Predictability was supported by the repetitive nature of the language in *Green Eggs and Ham* (Seuss 1960), *Bark, George* (Feiffer 1999) and *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Westcott 1980). It was facilitated by a familiar feel to the plot in *A Color of His Own* (Lionni 1975) and *Not Now Bernard* (McKee 1980) and visual clues given by the illustrations in *Monkey and Me* (Gravett 2007).

As previously mentioned, video and audio recordings were made of whole-class picture book reading sessions. The researcher used a video camera, which was put on a tripod at the front of the classroom to the side. This gave an angle that made most students visible during the recording, although sometimes speakers could not be identified. An audio recording was made using an iPhone 6 that was in the pocket of the researcher. The audio recording was initially made as a back up to the video, although when it came to the transcription process, an initial transcript was made with the audio recording. This was then checked for accuracy using the video recording, which was also used to identify speakers

and record any relevant non-verbal information. Regrettably, an error was made in making the video recording in Lesson 2-1 (*A Color of His Own*), the only data that remained was the audio recording. Whilst a fairly detailed transcript was produced, this led to Lesson 2-1 having the most unidentified student utterances and non-verbal information was not recorded in the transcript.

Transcripts were produced using Richards' transcription conventions (2003, p173-4). The actual conventions used in the current study are detailed in *Figure 1 'Transcript Conventions'*.

Figure 1: Transcript Conventions

(2.0) Pause of about 2 seconds	Can you see a horse?(2.0)can you see a horse?
(...) Pause of about 1 second	said Bernard(...)not now Bernard
(..) Pause of about 0.5 seconds	Errr(.)baseball?(..)ah(.)baseball
(.) Micropause	Dragon?(.)oh it's a monster(.)monster
<i>Italics</i> Translation from Japanese to English	Kitsune sugita yo <i>We've gone past the fox bit now</i>
[] Overlap	mmm (.) [but he said] Meo::w [Meo:::w]
: Sound stretching	OK a:::nd
? Questioning intonation	wh-why >why do you think< (.)why?
! Exclamatory Intonation	Oh no!
(XXX) Unable to transcribe	chameleon (XXXXXXX)

(tasty) Unsure transcription	(oishii) sou de <i>It looks (tasty)</i>
(()) Other details	((chuckles)) yeah he's very angry
↑ Prominent rising intonation	No::(.)George↑(.)said George's mother
↓ Prominent falling intonation	are gre:::en(...)green↓
- Abrupt cut-off	said th-said Bernard
CAPS Louder than surrounding talk	the:::re's a MONSTER in the GARDEN
° ° Quieter than surrounding talk	What colour is it?(.)°what colour?°
> < Quicker than surrounding talk	What >what< colour is it

The identity of each speaker was recorded where possible, with each turn labelled with the identifying number of the relevant teacher or student. Where the speaker could not be identified, the speaker was recorded as 'SX'. The acronym 'Ss' was used where more than one student said the same thing simultaneously and they could not be identified individually. The turns were numbered in the order in which they were taken for easy reference during data analysis. Non-verbal information was also recorded where appropriate, such as, '((makes circle with finger around box))' (*Green Eggs and Ham*, Lesson 1-1).

Any translation from Japanese to English was done by the researcher, who has a Japanese Language Proficiency Test N3 Qualification. In basic terms, this means 'the ability to understand Japanese used in everyday situations to a certain degree' (JLPT 2016). As the researcher had taught in Japanese elementary schools for around six years at the time of the study, he was also

familiar with Japanese language that is often used in English lessons by HRTs and students. The original Japanese is also left unedited in any quotations from the transcripts, giving readers the chance to agree or disagree with the translation.

A reflective log was kept during the data collection period, recording the thoughts of the researcher pre-class, post-class and after watching the video for the first time. To ensure accuracy in note taking, the following procedure was adapted from Richards (2003):

1. Take notes as soon as possible after a lesson.
2. Take fieldnotes back at base (in the current study, this was initially done in the staff room, then once again at home on the same day after watching the video for the first time).
3. Leave as little time as possible between notes and fieldnotes.
4. Aim for richness of detail, recalling as much as possible.

The reflective log for *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2) is shown in Appendix 2. The log was used to maintain a cyclical pattern between each whole-class picture book session, applying things observed in previous lessons to future ones. It was also used as a continual reference point and as a basis for data analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

The current study followed the basic pattern of the analytical process laid out by Dörnyei (2007, 246):

1. Transcribing the data
2. Pre-coding and coding
3. Growing ideas - memos, vignettes, profiles and other forms of data display
4. Interpreting the data and drawing conclusions.

During the data collection phase, initial transcriptions were made. Then I commenced pre-coding by writing free-form ideas after reading and re-reading initial transcripts and cross-referencing with the reflective log.

Coding was conducted following the data collection process and after detailed transcripts had been produced. Other studies in the field (Lugossy 2012, Nishida and Yashima 2010) have commented on the use of L1 and L2 in their analysis of classroom interactions. With this in mind, each turn was initially broken down into the following categories:

1. L1 Turn - turn taken solely using Japanese
2. L2 Turn - turn taken solely using English
3. Mixed Turn - turn taken using a mixture of Japanese and English
4. Undecipherable - unable to pick out anything that was said in the turn
5. Non-verbal - a communicative gesture was made (eg. raising hand)

6. Verbal Noise - a communicative noise was made (eg. laughing)

Following this, to help answer research question 1, a code was given to all teacher turns that were relevant to the co-construction of meaning, using Walqui's (2006) six forms of scaffolding (modelling, bridging, contextualising, schema building, re-presenting text and developing metacognition) as an initial framework. A similar process was followed with learner comments relating to collective scaffolding to answer research question 2, this time using Tharp and Gallimore's (1988) six means of assistance (modelling, contingency management, feeding back, instructing, questioning and cognitive structuring). In both cases, additional codes were applied based on patterns and correlations that emerged when analysing the transcripts.

The 'growing ideas' phase was completed as a free-form stream of ideas. Holliday (2015) suggests that the cyclical process of determining themes, constructing arguments then going back to the data to make any necessary changes to codes and themes is the classic method for analysing qualitative data. The coding and growing ideas phases were undertaken several times until the researcher was satisfied with the codes attached to all relevant turns. In their analysis of interactions between students and teachers, Oliver and Mackey (2003) warn that category identification that emerges in processes such as coding should only be viewed as descriptive, as not all teachers behave in the same way. Whilst coding was important in the current study to establish themes and grow ideas, analysis of sections of the transcripts presented in the report

enabled the researcher to make arguments, suggest findings and draw conclusions from the data.

3.4 Pilot Study

Bell (2010) explains that piloting should tell the researcher if the instruments they have designed or chosen are fit for purpose. The pilot of the current study followed the process described in this methodology, up to the growing ideas phase of Dörnyei's (2007) analytical process. The book *Angelica Sprocket's Pockets* (Blake 2010) was read to the 2nd grade class a few weeks before the main data collection period was commenced. To be satisfied that the research instruments were appropriate, the following processes were tested:

- recording equipment
- the reflective log
- the transcription process
- pre-coding and initial coding
- growing ideas
- some analysis of transcript extracts

Following the pilot study, a brief interpretation of the data was undertaken to assess if the research questions could be answered with the devised methodology. It was concluded in the reflective log that the methodology seemed suitable to answer the research questions. The process was barely changed between the pilot study and the final project. The main changes were that more

detail was added to the transcripts, by incorporating more transcription conventions and spending more time on the process. The other main difference was the style of coding. In the pilot study highlighter pens were used to code turns, which didn't allow enough flexibility for altering codes and keeping a trail of previous codes. In the final project, coloured post-it notes were used, with a different colour given to each code. The codes could be layered on top of each other if they were changed to leave a paper trail.

4 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Teacher and Learner Turns

In total, 44 pages of data were transcribed to represent the 42 minutes and 42 seconds of video and audio data collected over six whole class storytelling sessions. The total amount of turns recorded was 976, with 350 turns taken by the researcher, who played the role of the ALT, 109 by the two native Japanese speaking HRTs and 517 taken by students. It is interesting that more turns were taken cumulatively by students than the ALT, who you might expect to have the dominant voice during whole class picture book reading. These statistics do not take into account turn length, and admittedly the ALT often took longer turns than the students or HRTs, particularly when reading certain sections of the stories. However, the data does show that learners make lots of comments during whole class picture book reading, suggesting that communication opportunities are encouraged by storytelling.

Figure 2: Types of Turn

	L1 Turn	L2 Turn	Mixed Turn	Undecipherable	Non-Verbal	Verbal Noise	TOTALS
ALT	1	343	2	0	3	1	350
HRTs	27	54	5	0	3	20	109
Students	248	168	13	31	5	52	517

A supplementary coding process was undertaken using the codes described in Figure 2 to gain an understanding of whether learner and teacher turns were taken in L1 Japanese, L2 English or a mixture of the two and whether turns were

verbal or non-verbal. As you might expect, the turns taken by the native English speaking ALT were overwhelmingly balanced towards L2 turns, with a total of 98% of turns taken in English. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that the native Japanese speaking HRTs took more turns in L2 (50%) than in L1 (25%). The HRTs may have been consciously trying to increase the amount of L2 input that learners receive or they may have been aiming to act as a role model and encourage target language use. Interestingly, a considerably high proportion of HRT turns, 18%, were 'Verbal Noises', which were mainly laughter or verbal sounds like 'mmm' indicating affirmation or encouragement.

More learner comments were taken in L1 (50%) than L2, although the proportion of L2 turns (33%) is higher than you might expect. Often learners' L2 comments were repetitions of turns taken by a teacher or other learners. There were also numerous occasions where learners were answering questions from the ALT that encouraged labeling such as '*What can you see?*' or '*What's this?*'. It could be argued that the substantial amount of L2 turns taken by learners indicates a willingness and desire to use English. This desire may have been encouraged by the high proportion of L2 turns taken by the HRTs. The number of L2 turns taken by learners may also have been influenced by the linguistic accessibility of each book. During the reading of *Monkey and Me* (Lesson 1-3), for example, 76% of learner turns were taken in L2, which could relate to observations in the reflective log that this book was purposefully chosen for its simplicity and generated the most excitement and enjoyment of all the books used in the study. Furthermore, most of the learner L2 turns were one word guesses at animals

that were due to appear in the story based on a gesture made by the main character and her soft toy monkey.

In certain instances, the use of L2 by learners may have been encouraged by particular types of scaffolding used by the teachers. The teacher scaffolding that was observed in the current study is contemplated in the following section.

4.2 Teacher-Student Scaffolding

During the data analysis phase, a coding process was undertaken using Walqui's (2006) six main types of scaffolding as an initial framework, with constant reference made to Walqui's (2006) definitions to ensure accuracy of coding. No instances of 'developing metacognition' were observed, which you might expect due to the learners age and level. There were also no instances of 'schema building', which may have been due to the definition provided by Walqui (2006), which centres around learners previewing texts and paying attention to elements such as illustrations, captions, heads and subheads before reading, all of which have little reference to oral storytelling, with the exception of illustrations. Instead 'bridging' was often used, in reaction to entries in the reflective log, to try to help students incorporate any existing knowledge that may have helped children understand the meaning of picture books. Learners were asked what they could see on the front cover of books with the aim of activating previously learned English vocabulary and introducing themes. Before the reading of *Green Eggs and Ham* (Lesson 1-1) pictures of normal eggs and ham were shown and the children were asked what colour the eggs and ham were in the pictures (pink

and yellow) and in the book (green). They were then asked if they like green eggs and ham, to introduce a key theme, that green eggs and ham are not delicious, which may have been missed by some learners without explicitly drawing attention to it by bridging.

On reflection, it may have also been beneficial to purposefully implement schema building by showing students all of the pictures in the books pre-story. Student responses to bridging and schema building could have been compared, suggesting if and when each scaffolding technique could be used with 6-8 year old Japanese elementary school learners.

Figure 3 shows the cumulative amount of each of the four remaining types of scaffolding that were used as the initial framework.

Figure 3: Types of Teacher-Student Scaffolding

	Modelling	Bridging	Contextualisation	Re-presenting text
ALT	6	38	49	15
HRTs	6	0	4	11
Total	12	38	53	26

4.2.1 Modelling

Modelling was the least frequent type of scaffolding observed and it was only used by either the ALT or a HRT to show how students might respond to a question by a teacher. The following extract is taken from *Green Eggs and Ham*

(Lesson 1-1, Turns 32-40):

① **ALT:** Do you like green eggs and ham?(.)yummy?

② **1-SX:** Sa

Well....

③ **1-S5:** Green eggs?

④ **ALT:** Yummy?(.)Green eggs

⑤ **1-S6:** Sugoi mazui yo na

That's really disgusting, isn't it?

⑥ **1-S7:** (Green and) hamu da

(It's green ham)

⑦ **ALT:** Yes I do(.)no I don't?

⑧ **1-S8:** No I don'

⑨ **1-S5:** No I don'

The ALT asked students if they liked green eggs and ham (line 1) to try to encourage a personal reaction to the story and also to see if the learners had interpreted an important concept in understanding the humour of the story, that green eggs and ham are not very appetising. There was possible uptake from the learners immediately following the initial question (lines 2-3), but the ALT felt it was necessary to repeat the phrases 'yummy?' and 'green eggs', to help learners answer the question. This prompted Student '1-S6' to comment in Japanese, displaying understanding of the concept that the ALT was hoping had been communicated to the learners, '*that's really disgusting, isn't it*' (line 5). The

ALT was also looking for the familiar answer of ‘Yes I do / No I don’t’ to the question, ‘Do you like...?’. The two possible answers were modelled in line 7, which led to L2 responses of ‘No I don’t’. Whilst learner L1 comments can be invaluable in aiding comprehension checks by a teacher and contributing to the co-construction of meaning for the whole class, the encouragement of L2 comments may also be beneficial, as learners can use some of the English they know in the meaningful context provided by whole-class storytelling.

4.2.2 Bridging

Bridging was frequently used throughout the study by the ALT, in total 38 ALT turns were coded as bridging. This is probably because there was constant reference in the reflective log to consciously incorporate it during lesson planning. Bridging seemed to draw learners into stories and create interest as, in total 26 bridging turns that were taken pre-story stimulated 100 learner comments. This may have served as a way in to the story for learners, as bridging questions introduced some key vocabulary and concepts with the aim of aiding comprehension.

The extract below is taken from the reading of *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2, Turns 1-21). The ALT showed the book cover and asked some bridging questions as a way into the story:

- ① **ALT:** >OK<(.)Errrr(.).so(.).fi::rst(.)>question<(.)what can you se:::e?(.)what can you see?>in this picture<what can you see?

- ② **2-S4:** Erm(.)obaachan
Erm, an old lady
- ③ **ALT:** (XXXX)so this(.)in English(.)old lady
- ④ **2-Ss and HRT2:** Old lady
- ⑤ **ALT:** Old lady
- ⑥ **HRT2:** Hmmmm ((showing interest))
- ⑦ **ALT:** What's she-what's she doing(.)wha-what are you doing?>what are you doing?<
- ⑧ **2-S2:** (XXXXXX) obaachan
(XXXXXX) old lady
- ⑨ **2-S8:** eto, g-eto ((maybe the g- was the start of the word 'grandma'))
Erm, g-, erm
- ⑩ **2-S10:** Grandma
- 11 **2-S4:** [pig] ((there are also pictures of animals on the cover, including a pig))
- 12 **2-SX:** Grandma
- 13 **ALT:** Oh(.)grandma?
- 14 **2-S4:** (XXXXXXXX)
- 15 **2-S8:** ((laughs))
- 16 **ALT:** What's she doing>what's she doing?<
- 17 **2-SX:** Grandma
- 18 **2-SX:** Grandma

Following comments during lesson planning in the reflective log (Appendix 2), the ALT initially asked what the students could see, with the aim of not only

encouraging learners to draw meaning from pictures, but also to elicit some key vocabulary related to the story, specifically the terms 'old lady' and 'swallowed', which feature in the title of the book. Whilst it was soon clear to learners that the 'old lady' was prominent, the students did not understand the question '*What's she doing?*' (line 7). The ALT tried to scaffold the language to '*what are you doing?*', as this was a phrase that the students had recently learned. However, a connection between 'what are you doing?' and 'what is she doing?' was not made, with several students offering the answer of 'grandma', probably presuming that the ALT was still questioning about who the main character of the book was.

The breakdown in communication around the question of what the old lady was doing, led to contextualisation by the ALT, who mimed what swallowing meant before reading the story and continued miming, along with HRT2, throughout the story. It could be argued that in this instance, bridging allowed the teachers access to the learners' ZPD, ascertaining that extra guidance was needed to scaffold the meaning of vocabulary that was important to the story.

4.2.3 Contextualisation

As *Figure 3* shows, contextualisation was the most frequently observed type of scaffolding, particularly by the ALT, with 49 instances recorded. Contextualisation was realised using gestures, pointing at illustrations and giving verbal explanations or hints. The following extract is taken from *Monkey and Me* (Lesson 1-3, turn 13):

ALT: So(.)monkey and me(.)monkey and me(.)monkey and me(.)we went to see:::e(2.0)((making 'see' gesture, looking around))we went to see so:::me(.)penguins!

Monkey and Me is a very rhythmical and easy to follow book, following the same pattern each time, with the only details that change being animal names. It was predicted by the ALT that the phrase 'we went to see' may not be understood by the students, so it was contextualised with a gesture. Pointing at illustrations can also help learners understand language they are unfamiliar with, particularly vocabulary, as we see here in *Green Eggs and Ham* (Lesson 1-1, Turns 86-90):

① **ALT:** Would you eat them with a fox(.)>°with a fox°< ((points to the fox))

② **1-S1:** Fox?

③ **1-SX:** Kitsune

Fox

④ **1-S1:** Kitsune

Fox

⑤ **ALT:** Yeah(.)it's a(.)fox

The above extract shows clearly that pointing seems to help learners understand unfamiliar vocabulary. Whilst the unidentified learner who spoke in line 3 may have known the English word, 'fox', it seems likely that pointing to the picture drew attention to it, encouraging learners to translate it to their L1.

Contextualisation was also done verbally, often drawing attention to English that learners had come across in previous lessons. For example in *Green Eggs and Ham* (Lesson 1-1, Turn 49):

① **ALT:** OK(.)so let's start(.)| a::m Sa:::m(.)>my name is Sam<

The character Sam gives his name in the book with the phrase '*I am Sam*', whereas the ALT also adds the phrase 'my name is Sam', as it may have been more familiar to learners. Another technique used, was embedding unfamiliar vocabulary in a context that may be understandable to learners, in this example, 'autumn' is repeated sequentially in the context of the seasons of the year:

① **ALT:** ((at end of a long turn)) bu:::t i:::n autumn

② **2-SX:** Autumn?

③ **ALT:** °spring, summer, autumn°

(*A Color of His Own*, Lesson 2-1, Turns 88-90)

Framing language in a context that learners have come across previously may also help them construct meaning. The example below shows the ALT pointing to a picture on the whiteboard that was drawn to help the children sing a song about food earlier in the same lesson:

① **ALT:** Where's Bernard(.)>do you think<(.)where's Bernard?((seemingly not

hearing previous learner comment))

- ② **1-S5:** Ah, eat
- ③ **ALT:** Ah, eat eat(.)he's in the monster's... ((pointing at the picture of a tummy on a board from a song about eating food the children had sung earlier in the lesson))
- ④ **1-S5:** Tummy
- ⑤ **ALT:** Tummy(.)yeah monster's tummy

(*Not Now, Bernard*, Lesson 1-2, Turns 48-52)

Here Student '1-S5' was using language that he knew to communicate that the monster had eaten Bernard 'Ah, eat' (line 2). On reflection, this is a legitimate answer to the question 'where's Bernard?' in the interlanguage of the learner. It is also an example of a willingness to try to use L2 knowledge to contribute to the dialogue. On this occasion, the ALT was looking for a specific answer 'he's in the monster's tummy', which Student '1-S5' was also able to contribute to, co-providing the answer with scaffolded help.

4.2.4 Re-presenting text

In the current study, no activities were undertaken to re-present any of the stories in a different genre by either learners or teachers, as the focus was on initial whole-class storytelling, rather than activities related to the story. However, as Walqui (2006) explains, re-presenting text begins with asking students what is happening and what will happen next. Learners were often asked to predict what would happen next in a story by the ALT, re-presenting the text with their own

interpretation of what would happen. The following extract is taken from *Green Eggs and Ham* (Lesson 1-1, Turns 155-165). Throughout the story, the main character constantly rejects 'Sam's' requests to eat a plate of green eggs and ham:

- ① **ALT:** Question What(.)what's next(.)>do you think<(.)What's next?
((gesturing to where the next page would be))
- ② **1-S8:** Ah tsugi?
Ah, next?
- ③ **ALT:** Next
- ④ **1-S5:** Taberu to omou
I think he'll eat them
- ⑤ **ALT:** Eat eat
- ⑥ **HRT1:** Eat
- ⑦ **ALT:** Who thinks he-he'll eat?
- ⑧ **6 Ss:** ((raise hands))
- ⑨ **HRT:** ((raise hands))
- ⑩ **ALT:** Or who thinks he'll not not eat?(.)not eat
- 11 **A different 6 Ss:** ((raise hands))

The students quickly understood what the ALT was asking, possibly because of the contextualisation by gesture in line 1. On this occasion, only Student '1-S5' gave a verbal response to the question, prompting the ALT to ask for students to raise their hands if they thought the character would eat or not. Following this, 12

out of 22 students participated in predicting what would happen next. Another option could have been to wait longer for more students to respond. Hosoda (2014), in her study in Japanese elementary school English classes, suggests a wait time of around five seconds is appropriate when waiting for answers to questions. In the reality of her study, teachers generally waited less than a second. In the current study, this point was constantly referred to in the reflective log, but was not fully put into practice, suggesting that applying theories and ideas from research in a cognitively demanding live teaching situation can be challenging.

Other techniques were also attempted to encourage participation from a wider variety of learners. For example, during the reading of *Not Now, Bernard* (Lesson 1-2), the ALT attempted to ask students to predict what would happen next in pairs. Most of the students did not understand the request and therefore not many learners participated. This could have been due to the learners' age and their lack of familiarity with pair work in English lessons. It could have also been due to a lack of communication with the HRT before the lesson, this was commented on in the reflective log and consequently all remaining storytelling sessions in the study (Lessons 2-2, 2-3 and 1-3) were undertaken following consultation with the HRTs.

There were also 11 instances recorded of re-presenting text by the HRTs, these were mainly taken from short reflection periods after each story, where the HRTs often asked learners what they thought about the story using questions

(paraphrased from the transcripts) such as ‘*What happened at the end?*’, ‘*What did you think?*’, ‘*Would anyone like to make a comment about the book?*’. Doing this enabled learners to give an emotional response to the story, talk about parts of stories that they did or did not understand and apply what happened in stories to their own lives. Having a short reflection period after each story was not initially planned. In the first storytelling session, HRT2 spontaneously asked learners if they had any comments about the story. It was noted in the reflective log that asking for comments could be beneficial, so a brief reflection period was included after each following story.

4.2.5 Other codes

In line with the qualitative nature of the study, several other codes emerged during the coding process. Some were discarded, due to a lack of relevance to the co-construction of meaning and scaffolding, others were merged together upon recoding. Figure 4 shows the instances of the remaining codes, ‘positive reinforcement’, ‘showing interest’ and ‘L2 response to L1’.

Figure 4: Other Codes

	Positive Reinforcement	Showing Interest	L2 Response to L1
ALT	40	10	19
HRTs	13	45	0
Total	53	55	19

L2 response to L1

'L2 response to L1' was incorporated largely because of Lugossy's (2012) assertion that learners' L1 comments open up opportunities to talk about topics in L2 that are nominated by learners. Surprisingly, in the current study there were no instances of 'L2 response to L1' leading to any further interaction on learners' 'nominated topics'. This may have been due to a lack of technique in stimulating further conversation by the ALT, it may have been due to the ability or age of the learners or even the nature of whole-class storytelling, where the classroom interaction narrative is unlikely to stray too far from the plot of the text, even when learner comments are related to different topics.

Showing Interest

The most prominent code identified for HRT turns was 'showing interest'. This code bears resemblance to Mitra's (2014, p551) 'grandmother's method', where children's levels of learning increase if there is an adult admiring, praising and acting fascinated. 'Showing interest' often took the form of laughter, sounds of agreement such as '*mmm*' or repetition of learners' or the ALT's utterances in acknowledgment. It is difficult to make a case for an increase in learning but the 'showing interest' turns often seemed to encourage comments from learners and interaction with the story, as indicated in the extract below from *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2, Turns 110-126):

- ① **ALT:** I know an old lady who swallowed ((mimes swallowing)) swallowed a cat

- ② **2-S8:** Eh? ((sounds shocked))
- ③ **2-S12:** Eh? ((sounds shocked))
- ④ **HRT2:** Ha ha ha
- ⑤ **ALT:** Swallowed a cat(..)cat ((pointing at picture of cat in a soup/stew pan))
- ⑥ **2-S9:** Eh, Nikonda no?
Eh, she boiled it?
- ⑦ **2-S4:** Neko taberu?
She's going to eat the cat?
- ⑧ **HRT2:** Ha ha ha
- ⑨ **ALT:** Mmm(.)Cat soup
- ⑩ **HRT2:** Cat soup(.)Eurgh! ((makes mock disgusted gesture))
- 11 **2-SX:** Blergh!
- 12 **2-SX:** Eurgh!
- 13 **2-S2:** Neko tabeta?
Did she eat the cat
- 14 **ALT:** Mmm(.)

The involvement of the HRT by laughing and reacting to the 'cat soup' comment (Line 10) was not only enjoyable for the students, it also seemed to contribute to creating an atmosphere, where learners were comfortable reacting and questioning what they thought was happening in the story. The learner comments here not only allowed the teachers to check the level of understanding of the learners, they were also able to confirm that their interpretations of the plot of the story were relevant. In this case, the ALT

confirmed comments were relevant with the 'positive reinforcement' phrase 'Mmm' (lines 9 and 14) and answered the question from Student '2-S9', 'She's going to eat the cat?' (line 6) with the phrase 'Cat soup' (line 9).

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement refers to instances where a teacher indicated that a learner comment was relevant to the story or an appropriate response to a question. The following example is taken from *Not Now, Bernard* (Lesson 1-2, Turns 57-62):

- ① **ALT:** The:::n the monster went indoors(.)doo doo doo doo(.)doo doo doo(.)indoors
- ② **1-S5:** In the house?
- ③ **ALT:** In the house(.)ye::s(.)in the house
- ④ **1-S5:** Oh my god!
- ⑤ **ALT:** Oh my god(.)yeah
- ⑥ **1-S3:** OH MY GOD! ((putting arms on head in 'oh my god' pose))

Student '1-S5' queries where the monster in the story is going with the question 'in the house?', to which the ALT responds with positive reinforcement by repeating the phrase and saying 'ye::s'. This leads to the reaction of 'oh my god' by the same student and subsequently one more learner. The interesting thing here is that the exchange took place entirely in L2, something which was quite rare in the current study. The exchange may have been lengthened as a

consequence of the positive reinforcement turns of the ALT, allowing learners to meaningfully communicate in the target language and contribute to the co-construction of meaning, albeit for a short amount of time.

4.3 Collective Scaffolding

The codes of modelling, contingency management, feeding back, instructing, questioning and cognitive structuring (Tharp and Gallimore 1988, Gnadinger 2008) were used as an initial coding framework when looking for evidence of collective scaffolding in whole class storytelling. In the current study, only six turns were interpreted as collective scaffolding, and only one instance was taken from the initial framework. This took the form of ‘feeding back’, where one student asked a question during *A Color of His Own* (Lesson 2-1, Turns 32-33):

① **2-SX:** Iro ga tabereru?

They can eat colours?

② **2-S3:** Chigau yo iro wo kaereru de sho(.)iro wo kaererun de

No, they can change colour can't they? They change colour

In this instance, Student ‘2-S3’ fed back that the defining characteristic about the chameleon featured in the story, was not that he can eat colours, but that chameleons can change colour. This probably contributed to the construction of meaning by the unidentified student here, who may have assumed the character of the chameleon in the book was a fantasy character who could eat colours.

Besides this example, there is not much evidence to suggest that collective scaffolding occurred during whole-class picture book reading with this group of 6-8 year old Japanese elementary school learners. The remaining five instances of collective scaffolding were given codes that emerged during data analysis. Four turns were deemed to have the function of 'labelling pictures', where students were talking about what they could see in the books' illustrations to each other. One instance of 'positive reinforcement' was recorded, using the same definition described in the teacher-student scaffolding section of this chapter, where one student asked if the old lady had died at the end of *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2) and another student confirmed that she had.

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The current study investigated different ways that teachers and learners provided scaffolding support when co-constructing meaning during whole-class picture book reading in classes of 6-8 year old Japanese elementary school students. Previous studies have suggested that listening to learners' spontaneous comments during picture book reading allows teachers access to the learners' ZPD, which in turn enables teachers to support learners in creating meaning by responding to comments (Lugossy 2012). It has also been proposed that the linguistic participation that is abundant during storytelling increases learners' responsibility, encouraging them to ask questions and make comments that are personal to them (Ohashi 2013), making their own meaning individually and collectively as a class. The current study aims to add to the current body of research by breaking down the types of scaffolding support provided into categories, hopefully gaining insight into the roles played by an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and Home Room Teacher (HRT) during whole class picture book reading.

5.1 Response to Research Questions

1. How does a teacher co-construct meaning with learners by responding to spontaneous comments during whole class picture book reading?

The most common form of teacher-student scaffolding was contextualisation, in the form of verbal explanations, gestures and pointing at pictures, a finding which seems fairly consistent with the literature. Collins (2005) concluded that

L2 explanation of new vocabulary encountered in stories was helpful even if children had little L2 ability, this was also found by Elley (1989) when investigating vocabulary gains. Bland (2015) suggests that teachers support meaning during storytelling using gestures, expressive prosodic features and verbal noises such as gasps, in what she terms 'creative teacher talk' (p190). A similar sentiment is held by Uchiyama (2011), who found that if a storyteller used props and was animated, learners were drawn into the world of the story.

Illustrations are seen as one of the key elements that contextualise picture books (Cameron 2001, Hughes 2010, Linse 2007, Bland 2015) and pointing at pictures can help learners understand vocabulary (Elley 1989, Collins 2005). Contextualisation was provided in the current study when learners explicitly indicated that they did not understand something and also at times when it was predetermined by the ALT that support may be needed. In addition, there were occasions when responses to bridging questions posed by the ALT indicated that contextualisation may be needed. The best example of this was the ALT and HRT2 providing contextualisation using gestures throughout *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2), as discussed in the results section.

Roche (2014) suggests that open questions such as '*what will happen next?*' or '*what do like about the book?*' can be more useful than closed questions in inspiring children to think about the way in which they use language. In the current study, the most frequently used open question was '*what will happen next?*', which provided some interesting responses. However, in comparison,

more closed questions with pre-determined answers were asked by the ALT, particularly in bridging turns, which constituted the second highest percentage of questions. Bridging also seemed to have the purpose of creating interest in the story, activating some vocabulary and leading into concepts that would be introduced in a story. It may be that closed questions have more of a function in L2 younger English classrooms, as they are easier to comprehend and respond to when students have limited L2 ability. It could be that this is a pre-determined belief of the researcher, which has not been fully tested in the current study.

So far, in the answer to research question one, I have mainly focused on scaffolding provided by the ALT rather than the HRTs. One interesting finding in the current study, was the most frequent type of response to learners' spontaneous comments by the HRTs, 'showing interest', a code that emerged during data analysis. Whilst no previous studies have identified 'showing interest' as a type of scaffolding, HRT involvement in English activities has been linked to learner motivation. For example, Nishida and Yashima (2010) found that an increasingly prominent role by the HRT during practice for an English musical play was motivating for students. In an English lesson where an ALT is present, they are likely to play the main role in whole class picture book reading, which begs the question, '*what role should the HRT play?*'. It may be that a 'showing interest' role for the HRT in this type of activity could encourage linguistic participation from learners, which may help a class co-construct meaning during whole-class picture book reading. If this is the case, then I would like to suggest that 'showing interest' in learner comments could be considered a form of

teacher-student scaffolding.

2. Does collective scaffolding occur between learners when co-constructing meaning during whole class picture book reading and if so how does it occur?

On the evidence of the current study, collective scaffolding rarely occurs during whole class picture book reading with 6-8 year old EFL learners within the context of this study. This could be because most of the literature on collective scaffolding focuses on group work (Donato 1994, Gnadinger 2008), raising the question of whether collective scaffolding is relevant to whole class activities. During data analysis in the present study, it was felt that whilst there were lots of spontaneous comments from learners, they were mainly directed towards teachers or the whole class. This is something that you might expect in a medium where the goal is for everyone to enjoy a story together as a class. On reflection, looking for instances of collective scaffolding using a framework of coding categories initially designed to help teachers support learners (Tharp and Gallimore 1988) may not have been appropriate.

In Ohashi's (2013) study, the focus was on linguistic participation, including peer support, with one of the featured activities being whole class storytelling. The storytelling activity showed evidence of collaborative participation between teachers and learners, contributing to the construction of meaning and encouraging playfulness with the target language. The following extract displays

learners playfully interacting with pictures in their L1 in the current study (*Bark, George, Lesson 2-3, Turns 66-73*):

① **ALT:** So::: George's mother took George to the VET ((picture is of vet putting on a very long latex glove getting ready to examine George))

② **S8:** Ha kao nagai ne, te mo nagai!

He's got a long face, hasn't he? Long arms too!

③ **ALT:** A vet i::s like an animal-animal doctor

④ **S3:** Kao Naga!

His face is long!

⑤ **ALT:** Animal doctor

⑥ **S3:** Te mo naga!

He's got long arms too!

⑦ **ALT:** Err(.)'ll soon get to the bottom of this said the vet

⑧ **S3:** Ashi mo naga

And long legs

In the above extract, the ALT was unaware of the learners' comments, probably because of the cognitive attention being given to providing pre-planned verbal contextualisation, describing the vet as an animal doctor in line 2. Due to the interaction occurring between only a few students, as opposed to the whole class, the extract was regarded as collective scaffolding with the purpose of 'labelling pictures', as the learners were talking about what they could see in the book. It seems like this could have been a chance to talk about a topic in English,

originally nominated by learners in their L1 (Lugossy 2012), the funny picture of the vet in the book. Ohashi (2013) suggests that 'transformational linguistic participation', how students participation develops over time, can deepen our insight into second language learning. It could be that regular L2 interaction from the teacher following L1 comments could positively aid transformational linguistic participation. Whilst 19 instances of L2 responses to L1 comments were recorded in the current study, this figure seems quite low and there could have been more attention paid to some learner comments. That said, it was noted on several occasions in the reflective log that learner comments were unheard. It may be inevitable that some comments will go unnoticed due to the cognitive demands placed on the storyteller, who must also read the story in an engaging way.

5.2 Limitations of the current study

First and foremost, the small sample size and narrow age spectrum of the learners prohibits any findings of the current study being applied to a wide range of contexts. It is hoped that ideas presented here could be considered for trial by other practitioners in their own classrooms with the same action research spirit of the current study.

If I were to conduct the research again, several changes would be made to the methodology. Firstly, rather than focussing solely on 6-8 year old learners, it could have been interesting to compare the classroom interactions recorded in the current study with older, 10-12 year old, learners. Older elementary school

learners have not only been learning English for a longer period of time, but are also at a different stage of cognitive development, so may have reacted differently during whole class picture book reading. It would have also been preferential to collect data over a longer period of time, allowing for more reflection time during the data collection period.

The frameworks used for coding during the analysis of teacher-student scaffolding (taken from Walqui 2006) and collective scaffolding (taken from Tharp and Gallimore 1988) could be considered a weakness, as they were not specific to storytelling, or even second language learning in the case of collective scaffolding. That said, the frameworks were used as a base, allowing other codes to develop naturally and enrich the fabric of data analysis. Ideally, a framework would have been taken from an EFL young learner context as close to the current study as possible. As such a study was not identified, frameworks were adapted from further afield.

Whilst coding was undertaken with constant reference to the key texts (Walqui 2006, Tharp and Gallimore 1988), it was all conducted by the research practitioner, which could lead to suggestions of bias. Dörnyei (2007) suggests that peer checking can add to the data's validity. In Gnadinger's (2008) study, she trained two research students to code transcripts with her, which allowed for cross referencing, ensuring accuracy. Recruiting assistants to help with data analysis was probably not practical for time or budget reasons and may not be appropriate for a masters dissertation. However, if I were to follow a similar

methodology again, cross referencing during coding seems essential.

6 CONCLUSION

It was found that teachers responded to learners' spontaneous comments during whole-class picture book reading in a variety of ways, many of which could be identified as scaffolding. In particular I, the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), mainly provided support using two types of scaffolding: bridging and contextualisation. Bridging was implemented following comments in the reflective log throughout the current study. This was a move that also saw learner reactions to bridging turns identify the need for contextualisation support on several occasions. An example of this was discussed in chapter 4 where learners were unsure what the old lady was doing in *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2), leading to contextualisation of 'swallowing' by miming. In addition to using gestures, contextualisation was provided by pointing at pictures and enriching the text of the picture books with further L2 input. This was mainly done using language that learners were familiar with.

The main type of support provided by the Home Room Teachers (HRTs) was 'showing interest'. Whilst this may not be considered scaffolding in the current literature, I would like to suggest that teachers showing interest to pupils by interacting with comments made by learners or the ALT with laughter, repetition or other sounds:

1. Encourages linguistic participation
2. Validates learners' contribution to the co-construction of meaning
3. Provides learners with a positive role model for target L2 interaction.

Moon (2000) agrees that teachers showing interest to what learners say by smiling, nodding, listening patiently and accepting learner comments with a positive attitude encourages them to share their thoughts. In Walqui's (2006) comparison of the traditional classroom dialogue pattern Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) and scaffolded talk, she points out two features of the teacher's role in the latter:

1. Allowing learners to speak for themselves
2. Helping learners to present a clear argument with precision

'Showing interest' certainly seems to encourage learners to speak for themselves. Whilst it seems unlikely that it helps learners with their precision, due to a lack of corrective feedback, and in this case possibly the age of learners, 'showing interest' probably has a place when used in conjunction with other forms of scaffolding. In the team teaching environment of the current study, scaffolding could even be shared between both teachers, with each teacher fulfilling pre-agreed roles within the scaffolding spectrum. Whilst specific scaffolding roles were not discussed in the current study, there were instances of collaboration in scaffolding. For example in *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2), a key theme in the book is the old lady swallowing various animals to catch the previous animal she has swallowed. I provided contextualisation with HRT2 following discussion during lesson planning (Lesson 2-2, Turns 67-72):

- 19 **ALT:** For example(.)((to HRT2)) (XXXX) run
- 20 **HRT2:** Hmmm ((in agreement))
- 21 **ALT:** ((chases after and catches HRT2)) I catch
- 22 **HRT2:** ((laughs))
- 23 **ALT:** Catch(..)Mr HRT2(..)OK(.)o::r ((moving towards where students are sitting))(...)!::: catch(.)catch S8↑
- 24 **S8:** Catch catch catch catch catch catch ((catching ALT back))
 ((some excitement in the room, students 'catching' each other))

The above example created excitement and hopefully helped learners understand the meaning of 'catch' in the story. Contextualisation was executed following discussion about the role of both teachers, who jointly provided the same type of scaffolding. Whilst teachers intentionally providing different types of scaffolding was not explored in the current study, this is an avenue that could be investigated further in future research studies.

In the current study, learner participation was quite high, with learner turns, including L1 and L2, cumulatively outnumbering those of the ALT and 32 out of 38 students making spontaneous comments. This suggests, in line with other research in the field (Lugossy 2012, Ohashi 2013), that whole-class picture book reading has sociolinguistic benefits. Participation from learners may give an indication to teachers about their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978). It can also contribute to the co-construction of whole class meaning, as

ideas are shared between class members, creating their own interpretation of the story. In the current study there were instances of learners commenting on what they thought about the characters' behaviour, for example in *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* (Lesson 2-2) comments such as '*Hidosugiru*' (*That's too cruel*), '*Nan de mo kamu*' (*She'll chew on anything*) and '*Tabesugiru*' (*She's eating too much*) were made about the main character eating lots of different animals. There were also occasions where students related what they heard or saw in books to their own lives, for example in *Not Now, Bernard* (Lesson 1-2, Turns 97-99), one student noticed that a baseball game was on the TV in one of the pictures in the book:

⑥ **1-S12:** Yakyuu (XXXX)

Baseball (XXXX)

⑦ **1-S1:** Yakyuu dekiru no?

You can play baseball?

⑧ **1-S12:** Mmmm ((in affirmation))

Baseball being on the TV was not related to the plot of the story, but was the point of interest for Student '1-S12', a baseball player. This short exchange, was stimulated by the story and may have been just as meaningful to these two learners, or even more so, than the story itself.

6.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Several research gaps were identified during the analysis of results in the

current study. Schema building may have helped learners construct meaning if it had been deliberately attempted by the ALT. A comparison between learners' responses to bridging and schema building could provide insight into how to prepare young learners for whole class picture book reading, pre-story.

Much of the literature in the field of scaffolding (Walqui 2006, Gibbons 2002, Hammond and Gibbons 2005) and storytelling (Roche 2014) suggests that open questions should be used by teachers to encourage learner participation, future independence and links to personal experiences of the individuals in the classroom. The current study suggested that closed questions may also be suitable for Japanese elementary school English learners. Cameron (2001) also proposes that closed questions have a purpose for young learners, as they offer more support. A study purposefully using open questions or closed questions in different picture book reading sessions could suggest which situations are better suited to the two types of question with learners of this age and L2 ability.

It seems clear that any further research in this field should consider the roles of both the Home Room Teacher and the Assistant Language Teacher. Involving both teachers at the design, implementation and analysis phases of research could provide results that are more beneficial to all parties. I participated in the current study as the ALT and consultation about the project with the HRTs was kept to a minimum, largely because HRTs in Japanese elementary schools are very busy and adding to their workload may have had a negative impact on them. That said, it was decided part way through the study that short meetings should

be held before picture book reading sessions to discuss areas where learners may need extra support and generally prepare the HRTs for what story was coming. For HRTs, reacting blindly to a text in their L2 may make providing support more difficult.

6.2 Reflection on the Project

I would like to finish the report by reflecting on how completing the process has affected my own learning and teaching, my students' learning and issues that have arisen throughout. Before beginning this project, I thought that I had a basic understanding of the concept of 'scaffolding', although I had never actively tried to apply the theory that I had read about in a classroom situation. Breaking down scaffolding into different types and reflecting on the impact that each type of scaffolding has in the slow motion environment that the process of transcription affords, increased my meta-awareness of scaffolding as a concept and showed me how it materialises in action in a real classroom.

In the classroom, completing the project has made me pay more attention to learner comments during picture book reading, and also during other parts of English lessons, even if they are slightly off topic. I noticed instances where learner comments were not responded to. On occasions teacher comments could have created learning opportunities, such as the example discussed in chapter 5 where learners were commenting on pictures of the vet in *Bark, George* (Lesson 2-3). Along similar lines, Roberts (2012) poses an interesting metaphor, asking what a teacher should do if an elephant walks past the

classroom window. The two choices are to either chase the elephant or continue with what is prescribed in the lesson plan. Having completed the current study, I will definitely be chasing more elephants as they appear in the form of spontaneous learner comments. I hope that my ability to do this has been improved by an increased awareness of the way in which I respond to learner comments, which I think has helped me to evaluate ways in which I should support my students in different situations.

The question of how the current study has benefited my students is one that is difficult to back up with empirical evidence. The classes who took part continue to look forward to and enjoy whole class picture book reading, but whether this can be credited to the current study or not is unclear. Hopefully the sociolinguistic benefits suggested by the results of the current study, will contribute to an improvement in learners' English ability. However this is a claim that cannot be backed up by any evidence that has been collected here.

Throughout the study various issues have arisen, including technical difficulties with video recordings during the data collection phase and completing the often painstaking process of transcription and coding as a novice researcher. Hopefully overcoming such issues has improved my abilities as a researcher, and allowed me to gain new skills that I can use in the future should I decide to conduct any more research in the field of TESOL.

Word Count = 16'192

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Chris Cooper has been working as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Japan since 2010. The majority of his time has been spent working in elementary schools. He graduated from Sheffield Hallam University with an MA in TESOL in 2016. He currently works in the 'Special English Zone' of Soja City as a direct hire ALT.

APPENDIX 1 - ETHICAL CONSENT LETTERS AND SIGNED FORMS

School Principal Consent

Dear [REDACTED]

As you know I am currently studying for a Master's Degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). As part of this course I am doing some research on storytelling. I would like to find out if responding to students comments during storytelling and the comments they make to each other help them construct meaning.

To do so I would like to record some of my lessons on video and make transcripts of interactions to analyse what is said during lessons that include storytelling. As I teach with home room teachers, I would also like to observe their interactions with students, but I will do this in a positive way, hopefully I can learn from how they help students. I will only use the information recorded in the transcripts and I will not show the videos to anyone outside school. All data will be kept on my password protected computer. I will keep all names of students and teachers anonymous.

Following our previous discussion, I hope you can give me permission on behalf of the students. The teaching in the lessons related to this project will be similar to usual lessons and I will be careful handling the video data and destroy it when the project is complete. I will ask permission from participating home room teachers separately. Participation is voluntary, so if you or any participating home room teachers would like me stop working on the project or disregard recordings of any particular lessons at any point in the study, I will follow these wishes.

If you are able to give me permission to carry out my project, could you please sign the consent form below, I would be very grateful. I hope the results of the project will help to improve students' English ability at the school by finding ways to help them understand English learned in context during storytelling. I will share my findings at a staff meeting at school and with fellow Assistant Language Teachers in [REDACTED] City. Thank you very much in advance.

Chris Cooper

[REDACTED] Elementary School, [REDACTED]

Tel [REDACTED]

/

email [REDACTED]

MA research project – School Principal consent form

Name of researcher: **Chris Cooper**

Title of research project:

Scaffolding during the initial reading of picture books in a Japanese elementary school EFL classroom: a qualitative study investigating how teachers and learners co-construct meaning during storytelling.

Please sign the form if you are in agreement with the following statements:

I have been fully informed about the format and procedure of the research project.

I give permission for the filming and transcribing of lessons containing storytelling.

I understand that the names of participating teachers and students will be anonymous and only used in this research project.

I understand that I can see a summary of the findings after the research project has been completed.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

██████████

School Principal, ██████ Elementary School

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chris Cooper

MA Research Student

Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Participating Homeroom Teacher Consent

Dear Mr/Mrs...

I am currently studying for a Master's Degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). As part of this course I am doing some research on storytelling. I would like to find out if responding to students comments during storytelling and the comments they make to each other help them construct meaning.

To do so I would like to record some of my lessons on video and make transcripts of interactions to analyse what is said during lessons that include storytelling. As we teach together, I would also like to observe your interactions with students, I will do this in a positive way, hopefully I can learn from the way that you help students. I will only use the information recorded in the transcripts and I will not show the videos to anyone outside school. All data will be kept on my password protected computer. I will keep all names of students and teachers anonymous.

I hope you can give me permission on behalf of yourself and your students to include your class in my study. The teaching in the lessons related to this project will be similar to usual lessons and I will be careful handling the video data and destroy it when the project is complete. Participation is voluntary, so if you would like me stop working on the project or disregard recordings of any particular lessons at any point in the study, I will follow these wishes.

If you are able to give me permission to carry put my project, could you please sign the consent form below, I would be very grateful. I hope the results of the project will help to improve students' English ability at the school by finding ways to help them understand English learned in context during storytelling. Hopefully, this will encourage them to speak English outside of class by using phrases learned from stories. I will share my findings at a staff meeting at school. Thank you very much in advance.

Chris Cooper

Tel

/

email

Elementary School,

MA research project – Participating Teacher Consent Form

Name of researcher: Chris Cooper	
Title of research project: Scaffolding during the initial reading of picture books in a Japanese elementary school EFL classroom: a qualitative study investigating how teachers and learners co-construct meaning during storytelling.	
Please sign the form if you are in agreement with the following statements: I have been fully informed about the format and procedure of the research project. I give permission for the filming and transcribing of lessons involving my class containing storytelling. I understand that the names of participating teachers and students will be anonymous and only used in this research project. I understand that I can see a summary of the findings after the research project has been completed.	
Signed: _____ INSERT TEACHER'S NAME [REDACTED] Elementary School	Date: _____
Signed: _____ Chris Cooper MA Research Student Sheffield Hallam University, UK	Date: _____

APPENDIX 2 - SAMPLE FROM REFLECTIVE LOG

Reflective Log

Lesson Number: 4 (2-2)

Date/Time: 7/3/2016

Class (lesson number with this class): 2nd Grade - 15 Ls (2)

Book: WESTCOTT, Nadine Bernard (1980). *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*. Boston. Little Brown and Company

Pre-Class (w/ justification from reading/previous classes)

1. How will I encourage learner comments about the meaning of the story? (eg. ask 'what happens next?', TPR, pointing)

1. Ask what children can see on front cover - all animals, old lady, food, cookies, tea, etc - what is old lady doing? - cover swallowed meaning
2. Catch - 'I catch HRT2 sensei / I catch (student)
3. Ask 'where is the horse?' on two pages near end of story
4. 'How many cats here?' 'and here?' 'why?'

2. How should I respond to learner comments?

(eg. recast comments in Japanese into English / provide definitions if students repeat words that they hear from the story)

1. Responding with open ques seems to be difficult, but will try again 'Why?'
2. Again recasts seem to be most natural
3. Try to hear / respond to more comments - this may be an unrealistic goal, but I want to respond to as much as possible

3. How can I create the conditions for collective scaffolding to occur?

(eg. create group atmosphere / don't ignore comments...)

1. Forget about the predicting in pairs!
- I want more natural comments - STs seem to be comfortable making comments

4. Any other comments, thoughts, concerns, ideas?

1. Relate to things we learned recently
- 'I don't know why' - from Hello Goodbye / insects
2. This time I ran through story with HRT - should also discuss bridging
3. Again, book is relatively small, but hopefully should be OK for 15 Ls

Post-Class

1. What kind of comments did learners make? (eg. repetition, prediction, labelling, English/Japanese, non-verbal responses)

1. all comments in Japanese, I think
2. Seemed to comment in pauses I made
3. Often comments were in response to pictures

2. How did I respond to learners comments? (eg. recasts, definitions, translation of Japanese comments into English)

1. Answered Japanese questions from learners in English
- did the old lady die? Maybe did she eat it?

3. How did the homeroom teacher respond to learner comments?

1. Extension of my 'catch' explanation - she ate the spider to catch the fly
- did they understand that part of story though - not sure they did
2. Comment time - cut due to time
- but HRT had discussion with learners about story on way back to class (in Japanese)

4. Did collective scaffolding occur, if yes, what kind of comments were made?

1. I think there were some comments made between STs
- need to check the video though - as always
- collective scaffolding is something I may need to look at in more depth in during coding/analysis - may not be able to record comments, only instances of collective scaffolding - is this worth it?

5. Any other comments, thoughts, concerns, ideas/things to take forward?

1. Getting HRT 'on board' was a good idea I think
- helped co-construct meaning more this time and was more involved with story

Comments relating directly to pre-class reflection

1. Implemented most things identified pre-class this time
- except for the 'how many cats?' thing
- pointed at the pictures of cats - led to a comment - cat soup

Comments After Watching Video For the First Time

Overall impression

- the co-construction of meaning was actually very rounded
- most involved by all parties seen so far
- nice scaffolding from HRT in a few places
- also nice balance of comments
- sometimes there are probably too many comments
- and they can be a bit hard to control/harness - nit this time

Most comments made by learners who didn't understand were answered by pointing to pictures or answering Japanese in English

- some were helped with gestures
- I didn't understand some comments/maybe gave slightly unrelated answers occasionally
- I am seeing with each observation - this is inevitable

More use of gesture this time than other books

- to communicate the meaning of swallowed and catch
- two important verbs in the book that learners were probably not familiar with
- or in this context where 'catch' is concerned
- probably associate catch with baseball

Most learners don't seem at all affected by the presence of the camera

- one student did look right at the camera once though
- maybe she is conscious of it / affected by it
- the HRT did explain to the students why I was filming the story part of the lesson

Comments seemed to come from around the room

- often with the other class (1st grade) - most comments seem to come from right in front of the ALT reading the story (me)