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Integrating children's fiction and *Storyline* in the second language classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study in which, for five weeks, the English lessons of two classes of 11–12 year olds in Sweden were based on Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*. To promote the learners' engagement with the text, support understanding, and facilitate incidental vocabulary acquisition, a range of language-focused tasks were designed within the framework of the Storyline approach. In Storyline, a fictive world is created in the classroom. The story develops when learners, working in the same small groups, collaborate on open so-called key questions, which structure the Storyline, introduce happenings and problems, and link with the syllabus. Another characteristic is the integration of practical and theoretical subject content. Learners' art work and texts are displayed on a frieze, or walls of the classroom, creating a visual record of the developing story. The study also investigated the influence on learning of the book's illustrations, and the learners' own drawings. The majority of the learners made gains in vocabulary, as evidenced in pre- and post-tests, writing and speaking tasks. While some learners had never thought about illustrations and drawings as a support, for many, both of these were found to be helpful.

KEYWORDS

young second language learners; children's fiction; vocabulary; pictures; drawings; Storyline

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a five-week case study in Sweden. The participants were two classes aged 11–12, who took part in a Storyline in English based on Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*. The study investigated the learners' language development, with a focus on incidental vocabulary acquisition.

The Storyline approach originated in Scotland in the 1960s in response to the requirement for interdisciplinary teaching in the primary curriculum (Bell, Harkness, & White, 2007). Today it is used in diverse geographical contexts (and is familiar to many teachers in the Nordic countries), with ages ranging from preschool to university, and in second language (L2) teaching (Ahlquist, 2011). A fictive world is created in the classroom when learners working in small groups take on the roles of characters in a story. Examples of topics appropriate for the young language learner classroom are families living in a street, circus performers, or workers/animals in a wildlife park or on

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a farm. The story develops as the learners work on open, so-called key questions, designed to structure the story, introduce happenings and problems, and provide links to curriculum content. As Bruner points out, `for there to be a story something unforeseen must happen´ (Bruner, 2002, p. 15). One appeal of Storyline is that the learners are not sure what each lesson will bring.

A Storyline typically lasts between four to six weeks, ending with some kind of celebration. Characteristic for the approach are the integration of theoretical and practical subject content, and the use of a frieze (or classroom walls) to display story developments in pictures and text. Tasks may involve the learners in speaking and writing in role; focus on vocabulary; and target grammatical structures, for example, aspects of the past tense when writing a character's diary entry. Puppets and drawings help to bring characters and the fictive world to life. Learners work both on their own and collaborate in their group. It is in particular the creative and collaborative aspects of Storyline which lead learners of all ages to describe it as a `fun´ way to learn (Ahlquist, 2011). The use of this word is significant since, as Swain, 2013) argues, emotions are inseparable from cognition and have a powerful effect on learning.

A sociocultural perspective on second language learning

Research conducted within a sociocultural perspective makes no distinction between language use and language learning: learners learn as they use the language, and it is through using the language that they learn it (Lantolf, 2000). The socioaffective context is considered to influence learning; factors such as the physical environment, personal relationships, the nature and quality of collaboration, and an individual's engagement are examples of variables which can have positive or negative effects. A further variable is the nature of the task – as Ellis points out, `the design of a task impacts on that activity´ (Ellis, 2018, p. 36).

Storyline can be considered an example of Project-based Learning (PBL) and Task-based Teaching and Learning (TBLT). Both approaches place importance on the outcomes or products of tasks which learners work on over a period of time. Within the research field of second language learning, definitions of *task* vary, but what they have in common is a focus on meaning and that learners `make free use of their language resources to achieve an envisaged outcome in written or spoken form´ (Anderson, 2020, p. 175). In Storyline, the story provides the framework for a variety of tasks which contribute to the development of the characters and story.

The benefits of tasks which involve young learners in interaction have been researched in a number of studies. Pinter (2007), for instance, has shown how task repetition can help improve the performance of young learners since they learn what they have to do differently next time in order to achieve better results; Butler and Zeng (2014) have demonstrated how pairs of 9–10 and 11–12 year olds respectively manage interactive problem-solving tasks in English. With regard to groups, Ahlquist (2011) found that for many of the 11–13 year olds in the Storyline study, positive features of working with others included being able to get help if needed, that it was more fun than working alone, and that they learnt from each other. These responses exemplify the way in which learning is said to occur in the zone of proximal development: `the learner can

perform at a higher level because of support (scaffolding) offered by an interlocutor´ (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 118).

Lightbown and Spada make the point that while Vygotsky's (1978) concept of zone of proximal development, or ZPD, is traditionally understood to involve interaction between adult and child, research within second language learning has been broadened to include learner-learner interactions. With regard to the latter, it is therefore the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the more proficient learner is also challenged when they work with a less proficient peer. In Storyline, the variety of tasks that the learners engage in integrate language and art work, and may also incorporate the use of digital tools. Learners' respective talents should be reflected in the composition of the groups, and task design should ensure that everyone has a role to play, which includes the need to provide and receive support at different times, depending on the task.

Both communicative and language-focused tasks feature in textbooks, which continue to predominate in L2 classrooms (Gray, 2016). Such tasks can also be created around authentic children's fiction, in other words, books written for first language (L1) readers, rather than L2 learners. Books are a valuable resource for vocabulary. Ghosn (2013) argues that when children read or listen to stories, they form mental images of words, which facilitates learning. The recurrence of key words serves to reinforce this learning (Cameron, 2001). Moreover, many children's books are rich in illustrations, and as Bisson, van Heuven, Conklin, and Tunney (2015) point out, pictures promote `the creation of direct connections between the foreign language words and the semantic representations, which facilitates recall later on´ (p.1324). A further linguistic benefit is that the learner encounters grammatical structures in a meaningful context, which supports understanding and promotes acquisition of these structures (Pinter, 2017).

Regarding the use of learners' own drawings, within a sociocultural perspective, drawing is not just self-expression, but a concrete way of representing thought (Vygotsky, 1978). Children's drawings are a way for them to express understanding, as well as a support for the content, organisation and construction of written text (Adoniou, 2013). The drawings may also serve as memory prompts, mediating the learning of new words and concepts, serving a similar function to the role of images in books as mentioned above.

Apart from linguistic benefits, there is an increasing body of research highlighting the cognitive and affective advantages of using authentic L1 children's fiction in the L2 classroom. Bland (2015) makes the point that children have an understanding of what to expect in different kinds of stories, and this trains their thinking skills, for example, when they are asked to infer what might be about to happen. This also invokes the use of imagination – a powerful and underestimated learning tool, according to Egan (1988) – in bridging the gap between what has gone before and what might happen next. Regarding a broader application of work with fiction, Fleta and Forster (2014) have shown how children's books can be integrated into project work and forge meaningful links across the curriculum.

This can be contrasted with the more limited use made of stories found in textbooks. Long (2020) maintains that often, such texts `are intended to show the inner workings of the code, not how the language is used for communication´ (p. 171). He argues that impoverished input does not promote acquisition. This is `sacrificed for

comprehensibility, in the interest of which the language used is mostly limited to what students already know′ (Long, 2020, p. 172).

One way of exploiting the linguistic, cognitive and affective benefits of a children's book is through the group collaboration and creativity of the Storyline approach.

The study

Context and participants

This qualitative case study, situated within a sociocultural theoretical framework, was carried out in a state-run primary school for pupils aged 6 to 13. The school is located in a small rural town in the south of Sweden and the majority of pupils have Swedish as their first language. The participants were two grade 5 classes (aged 11–12), totalling 35 pupils, in their fourth year of learning English. Though there is considerable variation in the size of primary classes in Sweden, classes of this size are not uncommon. The study was carried out in the subjects' own classrooms. They were taught by their class teachers (both experienced in teaching primary English), for five weeks, with two lessons of 40 minutes and one of 50 minutes per week. The work was not graded; pupils in Swedish schools receive grades for the first time at the end of year 6. Prior to the start of the study, written parental permission was obtained for the purposes of video and photographs. Sole researcher, I was known to the pupils from a previous study (Ahlquist, 2020, in which language-focused tasks were embedded into lessons based on a children's book), and I was present in each lesson of both classes up until the middle of week four when, due to the spread of Covid-19, the school was closed to outsiders.

The classes enjoyed their English lessons, both in the view of their teachers, and based on a preliminary questionnaire regarding what the learners liked and disliked about the lessons, things they would like to do in these lessons, and how they think they learn best. Both classes contained a range of abilities. One difference was that the class referred to as Class 1 contained a number of pupils with diagnoses, two pupils who were quite recent arrivals and in the process of learning Swedish, one Swedish-English bilingual, and several who enjoyed speaking but were reluctant writers. They were supported in their writing by use of a Chromebook. Due to the restless nature of some individuals, and the fact that some found it hard to cooperate in a group, their teacher often gave the class individual work.

Both classes used a textbook and had also worked with Storyline; both classes had, for the first time, worked with children's fiction in the previous study. In addition, Class 2's lessons sometimes included playscripts and role play. The teachers used English as the language of instruction and encouraged the pupils to speak English. The school implemented the principles of Cooperative Learning (for example, see Ahlquist, 2015) across the curriculum and the learners were used to working in groups, though as mentioned above, some found this harder than others.

In the Swedish syllabus for English (National Education Agency, 2011), it is stated that, among other things, learners of this age should work receptively and productively with spoken and written description, instruction and stories. They should take part in different kinds of dialogues, use strategies to make themselves understood, and develop

knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, spelling, punctuation and pronunciation in order to enhance their skills as effective communicators. Based on this content, a Storyline was created around Dahl's *Fantastic Mr Fox*, which the teachers considered would appeal to their classes. It tells the story of three unpleasant farmers, who team up in order to kill the fox who is stealing food from them, and how the fox outwits them. The reason for using Storyline was primarily that the young learners were familiar with and had enjoyed their previous experience of the approach, which is important for motivation and consequently learning (Lamb, 2017); that they were used to working in groups; that the use of characters would provide opportunities for speaking; and that the pupils' own drawings would be used to depict the story. The research questions were:

(1) To which tasks did the learners respond most positively?
(2) In what ways could language development be observed?
(3) In the view of the pupils' themselves, does drawing help them learn English?
(4) In the view of the pupils themselves, do the book's pictures help them learn English?

The data collection tools were:

- Observation field notes (research questions 1 & 2)
- Learner questionnaire (research questions 1, 3 & 4)
- Teacher interview (research questions 1 & 2)
- Photos and recordings (research question 2)
- Vocabulary pre- and post-tests (research question 2)
- Learner texts (research question 2)
- Learner notebooks (research questions 1 & 2)

Note: the questionnaire was written in L1 and translated by the researcher; reflections in the notebooks were also intended to be in L1 though many pupils chose to write in L2; instructions for the vocabulary tests were in L1 and further supported with verbal instruction and demonstration by the teachers, also in L1.

Materials and method

Based on the 2016 colour edition of *Fantastic Mr Fox*, the lessons were planned by the researcher in conjunction with the teachers. During the study period, at the end of each week, meetings were held between the teachers and researcher to adjust the planning for the coming week – for example, if some things had taken too much time or if it were considered that a different type of task might work better. The role of the researcher was to observe. The pupils did not know which book they were going to work with, only that they would be creating a Storyline around the characters and plot of a book. They were also told that their teachers and I would like to know their views on working this way: did it help them learn English and if so, how?

Prior to the first lesson, the teachers had divided their classes into four groups, taking into account learner differences such as ability to collaborate, linguistic proficiency

(heterogeneous groups were created), and the fact that some individuals were often absent. Before the first lesson, the learners completed two vocabulary tests on the target words. The words selected were considered to be useful for an understanding of the story. One test involved matching 19 English and Swedish words (the results of which are shown in Appendix 1). In the second, the pupils read sentences in English in which one or two words were underlined. They had to write a word in Swedish which meant the same as the underlined word. This test comprised 20 words. (The results are shown in Appendix 2). Each test was explained in Swedish by the class teacher and instructions were provided in Swedish on the paper. The tests were written in two separate lessons, with 20 minutes for each. In addition, in one of these lessons, the learners had 20 minutes to write a text based on a picture of a fox, following on from the words: *This is a story about a fox.*

The point of this text was to introduce the topic (a book about a fox) and to give the pupils a chance to use their existing vocabulary to describe, create a story, or simply write some sentences about the fox. The intention was that at the end of the study, they would be given another picture, containing a fox and a hen coop, and asked to write about that picture. This was intended to provide insight into whether words that the pupils had met in the course of working with the book had become available as a resource for production. The reason for using a different picture was that in the previous study, where the same picture had been used for both a pre-study and post-study text, the pupils had queried why they had to write about the same thing again, and were not motivated to do so. While this is clearly problematic, it has to be admitted that regardless of the picture or pictures used, there is no guarantee that what a learner writes is an accurate reflection of what they actually know. Reluctant writers or those who find it hard to create a story, especially given the time limit, may produce short texts lacking in descriptive detail, but nevertheless have learnt many words from the book.

Table 1 shows the key questions, lesson content, skill focus and interaction patterns. The work for each key question took approximately a week, with the tasks spread over the three lessons. The table includes the main tasks, but not the warm ups, which involved various kinds of vocabulary exercise (such as odd-one-out) and games (for

Table 1. Overview of lesson content and interaction patterns.

Key Question	Task	Skill	Interaction Pattern
Who are the characters?	Learners read a part of the text, draw the character and their imagined home; write about the character and an imagined typical day. (Each group read about one of the farmers or the fox). Tasks were divided between group members.	Reading Writing	One learner per task
	The drawings and texts are placed on the frieze. The learners prepare to introduce `their´ character and present this to the class. They create two questions for the audience based on their presentation. The class stands by the frieze.	Speaking Listening	Group
What do you think the farmers are going to do?	Teacher reads and learners listen: Why can't the farmers catch Mr Fox? Which farmer has a plan? Then the groups talk together about what this could be.	Listening Speaking	Individual Group

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

Key Question	Task	Skill	Interaction Pattern
	Each learner in the group receives a part of the text about Mr Fox leaving the hole, being shot and injured, and escaping back to his hole. Each draws a sketch based on their text (Figure 1), then they agree on a sequence, and together, write a sentence for each of the pictures.	Reading Drawing Speaking Writing	Individual Group
	The teacher writes ` shovel´ on the board and reads up to the words `the most frightening sound a fox can hear´. What is this? What happens next? The learners create a dialogue between the fox family and include Mr Fox's plan.	Listening Writing Speaking	Individual Individual Group
How do you think Mr Fox tries to save his family?	The learners act out their dialogues and the audience listen for similarities and differences in the plans.	Speaking Listening Speaking	Group Individual Class
	The teacher reads the part of the story which deals with the actual plan, finishing with the words `no one can dig as fast as a fox´. The learners look at a projected picture of a crater and people peering down. What has happened? Who are the people and what are they looking at? They write in their notebooks.	Listening Writing	Individual Individual
	The teacher reads about the farmers' plan to involve all their workers in the foxhunt. The learners listen for how many workers each farmer has then together work out how many workers there are in total.	Listening	Individual Group
What do you think Mr Fox will do now?	Each learner has a picture unseen by the others. The pictures form a sequence of steps as the foxes tunnel into a storehouse. The learners describe their pictures and the group works out a possible sequence. They place the pictures on the desk and can make changes to the sequence (known as Blind Hand Description: Balouche, 1997). Each learner is then given a part of the text and decides which picture it matches.	Speaking Listening Reading	Individual Group Individual
	The teacher shows a picture of a small fox arriving home with food for his mother. The learners write what happens next.	Writing	Individual
Who do you think will win – Mr Fox or the farmers?	The teacher reads about Mr Fox taking the farmers' food. The learners in pairs read a description of either the cellar or storehouse and draw a picture.	Listening Reading	Individual Pair
	Each pair teams up with one which drew the other picture. They take it in turns to describe their own, and draw the others' picture. (Figure 2)	Speaking Listening	Pairs
	The learners read about Mr Fox's meeting with Badger and Rat and write a dialogue with a partner about one of those encounters.	Reading Writing	Individual Pairs
	The learners write a description or narrative based on the book's illustration of the final feast.	Writing	Individual

example, bingo), and also whole-class recapping of what had previously happened in the story. Neither does it include the rounding off tasks, where the learners wrote new words in their notebooks, or a reflection on what they had liked, or not, or what they had learnt in the lesson. No homework was given to learn or work with the core vocabulary.

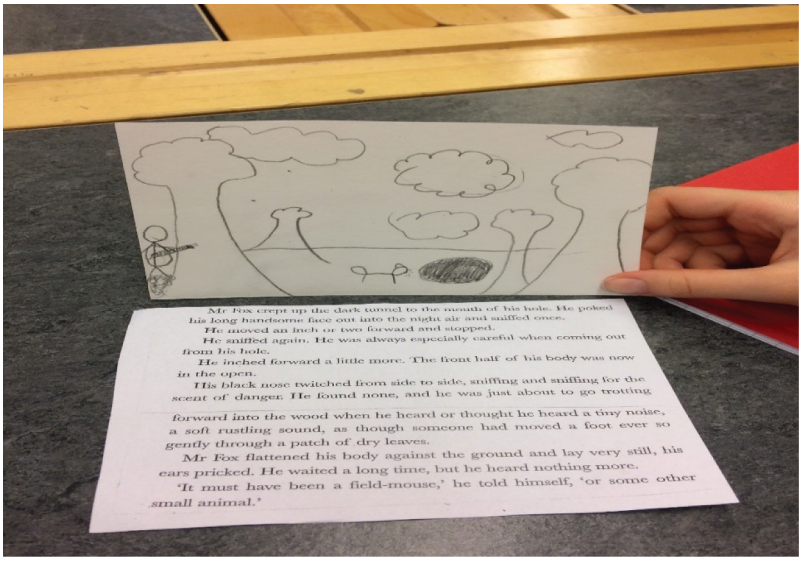

Figure 1. A sketch based on a text

Figure 2. Describing a storehouse for a partner

Note: As mentioned previously, due to COVID19, the school became off-limits to non-members of staff before the end of the fourth week and the project was completed by the teachers. The vocabulary post-tests were originally scheduled for immediately after the end of the study, but due to Covid-related logistical issues, were carried out one month later, and there was no delayed post-test opportunity. Further, as a result of time lost in the last week, the teachers rounded off the project by asking the pupils to write about the picture of the final feast: who was there, what did they do, what happened next? The second text about the fox and hen coop was not written.

Findings

In order to answer the research questions, content analysis was carried out on the data sets based on the following coding: speaking, writing, listening, reading and vocabulary were represented by the letters S, W, L, R and V respectively; C stood for aspects of cooperation; I for instruction or classroom management issues; D/F for drawings and the frieze; and P for pictures in the book.

Research question 1: To which tasks did the learners respond most positively?

Both teachers stated that their classes had enjoyed working with the story and with the pictures. Table 2 shows the pupils' responses. The questionnaire contained six headings under which were listed the tasks that the pupils had worked with. The original intention was that the pupils would select the task in each category that they liked the most. However, the teacher in Class 1 instructed the class to tick all the tasks they had enjoyed, which makes comparison difficult. The pupils were also given a choice of: *yes/no/don't know* regarding whether seeing the book's pictures on the one hand, and drawing their own on the other, helped them learn.

It can be seen that at least half the pupils in Class 1 liked everything except *writing words in the notebooks* and *introducing the character*. In Class 2 (in which two pupils were absent when the questionnaire was completed), at least half chose: *listening to the teacher read, watching other groups' role plays; reading and drawing*, and *predicting*. Taking both classes together, we can see that at least half of each class particularly liked:

- listening to the teacher read
- watching each other's role plays
- reading and drawing
- writing what is going to happen

Table 2. Learner questionnaire.

	Tasks	Class 1 (18 pupils)	Class 2 (15 pupils)
Words	Bingo	12	6
	Odd-one-out	11	6
	Group the words	8	3
	Maze	9	-
	Write words in notebooks	7	7
Listening	Teacher reads aloud	14	10
	Others' role play	10	8
Reading	Self	12	2
	Read & draw	9	12
Writing	What is going to happen	12	10
	Character description/typical day	10	3
	Dialogues	9	3
Speaking	Describing to partner	9	5
	Role Play	13	6
	Introducing the character	8	5
Pictures	Blind Hand Description	10	5
	Draw own	9	5
	Match picture & text	12	7

What is striking is that no speaking task appears in this list. It is striking because field notes record that the learners in both classes prepared and performed the dialogues with enthusiasm, that in both classes there were pupils who spoke English with a certain amount of ease, and that in Class 2 in particular, the pupils were said by their teacher to enjoy speaking English and tried to use it as much as they could in their usual lessons, even while discussing what to do in a task. *Role play* and the task in which the pupils in pairs had to *describe the picture* they had drawn to another pair were considered by the teachers to be popular, with the teacher of Class 2 commenting that in the latter `they noticed that they knew a lot´. Both teachers described how in a value exercise, in which the learners had to take a stand, for example, on whether or not it is ever right to take what does not belong to you, many attempted to explain their stance in English, but in Class 1, this was limited to the more confident speakers.

Research question 2: What changes in language development could be observed?

Table A1 (Appendix 1) presents the pre- and post-test results for the two vocabulary tests in Class 1 and Table A2 (Appendix 2) the results for Class 2. The learners are represented by letters. In test 1 the pupils matched an English word with a Swedish word (in the table referred to as *recognition*). They were used to this kind of exercise from their textbooks. In test 2 the pupils had to suggest a Swedish word for the underlined English words in the sentence. This is referred to as *recall*. Due to absence, not all learners completed both test-types on both occasions, preventing comparisons.

The average results can be summarised thus:

Total possible score
19Test 1 Class 1 pre-test 11.3post-test 14.1
Test 1 Class 2 pre-test 10.5post-test 13
Total possible score
20Test 2 Class 1 pre-test 12.3post-test 16
Test 2 Class 2 pre-test 13.3post-test 15.3

Some things are worth highlighting. In Class 1, Test 1:

- 13/15 increased their score, with three achieving a full score.
- one second-language learner of Swedish (Q) increased his score from 2 to 11

In Class 1, Test 2:

- 3/17 knew all the words in the post-test
- all but one pupil increased their total, some quite considerably: 9–18 (D);12–18 (F), and two more 9–16 (H & P).

In Class 2, Test 1:

- 9/13 increased their score, with some quite large gains: 4–11 (D), 8–13 (C), 13–19 (I) and 12–17 (J).

- 4 lost marks, by as much as 3 in one case. This could be because they guessed correctly the first time, but not the second, or that they were unsure the first time and changed their choice in the post-test.

In Class 2, Test 2

- 11/13 increased their score.

On the questionnaire 10/15 in Class 1 and 11/18 in Class 2 believed they had learnt more words, and some gave examples, such as *orchard, badge*r, *floorboard, cellar, dwarf*.

In a study with relatively few lessons, and without any particular grammatical focus, it was hypothesised that lexical knowledge would benefit more than any other aspect of the learners' English. Evidence of this would be seen primarily in the vocabulary tests, but also in the written texts and speaking tasks. Though both teachers noted that the writing of some learners had developed, in Class 1, only one learner mentions developing in writing, and 4 in Class 2, one of whom specified better spelling. In Class 2, when writing about the small fox who ran back along the tunnel to his mother, the learners wrote for 15 minutes in concentrated silence. This can be compared with Class 1, many of whom used Chromebooks. Though these are intended to support those who find it difficult to write, and their use allows the learner to check words and spellings, observation notes show that it took time for these learners to get started and, not infrequently, they were distracted by other things accessible in the Chromebook. Texts in Class 1 are mostly shorter on average than in Class 2.

Since the pupils did not write a text based on a picture of a fox and a hen coop, no direct comparison could be made regarding the vocabulary used in the pre-study and post-study texts. Instead, the pupils had written about the picture at the end of the book showing the animals feasting on food taken from the farmers.

The following sentence, taken from one group's dialogue about Mr Fox's escape plan on hearing the frightening scraping noise, illustrates some common issues in the writing tasks: *Lets start diging we need to get the heck out of here*. The learners were often inconsistent in their use of apostrophes. While *can't, don't, aren't* are usually written correctly, *you're* is frequently written as *your*. Many learners were uncertain when to use a double consonant, as in *digging*. Other common spelling mistakes include using lower case for the pronoun `I´ unless it occurs at the beginning of a sentence, and the words *because* and *which*. The sentence above also illustrates that despite grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and lack of punctuation, many learners are familiar with idiomatic, and less familiar, expressions: *get the heck; Bye losers the Rat screamed; they took a deep breth*. In her description of the feast, one learner included the phrase *lots of donuts stuffed with goose liver*. When asked about this, she told her teacher that she remembered it because her group had worked with the description of Farmer Bunce at the beginning of the story. The actual words in the book are: *His food was doughnuts and goose-livers. He mashed the livers into a disgusting paste and then stuffed the paste into the doughnuts* (Dahl, 2016, p. 3). This shows that the learner had not simply remembered a phrase, but had manipulated the words to formulate her own sentence.

Most pupils used the present and past tenses randomly, which was also the case for the writing of many in L1, indicating that this was at least as much a cognitive development issue as a linguistic one. However, many texts display the writer's control over some irregular forms of common verbs (*said*, for instance), though with a tendency to omit the `ed´ ending on regular past tense and past participle forms: *Mr Fox and the four children have raid a chicken house*. Other omissions include the auxiliary in the present continuous: *we need to hurry so the farmers not now what we doing*. Regarding tenses, it is interesting to note the presence of structures which the learners had not encountered in their lessons. The present perfect is one example; the past perfect another. Others are the past continuous: *Mr Fox was late cuz he was arguing with mr mouse*, and the *going to* construction used in the past: *they were just going to attack*. There is also one example of a conditional: *If you don't let me in I will eat you*.

Many learners appeared unsure of two grammatical features with which they have worked at school – the object pronoun: *are we going to eat they? Then the small fox give she a bird*, and the possessive adjective: *they going to invite all they friends; he name is; he's favourite food; she's brother*.

A strategy commonly employed where the learner was uncertain how to express something in L2 was to use the L1: *She was so happy she run three varv* (laps) *on the äng* (meadow) *after that she was trött* (tired). In the case of one pupil, in the five sentences which comprise her pre-study text about the fox, all but one contain a Swedish word.

When the length of the pre-study texts are compared with those written at the end, in Class 1, there is very little difference although they had a whole lesson to write. There is more difference in Class 2. For instance, the first text of one learner contains seven descriptive sentences, all beginning *I can see*. The second text comprises 10 lines of narrative, including 10 words from the book and ending *Then something really bad happened*. The sense of drama is seen in several texts in this class: *It's a beautiful afternoon. The sun had started to go down. All look up at the sky. but when they look down they saw a tractor coming right at them*. In all cases, there is less use of L1 in the second text.

Other than words, the aspect of development most commented on by the learners is speaking (4/18 in Class 1 and 8/15 in Class 2), with one specifying *pronunciation* and another *speaking in front of the class*. A willingness to speak English in the tasks, and enthusiasm for role play, shown in the way pupils used their tone of voice and gestures, is recorded in the field notes and supported by the teachers. One example concerns the dialogue (key question 2) in which Mr Fox realises the farmers are trying to dig him out, tells his wife, and together, they wake the children and instruct them to start digging. Whole groups or individuals within groups tried to do this without referring to their written dialogue, acting out the sleeping, waking and digging, with Mr Fox expressing urgency in his tone, and the little foxes, fear in theirs, as they all started to dig.

Research questions 3 & 4: In the view of the pupils themselves, does drawing help them learn English? In the view of the pupils themselves, do the book's pictures help them learn English?

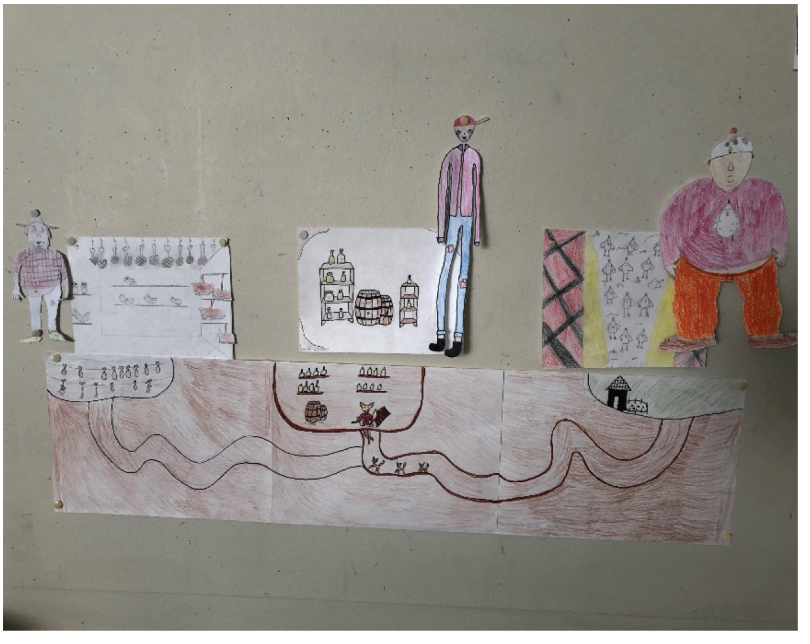

Figure 3. Drawings on the frieze

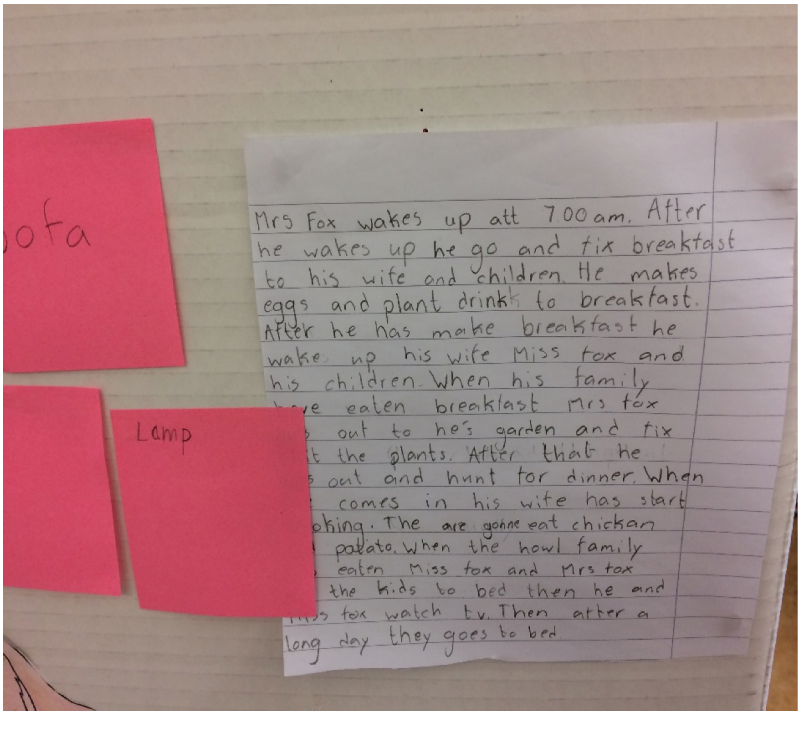

Figure 4. Text on the frieze

Regarding whether drawing pictures helped the learners to learn, 44% in Class 1 thought so compared with 67% in Class 2. Other pupils were unsure and in four cases, they thought not. When it came to working with pictures from the book, the situation was reversed: 67% in Class 1 and 53% in Class 2 thought the pictures helped them learn. Others did not know.

The field notes record occasions when the learners referred to the frieze (Figure 3 & Figure 4) For example, in a True or False recapping task, the teacher made the statement *Bunce is short and fat*. At this point, most heads in both classes swivelled to look at the frieze at the back of the room. Another example is when pairs had to create a question and answer about the story for a quiz. Many found this hard, until they were encouraged to go and look at the frieze, which many then hurried to do, especially in Class 2. When the teachers followed up the questionnaire responses regarding the drawings and the frieze, the learners stated that it was easier to remember what they were learning when they drew; the frieze reminds them what they did; and it is fun to look at others' work. The teachers added that they noticed how, when pupils gathered at the frieze, they talked about what they had done.

Discussion

Since learners' interest and enthusiasm leads to engagement, and this in turn is linked to learning outcomes (Ahlquist, 2011), it was considered important to identify which tasks were especially popular. The tasks that the learners appeared most enthusiastic about included a game element or challenge. One example concerns word games, where, for instance, learners had to group words with something in common, leaving an odd-one-out. Another example is a rather challenging version of bingo: from a list of 12 L2 target words on the board, the learners chose and wrote nine in their notebooks. The teacher then read out the L1 translation of the words on the board, and the learners crossed off the words if they had them.

A further example of popular task concerns uncertainty, such as predicting what is going to happen, and writing about this. The challenge here is partly linguistic – understanding what has been heard or read and then being able to express one's ideas in L2. It is also partly cognitive, requiring the learner to draw inferences based on what they know and speculate about a probable or possible development. A fourth example is the information gap task where pairs first drew a storehouse or cellar based on reading an extract from the book, and then, with a screen placed across the desk, directed another pair how to draw it. As the teacher of Class 2 remarked, `they noticed that they knew a lot´. It is when we put learners into situations where they need, and want, to express themselves, that they draw on all their resources and realise how much they know, which from a motivational perspective, is important. Young learners in Sweden are exposed to, and in many cases use, English in their lives outside school – through social media, television, music and gaming (referred to as extramural English by Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Informal contacts with English are known to have a positive effect on incidental acquisition of vocabulary, and competence in listening and speaking (Enever, 2011), which can become apparent in the classroom when tasks move beyond the confines of a textbook/workbook.

It is clear from the observation notes that many pupils enjoyed speaking English, and from these and the questionnaire, that they liked to listen to each other's role plays as well as to the teacher read. Several of the learners spoke with relative ease, delivering their role play without script or notes. Others were less comfortable. One such pupil noted in her questionnaire that she was now more used to speaking in front of the class. Although some rehearsal time was provided before the character introductions and the dialogues, more would have been useful, to enable all learners to speak without reading from their script. With heads bowed over their paper, and lines delivered more quickly than if the learner had to think as they spoke, this presented some difficulty for the audience, who had to listen in order to be able to answer a question. On one occasion, only one learner in the class was able to answer the presenting group's question, leading a member of this group to say, (in L1), `it feels as if only x was listening, because only he knew the answer´. This highlights the importance of preparation time, not only because it can lead to a more polished performance, but also because the presenting group receives positive feedback when others show they have understood what has been said.

Although no specific language focus was built into the study, it might have been a benefit to revise object pronouns and possessive adjectives, which the pupils had worked with, but of which many were still uncertain. Revision of question forms could have helped. The most common mistake was to omit the `do´ auxiliary and simply invert the verb and subject, as in `What food like they?´ However, learning to formulate questions correctly in English is a process undergone by both L1 and L2 speakers (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Having learnt to invert subject and verb for the verbs *be, have*, and *can*, these learners were at a stage of over-generalisation.

The aspect of learning that the majority of pupils commented on is *words*. In itself this is not surprising. As Read (2007) points out, young learners tend to measure their progress in terms of the number of words they know. When the learners filled out their post-study questionnaires, they had not yet been told the results of either the pre- or post-study vocabulary tests, and so their response was intuitive. The majority of pupils (79% in total) did make strides in their vocabulary learning, which is all the more interesting since the post-tests were carried out a month after the study when the pupils had been working on other things. The fact that the core vocabulary of the book was recycled over the five-week period, both through exposure and through production, helps to explain this.

Other than in the vocabulary tests, the pupils' acquisition of the core vocabulary was demonstrated in the text which they wrote at the end of the fifth week. In Class 2, many texts were considerably longer than those they had written before the study started, based on the picture of a fox, and these texts also included vocabulary from the book, and a range of grammatical structures. The picture itself was richer in detail than the first; the pupils had worked with the book for five weeks; they had thought and talked about what might have led up to the scene depicted and speculated about what might happen next. In other words, they had a different level of cognitive and linguistic support when they wrote this final text. Since the picture showed the conclusion of the story, the task also enabled the learners to bring it to an end in a way that allowed them to use their imagination – what might happen after the end of the story, or just to describe what they saw. That the texts of many pupils in Class 1 were short may be

explained at least in part by the fact that this class contained many reluctant writers, and those who found it hard to get started on any task.

Pictures in the book can help to support the pupils' understanding, but this presupposes that they make use of them. Based on the questionnaire, some pupils were uncertain if pictures helped them learn or not, suggesting either that this is something they had not thought about, or that they did not pay much attention to the pictures. Further work could therefore be done on learning to `read´ pictures, partly to develop visual literacy, and partly to develop lexical knowledge, which would in itself mediate understanding of the text. Similarly, though some learners were unsure if drawing supported their learning, and some thought it did not, the majority stated that drawing helped them to learn. Certainly, such tasks were popular. The problem is that drawing takes time in already short lessons. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to establish in advance the amount of detail a particular drawing-based task requires. For example, in the information gap based on the drawing of a cellar or storehouse, the learners were told to draw a sketch, given a strict time limit and told not to use coloured pencils (though some still did so). What was important was to establish which items were in the storehouse/cellar and where they were located; this was the information they would have to convey to their partners.

When it comes to the display on the frieze, there is an argument for allowing time to work on drawings with more detail, including colour, and this might be made possible if art lessons can be combined with those in English during the Storyline period. The frieze is a record of the story depicted through the learners' work, and they are interested in seeing what others have done. When they stand at the frieze and talk about it, they are often pointing out details, using words from the book. Not least is the affective significance of having created something together: a `shared narrative´ (Bruner, 2002, p.15). Allowing more time for the frieze, perhaps producing assessment or evaluation criteria together with the learners regarding what should be assessed or evaluated and how, as well as including self-assessment, could have a positive impact on metacognition and enhance opportunities for learning.

Other than lack of time, one drawback of Storyline is that if learners are absent, the story moves on without them, and it is vital to the functioning of the group that they are brought up to date on their return. In theory, the group members use the display on the frieze to help them re-orient their classmate, which in turn refreshes their own memory of events and the words used in the story. How well this works in practice depends on the willingness of both parties to give and receive help. Another drawback is the length of the lessons. The learners no sooner get started than it is time to finish and go on to another subject, or break. Incidents which happen during the break can and do carry over to the classroom and affect not only the time available for the lesson, but the quality of the work. Where a lesson was late starting, or where a task took longer than anticipated, the round off with the notebook was impacted, leaving less time to record new words, write sentences, express views on the lesson content and learning. If the notebook is to serve a function as a reflective tool for learning, there must be time to work with it. Since just under half of the learners in each class stated that they liked writing in their notebooks, this is something to prioritise in future.

Conclusion

The limitations of this small-scale study include the amount of statistical data, with no T-test of mean, the short period of time, and low number of pupils. There was no control group, meaning that it is impossible to say whether or not similar results would have been achieved in non-Storyline lessons over the same period. This may have been possible, assuming that the core vocabulary was recycled. Many of the tasks which were included in this Storyline were of the kind found in a textbook (put words into groups which have something in common, for instance).

However, the aim of the study was not to claim that the approach is superior to other ways of working in the primary classroom, but to investigate how a Storyline based on a children's book has the potential to promote second language development. While vocabulary can be tested, along with writing and speaking, there is also the issue of underlying skills and knowledge, which are harder to assess but just as important. For example, a teacher who knows his or her pupils will recognise when a previously reluctant speaker dares to say more because they are engaged by the story, supported by working in a group, or because they are being given a chance to express and reinforce their understanding in a variety of ways. Teacher assessments in such cases are subjective, just as a researcher's observations must always be to some extent subjective, though both draw their validity from professional knowledge and experience.

The Storyline approach was devised to bring together subjects of the curriculum within a story framework, bringing meaning to the content. Though large classes may lead to higher noise levels and greater demands on classroom management, there are likely to be fewer problems where young learners are used to working in groups, especially cooperative groups, and with time limits on task. For a teacher and class new to Storyline, a good idea would be to try out the approach in the first language. It might, for instance, be a story about neighbours. Subjects such as civics or natural science can be incorporated through the happenings in the story: living in a more sustainable way, for example. As a development, a new family arrives in the street – from another part of the world, not yet able to speak the majority L1. With this, we have introduced a rational for using English, which our new family can speak. Can the pupils introduce their characters to the new family? What can they say? What might they ask? How can we involve all the neighbours in a street party to celebrate other cultures? There are many possibilities. Through Storyline, the teacher is able to create a forum for pupils to apply their wider knowledge and skills, and they might just be surprised at how much the learners know.

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APPENDIX: Vocabulary Test Results

Table A1. Vocabulary test results class 1.

Name	Recognition Pre-Test, 19	Recognition Post-Test, 19	Recall Pre-Test, 20	Recall Post-Test,20
A	17	19	19	20
B	16	19	15	14
C	6	7	4	8
D	11	13	9	18
E	6	9	10	12
F	-	16	12	18
G	-	16	18	20
H	-	16	9	16
I	19	19	16	18
J	17	17	13	16
K	15	17	17	20
L	15	14	18	19
M	16	19	14	17
N	16	17	17	18
O	11	17	15	16
P	3	5	9	16
Q	2	11	5	6
R	0	4	3	-

APPENDIX: Vocabulary Test Results

Table A2. Vocabulary test results class 2.

Name	Recognition Pre-Test, 19	Recognition Post-Test, 19	Recall Pre-Test, 20	Recall Post-Test,20
A	-	11	13	13
B	15	17	11	15
C	8	13	12	16
D	4	11	12	16
E	17	16	17	18
F	14	17	15	18
G	13	14	14	14
H	11	8	13	14
I	13	19	17	20
J	12	17	15	17
K	14	17	16	17
L	7	5	10	11
M	8	6	10	11
N	11	15	-	18
O	3	-	-	-
P	-	7	-	12