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Maria Bortoluzzi, Elisa Bertoldi, Nicoletta Vasta and Cristiana Tonon

Multimodal Dialogic Teacher Education: Learning to Mediate Children's Picturebooks for Active Citizenship and Intercultural Encounters

Abstract I: L'articolo intende essere un contributo teorico che ricontestualizza la formazione dialogica delle/degli insegnanti trasformandola da pratica prevalentemente logocentrica a pratica *embodied* e di interazione multimodale che media significati co-costruiti attraverso la combinazione di diverse modalità. Traendo spunto dal contesto teorico del progetto Erasmus+ *Intercultural Citizenship Education through Teacher Education for the Mediation of Picturebooks* (ICETEMP), l'articolo sostiene che la formazione dialogica delle/degli insegnanti per la mediazione di libri illustrati per bambini/e nelle letture ad alta voce debba riconoscere l'importanza fondamentale delle risorse multimodali nell'interazione tra insegnante, bambini/e e libri illustrati. Le pratiche di dialogo interiore, dialogo tra pari e dialogo di interazione in classe dimostrano come il significato sia co-costruito attraverso una ricca orchestrazione di diverse risorse multimodali.

Abstract II: The article is a theoretical contribution that recontextualises dialogic teacher education from a primarily logocentric practice to an embodied and multimodal one, mediating co-constructed meaning through an orchestration of modes. Drawing on the wider theoretical context of the Erasmus+ project *Intercultural Citizenship Education through Teacher Education for the Mediation of Picturebooks* (ICETEMP), the article posits that dialogic education in teacher education for mediating children's picturebooks in read-aloud performances needs to recognise the crucial relevance of multimodal resources in the interaction between teacher, children and picturebooks. Practices of inner dialogue, peer dialogue and interactive dialogue demonstrate how meaning is co-constructed through a rich orchestration of different multimodal resources.

Keywords: ICETEMP, picturebook mediation, dialogic education, teacher education, English FL/AL.

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1. Introduction

Dialogic education approaches can have a profound influence on intercultural and citizenship education because they are based on the mediation and co-construction of knowledge. The extensive mainstream dialogic education (DE) literature is largely grounded in L1 learning contexts and focuses mainly on verbal, oral and written discussion and argumentation (see, among others, Mercer, Wegerif & Major 2020; Cui & Teo 2021), with some exceptions (e.g., Heggernes 2019; Maine 2015). The present paper is based on the reflections generated during the initial stages of the project *Intercultural Citizenship Education through Teacher Education for the Mediation of Picturebooks* (ICETEMP; Erasmus+ KA220-HED2024-011). The project centres on student teacher education for English as a foreign or additional language (FL/AL) and focuses on intercultural and citizenship education through the mediation of picturebooks during read-aloud events for young learners (Masoni 2019; Bland 2022; Bertoldi 2025a). The innovative aspect of the project is the conceptualisation of dialogic education with reference to picturebook read-aloud performances within a synthesised framework that can facilitate intercultural communication among teachers of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The introduction of a dialogic dimension in teacher education for the mediation of picturebooks places strong emphasis on multi-sensory and multimodal communication through both enacted picturebook read-aloud performances and classroom interaction. The embodied quality of communicative interaction in the classroom and during read-aloud performances consists of ensembles of modes, including oral language, gesture, facial expression, proxemics, gaze, and voice quality (Bertoldi 2025a: 162). In addition, picturebooks are themselves inherently multimodal, through the interplay of images, written language, oral language when read aloud, graphic design, and haptic features (Painter, Martin & Unsworth 2013; Bertoldi 2025a, 2025b). These ensembles of modes contribute to shaping meaning-making in the interaction between teacher and learners (Kress 2010). In a similar vein, classroom dialogue also needs to be viewed in its naturally multimodal and embodied context rather than being treated as primarily logocentric argumentation. On the basis of these considerations, this article aims to discuss what DE practices and principles can be considered more relevant for mediating picturebooks during read-aloud performances in relation to the educational context in English as an FL/AL.

The article is a theoretical paper based on reflections and discussions in the early stages of the ICETEMP project. Dialogic education can potentially involve four main interrelated planes of interaction which are deeply interconnected and mutually influence one another:

1. Dialogic education for student teachers and children in picturebook mediation: how student teachers apply dialogic education during picturebook mediation in their teaching placement;
2. Dialogic education for student teachers interacting with educators in preparation of picturebook mediation for children: dialogic interaction during teacher education;
3. Dialogic mediation for student teachers among peers during COIL (telecollaboration): how student teachers adopt dialogic interaction during their online meetings and work with other student teachers;
4. Dialogic education for teacher educators planning modules and discussing issues among peers: how teacher educators apply dialogic education while working among peers planning education modules.

This article focuses on planes 2 and 3 at a theoretical and reflective level, while work on experimental data gathered during the project is not within its scope and will be explored in a future contribution. Planes 2 and 3 inevitably impact on planes 1 and 4 directly or indirectly, but a reflection on these levels remains beyond the scope of the present paper. In all four planes, language teacher educators and student teachers can fall back on the common background knowledge and practice offered by Communicative Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers 2014) in which language use is understood as meaningful communication among participants in socially and culturally situated events. This provides a solid basis for promoting cross-cultural dialogue in a foreign or additional language. In such interactional contexts, multimodal communication, which is pervasive and ever present in authentic communicative events, is a default support for comprehension, both in FL/AL and in L1, and can be seen as an efficient and user-friendly scaffolding strategy for verbal understanding (Wood *et al.* 1976; Krashen 1985; Curtain & Dahlberg 2004; Long 2007; Masoni 2019; Bertoldi 2025a). Thus, dialogic education in ICETEMP seamlessly fits with multimodal meaning-making, which teachers of young learners tend to adopt naturally, given the intrinsically multimodal development of language competence (Halliday 1978; Iverson & Goldin-Meadow 2005; Paradis 2007; Shams & Seitz 2008; Fabbro & Cargnelutti 2018; Wang & Wei 2022). In spite of, or maybe because of this 'natural' way of acquiring languages, the relevance of multimodality is not always considered during pre-service or in-service teacher education. Building on a more logocentric dialogic approach deriving from mainstream L1-focused literature, ICETEMP moves towards an innovative multimodal dialogic approach for FL/AL teacher education, in which picturebook mediation instruction is seen as the ideal ground for practising and reflecting on the affordances of multimodality (Bertoldi & Bortoluzzi 2019; Bertoldi 2024, 2025a, 2025b).

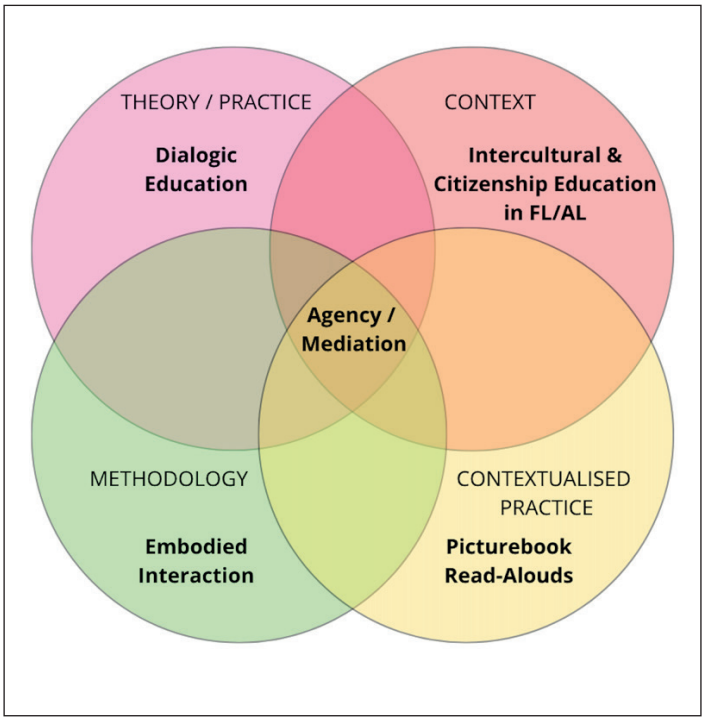


Figure 1. Dialogic education in multimodal interaction for picturebook mediation.

Reflections and discussions during the initial phases of the ICETEMP project led to the development of a model that represents the conceptual synthesis of picturebook mediation as multimodal and dialogic. The model, shown in Figure 1, illustrates the interaction of the four main educational areas in FL/AL picturebook mediation. Dialogic education (top left circle) informs both the theoretical framework and the applied practice within the broader context of intercultural and citizenship education in FL/AL (top right circle). Embodied interaction (lower circle on the left) combines a range of different modes that guide the co-construction of meaning among all participants. It is specifical-

ly through this embodied interaction that the contextualised practice of the picturebook read-aloud performance (lower circle on the right) takes place. At the intersection of these four areas lie agency and mediation (centre of the model), highlighting their central role in the interaction among all participants (children, student teachers, and teacher educators).

Within the context of the project and the preliminary reflections about the theme of dialogic education for language teacher education and picturebook mediation, the present paper positions itself as a theoretical discussion informed by previous practice and implementations and potentially sustaining future experimental research developments in this field. The innovative contribution of the present paper consists in positing multimodal interaction in educational settings as crucial for dialogic education, whereas, so far, the literature in dialogic education has predominantly focused on verbal features, neglecting non-verbal modes. In line with the purpose of the present paper, the following sections offer an outline of how dialogic approaches can be embedded in teacher education within the context of language teacher education for picturebook mediation. Section 1 has introduced the theoretical and project framework and has outlined the four interrelated planes of dialogic interaction; Section 2 discusses how dialogue can be promoted through shared communicative principles. Section 3 focuses on multimodal embodied dialogue in classroom practice through inner dialogue, peer dialogue and enacted dialogue, and presents guidelines for picturebook mediation supported by brief indicative references rather than extensive empirical evidence (see Bertoldi 2025a for such evidence). Finally, Section 4 summarises some key reflections on multimodal dialogic interaction for teacher education.

2. Promoting Dialogue Through Shared Communicative Principles

Among the fundamental conditions for promoting learning is the creation of a context of interaction that facilitates communication. Traditionally, one way of achieving this has been through an educational class contract, discussed, agreed upon and sometimes metaphorically or literally signed by learners and their teacher. In the project *Dialogue and Argumentation for Cultural Literacy Learning in Schools (*DIALLS) this contextual situation facilitating exchange is created through the dialogue and argumentation objectives of the Cultural Literacy Learning Programme (CLLP) (Rapanta *et al.* 2021). In the *Thinking Together Project* (2025), "ground rules" are established to create an atmosphere conducive to classroom dialogue, and more specifically to support the more complex level of "thinking together" through "exploratory talk" in which learners engage in constructive dialogue based on respectful critique of one another's ideas (Mercer 1995: 104). To reach this complex level, teachers need to foster a sense of trust and respect in the class (Littleton & Mercer 2013) supported by the 4Cs of good thinking, as illustrated in the diagram developed by Phillipson and Wegerif (2017: 20). The 4Cs - Caring, Critical, Collaborative and Creative thinking - are dispositions of dialogic thinking and one of the pedagogic means of fostering them is the establishment of ground rules instantiated through talk, and established and enacted with the class (Phillipson & Wegerif 2019: 39; Figure 2).

In this kind of classroom environment, respectful exchange and shared dialogue can take place and offer the educational atmosphere of respect in which ICETEMP classroom

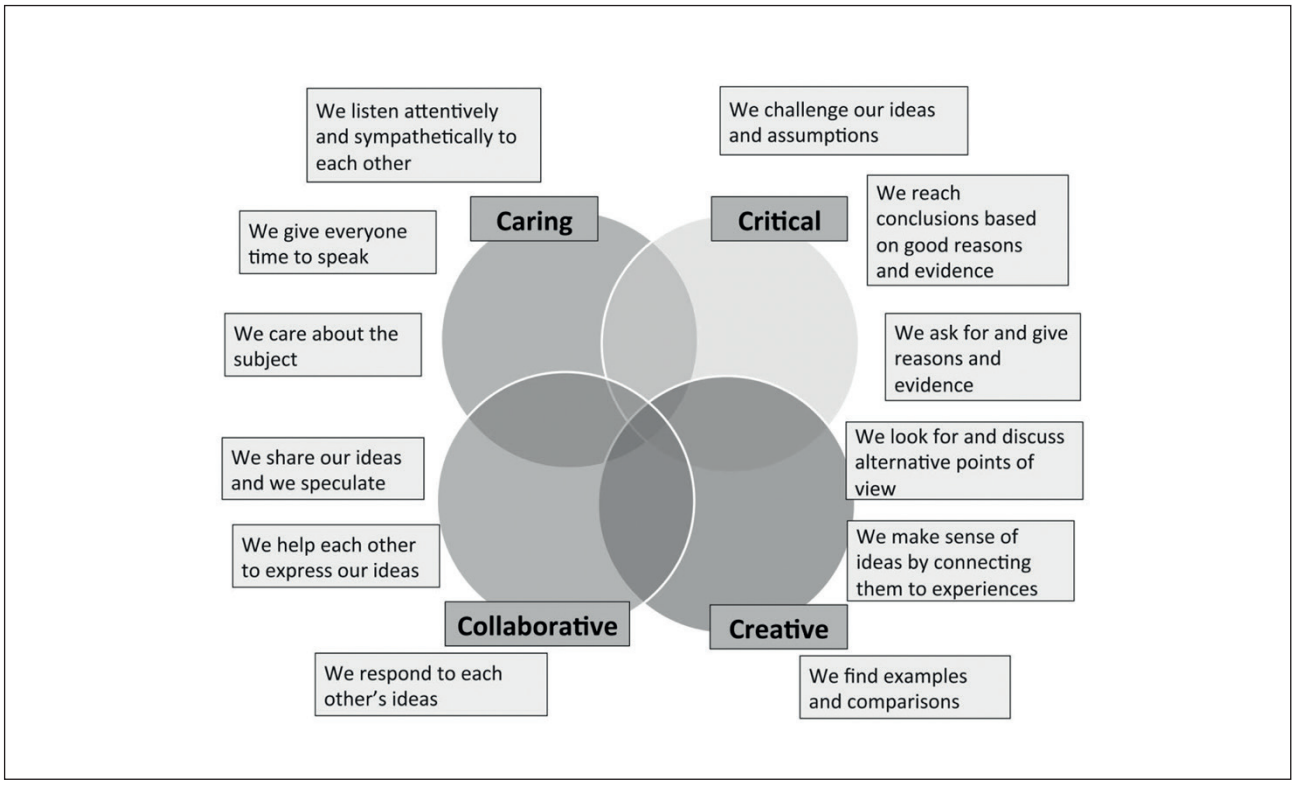


Figure 2. Ground rules for critical, caring, collaborative, and creative thinking (Phillipson & Wegerif 2019: 39).

practice can thrive, both in student teacher education classes and in picturebook mediation with children. However, we believe that this can be achieved only if embodied, in-context interactions are taken into consideration and included in the teacher education process and critical awareness-raising. Verbal and non-verbal communication are inextricably intertwined; it is Western knowledge and its pedagogical tendency towards logocentrism that has traditionally given prominence to verbal interaction in human exchanges, even in oral classroom dialogue, which is eminently embodied. Drawing on the *Thinking Together Project* (2025) ground rules, we select those that are more relevant to interaction in FL/AL for ICETEMP teacher education contexts and complement them with multimodal aspects related to embodied communication for classroom learning (Lim 2021; Lim, Cope & Kalantzis 2022) and read-aloud performances (Masoni 2019; Ellis & Mourão 2021; Bertoldi 2025a, 2025b).

Drawing on established literature on multimodality, Bertoldi (2025a, 2025b) discusses the main modes that orient the co-construction of meaning in read-aloud performances in FL/AL and classroom dialogue in the mediation of picturebooks with FL/AL children. These variables underlie face-to-face interaction and are crucial for classroom dynamics in read-aloud performances. They were extrapolated and used by Bertoldi for her data analysis annotation model (2025a: 162); however, they can also be used to reflect on how ground rules for dialogic education can be complemented with multimodal features. The categories are adapted for the ICETEMP context and for teacher education purposes:

Spoken language: picturebook text read aloud, read-aloud talk (see Ellis & Mourão 2021); phatic exchanges and classroom dialogue (the latter two may or may not be part of read-aloud talk depending on the context of use).
Voice quality: intonation (statement, question, exclamation), volume, pitch, speed and tone (surprised, amazed, excited, curious, frightened, sad, bored, etc.).
Gaze orientation: directed to students, peers, teacher educators, the picturebook, one specific element in the picturebook, a prop, directed elsewhere, etc.
Facial expression: surprised, amazed, excited, curious, happy, frightened, sad, angry, irritated, etc.
Gesture: deictic (pointing at one item), metaphorical (representing a concept, object), supporting comprehension of a vague and redundant concept, highlighting an emotional state, eliciting response/participation.
Body movement and proxemics: moving closer or further away from the audience.
Object handling: moving objects, such as props, closer or further away from the audience.
Picturebook handling: moving the book closer or further away from the audience according to the communicative function in context.
(adapted from Bertoldi 2025a).

These multimodal variables have been extensively documented in research on multimodal communication (Kress 2010; Bezemer & Kress 2016; Jewitt 2017; Norris 2019) and in FL/AL teacher education contexts, particularly in picturebook mediation (Masoni 2019; Ellis & Mourão 2021, 2022). Bertoldi's empirical studies (2024; 2025a; 2025b) demonstrate how the orchestration of these modes contributes to meaning-making and scaffolds learners' comprehension in FL/AL contexts. When reflecting critically on these variables for teacher education, we need to take into consideration that they are deeply influenced by socio-cultural norms and repertoires, as language usage is. Within a multicultural and intercultural project such as ICETEMP, participants will need to be reminded that awareness of cultural expectations and differences underpins intercultural competence. This was particularly relevant during the COIL/telecollaboration experience of the ICETEMP project when groups of student teachers from different countries interacted online during joint tasks (e.g., selecting a picturebook, planning its mediation, etc.). Additionally, categories and sub-categories overlap and combine, creating multimodal orchestrations and ensembles (Kress 2010) in which oral language is not necessarily cognitively and affectively more relevant than other modes. In fact, often it is not, even though it is given great prominence in pedagogy and in dialogic education (Bourne & Jewitt 2003). An example would be arguing a point correctly from a linguistic and factual perspective, but doing so with an aggressive tone or questioning intonation. In this case, the argument might be acceptable, but at the pragmatic level it is not dialogic; rather, it either represents an attempt at imposing a point of view (aggressive tone) or reveals uncertainty (questioning intonation). The same can happen when the argument

is accompanied by gestures or facial expressions that show distancing, imposing attitudes or hesitations. Our point is that dialogue is always embodied and never merely verbal; it involves affect and emotion, as well as knowledge and cognition. Additionally, dialogue is performed and enacted in socio-cultural contexts by participants who have specific and often emergent verbal and multimodal repertoires and culture-bound social expectations.

By complementing the ground rules in Figure 2 with multimodal variables (Phillipson & Wegerif 2019; Bertoldi 2025a), we obtain *shared principles of embodied dialogue*: they are not rules, because, as pragmatic principles (Leech 1983), they vary according to the context, the specific moment in the communicative event, and the participants' socio-cultural repertoires and expectations. They therefore need to be shared and reflected upon because they are the common ground for classroom communication and class dialogic interaction. The teacher education classroom is a sandbox in which these variables can be observed, discussed, learned, rehearsed, reflected upon and adapted to specific learning contexts such as, for instance, the COIL/telecollaboration experience as cross-cultural practice. It should be noted that learning about and adapting multimodal features is far more complex than working with other aspects, such as verbal expressions: multimodal features are embedded in individual and group development from birth, are generally used unconsciously and taken for granted as 'natural', and yet, they are not always reflected upon or discussed due to the logocentricity of our Western pedagogic system.

Following the 4Cs of *Thinking Together Project* (2025) - Caring, Critical, Collaborative and Creative talking and thinking (Figure 2) - and adapting the communicative actions to the ICETEMP context, it becomes possible to reflect with student teachers on how these need to be complemented by embodied interaction in order to develop shared principles of embodied dialogue. Table 1 operationalises the proposed framework by integrating the dialogic principles of the *Thinking Together Project* (2025) with multimodal features relevant to picturebook mediation. It must be underlined that embodied dialogue is context-sensitive and culturally mediated; therefore, some features might be more relevant than others in different contexts.

Table 1. Shared principles of embodied dialogue.

Shared principles of embodied dialogue in context	
Thinking Together Project (2025) (adapted from Phillipson & Wegerif 2019)	**Multimodal Aspects of Dialogic Interaction (adapted from Bertoldi 2025a)**
CARING	
Listen attentively and sympathetically	Gaze (directed to speaker), receptive facial expression, open body posture, minimal vocal responses (mm-hmm), respectful proxemics
Give everyone time to speak in the FL/AL	Strategic silence (pause before responding), encouraging gaze, patient facial expression, calm voice quality, inviting gestures

Show care for the interaction, the participants and the topic	Warm voice quality, engaged facial expression, appropriate proxemics, inclusive gestures, responsive body movement, sustained gaze
CRITICAL	
Challenge our ideas and assumptions	Questioning voice intonation, direct but respectful gaze, precise gestures (pointing, contrasting), thoughtful facial expression, leaning forward (engagement)
Accept and respect explained challenges	Open body posture, receptive facial expression, calm voice quality, nodding (acknowledgement), sustained gaze, measured response pace
Ask for and give reasons and evidence	Clear voice articulation, explanatory gestures (enumerating, connecting), alternating gaze (peers-topic-peers), thoughtful pauses, referential body movement
COLLABORATIVE	
Share our ideas and speculate	Inclusive gaze (scanning group), open gestures, inviting voice tone, forward-leaning posture, encouraging facial expression, appropriate volume
Help each other express ideas	Supportive gestures (offering floor), encouraging gaze, warm voice, proxemics (reducing distance), nodding, mirroring significant gestures and other non-verbal responses
Respond to questions and ideas	Direct gaze (to questioner), clear voice articulation, responsive gestures, acknowledgement through facial expression, appropriate pausing, engaged posture
CREATIVE	
Look for and discuss alternative points of view	Exploratory gestures (opening, expanding), curious facial expression, varied voice intonation, shifting gaze, dynamic body movement, wondering tone
Acknowledge others' ideas and build on them	Affirming gestures (yes, plus), connecting voice ("and also...", "building on that..."), gaze towards idea-giver, bridging gestures, enthusiastic facial expressions
Compare ideas and arrive at shared solutions	Comparative gestures (weighing, contrasting), inclusive gaze (whole group), synthesising voice tone, mediating body position, collaborative facial expressions
Respect different views	Accepting gestures (open palms), respectful gaze, validating voice quality, calm facial expression, neutral body posture, appropriate proxemics

What are here called **shared principles of embodied dialogue** (Table 1) can be expanded and adapted to the context of interaction. This adaptation depends on the type of dialogic activity to be carried out. Drawing attention to multimodal communication as the synergic interplay of visual and verbal interaction also highlights that dialogue is not only verbal.

Dialogue will often not be effective, positive or even respectful if intonation, voice quality, gestures and facial expressions – which differ cross-culturally and are particularly complex to control in a FL/AL context – are not taken into due account. One often overlooked aspect in teacher education is that, in oral face-to-face or online synchronous communication (what teachers do all the time), the verbal aspects of interaction are only a fraction of the multimodal communication ensembles we are exposed to (Ngo 2018; EUMADE4LL n. d.; Sindoni *et al.* 2019; Sindoni 2023). Nevertheless, in mainstream education verbal aspects are presented as prominent. Reflecting on how gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions can contradict or support our verbal communication represents a crucial activity for student teachers and educators, especially when the context includes a read-aloud performance with children.

3. Shared Principles of Embodied Dialogue for Picturebook Mediation During Classes and COIL/telecollaboration

Selecting picturebooks and deciding on moves of picturebook mediation should also take into account the orchestration of multimodal ensembles in FL/AL contexts; the process of building on each other's ideas needs to be grounded in carefully-orchestrated embodied dialogue. Bertoldi's guidelines for the process of selection and planning picturebook mediation in FL/AL offer suggestions that are inherently dialogic: first, they promote the teacher's inner dialogue when they reflect on picturebook mediation; second, these guidelines can also be adopted to reflect on picturebook mediation together with peers (Bertoldi 2025a, 2025b).

The shared principles of embodied dialogue, as presented in the previous section, can be adapted to synchronous and asynchronous COIL interaction. In asynchronous COIL interaction, the dialogue about the activities to be carried out, commented on, and posted on digital platforms can mainly occur through multimodal texts shared online. In the case of ICETEMP, this is done on Padlet and the eTwinning platforms. Note that all these texts have a verbal component (oral, either audio- or video-recorded, or written), but also include ensembles of modes including intonation, images, graphic aspects, sounds, music, etc. (Sindoni *et al*. 2019; Vasta & Baldry 2020). In addition, the mixed groups formed by two or more student teachers from each university (here referred to as "Erasmus Groups"[1]) had very different socio-cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds and needed to mediate their dialogic sharing, feedback and final decisions on the assigned activities through verbal and non-verbal forms of respectful interaction. Their interactional context is the online "third space" which provides a shared environment used synchronously or asynchronously, a common ground for shared principles of embodied intercultural dialogue (O'Dowd & Lewis 2016; Dooly & O'Dowd 2018; Helm 2018; Orsini-Jones & Lee 2018; Helm 2024). This

[1] For the COIL component of the ICETEMP pilot module in spring 2026, approximately 127 student teachers were involved from the seven partner universities of the project. Student teachers worked in telecollaboration divided into groups of four or five students from two different universities. At the University of Udine (Italy), where the authors of this paper are based, 20 student teachers worked in telecollaboration with 16 student teachers from the Complutense University of Madrid (Spain). The total 36 student teachers were divided into 8 groups of four or five, with students from both universities working together.

third space, which is also the online space in which materials and activities were posted, becomes a space of mediation and negotiation both linguistically and non-verbally. On the one hand, features other than verbal language gain relevance online because affordances multiply through the use of digital tools (videos, graphic design, emojis, etc.), on the other hand, some features that are generally used to scaffold comprehension and interaction become less visible or usable online. A clear example is gaze and proxemics in synchronous interaction: to look at our interlocutor, participants have to look at the webcam lens; to come closer to the interlocutor they have to come closer, but not too close, to the camera lens. In synchronous interaction we partly miss out on proxemics and gestures which tend to change in front of a screen or become less prominent for the interlocutors. In asynchronous interaction as well, feedback and reactions to resources and activities or videos posted by others have to be approached with extreme care and respect: student teachers should be reminded that this long-distance and time-displaced dialogue is going to remain online much longer than a simple fleeting oral interaction. As a consequence, participants have to ensure that the asynchronous interaction is carefully organised and clear, respectfully worded and multimodally cogent and coherent to promote comprehension and favour asynchronous dialogue and learning.

COIL/telecollaboration in ICETEMP took place in spring 2026 and focused on picturebook selection and decisions regarding how the selected book will be mediated for children in the classroom. We report here the guidelines summarised by Bertoldi (2025b) for planning the read-aloud performance through dialogue. A more detailed version of these guidelines can be found in Bertoldi (2025a: 152-155). For the purposes of ICETEMP, Bertoldi's guidelines are adapted to support dialogic reflection and practice at three interconnected planes: (1) the student teacher's inner dialogue during planning and preparation; (2) peer-to-peer dialogue during COIL/telecollaboration; and (3) enacted dialogue with children during read-aloud performances. Each guideline first presents a rationale drawn from research on multimodal picturebook mediation (Bertoldi 2025a), and then offers sample questions that invite dialogic inquiry across the three dimensions of practice. As illustrated in the Dialogic Mediation Triangle (Figure 3), these dimensions are not conceived as sequential stages but as mutually informing aspects of picturebook mediation: inner reflections become shared explorations with peers, which in turn shape dialogic interaction with children. Together, they offer a pedagogical logic oriented towards noticing, discussing, and enacting; however, this movement is not linear but reciprocal, as planning informs practice, practice reshapes reflection, and peer dialogue mediates between the two. In the following subsections, the three types of dialogue presented in Figure 3 are contextualised across different phases of read-aloud planning and performance, and their interrelationship is further developed with potential applications to teacher education.

Teachers need to become familiar with and reflect on the characteristics of the picturebook they are going to use in class and plan how best they can do it for their classroom context. The three types of dialogue can be used by teachers and educators to identify the most appropriate strategies for classroom mediation, as presented in the following sections. Note that cultural differences and specificities of the educational context require a different emphasis in applying the guidelines presented in the following sections.

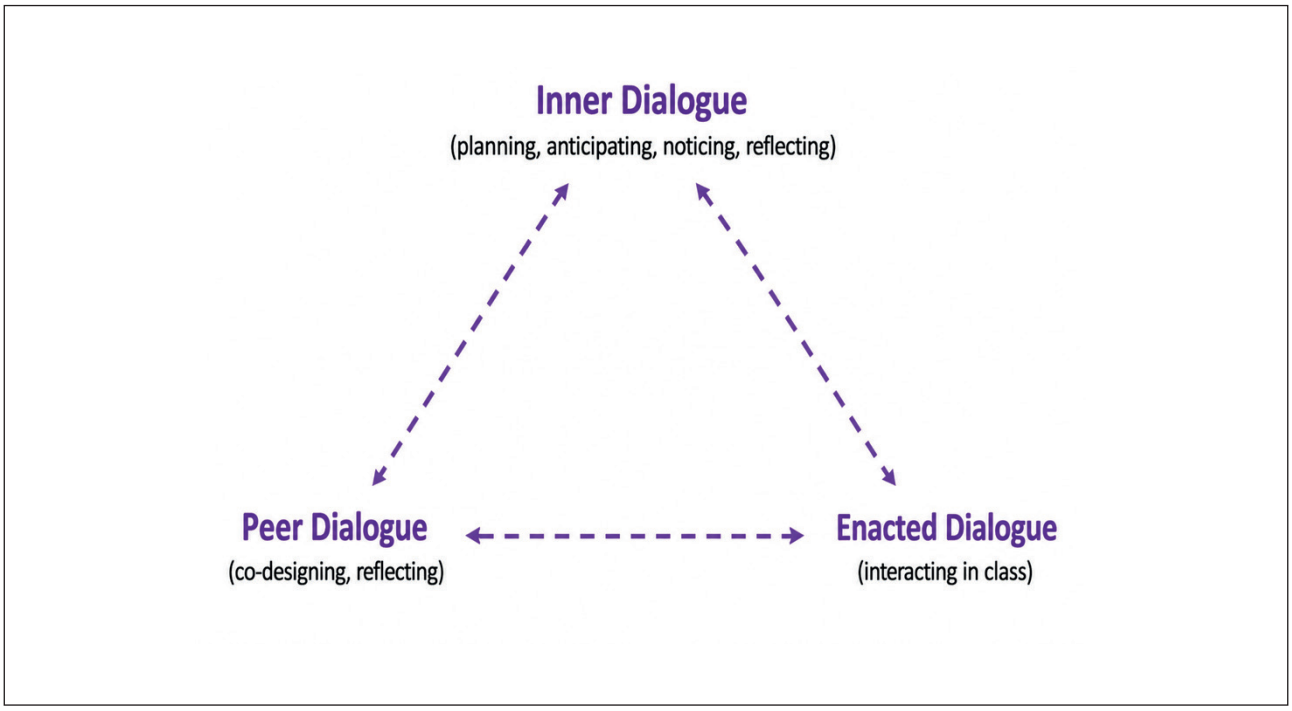


Figure 3. Dialogic Mediation Triangle.

3.1. Reading and Discussing Picturebook Verbal Texts

A close reading of the verbal text of picturebooks allows teachers as storytellers to identify key expressions (technical terms, formulaic expressions, repetitions, key structures and words) that can contribute to conveying the general meaning of the information, facts and events in the picturebook. Equally important is identifying any difficulties for specific FL/AL target audiences. Such a close reading becomes the foundation for both peer dialogue about picturebook selection and the implementation of a dialogic approach with children, as understanding what is central and what might be challenging shapes how we mediate meaning multimodally (Bertoldi 2025a: 152). In the ICETEMP project, the following types of dialogues can be implemented in the planning stage and during the selection of the picturebook for the class.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting
• How can a close reading of the selected picturebook be maximally effective?   • What key expressions, technical terms, repetitions, or structures can help convey meaning to children? • Where might difficulties arise for this specific FL/AL audience? • What can be noted about language patterns and structures?
PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting
• What joint observations do we share about the verbal text? • Which expressions in the verbal text does each of us consider "key"?

- How do our different linguistic and cultural backgrounds shape our reading of these texts?
- What challenges might we anticipate, and how can we support each other when identifying solutions?
- How do our diverse first languages help us spot features that others might miss?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How will these key expressions come alive in dialogue with children?
- Which words in the text invite questioning or wondering?
- Which structures facilitate children's participation in the conversation?
- How can I scaffold comprehension while preserving the integrity of the written text?

3.2. Exploring the Visual Text Together

Reflecting on how to make the most of the visual text in a picturebook can help teacher storytellers effectively orient children's attention to specific items in the illustrations with a view to facilitating comprehension, scaffolding communication and promoting interaction. The illustrations in picturebooks often present information that complements, extends, or even contradicts the written text, creating opportunities for meaning-making that go beyond words alone. Understanding word-image interplay is fundamental in multimodal mediation (Bertoldi 2025a: 152-153). These guidelines are particularly relevant in the planning stage of the mediation and also in reflecting what can be improved or changed.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- How can I make the most of the visual text?
- Which illustrations might help scaffold comprehension of challenging concepts or obscure vocabulary?
- Where should I direct children's attention, and when?
- What does the visual text reveal that the written text does not? How do images and words work together to create meaning?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- What do we each see in these illustrations?
- How might our different cultural and visual literacy backgrounds enrich our collective understanding?
- Which visual elements resonate with us, and why?
- How can we help each other identify details, symbolic meanings, or visual narratives that we might otherwise miss?
- What multimodal strategies might we share for orienting children's attention effectively and dialogically?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How will I invite children to explore the illustrations dialogically rather than simply directing their gaze to the illustrations?
- What questions might open up visual discovery, such as "What can you see here?" "Can you find...?" "What do you think is happening in this image?"
- How can visual exploration become a shared journey of discovery where children act as co-investigators and co-constructors of meaning?

3.3. Embodying Meaning Through Multimodal Orchestration

Weighing up how key expressions in the written text might be embodied through gestures, voice quality, use of props, and facial expressions can help teacher storytellers effectively convey meaning so that children can understand information, facts and events without altering the verbal text. This embodiment is not ancillary but constitutive of meaning: the non-verbal and suprasegmental realms (gestures, facial expressions, use of voice features and intonation) play a crucial role in children's comprehension, particularly in FL/AL contexts where verbal language alone may be insufficient for full understanding (Bertoldi 2025a: 153). These guidelines are relevant at the planning stage of picturebook mediation, but they should also be used throughout for reflecting on practice and, if needed, changing how it is implemented in class. They can even be used during the read-aloud to orient children's attention and involve them in the co-construction of meaning.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- How might key expressions be embodied through gestures, voice quality, props, and facial expressions?
- What multimodal combinations best convey meaning while preserving the integrity of the written text?
- Which concepts in the text are more abstract and therefore most in need of embodied representation?
- How can I ensure that my embodiment clarifies rather than confuses?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- How do we each embody these expressions differently?
- What can we learn from each other's gestural repertoires, voice modulation techniques, and use of available resources?
- Can we try different embodied approaches together and reflect on their clarity and effectiveness?
- How might cultural differences in embodied communication enrich our collective repertoire?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How will embodied communication invite children into dialogue rather than simply transmit information?
- Can my gestures become invitations for children to mirror, extend, or respond with their own embodied meanings?
- How does my voice quality (its warmth, enthusiasm, wonder, or curiosity) create an affective space that invites children to engage emotionally and intellectually with the content?

3.4. Achieving Coherent Multimodal Orchestration

Reflecting on the orchestration of gestures, voice quality, use of props, and facial expressions to achieve communicative purposes and bring about effective interaction means being aware of the need to avoid information and multisensory overload for children. While multimodal resources enhance meaning, their uncoordinated or excessive use can confuse rather than clarify. Coherence between modes, ensuring that gesture, voice, gaze, and facial expression work in harmony rather than competition, is essential for children's meaning-making (Bertoldi 2025a: 153). These guidelines for dialogue can also be adopted when reflecting on

practice through video recording, a technique that allows teachers to see themselves mediating the picturebook.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting
• How can I orchestrate gestures, voice, props, and facial expressions coherently? • What might create multisensory overload for children? Where is "less" actually "more"? • Are my modes working together to create a unified, comprehensible message, or are they potentially competing for attention? • How can I achieve balance between richness and clarity?
PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting
• What do we notice about each other's multimodal orchestration? • Where do we see coherence and harmony between modes? • Where might we risk overwhelming children with too many simultaneous inputs? • Can we practise together, observe each other, and offer constructive feedback on achieving multimodal balance? • What criteria can we develop together for evaluating effective orchestration?
ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class
• How does multimodal orchestration support rather than dominate dialogic flow? • Am I leaving sufficient pauses and spaces for children's multimodal responses? • Can children breathe, think, and respond, or am I filling every moment with my own performance? • How can I coordinate modes without monopolising the communicative space that should be shared?

3.5. Memorising Texts to Enable Dialogic Presence

Focusing on memorising both the verbal and visual text in the picturebook allows teacher storytellers to: (a) move the picturebook closer to children, giving them a better view of the illustrations, and (b) maintain eye contact with the audience. Being familiar with the visual text also allows storytellers to act as "tour guides" (Sipe 2008) orienting children's attention to specific images, inviting them to spot specific objects, characters or their features, thus scaffolding communication and facilitating meaning-making. Memorisation is not rote repetition but deep internalisation that frees the storyteller to be fully present and responsive to children (Bertoldi 2025a: 153). Familiarisation with the picturebook and the performance can contribute to self-efficacy for the teacher who can thus focus better on the interaction with the children.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting
• What would it mean to internalise this book so deeply that I can be fully engaged with the children rather than dependent on the page? • What are the rhythms, patterns, and key moments I need to embody?
PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting
• Can we rehearse together, helping each other become so familiar with the texts that we can focus on interaction rather than reading? • How can we practise to orient attention dialogically?

- What feedback can we offer each other about eye contact, engagement, and responsiveness to our audience?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How does memorisation free me to maintain eye contact with children, perceiving their engagement, interest, or wonder?
- How can I follow children's curiosity and interests while scaffolding their exploration of the text?
- How does deep familiarity with the book enable spontaneous, dialogic interaction rather than scripted performance?

3.6. Preparing and Rehearsing as Dialogic Practice

Preparing and rehearsing the read-aloud several times before the event with children ensures multiple dimensions of readiness. This rehearsal is not about perfecting a fixed script but rather about developing the flexibility and confidence needed to engage dialogically. Rehearsal includes: (a) developing familiarity with both visual and verbal texts and identifying formulaic expressions needed for managing group dynamics and using read-aloud talk; (b) reflecting on voice quality, speed, movement, gestures and facial expressions, using voice recording and/or videorecording to identify and control coherence between modes; and (c) pre-selecting categories of read-aloud talk that provide children with opportunities to join in, while planning moments when children can respond, react, answer, move, without interrupting the performance's flow (Bertoldi 2025a: 153-154).

3.6.1. Building Familiarity and Facilitating Language

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- What formulaic expressions will I need for managing group dynamics (e.g., "Let's look together", "Who can tell me...?", "Wait, let's see…")?
- How can I become fluent in both the book's language and the language of dialogic facilitation? Which picturebook-specific moments, images, or multimodal features might require particular questions or prompts, and how can I anticipate these in my planning?
- What transitions will I need between moments of reading and moments of interaction?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- What facilitative expressions do we find useful in our different teaching contexts?
- Can we create a shared repertoire of phrases that invite participation, acknowledge contributions, and sustain dialogue?
- Alongside these more general dialogic prompts, what picturebook-specific questions need to be anticipated and prepared, arising from the particular images, narrative moments, and multimodal features of the book?
- How do different types of dialogic questions (e.g., exploratory, interpretive, or justificatory) support children's meaning-making during read-alouds?
- How do these facilitative expressions and question types work differently across our cultural and linguistic contexts, and what can we learn from each other's ways of inviting, acknowledging, and building on children's responses?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How will familiar facilitative expressions create a predictable, safe structure within which children can take dialogic risks?
- Do my phrases genuinely invite participation ("What do you think?" "Tell us more") or do they mask closed questions?
- How can formulaic expressions support rather than constrain the spontaneity of dialogue?

3.6.2. Reflecting on Multimodal Coherence Through Recording

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- How coherent are my voice quality, gestures, movements, and facial expressions?
- Can I record myself and reflect critically on what I can see and hear?
- Do my modes work in harmony or do they send conflicting messages?
- Are there distracting or irrelevant gestures I should eliminate?
- Where do I see alignment between what I intend to communicate and what my body actually conveys?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- What do we notice about coherence between modes in each other's performances?
- Where do we see alignment or dissonance between gesture and voice, between facial expression and verbal content?
- How can we support each other in eliminating distracting elements while strengthening meaningful multimodal combinations?
- Can we develop shared criteria for evaluating coherence?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How does multimodal coherence support children's meaning-making and engagement?
- When modes align – when gesture, voice, gaze, and facial expression all point in the same direction – how does this create clarity for children?
- When there is productive tension between modes, how might this stimulate dialogic inquiry and deeper engagement with complexity?

3.6.3. Planning Read-Aloud Talk and Participation Moments

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- Which categories of read-aloud talk (questioning, commenting, extending, connecting) will enhance meaning and expand content?
- Which picturebook-specific moments, images, or multimodal features invite particular forms of talk or questioning?
- Where will I create openings for children to join in through verbal responses, gesture, sound effects, movement?
- How can I balance advance planning with openness to children's spontaneous contributions? Where are the natural breathing spaces in the text?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- What types of read-aloud talk do we each plan to use?
- How do different cultural traditions shape our approaches to questioning (open vs. closed), commenting (evaluative vs. wondering), and extending (building on children's ideas)?
- Can we learn from each other's diverse repertoires?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How do different forms of read-aloud talk create different dialogic spaces?
- When do open-ended questions ("What do you think?" "What surprises you?") invite exploration and divergent thinking?
- When do focused questions ("Can you find...?" "What colour is...?") scaffold understanding and build confidence?
- How can I ascribe value to individual differences in how children choose to participate (some verbally, some gesturally, others through attentive silence) without privileging any single mode of contribution?

3.7. Creating a Welcoming Dialogic Environment

Creating a welcoming environment for children and being open to communication can help storytellers effectively promote interaction. Smiling conveys empathy, happiness, and willingness to interact. Posture and proxemics are crucial, as they show the level of interest, attentiveness, and engagement with interlocutors. Friendly and pleasant tones of voice create a positive atmosphere, making children feel comfortable and at ease. Effective combinations of voice features, facial expressions, proxemics, and gaze contribute to creating rapport between storytellers and children, making the read-aloud performance an enjoyable and memorable experience (Bertoldi 2025a: 153-154).

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- What does "welcoming" mean in this specific context, with these specific children?
- How can my smile, posture, proxemics, and voice tone communicate genuine openness and readiness for dialogue?
- What might make children feel safe enough to take risks, ask questions, or offer unexpected contributions?
- How do I want children to feel during the read-aloud?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- How do we each create welcoming environments differently, shaped by our cultural backgrounds and teaching contexts?
- What can we learn from different cultural approaches to warmth, appropriate proximity, and engagement?
- How do norms about smiling, eye contact, and physical distance vary across our contexts, and how can this awareness help us understand the diverse ways children might respond to us?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How does a welcoming environment become a genuinely dialogic space where children feel their contributions matter?

- Do children sense that I am engaging "with" them rather than performing "for" them?
- Does my posture communicate "I am here to listen as much as to speak"?
- How do effective combinations of voice, facial expressions, proxemics, and gaze create the kind of rapport that enables authentic, rather than performative, dialogue?

3.8. Using Gaze to Perceive Engagement and Sustain Dialogue

Contemplating the function of gaze in read-aloud performances can help storytellers understand how it can be used to 'perceive' the children's engagement during the read-aloud: their interest, involvement, enthusiasm, boredom, and excitement offer constant feedback to the storyteller. Reflecting on the relevance of eye contact between teacher storytellers and children can contribute to promoting engagement and communicating to all children that they are considered fully-fledged agents and active participants during the performance. Gaze is not simply about looking but about seeing and being seen, about recognition and acknowledgement (Bertoldi 2025a: 154). Through gaze, every child can feel involved and a protagonist in the read-aloud event and called to participate in the dialogic interaction.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting

- What are the functions of gaze in dialogue?
- How can I use eye contact not just to transmit but also to perceive, to notice engagement, interest, involvement, confusion, enthusiasm, or withdrawal?
- What does it mean to truly see children rather than simply look in their direction? How can gaze become a form of listening?

PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting

- How do we each use and interpret gaze differently?
- What cultural norms shape our eye contact patterns, when direct gaze signals respect or disrespect, engagement or challenge?
- How can we help each other understand that gaze in dialogue is not about surveillance but about holding space, about communicating "I see you, I acknowledge you"?
- How does gaze function in our own peer dialogue, when do we make eye contact, when do we look away, and what does this communicate?

ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class

- How does eye contact communicate to each child that they are a fully-fledged agent and active participant, not merely a passive recipient?
- How can my gaze invite rather than evaluate, welcome rather than judge?
- How do I notice children's subtle signals – a furrowed brow, a slight lean forward, a glance towards a peer – and respond dialogically to what I see?
- Can I perceive children's engagement without my gaze becoming intrusive or demanding?

3.9. Valuing Children's Multimodal and Plurilingual Repertoires

Reflecting on the importance of giving children the opportunity to interact through their multimodal and plurilingual repertoires (i.e., FL/AL, own language(s), other languages,

voice sounds, gesture, body movements, focused gaze, attentive silence) can support teacher storytellers in recognising children's existing knowledge and linguistic resources as assets. This recognition that children bring rich and varied resources to interaction is fundamental for dialogic pedagogy. When children can draw on their full communicative repertoires, they become active meaning-makers rather than passive language learners (Bertoldi 2025a: 154).

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting
• How can I create opportunities for children to interact through their full multimodal and plurilingual repertoires? • Am I prepared to value not only verbal responses in FL/AL, but also contributions in my own language(s), in other languages, through gesture, through sound effects, through attentive silence? • What messages do my planning decisions send about which of these forms of participation "count"?
PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting
• What multimodal and plurilingual resources do we each bring to our own dialogue in COIL/telecollaboration? • How can our first-hand experiences of negotiating meaning across languages and modes help us better understand children's experience? • How can we support each other in genuinely valuing all forms of participation, including the use of different languages?
ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class
• How am I noticing, interpreting, validating children's diverse ways of participating? • Am I truly listening to silence as a form of engagement? • Am I recognising gesture, gaze, facial expression, body movement, and the use of children's own language(s) as legitimate, valuable contributions to dialogue, rather than as precursors to verbal participation in FL/AL? • How can I create space for children to draw on their knowledge and plurilingual abilities as assets, trusting that meaning can be made across and between languages and modes?

3.10. Respecting Socio-Cultural Differences in Dialogic Interaction

Considering how verbal and non-verbal repertoires are influenced by socio-cultural variables is crucial for storytellers seeking to understand and interpret the interactions of different participant groups (in terms of age and other variables), along with their socio-cultural and multimodal backgrounds and expectations. It is also essential to respect individual differences in the way each child establishes a relationship with the storyteller and the other children and interacts with the picturebook. There is no single "correct" way to participate in dialogue; rather, there are multiple culturally shaped ways of being present, attentive, engaged, and responsive. Dialogic pedagogy requires cultural humility and responsiveness to difference (García & Li Wei 2014; Bertoldi 2025a: 154). One of the several instances of cultural and individual differences in dialogue is the use of gestures and facial expressions that can be used with more or less emphasis during picturebook mediation.

INNER DIALOGUE: planning, anticipating, noticing, reflecting
• How are verbal and non-verbal repertoires influenced by socio-cultural variables? • What assumptions do I bring about "appropriate" participation, turn-taking, proximity, eye contact, gesture, and silence? • What do I need to unlearn? • What do I need to learn about the specific children I will engage with? • How can I approach cultural differences with genuine curiosity and humility rather than with assumptions about deficit or deviance?
PEER DIALOGUE: co-designing, reflecting
• What have we learned from each other about cultural differences in communication and interaction? • How do expectations about participation, appropriate proximity, eye contact patterns, volume, turn-taking, and the meaning of silence vary across our contexts? • How has our COIL/telecollaboration experience revealed our own cultural assumptions and helped us develop greater awareness and flexibility? • How can this cross-cultural dialogue prepare us to respect and learn from children's diverse ways of engaging?
ENACTED DIALOGUE: interacting in class
• Am I respecting individual differences in how each child establishes connection with me, with peers, and with the picturebook? • Can I recognise that a child who rarely speaks may be deeply engaged? • Can I recognise that a child who moves constantly may be intensely focused? • Can I recognise that a child who avoids eye contact may be showing respect? • How can dialogue remain genuinely open to multiple valid, culturally shaped ways of being and communicating?

4. Concluding Reflections on Embodied Dialogue for Teacher Education

The purpose of the paper has been to identify which DE practices and principles can be considered more relevant for mediating picturebooks during read-aloud performances in relation to the educational context in English FL/AL. By exploring dialogic education as an embodied practice, the paper has offered innovative reflections and guidelines across three interconnected levels: the dialogic relationships between student teachers and teacher educators, peer dialogue among student teachers in the teacher education class or in COIL/telecollaboration contexts, and enacted dialogue between student teachers and children during picturebook mediation (Figure 3). What emerges is not a linear sequence but a recursive, spiralling relationship in which each dimension of dialogue informs and transforms the others.

The guidelines presented for picturebook selection and mediation exemplify this recursive quality and demonstrate that shared principles of embodied dialogue inform teacher education. Beginning with inner dialogue, that is, individual reflection on how to orchestrate multimodal resources, the guidelines expand into peer dialogue in COIL/telecollaboration or in presence, where diverse cultural and linguistic perspectives enrich collective understanding. Both forms of dialogue then shape and are reshaped by enacted dialogue with children, whose embodied responses continually challenge and expand pedagogical under-

standing. By positioning agency and mediation at the centre of dialogic interaction, Figure 1 captures this ecology, which lies at the core of the present article and gives explicit attention to embodied and multimodal dimensions often ignored or neglected in the theory and practice of dialogic education.

By recontextualising established practices of dialogic approaches (DIALLS n.d., *Thinking Together Project* 2025) as shared principles of embodied dialogue (Table 1 and Section 3), we posit that authentic dialogue is inherently multimodal: intonation, gesture, gaze, facial expression, proxemics, and body movement constitute meaning-making in their own right. This extends mainstream approaches to dialogic education from a predominantly logocentric perspective towards an explicitly embodied and multimodal model of dialogue. This theoretical re-contextualisation of dialogue as embodied and multimodal practice is particularly relevant in FL/AL contexts, where children's emerging linguistic competence makes them highly attuned to paralinguistic and embodied cues. The paper also contributes to teacher education for FL/AL contexts and picturebook mediation in particular, since learning to orchestrate non-verbal modes coherently becomes as fundamental as learning to ask productive questions or to build on ideas verbally to establish the dialogic relationship with children. We believe that the teacher education classroom thus becomes a "multimodal rehearsal space" for dialogic principles and practices where student teachers can identify, adopt, and reflect upon embodied and performed communication before enacting those dialogic interactions with children. COIL/telecollaboration offers particularly rich learning contexts, as encounters with diverse cultural norms around gaze, proximity, gesture, and silence become opportunities to develop the cultural humility and multimodal flexibility that dialogic pedagogy requires. Learning to teach dialogically is itself a dialogic process that is embodied, multimodal, intercultural, and distributed across multiple planes. Student teachers do not learn by first acquiring principles abstractly and then applying them, but through authentic participation in dialogic interactions at all three levels simultaneously. This paper suggests that FL/AL teacher education requires creating conditions for dialogic encounters across diversity and supporting the development of embodied competences to facilitate such encounters with children. It also implies that the whole of student teacher learning practice must attend to multimodal dimensions: the focus should rest not only on what student teachers say, but also on how they say it and how they listen to students and peers with their whole bodies, how they use gaze to invite rather than evaluate, and how they orchestrate modes while leaving space for others' contributions.

In recontextualising dialogic education from primarily logocentric to explicitly embodied practice, we aim not to prescribe new rules but to invite ongoing inquiry into how meaning is made together through a rich orchestration of all communicative resources. Teacher education for dialogic, intercultural, plurilingual classrooms centres on students and teachers being fully engaged, with their whole selves, in attentive and respectful relationships with others.

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Maria Bortoluzzi (PhD, Edinburgh) is Associate Professor of English Linguistics at the University of Udine, Italy. Her research interests include ecological discourse studies, critical discourse studies, multimodal and multiliteracy awareness for language teacher education

in English as a foreign and additional language. She has published extensively in these areas. Her latest book, *Representation of Plants in Discourse: From Neglect to Recognition* (2026, Bloomsbury Academic), includes educational reflections on learning with plants for language teachers. She co-edited the volume *Ecological Communication and Ecoliteracy* (2024, Bloomsbury Academic).
maria.bortoluzzi@uniud.it

Elisa Bertoldi (PhD) is an experienced English teacher in Italian primary schools and a teacher educator working with in-service and pre-service teachers. She held research fellowships at the Universities of Udine and Padova. Her research focuses on multimodal communication in EFL teaching and learning, EFL teacher education, pragmatics, picturebook mediation, and AI in EFL assessment. She recently published the monograph *A Multimodal Exploration of Non-Fiction Read-Aloud Performances in English as an Additional Language* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025).
elisa.bertoldi@uniud.it

Nicoletta Vasta is Professor of English Linguistics in the Degree Course in Primary Education at the University of Udine. She conducts research in critical multimodal discourse analysis (CMDA) and its pedagogical applications, as in her recent study (DOI:10.35923/BAS.29.23) on the history section of *BrainPOP*, an animated educational website for primary school children, and on the educational resources for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize-winning *1619 Project*'s account of Black America's history. Her long-standing interest in EFL/EAL learning and teacher training dates back to the 1990s, when she coordinated the University of Udine unit's participation in the Italian Ministry of Education's first programme for in-service EFL primary schoolteachers.
nicoletta.vasta@uniud.it

Cristiana Tonon is a PhD student in Ecolinguistics at the University of Udine, Italy, and was a visiting researcher at the University of Gloucestershire, UK, for four months in spring 2026. Her research examines the emerging discourses on the rights of rivers. Her previous work explored metaphors used in the experience of depression. She is also a permanent teacher of English in an Italian high school. She taught Italian FL in a secondary school in Ireland in 2020/2021 and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to teach Italian FL at a liberal arts college in the United States in 2023/2024.
tonon.cristiana@spes.uniud.it