



Telling Through Pictures: Exploring Children's Agency in Shared Talk About Favourite Books

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Abstract

This study explores children's agency during adult–child interactions focused on the child's favourite book. A total of 55 preschool-aged children (5–6 years old) participated in semi-structured interviews that examined how they used book illustrations to support, structure, and enrich their dialogue with adult about a book. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical procedures included obtaining informed consent from parents, verbal assent from the children, and offering participants the right to withdraw at any time. The findings indicate that children actively used illustrations to facilitate participation, organize their responses, and enhance engagement in dialogue with the adult. The reference to the illustrations in book enabled children to take initiative and influence the direction of the conversation, thereby fostering mutual understanding. Through the exercise of agency, children assumed a more active and dominant role in the interaction, effectively demonstrating their knowledge, shaping the flow of communication, and asserting control over how the book's content was interpreted and shared.

Keywords Children's agency · Picture books · Illustration · Preschool age

Résumé

Cette article examine l'agentivité des enfants lors d'interactions adulte–enfant centrées sur le livre préféré de l'enfant. Au total, 55 enfants d'âge préscolaire (5–6 ans) ont participé à des entretiens semi-structurés visant à analyser la manière dont ils mobilisent les illustrations du livre pour soutenir, structurer et enrichir leur dialogue avec un adulte autour d'un ouvrage. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique. Les procédures éthiques comprenaient l'obtention du

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consentement éclairé des parents, l'assentiment verbal des enfants, ainsi que la possibilité pour les participants de se retirer de l'étude à tout moment. Les résultats montrent que les enfants utilisent activement les illustrations pour faciliter leur participation, organiser leurs réponses et renforcer leur engagement dans le dialogue avec l'adulte. Le recours aux illustrations du livre permet aux enfants de prendre des initiatives et d'influencer l'orientation de la conversation, favorisant ainsi une compréhension mutuelle. Par l'exercice de leur agentivité, les enfants adoptent un rôle plus actif et dominant dans l'interaction, démontrant efficacement leurs connaissances, façonnant le déroulement de la communication et affirmant un contrôle sur la manière dont le contenu du livre est interprété et partagé.

Resumen

Este artículo explora la agencia infantil durante interacciones adulto–niño centradas en el libro favorito del niño o la niña. Un total de 55 niños en edad preescolar (5–6 años) participaron en entrevistas semiestructuradas que examinaron cómo utilizaron las ilustraciones del libro para apoyar, estructurar y enriquecer su diálogo con un adulto en torno a una obra. Los datos se analizaron mediante análisis temático. Los procedimientos éticos incluyeron la obtención del consentimiento informado de los padres, el asentimiento verbal de los niños y la posibilidad de que los participantes se retiraran del estudio en cualquier momento. Los resultados indican que los niños utilizaron activamente las ilustraciones para facilitar la participación, organizar sus respuestas y aumentar su implicación en el diálogo con el adulto. La referencia a las ilustraciones del libro permitió a los niños tomar la iniciativa e influir en la dirección de la conversación, favoreciendo así la comprensión mutua. A través del ejercicio de su agencia, los niños asumieron un papel más activo y dominante en la interacción, demostrando eficazmente sus conocimientos, moldeando el flujo de la comunicación y afirmando control sobre la manera en que el contenido del libro fue interpretado y compartido.

Introduction

While engaging with books, children draw on multiple semiotic resources—text, images, and visual design features—to make sense of what they read and see (Sipe, 1998). In doing so, they employ both hermeneutic and aesthetic impulses to construct meaning (Sipe, 2000). Among these resources, illustrations hold particular significance, as young children often “read” images as visual texts, exploring pictures rather than relying solely on written language (Pantaleo, 2024). During shared reading, illustrations typically attract most of children’s attention (Evans & Saint-Aubin, 2005; Justice et al., 2005; Roy-Charland et al., 2015). By foregrounding details that resonate with children’s interests and experiences, illustrations invite interpretation, stimulate imagination, and create opportunities for children to participate as active meaning-makers. This openness of interpretation fosters identity development and empowers children to act as agents of their own imagination and learning (Mathis, 2016).

In this study, we focus on a specific context that invites agentic engagement: an adult–child interaction in which a child introduces their favourite book to an adult. We examine how children use illustrations to pursue communicative goals, contribute to shared meaning-making, and participate actively in book-related interactions. Grounded in a sociocultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch et al., 1996), we conceptualize children's agency not as an isolated trait but as a relational, context-dependent process. Agency is understood as the capacity to act purposefully, negotiate meaning, and shape interactions in ways that reflect one's own intentions, motivations, and abilities (Kumpulainen et al., 2014). It emerges through interactions with others, cultural tools, and the goals of specific activities (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Developing agency thus requires openness to the influence of cultural tools and engagement in socially situated practices, which in turn enable children to act as purposeful and engaged participants in their own learning (Choi, 2018; Fisher, 2011).

Child's Agency in Early Childhood Literacy Development

This study is based on the understanding that successful promotion of children's literacy development requires more than merely providing access to cultural tools associated with literacy—so-called *literacy objects* (Neuman & Roskos, 1992)—or ensuring that competencies evolve in line with prescribed educational standards defined in the early childhood curriculum (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Rather, within both home and early education settings, through embodied interactions with the material environment (Daniels, 2021), children can benefit from meaningful opportunities to take initiative, act with purpose, and co-construct experiences that support their goals and promote further learning (Vaughn, 2014).

Recent research in early literacy foregrounds children's agency as a critical lens through which to understand young learners' engagement in self-directed and exploratory literacy practices. As Vaughn et al. (2020) demonstrate in their systematic review, agency in literacy education highlights how learners actively shape their environments through intentional actions and choices. The review identifies five recurring dimensions of agency: self-perception, intentionality, choice-making, persistence, and social interaction. These dimensions reflect children's capacities to view themselves as competent actors, make deliberate decisions, persist through challenges, and co-construct meaning within social contexts.

Empirical studies further reveal that elements of agency can be observed in literacy activities even among very young children. For instance, Rowe and Neitzel (2010) found that among 2- to 3-year-olds, varying patterns of interest lead to different levels of engagement in emergent writing. These differences manifest in how children interact with people, materials, and tasks, ultimately shaping unique pathways into early literacy. Similarly, research with kindergarteners shows that when given opportunities to make choices, children explore diverse genres and integrate digital and physical resources to create their own books. Such experiences transform writing into a playful, creative, and expressive activity—contrasting with the often rigid and prescriptive literacy practices typical in formal schooling (Son & Wee, 2024). Agentic engagement also contributes to children's evolving identities as learners, allowing

them to challenge normative expectations of literacy and redefine what it means to be literate in early education settings (Kuby & Vaughn, 2015; MacCleod, 2004).

Book interactions, in particular, offer multiple avenues for preschool children to exercise and develop agency. Through the selection of books, recognition of familiar content, opportunities to expand knowledge, the formation of emotional connections, and the integration of story elements into play, children engage literature as active participants. As Mathis (2016) notes, while books are not the sole source of agency, they serve various important functions in the lives of young literacy learners. Crucially, the way book use is embedded in everyday contexts—whether in home or in early childhood setting—determines whether and how children’s agency is supported or constrained.

The Current Study

Books, as cultural artefacts, play a pivotal role in mediating children’s actions and meaning-making processes in early literacy development. They are not merely instructional tools but dynamic spaces through which children negotiate meaning, express identity, and position themselves as active participants in the social world of reading and interpretation. Building on this perspective, the present study examines how young children exercise agency in interactions involving books they are familiar with and consider their favourites. We adopt a sociocultural understanding of agency as the capacity to act intentionally, pursue interests, and engage meaningfully in social exchanges (Dyson, 2020). Our focus is on children aged 5 to 6, who are at the cusp of formal literacy yet not fully independent readers. At this stage, illustrations often become the primary gateway to narrative meaning—either through their interplay with written text (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006) or as self-contained visual stories with their own interpretive logic (Kress, 1997; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Within this context, we investigate how children use illustrations to direct and shape conversations about their favourite books, thereby enacting agency and co-constructing meaning in dialogue with adults. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. *How do children exercise their agency during conversations with adults about their favourite books?*
2. *In what ways do children use illustrations to support, structure, and enhance their communication in these interactions?*

Furthermore, this study aims to inform early childhood education and care practices by centring children’s perspectives, highlighting the significance of acknowledging and valuing young children’s lived experiences, interpretations, and intentions within reading and literacy-related interactions (Sommer et al., 2010).

Methodology

To address our research questions of exploring preschool children's agency in book-related talk, we adopted a qualitative research design (Shank, 2006) grounded in semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviewing is well suited for research with young children, as it allows them to express their perspectives in an ecologically valid and developmentally responsive way. This approach enabled children to draw on their own experiences with books and to actively participate in the meaning-making process during the interview interactions.

Given the exploratory nature of our research questions, we employed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This analytic method provides a flexible yet rigorous framework that can accommodate both concepts identified as important a priori and insights that emerge from the data. Its adaptability makes it appropriate for research with young children, whose ways of expressing experience are often multimodal, situated, and fluid.

Our study followed an inductive, data-driven orientation (Byrne, 2022), allowing patterns and themes to arise from the children's talk without imposing pre-existing theoretical categories. This approach aligns with our intention to foreground children's own interpretations and to generate broader understandings from specific observations within the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as an open-ended method that provides space for children's spontaneous contributions, including their initiatives, preferences, and narrative choices—key dimensions of children's agency.

Epistemologically, our stance can be described as contextualist (Braun & Clarke, 2022), acknowledging both the meaningfulness of children's subjective experiences and the influence of the broader social and cultural contexts in which these experiences are embedded. This epistemological position enables us to recognise that while children's accounts are interpretive and co-constructed, they nevertheless reflect real and meaningful experiences for the children themselves (Madill et al., 2000; Willig, 2008).

Participants

In this study, we employed a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2015), which involved selecting participants who could provide rich information relevant to the research topic and thus enable an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study. Therefore, we included children who showed an interest in books and reading and who typically demonstrated signs of active engagement during shared reading in either home or preschool settings (for example, by asking questions, commenting on the storyline or illustrations). The selection was based on initial consultations with the preschool teachers who helped to identify children that enjoyed talking about books and reading.

A total of 55 children (29 girls and 26 boys), aged 5 to 6 years ($M_{age} = 5.9$), participated in the study; the youngest was 5 years old and the oldest was 6 years and 11 months old. All participating children attended preschool and were enrolled in the preschool class. Children were recruited for the study from various regions across

Slovakia as well as from bordering regions of the Czech Republic. The interviews were conducted in the children's mother tongue, either Slovak or Czech.

Participating children primarily came from homes where shared reading was a common practice, often integrated into bedtime routines or other quiet moments. In most families, mothers were identified as the main adults engaging in shared reading (48 cases), followed by fathers (6 cases) and grandmothers (1 case). The mean age of adults involved in shared reading was 37.6 years, ranging from 28 to 60 years. These adults represented a range of educational backgrounds: four had completed secondary school, twenty-one had secondary school with a leaving examination, six held a bachelor's degree, twenty-two a master's degree, and one had completed doctoral studies. Their professional backgrounds were similarly diverse, including education (11), accounting and finance (11), services (10), maternity leave or home care (7), healthcare (6), technology and manufacturing (4), advertising or media (2), science (1), agriculture (1), and human resources (1).

In their families, children had ready access to books through personal or family collections, including shared bookshelves with siblings. For the study each child independently selected a book they considered their favourite and demonstrated a clear interest in discussing it during the interview. From this perspective, these children represent appropriate participants for the study due to their prior experience with shared reading and engagement with books. However, the purposeful sampling strategy also constitutes a limitation, as it excludes children without established relationships to reading and literature.

Ethical Considerations

Parents were recruited through kindergarten teachers, who provided them with information about the objectives of the study. Those who expressed preliminary interest in participating with their child were subsequently contacted by phone or in person to receive more detailed information. After considering the study's details, parents provided written informed consent, which included information about their right to withdraw at any time, including on the day of the interview, either verbally or in writing.

Children provided verbal consent and were informed that they could pause or discontinue the interview at any time, ensuring their voluntary participation and comfort throughout the process.

The research was conducted in conformity with the APA's ethical code; the ethics approval was obtained from the institutional Ethical Committee associated with the first author.

Method

The study employed in-person, semi-structured interviews focusing on children's favourite books. Prior to the interview, parents were asked to assist their child in preparing for the session by explaining that they would be talking about a book they particularly liked. Each child was asked to have their favourite book at hand and was informed that they could use it at any time during the conversation. Parents' role was

limited to providing this instruction and, if necessary, helping the child locate the chosen book at home. The selection of the book itself was entirely up to the child, who had full freedom to choose any book they wished to share. This autonomy was further reinforced at the beginning of each interview, when the interviewer introduced the session with an open prompt such as: *"I'd like to speak with you about your favourite book—a book you would like to share with me."* Before the interview began, children also chose the location within their home where the conversation would take place, most commonly their own room. In most cases, parents were not physically present in the room during the interview but could observe from a nearby location.

The interviews were structured into three thematic units, each following a framework of questions adapted to the child's linguistic and communicative abilities.

The first thematic unit aimed to identify the child's favourite book and explore its content. Children were asked to introduce their chosen book and describe its storyline or content. The full list of books discussed is presented in "[Appendix](#)". The initial questions were: *"What story does this book tell? Can you tell me what happened in it?"* for fiction books, or *"What is your favourite book about?"* for non-fiction books. These questions were designed to elicit a natural retelling and allow children to engage with the book at their own pace. The second thematic unit focused on the characteristics that influenced the child's book selection and examined whether the book was suitable for independent interaction (e.g., browsing) or shared reading. Children were asked why they liked the book and why they chose it as their favourite for discussion. Initial questions included: *"What do you like most about this book?"*, *"Can you tell me the story or part of the book that interested you the most?"*, and *"Why do you like reading or looking at this book?"* This section further examined themes such as the main characters from the child's perspective, the overall mood of the book, its most engaging features, and the child's motivations to interact with it (e.g., for entertainment or to learn new information). Additional follow-up questions were used to explore aspects that the child did not mention spontaneously. The third thematic unit focused on the reading habits and routines of the child and their family, as well as practices related to book selection. Children were asked questions such as: *"Do you have someone (outside preschool) who often reads books to you? Who is it?"*, *"Do you have to ask them to read, or do they come and suggest reading together?"*, *"Do you like it when someone reads to you? Why do you enjoy it?/Why don't you enjoy it?"*, and *"What does it look like when someone reads to you? Can you show me where and how you usually read together?"* This unit allowed children to describe shared reading routines, preferred reading partners, and their experiences with reading at home, providing insight into their home literacy environment.

The interview protocol was designed to foster children's active and comfortable participation by creating a child-friendly, dialogic setting in their home (Ponizovsky-Bergelson et al., 2019), where the presence of their favourite book and the researcher's genuine interest encouraged them to share their experiences and assume an expert role in the interaction. The conversation with a child was guided using open-ended questions whenever possible. When children provided brief or limited responses, the interviewer repeated or reformulated questions, provided prompts, and offered gentle encouragement to elaborate (e.g., *"That's interesting! Can you tell me more about that?"*). Deliberate pauses were also employed to give children time to

reflect and expand their responses. In cases where children were particularly quiet or hesitant, the interviewer followed the child's lead, acknowledged their contributions, and used nonverbal cues (e.g., nodding) to support engagement without pressuring them. Although a set of thematic question areas was prepared for the semi-structured interview, the interviewer closely followed the child's verbal and non-verbal cues, adjusting the course of the interview or asking additional questions related to topics spontaneously introduced by the child (Shiel et al., 2012). Throughout the interview, the researcher aimed to create an atmosphere of trust and genuine curiosity, reassuring children that their perspectives were valued and interesting. In this setting, the researcher was perceived as a visitor in the child's familiar space, allowing the child to exercise agency by introducing the researcher to their world while supporting those who were less talkative to participate at their own pace.

Data Analyses

Each interview with the child was videotaped, transcribed verbatim (McLellan et al., 2003) and analysed. The transcription of the data included not only the child's verbal expressions but also their nonverbal interactions with the book, such as pointing, page-turning, or gesturing. These interactions were coded and analysed to identify the aspects of the book that children themselves highlighted as important in explaining why it was their favourite. Such aspects included specific story elements, characters, illustrations, or emotional responses that the child emphasized during the conversation. The analysis also focused on how these references contributed to the child's meaning-making and sharing processes during the discussion. Interviews with children were processed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), aided by the qualitative data analysis tool ATLAS.ti, version 9. Thematic analysis was used to prioritize the voices and experiences of our participants, allowing for the development of themes that authentically reflect their perspectives and insights.

The data were analysed using the six-step procedure of reflexive thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by the first author and imported into ATLAS.ti for systematic organization and coding. Both authors familiarized themselves with the data through repeated readings and independently generated initial inductive codes that captured salient features of children's engagement with books and illustrations. Related codes were then grouped into preliminary categories and candidate themes. These were collaboratively reviewed and refined through iterative discussions between the authors, following a consensus-building approach that emphasized interpretive depth (Nowell et al., 2017). Discrepancies were discussed until agreement was reached. The final themes and subthemes were defined to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions between them, representing the central patterns in children's accounts of their book reading and interactions experiences.

Results

Children's agency was promoted from the outset by the research design, which allowed each child to independently select the book that would serve as the basis for the discussion. This autonomy in choice fostered a sense of ownership and engagement, particularly because the selected books were familiar and favoured by the children. Familiarity with the book enabled the child to navigate its content independently, with illustrations serving as navigational anchors. More importantly, from the perspective of investigating children's agency, the child's in-depth knowledge of the book allowed for a shift in the usual adult–child power dynamic. Rather than assuming a passive or subordinate role, the child could adopt the position of an expert, engaging in the conversation with a sense of confidence and authority.

The child's role as an active agent in communication about their favourite book was supported by the book's illustrations, which played a significant role in two key themes identified during the analysis. The first theme—*illustrations as a means for enhancing children's expressive abilities*—focused on how illustrations served as supportive tools that helped children overcome limitations in their expressive and communicative abilities. Within theme following subthemes were developed from the relating codes: *seeking shared attention*, *avoiding the need for detailed verbal explanation*, *overcoming linguistic limitations*, *using illustrations as an alternative mode of expression*, *illustrations as cognitive aids in communication*, and *navigating and managing the structure and content of storytelling*. It highlights children's use of illustrations as visual cues that support communication and the reconstruction of narrative content. The second theme—*illustrations in the service of children's autonomy and initiative*—captured children's interactions with illustrations as a means of asserting initiative and taking control of the interaction. Within this theme following subthemes were derived: *drawing the adult's attention*, *actively checking the adult's engagement*, *intervening in the interaction*, *initiating new topics*, and *inviting the adult to assist*. By referring to illustrations, children directed the flow of conversation, introduced topics of personal interest, and at times redefined the adult's role—from a guiding presence to that of a responsive listener.

Table 1 presents an overview of the finalized themes and subthemes with their corresponding descriptions.

Illustrations as a Means for Enhancing Children's Expressive Abilities

The children who participated in our interviews willingly shared and elaborated on details about their favourite books, drawing on personal experiences and preferences. These interviews are characterized by rich interactive exchanges between the child and the adult, in which the book and its visual elements served as key mediators for more effective communication.

Typically, while recounting the story, children followed the illustrations closely and pointed to them, optionally also *seeking shared attention* with the adult. It was common for children to refer to illustrations that corresponded to textual elements they considered important. By doing so, they were able to maintain narrative flow, include key content, and ensure that their communication partner was following and

Table 1 Summary of the themes

Theme	Subtheme	Description
Illustrations as a means for enhancing children's expressive abilities	<i>seeking shared attention</i>	Pointing to illustrations or using verbal cues (e.g., "look," "here it is") to engage the adult's focus and ensure shared understanding during storytelling
	<i>avoiding the need for detailed verbal explanation, overcoming linguistic limitations</i>	Using illustrations to communicate meanings, emotions, or surprising story moments without relying on complex vocabulary or extended verbal explanations
	<i>using illustrations as an alternative mode of expression</i>	Turning to images as expressive tools that bridged the gap between their thoughts and verbal communication when lacking the words to describe the idea
	<i>illustrations as cognitive aids in communication</i>	Using visuals to recall story details, organize thoughts, and maintain the flow of narration by providing concrete visual anchors for memory and meaning
	<i>navigating and managing the structure and content of storytelling</i>	Using illustrations strategically to guide the story, emphasize key events, shift focus, or maintain coherence, demonstrating agency in shaping the narrative
Illustrations in the service of children's autonomy and initiative	<i>drawing the adult's attention</i>	Using gestures and verbal cues (e.g., "Look!" or "I'll show you!") to highlight key visual elements and direct the adult's focus to specific parts of the story
	<i>actively checking the adult's engagement,</i>	Seeking confirmation that the adult understood their intended reference, using phrases like "See?" or pointing to verify shared comprehension
	<i>intervening in the interaction</i>	Taking initiative to correct, clarify, or expand on details of the story when adults overlooked them
	<i>initiating new topics</i>	Introducing new ideas or story-related observations that they found personally meaningful, redirecting the flow of the conversation
	<i>inviting the adult to assist</i>	Inviting the adult to read from the text, pointing precisely to the relevant passage in case children want to share specific information but could not recall details

comprehending their story—even when their linguistic resources were limited. In the following examples, children summarize the content and highlight key characters and their attributes by referencing illustrations:

“Look! (points in the book to an illustration of a dog) That’s Hugo! And he gave mouse Ela a ride on his back.” [B_06]

“Here’s Rex, he has a long neck. And here is Brontoraurus, Brontosaurus, and another one. And here’s a crocodile, look (points one by one to the characters in the illustration). But he’s not a dinosaur; not a dinosaur; not a dinosaur.” [B_03]

Illustrations were also used by children as a strategy to introduce or evaluate content without relying on specific vocabulary or more advanced grammatical or stylistic structures. In this case children pointed to illustrations when discussing parts of the book that required clarification or elaboration. These references were sometimes prompted by emotional reactions to surprising or engaging content, which the child managed to communicate by directing the adult's attention to the illustration—thus ensuring comprehension while *avoiding the need for detailed verbal explanation*. In such cases, the illustration served both as a communicative anchor and a narrative device, supporting the child's ability to structure and convey story content:

“Definitely space. The Sun. And how those waves from the Sun are so long. Do you see how long those waves are? (points to the illustration in the book)” [B_01]

Illustrations also enabled children to *overcome linguistic limitations* when explaining more complex content. In the following example, the child discusses the dangers of poisonous mushrooms with evident understanding. Here, the visual aid helped the child convey nuanced knowledge while compensating for limited verbal fluency:

“And it’s deadly poisonous. Our most poisonous mushroom. (starts coughing) It makes your stomach hurt, your belly. And some people even died from eating just one. And I also like the champignon (flips through the book and points to the illustration). Here it is.” [B_14]

In this instance, the illustration acts as a stabilizing tool, reinforcing and extending the verbal message while allowing the child to retain control of the narrative flow.

When children struggled to find the right words or express a complex idea, they also turned to *illustrations as an alternative mode of expression*. The image served as a “bridge” between the child’s internal concept and the adult’s understanding. This allowed children to convey what they could not—or preferred not to—articulate, masking linguistic gaps while maintaining communicative intent:

“First she found her like this, and then she actually found her like this.” (she pointed to two different illustrations of Tatiana Tutu.) *“But this part was the most interesting to me.”* (she pointed to an illustration of the famous ballerina Tatiana Tutu.) *“Because she cried... that... That’s how I knew she was the ballerina—because there was a star here, and sometimes people who are the best at something are called stars. And she went like this and found the sad ballerina Tatiana by the dressing room.”* [G_06]

Illustrations also served as a *cognitive aid in communication*, helping children recall story details, including plot developments and character traits. When children had difficulty retrieving specific words or meanings, they often searched the book for relevant images, using this process to buy time for reflection and to retrieve

more complex content. This strategy supported more effective communication of the intended message:

“But there’s one more... Wait... I can’t find her now.” (She flipped through the book looking for the illustration of the ballerina. After a moment, she pointed to it.) *“Wow! And who’s this? She’s also a ballerina.”* [G_06]

“Wait, let’s look for it together... But I know there was that preschool and by the preschool... So somewhere around there they had to...” (She flipped through the book looking for the relevant illustration of the scene.) *“Yesss! And then he just didn’t make it in time.”* [G_06]

Another way in which illustrations functioned as cognitive tools in children’s communication was through the process of searching for a specific image or focusing on its details. While looking through the book, children often made deliberate decisions about which aspects of the story to highlight in the conversation. This engagement allowed them to maintain thematic coherence in their narration, consciously link different parts of the story, or shift the narrative focus altogether:

“It’s not that easy. But for example, here, let me see what’s there.” (Flips through the illustrations.) *“Aha, here’s the lamb, it got tangled in the thorns. And here’s the kitten. Aha, and here, here’s the swan, look. She’s still young.”* [B_09]

“Wait... (flipping through the book) Where is it... Near... Oh my gosh... What is this? (looks at the illustration) I don’t think that’s the vampire!” [G_06]

In pursuit of their communicative aims, children also pointed to illustrations to emphasize specific information, using expressions such as “look,” or “here it is,” to maintain shared attention and understanding. For example:

“There are calves here too. And look, aha!” (she pointed to an illustration of two calves, then turned the page and showed more calves on the next illustration) *“There’s also a ram, and sheep. And this is probably—this is about the garden. This one is about mowing too, here.”* (points to illustrations) [G_12]

These examples illustrate how illustrations not only supported verbal expression but also helped children *navigate and manage the structure and content of their storytelling* in the context of dialog. By actively referencing the visual material, children exercised narrative control, choosing what to say and when, while also demonstrating reflective engagement with the story.

Illustrations in the Service of Children’s Autonomy and Initiative

The context of discussing a favourite book created opportunities for children to assume a more active role in communication. They took the initiative in shaping the flow of the interaction and in ensuring mutual understanding. Doing so, they used strategy to highlight a key moment in the narrative by pointing to an illustration in which the event occurred. Through gestures, children signalled that an important piece of information—whether complementing or replacing verbal description—was accessible visually. In addition to nonverbal cues, they also used verbal strategies, such as instructions (*“Look! Wait, I’ll show you!”*) or deictic expressions (*“this”, “that”*), to *draw the adult’s attention* to a particular detail of the content.

“And look!” (Points to the picture of the toad caught in a net.) *“Mhm. So he... they caught him like this in a little net.”* [B_10]

Such efforts were accompanied by attempts to *ensure mutual understanding*, with the child *actively checking whether the adult had correctly identified the relevant aspect* of the story or character. In the following case, the child uses the verb “see” to confirm shared understanding:

“He gave him a piece of himself. A little piece of string.” (The child pointed to the picture showing the bird being pulled from a well.) “See, this is how they pulled him out.” [B_25]

During these conversations, children were also capable of assuming an expert role—one that the context of the book discussion allowed them to inhabit. When the interviewer omitted what the child perceived as important or interesting narrative details, *children actively intervened*. In the following example, the adult attempts to name the characters in a family tree illustration. The child interrupts, completes the list, adds character traits, and even refers to the caption under the image as evidence of her knowledge:

Interviewer: “Exactly. You found it. Here’s their family tree. Uhm. Look. This is Medulienka. That’s her dad.”

Child: “Vampire. Mom. Fairy. And this is Isadora. She’s the vampire fairy. And this is the pink bunny. But I think it says bunny here.” (Points to the illustration of the bunny.) “Here underneath it.” [G_06]

Children were also observed *initiating new topics* in order to express what they considered important in their experience of the text. In doing so, they sometimes diverged from the adult’s original conversational path. In the first example below, the child initiates a topic independently by referring to information learned from the book. In the second, the child resists the adult’s attempt to redirect the conversation and continues sharing a detail they found entertaining:

“Did you know that an octopus has three hearts?” (The child asks the adult.) “And it has an eye here, and an eye here, and another eye here.” (She finds the corresponding illustration of the octopus and shows it to the adult.) “I learned that from this book too.” [G_05]

Child: “And here we have this book...” Interviewer: “And, when you...” Child: “And there’s this story” (points to the illustration), “about One-Eye, Two-Eye, Three-Eye, and it’s funny because look, the eyes are here” (points to forehead), “and two are here” (points to his own eyes and laughs). [B_10]

In interviews children also demonstrated a desire to present themselves as knowledgeable, wanting to share newly learned information even when they could not recall the details. In such situations, they *invited the adult to assist* by reading aloud the relevant part of the text with pointing precisely to the location in the book where the information could be found:

“And here at the end, Cinnamon the Monkey writes on a paper how we should behave politely when going on vacation, or on a plane, or in a restaurant. And she writes some new things she learned from the story. Will you read what it says here?” (The child hands the book to the adult and points to the passage they want read aloud.) [B_19]

These examples illustrate that illustrations children not only serve as visual aids but also as tools of interactional agency. Targeting illustrations in the book, sometimes accompanied with gestures and verbal cues, children actively directed the flow

of conversation, asserted interpretive authority, and ensured mutual understanding. In doing so, they positioned themselves as competent participants and co-constructors of meaning within the adult–child dialogue.

Discussion

Illustrations are a fundamental component of children’s books and have been widely studied for their role in shaping children’s responses, supporting meaning-making, and facilitating adult–child engagement (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Kiefer, 2015; Sipe, 2015; Wagner, 2017). While much of this research emphasizes how adults use illustrations to foster reading, less attention has been paid to how children actively engage with illustrations as communicative tools.

This study views children not only as recipients of reading but as social actors who purposefully use books as cultural tools (Gee, 1991). Aligned with the concept of emergent literacy (Sulzby & Teale, 1991), we explore children’s agency during adult–child dialogue about their favourite books. Grounded in a sociocultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978), this study explored how 5- to 6-year-old children use illustrations in picture books to construct meaning, express ideas, and shape the flow of conversation during shared book talk. We focused on two central questions: how children exercise agency in conversations about books, and in what ways illustrations support and structure their contributions. The findings shed light on how illustrations can serve as tools that enable children to participate actively in meaning-making and sharing processes, guiding and enriching their engagement with book content in dialogic contexts.

Using Illustrations as Tools for Enhancing Meaning-Sharing Efficiency

From the children’s perspective—especially during the pre-reading stage—illustrations play a crucial role in supporting comprehension and engagement with a book’s content (Justice et al., 2005). In dialogues about favourite books, illustrations enabled children to take on more active roles, positioning themselves as knowledgeable participants familiar with the narrative. This function extends beyond typical uses such as aiding content navigation (Fang, 1996) or inspiring invented stories (Arizpe, 2023). Instead, children employed illustrations as cognitive tools to support memory recall, organize narrative sequences, and contribute meaningfully to co-constructing the dialogue.

Illustrations also served as shared referential points, providing a mutual focus for communication and establishing joint attention—a key mechanism for shared understanding (Tomasello, 1995). Children often initiated this shared attention through verbal cues (e.g., “*Look!*”), gestures, or by directing the adult’s gaze to specific illustration details. These acts reflect early expressions of agency, as children actively shaped the interaction and experienced a sense of control over the communicative process (Gallagher, 2000).

Moreover, directing shared attention allowed children to demonstrate competence and convey meaning without relying on complex verbal explanations. They

used deictic expressions (e.g., “*this*”) or prompted joint exploration with phrases like “*Wait, let’s look for it together!*” These strategies illustrate children’s intentional use of social and semiotic resources to overcome linguistic limitations and engage actively in dialogue with adults (Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2010).

Assuming a Dominant Role in Communication

Children employed various strategies to express their intentions and demonstrate communicative competence. Beyond merely directing adults’ attention to book content, they actively sought to align the adult’s interpretation with their own, indicating an effort to establish shared understanding (Howe et al., 2005). Although these interactions lacked explicit negotiation of meaning (Löfdahl & Hjalmarsson, 2014), children aimed to ensure the adult comprehended their cues, possibly due to their perceived epistemic authority as experts on the book.

This guiding role was particularly evident when children pointed to illustrations while clarifying intended meanings, often using control questions such as “Do you see?” These behaviours reflect children’s awareness of their authority and their active role in shaping communication. Familiarity with the book content empowered them to select what, when, and how to present information, reinforcing their position as narrators and experts (Vaughn, 2018).

In interviews, children positioned themselves as knowledgeable agents, demonstrating control by locating relevant book sections or elaborating on adult prompts (Manyukhina et al., 2023). Their agency became most visible when adults attempted to dominate the interaction; children often reasserted control by steering the conversation back to their interests. While acknowledging the adult’s temporary epistemic authority, they simultaneously detached from it to maintain their own expertise (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Additionally, children leveraged adults’ reading abilities to access text beyond their own skills, using illustrations strategically to fulfil their communicative goals.

This subtle negotiation of authority allowed children to assert dominance in conversation, thereby shaping the interaction’s flow and influencing how the book’s content was shared and understood.

Conclusion

Our findings support the view articulated by Pramling et al. (2024) that children’s agency is not a fixed capacity, but a dynamic process enacted within specific social contexts. When framed within a socio-cultural, discursive orientation—where the child’s activity is directed toward an object in interaction with others—agency emerges as a situated, communicative practice.

By focusing on adult–child interactions centred on a child-selected favourite book, the study created conditions that positioned the child as a potential epistemic authority. However, this status had to be actively negotiated. Success depended both on the adult’s responsiveness (e.g., asking open-ended questions, showing genuine interest in the child’s perspective) and the child’s ability to initiate and sustain strategies

for sharing their knowledge and guiding the interaction. Although the interviewer adopted a responsive stance, the conversation was still initiated by an adult. Children had to navigate this structural asymmetry through discursive moves (Mäkitalo, 2016) that allowed them to steer the dialogue toward their own communicative goals. The book's illustrations served as tangible reference points that children used not only to support their talk but also to frame the discussion and invite the adult to engage with their perspective. Thus, the children's participation extended beyond merely responding to adult prompts; they shaped the flow and content of the interaction by strategically using accessible resources—in this case, illustrations—to influence the course of communication. In doing so, they demonstrated agency as an emergent, socially mediated process, grounded in communication and shaped by the resources available to them.

These findings contribute to a growing body of research that conceptualizes children's agency within a socio-cultural framework—as interactive, communicative, and contextually situated.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study also have important practical implications for educators, caregivers, and others involved in early childhood education. They highlight how adult–child interactions with books—particularly through shared reading—can serve as meaningful contexts for fostering children's autonomy and initiative. Within these interactions, children actively contribute personal interpretations, connect book themes to their own lived experiences, and demonstrate agency by navigating the communicative space in ways that reflect their developmental capacities, interests, and preferences. This study underscores the necessity of cultivating environments where children's voices are genuinely heard and meaningfully responded to, aligning with research on children's rights to participation in educational settings (e.g., Clark et al., 2003; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Tangen, 2008). The children in our study articulated what they found compelling in the books and explained why, bringing personal and emotional engagement to their interactions. Such moments of shared meaning-making emphasize the need for sustained reciprocal communication that extends beyond passive listening to include active interpretation and co-construction of knowledge. Ultimately, these insights point to the value of fostering autonomy and initiative in ways that are both developmentally appropriate and socially situated. Shared reading provides a particularly effective platform for this, provided that adults adopt a responsive, supportive stance that empowers children to take an active role in meaning-making and communication. This reinforces the importance of pedagogical practices that recognize young children as capable communicators and co-constructors of knowledge, able to direct aspects of their own learning within trusting, dialogic relationships.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by its focus on preschool-aged children, whose developmental stage may restrict their ability to fully articulate or reflect on their experiences. Addi-

tionally, we did not collect information about the participating children's language levels, which may have influenced their ability to express themselves during the interviews. At the same time, the findings highlight how children actively worked to overcome these limitations, striving to express themselves and achieve communicative goals, actively using illustrations in the book. This strategy emerged as a meaningful expression of agency, though it was not observed in all participants from the larger study sample. While the interviews were conducted in environments familiar for children, and the interviewer demonstrated genuine interest—met with enthusiasm from the children—the interaction remained a structured, researcher-initiated encounter. As such, it did not fully capture the spontaneity or natural flow characteristic of everyday adult–child interactions.

Future research could address this limitation by examining children's agency in more informal or naturally occurring contexts—for example, during conversations with parents or early childhood educators. Such settings may offer richer insights into how children express agency in familiar and socially embedded interactions.

Appendix

Children's book selection for the interview

Participant ID	Gender	Age (Months)	Book selected for the interview	English title (if available)	Book genre
G_01	Female	60	Burnie, D. (2002). <i>Velká obrázková encyklopedie. Dinosauři</i> . Svojtka&CO	Burnie, D. (2001). <i>The kingfisher illustrated dinosaur encyclopedia</i> . Kingfisher	Informational (nonfiction)
G_02	Female	65	<i>Tlapková patrola. 5 minutové pohádky</i> . (2023). Egmont ČR	<i>PAW Patrol 5-Minute Stories Collection</i> . (2017). Random House	Narrative (fiction)
B_01	Male	77	Lobel, A. (2012). <i>Kvak a Žbluňk jsou kamarádi</i> . Albatros	Lobel, A. (2003). <i>Frog and Toad Are Friends</i> . HarperCollins	Narrative (fiction)
			Miler, Z. (2011). <i>Krtek a autíčko</i> . Albatros	Miler, Z. (2012). <i>Little Mole and His Little Car</i> . Albatros	Narrative (fiction)
B_02	Male	64	<i>The Usborne Children's Encyclopedia</i> . (2014). Usborne Publishing Awdry, W. (2016). <i>Velká kniha o mašince Tomášovi. Tomáš a jeho přátelé</i> . Egmont ČR	Awdry, W. (1986). <i>Thomas the tank engine & friends: Big story book</i> . Ladybird books	Informational (nonfiction) Narrative (fiction)

Participant ID	Gender	Age (Months)	Book selected for the interview	English title (if available)	Book genre
B_03	Male	60	Abeille, G. (2019). <i>Dinosauři—60 úžasně zajímavých skutečností</i> . Svojtka&CO. [Engl.: <i>Dinosaurs—60 Amazingly Interesting Facts</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_03	Female	62	Bícová, R. (2011). <i>Ovečka Barborka</i> Samuel. [Engl.: <i>Barborka the Lamb</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_04	Male	64	<i>Malá obrazová encyklopedie vesmíru</i> . (2023). Aulea. [Engl.: <i>The Little Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Universe</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_04	Female	71	Wechterowicz, P. & Dziubak, E. (2019). <i>Objím ma, prosím</i> . Stonožka	Wechterowicz, P. & Dziubak, E. (2017). <i>Hug Me, Please!</i> Words & Pictures	Narrative (fiction)
G_05	Female	68	<i>Rozprávky o vílach</i> . (2017). Matys. [Engl.: <i>Tales of Fairies</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_05	Male	75	<i>Úžasně stroje: velké rozkladacie strany plné faktov</i> . (2018). Bookmedia. [Engl.: <i>Fantastic Machines: Big Fold-Out Fact Pages</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_06	Female	67	Muncasterová, H. (2017). <i>Izadora Lunová ide na balet</i> . Albatros	Muncaster, H. (2016). <i>Isadora Moon Goes to the Ballet</i> . Oxford University Press	Narrative (fiction)
B_06	Male	62	Penzešová, A. (2020). <i>Gombičky pre myšku Elu</i> . Fortuna Libri. [Engl. <i>Buttons for Little Ella Mouse</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_07	Male	71	<i>Dinosaury: život, potrava, mláďatá, súboje, ako vyhynuli</i> . (2008). Fragment. [Engl. <i>Dinosaurs: Their Lives, Food, Young, Fights, and How They Became Extinct</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
B_08	Male	69	<i>Tlapková patrola. 5 minútové pohádky</i> . (2023). Egmont ČR	<i>PAW Patrol 5-Minute Stories Collection</i> . (2017). Random House	Narrative (fiction)
B_09	Male	72	Cholewińska-Szkolik, A. (2019). <i>Miška a jej mali pacienti 1: Veterinárka z Lipovej kliniky</i> . Ikar. [Orig.: <i>Misia i jej mali pacjenci. Weterynarz z Lipowej Kliniki</i> ; Engl.: <i>Mikey and Her Little Patients 1: The Veterinarian from Linden Clinic</i>]		Narrative (fiction)

Participant ID	Gender	Age (Months)	Book selected for the interview	English title (if available)	Book genre
B_10	Male	81	Wolf, T. (2021). <i>Rozprávky z lesa—o malom dinosaurovi</i> . Foni book. [Orig.: <i>Il piccolo dinosauro. Le storie del bosco</i> ; Engl.: <i>Tales from the Forest—About a Little Dinosaur</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_11	Male	72	<i>Biblické príbehy — „Moje prvé čítanie“</i> . (2017). Klub čitateľov. [Engl.: <i>Bible Stories—“My First Reading”</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_12	Male	72	Đuričová, I. (2017). <i>Zvieratká z abecedy</i> . Ikar.[Engl.: <i>Animals from the Alphabet</i>]		Poetic
G_07	Female	72	Zuzanka. (1998). Junior. [Engl.: <i>Little Susie</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_13	Male	68	<i>Dinosaurs. Úžasný svet zvierat</i> . (2010). Svojtka&CO[Engl.: <i>Dinosaurs: An Incredible Animal World</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_08	Female	60	Ditteľová, G. (2005). <i>Dobrá noc, Murko!</i> . Junior. [Engl.: <i>Goodnight, Murko!</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_14	Male	70	Hagara, L. (1987). <i>Atlas húb</i> . Osveta. [Engl. <i>Atlas of Mushrooms</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_09	Female	70	Jobus, B. (2013). <i>Ako muflón Ancijáš sľub dodržal</i> . SLOVART. [Engl.: <i>How Ancijáš the Mouflon Kept His Promise</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_10	Female	68	<i>Macko Puf—Deň v lese</i> . (2019). Egmont SK	<i>Disney's Winnie the Pooh: Everyday</i> . (1999). Mouse Works	Narrative (fiction)
G_11	Female	76	Walliams, D. (2020). <i>Niešo</i> . SLOVART	Walliams, D. (2019). <i>Fing</i> . HarperCollins	Narrative (fiction)
G_12	Female	70	Pabst, I. & Suess, A. (2017). <i>Moja veľká kniha príbehov na gazdovstve</i> . Swager & Steinler. [Orig.: <i>Mein großes Buch vom Bauernhof</i> ; Engl.: <i>My Big Book of Stories on the Farm</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_13	Female	61	Astley, N. & Baker, M. (2011). <i>Peppa Pig: Treasury of Piggy Tales</i> . Ladybird Books		Narrative (fiction)
B_14	Male	65	Walther, M. (2020). <i>Veľká knižka DINOSAURY pre malých rozprávačov</i> . PRESCO GROUP	Walther, M. (2020). <i>My Big Wimmelbook—Dinosaurs: A Look-and-Find Book</i> . The Experiment Publishing	Informational (nonfiction)

Participant ID	Gender	Age (Months)	Book selected for the interview	English title (if available)	Book genre
G_14	Female	63	Kozłowska, U. (2008). <i>Nezbedný psiček. Příroda</i> . [Orig.: <i>Wesoły piesek</i> ; Engl. <i>The Naughty Puppy</i>]		Poetic
G_15	Female	71	<i>Snehulienska a sedem trpaslíkov. Ariel malá morská víla</i> . (2013). Egmont. [Engl.: <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The Little Mermaid</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_16	Female	72	<i>Barbie gymnastka</i> . (2013). Egmont ČR	Depken, K. L. (2014). <i>Barbie: I Can Be A Gymnast</i> . Random House	Narrative (fiction)
G_17	Female	63	<i>Mačky aristokratky</i> . (2009). Egmont SK	<i>The Aristocats</i> . (1973). Mouse Works	Narrative (fiction)
G_18	Female	62	<i>Rozprávky zo Dvora</i> . (2022). Viktoria Print. [Engl.: <i>Tales from the Yard</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_19	Female	83	Pilařová, I. (2013). <i>Bylo nebylo: velká kniha českých pohádek</i> . Sun. [Engl.: <i>Once Upon a Time: A Collection of Czech Fairy Tales</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_20	Female	63	<i>Ladové královstvo—2 nové příběhy: Návrat do dětstva/Roztopené srdce</i> . (2015). Egmont SK. [Engl.: <i>Frozen—2 new stories: Return to Childhood/Melted Heart</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_21	Female	76	Barklem, J. (2021). <i>Rozprávky spod černičia</i> . Stonožka	Barklem, J. (2011). <i>The Complete Brambly Hedge</i> . HarperCollins	Narrative (fiction)
B_16	Male	67	Rupert, M. (2004). <i>Obrazová encyklopédia Zvieratá</i> Ottovo nakladateľstvi. [Engl. <i>Animals: An Illustrated Encyclopedia</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_22	Female	69	<i>O červenej čiapočke a iné rozprávky</i> . (1999). Matys. [Engl. <i>Little Red Riding Hood and Other Fairy Tales</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_17	Male	74	Kubašáková, Z. (2018). <i>Škriatok v pyžamku a iné rozprávky</i> . TAKTIK. [engl. <i>The Elf in Pajamas and Other Tales</i>]		Narrative (fiction)

Participant ID	Gender	Age (Months)	Book selected for the interview	English title (if available)	Book genre
B_18	Male	62	Čapek, J. (2018). <i>Rozprávky o psičkovi a mačičke: Ako spolu gazdovali a ešte o všelijakých iných veciach</i> . Ottovo nakladateľstvi	Čapek, J. (1996). <i>All about doggie and pussycat: how they kept house and all sorts of other things as well</i> . Albatros	Narrative (fiction)
G_23	Female	82	Havranová, I. (2015). <i>Havkáči z našej ulice</i> Marenčin PT. [Engl.: <i>Doggies on Our Street</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_19	Male	70	Stoličný, P. (2019). <i>Prázdniny s opicou Škorickou</i> Fortuna Libri. [Engl.: <i>Holidays with Cinnamon the Monkey</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_20	Male	60	Brožiková, J. (2007). <i>Prvá detská encyklopédia</i> . Slovart. [Engl.: <i>Kids' First Encyclopedia</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_24	Female	68	<i>Ladové kráľovstvo—2 nové príbehy: Návrat do detstva/Roztopené srdce</i> . (2015). Egmont SK. [Engl.: <i>Frozen—2 new stories: Return to Childhood/Melted Heart</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_25	Female	73	Disney, W. (1996). <i>Oliver a spol</i> . Egmont SK	Disney, W. (1997). <i>Oliver & Company</i> . Lady-bird Books	Narrative (fiction)
B_21	Male	66	Smotlacha, M. (2018). <i>Vreckový atlas húb</i> . Ottovo nakladateľstvo. [Engl.: <i>Pocket Atlas of Mushrooms</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_26	Female	71	Wilkes, A. & Shackell, J. (1996). <i>Začíname s angličtinou</i> . Fraus. [Engl.: <i>Starting with English</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
B_22	Male	71	Čapek, J. (1974). <i>Rozprávky o psičkovi a mačičke: Ako spolu gazdovali a ešte o všelijakých iných veciach</i> . Mladé letá	Čapek, J. (1996). <i>All about doggie and pussycat: how they kept house and all sorts of other things as well</i> . Albatros	Narrative (fiction)
B_23	Male	82	Sutejev, V. (1976). <i>Rozprávky a obrázky</i> . Progress. [Engl.: <i>Fairy Tales and Pictures</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_24	Male	75	Štelbaská, Z. (2017). <i>Zahráme sa s hocičím</i> . Ikar. [Engl.: <i>Let's Play with Anything</i>]		Informational (nonfiction)
G_27	Female	83	Kerekesová, K. Moláková, K., & Salmela, A. (2013). <i>Mimi a Liza</i> . Slovart. [Engl.: <i>Mimi & Lisa</i>]		Narrative (fiction)

Participant ID	Gender	Age (Months)	Book selected for the interview	English title (if available)	Book genre
B_25	Male	72	Řuričková, M. (2002). <i>O gul'kovi bombuľkovi</i> . BUVIK. [Engl.: <i>Bumbulek the Little Ball</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
G_28	Female	71	Reitmeyerová, A. (2019). <i>Bojazlivá veverička Valentinka</i> . Fortuna Libri. [Engl.: <i>Valentine the Shy Little Squirrel</i>]		Narrative (fiction)
B_26	Male	69	<i>Labková patrola. 5 minútové rozprávky</i> . (2018). Egmont SR	<i>PAW Patrol 5-Minute Stories Collection</i> . (2017). Random House	Narrative (fiction)
G_29	Female	69	Bukvanová, L. & Enright, A. (2016). <i>Rozprávky o vilach</i> . BOOKMEDIA. [Engl.: <i>Fairy Tales About Fairies</i>]		Narrative (fiction)

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