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Help to Self-Help: Scaffolding Help in Systematised Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (SYKL) in Danish L1 Classrooms

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of Systematised Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (Danish abbreviation: SYKL) in 4th-grade Danish L1 classrooms (students aged 10–11), with the aim of enhancing students' socio-academic participation. SYKL is a structured peer tutoring approach that simultaneously promotes social relationships and academic inclusion. It involves explicit instruction for both teachers and students on how to support one another and engage in meaningful academic dialogue during pair work, with students alternating roles as tutor and tutee. Drawing on video observations and focus group interviews, the analysis examines the scaffolding of reciprocal help within SYKL. The findings indicate that socio-academic participation can be enhanced when pair work is scaffolded through curriculum integration and student pairing (macro-scaffolding), metacommunication and task design (meso-scaffolding), and students' own micro-level peer scaffolding. Although scaffolded peer tutoring places significant responsibility on students, the teacher's role remains central in designing tasks, pairing students, and modelling collaboration. The article contributes to the growing body of research on peer tutoring by emphasising the importance of scaffolding in promoting participation and learning in same-age peer interactions.

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Introduction

In school, small-group conversations (Sutherland, 2015) and pair-based peer tutoring (Thurston et al., 2020) are among the prevalent teaching methods. However, student conversations often lack structure, and teaching methods like Cooperative Learning frequently become disconnected from the subject area (Rasmussen & Schmidt, 2022), with the risk of leading to superficial and unqualified pair work (Gillies, 2013; Topping, 2005). Thus, teachers "may eventually skip collaborative activities, as too often the only tangible outcomes are decibels." (T'Sas & Daems, 2024, p. 3). At University College Copenhagen (KP), we are exploring ways to enhance peer tutoring through an intervention project named *SYKL*, an acronym for *Systematised Reciprocal Peer Tutoring*. SYKL has been developed for and implemented in science and mathematics (Andersen et al., 2023; Schmidt et al., 2023b; Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024), and recently in Danish L1 for all grade 4 classes at seven schools in a Copenhagen suburban municipality (Schmidt et al., 2023a). This article explores SYKL in Danish L1, emphasising the scaffolding of students' dialogic pair work.

Previous SYKL research has highlighted that "an integral feature of student participation is that academic aspects are constantly woven into social contexts of significance" (Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024, p. 26). In fact, research suggests a strong link, and potentially even causality, between social and academic benefits of peer tutoring (Rasmussen & Schmidt, 2022; Thurston et al., 2020). Accordingly, in SYKL, students are paired based on both social and academic criteria, aiming for socio-academic inclusion (Schmidt, 2015). However, research into socio-academic inclusion remains limited (Thygesen et al., 2026) and mainly focused on mathematics (e.g. Sneck et al., 2023; Thurston et al., 2020), science (Ketonen et al., 2020; Krajcik et al., 2023), and English L2 (Harman & Smagorinsky, 2014; Xu et al., 2022). A metareview of 17 studies by Bowman-Perrott et al. (2016) finds that English language learners benefit from peer tutoring academically, socially, and linguistically. Only a few socio-academic studies deal with L1, primarily within literacy (Thygesen et al., 2026). Llorent et al. (2022) find that 'Cooperative Project-Based Learning' significantly increases literacy, and social and emotional competencies, particularly for girls. Other socio-academic L1 studies are in the periphery of the current study, since they deal with students with severe disabilities (Kozleski et al., 2021) or behaviour-management (Gage et al., 2015; Martella & Marchand-Martella, 2015).

Research into academic peer tutoring in L1 focuses on literacy in general and reading in particular. Studies show that peer tutoring positively impacts reading skills, vocabulary, spelling, and reading comprehension (Flores et al., 2024; Hansen et al., 2018; Spörer & Brunstein, 2009; Stenhoff & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2007), metacognitive skills like self-regulated reading activities (ul Ain et al., 2023; Van Keer & Vanderlinde, 2010), and reading motivation (Tsuei et al., 2020). Research is more limited when it comes to applying peer tutoring to broader L1 contexts, such as language, communication, and literature (Hansen, 2015). A promising approach is through *exploratory talk*, which "hesitant and incomplete because it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns" (Barnes, 2008, p. 5). This contrasts the still much prevailing *IRE* (*Initiation – Response – Evaluation*, cf. Mehan (1979)) structure of classroom discourse (T'Sas & Daems, 2024). Accordingly, recent research in Danish L1 shows how collaboration can be supported through exploratory approaches, particularly within literature teaching (Albrechtsen & Qvortrup,

2017; Dam-Christensen 2022; Hansen et al., 2017; Kabel, 2021; Oksbjerg et al., 2024), oral conversation and communication (Høegh, 2018; Rasmussen, 2021), and student feedback (Bærenholdt & Christensen, 2017). Such low teacher control methods can be highly rewarding but require clear structure and scaffolding (Kvistad, 2021; Sutherland, 2015; T'Sas & Daems, 2024).

SYKL addresses this need. However, scaffolding within SYKL presents its own challenges. Grade 4 students often struggle to offer and (particularly) request help during pair work (Schmidt et al., 2023a), necessitating strategies for help seeking and giving (cf. Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). In SYKL, as in most peer tutoring scenarios, students are largely left to their own devices during pair work, raising questions about how to scaffold SYKL at both macro-, meso-, and micro-levels (Van Lier, 2004), the later including reciprocal peer scaffolding (Donato, 1994; Lialikhova, 2019). When compared to teacher scaffolding some studies even suggest that peer scaffolding is more effective (Herdiana & Munir, 2023; Jamali Kivi, 2021). These considerations lead to the following research questions for this study:

> *How is reciprocal help scaffolded in SYKL dialogues in the context of Danish L1, and how could it be reinforced to enhance students' socio-academic participation?*

This exploratory study examines the scaffolding provided by students and teachers during SYKL and their attitudes towards it, with the aim of contributing to empowering students to transition from reciprocal help to self-help. In order to achieve this, scaffolding must contribute to inclusion defined as "the practices that reduce barriers for participation and learning for every student" (Tjernberg & Mattson, 2021, p. 187). Inclusion theory views participation as involving collaboration and engagement in both social and academic contexts (Booth, 2011; Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024). Without active involvement in academic communities, students risk marginalisation (Wenger, 2003).

Methodology

Intervention Design

Teachers involved in the intervention received training in peer tutoring, including methods to scaffold exploratory dialogue. The 13-week intervention took place during the autumn of 2022, each week featuring a 45-minute SYKL lesson structured as follows:

1. 5-minute teacher introduction to the task topic, including metacommunication about good helping strategies.
2. 15-minute pair work session with one student as tutor, the other as tutee.
3. 15-minute session with roles reversed.
4. 10-minute whole-class discussion on academic content and student collaboration.

Pair work was guided by six generic scaffolding prompt cards. Tutors received a task sheet, while tutees received a sheet of hints with scaffolding questions, prompts, and suggestions.

Data Collection and Analysis

Four classes from four schools were selected based on socio-demographics. The following video-recorded and

transcribed data were collected:

- During intervention: Observations (Hansen & Carlsen, 2017) of 12 randomly selected dialogues, comprising three lessons from each class.
- Post-intervention: 12 semi-structured focus group interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) with students, teachers, and supervisors. Students who were interviewed had also been observed, enabling stimulated recall (Dempsey, 2010) by watching video sequences of their own dialogues.

All data were processed qualitatively. Observations and interviews were thematically coded using an inductive approach (Willis et al., 2012) but focused on scaffolding from a theoretical-didactical perspective. In the analysis, empirical data are presented as fieldnotes from video observations and quotes from interviews. All tasks and quotes were translated from Danish to English, and all names were changed for research ethical reasons.

In the analysis, I examine three cases that highlight various aspects of SYKL scaffolding. Cases have been chosen to represent a spectrum of scaffolding, from weak to strong. They also reflect themes frequently discussed in the interviews conducted, which are referenced where relevant. Additionally, I have selected cases where students were interviewed, except for Case 3, which is included for its exemplary nature. All cases evolve around different approaches to teaching language (grammar, orthography, semantics).

Theoretical Framework: Scaffolding

To operationalise scaffolding theory for analysis, this study primarily adopts the framework and terminology proposed by Van de Pol et al. (2010), Van Lier (2004; 2007), and Polias (2016; Forey & Polias, 2017).The concept of educational scaffolding was initially introduced by Wood et al. (1976), where it denotes a "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" (p. 90). Essentially, scaffolding is linked to the fundamental educational principle that children's development and learning are often guided by others (Stone, 1998). Consequently, since Cazden (1979), scaffolding has frequently related to Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of the *Zone of Proximal Development*, *ZPD* (Van Lier, 2004).

A meta-study by Van de Pol et al. (2010) identifies three core characteristics of scaffolding: 1) *contingency*, i.e. the adaptation of support to the specific student and context; 2) *fading*, i.e., the gradual reduction of support over time; 3) *transfer of responsibility*, i.e., the gradual shift of learning responsibility to the student. Due to contingency, scaffolding relies on the specific teaching situation, requiring continuous adaptation to both the student and the task at hand (Puntambekar & Hübscher, 2005). However, as this adaptation usually occurs within the confines of pre-established teaching sequences, scaffolding can be more aptly described as "a balancing act between the planned, on one hand, and the unpredictable or improvised, on the other" (Boblett, 2012, p. 11). Thus, it oscillates between the "highly planned" and "highly contingent" (Polias, 2016, p. 82 f.), between structure and interaction (Van Lier, 2004), between teacher-controlled "directive" and student-centred "supportive" scaffolding (Lenski & Nierstheimer, 2002, p. 130), and between pre-designed *hard* and situation-specific *soft* scaffolding (Hansen & Fogt, 2023; Saye & Brush, 2002). In addition to these characteristics, pedagogical scaffolding is,

according to Van Lier (2004), characterised by continuity, contextual support, intersubjectivity, and flow.

Scaffolding Levels

Scaffolding hence operates on various levels, determined by the degree of planning and improvisation involved, cf. the continuum of macro-, meso-, and micro-scaffolding (Van Lier, 2007). Macro-scaffolding refers long-term planning (Van Lier, 2007) and the broader institutional and cultural context of the teaching process (Engin, 2014), forming the most enduring scaffold. At the opposite end, micro-scaffolding is the most contingent and situation-specific type, relying on continuous adjustments, collaboration, and interaction (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Originally, the scaffolding concept was largely synonymous with micro-scaffolding (Malik, 2017). In between, meso-scaffolding pertains to the structuring of individual activities and tasks (Boblet, 2012; Palincsar, 1998; Van Lier, 2007), fluctuating due to the extent to which the teaching activity is planned or contingent. From a functional-linguistic perspective, meso-scaffolding involves "incremental shifts in the register by taking small steps backwards and forwards" (Polias, 2016, p. 82), guiding students from an everyday-concrete to a technical-abstract *Field*, from an informal-personal to a formal-objective *Tenor*, and from spoken language accompanying action towards a more written-style and reflective *Mode* (Forey & Polias, 2017).

Scaffolding Functions

Already Wood et al. (1976) launched six scaffolding functions, which continue to be widely applied, and they form the framework utilised in this article. However, I have adopted the operationalisation proposed by Van de Pol et al. (2010) who distinguish between scaffolding intentions and means, integrating the *six means of assisting performance* from Tharp and Gallimore (1988). Furthermore, Van de Pol et al. (2010) categorise the intentions of scaffolding at the student support level as either affective, cognitive, or metacognitive, cf. Table 1 (concepts have been rearranged):

Table 1. Scaffolding Intentions and Means, cf. Van de Pol et al. (2010)

Scaffolding intentions	**Support of**
Recruitment	Student affect
Frustration control / Contingency management	
Reduction of degrees of freedom	Students' cognitive activities
Cognitive structuring	
Direction maintenance	Students' metacognitive activities
Scaffolding means	
Feeding back	
Hints	
Instructing	
Explaining	
Modelling	
Questioning	

Scaffolding in SYKL

In accordance with the theoretical framework, the levels of scaffolding in SYKL can be displayed as in Figure 1:

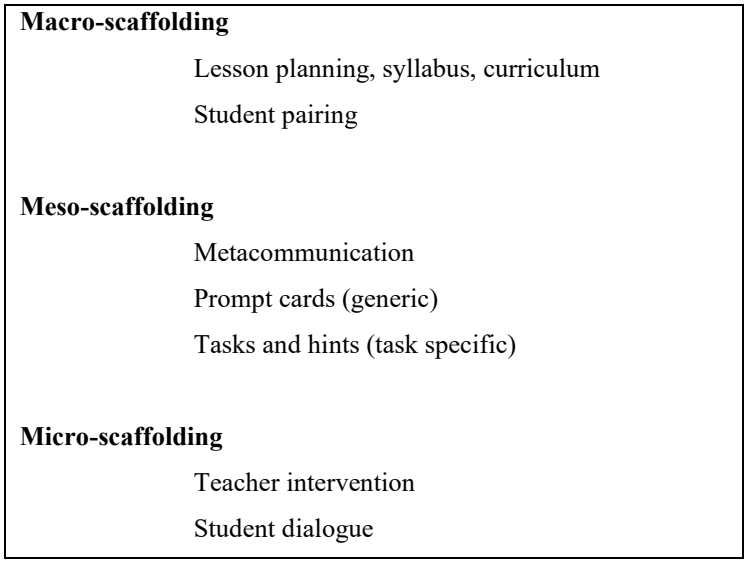

Figure 1. Macro-, Meso-, and Micro-Scaffolding in SYKL

Macro-Scaffolding

The overall SYKL design and the teachers' syllabus planning form the macro-scaffold of the intervention, aimed metacognitively at direction maintenance and cognitive structuring. Student pairing is also a component of the macro-scaffolding, specifically recruitment. Teachers match students based on social and academic criteria: Socially, students should have the potential to (re)establish friendships; academically, there should not be a significant disparity between them. Essentially, students should be near one another's ZPD (Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024). I do not have access to the long-term planning or the teachers' specific considerations when pairing students. However, since scaffolding levels are interconnected, traces of macro-scaffolding can be observed in the dialogues. Additionally, the overall planning and partner composition are often reflected upon in interviews.

Meso-Scaffolding

Continuous metacommunication is cardinal to SYKL meso-scaffolding, during the teacher-led introduction to and follow-up on SYKL dialogues, but occasionally also during dialogues. Previous research into SYKL (Schmidt et al., 2023a) indicates that socio-academic inclusion is promoted when students are explicitly instructed and supported in offering and requesting help, e.g. by integrating the six scaffolding prompt cards during and beyond dialogues. The cards outline the desired socio-academic norms (Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024) and basic conversational ground-rules (Sutherland, 2015). The cards are displayed in Figure 2.

The strategies encompass scaffolding prompts in the headlines, supplemented by supportive questions and sentence starters. The green cards prompt students to collaboratively read the task, activate prior knowledge

(recruitment), plan the workflow, and potentially break the task into smaller segments (reduction). The yellow card underscores the significance of encouragement (recruitment and frustration control). The blue cards advocate for active listening and sharing of queries and thoughts (direction maintenance), using explanations and technical terms (cognitive structuring). Lastly, the red card motivates students to draw parallels with other tasks or subjects, and their personal lives (cognitive structuring), aiming to enhance deep learning and personal relevance (recruitment).

1. READ THE TASK TOGETHER! (*Green*)
2. GET STARTED WITH THE TASK! (*Green*)
3. REMEMBER TO ENCOURAGE YOUR PARTNER! (*Yellow*)
4. LISTEN AND ASK! (*Blue*)
5. THINK ALOUD! (*Blue*)
6. FIND CONTEXTS AND PERSPECTIVES! (*red*)

Figure 2. The Six Scaffolding Prompt Cards

The planning and design of specific tasks and accompanying hints are inherently key parts of meso-scaffolding. In Danish L1, assignments typically take point of departure in a brief mono- or multimodal text (excerpt) or a collection of sentences, words, or word parts. Previous SYKL research (Schmidt et al., 2023a) found that socio-academic participation is promoted when tasks are challenging with progression, i.e. 'low-threshold – high-ceiling' (cf. Li et al., 2013), exploratory (cf. Wegerif & Mercer, 1997), and contain both closed and open elements (cf. Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2016), and if the task requires the students to do something concrete besides conversing, such as underlining, (re)writing, drawing, sorting, or reading (out).

Micro-Scaffolding

At the micro-level, teachers can intervene (Koyuncu et al., 2022; Lialikhova, 2019), but dialogues are ideally peer scaffolded by the students themselves, facilitated by prompt cards, tasks, and hints. This way, teachers can devote most of their time to students who genuinely need assistance (Schmidt et al., 2023a).

Analysis

Case 1: Word Classes

> *Nikoline (tutee) and Olivia (tutor) are working on a task about word classes within a novel excerpt from their reader. The task instructs: "Read the text aloud. Examine the text for adjectives and nouns. Put a blue line under the adjectives and a red line under the nouns." The four hints are:*
>
> 1. *Do you remember what an adjective is? (A descriptive word)*
> 2. *What do you put in front of adjectives? (To be)*
> 3. *Do you remember what a noun is? (A naming word)*
> 4. *What do you put in front of nouns (A or an).*
>
> *The session starts with the teacher's collective introduction to – or repetition of – the word classes nouns, verbs, and adjectives, reviewed with examples as students pitch in. The classification is somewhat unprecise. E.g., verbs are introduced with the phrase starter "To …" A student suggests* stupid *("to be stupid"), which the teacher initially affirms but revises after another student remarks, "stupid is an adjective." The class views a brief video on word classes, echoing the teacher instruction. Additionally, the teacher mentions the scaffolding cards, including explicitly* Think Aloud!*,* Remember to encourage your partner!*, and* Read the task together!
>
> *The activity commences with Nikoline reading the task and text aloud. She asks the teacher what nouns are – even though this is mentioned in the hints. She starts marking the text with blue and red lines. Olivia nods, muttering something about adjectives. Nikoline continues marking and occasionally erases. After about 15 minutes, Olivia queries, "Are we done then?", which Nikoline affirms. The students discuss how much time is left.*
>
> *In the follow-up class discussion, Nikoline engages twice, indicating she completed the task correctly. The teacher asks Nikoline and Olivia if they encouraged or complimented each other, receiving a negative response.*

The work is notably marked by a lack of dialogue, with only 3-4 sentences exchanged. There are occasional smiles and giggles, but the 'dialogue' mainly consists of Nikoline reading aloud and marking the text, with Olivia uninvolved. The task is not designed for pair work, and the hints offer mere cognitively structuring mnemonic questions and answers, which, having been (inadequately) covered in the introduction, are redundant and

unhelpful. Nikoline seems to require no assistance, suggesting that the task might be (too) easy for her to solve.

Word classes are introduced and reviewed based on a rather abstract Field, with no practical application discussed. The exercise is thus an example of decontextualized grammar teaching (Smith, 2022), with minimal impact on enhancing metalinguistic understanding (Myhill et al., 2012). The task involves registering words, with no rationale provided for analysing word classes in fiction. Moreover, the redundancy of the hints, already addressed in the introduction, seems to further disengage the tutor.

Accordingly, there is no evidence of micro-scaffolding between the students, as the task does not necessitate it. The task and hints provide minimal meso-level scaffolding. Metacommunication about word classes is flawed, and the scaffolding card principles are neglected, despite the teacher's reminder. The encouragement to praise each other appears as a detached form of recruitment due to the lack of dialogue. At the macro-level, it is not possible to determine whether the student pairing is well-functioning, but the task appears disconnected from the broader curriculum. The students – at least Nikoline – may learn something about word classes, but the task does not foster exploratory dialogue.

In the interview, the two students reflect on SYKL tasks' integration with teaching. Nikoline notes that SYKL often shifts abruptly "from 'now we're going to do adjectives,' to 'today you're going to explain this text to your partner.'" She continues:

> If you just get the task explained beforehand, then I think it's fine to work with something that you haven't worked with in a long time, and stuff like that. But if you just get the task, and then you have to solve it and not get it explained, then I would rather have something that we have worked with.

Nikoline's point concerns macro-scaffolding, calling for continuity (cf. Van Lier, 2004). This sentiment aligns with teachers' and supervisors' views, highlighting the risk of SYKL becoming a remote segment of teaching, reducing grammar instruction to a detached, end-of-lesson activity, as phrased by a teacher, "such a tick-off, such a detach-thing from my teaching […]. Then there's like half an hour left, so it was like: 'Well, then we can do a bit of grammar,' or something." Applied this way, SYKL can inadvertently contribute to isolated grammar teaching.

Case 2: Silent Letters

> *Oliver (tutee) and Malthe (tutor) are working on a task concerning silent letters. They have before them a stack of cards, each bearing a word with a silent* d*. The task, building on the previous SYKL task sorting words, reads: "Now the pile with all the silent d's should be sorted into different categories." The hints are:*
>
> *When your partner is stuck on a word card, you can ask …*
>
> 1. *What letters follow the silent d?*
> 2. *You could try to create four stacks.*
> 3. *What letter precedes the silent d in the word* land *['land']?*

4. *What letter precedes the silent d in the word* kvinde *['woman']?*
5. *What letter precedes the silent d in the word* sværd *['sword']?*
6. *What letter follows the silent d in the word* ældst *['oldest']?*

The session commences with a group introduction, where the teacher, Sanne, emphasises the importance of listening to each other, reminds the tutor to occasionally hold their tongue, and clarifies that not all hints need to be used. She also explains the term category *as "stacks."*

The dialogue begins with Oliver querying the teacher: "But how are we to sort them into different categories?" Malthe interjects by reading out Hint 1, to which Oliver responds with an "oooh!" and begins sorting, however incorrectly according to the intervening teacher. Malthe offers further assistance, which Oliver declines, stating: "But I understand it well now." He explains his preliminary sorting system to the teacher, who again corrects him as he has created too many stacks. The remainder of the task continues to unfold with minimal dialogue between the students, save for a few detours about their upcoming library visit. Oliver continues sorting and remains engrossed in the task, while Malthe appears increasingly disengaged, staring into space, yawning, and fiddling with papers. He offers help multiple times, but with no response. Oliver once again addresses the teacher: "Like this, Sanne, we're done!" She disagrees with the categorisation and asks Malthe to assist with Hint 3, followed by the remaining hints. She asks Oliver if he can discern a pattern, to which he replies: "So, I have to redo it?" She guides him towards creating four stacks. Oliver, seemingly aware of the lack of dialogue, asks Malthe, "Is it boring?", eliciting a smile from both.

In the collective follow-up discussion, the teacher determines that d *can be silent in* rd*,* nd*,* ld*, and* ds *combinations (which does not entirely align with the logic of the hints), and that knowledge of silent letters is crucial for spelling.*

Like Case 1, this session is marked by a lack of student dialogue, except for occasional procrastinations (Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024), cf. Oliver's first-person statement: "So, *I* have to redo it?" Oliver instead engages in several dialogues with the teacher, who provides scaffolding aimed at direction maintenance and cognitive structuring, in part by encouraging Malthe to read aloud the hints that he is otherwise prevented from introducing. Oliver might have benefited from earlier assistance, as his own system leads into a dead end. The hints, which are primarily cognitively structuring and complexity-reducing (interrogative-formed) clues, are somewhat misleading, however. Hint 1, which initiates the work, is deceptive as there is only one category with a letter *following* a silent *d*, as per Hint 6. Hint 6 is misleading in itself, as the *d* here is silent due to the consonant combination *ld*, not *ds*. It appears to be an oversight that both Hints 3 and 4 contain *nd*; one of them should probably have included *ld*, which is also evident from the following class discussion. Given these inconsistencies, it is understandable that Oliver initially sorts into an excessive number of categories.

The Field is abstract as the task is relatively decontextualised even though the students do receive some explanation as to why knowledge about silent letters is important. The Tenor is impersonal, but there is a slight

shift in Mode from language accompanying action, as Oliver sorts, thinks aloud and talks to the teacher, to a reflection on silent letters in spelling during the class discussion.

The tutor is only involved in the work to a very limited extent, likely due to the (exploratory yet) closed nature of the task, and possibly the pairing itself. Oliver comments on pairing in the student interview (where he is interviewed with his mathematics partner, not Malthe), providing a seemingly hypothetical example:

> Let's say, for instance, that the best student in the class was paired with the worst. It wouldn't work […]. The [worst student] would hardly be able to do anything. And then when you ask, 'should I come up with a helping question?,' it's just like, 'oh yeah,' but you don't really listen to what they're saying.

This suggests that Oliver does not recognise Malthe as a relevant SYKL partner (although they discuss other topics and joke around). And since the – principles behind – the scaffolding cards are not included in this dialogue, the community-building scaffold is weak. The scaffolding is cognitive and metacognitive, and it primarily occurs through teacher intervention and somewhat misleading hints. Oliver communicates mostly with himself and the teacher. In the teacher interview, Sanne notes that the biggest challenge in SYKL is creating the tasks and hints,

> because I feel a bit like I'm inside the heads of 20 children […] to figure out: What is the right question […] to put on as hints, so that [the students] also come to the answer […], which you would like them to reach?

Accordingly, the design of SYKL tasks and hints must be differentiated to maintain direction. However, if the students are to reach a specific answer, as the statement also implies, the result is mainly closed tasks, which might limit exploratory dialogue.

Case 3: Word Comprehension and Fairytales

> *William (tutee) and Agnes (tutor) are working on a task concerning word comprehension and fairy tales. The task sheet presents the initial three paragraphs of H. C. Andersen's 'Clumsy Hans' (n.d. [1855]). The task instructs, "Read the beginning of the fairy tale* Clumsy Hans *and underline the words that say something about the three brothers. Draw the three brothers and let your partner guess who is who." The four hints are:*
>
> 1. *Do you have any idea what the words, you have underlined, mean? Look them up if necessary.*
> 2. *What could the name Clumsy Hans mean?*
> 3. *Which one of them do you think will win the king's daughter (the princess)? Why?*
> 4. *Do you know other texts from H. C. Andersen?*
>
> *During the brief introduction, the teacher reminds students to read the entire task but not to read all the hints aloud initially. She informs them that they will be working with fairy tales featuring "old-fashioned language" and "inverted word order," which might be "at bit tricky." She adds that fairy tales are categorised under "narrative texts," linking it to the class's ongoing work on written composition.*

The dialogue commences with William reading the task aloud, commenting, "Okay, that's actually a really fun task," a sentiment Agnes shares, and they exchange smiles. As William reads aloud, Agnes attentively follows. He pauses occasionally to seek help, e.g. "[…] an old squire […], isn't that something you say when it's a farmer?", or just to think aloud, e.g. "[…] cod liver oil – eww! That was something they also got in the old days – my mum has tasted it." Agnes assists in correcting misreading, e.g. vittige *('witty') instead of* vigtige *('important'), because "there's no g there." William starts drawing, but the teacher reminds the students of the underlining task. William thinks aloud while underlining, and Agnes assists. They discuss most of the underlinings, e.g. "old farm," "lordly," and "dexterous." Agnes says, "Now you must open the notebook," and William prepares to draw, continuing to think aloud: "Clumsy Hans, […] he's riding a goat," to which Agnes replies, "You mustn't say that that to me," making them both smile. Agnes says she will read the hints to herself while William draws. The teacher asks if they remembered Hint 2. Agnes reads it aloud, and William responds, "Someone who's called Hans, and then he's clumsy," to which Agnes laughs and replies, "Yes, that may well be. Good proposal." She asks if William knows other Andersen texts (Hint 4). He says, "The Ugly Duckling, and with Agnes' assistance – "What about him who were to meet those dogs?" – they also recall 'The Tinderbox'. Agnes asks who he thinks will win the princess (Hint 3) – William knows the answer as he is already familiar with the fairy tale. Agnes then draws attention to the meaning of the underlined words (Hint 1), and fetches a dictionary, which she flips through while William finishes drawing. He shows his drawings, but, once again, inadvertently reveals who the drawings depict. They both laugh.*

In the summary, the teacher revisits difficult sentences and archaic words, exemplified in the text with the students' assistance. Then, a series of words characterising the three brothers are reviewed, and the class discusses which features of the drawings helped the tutors guess. Agnes contributes: William drew Clumsy Hans on a goat. The teacher asks the students to write in their notebooks what was good about the SYKL partnership and what could be improved. These are individual tasks that are not collected in plenary.

This dialogue is exemplary in numerous ways. Both students are profoundly engaged throughout all phases, i.e. in flow. They opt to read the fairy tale *aloud*, despite the instructions merely stating that the tutee should read it. Agnes self-initiates while William sketches, and 'interrupts' him with conversation and hints, partially aided by two brief teacher interventions. Agnes assists with reading aloud and underlining, the students actively participate and are fully oriented in the text. Scaffolding occurs at all levels:

At the macro-scaffolding level, the teacher draws a connection to the class's ongoing work with written composition. Even though the students are not currently working with fairy tales beyond the task, the work is thus integrated into a form of continuity. The students' close collaboration and the abundance of smiles and laughter suggest a successful pairing.

Meso-scaffolding primarily structures cognitively, focusing on the text's archaic and (consequently) challenging sentences and words. It comprises both an initial teacher 'warning' and a summarising exemplification with the students' input. Metacommunication also maintains direction, as the teacher reminds the students to read the entire

task, and recruits, as the students are to evaluate the cooperation. The scaffolding cards are not explicitly drawn into the work, but all the principles are present: The students read the task together and start working immediately, they encourage with assistance and smiles, they ask and listen to each other, they think aloud and identify connections, e.g. with other fairy tales. Lastly, the task itself must be considered scaffolding. It recruits, as the students find it enjoyable. It is challenging, not least due to the archaic language and unfamiliar text world. The various (speech) acts of the task, both of a closed (reading) and a more open nature (underlining, drawing, guessing), stimulate exploratory conversation. The accompanying hints consist of scaffolding questions with a slight in-built progression, all of them supporting cognitive activities: reduction and cognitive structuring through investigation of words (Hints 1-2), and cognitive structuring through pre-knowledge of text/genre and author (Hints 3-4). Moreover, in contrast to Cases 1 and 2, the task integrates language teaching (semantics) in context with literature reading. The major dialogical challenge of the task is that the drawing task risks leading to passivation of the tutor. Agnes solves this by bringing the hints into play, browsing the dictionary and asking William about fairy tales and difficult words while he draws, and this leads to conversations that must be considered Danish L1 relevant – though without evoking a more technical Field.

Micro-scaffolding is largely carried by the students' own peer scaffolding. Agnes recruits with encouragement, and structures cognitively through the entire repertoire of scaffolding means: feedback (e.g. "Good proposal"), hints ("What about him who were to meet those dogs?"), instruction ("Now you must open the notebook"), explanation ("there's no g there"), numerous questions – and to a certain degree modelling, e.g. when she looks up the difficult words. Furthermore, peer scaffolding is mutual, as William asks quite a lot of cognitively structuring questions to his tutor and shares contextualising thoughts about for example his mother's experience with cod liver oil. The teacher's only micro-scaffolding function is to maintain direction through a couple of reminders of bringing all parts of the task and hints into play.

During the interview, the teacher explains that the SYKL notebooks were introduced as a solution to the issue of students often completing tasks too quickly. The act of writing serves to prolong engagement with the work. The student evaluation of their collaboration is another add-on to SYKL. Both these practices are aimed at guiding students towards a more reflective Mode. Otherwise, there is no clear evidence in this dialogue of the students shifting towards a more formal register. But they do indeed oscillate between using the fairy tale's specific vocabulary and their own everyday language.

Discussion

The observed cases highlight varying levels of scaffolding and participation. Case 1 shows that tasks not designed for pair work, coupled with redundant hints, fail to foster reciprocal help. The decontextualised grammar task lacks macro-level continuity, disengaging students, leading to minimal micro-scaffolding. Case 2 similarly shows limited student dialogue, with scaffolding primarily provided by the teacher. Misleading hints and the closed task restrict exploratory dialogue. Student pairing plays a critical role, as the tutor does not seem to recognise the tutee's help. Case 3 presents an exemplary dialogue where both students are thoroughly engaged. The task's integration into the broader curriculum and the students' enjoyment highlight the importance of pairing and

continuity. Micro-scaffolding is largely carried by the students themselves, with mutual encouragement and exploratory dialogue.

Although the dataset for this study is quite limited, the analysis, alongside other studies, point to implications for peer tutoring practice. Successful pair work relies on strong macro- and meso-scaffolding. Integrating the task into the overall curriculum ensures continuity and relevance, preventing the dialogue from being perceived as detached. Student pairing presents its own challenge, as "students may lack the scaffolding skills or motivation to support peers" (Sutherland, 2015, p. 47), or the tutee might think so, cf. Case 2. This may point to a more general issue with same-age tutoring, and research has found that low-achieving students "struggled to collaborate and avoided performing cognitively demanding tasks, unless scaffolded by the teacher" (Lialikhova, 2019, p. 1). Conversely, previous research into SYKL in mathematics found that both tutor and tutee were on task approximately 90 percent of the time (Falkenberg & Petersen, 2022), so Case 2 might not be typical in this regard.

Meso-level metacommunication and use of prompt cards risk becoming superficial reminders rather than guiding principles, cf. Case 1. Help functions best when students forget their helper roles and collaborate on the task, as demonstrated in Case 3, a paradoxical yet defining feature of scaffolding (Van de Pol et al., 2010). However, the cooperative ground rules (Sutherland, 2015) *are* new to students, so some initial rigidity in upholding them should be expected (Kvistad, 2021). Pair work could likely benefit if the teacher modelled collaboration (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2001) instead of merely instructing students to praise each other.

As indicated in all cases, the task design is crucial. The analysis confirms that tasks and hints should be challenging, with progression and room for differentiation. They should include both closed and open elements and require students to engage in concrete activities beyond conversation. Additionally, tasks should be collaborative, requiring active participation from both students to prevent tutee passivation, and tasks should support students' affect, e.g. recruiting through creative task design (Oksbjerg et al., 2024), not just (meta)cognition. These traits are all present in Case 3's task, although the tutor must self-activate while the tutee draws.

Same-age tutoring might often seem like more talk than learning, raising the question: Do the students learn anything? In their commentary on a study of SYKL in science (Andersen et al., 2023), Jacobsen and Mulvad (2023) question the academic benefits for students working within SYKL. They argue that the 'unequal' relationship between tutor and tutee, combined with the accompanying Mode and everyday Field in dialogues, places students too far left on the register continuum, resulting in limited academic learning. This observation aligns somewhat with my analysis, where cognitive structuring of tasks, hints, and students' subject-specific language appear challenging. However, the critique overlooks key aspects of peer tutoring.

The focus of SYKL is not primarily technical-abstract learning, but socio-academic inclusion and strategy development. SYKL is not intended to replace teaching or teachers, but to enhance dialogical skills. With proper scaffolding, peer tutoring can empower students (Van Lier, 2007), helping them find their own voice (Sutherland, 2015), building learning and participation strategies (Schmidt & Thygesen, 2024). Such student-centred

approaches "require strong teacher professionalism" (Koyuncu et al., 2023, p. 12). Cognitive structuring should primarily remain the teacher's domain, encompassing tasks, hints, and the metacommunication around pair work. As the analysis indicates, the teacher, though often absent in dialogues, remains crucial to peer scaffolding through macro- and meso-level course planning, pairing, and task design.

Scaffolding peer tutoring takes time to be effective. Research into SYKL in mathematics (Rasmussen & Schmidt, 2022) shows the development of 'social' and 'mathematical' actions over time:

> Encouragements are exchanged for a general positive disposition to each other and attempts to create meaning in the tasks are exchanged for a more daring propensity to propose solutions, even if [the students] risk making mistakes along the way" (p. 7).

The long-term effects of SYKL in Danish L1 are yet to be explored.

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