



We are familiar with what critics and enthusiasts say about children's books. Less familiar to us is what children say.

At Goldsmiths, University of London, we've devoted a module on our MA in Children's Literature to this very subject. Students devise projects which investigate how children respond to children's literature. Over some ten weeks or so, they try out various 'interventions' which aim at producing responses from children, whether that's in talk, writing, drawing, drama or whatever way seems appropriate. Then they analyse what the children have said or done using a mix of tried and tested methods or applying new ones. Some of the best examples of these studies are in this book.

They are superbly informative reads just as they are, but we hope that they will also inspire others to do the same.

The more the better!

-Michael Rosen



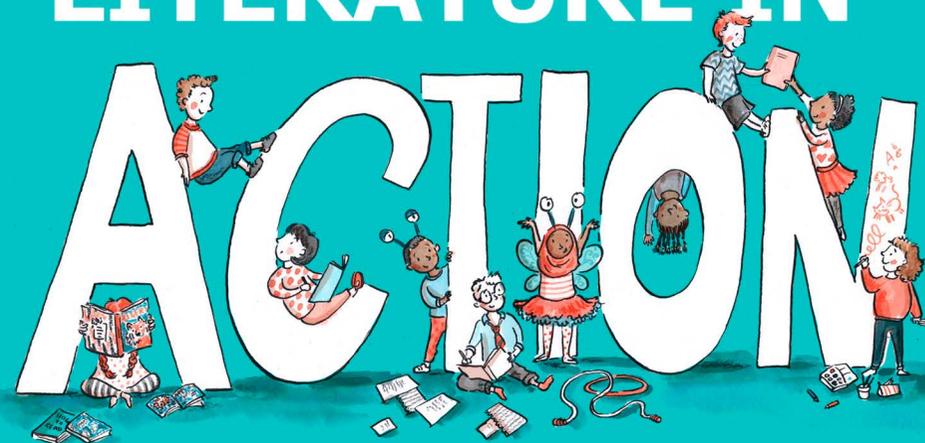
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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN ACTION

Goldsmiths UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN



Editors:

Richard Charlesworth

Deborah Friedland and

Helen Jones

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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**Edited by Richard Charlesworth, Deborah Friedland
and Helen Jones**

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Professor Vicky Macleroy

Children's Literature in Action

To the team at Goldsmiths for reigniting my passion for Children's Literature; to my parents for starting the spark.

Richard Charlesworth

To Elliot, Rose and Jesse – thank you for the many wonderful hours we spent reading stories when you were little. And for two cute bear cubs, Maya and Orin, who are continuing the family tradition with me.

Deborah Friedland

For my dad, for showing me the power of action research and lifelong learning. For my mum, thank you for giving me my love of children's literature. And for Martin, Sophie, Louisa and Alice, thank you for your patience and participation!

Helen Jones

And, of course, for Julia Hope,
for all her inspiration, support and guidance.

Children's Literature in Action

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Children's Literature in Action

INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL ROSEN AND JULIA HOPE

This book presents outstanding work from students taking 'Children's Literature in Action' – a module on the MA Children's Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London. The collection features research studies spanning seven years from 2014-15 when the first cohort took the MA programme to the latest research in 2020-21 during the pandemic. It is divided into four sections:

- Picturebook research
- Culture, humour and creative reading research
- Poetry research
- Reading and relationships research

The illustrations were created by students on the Children's Book Illustration pathway (in collaboration with a creative writing student). It is hoped the volume fills a gap in research publications that feature children's responses to literature, and that readers are inspired to carry out their own projects as a result.

HOW THE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN ACTION MODULE DEVELOPED

The MA Children's Literature programme at Goldsmiths was devised by Clare Kelly, Maggie Pitfield and Michael Rosen in 2013-14. It built on an existing educational module, 'Children's Literature and Cultural Diversity', taught by Clare Kelly, Chris Kearney, Maggie Pitfield and Vicky Macleroy. Discussion focused on such matters as what would be the likely background and experience of most prospective students; what would be most use for such a cohort; what was the combined experience of the staff who could teach the MA. More specifically in relation to children's literature, we looked at how the programme could cover aspects of the history of children's literature along with recent critical perspectives and theories. As we expected that

most of the students would be teachers, we built on programmes already on offer at Goldsmiths that looked at, for example, controversies and challenging themes in children's books. One gap we noticed in this were children themselves. We asked ourselves, how could we devote some time on the programme to exploring how children read books: how they are affected by them, how they see themselves as readers, what situations and interventions might encourage children to read - and why? Underlying this were theories that focus on the place of the reader and the construction of the reader, usually known by such terms as Reader-Response (Rosenblatt, 1938/1978, etc.) and Reception Theory (Hall, 1973, etc.).

Rather than this part of the programme following a pattern of lectures and direct teaching in the usual sense, we proposed that the best model for this would be to draw on tenets of 'action research' particularly through a core text: *Classroom Action Research in Literacy: a Guide to Practice* (Bearne et al., 2019). We would ask students on the module to put themselves at the centre of a study which would investigate any of the following: how a child (or a group of children) talks about a book (or several books); how children write about books; how children use any art form inspired by a book (or books). We proposed that this would be one whole university term's work and so would involve longitudinal observations on what would be a series of 'interventions'. By this, we meant that our students would create events/lessons/sessions in which the same child (or children) would be exposed to children's books in whatever way our students proposed.

The rationale behind this was (and remains so): that it is easy and legitimate for adults to read and analyse books for children; however, as they are primarily intended for children, it is even more legitimate to create 'laboratories' in which children can express what they think about these books intended for them. Any student taking part in such a study would then be informed in some detail about how their 'sample' responded to whatever input they had created. We imagined and hoped that they would be able to take this knowledge and experience forwards into their practice, whether that was as a teacher, a librarian or any other

practitioner working with young people, and also as children's book creators.

There's one twist which is missing from this description: the role of the student in this process. In our seminars, we proposed that the students would be sharing their research proposal, reporting back on how the sessions were going, writing a journal for their own private consumption, producing, gathering, collecting, selecting and analysing data (i.e., what the children produced by way of talk, writing, commentary, artistic output). We imagined and hoped that this would also have the knock-on effect of affecting the students' professional practice whether that was as teachers, librarians, writers, illustrators, youth workers, social care workers or whatever.

In order to emphasise that this was an active process, we proposed that this module of work would be called 'Children's Literature in Action'. Clearly, we were by no means the first people to explore this area and our combined experience of teaching, researching and working with others in the field went into devising the module. We would draw on this in providing readings for the students from people who had affected our practice and who had themselves conducted or constructed these kinds of observations and/or those who had created situations which produced fruitful, in-depth responses from children, people such as Aidan Chambers, Robin Alexander, Neil Mercer, Fiona Maine, Lynn Dawes, Emrys Evans, Bill Corcoran, John Yandell, Eve Bearne, Jackie Marsh, John Richmond; and/or had theorised about Reader-Response, such as Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, Roland Barthes, Gerard Genette. Moreover, we hoped that the students themselves would explore and discover research, journals, papers, and any works by others which would help them locate their own research projects in the field.

FOREGROUNDING THE CHILD IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE STUDIES

The study of children's literature has evolved over a long time, drawing in the work (mostly) of librarians, teachers, authors of children's literature, and university academics who may, though

not necessarily, have been involved in training librarians and teachers. As a field, it varies enormously between conventional biography, historical surveys, explorations of genre and theme, the application of theoretical perspectives such as psychoanalytic, semiological, Marxist and so on. With the appearance around the world of departments or sub-departments in universities that specialise in the study of children's literature, there is now a growing literature that discusses the study itself, raising questions such as why study children's literature, and what do different methods of study or different theoretical positions offer critics and practitioners?

As a field, the study of children's literature both draws on many related fields and offers insights into other fields. So, to take one example relevant here, the study of childhood can be a matter of interest to children's literature scholars because it raises questions of, say, what kind of people and what kinds of readers are the readers of children's books and how do they develop and change. In addition to this, children's books themselves are of course full of children and this is of interest to people concerned with whether children are affected by or even in part constituted by representations of themselves. Linked to this, there are also questions around what kind of agendas, hidden or explicit, do adults have when writing for children. What are these agendas and how have they changed over time and how do they vary now?

At first glance, this kind of work centres the child. Appropriate enough comment perhaps, given that the apparent intention of children's books is to engage children. However, no matter how concerned critics, authors and academics have been with children, it is not easy to find children's thoughts, voices and responses to children's literature. Perhaps that needs modifying: millions of words are written by children every day that respond to books in a school context. These responses are more often than not produced within what is usually called 'Comprehension'. The objective of comprehension exercises, tests and exams is usually to find out whether the child/school student has understood a passage or book. As these are tests, they are standardised, which means that a grid has been produced

narrowing students' responses down to questions under such headings as 'retrieval', 'inference', 'chronology' and 'effect'. These headings may or may not be necessary conditions for understanding a text but they are surely not the whole picture.

Through this module we wanted to explore other dimensions to what children's minds do when reading books. Using methods such as dialogic method and artistic interpretation through e.g., painting, music, performance, film, powerpoint, photography, sculpture, ceramics etc., this kind of research treats the whole child as the responder and interpreter of books. Rather than demanding of a child that this or that adult-directed, adult-chosen passage of a book is 'understood' according to some closed-ended questions (with right and wrong answers), we think it is important to focus on (or at least start with) how a reader is affected by a text. There is a humanistic point here. Writers write books so that readers read them. Ultimately, writers want readers to engage with what they write, which means that writers want readers to feel, wonder and think about what they're reading so that they carry on reading.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE MODULE

Reader Response Theory

The development of Reader Response Theory throughout the second half of the 20th century and beyond has had a major impact on the way we view books and their readers and is a key theoretical approach underpinning the 'Children's Literature in Action' module. As early as 1938, Louise Rosenblatt began to examine the reading process and elevate the role of the reader, focusing on responding to the literary text as a unique 'event', conditioned by multiple facets pertaining to that particular reader. However, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that a school of thinking coming under the umbrella theory of 'Reader Response' emerged, which has since expanded to all areas of the arts, where it is often known as Reception Theory. Building on the work of Roland Barthes and other post-modernists, Wolfgang Iser asserted that the reader brings to the work 'pre-understanding', a context of beliefs and expectations (Iser, 1976, first published in English in 1978). The text produces 'blanks' or

'gaps' that the reader selects and organises, excluding some and 'concretising' others – giving shape or meaning in the act of reading, according to their own context of beliefs. It is this process that students on the module are encouraged to observe, record and analyse.

At the same time Louise Rosenblatt (1978) deepened her 'transactional' theory of literature, the idea of a two-way relationship with the text, focusing on the role of the reader, similar to that outlined by Iser. She likened the author/text/reader to an electrical circuit – all important to the production of meaning; a different reader will form a different circuit and therefore a different meaning. Taking the transactional view a step further, Stanley Fish (1980) claimed that there is no objective work of literature, only interpretations. As readers we are part of an 'interpretive community' in which we are trained, that gives us a particular way of reading a text. An individual's response is determined by the conventions of reading that they have been educated into, within a particular socio-historical context, using strategies that guide them to seek certain meanings. The module helps students identify this construct and where possible enables children to build their own interpretation of texts, in collaboration with others.

Dialogic Method

A collaborative approach is constantly evoked on the module as part of 'Dialogic Method', which encourages students to discuss their opinions as part of their learning. Developed in the early 20th century, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1934) idea that interaction of teacher and pupil, through dialogue, would lead to a greater understanding on both sides has fueled much contemporary thinking on the nature of classroom discourse. Building on such early forays, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) defined his view of the dialogical method as 'a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it' (ibid., p. 98), and this is a key part of our teaching sessions. Relating to the field of children's literature, if we are to discuss texts with children in exciting new ways, we must examine the mechanics of this 'talk about texts' (Maybin & Moss, 1993).

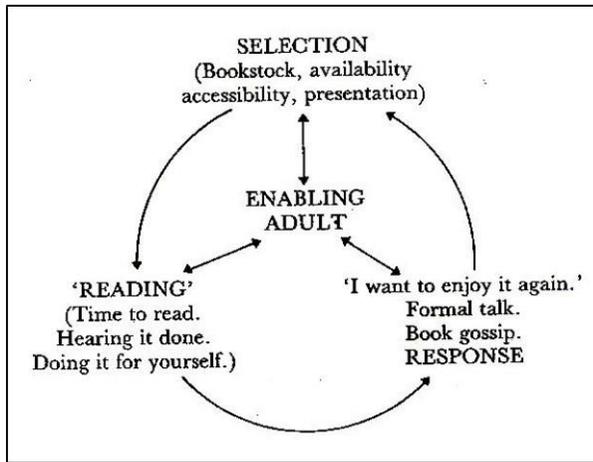


Figure 1: *The Reading Circle* (Chambers, 1991/1993/2011, p.15)

Figure 1 shows Aidan Chambers' representation of 'The Reading Circle' (1991/1993/2011, p.15), concerning the selection, reading and response to texts, and demonstrates how 'the enabling adult' (ibid), be they teacher, parent, librarian, etc. impact on every part of the process. Chambers sees that a vital part of the reading process is the opportunity to discuss what has been read with an adult or with other children, or both. He asserts that through 'book talk' (ibid, p.19) children arrive at a greater understanding of the meaning and significance of a text, than they do as lone readers, and he suggests ways in which teacher questioning could move from simple recall to more critical engagement with the text. Through his 'Tell Me' (ibid., p.100) approach Chambers suggests that there is no single reading of a text, but the creation of a 'community of readers' (ibid., p.108), jointly discovering their own interpretation. Chambers' work is particularly pertinent to this module, as he highlights the position of the 'enabling adult' in charring dialogs with children about books, and students are encouraged to reflect on their own participation in focus group discussions. By facilitating rather than dominating, any involved adult carries enormous responsibility which is not always acknowledged.

These ideas of dialogic method have been built on and refined by Robin Alexander (2008) to look at how teachers as well as children talk in the classroom. He notes that the so-called 'recitation script' of what he calls a closed initiation-response-feedback (IRF) exchange, with closed teacher questions, brief recall answers and minimal feedback to 'report someone else's thinking' (ibid., p. 93) remains dominant. In contrast, students are introduced to Alexander's five identified principles for good dialogic teaching:

- Collective
- Reciprocal
- Supportive
- Cumulative
- Purposeful (ibid., pp. 112-113).

Students are also encouraged to engage with Michael Rosen's 'Matrix' (2017) to analyse the kinds of talk and writing that children do in response to literature in particular. The 25 forms of reaction that might be generated, as described in the Matrix, may well overlap, and not all categories fit all situations, but it can be adapted, expanded, reduced, and amalgamated with other models to provide an individual framework for analysis, tailor-made by each student to suit their own project.

Multimodal Response

Since the 1960s there has been an explosion in children's publishing of what we refer to loosely as picturebooks, and nowadays children are very good at identifying visual features, as well as text. Perry Nodelman (2005) argues that illustrations play a powerful role in conveying to children the overall story and 'meaning' far more directly than the words do, and in fact can carry more allusions and connections than may be in the text itself. Often children's drawn responses become part of the data that students analyse on the module, especially when working with picturebooks, fitting with Kate Noble's (2016) assertion that 'a visual experience demands a visual response true to its original form' (p.118).

So how are researchers, teachers and indeed children to read, interpret and analyse the interrelation of the visual and the verbal image? Laurence Sipe (1998) suggests that teachers often feel they lack the training in visual literacy to analyse and understand children's images, and to help their pupils construct meaning for themselves through pictures. While Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2001) point out that written language has been the dominant system of meaning used in educational contexts, the visual image has often been seen as merely supporting the text, rather than being a system of meaning in its own right. They argue that the integration of the two – multimodal discourse – is key in our modern world. Building on this view, Frank Serafini (2009) offers a 'visual grammar' which works to fuse written language, visual image and graphic design together to tell a story or offer information, and argues that in order for teachers to guide children in constructing meaning from multimodal texts they need to understand this interrelationship.

On the 'Children's Literature in Action' module, students are supported to analyse children's multimodal expressions, with various frameworks suggested that they can adopt, adapt and apply. For example, early on William Moebius (1986) identified certain graphic 'codes' that operate within the elements of design and expression in picturebooks. These include: positioning on the page; perspective; framing; use of lines; use of colour. David Lewis (2001) includes line and colour in his 'key features of the visual image' (p.103) but adds action and movement, size and location, and symbolism to his list. All these are contained within Kate Noble's (2016) useful structure for analysing pictorial responses, but with a holistic category added in. She suggests the consideration of:

- *literal responses*, 'whereby the child draws people or events from the text to communicate story and content',
- *overall effect*, 'considering qualities such as the aesthetics of the image and a discussion of colour, tone, form and line' and

- *internal structure*, 'examining the composition for balance and the relationship between objects or characters and their relative scale' (ibid., p.118).

Tutors on the module encourage students to try out different methods of eliciting responses from children when sharing books, in order to enrich and 'triangulate' their data. As well as transcripts of 'booktalk', and children's writing and pictures, some offer photos and video of children's reactions to text, including physical bodily movement and the creation of expressive artefacts – a truly multimodal response.

Action Research as a Methodology

The 'Children's Literature in Action' module draws heavily on 'action research' as a methodology. This is an umbrella term for a range of approaches in which researchers engage in critically reflective inquiry to improve an aspect of social activity. It has a long tradition in community and youth work, and nursing, and is very well established in education. The founder of action research is widely acknowledged as Kurt Lewin, an American psychologist whose work with community groups in the 1940s demonstrated that positive change can occur when people collaborate on projects they define and contribute to (Bargal, 2006). Since action research focuses on professional or social change, inquiries are almost always collaborative in nature. Richard Winter (1998, 2002) is among those who emphasise the importance of reflection with others, incorporating different perspectives in a non-hierarchical way to deepen and broaden understanding. This feature of action research is found in the weekly sharing of findings on the module, and in the attention to children's perspectives.

The way in which action research inquiries are undertaken is sometimes described as a spiral, composed of repeated cycles of reflection, planning, action and observation. The starting point for action research inquiry is a problem or issue encountered by the researcher. Having clarified the situation as they currently see it, the researcher then plans an intervention, or action, to respond to the issue identified. They then record the results of the intervention and reflect on what happened. In terms of methods,

action researchers draw on all the standard data collection methods, but a journal of some kind is essential for capturing the practitioner's evolving understanding of the situation on a day-to-day basis. In many cases the reflection process enables the researcher to understand hitherto unseen aspects of the situation (Elliott, 1991) over an extended period. Events that appear to have no significance when considered in isolation, achieve a new relevance when compared or added to earlier recorded events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). On the 'Children's Literature in Action' module, students are encouraged to keep a journal of their weekly interventions for these exact reasons.

In seeing the issue differently, the researcher is able to plan a new and more appropriate intervention, which in turn is observed and recorded for further reflection until the issue has been fully addressed. The reality is often much messier than this suggests, but these steps and the need to revisit the issue with increasing understanding have enabled generations of action researchers to deepen their understanding of themselves and the children they work with. Alongside the commitment to collaboration, action research also requires more personal engagement and vulnerability than many forms of research. Jean McNiff (2022), a key figure in the action research movement in the UK, draws attention to the action researcher as both subject and object of the research, who is required to 'think about your own life and work, and this involves you asking yourself why you do the things that you do, and why you are the way that you are' (n.p.). This is known as 'reflexivity', and on the module students are encouraged to explore ways in which they think their personality or cultural background might be affecting the responses of the children who are participating in the research. Students find this reflexivity challenging but illuminating.

HOW CAN ACTION RESEARCH CONTRIBUTE TO THE STUDY OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE?

Drawing on action research methodology is a way for those involved with children as readers to explore the real purposes of reading and writing. It aims to get in close to the moments of engagement in order to find out, say, what goes through a child's

mind as they read, what aspects of their own lives did the reader reflect on as they read, what other texts from the child's own 'repertoire' of texts surfaced and merged with the text they read, what questions or puzzles surface in the reader's mind as they read, what flow of emotions towards characters, images, colours, scenes, plot lines, outcomes did the reader have as they read? Or on cool reflection afterwards, what ideas did the reader have that arose as they read or afterwards, what information did the reader choose to seek out as a result of reading part of, or all of a book, where did this reading or reading in general fit into the reader's way of life, is the reading of a particular book part of a pattern - by author, genre, media tie-ins, or some other linking agenda? Over the years of the 'Children's Literature in Action' module, we have drawn on already existing frameworks and/or devised frameworks that assist the students in creating open-ended questions and methods of analysis of response (see Alexander, Chambers, Evans, Rosen, previously mentioned).

Laying such questions out is a guide to the field, but paying close attention to what children say, write, draw, perform, film etc, may well give rise to responses that can't be predicted. Given that one of the jobs writers set themselves is to be 'original', it should follow that at least some responses coming from young people will be or could be surprising. One example: it is common for adults to identify what we imagine is a book's 'message' or 'point'. We then often imagine that a child reader will or won't get that message. And that's it. However, there is another possibility: that the child gets the point but 'resists' it. Within the framework of a standardised comprehension test, there is no space for such a nuanced response. Again, one of the great advantages of, say, inviting young people to write something literary (a story, poem, play, song, sketch, film script etc) in response to a work of children's literature is that it's possible, on close analysis, to discover lines of influence from the work that's been read to the new piece that's been written.

In one sense, none of this needs to find its way back into the world of conventional children's literature criticism or critical theory. To repeat, it is legitimate for an adult to read a book ostensibly written 'for' children and to analyse it as an adult for

social, psychological, psychoanalytical, historical, developmental, aesthetic, literary critical reasons. However, if an adult wants to hypothesise about the response of a child reader or a collective of child readers, then the adult in question strays into dubious territory if they don't have evidence. Moreover, if that evidence has been collected by simply quizzing a child or children then it's fairly safe to say that the large part of the response will be flavoured with the child's desire to answer what the child imagines that the adult wants to hear. Another paradigm is necessary, one where the child or children have more space, more 'freedom' if you like, to explore their responses for themselves. Of course these may turn out to be shifting, experimental, or varying from moment to moment but that's actually part of the reading process. Action research methodology teaches us that being provisional about our conclusions (to be oxymoronic for a moment) is a virtue not a weakness. It shows that we are prepared to 'have a go', try things out, see if it 'tastes' like this or like that!

In short, literature is not an egg box. When we read, we don't sit taking the exact right number of eggs out of the box. Nor if we do take the right number out, this is not what the eggs are for! Telling someone 'There were six eggs in the box, I took all six eggs out', tells us nothing about what the eggs are for. To carry on the metaphor, we take eggs out of boxes to cook eggs according to our taste: boil, fry, scrambled and so on. The argument here is that we use what is in texts in order to make of them what we want and like. Our 'Children's Literature in Action' module aims to find out more about this. The approach we are championing here could help any of us or all of us understand what children get from books. More specifically, it can help librarians, teachers, writers and critics focus on what really goes on in children's minds as they read.

STRUCTURE OF THE MODULE AND DEVELOPING THE ASSIGNMENT

As mentioned above, the 'Children's Literature in Action' module was devised to last a term, with ten seminars held in the evening, as with all other MA sessions in the Department of Educational

Studies at Goldsmiths, in order to accommodate practising teachers and others working in day-time educational settings.

The structure of the module is such that students are encouraged at the outset to find a focus for their study, typically by constructing a question that they want to interrogate, and also by firming up their choice of setting for their following "interventions". They are also provided with an overview of action research as a methodology and how they might draw on some key approaches (Bearne, Graham & Marsh, 2019). As with any research which is undertaken with human participants, an ethics form is explained to students, along with documents from the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) discussing research guidelines, and official documentation from Goldsmiths. The ethics form is filled out, perhaps in consultation with other staff in their setting, and submitted to module tutors to be signed off before any data can be collected. This encourages students to consider issues of sensitivity, confidentiality, informed consent and disclosure in the research process, and sets the tone in compiling letters of consent that may be sent out to the parents of child participants.

In the second session, students read about and discuss different research methods that can be applied to the study of children's literature in terms of reader response, evaluating the relative merits of qualitative versus quantitative data. Tutors particularly focus on how to set up questionnaires, interviews (structured, semi-structured, and unstructured), focus groups, dialogic interaction between children, and how to generate and analyse children's talk, as well as drawn and written response to texts. They are also required to find comparative studies to their own, either commensurate with their focus or their methods, or both, to situate their study in the field of enquiry, and form part of the discussion at the beginning of their written assignment. As already mentioned, students are expected to keep a journal throughout the project, which is not submitted for assessment, but keeps a record of the process and roll out, with observations that can be used as 'field notes' as part of the data collected. Past students have commented on how useful maintaining this journal

has been in terms of preserving memories, documenting key moments, and as a rough draft for their subsequent data analysis.

For each session a relevant reading is selected by module tutors and shared with students, to be read in advance and discussed in the session. Past students who have undertaken the module in previous years are also invited in to talk about their experience of carrying out a project, sampling and collecting data, analysing and interpreting data, developing conceptual categories, writing up the project and disseminating their findings. In fact these elements make up the focus of each session, so past students draw out the theme of the week. Students are provided with the assignment and portfolio of the visiting speaker for the week, so that they can see the focus of their study and understand how it was rolled out. Visiting MA alumni are also encouraged to give tips from their own experience and answer any questions from the current year's students.

From the third session onwards, and continuing for the rest of the module, students are required to present an outline or some data from their project as it progresses, explaining to the rest of the class how the 'interventions' with children are constructed and conducted, and demonstrating how they might analyse their data, perhaps in the form of transcripts, drawings, or writing. As discussed above, this analysis and interpretation is built on models or matrices for analysing children's response to texts which have been shared as readings throughout the module. Student presentations are followed by feedback from module tutors on project design, data collection and analysis, and ways forward, and other students are encouraged to provide suggestions to peers in the class as well.

Around week five or six (to correspond with Half Term in UK schools), students submit an online example of a portfolio entry that they might submit in their final portfolio, alongside their assignment. This is then evaluated online by peers on the module, and feedback provided digitally by module tutors. It is an important exercise, where students begin to consider what is appropriate to submit as a portfolio item – a transcript with analysis, a picture or pictures in response to text, written work by children, or basic information about the project such as a grid

providing information about participants, or an overview of 'interventions' with foci. Students also see the choices others have made about portfolio items and find a voice in making suggestions to their peers, becoming aware that at least five portfolio submissions must be collated, analysed and submitted.

The assessment for the module is a 3,500-word (approx.) assignment and an annotated portfolio of between five and ten items (approx. equivalent to 1,500 words). The assignment should be comprised of:

- A literature review of relevant theory and comparative studies,
- An outline of the study and why it was conducted this way,
- A discussion of the setting and participants, how they were chosen, and why that sampling method was decided on,
- An outline of the methods used to collect the data, and why they were chosen,
- A narrative of the process: the story of the study and any adaptations made throughout its development, with reasons,
- An analysis of the data collected, linking explicitly to the items in the portfolio, and explaining why it was analysed in this way,
- A summary of findings, any conclusions reached, and a consideration of what was learnt from conducting the study.

The portfolio (already discussed) can take a variety of forms e.g., children's writing, drawing, audio recordings, artefacts, performances recorded on video etc. There should be at least five separate items in the overall portfolio, each accompanied by 100 words (approximate) rationale for inclusion of the submission. However, in this collection of past students' work we have, for ease of reading integrated the portfolio items within

the overall assignments presented. We hope you enjoy the journey!

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We would like to thank our colleague, Sarah Pearce, for her critical insights, reflections, and feedback on this introductory chapter.

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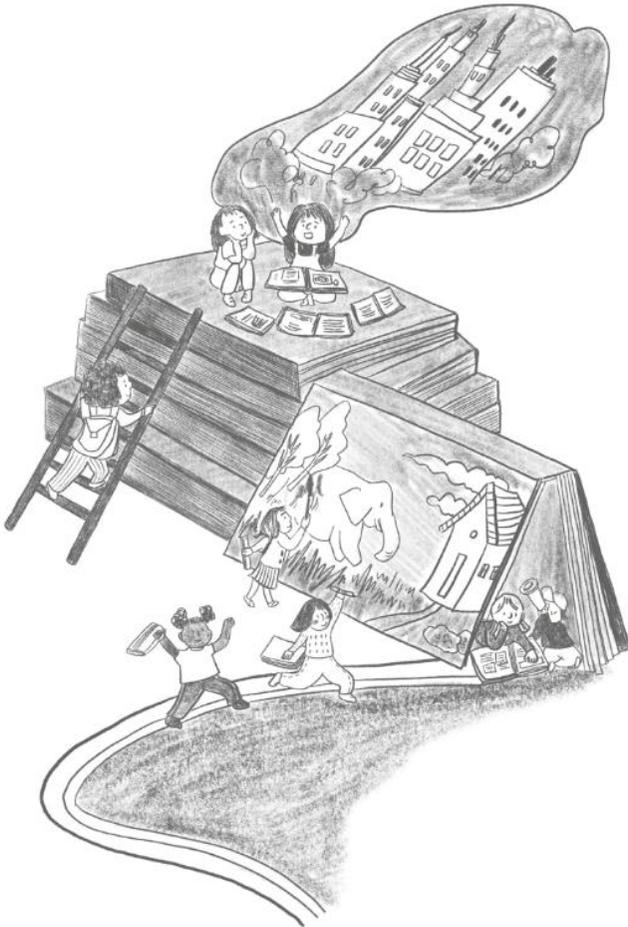
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PART I: PICTUREBOOK RESEARCH



Children's Literature in Action

INTRODUCTION TO PICTUREBOOK RESEARCH

RICHARD CHARLESWORTH

A powerful resource for children, a picturebook can allow them to interrogate a range of global issues, in an age-appropriate manner. Never before has the quality, scope and relevance of picturebooks been as good as it is today, increasing the opportunities not only for literacy but also for teaching development and intercultural education.

(Dolan, 2014, p.1)

The essays in this chapter, explore how picturebooks can be used in practice to deepen understanding of children's own literary lives and their understanding of the wider world. In Victoria Baker and Natasha Gray's research, picturebooks are used in Upper Key Stage Two (10-11 year olds) to provide rich opportunities for pupils to achieve, and often exceed, objectives within the confines of the National Curriculum.

Kathryn Conway demonstrates how picturebooks can support development of empathy and engagement skills with a group of disaffected, traditionally seen as 'underachieving', boys. The thread of engagement is also focused on by Emily McGrath and Joanna Hasler who track and evaluate pupils' emotional responses to illustrations and text.

My own research encourages practitioners to explore beneath the surface of issues and themes that are presented in picturebooks. By texts acting as a springboard, the project centres on creating dialogic spaces of enquiry (Maine, 2015; Alexander, 2017) between both children and facilitator.

Reading these essays, it is readily apparent that children bring a wealth of experience to texts. They work, both independently and as a group, to fill in the gaps between word and image (Iser,

1978). It is clear that these are practitioners who understand the importance of picturebooks across a range of contexts, ages and settings.

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CAN PICTUREBOOKS SUPPORT CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES (AS OUTLINED IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM) WITHIN UPPER KEY STAGE TWO?

VICTORIA BAKER

Despite the common perception that picturebooks are for a younger audience (Evans, 2015, p.4), during the last decade, there has been a growing number of picturebooks published for older readers (Hall, 1990; Giorgis, 1999; Nodleman & Reimer, 2003; Martinez et al., 2009). These texts are often 'unusual, [and] thought-provoking' (Evans, 2015, p.4), recognised as 'outstanding works of art' (Campagnaro, 2015, p.121), and sometimes blur the boundaries between children's and adult's literature (Ommundsen, 2015, p.71).

However, throughout my primary teaching career and literacy leadership, I have noticed the limited use of picturebooks with children aged between 9-11 in Upper Key Stage 2 (UKS2), despite a growing advocacy for them. When speaking with one Year 6 teacher about this, he stated:

I love picturebooks and if I have time I read them for fun with the kids, but I can't use them in guided reading because they aren't challenging enough. They don't prepare the kids for the challenging extracts that they encounter in the SATs.

(Mr Smith, 2017)

The notion that reading picturebooks is 'for fun' reflects Roser, Martinez and Fowler-Amato's (2011) suggestion that teachers undervalue the potential of picturebooks within literacy education. Moreover, his comment reveals the way teachers can feel constrained by the expectations of the Key Stage 2 Standard

Achievement Tests (SATs). Evidently, the place for picturebooks within Mr Smith's classroom has been diminished due to his belief that they do not sufficiently support children in achieving the reading standards outlined within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013).

Despite this belief, there is a growing body of research (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007; Arizpe, 2013; Campagnaro, 2015) arguing for the use of picturebooks within literacy education. As Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007) suggest, 'picturebooks represent a unique visual and literary art form that engages young readers and older readers in many levels of learning and pleasure' (p.273). By reading and discussing picturebooks with a group of 9-10-year-olds, I sought to explore the extent to which such texts could support the pupils' reading comprehension development in line with the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) expectations.

Defining Reading Comprehension

Within UKS2, the teaching of reading centres upon children's comprehension as opposed to word-reading skills. Reading comprehension can be defined as 'the process of constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written text', which, in schools, is developed through the teaching of reading strategies (Snow, 2002, cited in Taboada & Buehl, 2012, p.102). The National Curriculum (DFE, 2013) sets out the reading strategies in UKS2 as:

- understand what they read by:
 - checking that the book makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and exploring the meaning of words in context
 - asking questions to improve their understanding
 - drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence
 - predicting what might happen from details stated and implied
 - summarising the main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph, identifying key details that support the main ideas
 - identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning

(DfE, 2013, p.34)

The teaching of reading strategies is commonly achieved through guided reading which, as Hanke (2013, p.136) highlights, was introduced within the National Literacy Strategy (NLS - DfE 1998). During guided reading, children are often organised into small, ability-based groups, providing the opportunity to, 'talk, read, and think their way purposefully through a text' (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1997, cited in Washtell, 2008, p.60). Evidently, this strategy recognises discussion as key to developing pupils' reading comprehension, also referred to within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013): 'comprehension skills develop through pupils' experience of high-quality discussion with the teacher...' (2013, p.4).

Dialogic Teaching

The value of discussion in learning is recognised through the work on 'dialogic teaching' (Wells, 1999; Mercer, 2000; Alexander, 2008; Chambers, 2011; Maine, 2015), which emphasises the need for social interaction between teachers and pupils, as well as pupils themselves, in achieving understanding (Reedy, 2011, p.56). Dialogic teaching is defined by Mercer and Littleton (2007) as:

(t)hat in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which children's thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward.

(Mercer and Littleton, 2007, p.41)

Dialogic teaching builds upon Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the 'social nature of learning' (Maine, 2015, p.12), which states that a child's cognitive development is dependent upon their social interaction with others through spoken language (Alexander, 2008, p.11). This learning theory views meaning as being jointly constructed through dialogue (Maine, 2015, p.12), and thus Maine (2013; 2015) argues that reading comprehension is best fostered through dialogic teaching.

Reader-Response Theory

The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) acknowledges that reading comprehension is supported by the reader's application of prior knowledge, emphasising that 'good comprehension draws from...knowledge of the world' (DfE, 2013, p.4). As Maine (2015, p.79) highlights, this notion derives from reader-response theory, influenced by the work of Rosenblatt (1978) and Iser (1978). Reader-response theory challenges the sole emphasis upon authorial intention, instead proposing that the reader has an active role in interpretation of text (Hirvela, 1996). Rosenblatt (1978, cited in Maine, 2013, p.151) referred to this process as the transaction between the reader and the text, where 'the reader brings with them their own experiences, expectations and motivations, which affect the meaning that is constructed...'

Martin (2011) argues that response and comprehension are synonymous, suggesting that teachers must allow students to reflect on narratives through oral and written responses, to fully comprehend what they have read.

In light of the importance of both dialogic teaching and reader-response theory in developing pupils' reading comprehension, I combined both practices in my approach to exploring picturebooks with pupils. Through doing so, I aimed to encourage both transaction between the text and the reader, and transaction between readers, allowing them to 'co-construct meaning', and add 'depth to the reading experience' (Maine, 2013, p.151).

Picturebooks and Older Readers

Many critics (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Evans 2009) advocate for the use of picturebooks within literacy education, arguing that, despite their brevity, they contain dense information and complex vocabulary to challenge readers. Furthermore, it is argued that picturebooks require advanced reading skills, as readers must negotiate and interpret meaning from both word and image (Nodleman & Reimer, 2003; Goodwin, 2011; Salisbury & Styles, 2012). Many critics have explored the complexities of this word-image relationship. Nikolajeva and Scott (2000), for example, argue that this interaction can be: *symmetrical* (where

the word and image convey the same message); *enhancing* (the word or image provides detail which the other lacks); *counterpointing* (word and image convey different messages) and *contradictory* (word and image convey contradictory messages).

As Martinez, Roser and Harmon (2009, p.28) highlight, there is a lack of research surrounding the use of picturebooks for teaching reading with older children. Rather, research focuses upon the use of picturebooks for developing visual literacy (Tulk, 2005), supporting critical discussion (Murphy, 2009), or inspiring creative writing (Miller, 1998; Henry and Simpson, 2001). For example, although Tulk (2005) conducted research exploring the use of picturebooks with pupils aged 11-12-years-old, her study focused upon visual literacy: the skill of interpreting and reading image (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p.77). Tulk (2005) argues that visual literacy developed her pupils' analytical skills as they analysed literary features, including tone and style.

Although not directly focused upon older children, Pantaleo (2008) researched students' responses to contemporary picturebooks. Through analysing their oral responses, she concluded that 'reading picturebooks is a multifaceted...act that requires focus and sophistication' (2008, p.9). Furthermore, she drew upon Iser's (1978) work, arguing that picturebooks support the development of pupils' inference strategies. Iser (1978) argued that 'gaps' within texts invite readers to infer meaning and 'fill in gaps with information that is consistent with events and characters in the text' (cited in Pantaleo, 2008, p.23). Pantaleo (2008, pp.23-24) concluded that picturebooks require complex 'gap-filling' (Iser, 1978) or inference strategies due to the multifaceted relationship between word and image.

Both Tulk's (2005) and Pantaleo's (2008) research signpost towards the way in which the reading of picturebooks poses great potential for literacy education, with the observed skills of analysis and inference being essential reading strategies within a pupils' developing comprehension. I sought to expand upon these findings with the aim to discover whether the reading of picturebooks with older primary pupils could aid their development of reading strategies as required within the National Curriculum objectives (DfE, 2013).

Methodology

This study was a teacher-led action research project, 'aimed at making changes to classroom practice' (Bearne et al., 2007, p.4), where a research journal (Campbell et al., 2004, p.88; Koshy 2010, p.90) was maintained to document my reflections and evaluations.

The research was conducted at a state primary school in Camden with six Year 5 pupils. To effectively examine whether picturebooks can challenge UKS2 pupils, I chose to conduct the research with fluent, independent readers and therefore asked the class teacher to select confident readers who would also benefit from further challenge. Over eight weeks, I delivered weekly guided reading sessions based upon two picturebooks: *The Island* (Greder, 2007) and *Varmints* (Ward & Craste, 2007). These texts were chosen for their exploration of complex themes and '...topics that are more abstract and more intellectually demanding' (Murphy, 2009, p24). This timetable documents the content of the sessions:

Weds Afternoon: 1.15pm -2.15pm (8 sessions)	
3 May	Book Introduction: <i>The Island</i>
10 May	Read aloud and discussion of part 1
17 May	Read aloud and discussion of part 2
24 May	Story Recap + Follow up activity <i>Inference mini essay</i>
7 June	Book Introduction: <i>Varmints</i>
14 June	Book Read aloud and discussion of part 1
28 June	Book Read aloud and discussion of part 2
5 July	Story recap + Follow up Activity <i>Analysing Language, Structure and Presentation</i>

The four discussion sessions were audio-recorded, with transcripts used to analyse the children's responses. Action research is often associated with a cycle of planning, action and reflection (Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 2007, pp.2-3). Follow-up activities were planned in response to the discussion sessions,

with the aim to provide further opportunity to develop key reading strategies.

To ensure that the research was ethically sound, pseudonyms were used for all participants to ensure anonymity. Informed consent was gained from the headteacher, the students' guardians and the children themselves, who were aware that they could remove themselves from the research at any time.

Data Analysis and Discussion

To analyse the children's responses to the picturebooks, I utilised both Rosen's (2017) and Sipe's (2008, p.83) categorisations of pupil responses. As shown below, I correlated the categories to the relevant National Curriculum objectives, focusing on skills of: inferring, predicting, justifying, questioning and analysing language, structure and presentation (DfE, 2013).

Interrogative (Rosen, 2017)	Speculative (Rosen, 2017)	Inferential (My own)	Structural (Rosen, 2017)	Language Analysis (Sipe, 2008)	Justification (My Own)
NC Objective: Asking questions to improve their understanding	NC Objective: Predicting what might happen from details stated and implied	NC Objective: Drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions	NC Objective: Identifying how... structure and presentation contribute to meaning	NC Objective: Identifying how language... contributes to meaning	NC Objective: Justifying inferences with evidence Predicting what might happen from details stated and implied
Representational or symbolic (Rosen, 2017) Where we make comments about what we think something 'represents'.			Evaluative (Rosen, 2017) Where we make value judgements about aspects of a text... These can be comments about significance, 'what the author is getting at...', or 'why someone in the text said 'x'		

Examples of children's responses have been demarcated with square brackets and commented upon in the 'notes' column.

Prediction and Justification

The children's ability to offer predictions from stated or implied details of the texts was prevalent when reading both picturebooks. This was most obvious in the book introduction sessions, where the children formed plausible predictions about the narratives using the details depicted on the covers. Furthermore, in response to my questioning, the children

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<p>03/05</p> <p>Prediction discussion continued after reading the blurb of <i>The Island</i></p>	<p>VB: How have your predictions changed? Have they changed? Are you still thinking the same?</p> <p>Sumra: I think he is a sort of dark-hearted or something like that [Speculative] because he stood up and it says 'he wasn't like them'... which kind of makes me feel like he is some sort of vampire or skeleton or something [Justification].</p> <p>Musa: When it says he wasn't like the others, like other people [Justification], he's probably like a human, like a person...but inside not a normal person, like a crazy person [Speculative].</p> <p>Zahid: I think maybe erm the other way round to what Musa said cos maybe, he could be the normal guy and the other dwo could be the enemy... like scary guards [Speculative].</p>	<p>Justifies her prediction using textual evidence.</p> <p>Building upon each other's ideas.</p>
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Sumra's second response demonstrates her ability to support predictions using textual clues, as she uses the statement 'he wasn't like them' to predict that the visitor to the island is 'dark-hearted' or non-human. Musa's and Zahid's following predictions reflect Iser's (1978) assertion that texts offer the possibility of multiple interpretations. Musa, although agreeing that the visitor is different to the islanders, disagrees with Sumra through his statement: 'he's probably like a human'. Furthermore, Zahid offers an interesting counterpoint as he inverts both Sumra's and Musa's ideas to suggest that the visitor could be the 'normal' person.

Asking Questions

During the reading and discussion of both picturebooks, the children offered many interrogative responses, demonstrating their desire to deepen their understanding. Sometimes the children's interrogations related directly to the 'counterpointing' or 'contradictory' interactions (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, pp.225-226) between the words and images. This occurred in the reading of *The Island* when the children encountered a 'counterpointing' interaction, as the image depicted a disturbed woman, whilst the text stated: 'One morning the man appeared in town'.

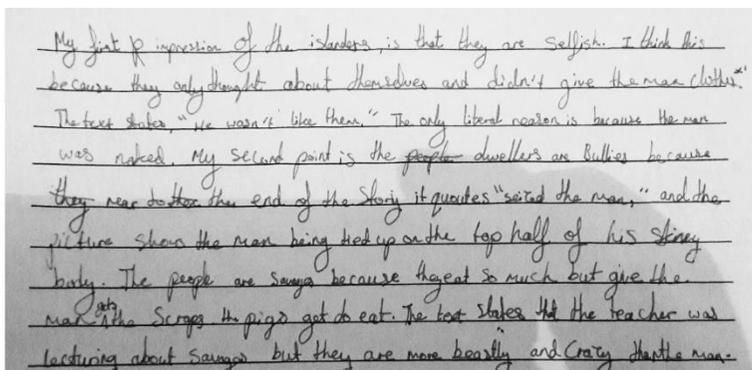
<p>Kaira: When it says 'one morning the man appeared in town' like erm I don't really understand why the person's like that? [Interrogative] Maybe they might be shocked [Inferential] cos he got out or something [Justification] and like so maybe they might be scared or that could be him dressed up in disguise as someone [Inferential]. Alice: The lady might be shocked [Inferential] because she's never seen him before and he looks erm different to all the other people [Justification] and she might be scared of him [Inferential]. Musa: Yeah because he's not wearing any clothes [Justification].</p>	<p>Questioning to improve understanding in relation to the word-image relationship.</p> <p>Infering and justifying, together, to answer the question.</p>
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Kaira's interrogative response reflects her acknowledgment of the opposing messages conveyed between the word and the image and her desire to understand it. Having speculated aloud, she continues to infer two possible meanings: the image either depicts the character's fear towards the man or represents the man in disguise. The pupils' responses support Evans' (2015) conclusion that challenging picturebooks '[invite]...children to respond to texts by asking...questions and sharing their personal thoughts and points of view' (2015, p.xxv).

Inference and Justification

The children demonstrated their ability to infer throughout the readings of both picturebooks, continually making inferences to explore the meaning of the text and deepen their understanding. Similarly to their interrogative responses, the children's inferential responses often occurred in response to the 'counterpointing' interactions (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000, pp.225-226) between the images and words. This is evident in the discussions seen on the following page, where the children responded to the *counterpointing* relationship between the threatening image of the islanders and the simple text that read, 'so they took him in' (Greder, 2007, p.4).

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This supports Evans' (2015) argument that challenging subject matter and unconventional illustration encourage children to 'delve into the gaps to understand what is being said' (2015, p.4).

Analysis of Structure, Presentation and Language

It became evident, through reading *The Island*, that the children rarely offered responses demonstrating analysis of the structure, presentation and language of the text. Thus, this became a key focus when reading *Varmints*, chosen for its poetic style and use of figurative language devices such as alliteration and simile. Consequently, this encouraged some responses that met the objective.

<p>P9</p> <p>28/06</p> <p>Second discussion session of <i>Varmints</i></p> <p>Excerpts of discussion as we recapped the story</p>	<p>Musa: It says 'others' really suddenly like...it just makes me feel like...like it says 'those few who pause'...which is all peaceful and calm and then just in bold it says 'others' which breaks the peace. So you know something bad is going to happen with the others [Language Analysis].</p> <p>Sumra: Erm...the sky was quite light before but it starts to get darker once the others came, maybe that shows that they come with evil [Representational or Symbolic].</p> <p>...</p> <p>Sumra: I think the house...the window that has light in it, only that person or animal actually cares for nature so when they give to nature their hearts brighten up. The light could be...could represent...their hearts. The rest of them don't have the light in their house because they don't respect or think about nature [Representational or Symbolic].</p>	<p>Analysis of language</p> <p>Representational - use of dark tones to represent evil</p> <p>Representational - light representing nature and love.</p>
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Nikolajeva (2010) highlights, to interpret symbolic meaning within a text, readers must first 'be aware of the existence of symbolic codes' (2010, p.37). This is evident as, following my input, the children began to consider the notion of prison as symbolic for 'being trapped'. Furthermore, Musa's comment demonstrates his attempt to consider representation, as he suggests that the traffic 'represents human traffic'.

During the second reading session, on numerous occasions, the children demonstrated their ability to independently consider representation within the text. In the aforementioned exchange (dated, 28 June) Sumra interprets the author's use of dark tone to represent a sense of evil. This is an idea which she expands upon and refers back to, as she considers the idea of light as symbolic for the creatures' love and care of nature. These responses reflect both Campagnaro's (2015, p.122) and Nikolajeva's (2010, p.37) suggestions that picturebooks use visual figurative language and symbolic representation to imply meaning. Furthermore, the interpretation of such devices, as Nikolajeva (2010, p.36) suggests, requires the reader to access one of Barthes' (1975) most complex codes: 'the symbolic code'. In turn, this demonstrates the power of picturebooks and their use of imagery, to develop a complex reading skill.

Conclusion

The children's written and oral responses to *The Island* and *Varmints*, revealed the ways in which picturebooks can be used within UKS2 to support development of reading comprehension strategies (outlined within the National Curriculum, DfE 2013), and support Evans' (2015) argument that picturebooks can '...work on many different levels...and [are] worthy of in-depth analysis' (2015, p.4).

Given the small sample within this study and the lack of current research linking picturebooks to the development of older children's reading comprehension, it is evident that further research within this area is needed. However, the findings of this study have implications for teaching practice. As demonstrated through the children's different responses to the two picturebooks, text selection is vital in providing adequate

challenge to older readers. *The Island*, through its exploration of complex and mature social issues, such as prejudice and immigration, encouraged the children to interrogate the text and infer meaning to comprehend characters' motives. On the other hand, the poetic language and use of 'visual connotative devices' (Campagnaro, 2015, p.122) within *Varmints* enabled the children to develop their analysis of literary devices, such as figurative language and symbolism.

Furthermore, allowing the children to respond through dialogic engagement, alongside written response, had a clear impact upon the outcomes, providing the children the opportunity to jointly construct meaning and consider multiple interpretations. It is also clear that the teacher's role as a facilitator is key in aiding the children's comprehension. During the study, I had considerable impact upon the pupils' responses to the picturebooks. When engaging with more complex reading strategies, the children required prompting and their achievement of comprehension strategies were affected by my use of questioning. As Dillon (1982) highlights, this is a key technique for extending discourse, but it is important to consider also that the children had little experience of picturebook analysis, and therefore needed some modelling from me as the facilitator.

It is my hope to continue to explore the use of picturebooks within the primary classroom and advocate for their use with older readers – to both aid reading comprehension whilst also adding to children's reading for pleasure experience. It is important to highlight that although my research focused upon the use of picturebooks as a way to develop children's reading comprehension, there is of course an important place for reading picturebooks 'just for fun' (Mr Smith, 2017).

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DOES CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF REFUGEE-THEMED PICTUREBOOKS 'SCAFFOLD' CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE?

RICHARD CHARLESWORTH

We are now witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record. An unprecedented 65.6 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 22.5 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.

(UNHCR, 2017)

Through news outlets, across a range of distribution channels, children are increasingly aware of the world outside the classroom. On several occasions during my career as a primary school practitioner I have had to have complex, and in some cases quite difficult, conversations about issues that face children and the news shaping the world they live in. A recurring theme that has come up in conversation is the on-going refugee crisis, and regular mass-movement of people following humanitarian disasters. Over the past two years, children I work with have been particularly attuned to front page headlines and national discussion about how we respond to, and talk about, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. From my experience young people were particularly aware of: debate over the use of terminology ('Swarms of'); outpourings of emotion across the nation following the death of Alan Kurdi; and images of intensified fighting in Syria and people fleeing their homes. Some pupils came from refugee and migrant backgrounds, themselves.

The use of refugee-themed picturebooks as curricular resource material is growing in English-dominant western countries (Dooley, Tait & Sar, 2016). With each wave of humanitarian migration, new books about current or previous groups of arrivals have been published (Hope, 2008). This has led to several

academics calling for the inclusion of refugee issues into the curriculum (Dolan, 2014; Hwang & Tipton Hindman, 2014; Mudiyansele, 2014).

At this time of widespread suspicion of and hostility to asylum-seekers and refugees, it is not surprising that scholars in that literary tradition have pointed to the potential of refugee-themed picturebooks for developing empathy for humanitarian arrivals.

(Dooley, Tait & Sar, 2016, p.86)

With such a wealth of resources now available (Hope, 2017), I embarked on an action research project with the aim of exploring how critical discussion of refugee-themed picturebooks can act as a catalyst in 'scaffolding' children's understanding of the refugee experience. Throughout this essay I refer to 'scaffolding' as outlined by Bruner and Haste (1987). They posit that the foundation of a child's understanding, and knowledge, is dependent on support from adults and more knowledgeable peers. Throughout childhood, as their own cognitive ability develops and they become less reliant on adults, they are able to facilitate autonomous learning.

By using themed picturebooks with a group of 10–11-year-olds, I sought to analyse and evaluate the children's understanding of the refugee experience through their interactions with the text and each other during critical discussions.

Critically Reading the Word and the World

Educationalists as far back as Dewey (1933) have emphasised the importance of teaching children to think and inquire. In order to make sense of the world and the perception of themselves within it, children must be taught to think critically (Roche, 2015, p.11). Many educators (Stephens, 1992; Evans, 2004; Leland et al., 2013) see critical thinking and critical literacy as allowing children to challenge preconceived notions, values and assumptions they hold of the world. Critical thinking and critical literacy are central aspects of critical pedagogy. Shor defines this as teaching so as to engender habits of thinking, reading, writing and speaking which:

go beneath surface meaning ... to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization [sic], experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse.

(Shor, 1992, p.129)

These ideas stem from the work of Paulo Freire (1972), who argued for a problematising form of education, one where children would seek to interrogate and understand meaningful issues, rather than just skirting over them. An ability to critically read 'the word' alongside 'the world' allows the reader to form new understandings of others (Ee Loh, 2009). By going beyond a 'tourist perspective', children move from a lens which shows only surface-level information about someone's culture and, instead, start looking through a lens in which they are 'gaining insights into how people feel, live and think around the world' (Short, 2009, p.1). Encouraging children to critically analyse texts gives them the opportunity to create a 'window and mirror', as they look out on different ways of viewing the world and reflect back on themselves in a new light (Short, 2009, p.6; Bishop, 1990).

Texts through a Lens

Botelho and Rudman (2009) suggest a multi-layered analysis of children's literature that demonstrates how different lenses shape the interpretation of a text. These lenses can include:

- a literary approach (in which the technical aspects of the book are examined)
- a reader response approach (which involves the reader in the process of co-constructing meaning in conjunction with the text)
- a feminist approach (where literature is critiqued on the basis of gender)
- a critical multicultural analysis (which examines the location, construction and negotiation of power and power relations).

(Dolan, 2014, pp.102-3)

As children critically discuss refugee-themed picturebooks, a range of lenses and stances (including those on the socio-cultural and socio-political spectrum) could be used. However, the lens used will be determined by the reader's own personal perspective and prior experience, a concept proposed by Rosenblatt in her seminal work on reader-response. Rosenblatt (1978) recognised that an individual will read a text within the context of their own personal experiences, and that these experiences will in turn affect how the text is understood. This 'self-constructed' understanding makes reading a situational event (Maine, 2015, p.27).

Talking about Texts

By acknowledging that meaning can be constructed not only from the interplay between text and reader, but from interaction with others, Vygotsky described how the gap between the child's existing knowledge and their potential could be bridged with guidance of a teacher or 'more capable peer' (Vygotsky 1962, cited in Alexander, 2017). Vygotsky referred to this as the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD). Vygotsky fundamentally saw dialogue as a cooperative enterprise "in which agreement is reached and misunderstandings are resolved" (Fisher, 2009, p.10).

The interaction between pupil and pupil, or pupil and teacher, depends on what Bakhtin (1981, p.278) terms the 'unfolding of social heteroglossia', where a pupil's own voice is constructed and adapted in conversation with multiple other voices. Bakhtin valued the distinctiveness of the other - the other's perspective bringing a difference of opinion resulting in productive dialogue (Fisher, 2009, p.10). Considering these two theorists' views on dialogue (Vygotsky working towards a consensus, Bakhtin valuing diversity), I will attempt to encourage pupils to recognise they are in a safe space where they are able to voice different opinions (should they have them).

Dialogic Perspectives

Gordon Wells (1999) uses the term 'dialogic inquiry' to update the ideas of Vygotsky and Bakhtin for modern classrooms. His concept of teaching as encouraging a 'community of inquiry' links

closely to Mercer's (2000) use of 'interthinking', where common knowledge is co-constructed by children actively listening to each other's ideas then reflecting upon them (this self-reflection Vygotsky called 'intra-mental functioning').

Vygotsky (1978) and Mercer & Littleton (2007) were concerned with collaborative exploration of text where '[e]xploring thinking and language together opens up consideration of the inter-mental... processes in action' (Maine, 2015, p.4). Joint discussion will inevitably lead to a 'social mode of thinking' (Mercer, 2004, p.141) and as such the reader reaches a dialogic perspective.

This type of interaction promotes talk where views are exchanged equitably, rather than traditional monologic classroom talk, where there is one dominant monologue (usually being that of the teacher).

There is a wealth of research that focuses on classroom dialogue (for example, Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Nystrand et al. 1997) however recent focus on the importance of language for learning, building on the works of Vygotsky, Bakhtin and Wells, has been embraced within models of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2003, 2017). Alexander outlines the principles of dialogic teaching which 'harnesses the power of talk to engage children, stimulate and extend [children's] thinking, and advance their learning and understanding' (2017, p.37). He describes how talk is central to an empowering pedagogy and provides a set of justifications, principles, repertoires and indicators for classroom use (2017, pp.37-44).

The dialogic approach encourages teachers to embrace the lesser-used repertoires of discussion (the exchange of ideas with a view to sharing information and solving problems) and dialogue (where common understanding is achieved through structured and cumulative questioning and discussion). This approach is especially pertinent to my project as it will allow children to critically discuss their responses to the texts, without fear of 'wrong' answers and the direct input of the teacher.

Methodology

This was a teacher-led action research project exploring how critical discussion of refugee-themed picturebooks can scaffold children's understanding of the refugee experience. Due to the potential cultural, social and emotional issues surrounding the theme, safeguards were put in place and discussions carefully monitored to alleviate any anxiety or concerns that arose from the children (BERA, 2011).

Children were selected after completing a short survey focusing on their views of multimodal texts (as suggested by Bearne et al., 2007). Particular care was taken to include a diverse sample, including a mix of gender, ethnicities and attainment levels. Each child worked with a different partner each week.

Having taught the class two years prior to the project, I was aware of my potential dual role in the eyes of the children - that of teacher as well as facilitator. To alleviate the impact this could potentially have on the project, I set up semi-structured partner discussions, recorded on a Dictaphone. By 'the adult' being absent for this part of the discussion children were distanced from the 'Initiation-Response-Evaluation' structure of traditional classroom talk (as defined by Cazden, 1988).

This was followed by a whole group discussion with myself acting as facilitator, working alongside the children to build reciprocal and cumulative chains of thought (Alexander, 2017, p.38). Finally, to avoid any 'superficial appreciations of cultural differences' (outlined in Short, 2009, p.2) I had a range of academic-approved children's texts (see supporting materials) to refer to when questions were encountered that the group wanted to pursue further.

All picturebooks selected for the project were age-appropriate and contained a mixture of text and image. Dolan (2014, p.99) suggests critically interrogating the texts before commencing an action research project, comparing and contrasting how the issues are depicted. Among the five picturebooks, *The Journey* (Sanna, 2016), *Azzi in Between* (Garland, 2012) and *Migrant* (Trottier, 2011) are fictionalised stories drawing on real-life experiences of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers; *Teacup*

(Young and Ottley, 2015) and *Refugees* (Miller, 2004) are more abstract, preferring to prioritise the visual mode over the linguistic. Evaluations on the texts were also conducted independently by the children at the end of the project, through use of response journals.

Whilst I believe the texts could have been read randomly, I decided to lead with *The Journey* specifically due to its endpapers, which adequately introduced the refugee theme. I am aware that this decision in itself had the potential to influence the direction of the group's critical discussion, however, I believe the benefit of contextualising the theme would allow me to start discussion given the short time frame I was working within (I conducted 5 one-hour sessions with the group).

Data Analysis and Discussion

A combination of two frameworks were used to analyse the data from the project. In order to facilitate a better understanding of the different types of talk that occurred in each session, I used a matrix (figure 1) proposed by Rosen (2017).

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<p><u>Prioritised categories of talk - Rosen's Matrix (2017)</u></p> <p>These categories would demonstrate significant possibility to empathise, relate to, or respond to the refugee experience.</p> <p><u>Prioritised Categories</u></p> <p>Experiential Interrogative Selective Analogising Eureka Moments Author Intention Contextual</p> <p><u>Secondary Categories</u></p> <p>Intertextual Intratextual Semantic Reflective Effects Effect of interactions Representational or Symbolic</p> <p>Examples of talk referred to in the study have been emboldened and demarcated with square brackets.</p>

Figure 1 – Categories of Talk (Rosen, 2017)

This provides detail of a range of descriptors which articulate the 'type' of response a child might give when talking about a text; I used this matrix to indicate the 'type' of themes and categories I saw children drawing upon within the study (the aim was to hone in on the significant 'type' of critical comment and discussion that I witnessed, as an indicator of their furthering knowledge and understanding).

Evans' (1992, p.32) 'six-stage' framework allowed analysis of children's responses to the literature. The scale measures engagement (through enjoyment and 'elementary understanding') and development of ideas (through the 'degree of sophistication of responses'). These stages range from stage 1 to stage 6, where stage 1 is considered an 'unreflective interest in action' (see figure 2).

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Process stages: Kinds of Satisfaction	Process Strategies
1. Unreflective interest in action	a) Rudimentary mental images (stereotypes from film and television) b) Predicting what might happen next in the short term
2. Empathising	c) Mental images of affect d) Expectations about characters
3. Analogising	e) drawing on the repertoire of personal experiences, making connections between characters and one's own life
4. Reflecting on the significance of events (theme) and behaviour (distanced evaluation of characters)	f) Generating expectations about alternative long-term outcomes g) Interrogating the text, filling in gaps h) Formulating puzzles, enigmas, accepting hermeneutic challenges
5. Reviewing the whole work as the author's creation	i) Drawing on literary and cultural repertoires j) Interrogating the text to match the author's representation with one's own k) Recognition of implied author
6. Consciously considered relationship with the author; recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes	l) Recognition of implied reader in the text, and the relationship between implied reader and implied author m) Reflexiveness, leading to understanding of textual ideology, personal identity and one's own reading processes.

Figure 2 - Response to Literature: A Developmental Model (Evans, 1992, p.32)

Again, the framework allowed me to focus on 'types' of responses, which may change over time and as such indicate a developing comprehension and understanding of text and issues.

When transcribing audio from each session, all children's names were changed to preserve anonymity; where 'chains of thought' (Barnes and Todd, 1995) occur, the whole sequence is included.

Picturebooks as a stimulus for developing understanding of the refugee experience

The complex nature of the refugee experience makes it a particularly challenging theme to open up to young children, especially for those who have not lived through that particular experience.

The dynamic and multimodal nature of contemporary children's literature allows readers to engage with complex topics at a variety of different aesthetic, cognitive and affective levels.

(Arizpe et al., 2014, p.306)

At the beginning of the project responses were predominantly based on the affect that the text had on the reader (stage 2 in Evans' developmental model). It was only when children began to interrogate and ask questions of the text (stage 4) that they were able to deepen their understanding of what it might be like to be a refugee.

Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007, p.277) identify three impulses when children are responding to pictures. These are defined as:

1. The hermeneutic impulse or the desire to know
2. The personal impulse or the need to connect stories to one's own life
3. The aesthetic impulse, in which readers either experience the secondary world of the story as if they were there or use the story as a springboard for their own creative 'performances'.

These impulses are evident in Emma's encounter with the first picturebook. Following the reading, Emma refers to a set of question prompts (provided to support discussion, if pupils did not initiate a line of inquiry themselves).

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Transcript from The Journey (session 1, group 1) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>10. Emma: (looking at question prompts) It reminded me of the film Paddington, he has to go on a journey; he's a refugee basically.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[Intertextual]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intertextual link to film as a result of the Aidan Chambers questions. - Emma is beginning to analyse and create links between learning and past experiences. - Uses reader-response theory (comment is constructed in 'discussion' between child and text) <p>Emma demonstrates some understanding of the refugee experience, enough to make the link between 'texts'.</p> <p>Discussion is initially stilted in manner. Children rely heavily on the prompts that were provided. Most description based on linguistic and visual mode.</p>

Here, she demonstrates the 'hermeneutic impulse' and desire 'to know'. Emma is 'finding routes through the text that connect words and images' (Lewis, 2001). The combination of narrative and aesthetic impulse is pushing Emma as a reader to shape the story and make it her own. She does this by connecting the story to her own life, making it analogous to the film of Paddington Bear. As the session continues, Emma discusses the autobiographical tone of the text.

Transcript from The Journey (session 1, group 1) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>31. Emma: Who's the author? 32. Tom: Francesca Sanna. 33. Emma: I wonder if she experienced something like that to write this book.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[Interrogative]</p> <p>34. Tom: You can't just write a book without experiencing what you are writing about.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[Author Intention]</p> <p>35. Zara: You might've seen it or someone you know had been through it. (whispers) unless it's imaginary. 36. Emma: I mean, the people are fictional but it's probably a real experience. 37. Zara: (agreeing) It probably is a real experience.</p>	<p>Emma is continuing to develop her questioning technique. She begins to interrogate the text – thinking about authorial intent.</p> <p>Tom's dogmatic statement almost resolves the discussion; however, Zara poses an alternate possibility for the group to consider.</p> <p>Is this book considered a 'real' example of the refugee experience? How will children be able to know this? Research may need some structure from adult in order to find alternate perspectives.</p>

It is at this point that I suggest that children are exploring the idea that the text has more than one interpretation. In the interchange between Tom, Zara and Emma that follows, the group discuss the

author's reasoning in writing the text. For them, this experience feels 'real'. Short (2009, p.2) warns of texts used in isolation, especially if educators are uncertain about their cultural authenticity. This can lead to stereotypical perceptions of the refugee experience being reinforced.

Following this discussion on the picturebook, the group chose a self-directed research question *How would it feel to be a refugee?* iPads were provided and non-fiction, child-appropriate texts suggested for research (see supporting materials). To avoid inappropriate online news stories, BBC's 'Newsround' and 'First News' were suggested by myself as facilitator as good starting points. A video interview with an 11-year-old Syrian refugee was viewed; children responded empathetically and left the session wanting to find out more about the situation in Syria.

Questioning around the text

The stimulus of a picturebook illustrates how children empathise with characters which supports their understanding of the refugee experience. Many of the children in the study had limited experience of refugee life, however by responding empathically they showed greater awareness and understanding of the complex nature of each experience. When talking in a group context about the second text, *Teacup*, Kate and Zara question the motives of the protagonist of the story, who is travelling across sea in search of a new home.

Transcript from <i>Teacup</i> (session 2, whole group) Researcher-group context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>101. RC: You said you'd like to find out about why people had to leave. You were interested in the story that happened almost before?</p> <p>102. Kate: Yeah, we were sort of knew it would have probably have been because of a war or something.</p> <p>103. Zara: I thought that he maybe would have left. Maybe he lost...</p> <p>104. Tom: He would have brought family.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[Interrogative]</p>	<p>Kate and Zara both were interested in how the boy had come to leave his country. Why had he made the decision to leave? What might have forced him?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Generalising statement (perhaps based on the previous text's depiction of migration. - Building on the aesthetic impulse (this text was particularly abstract in its depiction of the refugee experience, leaving lots open to speculation) - Tom offers the possibility of the main character having lost his family or left them due to extenuating circumstances. This thought is constructed by interrogating the visual and linguistic modes within the text.

Further exemplifying the 'aesthetic impulse' and desire 'to know', interactions such as this were evident throughout the transcripts, illustrating the power of each picturebook in exploring unique perspectives on the theme.

Interrogating the world being constructed

Towards the end of the project children were able to identify examples of social injustice, inspired by the 'messages' encoded in the texts. When talking about *Azzi in Between*, complex political, economical and geographical concepts are being discussed.

Transcript from <i>Azzi in Between</i> (session 1, group 1) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>19. Tom: It's the same as 'Refugee Boy'. It explains about the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It says they're fighting over a pile of rubble and dust. Which is kind of what they're doing there (indicating illustration of Azzi and her grandmother walking through a war-torn landscape to school). They're just fighting in piles of rubble and dust. There's nothing to fight over.</p> <p>[Experiential]</p> <p>20. Kate: (Continuing point) and they're still fighting. 21. Tom: Even if you did win the war you'd have to pay for... 22. Kate: (continuing point) for all of that. 23. Tom: For all of that to get rebuilt. To take over the country. 24. Zara: So really there isn't a point in fighting. You don't get anything out of it. 25. Kate: You get land, but haven't you already got enough land?</p>	<p>Example of collaborative, dialogic discussion.</p> <p>Links to Vygotskian principle that understanding can be co-constructed by children building on previous comment.</p> <p>The children here are discussing quite adult concepts of economics, politics and geography in relation to the refugee experience.</p>

These issues are not resolved, however they become part of a 'dialogic space of possibility': 'A virtual holding place for all ideas both within current use and also as an access to past ideas and experiences' (Maine, 2015, p.55). These complex issues of social justice are combining with pupils' past ideas and experiences, helping create new understanding of the refugee experience.

By the final session, children have built up an understanding of the refugee experience and are now beginning to weave these 'threads of understanding' (Maine, 2015) through the dialogue around the picturebook *Refugees*. Tom uses representational talk to find meaning.

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Transcript from Refugees (session 1, group 1) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>6. Emma: I feel that this could be translated into a human version and it would be very similar to a refugee lifestyle.</p> <p>7. Tom: Because basically the refugees go find food on an ordinary day.</p> <p>8. Emma: They're having an ordinary life. Sleeping in safety.</p> <p>9. Tom: Then the trucks come. Like the war in Syria where it suddenly started and the war destroyed lots of buildings. [Representational / Symbolic]</p> <p>10. Emma: Or any other country that experience this devastation.</p> <p>11. Tom: They're ripping up their home</p>	<p>Links to anthropomorphic stories. Children are much more responsive to this abstract book after three, detailed and descriptive texts.</p> <p>Tom attributes the trucks coming to destroy the ducks' home to the war in Syria. This understanding could have been acquired through our research sessions or from current affairs programmes which covered this at the time of the study.</p>

Scaffolding understanding through dialogue: Ali as 'more knowledgeable other'

From his very first comment, Ali establishes himself as an apparent 'expert' (within the context of the group, where peers knew little of the subject matter). He creates a direct connection between the family in the picturebook and his own family's experience of fleeing their home.

Transcript from The Journey (session 1, group 2) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>12. Ali: This book reminds me of my parents. They came from Somalia. There was a war. Loads of people came with them. It was a long journey. They had to go on planes, trains and boats to get here. They came here to escape the war. [Experiential]</p>	<p>- Direct reference to child / peer acting as 'more knowledgeable other' (Vygotksy, 1978).</p> <p>Will Ali continue to develop this knowledge, scaffolding others to his level?</p>

Responding experientially to the text, Ali is constructing his own semi-biographical 'virtual text', a term Bruner (1986) uses to describe the plane between a newly encountered text and the reader's dynamic, cultural history. By moving between what is read and the reader's own experience, children are likely to 'carry over [experience] into other activities' (Bakhurst and Shanker, 2001, p.174). By forming a 'transaction' (Rosenblatt, 1978) with the text, one based on personal experiences, Ali is perfectly placed to be in the position of the 'more knowledgeable other'. Vygotksy (1978) uses this term to describe a person who

has the ability to 'scaffold' another individual's learning. Considering the implication of these experiences 'carrying over', I expected to find points during the project where Ali had supported a peer/s in bridging the gap between their current understanding and that of his own (demonstrating Vygotsky's ZPD in action).

During our second session, Ali began to use different types of talk to move towards a collaborative approach.

Transcript from Teacup (session 2, group 1) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>(Reading out question prompt – provided in case discussion was not immediately forthcoming)</p> <p>46. Ali: Is there anything you've just read which reminds you of something you've read / seen? Why? How? I think 'Refugee Boy' relates to it a lot. [Intertextual]</p> <p>47. Tom: Yeah, they're both about refugees.</p> <p>48. Ali: A tiny bit, cos, it's all about change.</p> <p>49. Tom: It's connected to the word refugee. I don't think there's anyone I know that has been a refugee.</p> <p>50. Ali: Yeah, you do (indicating himself) Not me, my parents. And a bunch of people probably. You don't know. People might have come here. Loads of people at the school, their parents might be refugees. They've come from lots of places. [Author Intention]</p> <p>51. Ali: It sounds more like change.</p> <p>52. Tom: Change. It's a bit like 'The Journey'. He travels through lots of stages and while he's travelling it's growing. The teacup. [Intertextual]</p> <p>53. Ali: It's growing. I think the plant is like growing for how much it's like...</p> <p>54. Tom: like confidence maybe? Ali: Yeah, maybe it's confidence. That would just calm him down. The apple tree. It's like your own personal tree house.</p>	<p>Do these question prompts restrict the discussion that might have occurred after some initial awkward silence? Or would such silences impact negatively on the pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment of the sessions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intertextual link between one of the books provided throughout the project (see bibliography). - Here Ali is not just imparting knowledge, he thinks out loud on the idea that being a refugee might be 'invisible' (i.e. that you wouldn't be able to tell someone was a refugee from looks alone, you'd have to delve deeper). - Collaborative exploration of ideas, working towards a consensus (Vygotsky, 1978). Both pupils are co-constructing ideas, moving towards a common, shared understanding of the metaphor.

Rather than just imparting his self-constructed knowledge, Ali talks through his thought processes – actively thinking out loud. He works collaboratively with Tom (using dialogue as a cooperative enterprise) to reach a common, shared understanding of the intertextual link between texts. The dialogic

talk exhibited here continues to develop throughout the project. In a group discussion about *Azzi in Between*, Ali questions whether Azzi would ever return to her home country.

Transcript from <i>Azzi in Between</i> Session 2 Whole group context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
<p>123. RC: What would happen if grandma had gone with the family?</p> <p>124. Zara: The house wouldn't be safe.</p> <p>125. Emma: All of their belongings, their chickens, their home.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[Intratextual]</p> <p>126. Ali: Do you think they will be going back there?</p> <p>127. Emma, Tom, Kate and Zara: Yeah, yes.</p> <p>128. Kate: Can we look back at their house at the beginning and the one at the end. I really liked how the teddy bear is used for humour. It said it smiled, because it was always smiling (chuckles remembering the phrase)</p> <p>129. Zara: Maybe grandma stayed back to get more supplies.</p> <p>130. Emma: Or she might have been too old to make the journey.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[Selective Analogising]</p> <p>131. Ali: It would have slowed down their progress. The war could have reached them. They might not have made it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging speculative responses - Based on referring back to the text. - Ali could be mirroring a similar style of interaction that I have in our group discussion. <p>Emma's comment could be inferred by possible experiential experience with elderly members of family. Drawing analogy with previous experience.</p> <p>Ali builds on Emma's comment, applying additional context to the more speculative points that occurred previously. Comment builds on previous ideas with an aim to resolve the discussion.</p>

Through interrogating the text, a stage 4 process in Evans' model, Ali then listens to responses from his peers. Later on, he builds on the selective analogising suggested by Emma, applying context that may not have been identified had the pupils been working independently. Ali's 'scaffolding' is based primarily on his own existing knowledge and understanding, however in this case his capability in decoding multimodal texts, could have assisted him in inferring the political climate shown in the book.

By acting as the 'more knowledgeable other' (a role usually held by an adult or older peer), I was intrigued as to how Ali came to possess such a wide range of knowledge prior to the project commencing. Post-project questioning identified this prior knowledge as being a result of his family's background, a voracious reading appetite, and watching late-night news.

Interestingly, Ali was able to extend and deepen his understanding due to the study of the endpapers – features which are particularly common in refugee-themed picturebooks.

Transcript from Migrant (session 1, group 2) Pupil-pupil context	Researcher Notes (linked to theory, if relevant)
98. Zara: Is there anything that reminds you about something you have read or experienced? 99. Ali: I don't think so. I could understand if we were studying World War Two or something like that but. Remember this in in the early 1920s. 100. Tom: really? 101. Ali: Yeah, it mentions this has been happening at the back (shows the group the end paper)	

Knowledge assimilated by reading led to Ali having a thorough understanding of the nuances in language and experience between refugees, migrants and asylum seekers (Sanna, 2016; Trottier, 2011 and Garland, 2012). This was also demonstrated in his evaluation of the project, where he commented *'I have learnt a lot about refugees and also the difference between a refugee and a migrant'*.

Pupil Evaluation of the Project

Chambers (1993) argues:

[c]hildren should be asked what they like and/or dislike about a text, and if there are any things that puzzle them or make them think about other, similar texts. Such open questions and sharing of uncertainties proved to be good starting points for responding to [picturebooks].

(Chambers, 1993)

Questions exemplified from Chambers' work were used in the children's reflective journals and in their own evaluation on the project. As a result of interrogating the texts in this manner, children were more engaged and this enthusiasm to deepen understanding began to spread to other areas of the curriculum. The picturebooks acted as a springboard to further understanding and empathy towards refugees.

Children's Literature in Action

Evaluation

1. Which book was your favourite? Why? (use examples if you wish)
2. Was there a particular illustration or piece of text that you thought was effective? Why?
3. Do you prefer reading words or pictures? Why?
4. What can words tell you that pictures can't?
5. What can pictures tell you that words can't?

1. My favourite book was *The Journey* because it helped me understand the travel ~~from~~ of a refugee in depth even though the text was limited. The illustrations filled the pages and they added to the text. An. One piece of text ~~said~~ said "she kept us safe because mother was never scared" but the ~~text~~ gave a juxtaposition with the mother ~~holding~~ holding her children in her arms but has tears running down her cheeks. I felt that this gave a very real effect

illustration

Figure 3 - Pupil Evaluation to 'The Journey' (Kate)

Conclusion

Refugee-themed picturebooks can offer emotional intelligence or impart historical knowledge, rarely both. As teachers, we aim for a holistic understanding: a bridge between the two.

It is my belief, from conducting this small-scale study, that critical discussion of refugee-themed picturebooks has allowed the pupils I have worked with to lay some foundations of understanding that are necessary for them to wrestle with the complex narratives. Using picturebooks, alongside a dialogic teaching approach, enabled children to learn more about the experience: deepening their understanding of a range of different perspectives through self-directed research.

To fully understand the refugee experience, one must know who the refugee is we're talking about, why they became so, and the impact that this refugee experience will have on societies. Future

study must explore the potential offered by a cross-curricular approach, one which offers a platform for both emotional and historical learning. It must also take into account the authenticity of the experience: whose life is being reflected, and who is telling the story.

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WHAT ARE THE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF READING PICTUREBOOKS WITH YEAR 5 BOYS IDENTIFIED AS UNDERACHIEVING IN ENGLISH?

KATHRYN CONWAY

According to statistics, across all ethnic groups, girls continue to out-perform boys in English (www.jcq.org.uk). In the course of my own career, I have attempted to develop boys' interest and engagement in my English lessons and in the subject school-wide. I have encouraged male reading role models (Freedman, 2012), utilised digital literacies (Johnson & Gooliaff, 2013) and even adopted more 'boy-friendly' literature (Brozo, 2012; Millard 1997; Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999).

Whilst I implemented many schemes, I had never formally assessed the effectiveness of a given strategy. My teaching experience spans across Key Stage 2 (ages 8-11, primary level and, hereafter, KS2) right through to KS5 (post-16). For this project, I decided to target boys in Year 5 (whose ages were between 9 and 10) since this is the point when I have noticed that boys' interest in books begins to wane. I collaborated with a primary school in North London. The Assistant Headteacher would select six male students in Year 5 who lacked enthusiasm for English and were underperforming in the subject; I would offer a weekly intervention class and record my findings.

The Evolving Research Question

In my initial encounter with the six boys, I sought to understand why they did not like English (confirmed through initial questionnaires and open-ended interviews). They appeared to be less engaged in a subject they deemed 'less fun' than other curriculum offerings. English was laborious, involved 'too much writing' and the only English lessons they could recall with enthusiasm were ones 'when we do drama'.

At the start of the project, I intended to take a different text type each week and gauge which could provoke most interest and

result in valuable learning opportunities. However, the direction of my study changed after a successful session reading *The Island*, by Armin Greder. I will share these findings later here, but it was a result of this experience that my research question evolved. My own enthusiasm for these texts was also a contributing factor for pursuing this line of enquiry – studying picturebooks for my Masters sparked an interest in a genre I had little experience of as a secondary school practitioner. When a teacher exhibits enthusiasm for a topic, their students are more likely to be enthused too (Patrick, 2002; Hisley & Kempler, 2000).

Dialogic Teaching and Learning

A dialogic approach to teaching is influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978) who believed that students' development is strongly influenced by shared endeavours and social interaction. Many scholars have gone on to advocate the use of discussion for effective learning (Rosen, 1981; Chambers, 1993; Mercer, 1996; Alexander, 2006). Alexander (2008) is critical of English education which he believes is focused on 'writing, writing and more writing' (Alexander, 2008, p.95). Despite many developments in research since this publication, it is a definition which reflects the attitudes of my participants, 'I don't like English cos I hate writing lots.'. Also, a greater emphasis on summative assessment limits the amount of time that teachers can 'indulge' in talk. They feel pressured to move the lesson forward to cover content and drill students in exam responses. But teachers are missing opportunities for deeper learning. My own teaching approaches are dictated by curriculum and time constraints; I am frequently forced to stop dialogue in order to 'get through the novel'. It feels like a return to 'teaching as transmission' (Alexander, 2008, p.98) – an approach completely at odds with my teaching philosophy. I strongly agree with Alexander (2008) and Lefstein and Snell (2013) that rather than competing for the 'right' answer, students should speculate, think aloud and assist one another. Meaningful dialogue is paramount if critical literacy (Freire & Macedo, 1968) is to be achieved.

Picturebooks

Fiona Maine (2013) argues that creative dialogues elicit insightful responses that reflect the comprehension skills required by summative examinations. Mary Roche's (2015) research confirms that reading picturebooks and discussing them can teach these skills in an 'organic way' (Roche, 2015, p.59). In my analysis section, I look for evidence in support of comprehension being achieved through a dialogic method of reading picturebooks.

Nodelman (2017) describes picturebooks as the 'meeting of the simple and the complex' (Nodelman, 2017, p.10) and he is amongst a number of scholars who advocate the use of picturebooks to improve literacy (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006; Korda, 2006; Pantaleo & Sipe, 2012; Arizpe & Styles, 2003). Picturebooks require higher order thinking skills and students are engaged in 'sophisticated prediction and high-level inference-making' (Pantaleo & Sipe, 2012, p.13).

Pantaleo and Sipe (2012) are critical of Stevens et al (2010) who advocate a more traditional reading experience and express concern about narratives which are difficult to comprehend. One of the skills assessed in the National Curriculum for English at KS2 is: 'inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives...and justifying inferences with evidence.' (National Curriculum for English, 2014). It is significant therefore that as well as harnessing visual literacy, picturebooks foster empathy in young readers (Nikolajeva, 2012). I chose to focus on *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2014), *The Island* by Armin Greder (2014) and *Sad Book* by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake (2004); all multi-award-winning texts which offer readers a range of themes, emotion, language and variety in the interplay between word and image. I deliberately chose challenging picturebooks in order to meet the aims of my study.

Picturebooks are often seen as a text suited to younger readers, but there is growing recognition of the educational benefits of using them with older students (Murphy, 2009). Nikolajeva (2013) further cements the educational value of picturebooks in developing students' emotional literacy. Through vicarious experience with characters, students engage in 'higher-order

mind-reading' (Nikolajeva, 2013, p.253). Arizpe and Styles (2016) build upon this idea, arguing that students will make analogies between the text and their own experiences, thus be more *involved* in the text. Rosen (2017b) supports these notions explaining that the controversial content helps young people to deal with their own complex emotions. This is something I hope to prove when analysing my data. Hansen and Zambo (2009) found that creating a dialogic space specifically for boys improved literacy of *pre-school* males. I am keen to compare my findings and see if similar outcomes occur in a club for *older* male readers.

The picturebooks I have chosen to use can be broadly termed contemporary and challenging. Evans' (2015) empirical research reveals the many educational benefits of reading these texts, amongst them: encouraging philosophical thinking, use of symbolic visual language and an understanding of wider social issues. My participants have little recent exposure to the picturebook genre and no previous experience reading my particular text choices. As such, assessing their engagement in relation to all the findings here is of particular interest.

Methodology

This study was an action research project spanning a period of nine weeks and involving a small sample of Year 5 boys in an inner-city London school. Before commencing my research, I addressed any perceived issues in line with ethical guidelines (BERA, 2012) by seeking permission from the Headteacher, sending letters to guardians (explaining my role and intentions of the study), and speaking to the students themselves. They were given the opportunity to 'opt-out' at any time. I was conscious of my outsider status as a non-regular member of staff, but my weekly presence and 'practitioner' status placed me more as an 'inbetweenner' (Milligan, 2016) which I hoped would work to my advantage.

I am aware that it is impossible for any research method to be completely objective and that both outsider and insider research can lack subjectivity (Kim, 2012; Roulston and Shelton, 2015). I collected my data through audio recordings. Conscious that this method could be 'inhibiting and distracting for the participants'

(Koshy, 2010, p.96), I informed students in the first session and drew as little attention as possible to it in subsequent sessions. In order to be an effective qualitative researcher, I would engage in constant reflexivity. Reflexivity allows the researcher to be open and thoughtful in their approach, stepping back and reinterpreting what is seen at regular intervals (Kim, 2012). I also kept a reflexive journal (Janesick, 1999; Koshy, 2010) and documented any observations or reflections throughout the study. I found this post-session reflection particularly useful for documenting non-verbal observations revealing subtleties about students' responses.

The participants were selected by a teacher who may have been influenced by their own 'selection bias' (Roulston and Shelton, 2015, p.334). I requested a sample of underachieving boys and preferably boys 'not very enthusiastic about English', but I am conscious that this was a vague criterion. However, the teacher informed me that all my participants were currently failing to meet their target grade in English or attaining below the national average based on school-based summative tests. One student was 'at risk of exclusion' due to behavioural issues.

Over the weeks, I introduced the students to a selection of picturebooks through a guided read aloud and we completed a variety of activities around these. I selected the texts that I deemed 'complex, challenging and provocative' (Murphy, 2009, p.21). I checked that they were not texts that students had previously encountered at school or at home to ensure 'new' reading experience. In my analysis, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and ensure anonymity.

Data Analysis

Each session involved reading or rereading a picturebook, followed by discussions and activities. I employed a 'Tell Me' approach to my questioning (Chambers, 2003), striving to 'break the monologic mould of classroom talk' (Mercer and Litteton, 2007, p.39). In the first session, no written task was completed and one student expressed confusion: 'Is that it? How come we just talked?'. It became immediately apparent that the students were not accustomed to such opportunities for unbridled

discussion. They did not value 'talk' as a legitimate part of the learning process. This was concerning. However, as the weeks continued, they began to value discussion and became more adept at negotiating the dialogic space.

I found it challenging to refine my data as it all felt relevant and revealing, so the prospect of reducing it was overwhelming. However, I adopted a coding system which allowed me to select key moments that I felt were most significant in answering my research question (Koshy, 2010). I then used Rosen's (2017a) matrix for analysing talk and was also influenced by Henessy et al (2016) to adapt these categories.

Analysing	Making an analogy between one part of the text and something from elsewhere.
Speculative	What could happen? What might happen?
Interrogative and Inferential	Why? Questioning and uncovering layers of meaning.
Storying and Imaginative thought	Creating another story, implied generalisation (links to cognition, philosophy and morality). Evidence of abstract thought.
Reflective	I think...
Emotional responses	How we feel. How others feel.
Language/Literary Analysis	Demonstrating skills of analysis that link directly to English as a subject and possibly utilising terminology.
Clarifying and Chaining	Explaining our or other's perspective/ building upon them.

Figure 1: Talk Analysis (Rosen, 2017a; Henessy et al., 2016)

Abstract Ideas

When talking about *Sad Book*, the students began to discuss cruelty to animals:

Transcript	Commentary Notes
Chris: But look, you know the weird part is that, that...he says... <i>reading from the book</i> 'sometimes because I'm sad I do bad things. I	Close textual analysis . Chris interrogates the text. Complex ideas and issues are explored.

<p>can't tell you what they are...they are too bad. It's not fair on the cat.'</p> <p>That's a bit –</p> <p>Simon: Weird</p> <p>Isa: Sometimes when people get angry, they take it out on –</p> <p>Mark: But people need to understand that other animals have feelings too.</p> <p>We're not the only ones –</p> <p>Isa: Exactly!</p> <p>Michael: We're only smart enough to talk. That's the only difference between us and animals.</p> <p>Simon: Oh, and...civilisation.</p> <p>Isa: Hmm, that's true.</p> <p>Simon: Cos animals didn't think or create tables and chairs. Or iPads or stuff like that.</p> <p>Isa: Yeah.</p>	<p>Simon seems to fail to comprehend the statement. Isa builds upon this, interpreting it as a manifestation of his sadness into anger – higher order thinking skills at play.</p> <p>Michael links this to animal cruelty. Abstract concepts are introduced and philosophical ideas about what it means to be alive and human.</p>
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Mark asserts that 'animals have feelings' then Michael builds upon this, 'we're only smart enough to talk' before Simon tries to develop a definition of what it means to be a conscious human being: 'Oh, and...civilization... Cos animals didn't think or create tables and chairs...'. This is touched upon again when reading *The Island* when Michael introduces the topic of humanity again.

Transcript	Commentary Notes
<p>Zack: When you look at the cover, yeah, you might think that it's quite boring –</p> <p>Michael: I think it's a good book, but a bad book at the same time. Cos it's kind of, everything is weird, so you don't know what island it is. Everything is fiction, so the only thing that's true is human and that they're human. The only</p>	<p>Discussion of genre.</p>

<p>thing real is that they're human. Only the humans are real.</p> <p>Mark: Your turn, Isa (<i>passing the pencil to Isa</i>).</p> <p>Isa: I think, like they didn't like him cos: one, he wasn't wearing any clothes. Two, he didn't even know anything to do with fishing and stuff. And, I think three because I think cos he's not been on the island and he's a forenger, and some people don't trust forengers cos they don't know exactly where they came from and –</p> <p>Chris (<i>pronouncing it correctly</i>): It's FOREIGNER</p> <p>Isa (<i>enunciating carefully</i>) : Oh, for-eign-er then</p> <p>Zack: Foreigner – what is it?</p> <p>Isa <i>enunciating clearly</i>: A for-eign-er is someone from a different country, for example, if you're from Africa, and you come here then you're a foreigner.</p> <p>Zack: Africa? I'm from Africa like you. But I'm from London.</p> <p>Isa: (<i>pointing at Simon</i>) He's from London, but he was born in Poland (<i>pointing at Simon</i>)</p> <p>Chris: Were you?</p> <p>Isa: Yeah, so he's a foreigner, but I don't think he's still a foreigner because –</p> <p>Simon: – But I wasn't, like, I was only there for, like, three years so then I lived here.</p>	<p>Negotiating the interaction (turn taking through possession of pencil).</p> <p>Evidence of abstract thought.</p> <p>Michael is interrogating and reflecting. Abstract. Philosophical.</p> <p>Collective effort to solve the problems presented in the text. Chaining effect.</p> <p>Isa synthesises previous points made by the group. Linking to wider social ideas and abstract ideas – what is a foreigner?</p>
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The students demonstrate a sophisticated level of interrogation of issues beyond the text and there is also evidence of philosophical thinking (Evans, 2015). It is also interesting to note a 'chaining' effect as they build upon one another's responses (Alexander, 2008). In this discussion of *The Island*, the students move from an assessment of the text as 'quite boring' to analysis of character motivation and morality, onto literary analysis and eventually exploring the issue of discrimination: 'some people don't trust foreigners'. The manner in which they move from the abstract idea of 'foreigners' to concrete exploration of their own identities is quite momentous.

The evidence above reveals that not only are they engaged in successful cumulative talk (Mercer, 2007) but they delve into complex social issues. They are more involved because topics are 'abstract and more intellectually demanding' (Murphy, 2009, p.24). Also, it has long been accepted that readers respond better when they can relate texts to their own lives and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978) and the boys clearly enjoy making connections from text to their own lives and the world they live in.

Emotional Literacy

Although I am aware that picturebooks have been found to promote emotional literacy (Nikolajeva, 2013), I am surprised at how much evidence of this is apparent in my work with the boys. Perhaps it is due to my preconceived ideas about gender that I was struck by the emotional responses elicited. The effect of emotional reading seems twofold: sometimes the boys apply real-world examples to make sense of what they are reading and at other times what they are reading helps them to make sense of their own experiences and emotions.

This extract came halfway through the pupils' independent reading of Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake's *Sad Book* when they get to the poem about the author's sadness:

Michael: If I hadn't read this book, I would always think that Michael Rosen is just some happy guy that always makes everyone laugh and really –

Simon: It's true –

Mark: – and really, it's not actually true that he's always happy. To be honest yeah, this deserves more medals than those other ones. Cos this is about his personal life and he's expressing that to, like, everyone in the world.

Chris: But I just like the rhythm of this poem bit...

Zack: Hmm, rhythm.

Isa: There is rhythm.

Isa taps the table and Chris and Zack nod their heads as Chris mumbles the words from the poem.

Isa: But sometimes there's part of your life –

Chris: Where somebody makes you sad.

Michael: It's not always your fault.

Simon: (*thoughtfully*) Like sometimes I'm sad on the inside but happy on the outside.

The others nod in agreement.

Chris identifies 'rhythm' and there is a wonderful moment when they reread the poem mimicking the rhythm through head nodding and table tapping. This moment was one of many where the boys engaged in a literary and structural analysis of the text, quite unprompted. They do all this alongside a discussion about the multifaceted nature of their favourite author and an acknowledgement of their own inner emotions.

Another particularly moving example of pupils' reading helping them to make sense of their own emotions was when Zack created an autobiographical response to *Sad Book*:

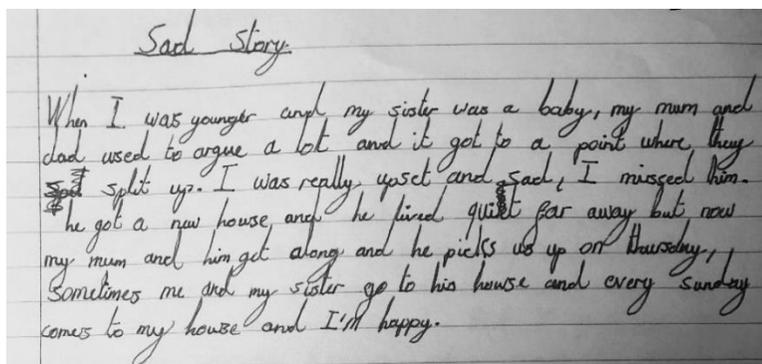


Figure 2 – Zack's Sad Story

When he finished, he read his piece of writing aloud (at his request) and then he began to cry. The reading, discussion and opportunity to reflect appeared to have some sort of cathartic effect on Zack. He was able to share how he was handling his feelings of sadness about his parents' separation. What struck me most was how supportive the other boys were as they offered words of reassurance and shared their own experiences. Reading the book and subsequent dialogue helped Zack to realise that he was not alone; how comforting to know that his favourite author felt sad and his peers too! I wonder if such a space for personal reflection would ever be possible in a regular classroom. Though this may seem unrelated to my research question, there is evidence to suggest that emotional literacy is correlative with academic progress (Doyle and Bramwell, 2006), so this serves as further evidence of the educational benefits of reading picturebooks with boys.

Untangling the Visual Content

Whilst ambiguity is a common feature of literary works, I notice that the particular visual and narrative features of the picturebooks encourage an enthusiastic problem-solving approach to comprehension (Hennessy et al., 2016). Students enjoy 'plots that involve untangling to make sense.' (Panteleo & Sipe, 2012, p.13) and the evidence certainly indicates that the boys were engaged when they were trying to make sense of ambiguous content. Reading *The Arrival*, students kept flicking

back and forth between pages and reassessing the images. They identified symbolism and possible tone of the illustrations: 'the clouds might rain', 'it's a sad mood', and speculated over meaning, often counteracting one another's interpretations (Hennessy et al., 2016). Isa also identifies the use of colour in *Sad Book*:

Isa: It's all grey.

Chris: Cos clouds are covering him...it's depressing and cos most times the pictures are...the backgrounds are –

Michael: normally dark because this is because of his dark side instead of the joyful, like, comedian side. Like, look, at this one. The colours in the background.

Chris: Yeah, it's like it represents it. Being sad.

Michael and Chris draw out the connotations of these colours in relation to the illustration of the subject. Nikolajeva (2012) argued that students' reading of visual images requires much skill. She adopts the term 'emotional Ekphrasis' (Nikolajeva, 2012, p.227) to explain how visual images evoke emotion in a way that words cannot. The boys seem to interpret the narrator's sadness by reading the image and the colours, therefore demonstrating high level 'visual meaning-making skills and competencies' (Panteleo, 2014, p.19).

Similarly, the students are confused by the picture of the woman in *The Island* and decode it through dialogue.

Stimulus	Transcript and Commentary
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Illustration: a double-page spread. A woman's figure is contorted, depicted in shock: her hand raised to her mouth, her eyes bulging, her expression exaggerated. The left-hand side of the page is white, save for the text. 'Then one morning a man appeared in town'.

Chris: Is that him?

Mark: I think it is.

Michael: No, it's a woman.

Chris: She looks like a man.

Michael: She's scared though.

Chris: She's scared of the man.

Mark: I'd be screed of *her*!

Chris: He will be scared too.

Mark: Why did he do the picture so ugly?

Michael: Cos it's scary.

Mark: They're all scary...and scared...cos he's on his own and sees them as, like, scary cos they're different. But he is weird to them cos the bones and stuff.

Chris and Michael: Oh, yeahhhh.

Together, they come to a sophisticated conclusion about what the illustration means. Though the man is feared (by the community as the outsider) they interpret, rather subtly, that the disturbing image of the woman may be from the point of view of the man himself - 'He will be scared too'. Mark concludes, 'he's on his own and sees them as scary cos they're different, but he's weird to them.'. Here, Mark creates a definition of xenophobia and together they have interrogated the text's visual content to reach a conclusion. Vygotskian principles are clearly at work here as students 'scaffold each other's learning' (Roche, 2015. p.49). It was heartening to witness how together they were able to reach a 'eureka moment' (Rosen, 2017a).

Piquing their Interest

In addition to my data analysis, the boys' teacher commented that Chris was now reading Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia* independently. This was a book I had recommended to him following our session on *The Arrival*. Also, I loaned Michael Anya's *Ghost*, a graphic novel by Vera Brosgol, which he devoured and wanted more: 'can you tell Miss to let us read these books in class?'. The sessions seem to have opened up a new genre to the students and some were expressing an interest in picturebook/graphic novel reading in their free time. These were students with an apathetic approach to reading before the intervention. This demonstrates that effective teaching strategies – and the time to implement them – can indeed translate into a long-term interest in reading beyond the classroom (Hochweber & Vieluf, 2018).

Conclusion

My action research set out to discover if a weekly picturebook intervention club could have educational benefits for boys. In our first session, one student even questioned the relationship between a picture book and KS2 English lesson: 'I thought we were doing English'. His comment revealed a lack of value placed on picturebooks at KS2. I had to convince them and soon I witnessed the boys' scepticism turn into intrigue and then lead to deep analytical discussion.

Roche (2015) argues that we should not approach group picturebook reading with an agenda, but simply seek 'critical thinking and talking' (Roche, 2015, p.160). For the average teacher, desperately trying to deliver content, this is not always possible. However, my position afforded me the freedom to do just this. By the end of the study, I was frequently just observing boys reading – and reading well. At times, I even questioned the legitimacy of this kind of 'free talk'. However, my fears have been allayed through analysis of my data and observations of the impact on students.

At the start of the study, I was informed that one of my participants was at risk of exclusion. At the end of the project, I asked which student this was and was surprised to learn that it

was Michael – a student who had behaved well, listened sensitively, engaged in dialogue and even sought opportunities for extra reading. The fact that it was a new environment beyond the classroom and I had no knowledge of his behavioural history seems to have given him an opportunity to reinvent himself as a learner.

My discoveries echo the findings of many researchers: that picturebooks and dialogic approaches can extend students' learning. However, I would argue that there is also a case for creating a social community of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) specifically targeting disaffected boys. I acknowledge that membership to the club impacted on the level of engagement of my participants. It meant that these 'underachieving' boys started interrogating, speculating, connecting emotionally and enjoying reading. Perhaps it is time that more spaces like this are created for underperforming boys in our schools.

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CAN PICTUREBOOKS PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXTEND DEEPER UNDERSTANDING IN KEY STAGE 2 ACROSS A RANGE OF ABILITIES?

NATASHA GRAY

Introduction

My interest in this question stems from my dissatisfaction with intervention programmes tailored for children working below ARE (age-related expectations) in reading. Having delivered these programmes across Key Stage Two (ages 8-11, hereafter referred to as KS2) for three years, these strategies usually consist of taking the child out of class to help them 'catch-up'. I have found this to be problematic as it takes valuable time away from their class and leaves them further behind with classwork. Furthermore, the initiatives used in these sessions are often rote learning, which can have pitfalls. However, the alternative is a child in a lesson that they cannot access.

One of these aforementioned rote learning initiatives was introduced to me by an E.P (Educational Psychologist) for a Year 5 pupil (aged 9/10), whose reading age is Year 1 (aged 5/6, hereafter referred to as Child D). The activity comprised of me counting the number of words in a book. Then the child read the book whilst I wrote down every incorrect word. Each session the child would read the same book until the number of incorrect words decreased. Frustratingly, I found the narrative completely lost on the child, and the focus became on how many words they got wrong.

Arguably, government initiatives are often too reliant on phonics and rote learning for children who are struggling to make the expected progress, and that testing a child's ability is dominated by their ability to decode words. Although, 'whole language theorists would argue that the essence of reading is *comprehension*, as the purpose of reading is to make meaning from text' (Maine, 2013, p.150). Curriculum changes in the UK (DFE, 2013a) imply that comprehension has importance in reading, 'yet

the accountability for primary literacy of comprehension remains fixed on technical and word recognition elements' (Maine, 2013, p.150). Therefore, making it impossible for many children to progress in literacy even if they show an understanding of context.

Deeper understanding, in this study, refers to a child's ability to surpass the surface meaning of a text (or image and text). The motive is to move away from factual interpretations and to assign emotive responses through causation and analysis of multiple meanings.

The result would support and satisfy KS2 Year 5 and 6 programmes of study. This research will investigate whether there are opportunities for picturebooks to provide total inclusion for all children and extend their deeper understanding of literacy.

Barriers to Deeper Understanding

The question I raised refers to the importance of delivering English lessons that provide an opportunity for all students to have access to and be able to thrive in. Gordon Wells (1997, p.108) shares his frustration as he tries to understand why so many schools fail 'to create communities that support the development of fully literate individuals'; he reiterates Maine's assertions that there is 'the absence of a coherent, theoretical base'. Furthermore, Roche proposes that assessments in schools isolate word recognition from comprehension as 'politicizing' or 'to look good in PISA rankings' (Roche, 2015, p.55). The disconnect between decoding and understanding is observed by many theorists. Hassett (2010, quoted in Maine, 2013, p.150), argues that reading requires 'not just a matter of reading the word, but rather, a matter of interpreting and representing meaning across various contexts and audiences with multiple sign systems'. She insists that the two are intertwined and to represent and interpret meaning involves more complexity than reading a word remotely.

Louise Rosenblatt observes the connections between reader and words by proposing that; 'a novel or poem or play remains merely ink spots on the paper until the reader transforms them

into a set of meaningful symbols' (1938, p.25). Therefore, children themselves bring to the text their own experiences and previous background knowledge. This type of interaction, which Rosenblatt called a 'transaction' led to her seminal work on 'reader-response theory' which was formulated to describe the types of transactions between the reader and the text (Evans, 2016, p.54). Nikolajeva and Scott (2013) characterises reader-response theory in relation to picturebooks:

with its central notion of textual gaps [...] Both words and images leave room for the readers/ viewers to fill with their previous knowledge, experience, and expectations, and we may find infinite possibilities for word-image interaction. The verbal text has gaps, and the visual text has its own gaps. Words and images can fill each other's gaps, wholly or partially. But they can also leave gaps for the reader/ viewer to fill.

(Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013, p.2)

Why Picturebooks?

Many scholars advocate the use of picturebooks as they remove the 'barriers' to literature as they often present simple language with sophisticated narratives. The recent popularity of these picturebooks could be attributed to new technologies, access to media, and how images influence our daily lives.

Visual images, design elements, and written language are being combined in unique ways, and readers in the new millennium will need new skills and strategies for constructing meaning in transaction with these multimodal texts as they are encounter both in and out of school setting.

(Kachorsky et al., 2017, p.232)

Karchorsky highlights that picturebooks draw on new proficiencies to establish meaning. Could these be beneficial for children of all reading levels?

Picturebooks are becoming greatly celebrated for their multimodal effects, being rich in aesthetics and meaning. In this instance, they are not illustrations to solely complement the words; they are 'books in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention' (Arizpe and Styles, 2003; quoted in Evans, 2012, p.23). Thus, picturebooks require a different interaction between reader, text, image and 'place special processing demands on readers' (Martinez and Harman, 2012, p.324). Alongside this, Martinez and Harman (ibid.) 'view the relationship as one in which illustrations and text reflect and expand on the meaning of the other and together create greater meaning than either can convey independently' (2012, p.324).

Deeper Understanding and Picturebooks

Picturebooks have the potential to incite deeper understanding through 'visual literacy,' which can be defined as 'the study of signs' (Hawkes, 1977; Eco, 1979; Solomon, 1988). These 'signs', which are subjective and can take on an abstract nature, invite the reader to interpret and make meaning from the information presented in the form of an illustration. Additionally, it requires the reader to reason between the interplay of images and words to make connections and construct meaning.

Golden and Gerber (1990; cited in Crawford & Hade, 2000, p.69), explored this process from a semiotic perspective. They investigated children's readings of picturebooks that included a print-based-text. Their work indicated that 'children's readings of picture books include elements of intertextuality, [...] in which the picture shows how visual cues powerfully affect the ways in which readers construct meaning regarding the story narrative'.

These theories could support readers in achieving greater understanding within literacy, where the narrative is more than the words itself, by inviting readers to make their own connections and interpret the 'signs.' This approach will ask readers to use a range of skills that go beyond inference such as causation, layers of meaning, or an emotive response.

Dialogic Learning

Robin Alexander coined the term 'dialogic teaching' by developing work from Bakhtin (1981), who explored the types of interactions formed through classroom discussions. Alexander argues that the traditional dynamics of the classroom, with the teacher questioning and children answering, are less effective for empowering engagement. He proposes that 'dialogic teaching harnesses the power of talk to stimulate and extend students' thinking and advance their learning and understanding' (Alexander, 2006, p.37).

In contrast to the study of a longer novel, picturebooks can afford teachers the time for conversations; they can open up dialogues between students and teachers and amongst themselves. Vygotskian theory 'supports the notion that through interaction with the text [...] children transfer the understanding and skills they have gleaned from dialogues with others to their own literacy related discourse [...] they converse not just with themselves but also with the text narratives' (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p.115).

Methodology

Consent from pupils, parents and the Headteacher were obtained prior to this study. To ensure confidentiality, each child's alias will be a letter. For the purpose of this study, and to identify whether the sessions can extend understanding in a range of readers, I will specify the children's ARE alongside the school's assessment framework. Thus, any quantifiable progress will be included:

ER (emerging reader) - 2 or more steps below ARE for reading

DR (developing reader) - working 1 step below ARE

SR (secure reader) - working at ARE or 1 step above ARE

This action research project took place in a large and diverse primary school in London. I have worked at the school for five years in KS2 implementing interventions for those children

struggling to meet the ARE. At the beginning of the year, I took over a Year 5 class due to the unexpected leave of their class teacher. This itself proved to be problematic as the children needed adjusting. However, having worked in that year group I knew the children very well. The class has 25 children with different experiences with reading. The sessions took place for one hour per week for a total of nine weeks.

The method I used predominantly for evidencing children's responses was a recording device to transcribe all conversations. As both Mercer (2002) and Chambers (2011) highlight the importance of 'classroom-based education as a dialogic process, in which both talk between teachers and learners and talk amongst learners have important roles to play' (Mercer, 2002, p.141).

To analyse the transcripts, I have referred to Michael Rosen's matrix, which helped categorise the type of talk (see figure 1, below). Together with Rosen in a tutorial, I highlighted 15 out of 25 possible responses that were most likely to demonstrate a 'greater understanding'. I have adapted the matrix to reflect this and have depicted 6 terminologies that were most prevalent in my findings. Due to the limitation of the length of the assignment only significant moments are highlighted.

Talk Matrix					
Evaluative	Causation	Representational/ symbolic	Eureka moment	Reflective	Semantic
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> Data Analysis * </div> <p><small>*These transcripts would have been discussed in the data analysis. For further definitions of the above terminologies see Michael Rosen's blog. To demarcate each 'type' of talk, I have included square brackets and commented upon further in the 'researcher notes' column (where applicable)</small></p>					

Figure 1 – Categorising types of talk (Rosen, 2017)

Data Analysis

Session 1, The Rabbits by John Marsden and Shaun Tan (1998). Part 1: Initial Thoughts

The first book I introduced was *The Rabbits*. Session 1: Each child was given a photocopy of the book and had 10 minutes to read through the book independently. Children were then invited to share their initial thoughts.

Child A (ER) starts the discussion and suggests that the rabbits, 'have unlimited life because they come on every other page.' He initiates the idea that the rabbits have a more significant meaning than the image itself. One that is symbolic / representational as described in the matrix. Furthermore, he uses causation with 'because' to provide reason and logic. The second recording by Child B (SR) provides an evaluation of the book as a whole:

Child/ARE	Transcripts	Researcher notes
Child A (ER)	I think the book is about war because the rabbits are attacking the animals and nothing stops them [Causation] ... they basically have unlimited life because they come every other page. [Representational / Symbolic]	- Representational / Symbolic uses causation to explain thought process.
Child B (SR)	The rabbits are about rabbits over the years and how they're acting like humans in World War 1 as seen on the front cover they're dressed posh, and they had war with a different type of animal. [...] So it's like these rabbits that are colonising [Eureka Moment] a country so that they can have a place to live. [Data Analysis] And it's like belonging, where there was this girl growing up [...]	- Eureka Moment, articulates how the rabbits symbolise real life events. Additionally links this text to another, synthesising similarities.

The underlying theme of this book is about Australian colonisation, which is neither explicitly mentioned by myself nor in the text. Child B articulates the theory that 'these rabbits are colonising a country'. This is what I distinguish using Rosen's matrix as a 'Eureka moment.' A sudden announcement that we have 'got it!'. Gordon Wells (ibid.) and others reason that reading 'picturebooks together about historic events helps children to understand events in a way that perhaps their history textbooks would not allow' (pp.109-110). What can be seen is Child A providing a scaffold to the symbolic nature of the book and Child B has been able to concretise their views, confidently executing an evaluation.

Session 1: Part 2

For this session, the class were divided into five groups of mixed ARE as Bennet and Cass (1988, quoted in Barnes & Todd, 1995,

p.93) 'found that groups mixed in ability engaged in more interactions than those that were homogeneous'. Each group were given an A3 piece of paper with an open-ended question on it. These questions were formulated to ignite conversation rather than illicit the correct answer. The children were asked to discuss their question and write down any notes then share them with the class:

Illustration: a double-page spread. Rabbits, the invaders of the land, are depicted in a commanding position; they are in control. The page is mainly earth, which shows bones/fossils of the ancestors. 'WE LOST THE FIGHTS' (capitalised in text)

Child-ARE/ Group	Transcripts	Researcher notes
Group 2		
Child A (ER)	I think it reflects how they buried the dead rabbits and took over the land. [Representational / Symbolic]	Representational / Symbolic, interpreted from the illustration
Child B (SR)	I think it represents that the rabbits show how serious they are - how strong they fought. [Representational / Symbolic] [...]	
Teacher: Child E (DR): Teacher:	Ok Year 5 . Very quickly we wanted to just do one more thing? ok, very quickly	Dialogic interaction. Child E sees this as an opportunity to raise further questions. They are confident in their approach to address the 'audience'
Child E:	What was your favourite part of the speech and what did you like about the picture? [Data Analysis] <i>(Several children raise their hand to participate- unfortunately due to this being such an impromptu transaction much of the dialogue is inaudible. Some responses to the audiences are noted below.)</i>	
Child E:	We were thinking that is was just like a background maybe of caves with a background of slaves in it.	
Child F (ER):	We were thinking that the background might represent how many rabbits died.	Children challenging audiences responses and offering alternative evaluations/reflections

Group two were asked to select a page that they found most interesting, and discuss why. The group used words such as 'reflecting' and 'representing', which further highlighted the symbolic/representational nature that the children had inferred. Interestingly, when I attempted to 'wrap things up' after several 'hms'. Child E (DR) objected: 'very quickly, we wanted to just do one more thing?'. Inquisitively, I agreed. Child E proceeds to address the audience (class) and reframes the group question to encourage further exchanges. Child E exhibits his deeper understanding publicly by demonstrating confidence in his ability to question and challenge others' ideas. This unforeseen interjection would 'embrace a sociocultural theory of learning'

(Vygotsky 1978) that understands 'the importance of creating a social community' (Pantaleo & Bomphray, 2011, p.174).

The children had become actively engaged in their own learning and were now facilitating their own lessons. The audience (rest of the children) were eager participants in this and many exchanges followed, creating a context for collaborative inquiry (Barnes & Todd, 1995, pp.81-82); this led to the introduction of a wider range of roles for both the students and the teacher. Evidently, this picturebook has allowed the boundaries between teacher and student to become one of mutual interaction, which has become advantageous to encouraging independent learners.

Fiona Maine (2013) asserts that:

[the use of] dialogic transactions [can be] more than merely promoting the teaching of comprehension skills to children, the paper demonstrates how meaningful and exciting responses can be promoted through children reading together and teachers encouraging creative dialogue'

(Maine, 2013, p.150)

Session 2. The Red Tree by Shaun Tan (2001)

1:1 Session

In this session, I chose to deliver a 1:1 session with child D (ER), who is substantially below age-related expectation. To gain a better insight as to whether a deeper understanding could be achieved for all children in the class, I felt it important to see whether they were accessing the material and not too reliant on group talk. We read the book page-by-page discussing each one. Child D had shown an understanding of symbolism and that the motifs throughout this book had a meaning greater than the object itself. In previous reading situations, Child D would have the barrier of reading the words and be stuck at decoding. Whereas, this book has allowed a route to deeper understanding. As Fiona Maine has observed in her study with picturebooks, 'it was important that children were able to engage with the texts

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chosen without being constrained by their ability to decode text and recognise printed words' (2013, p.152). This links nicely to Nikolajeva and Scott's adaptation of 'reader response theory' with Child D able to bring her own experiences and knowledge to fill gaps in decoding skills.

Child D - The Red Tree (Tan, 2001)		
Page no.	Transcripts	Researcher notes
Pg.1	Spreading joyfulness or calling for help because she has nowhere to live. [Representational / Symbolic]	She has noticed the words around the page and inferred meaning from this.
Pg. 2	It looks like a puzzle because it looks like this picture, but not with the girl and they want to all the autumns because there are leaves around it.	
Pg.3	All the pictures have nature with leaves and birds. [Representational / Symbolic] <i>Me: What could that mean?</i> It means that the same thing is happening every day. [Representational / Symbolic] She is lonely/ sad.	Showing understanding of the symbolic nature of a leaf on every page. Wow! She could read all the words - demonstrating confidence, less concerned with reading miscues.
Pg.5	The girl feels like she's at the bottom of the sea because there is a fish.	Miscue - able to re-read darkness correctly.
Pg. 6	We know that she is very small and she wants to shift herself into the sea and see where she ends up as in pirate films that put a letter in a bottle in the sea.	Intertextual
Pg. 7	I think it means that half the world has machines and the girl's one of them and she works to make friends with humans as all the time she has her eyes shut and she has a light in her which means she is a machine. [Reflective]	Reflective
Pg.9	<i>Me: What do you think this is about?</i> I think she's on a big shell drawing, counting how many days she's been living or might stay there - she might not have a house so writes how many days she's been living there. It looks like the person who wrote this keeps backing away as the picture gets smaller and smaller.	Begins to establish intent of author
After the session	"I really like these sessions." [Data Analysis]	

After the session, Child D said, 'I really like these sessions.' Often, she was noticeably self-conscious in reading situations, but it seems as if the combination of image and text gave Child D a new 'fluency' in reading; one that invited her to use verbal reasoning allowing her to arrive at a deeper understanding of symbolism. Interestingly, I also saw fewer miscues. For Child D the images helped to retell a representational narrative and 'illuminate' the possibilities of words.

Session 2: Part 1. Initial Responses

The same book was presented to the class. They were split into mixed ARE groups and each group had a copy of the book. The children's responses to this book were more reflective of the character's emotions, with children suggesting that the girl is 'lonely' and she's 'losing the endurance to carry on calling.' The discussion continues to develop with the children articulating the symbolic nature of the text:

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Child/ ARE	Transcripts	Researcher notes
Child J (ER)	I think that this book is about a girl. She's been trying for years to grow a tree but then she grew the tree and all the leaves fell off then she got sad and then at the end she got courage and started to grow a new one. [Reflective]	Reflective by making an interpretive statement.
Child Q (SR)	I think it's about her trying to find help but she's really sad as she can't find anyone to help her and it's like she's losing the endurance to carry on calling. [Reflective]	Sophisticated vocabulary
Child L (DR)	I think that the front cover is trying to tell us that she is trying to find people to talk to because she is so lonely but she can't find anyone and knows the words are like just falling out. [Causation]	Causation
Child M (SR):	I think that this page is symbolising loneliness and isolation and not everybody has good days- every day. [Representational / Symbolic]	Understanding the symbolism of the illustrations and reflecting on human nature.
Child O (ER):	I think this page is about how she is looking for her friend and time is running out. [Reflective] And now she's, umm, sad and lonely because [Causation] she wants her friend to come back. And maybe because the colours are very dark, but the room looks damp. So maybe it's symbolising [Representational / Symbolic] how the book is the girl is sad and lonely and what is happening to her.	Reflective and encapsulates the thoughts of the previous interactions. Demonstrates an understanding of symbolism through this dialogic exchange.

The children use 'causation' to reason why she feels this way and what the illustrations represent. Child M's (SR) response was extremely thoughtful and human; 'I think that this page is symbolising loneliness and isolation and not everybody has good days, every day.' She articulates a metaphor for life outside the realms of surface meaning.

Notably, Child C (DR) approached me after the session to tell me something that had happened during it:

This is the story, me and my friend were sat next to each other, we weren't friends any more. But now, we worked as a team to work together and both complimented each other on our work. I'm proud of that, maybe, it's just like the story 'The Red Tree.

This was an unexpected consequence of these narrative sessions. Although, arguably, not directly related to the question, it shows the effects that picturebooks can have. Therefore, I have defined this (using Rosen's matrix) as extra-textual, which appears to be unrelated to the text but shows the child's reflection on personal interactions with other pupils. This could, at the very least, evidence that, but I think it goes beyond this and demonstrates that the children can story. They can use a narrative to resolve 'real-life issues.'. Gordon Wells (ibid.), state that there are three benefits of engaging with literature; one such benefit is that it can 'deepen our understanding and extend our potential for responding sympathetically and intelligently to the situations that we actually encounter thus contributing significantly to our personal development' (p.109-10).

Session 2: Part 2

Each child was asked to work in pairs and to select a photocopied page of the book. The children continue to develop emotive responses. Several exchanges between two of the children highlight this:

Illustration: a double-page spread. A large ship is shown passing through a city landscape. It is surrealist in style/ tone. 'Then all your troubles come at once.'

Child-ARE/ Group	Transcripts	Researcher notes
Child C (SR):	I think it's telling us how her problems are causing a storm of emotions and she can't contain it so she's on a boat trying to run away from her emotions but it's causing a storm to happen. [Representational / Symbolic]	Emotive responses/ drawing on real-life experiences
Child T (SR):	I think that it's saying that the girl is drowning in her problems and she can't get away because it's taking over her life. [Causation]	
Child C:	I think she's lost and confused and doesn't really know what to do because she doesn't really have anyone to talk to and she doesn't have any friends, she's all by herself.	Metaphorical explanation of the text
Child T:	She is trying to break free from her emotional prison. She is lost in a flood of loneliness and she misses her friends and family.	

The children, in this case, are expressing how the storm is more than a storm itself; this would be a 'symbolic/ representational' transaction and has elements of storying with strands in philosophy and morality. It could be argued that this dialogue would go far beyond the conventional 'comprehension' framework and this use of language is more consistent with KS3 English, as described in the curriculum framework as 'drawing on new vocabulary and grammatical constructions from their reading [...] and using these consciously in their writing and speech to achieve particular effects' (DFE, 2013b, p.5). Child T has clearly developed an emotive response to the text; she has used particular language to consciously create an effect.

A later transaction by Child M (SR) concludes: 'If I was the author [...]'. She has been able to put herself in the place of the author to attempt to map out his intentions. She continues, 'it would mean to me; the way people travel through life. You have to wait to achieve [...]'. Child M's response is evaluative of the author's intentions, she has contextualised what she believes to be the message / moral of the story and how this relates to the 'real world'. She has been able to articulate metaphorical language to create a proverb about life.

Conclusion

In the last performance review that I held with the Headteacher, all students improved their levels in reading from the Spring to Summer term. Notably, Child D had made four steps of progress in reading. This is a significant development as previous results had shown only slight increases. Progress cannot solely be attributed to these picturebook sessions, but does show that the performance of students was not hindered. However, what can be evidenced is that picturebooks can be used as an effective resource for the inclusion of all children with varying reading levels. Furthermore, it helps to remove some of the 'barriers' to literature. One reason is that decoding words is supported by multimodal elements, as seen with Child D. This approach has allowed pupils to show their understanding of a deeper meaning that exceeds their relative 'ARE'.

I am aware, that at times, my analysis and findings somewhat deviate from the question. Perhaps, knowing the children and forming good relationships with them, I become slightly biased, therefore, more inspired by their personal reflections and journeys. Nonetheless, what can be observed by the analysis of the children's responses is that 'deeper understanding' is achieved by their use of causation, understanding and truly developing the symbolic and representational aspects of the texts to relate them to 'real life' through storytelling. All children, regardless of age-related expectations, were able to engage in active, thought-provoking dialogues and confidently articulate ideas that, at times, were more fitting to KS3 comprehension frameworks.

Most notable for me, was the powerful nature of picturebooks in that they afforded me the time to sincerely listen to pupils. Barnes and Todd note:

another spin off from listening to pupils' discussions is that they often show skills in the discussion group that go unnoticed [...] teachers have gained new insights into their pupils' strengths as well as their weaknesses by listening to group talk

(Barnes & Todd, 1995, p.107).

Picturebooks provided an opportunity for children just to 'say' what they think at that moment without fear of being right or wrong. Children were able to take ownership of these sessions and become active in leading and facilitating discussions, which would go some way to echo Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the importance of creating a social community (cited in Pantaleo, 2011, p.174); a shared learning environment where children can bring their own learning experiences to the class to inform us all.

As a further consequence of my research, I have seen a big shift in the children's attitude and engagement in learning. Accordingly, a change in relationships had been observed by another teacher:

I've noticed a big change - they seemed to dislike each other when I did animation with them. I haven't had to speak to any of them - they've been working well together.

Picturebooks have allowed inclusion for all and promoted group work through dialogic inquiry. Despite this not being the purpose of the study it exemplifies the range of impact, as Roche suggests that it demands 'reflection, critical thinking, open-mindedness, and a willingness to listen carefully to children' (2012, p.63). Thus, provides the opportunity to listen for a 'deeper understanding'.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE WAYS IN WHICH CHILDREN ENGAGE WITH THE IMAGES IN PICTUREBOOKS THAT HELP THEM TO PURSUE A MORE REFLECTIVE READING OF A TEXT

JOANNA HASLER

"It's a questioning book!" Annie exclaimed excitedly. She was referring to the picturebook *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne (1992) and this one phrase was an important moment for her and for myself, as her teacher. Both the words that she used and her tone of voice told me that she was starting to see reading and books in completely a new way.

Exploring Visual Literacy

I started this project with a desire to explore children's knowledge of and ability to use visual literacy, which is an area that has interested me for a long time. I wanted to find out how helping my Year 3 class to develop their skills in this area might enable them to access texts on a deeper and more reflective level. I also wanted to see if teaching them these skills would affect their general ability to comprehend a text. Finally, I wished to investigate if this particular class, at this age, were capable of reflecting deeply and in an interpretive manner.

I decided to focus on this area of research for several reasons. I teach in a very traditional school, in which the style of education delivered is very much focused on enabling children to pass the 11+ examination. It can therefore sometimes be rather narrow and does not fully cater to all learning styles. In addition, this year I have been teaching a class of girls which contains an unusually high number of children with a learning difficulty or a troubled home life. I suspected that they would achieve better results with a more visual and kinaesthetic style of teaching and learning.

I had noticed that when I was teaching traditional comprehension lessons in the manner advocated by the school, the ways in which the children expressed their ideas were very limited. I was interested in exploring the realm of visual literacy, as many of

these children were reluctant readers, but enjoyed expressing themselves through drawing and dramatic play. I thought that a more visual and interactive approach might be a way to help them connect with texts and start to see books as interesting and relevant to them.

Perspectives on Picturebooks

Visual literacy and the use of postmodern, multimodal picturebooks, particularly with older children, is an area that has not received a lot of attention until comparatively recently. Nodelman (1988) observed that, '... critical theory dealing with the narrative function of illustrations, as distinct from narrative elements in the text, is sadly lacking' (p.ix). Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) note that critics have tended to restrict themselves to discussing themes and issues raised in picturebooks and that '...literary studies often neglect the visual aspect or treat pictures as secondary' (p.3). In the past, some critics such as Wells (1986) went further and argued that images are always of less significance than text in a picturebook: '...it is the text that gives a precise significance to the illustrations rather than vice versa' (p.156). More recent critics such as Evans (2009) have argued that the juxtaposition of words and images in many picturebooks complement each other and can, in fact, be very challenging, '...many are extremely complex multimodal texts that often make great intellectual and cognitive demands on the reader' (p.4).

Serafini (2012) concurs and goes further in viewing the skills of visual literacy acquired through reading postmodern picturebooks as essential for children to be truly literate in our modern world; '(t)he reader in today's world needs to be positioned as a reader-viewer' (p.30). Meek (1988) notes that our education system can be biased towards print-only texts and that this is not the most beneficial approach for many children. She observes that children have an inherent ability to read pictures, which can be discounted at too young an age:

This particular kind of multiconsciousness, apparently so natural in childhood yet culturally, and specifically, learned, is passed

over as children are taught to pay attention only to words in books. The ousting of images by text has not been an unmitigated gain in the teaching of literacy, as we are only now beginning to realise.

(Meek, 1988, pp.27-28)

Although Meek (1988) wrote this over thirty years ago, it is still the case both in many individual schools and in education policy that great stress is placed on the acquisition of textual literacy, often to the exclusion of visual literacy. Serafini (2012) adds to the ideas of earlier critics such as Meek (1988) when he argues that the skills developed when reading multimodal texts such as postmodern picturebooks are more relevant to life today than those required to read straightforward print and are thus inherently valuable to today's children:

...contemporary and postmodern picturebooks and graphic novels, may serve to bridge the chasm from the traditional literacies and print-based texts that dominate schools today, to the multimodal, visual, and digital texts of the new millennium.

(Serafini, 2012, p.27)

The unique perspective picturebooks offer a reader is based on what Nikolajeva and Scott (2006), referencing Hallberg (1982), refer to as the iconotext, '...an inseparable entity of word and image, which co-operate to convey a message' (p.6), '...a form unlike any other' (p.2). This interplay of text and image to create a new and different meaning from that which either could convey in isolation is described by Pantaleo (2014) when she says that, "(i)n picturebooks, the total effect depends on the text, the illustrations, and the reciprocity between these two sign systems' (p.15). Serafini (2009) states that readers of picturebooks need to be taught to '...attend to both systems of meaning' (p.11) and to do this fully they require a good understanding of 'visual grammar' (p.12). Barrs and Cork (2001) talk about picturebooks as texts that '...challenge and make demands on readers' (p.36). Styles (2003), echoing Meek (1998), expresses a high level of confidence in children's ability to navigate both systems of

meaning and to employ the visual grammar necessary to find the meaning in both the congruence of the words and images and in the gaps between them when she describes children as '...sophisticated readers of visual texts' (Styles, 2003, p.x).

Could the children I taught become, in the words of Styles (2003), '...sophisticated readers of visual texts' (p.x)? Did they already possess these skills, undiscovered because I was not giving them the tools to unlock them? One of the questions Styles and Arizpe (2003), asked at the beginning of their research was, 'Are young children capable of sophisticated multi-modal reading?' (p.xi). They conclude that, '...children can become more visually literate and operate at a much higher level if they are taught how to look' (p.249). Teaching the children involved in my project how to look, enquire and draw comparisons was an important part of this research and I was careful to scaffold their learning by asking open-ended questions that encouraged them to move from their 'performance level' to their 'potential level' of understanding and expression, as outlined in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, discussed by Smidt (2009, p.83). Challenging multimodal picturebooks can facilitate children's progress through the Zone of Proximal Development and enable them to move from what they cannot yet do alone to independence, via help and scaffolded learning. Barrs and Cork (2001) describe picturebooks as 'texts that teach' and discuss how they '...require readers to become active and involved in the world of the text' (p.36), thus enabling them to learn and progress.

Two action research projects conducted in recent years were useful in helping me to formulate my initial ideas and gave me a point of reference. The first of these was (the aforementioned) Arizpe and Styles (2003) 'Children Reading Pictures'. The second project was Styles and Noble (2009) 'Thinking in Action: Analysing Children's Multimodal Responses to Multimodal Picturebooks', which appears in Evans (2009, pp.118-133). Both these projects have a focus on visual literacy and utilise postmodern, multimodal picturebooks. They therefore served as a useful point of comparison in my research.

Developing Our Detective Skills

I decided to focus on five different picture books: *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne (1992), *The Tunnel* by Anthony Browne (1992), *Come away from the water, Shirley* by John Burningham (2000), *Way Home* by Libby Hathorne, illustrated by Gregory Rogers (1996) and *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers (2010). I chose to use a variety of different research methods, as I wanted to give all the children involved in the study the greatest chance to find a method that could unlock their creative responses and help them to see themselves as 'readers' in every sense of the word.

The research methods I used included:

- an initial and then a final questionnaire that I gave the children about their reading preferences and their feelings about books and reading before the project started and after it finished;
- reading and discussing the picture books listed above with the children;
- recording the children's unsupervised discussions about the books;
- interviewing the children about the books, sometimes using questions based on Arizpe and Styles (2013, pp.255-256);
- asking the children to draw, write about or act out their responses to the books;
- encouraging the children to engage in imaginative dramatic play inspired by the books and using 'hot seating' to explore their thoughts and feelings about characters in the books.

I intentionally kept the amount of writing to a minimum as I had often suspected that the children were being held back by the necessity of expressing their ideas formally in writing during comprehension lessons. Styles and Noble (2009, p.118) discuss how drawing, body language and gesture have all become means of response that critics and researchers are becoming

increasingly interested in. Rosen and Rosen (1973) talk about '...how much more fluently children will express themselves in talk than in writing' (p.54); although I expected this to be the case, I was shocked by what the children revealed of their literary and emotional intelligence and how much I had previously underestimated them.

I started by encouraging the children to become detectives, identifying and connecting different elements within pictures. Chambers (1993) recognises the universal need to do this when he says that, '(w)e solve puzzles, we resolve difficulty, by finding significant connections between one element in a text and another' (p.18). I then tried to teach them how to look more closely at what they were seeing; to consider that the book might be employing a form of counterpoint (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, pp.24-26); and to analyse the books in a hermeneutic style (Ibid., p.2), by looking at the whole, then examining the details and finally returning to the whole. I tried to keep my questions as open-ended as possible, using Chambers' (1993) 'Tell Me' approach. Time was unfortunately a major constraint and many sessions had to be cut short before I, or the children, were ready to stop.

The Children and Their Responses to the Books

Fifteen children took part in this research project, but I focused closely on the contributions and progress of four, initially. All children's names were changed to preserve their anonymity and for ethical considerations. During the course of the project, I added two more children to this group, due to the extraordinary contributions that they made. Throughout, the children demonstrated a connection to and real enthusiasm for the picturebooks we read. Baddeley and Eddershaw (1994) note that:

One of the important advantages for older children of working with picture books is that the brevity of text allows swift comprehension and overview that they seldom achieve when they read novels

(Baddeley & Eddershaw, 1994, p.45)

India

India is a highly accomplished reader and reads prolifically. She demonstrated very good intertextual knowledge during our work on *Come away from the water, Shirley*, in which she identified links to Peter Pan and drew connections between the motives of the characters in each story: '...the dog is biting another man's leg, so the dog is kind of like Tinkerbell helping Shirley, who could have been Peter Pan' (fifth double-page spread). Meek (1998) states that by doing this, children '...become *insiders* in the network' of readers (p.22) - a powerful experience.

Whilst reading and discussing the sixth double-page spread in *The Tunnel*, India displayed an interesting awareness of and ability to think in the gaps created by the author:

Illustration: A double page spread. Rose crawls into the tunnel. A red dress and black shoes are seen sticking out of the tunnel, framed by stonework and ivy. Shadows surround the tunnel entrance. A book, in traditional fairytale design, lies open beside her.

India: And also, perhaps she [Rose] meant to close the book because maybe she believed that things could come out of it...

Miss Hasler (teacher): What sort of things might come out of the book?

India: The characters.

Caroline: Maybe witches and goblins and stuff.

Miss Hasler: Does that make you think of any other part of this story?

Abigail: Fairytales.

India: In the woods, it's like she's walking into the book.

Anthony Browne, in an interview with Arizpe and Styles (2003), noted that as an author of picturebooks, words and pictures were important, but '...some things you say in the gap between the words and the pictures' (p.207). An ability to read and interpret these gaps, as identified by Iser (1974), is unusual in a child of

seven who is, according to Piaget (1954), not yet capable of abstract thought.

Caroline

Caroline's reading is of a reasonable standard, but she had been a reluctant reader before this project started, something which changed as her interest in picturebooks grew.

Caroline was fascinated by the symbolism of the colours used in *Gorilla*:

Illustration: A double-page spread. The reader views Rose's father who is shown with a stern, disinterested gaze. He is looking at a newspaper, rather than his daughter. Rose is sat with her back to the reader. Her red jumper in contrast to the soft blue and white of her surroundings.

Caroline: ...the dad um is just wearing blue because he wants everything to blend in and that means that it's all blank, but the girl is red and so she still has some happiness for gorillas...the father's always just always thinking about blank things...

Miss Hasler: Why do you think the father's always thinking about blank things?

Caroline: Well maybe because his um...wife died and so he's just trying to forget about her and that means that maybe the colours on the girl...maybe that jumper was the mother's...so maybe he's trying to um look down and not take any notice of the colours and he's just trying to get on with his life in a blank sort of a way.

In developing her ideas in response to my question in this way, she was moving through Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, discussed by Smidt (2009, p.83).

In a letter to Anthony Browne (see figure 1) she continued to display curiosity about other elements of the visual story.

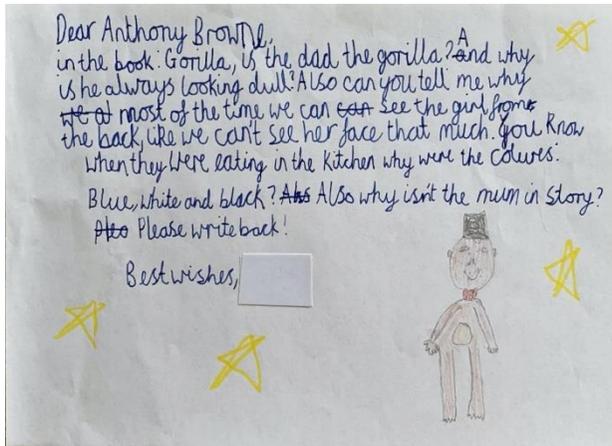


Figure 1 – Caroline's letter to Anthony Browne

Whilst discussing her renewed understanding of the characters and story of *The Heart and the Bottle* after participating in a session of dramatic play, Caroline employed a form of Kleinian 'unconscious phantasy' (Bott Spillius et al., 2012) in explaining why she and her friends had changed one aspect of the story: '...we changed it a little bit when the father was kidnapped instead of dying because that would be really sad for the girl'.

Susie

Susie has had a troubled home life and can be nervous about new experiences. She surprised me by her astute and insightful observations during the course of this project.

Susie was initially the only child who said that she preferred being read to by an adult, rather than reading to herself. In the initial questionnaire, her confidence in her own abilities was low and she said, '...an adult can understand the book more'. In the final questionnaire her confidence had risen sufficiently that she was able to proudly assert that, 'I can read pictures now'.

Whilst reading *Come away from the water, Shirley*, Susie demonstrated that she was able to read the images in the book to draw conclusions about the characters using the iconotext, when she judged Shirley's parents with the words: 'they're, like,

humungously bad parents', an observation not supported by either the text or the pictures alone.

A postcard that Susie wrote to Rose, the girl in *The Tunnel*, shocked me, as I realised how much I had been underestimating her. She posed the questions: 'Are you Little Red Riding Hood? Is the tunnel your life before you got eaten by the wolf?' This indicates an exceptionally high level of thinking and reasoning that I would not have supposed her capable of. It suggests an understanding of the different worlds on either side of the tunnel, whilst weaving in the intertextual references. It could also be interpreted as an unconscious understanding of Bettelheim's (1976) Freudian inspired theories on rebirth in Little Red Riding Hood.

Susie continually drew clues from visual references. Of particular interest was her part in the session of dramatic play, inspired by *The Heart and the Bottle*, in which she chose to play the part of the bottle. Afterwards, she reflected on the final image in the book (of a solitary empty bottle) and said:

I noticed how the bottle was feeling at the end because I think the bottle feels a little bit empty now that it hasn't got a heart and it really wants a heart so that it can love everyone and that's why it didn't open.

This could be seen through the lens of Klein's ideas about the projection of parts of the self onto objects (Bott Spillius et al., 2012). Susie was able to assess this image and understand its "salience" (Serafini, 2009, pp.18-19).

Abigail

Abigail has missed a great deal of school in the past few years and has consequently struggled with reading. Throughout this project, she revealed herself as an enthusiastic and imaginative storyteller.

During our discussions on *Come away from the water, Shirley*, Abigail repeatedly used sound and gesture like the children in Styles and Noble (2009) and made up parallel stories and fantasy

games, reflecting those that John Burningham offers us in this book.

Looking at the fifth double-page spread:

Illustration: a double-page spread. Shirley, the main character, is depicted walking the plank; her hands behind her back. A group of pirates are to the right-hand side of the page. The captain stands with a cutlass pointing towards her back, forcing her towards the edge of the page.

Susie: This is sort of like Captain, it's sort of like Peter Pan because there's all the pirates and Captain Hook, like, just pointing at her, and trying to make...

India: ...her walk the plank...

Susie: ...her walk the plank...

Abigail: ...dum, dum, dum (with sound effects!)

Susie: ...but there's no Peter Pan like trying to stop him, so it's like a bad version of Peter Pan...

Abigail: ...dum, dum, dum (with sound effects!)

India: That guy (pointing to one of the pirates in the picture of Shirley about to walk the plank on the pirate ship) looks like Smee.

Others: Yeah.

Abigail: Aaaaagh (in a pirate voice)...moustache soup!

Looking at the title page:

Illustration: a single page. The title page of 'Come away from the water, Shirley'. Shirley is shown steering a makeshift pirate ship. Her dog accompanies her at the bow. A skull and cross bones flag hangs as a sail – it is smiling.

India: ...I've got no idea why a skull and cross-bones should be smiling.

Susie: Yeah, it's strange. They're supposed to be sad, they're dead.

Abigail: Really?

Caroline: (to Abigail) You be quiet kitten.

Abigail: Meow.

Everyone: Shhhh.

India: And when the parents say, 'Don't get tar on your shoes'

...

Susie: (In a whisper) ...Not even kitty...

Looking at the eleventh double-page spread:

Illustration: a double-page spread. Shirley and her dog are shown sailing at night. The moon is behind clouds and the page is very dark. Light from the moon illuminates the sail, moon and dog.

Abigail: I want to smell the dog! (Bending down to smell the page.)

In using sound and gesture and in constructing parallel storylines in this way this she was using her own experiences to, in the words of Styles and Noble (2009), 'culturally mediate' (p.120) the story and engaging in what Arizpe (2013) calls 'co-authoring' (p.169) and what Styles and Noble (2009) refer to as 'co-construction of meaning' (p.120). In reflecting on the theories of Jerome Bruner, Smidt (2011) states that Bruner observed that children like Abigail may tell stories in this way, '...in order to make sense of reality' (p.99).

Sarah

Sarah was identified as having a specific learning difficulty last year and finds reading extremely challenging. She enjoys books and loves being read to but is unable to read any but the simplest books independently. She has had a very difficult home life and has experienced grief. However, during this project she demonstrated, more than any other child, the benefits of reading postmodern picturebooks; they enabled her to access a story independently and to understand complex messages that the author was trying to convey through both the text and the pictures.

Whilst reading *Gorilla*, Sarah showed that she was able to create stories based on her own experiences to explain why characters were behaving in certain ways, what Chambers (1993) refers to as 'world-to-text' (p.19). When reflecting on the third double-page spread in the book, she speculated that: 'I think the father's ignoring her [Hannah] because probably she reminds him of something... of his wife that passed away, probably'. When talking about why the girl in *The Heart and the Bottle* put her heart in the bottle, Sarah draws on her own experience to surmise that, '...she was so sad and she couldn't express her feelings'. In her final questionnaire, she summed up her achievements in interpreting this text by noting that: 'I can see me in the book'. Sarah appears to be able to step outside the normal boundaries, a perspective that presents an entirely new angle on her abilities for me, as her teacher.

Sarah was one of the few children to comment on the fact that the written text and the pictures tell different stories or give different amounts of information; what Nodelman (1988) refers to as their 'combative relationship' (p.221). When we initially read *Way Home*, I read only the text of the story to the children and asked them to draw a picture of Shane's home (figure 7). I then showed them the illustrations in the book after they had drawn their pictures and asked for their reactions. All the children were shocked, as they had drawn on their own experiences to draw pictures that reflected scenes of home they were familiar with, which were very different from what is portrayed in the images in the book (that of a cold, dark alleyway,

with boxes and newspaper on the ground). Sarah summed up the different messages being conveyed by saying that the 'words sounded different' from the pictures.

Annie

Annie is a fluent, confident reader, but has not yet discovered reading for pleasure. English is her third language; at home she speaks Greek and Russian.

During our reading of *The Tunnel*, Annie showed how a series of pictures can be read when examining the eleventh double-page spread (in which Rose discovers that Jack has become a stone statue and brings him back to life), using the sort of gesturing and pointing that Styles and Noble (2009) refer to in their research:

Illustration: a double-page spread. A sequence of four panels, each page split into two. Rose is seen embracing her brother, Jack, who has been turned to stone. As Rose hugs her brother, colour slowly returns to him; he begins to move. In the final panel, Jack has turned and embraces his sister.

On the same picture here, well he was screaming because he got hurt while he was turning to stone, because he still doesn't know that he doesn't like her, his face starts to turn serious, like he doesn't want to be with her, but because it looks like she's caring a lot about him, he smiles.

She went on to recognise that it is still relatively unusual for a story to feature a girl rescuing a boy and summed up *The Tunnel* as an 'other-way-round fairytale'. She thereby demonstrated that she had applied Nikolajeva and Scott's (2006) concept of 'hermeneutic analysis' (p.2), in which a reader is able to both examine detail and step back and consider a book as a whole.

Annie produced a very interesting postcard (see figures two and three) after reading *Come away from the water, Shirley*. It displayed her understanding of picturebooks as multimodal texts that are

akin to forms of digital literacy (Serafini, 2012), through both her portrayal of Shirley travelling through a portal in her drawing and her use of emoticon type symbols in her writing.



Figure 2- Annie's postcard (front)

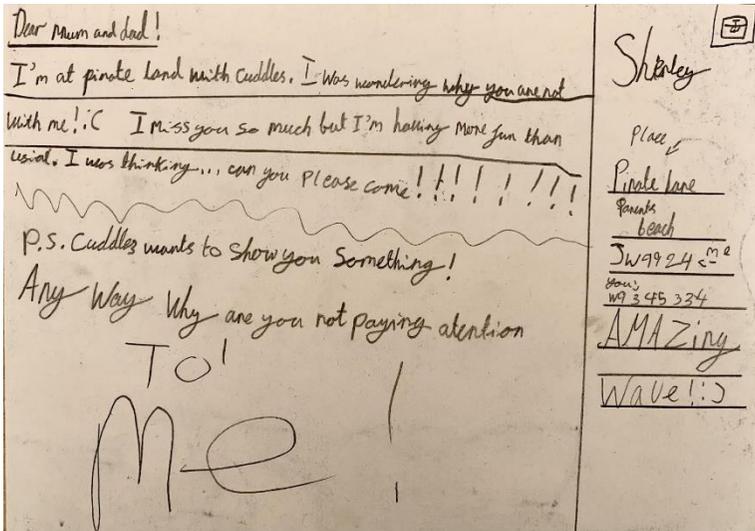


Figure 3 - Annie's postcard (reverse)

Just over halfway through this project, I recorded in my field notes that Annie had started taking a newfound interest in books and storytelling. At Parents' Evening, her father mentioned that she had been writing a lot of stories at home. A few days later she asked if she could tell me a story that she had made up. She recounted a story of her own invention entitled 'The Flake and the Waver', which astounded me. It was an involved narrative featuring many of the features of the postmodern picturebooks that she had recently been exposed to. Her main character had many facets and there was more than one way in which he could be judged, elements which she and her friends had recognised in *Gorilla*, *Come away from the water*, *Shirley* and *The Heart and the Bottle*. She described her story as 'a questioning story', which are almost the same words she used to describe the book *Gorilla*. This, I believe, is a very clear indication of how much value there is in picturebooks for children of this age.

Sophisticated Readers of Visual Texts

This group of children demonstrated, by the end of the project, an ability to 'read' images and draw sophisticated inferences based on them, far in advance of what I, and their previous teachers, had supposed they were capable of. This indicates that there is a definite need of, and place for, picturebooks to be used with older children on a regular basis. The skills that have been developed and the abilities that have been uncovered by this project support that conclusion. In their study, Arizpe and Styles (2003) determined that many of the children they worked with performed beyond expectations because they were listened to, their ideas were taken seriously and they were given time and space to develop them (p.248). This was certainly the case in my project. There may not always be as much time to give to individual children during lessons as I was able to give them as part of this project, but I believe that we need to start trying to think of solutions to make this sort of visual learning and exploration part of the everyday curriculum in schools.

During this project, the children started to see themselves as 'readers' in every sense of the word – whatever the level of their decoding skills. Their confidence in their own abilities increased enormously and they expressed an excitement for reading that

had not been there for some of them at the start. They all revealed that they were indeed '...sophisticated readers of visual texts' (Styles, 2003, p.x) and in the process they taught me a lot of important things about themselves and their abilities that I might not otherwise have known.

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HOW DOES ENGAGEMENT WITH PICTUREBOOKS IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL LITERACY?

EMILY MCGRATH

Nurturing the Whole Child

In recent years, the claim has been made that emotional literacy is a vitally important part of the education of young children (Fisher, 2006; Bruce, 2010; Harper, 2016), and as a teacher in Reception and Year 1 (working with children between the ages of four and six) I have always felt a responsibility to nurture children's emotional development as well as their academic progress. The value of emotional literacy is described by Bruce (2010, p.6) as providing 'the foundation of a better society for the future'. It develops children's awareness and understanding of their own and others' emotions, leading to increased confidence, independence, resilience, creativity, engagement in learning experiences, mutual respect and pride in their achievements (Bruce, 2010). Although academic attainment is often seen as a higher priority in a school environment, it can be argued that by fostering the development of the above characteristics linked to emotional literacy, children can be supported to reach their full potential; both academic and otherwise.

Further to this, the capacity to manage emotions serves a 'protective function' for children's school success (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004, p.97) as well as leading to well-being and good mental health later in life (Harper, 2016).

Acutely aware of my responsibility to foster children's emotional development, I have tried many different approaches to elicit responses when reading: traditional 'circle times', interventions, re-enacting and discussing situations with the children, short stories and anecdotes designed to prompt discussion of emotions and situations, and direct teaching of social-emotional concepts.

Over the years, I came to believe that the most valuable realisations and learning moments for the children (in terms of

developing a better understanding of their own emotions and the emotions of others) occurred during story times and reading sessions. Not only were the children beginning to recognise and understand emotions through the lens of the stories, but through discussion of the story they were able to explore them in a meaningful way. I viewed these story times as a valuable way of supporting the children's emotional development and I decided to carry out a research project with a small group of children, to explore the extent to which engagement with picturebooks supports emotional literacy.

Emotional Literacy and Stories

Emotional literacy is an educational concept, based on the theory of Emotional Intelligence explored by Goleman (1996), described by Steiner as 'heart-centred emotional intelligence' (2003, p.15). My research is grounded by the definition of Mathews et al. (2002) that the key to emotional literacy is the ability not only to recognise emotions in oneself and in others, but to have some understanding of these emotions (p.3).

There are several recent studies exploring how picturebooks support emotional literacy (Fisher, 2006; Nikolajeva, 2013; Harper, 2016), although academic research in this specific field is limited. There are, however, several studies demonstrating how engagement with books and stories support key components of emotional literacy such as: recognition of emotions and developing emotional knowledge (Beazidou et al., 2013); expression and emotional regulation (Fleer and Hammer, 2013); developing a sense of self (Thomas, 1999); and, the development of empathy (Nikolajeva, 2013; Waite & Rees, 2014; Aerila & Ronkko, 2015; Harper & Trostlebrand, 2010).

Accelerating the Development of Empathy

Harper (2016) describes the way children's literature that contains 'authentic characters, realistic problems, and possible resolutions validate children's emotions while offering models for managing strong emotions.' (p.81). One advantage of using stories to develop emotional literacy is that it enables young children to explore strong emotions in a safe way. As Fisher (2006) states; 'by featuring characters which are fictitious and with whom

children can identify, events and situations close to the children's own experiences can be presented and discussed in a non-threatening way' (p.20). Although these feelings can be truly experienced as if they are real, 'as soon as the reader acknowledges that the situation is fictional, the emotional engagement is shifted onto the characters', and can be discussed and explored (Nikolajeva, 2013, p.251). As Rosen (2017a) argues, even experiencing the feeling of grief and sadness through stories can benefit children in encouraging thoughts about how they might 'cope with the difficult things of life'. For young children in particular the 'vicarious emotional experiences' that picturebooks offer hold particular value, overcoming the barrier that their 'limited life experience of emotions' might present to developing empathy (Nikolajeva, 2013, p.250).

Arizpe and Styles (2003) clarify 'picture books' as books in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image. The relay effect in which the relationship between pictures and text creates layers of meaning (Moebius, 1986), may lead children to interpret the themes and emotions in a book in a way that is more meaningful to them, making picture books particularly valuable.

Reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) places the reader and their perspectives at the centre of the reading experience. This theory is important in relation to picturebooks, as 'both words and images leave room for the readers to fill with their previous knowledge, experience and expectations' (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p.2). For young children, picturebooks in their ambiguity and complexity demand the community of enquiry that makes children able meaning makers (Murriss, 2013). This is particularly vital for younger children's developing understanding of social-emotional concepts, as Miller's (1990) research with three-year-olds demonstrates.

A Shared Experience

Although it is clear how the text, pictures and interaction between them might develop emotional literacy, it is the discussions prompted by the context and manner in which picturebooks are shared and the transaction between readers as

they co-construct meaning from the text that offers depth to the reading experience (Maine, 2013). As in Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), group interaction and adult scaffolding can push children's learning on so that they are constantly working towards a higher level of understanding. The research carried out by Beazidou et al. (2013) suggests that in striving to promote emotional literacy, simply reading and asking strategic questions is not enough; children need to be active participants engaged in the experience through the use of creative questions involving 'why' and 'what happens if...'. (p.619). Several studies have made links between this type of dialogic reading and the potential that it has to facilitate social-emotional development (Beazidou et al., 2013; Doyle & Bramwell, 2006) and emotional intelligence (Fisher, 2007).

The supportive nature of dialogic teaching encourages children to 'articulate their ideas freely, without the fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers' (Alexander, 2008, p.105), and demands a culture of 'trust and openness and caring and respect' (Roche, 2015, p.49). This atmosphere is vital in emotionally sensitive discussions. Not only does dialogic teaching allow us to see the children's current levels of emotional literacy by supporting them to voice their developing ideas, but the cumulative aspect of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008) may also be particularly valuable in developing and extending their emotional literacy, as children build on their own and each other's ideas and develop their understanding of emotions through talk; as Maine (2013) describes, the children make meaning together, using imagination and empathy to enter the world of the text.

Developing Emotional Literacy

There are many ways that developing emotional literacy is visible in young children. A physical reaction such as a change in body posture or a certain facial expression may demonstrate understanding, or to help them make sense of an emotion (Nikolajeva, 2013). Strategies such as mimicking characters expressions, actions or gestures help them make sense of what a character is experiencing (Kummerling-Meibauer et al., 2015), and engaging in imaginative play and acting out part of the story from alternative perspectives helps them develop empathy

(Waite & Rees, 2014). Children may also use storytelling as a strategy. As Thomas and Killick (2007) explain, stories give us a language for being able to recognise and think about emotions (p.11). Paley describes how children are 'born knowing how to put every thought or feeling into story form' (1990, p.4) so the stories that the children tell in response to stimuli are incredibly valuable in shedding light on their developing interpretation and understanding of feelings.

Finally, the actual activity itself of sharing a story can support emotional literacy development through factors such as physical closeness (Betawi, 2015), listening to others, turn-taking and getting to know their peers (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006).

Methodology

I carried out a teacher-led action research project exploring how picturebooks can support the development of emotional literacy in young children. I chose a random sample of children from my own Reception class, to take part in a series of shared reading sessions. Each session was based on a different picturebook, and was roughly 30 minutes in length.

Picturebook texts included:

John Brown, Rose and the Midnight Cat by Jenny Wagner and Ron Brooks (1977)

Silly Billy by Anthony Browne (2006)

The Bear and the Piano by David Litchfield (2015)

Wild by Emily Hughes (2013)

Simp by John Burningham (1966)

Something Else by Kathryn Cave and Chris Riddell (1995)

During the sessions I read the text to them, giving them time to look at the illustrations, prompting them only with open, creative questions, and giving them time to respond and discuss the books freely; in line with the principles of dialogic reading (Alexander, 2008; Roche, 2015).

My research was carried out in line with ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) and ethical approval was granted by Goldsmiths University. I ensured that the children remained at ease by carrying out the sessions during school time, in a familiar location. I sought written

consent from parents and used pseudonyms in all of the transcripts to protect the children's anonymity.

I collected the data by filming and transcribing each session, including details of children's physical responses. It must be accepted that my presence during the sessions may have affected the children's responses and this aspect of the study is acknowledged during my analysis. In analysing the children's responses I have been careful to consider to what extent they can be taken as authentic, taking into account the possibility of approval-seeking responses and those directly informed by my modelling. While acknowledging this, I argue that in fact the presence of a teacher forms an important part of the study as it is an intrinsic part of the context in which this research may be replicated. The teacher's role is important on many levels; as Harper (2016, p.81) asserts, they provide language labels to help the children describe their feelings, but also as Kummerling-Meibauer et al. (2015, p.166) explain, the teacher's way of reading and modelling of an emotional response has an impact and both of these aspects of shared reading and its effect on emotional literacy must be recognised.

Data Analysis and Discussion

In qualitatively analysing the data I coded the transcripts according to an analysis matrix based on the 'continuum of emotional literacy' as introduced by Bruce (2010). This continuum suggests that emotional literacy is developed through stages, beginning with 'basic recognition', moving into 'simple understanding', 'appropriate handling and expression' and finally 'active understanding and expression of empathy' (Bruce, 2010, p.5). After the first few weeks it became clear that this continuum was too linear, that children were moving back and forth between these stages, and that they were all interlinked and interdependent. I also felt that the children were showing even more sophisticated elements of emotional literacy, as their active understanding led to them being able to generalise and apply emotional concepts to other contexts. I have therefore adapted Bruce's (2010) continuum to create my own more fluid interpretation of how I saw the children's emotional literacy

developing and coded the transcripts using these categories (see figure 1).

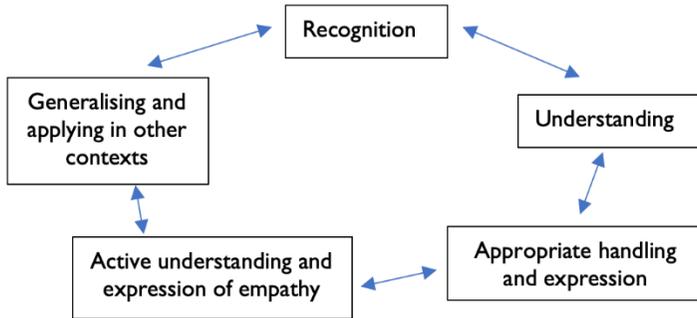


Figure 1. Adapted continuum for developing emotional literacy.

In interpreting the children's responses using Rosen's categories such as experiential, intertextual, intratextual, analogising, speculative, storying, effect of interactions, and symbolic comments (Rosen, 2017b), I was able to recognise the different ways in which the stages of emotional literacy outlined above were being shown. In the following discussion I attempt to use examples of these responses to show how engagement with picturebooks supported the children's development of emotional literacy.

Throughout the study it became clear that teacher involvement and dialogic reading was a key aspect of developing emotional literacy through picturebooks, and it was through the children's conversations that their developing emotional literacy became visible. To enable these conversations to flow I used open questions as recommended by Beazidou et al. (2013, p.619), and other strategies outlined by Alexander (2008, p.105), to create an atmosphere which encouraged speaking and listening. The supportive atmosphere also encouraged children to make each session relevant to them, and the freedom to speak allowed them to take what they needed from each story. For example, one child found time within every session to talk about her anxiety about moving schools.

The picturebooks clearly supported the development of emotional vocabulary. In the early sessions children tended to use the words 'happy' and 'sad' more frequently, and in the later sessions the range of emotional vocabulary was much larger and more complex social emotions such as 'embarrassed', 'jealous', 'belonging' and 'proud' began to appear more regularly without any prompting. The language in the books often enabled the children to verbalise their thoughts more easily in later sessions, and led to their ability to express their emotional literacy increasingly clearly in the later stages of the project, echoing the findings of Harper (2016, p.81) that the 'development of emotional literacy accelerates once children have language to express themselves'. Nikolajeva (2013, p.252) describes how verbal descriptions of emotions are a 'pedagogical device that ostensibly helps young children to articulate the emotion to recognize it later'. One example of this was in *The Bear and the Piano* session when Emma struggles to explain the concept of the bear feeling 'proud'. In this session she explains that 'he's not happy because he can do it - he's happy because he's learnt and it took him soooo long'. Later in this story, the author writes that the other bears were 'proud' of their friend. In a session two weeks later, Emma uses this newly learnt vocabulary to express her understanding of how Simp feels when she performs her cannonball routine.

Illustration: A double-page spread. On the left-hand side, Simp, the dog, stands on a drum proudly, surrounded by the circus crowd cheering. On the right, Simp is standing on top of a horse, holding onto the clown who has a prominent smile.

Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
ET (Teacher) – So how is Simp feeling now? MIA – Happy! ELA – Excited! MIA – And the clown is sooo happy. ET – Mmm what's making her feel happy? SOFI – Because everybody likes her now because she can do fun tricks now and they don't call her fat they call her lovely. EMMA – Yeah and she's proud! And the clown is proud too. Like when we did our dance at the carnival I was proud. ET – She does look very proud of herself. (continues reading) MIA – (gasps) Soooo happy! DAISY – Yeah happy and proud happy and proud! EMMA – Happy-proud!	[Recognition] [Recognition] [Recognition] [Understanding] [Active Understanding and Expression of Empathy] [Recognition] [Recognition] [Recognition]

One of the most basic ways in which the children recognised emotions echoed the findings of Bruce (2010, p.5) as they often looked closely at the facial expressions of the characters and their body language in order to interpret how they were feeling. Often the characters’ faces gave them all the clues they needed to decipher complex emotions, an example of this is shown below as Daisy and Michael discuss the bear’s facial expression in great depth, leading them to speculate about how he is feeling.

Illustration: A double-page spread. On the left-hand side, the titular Bear is seen playing a piano in the forest clearing. ‘The sounds that came from the strange thing were beautiful, and the bear had grown big and strong and grizzly’. On the right, the page is split into three panels vertically. Bear’s face is viewed in close-up – he looks happy and content. In the second panel, Bear’s hands play the piano keys. Finally, a medium shot of Bear at the piano, from behind.

Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
DAISY – He looks... his eyes kinda look proud and a little bit teary. MICHAEL – Yeah.	[Recognition]
DAISY – Because he looks a little bit proud of his-self cos he didn’t he maybe thought he couldn’t do it but he could do it. MICHAEL – Oh no maybe because he was so... sometimes when people are so so happy they actually cry because they’re so so happy.	[Active Understanding and Expression of Empathy] [Understanding]
DAISY – Yeah. And he might actually be a little bit embarrassed.	[Active Understanding and Expression of Empathy]

However, after a few sessions they were more often using the types of experiential comments described by Rosen (2017b) to interpret complex emotions by comparing the characters actions to their own in similar situations, and using their experiences to recognise what these actions meant for the characters emotions. As Nikolajeva (2013, p.251) explains; ‘in reading images, we project our own embodied emotions onto represented figures.’ Emma used this technique in one of the later sessions when she likens the way Simp feels before being shot out of a cannonball to how she felt before our recent performance in a carnival. An example of how the pictures supported these comments was when Michael recognises that the child in *Wild* is scared when she hides under the bed, as he says: ‘She’s so scared. I hide under the bed when I’m scared’.

Illustration: a single page. A young child is depicted crouched underneath a messy bed, strewn with colourful toys, blankets and two pets: a dog and a cat. The child's eyes look directly at the reader; they have a glum expression, as though they are on the verge of tears.

Contrary to Bruce's (2010, p.5) view of 'understanding' as one of the earlier stages of emotional literacy, I would argue that many of the children's responses demonstrated a very sophisticated level of understanding far beyond that expected in the early stages of emotional literacy. One example of how they demonstrate this is by showing an understanding of complex social emotions such as love, dependence and pity. Not only this, but they also demonstrate an understanding of the connections between these emotions, in comments about the 'effect of interactions' (Rosen, 2017b). This is demonstrated in a conversation between Emma and Immy as they discuss how John Brown's love for the widow Rose links to his fear of losing her, and the fact that he looks after her because she is lonely. This supports the suggestion that picturebooks involving relationships between characters support children's understanding of social emotions and their relationship to basic emotions (Nikolajeva, 2013, p.253).

Illustration: A double-page spread. On the left-hand side, Rose is shown feeding the chickens and ducks in the coop. A large, furry dog, John Brown, accompanies her. 'John Brown loved Rose, and he looked after her in every way he could.'

On the right, Rose is sat in a chair underneath a tree. The dog sits patiently beside her, as though comforting her. 'In summer he sat under the pear tree with her.'

Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
<p>ET – Why does John Brown look after Rose?</p> <p>IMMY – Because he loves her so much because he doesn't want her to be lost and die like the other one.</p> <p>EMMA – Because... I think because um, she's lonely and she doesn't have anyone, so and she only has her dog. So he is sorry for her.</p>	<p>[Understanding] -Immy uses intertextual references about the fact that Rose is a widow to show her understanding of an emotion deeper than love</p> <p>[Understanding] -Emma has inferred that Rose might be lonely and concludes that John Brown knows this and so looks after her</p>

As the project progressed, the children began to show deeper levels of emotional literacy in the way they were able to not only recognise emotions more quickly, but were able to transfer them into other contexts through intertextual references. As Roche (2015, p.58) suggests, the fact that I stopped regularly as I read, gave the children opportunities to stop and talk about the text and they began to use intertextual references to help them understand and explain themselves. For example, when discussing *Wild*, Emma went on to tell the whole story of Rapunzel in order to share with her friends how the two stories were similar. As the sessions went on, the children obviously became more confident in using this strategy, and started using examples from stories read throughout the project. A clear example of this is shown across the transcripts below (figures two & three) when Emma and Michael, and then Mia, discuss the idea of 'belonging' across three stories; *Wild*, *Simp* and *Something Else* (Cave and Riddell, 1995). The value of the cumulative nature of dialogic reading (Alexander, 2008) is also shown as Mia clearly builds on Emma's example.

Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
ET – How is she feeling now? EMMA – That she has a home now! Like she has belonging. ET – Does it remind you to think of anything else?	[Active understanding and expression of empathy] -Emma is using the word belonging as a way of explaining an emotion
EMMA – Yeah! Like Wild. Cos she never had a belonging! Well she had a belonging, like Simp... but it didn't take her that long to find a belonging.	[Generalising and applying in other contexts] -intertextual reference to <i>Wild</i> (see P4) to support her explanation of the idea of 'belonging' and how it relates to emotion
MICHAEL – Yeah and then she was happy when she got back to her belonging.	[Active understanding and expression of empathy] -building on Emma's idea, Michael links 'belonging' to 'happiness'

Figure 2. Transcript from Session 5 *Simp* (Bunningham, 1966)

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Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
<p>ET – Does this remind you of anything else you've read? MIA – Yeah it feels like Simp kind of. ET – It feels like Simp? Tell me how it feels like Simp. MIA – Well because like it's kind of the same because like he didn't have a home, and he didn't have any friends and that... this story he doesn't have any friends so like it's kind of... the same. EMMA – Yeah I think it's a bit like Wild like when she didn't belong. MICHAEL – Yeah! That means Simp is a bit like Wild. ET – How is it like Wild Ella? EMMA – Because like he... he belongs somewhere else and no one wants to play with him and then like... the parent... the person who took Wild... um they don't want to play with her so it's a little bit like Wild. MIA – Yeah and also like Simp because he didn't have any friends... and he didn't know any friends... and it's kind of the same. And also um... yeah because they feeled the same and like they both don't have... all of them don't really have any homes... well they do have homes... but like Wild doesn't have a home so Wild is a bit like it... EMMA – Wild has a home! The forest is her home. MIA – I know but she doesn't have a family there so she doesn't belong. EMMA – She doesn't have a house but her home is the forest. She doesn't have a house but that's still her home. Because all the animals look after her.</p>	<p>[Generalising and applying in other contexts]</p> <p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy]</p> <p>[Generalising and applying in other contexts]</p> <p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy]</p> <p>[Generalising and applying in other contexts]</p> <p><i>-intertextual references reflect and support deeper understanding</i></p> <p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy]</p>

Figure 3. Transcript from Session 6 *Something Else* (Cave and Riddell, 1995)

The children also began to create analogies with their own lives which showed an even deeper level of understanding as they were able to transfer feelings into other contexts and use the stories as a jumping-off point for discussing their own emotions. For example, when asked what she thought the message of the story was after reading *Simp*, Immy replied 'I think that we learnt that if you are sad... you're sad and you're happy can be two things at the same time... like you can be excited or also you can be nervous... and um I'm sad and nervous because I'm gonna move schools.'

A common theme throughout the project was the way the children often responded to the pictures by mimicking the facial expressions or body language, which seemed to help them not only recognise the emotions but also empathise with the characters. Echoing the findings of Waite and Rees (2014) the use of drama, acting out and character voices often helped the

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children to reach a deeper level of empathy. For Mia, mimicking the expression of Simp helped her to explain the emotions she identified, and speaking in character as the girl in Wild allowed her to reach the conclusion that she was confused (see figures four & five below). Even further to this, following the sessions the children began to tell and act out their own stories using the characters or scenarios in the books we had read. As Paley (1990, p.4) suggests, this may also have contributed to the way the stories gave the children an outlet to voice their emotions.

Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
<p>MIA – (intake of breath) ET – Wow what is she feeling there? MIA – Like (acts this feeling out by placing her hands over her mouth and smiling) so excited but scared at the same time because if that was me I would be so scared. ET – Does this remind anyone of anything? EMMA – Yeah I have like the time when we were at the carnival and we were gonna do our dance I was a bit nervous and feeling excited. MICHAEL – Maybe like... so... um she knows it's gonna be scary so it's scared but she thinks it was fun so it's kind of like (waves arms around madly) scared fun mixed up together.</p>	<p>[Appropriate handling and expression] <i>-appropriate physical response</i></p> <p>[Recognition] <i>-acting out feelings</i></p> <p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy] <i>-putting herself in the character's shoes</i> <i>-using her own experience to better understand and explain the characters emotions</i></p> <p><i>-building on other children's ideas and using actions to try to explain his idea of the feelings being mixed</i></p>

Figure 4. Transcript from Session 5 Simp (Burningham, 1966)

Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
<p>ET – Do you think they did the right thing? MIA – I think they didn't do the right thing to take her... because I think she's really angry that they took her because you shouldn't take people that aren't yours... and also... like if she was theirs she would be really happy... but if she wasn't theirs she would be like "why are they taking me..." like "why are they taking me because they know I look so lost, angry and not nice so why would... why are they gonna take me?" I think she's just confused.</p>	<p>[Understanding]</p> <p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy]</p>

Figure 5. Transcript from Session 4 Wild (Hughes, 2013)

It became clear that as well as supporting the children to understand their emotions, the books also gave opportunities for the children to translate coping strategies for appropriately handling emotions to their own lives. A poignant example of this

was after we read *Silly Billy* (Browne, 2006), Immy made her own worry doll using craft materials in class and wrote a note to the doll to put under her pillow which read 'I don't want to go to my new school' (see figure six). This example shows that Immy was able to recognise the concept of worry and anxiety, understand it and relate it to herself, and then go one step further to use the story to create a strategy to handle her own worries.

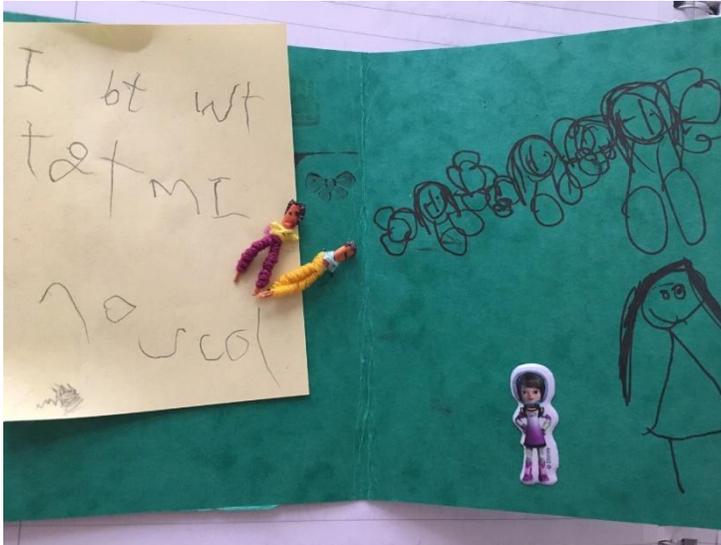


Figure 6. Immy's note to her worry doll which reads 'I don't want to go to my new school' following Session 2 *Silly Billy* (Browne, 2006)

In contrast with Goleman's view (1996) that empathy requires maturity to develop, several children demonstrated incredibly sophisticated emotional responses involving what Nikolajeva (2013) refers to as 'embedded' or 'higher-order' mind-reading. This is explained as *A thinks that B thinks that A thinks...* and in this process, 'readers are asked not only to understand what characters think and feel but also what they think and feel about each other's thoughts and feelings' (Nikolajeva, 2013, p.253). In fact, the best example of this was from the youngest participant in the study, Immy, when she empathises with John Brown, by interpreting how he is feeling as a reaction to how he imagines Rose is feeling:

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Transcript	Category of developing emotional literacy
<p>ET – Why do you think John Brown said that to the cat?</p> <p>IMMY – Maybe it's because um he thinks that Rose won't care about him, she will only... she will only care about the cat.</p> <p>ET – Maybe.</p> <p>EMMA – Or maybe she could care about the cat more than John Brown maybe, that's why he doesn't want to let her in.</p>	<p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy] <i>-Embedded mind reading – Imogen is able to empathise on more than one level as she imagines how John Brown is feeling, by thinking about how he is imagining Rose is feeling.</i></p> <p>[Active understanding and expression of empathy] <i>-Dialogic reading. Emma builds on Immy's argument</i></p>

As they became more comfortable with discussing emotions in stories the children even began to pick up on symbols that could represent emotions. One example of this was in *Wild*, as the children coming back to commenting on the character's hair – a symbol of the contrast between wild and tame. Even the settings of the stories represented emotions by the end of the project, for example in *Something Else*, Immy read gloom and loneliness into the house on a hill before we even began reading; 'I think it's just really lonely and quite gloomy. So it's cold and dark and gloomy and shivery'.

Illustration: a single page. A double-storey house sits precariously on the top of a steep hill. A solitary path winds its way around the hill. The surrounding landscape is barren, save for some trees. A small house, similar to the one depicted, is seen the far distance. 'On a windy hill alone with nothing to be friends with lived Something Else.'

One of the results of the study that resonated most with me was the way the stories gave the children a way to better understand other children with emotional difficulties. This was shown in two of the sessions (see transcripts in figures seven & eight) as the children made analogies with the characters in *Wild*, and *Something Else*, and used them to explain their understanding of how a boy in their class was sometimes naughty, but they could see that he felt angry and sad because he tried hard to fit in. It was very touching to see how kind they were to this child when they arrived back in class following these sessions and one of the children asked him if he wanted to play – the effect of the

young children. As well as developing the children's emotional vocabulary, the books supported the children to recognise emotions in themselves and others more easily using a range of clues, including using symbols and intertextual references to infer less obvious emotions.

The children's responses to the stories and their demonstration of skills such as active expression of empathy and embedded mind-reading opposes Goleman's (1996) belief that children of this age are not yet capable of empathy, and exceeds Nikolajeva's claim that this age is when empathy is just beginning to develop (2013, p.249).

Most importantly, the children's actions following on from the sessions (making worry doll notes to deal with anxiety; being kind to children they saw struggling with friendships; referring to stories when solving social-emotional conflicts), demonstrated how the stories had given them strategies for dealing with different emotions and developed their capacity for active expression of empathy. In this way the project had a profound impact for all of the children in my class and the research suggests that picturebooks are extremely valuable in supporting emotional literacy for young children, when introduced in small dialogic reading sessions.

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PART 2: CULTURE, HUMOUR AND CREATIVE READING RESEARCH



INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE, HUMOUR AND CREATIVE READING RESEARCH

HELEN JONES

When editing each chapter in the following section of the book, I have been excited and encouraged at every turn of the page. From Ellen Beer's joyful use of humorous books to engage early readers and Kate Donnelly's in-depth study of her own children's reading habits we get a powerful sense of why children might choose to read. Lucy Timmons' chapter highlights the importance of using drama to bring texts alive, while my own chapter on developing a comics lending library considers the importance of creating a space for this medium in schools. Both Karen Longman and Ameena Gamiet have researched the significance of representation in children's literature and their chapters contain powerful evidence of the need for children to read texts that both teach them about other cultures and reflect their own.

What I've found most exciting about reading these studies, is the transformative journey each researcher has gone on in the process of their projects. These chapters truly reflect the power of practitioner and action research, and I hope they give anyone reading them a spark to give it a go themselves.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF CREATING A SCHOOL-BASED COMICS LENDING LIBRARY FOR 7 TO 8-YEAR-OLDS?

HELEN JONES

Loved by children, but often rejected by educationalists, children's comics are only now emerging as being seen to have potential in engaging and developing children as readers (Burger, 2018; Evans, 2015; Gravett, 2014; Groensteen, 2009; Millard & Marsh, 2001). This study examines the impact on children's reading of a short research project during which I established a comics lending library in a school for the use of Year 3 pupils. Within this essay, I use the term 'comics' as a catch all term for the medium and when referring to paper periodicals, and the term 'graphic novels' to refer to comics published in book form.

The project was brought about when I noticed my eight-year-old daughter, although generally an engaged and capable reader, no longer chose to read at home her home-school readers (books generally from reading schemes and often adaptations of 'classics'). At home her chosen reading included a wide range of material, both written and multimodal and, increasingly, graphic novels. I began to ask myself, why was the material brought home from school not representative of her reading interests?

This study examines the theory behind reading for pleasure and reading engagement and the potential of the medium of comics in relation to this. The impact of the comics library is examined by studying how children chose to engage with the texts, and how it affected their opinions of themselves as readers, as well as considering the wider impact on the teacher and parents. Building on research by Millard and Marsh (2001) into a home-school comics lending library, this study examines whether comics are still relevant reading material 20 years later.

It is not a statutory requirement for schools in England to have a dedicated library space, however numerous studies have shown that school libraries can positively impact on reading for pleasure, on pupils' self-esteem and feelings of success and accomplishment, as well as general academic attainment

(Teravainen & Clark, 2017). In addition, parental involvement is also important in supporting children to become engaged readers (Cremin et al., 2014). It was for this reason I chose to set up a lending library, through which children would be able to engage with comics in school and at home.

The Reading for Pleasure Agenda

An influential OECD report of 2002 concluded that:

Being a frequent reader is more of an advantage than having well educated parents and finding ways to engage students in reading maybe one of the most effective ways to leverage social change (p.3)

Subsequently, getting pupils to engage as readers became part of the 2010-2015 UK Government's agenda to drive up educational standards. The publication of a new National Curriculum in 2013 aimed to support children to 'develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment' (DfE, 2013, p.3). In 2015 the Department of Education (DfE) published the paper *Reading: The Next Steps*, which noted that:

Children who love reading will read more and, over time, choose literature which is more demanding and suitably stretching. It creates a virtuous circle: as the amount a child reads increases, their reading attainment improves, which in turn encourages them to read more. (p.17)

Underlying this report is an implicit ideology of what 'literature' is, with reference to 'great works', 'our world class literary heritage' (my emphasis) and the 'canon of English literature – from Christopher Marlowe to Ian McEwan' (ibid., p.7-23). The document mentions only poetry, plays and novels as literary texts, and only those written by authors of British heritage. There is no mention of the possible value of non-fiction, of picturebooks, comics or multimodal texts, or of texts from other languages or cultures. In addition, the report appears to view reading for pleasure as a tool for improving academic reading

attainment, rather than considering the possibility of creating readers for life (Cremin et al., 2014). To me, this is the antithesis of what reading for pleasure is, equating it exclusively with academic achievement and a specific canon of fiction books.

Creating Engaged Readers who Read for Pleasure

Encouraging children to become engaged readers is not, for many parents, carers or teachers, a simple matter of creating the 'virtuous circle' outlined by the DfE. Children who read for pleasure must do so through their own agency and find satisfaction in the process (Cremin et al., 2014). In addition, engaged readers can be considered to read for pleasure as a form of play (Nell, 1998) and as part of a pattern of entertainment embedded in a range of media (Cremin et al., 2014 citing Hitchcock, 2010), which includes non-fiction as well as fiction (Alexander & Jarmen, 2018). Children should be given 'the time and the space to make their own reading choices' (Hempel-Jorgensen et al., 2018, p.87) in order to develop their own reading networks (Meek, 1988; Moss & McDonald, 2004). Reading for pleasure should also be recognised as an integral part of children's emerging identities (Parry & Taylor, 2018) in which textual diversity is essential (Cremin et al, 2014). Children come to school with a whole range of literacy experiences that should be integrated and celebrated (Bromley, 1999; Parry & Taylor, 2018). Importantly, what reading for pleasure should not omit is that children, like adults, need to take 'time out' (Meek, 1988, p.25) and that reading choices should also reflect this. Therefore, it is perhaps best to consider the engaged reader as one who can locate themselves within Wolf and Heaths' (1994) metaphor of a braid of literacy. It is arguable that it is through cultivating a child's multi-stranded understanding of themselves as a reader, one who understands that they have the right to choose how they engage with a multitude of texts (Pennac, 2006) that a child who chooses to read for pleasure emerges.

The Role of Comics in Engaging Readers

Comics have always suffered from a lack of legitimacy (Groensteen, 2009). Throughout the 20th century, comics for children struggled against censorship, being suspected of

corrupting the morality of young people (Gravett, 2014; Groensteen, 2009) and described by educationalists as aggressive, unsubtle, deplorable, saccharine, uncouth and feebly emasculating (Millard & Marsh, 2001). Even when viewed in a positive light, comics are often seen as 'useful primers, stepping stones to literacy, but not worth reading in their own right' (Gravett, 2005, p.11). An often-used analogy is that of the difference between the nourishing high art of novels and poetry versus the mass-produced junk food of popular culture (Reynolds, 1993; Marsh & Millard, 2000).

In previous decades, one of the barriers to the use of comics in schools has been an underlying assumption that in children's reading the movement from picturebooks to words is 'a matter of intellectual progression' (Millard & Marsh, 2001, p.27) and visual literacy has been largely ignored. However, in a progressively multi-literate society the importance of developing these skills is increasing. In comics, as with picturebooks, children must negotiate the complex counterpoint between words and images (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). Within Comics Studies there is a strong focus on the relationship between the text and the reader, reflecting Reader Response Theory derived from Rosenblatt and Iser, in which the reader must contribute a unique meaning to the text, filling the gaps (Danziger-Russell, 2013). McCloud describes the reader as 'a conscious and willing collaborator' (1994, p.65). This collaboration is forced through the medium itself, in the interaction of the images and texts, which the reader must synthesise into a coherent meaning (Hughes & King, 2010, citing Gutierrez, 2008). Bromley (1999) notes in relation to *The Beano*, that the child reader is 'always regarded as an active thinker, a problem solver' (p.31), and similarly, Nodelman describes the reader of a comic as being invited to 'join in a pulsing and ever shifting movement in to and out of numerous possibilities of illustrative connections' (2013, p.439). Rosen, in observing his young son reading *The Beano*, comments that reading comics calls on 'various kinds of sophistication in picking messages, codes, structures and meanings that are not immediately apparent' (1996, p.135) that led his son onto the realisation that 'any text is readable' (ibid). This was also noticeable in the research of Bourelle (2018) who

noticed that students were able to apply what they had learnt from reading comics to the analysis of advertisements, graphic design and film.

Another strength of the medium is the way in which comics function as social texts. It has been argued that it is impossible to read a comic to a child (Meek, 1988), and this is certainly my experience. To read a comic together, negotiating the interplay of words and images, you must do so 'accepted as a peer' (ibid, p.26) as the readers are both the 'teller and the told' (ibid, p.25), negotiating and constructing a shared meaning of the text.

A final consideration of the role of comics in engaging children as readers is that they are not always perceived as reading in a formal sense by children (Cremin, 2015), and that a great deal of what children choose to read in their leisure time is not book based (Cremin et al., 2014). In addition, recent research into children's reading habits showed that around a quarter of girls in the 5-10 age group prefer comics and magazines to books, and for boys that figure is much higher, at almost 45% (Egmont Publishing, 2017, citing Nielsen Children's Deep Dive, 2016). Comics often play a role in children's informal literacies rather than schooled literacies, part of the domain of 'ours' and 'play', rather than 'school' and 'work' (Moss, 2000). Therefore, there is a certain subversion in placing comics in the school context, going against the flow of the one-way traffic of cultural capital from school to home (Marsh & Millard, 2000).

To summarise, comics appear to have every potential to support and develop children's reading engagement, and a child's understanding of themselves as an active participant in the act of reading. Skills learnt in reading comics can be applied to a wide range of literature, both text based and multimodal. Comics are an important element of many children's reading repertoire and remain a crucial part of their 'time out'.

Methodology

The research took place in a large, four form entry primary school in the London Borough of Lambeth. The four classes which participated in borrowing comics from the library were from the Year 3 cohort of just under 120 seven-to-eight-year-old

children. The school does much to support and promote home school reading, with a weekly 'parents into reading' slot, during which parents of children up to and including Year 3 are invited to read for half an hour with children in the classroom. Each classroom has a book area, but there is no whole school library.

As a parent of children at the school (although none were part of the Year 3 cohort) I was positioned as having a personal interest in the comic library, with the hope I could influence the school community to see the importance of both a lending library and the role of comics in promoting children's engagement with reading. The study took on an action research model and a reflective diary was maintained (Bearne et al., 2007). As a methodological approach, action research can be defined as 'a democratic and participative orientation to knowledge creation' (Bradbury, 2015, p.1). Focusing on the goal of improvement, the researcher is embedded within the research itself, in self-reflection or collaboration with others, in a cyclical process of development (Bradbury, 2015; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010).

The research took place over an eight-week period, during which each class had five half hour weekly library sessions, with children also being able to borrow comics during class time. The school was unable to provide any funds for the library, so the stock was collected in a variety of ways. Primarily, requests for donations were sent out to parents and the local community. In addition, comics were obtained from Free Comic Book Day, an international event held each May. Publishers and local bookshops also donated. By the start of the project over 300 publications had been collected. Later on during the project, the school's parents and friends group provided £500 to support the library. In deciding how to spend this money, possible purchases were shared with the children, and they voted on which to buy, increasing the library stock to around 400 texts. The stock tried to incorporate as wide a range of age-appropriate comic genres as possible, including weekly publications, graphic novels and manga, with authors representing a range of cultures.

Evidence about the impact of the library was collected in a range of ways. Due to the large number of children and parents

involved in the research, questionnaires were used as the most efficient way to collect feedback from children, teachers and parents. In addition, to collect data about how the children and teaching staff were engaging with comics in the library, they were observed and photographed during library sessions. From each class a focus group of three children identified by their teachers as reluctant readers were chosen to monitor any impact of the project on their engagement and audio recordings of these children reading and talking about the texts were made. In addition, children also made their own comics. In the collection of evidence all names have been changed, the BERA (2011) ethical guidelines have been followed and ethical approval granted by Goldsmiths University.

Discussion of Findings

Three key themes, which will be examined below, can be drawn from the evidence collected during the project:

- The role of a comics library in building a community of comics readers.
- Comics readers became comics makers.
- Children's increased confidence as readers.

The role of a comics library in building a community of comics readers.

I loved how excited my class were to visit the lending library. I also liked how well the children engaged with one another when discussing and sharing comics.

– Class teacher

The library was met with almost universal enthusiasm. 78% of the Year 3 cohort reported that they 'loved' coming to use the library, with 97% of the children reporting 'really liking' or above. Borrowing records showed that children chose widely across the different types of comics available, and that there were no specific gender lines for choices.

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The children looked forward to visiting the library and valued being able to choose and borrow comics, and enjoyed interacting with others about their choices:

At home my dad reads Marvel comics which I don't enjoy, so here I can express myself and have fun.

– Year 3 child

I love swapping comics with my friends and exchanging jokes from the Beano.

– Year 3 child

The class teachers recognised the potential in children's agency in choosing and swapping comics, and noted how much it engaged reluctant readers:

Some of the reluctant readers were the keenest on swapping. Swapping and recommending...has been a highlight.

– Class teacher



Figure 1: Three children discuss their comic choices.

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During the library sessions children often chose to read the comics alongside each other or in small groups (see figure 1 & figure 2). These were often fluid groupings, which changed in size and type of discussion across each class's time slot in the library. Groups were often based on existing friendships, and borrowing or sharing of texts in a series (e.g., Pokémon) was common, children working as a reading network to actively share interests (Moss & McDonald, 2004). This was particularly noticeable when observing children reading comics from a series, during which they chose to read alongside one another, occasionally stopping to share notes and facts, jokes or to swap comics. As one teacher commented:

Everyone was engaged and sharing opinions - evaluating - even my reluctant readers.



Figure 2: Children read a comic together.

Discussion topics varied, but were often about the types of comics, stories, characters and adverts and also occasionally about issues that arose, for example the appropriateness of a character being called Fatty:

LAYLA: It is very funny and it's really, really weird ...

JAMES: Yes it is really rude and really weird because someone is called Fatty.

SADDIQ: It's a bit...

JAMES: ...no, seriously! Someone is called Fatty!

SADDIQ: It's a bit awkward.

This type of talk was typified by Mercer's (2000) concepts of explorative and cumulative talk with speakers exploring or building on each other's ideas to jointly construct meaning. In addition, more informal types of talk were observed, during which children were able to switch voice regularly (Maybin, 2003) from peer, to teacher, to clowning around, to character in the text (Pearson, 2010), demonstrating that children can engage as readers in a way 'not always determined by adults' (Watson, 1992, p.6).

Another approach to social reading was acting out the comics as scripts, which often occurred when children were reading the narrative together and can be seen as an 'active and empathetic response' (Pearson, 2010, p.10), supporting the argument that comics actively involve the reader (McCloud, 1994). Children were observed adopting roles, putting on voices for characterisation, using actions and using onomatopoeia sounds on the page. This also made the reading egalitarian, supporting Meeks' (1988) argument that the reading of a comic must occur between people as peers, rather than hierarchically. As noted by one child in their questionnaire:

Everyone can get involved and have fun.

Comics readers became comics makers.



Figure 3: A child copies from a comic at lunchtime.

One unexpected development from the project was the number of children who began to start making comics in their free time and at home. For example, 71% of parents who responded to the questionnaire reported that their child had made a comic at home as a result of the project:

She has made a comic strip and I was impressed with the standard. She seemed to understand the concept and styles of the writing well.

– Year 3 parent

He is working on a few different ideas – one that he asked us to help with and one on his own. He started by copying the comics that he likes but is now developing his own style and characters.

– Year 3 parent

Children brought in comics they had made at home, and also created comics in class and at lunchtime in the playground (see figure 3 & figure 4). This demonstrated that children, although not having been directly taught the conventions of the comics, were able to begin to apply key features to their own work, and that their enjoyment of reading the comics led them to write comics for pleasure in their free time.

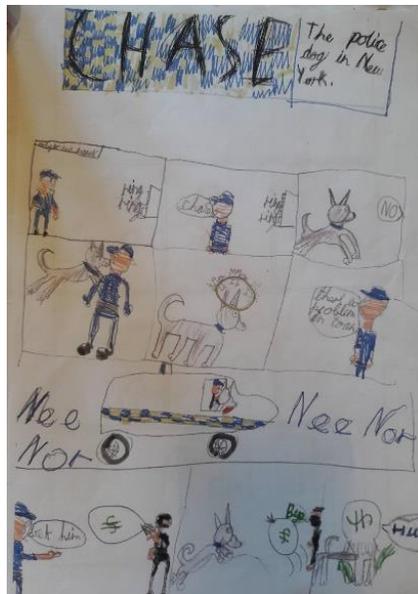


Figure 4: Children made their own comic strips at home and brought them into school.

Children's increased confidence as readers

Before the project, 77% of the children considered themselves as a 'good' to 'excellent' reader. However, 23% of the children considered themselves as an 'about average' reader (none regarded themselves below this). After the project was completed, there was a clear shift upwards in children's perceptions of themselves as readers. In particular, only 9% of the children now reported themselves as 'about average' readers, with 91% reporting themselves to be a 'good' to 'excellent'

above (figure 5), several words associated with reading for pleasure jump out – ‘love’, ‘books’, ‘like’, ‘reading’ – but most importantly, two not mentioned in the English National Curriculum – ‘comics’ and ‘fun’. While comics sit quite firmly outside the ‘great canon of English literature’, their potential was widely acknowledged by the parents and teachers involved in the project, and the library’s positive effect on Year 3 readers was observed by the wider school community – indeed the parent group saw the promise of the school having a whole school library and donated funds to the school to support the creation of one. Comics are a successful medium with which to bridge the gap between home and school reading practices, setting up the potential for two-way traffic between school and home reading (Marsh & Millard, 2000). To me, it is clear that comics have a specific role to play in developing children as having agency in reading and writing, and as collaborative readers. Having completed this research in 2018, I have continued to research into children’s enjoyment of comics, with a particular focus on children’s own comics making, self-publishing and engagement of reading comics made by peers (Jones, 2020). This is an area needing further research, particularly within the UK, and is the focus for my PhD thesis. The reading and creation of comics in primary schools is something I hope schools will embrace more in the future.

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WHAT SHAPES HOW MY CHILDREN CHOOSE BOOKS AND WHAT ROLE DO I HAVE AS A PARENT?

KATY DONNELLY

This chapter focuses on how my children (Ella, aged seven and Madison, aged ten) choose books, with the aim of understanding what shapes their choices, what they find difficult and what I, as an adult and parent, can do to support them. The research examines how different factors influence their choices, including mediators, such as teachers, friends and siblings; genre and author; appearance and presentation; how they see themselves as readers; the context in which they access books; and motivators such as the Summer Reading Challenge. Drawing on this knowledge, I examine what this means for my role as a mediator and how what I do changes their behaviour.

My focus on choosing books comes from an interest in how children develop the habit of reading for pleasure. My experience as a parent is that the National Curriculum leaves little space for reading for pleasure, concentrating instead on functional literacy and comprehension skills required for standardised assessments. I have focused on choosing books as a core element of reading for pleasure: being able to browse and sift through books; to identify genre and style; to develop preferences; to be confident to try (and not necessarily like or finish) new types of books; and to develop independence and an identity as a 'reader'.

This chapter first reviews the literature about children's choice making and reading and also looks at theories that give some insight into the family dynamic in which this research takes place. It goes on to outline the methodology used, drawing on the lessons from parental diaries of children's reading. These two sections form the framework for an analysis of my findings which looks at what I learnt about my children's choices - what interests and motivates them as well as the skills they deploy - and the extent to which their reading choices are bound up with how they see themselves as readers.

Exercising Choice

Exercising choice about what to read is a key part of reading for pleasure. Krashen (1993) links free voluntary reading to motivation, which in turn increases reading frequency and competence. Similarly, Schraw et al. (1998) identify choice and autonomy as intrinsic motivators for readers, strengthening reader engagement while Sanacore (1999, p.42) describes how good choices enable young readers to 'experience success as they pursue a sense of self-determination' and Gambrell (1996, p.21) identifies the 'power of choice', noting that when children were asked about books they most enjoyed, over 80% identified books they had chosen themselves. This pattern is supported by recent survey data (Scholastic, 2015) with very high proportions of children agreeing that their favourite books (91%) and those that they are most likely to finish (90%) are ones they have chosen themselves.

In their review of the evidence linking choice and reading, Clark and Phythian-Sence (2008, p.4) conclude that 'providing choice can be a motivational strategy' and that 'choice empowers the individual, instils ownership in the task, and encourages self-determination in literacy learning'. However, Clark and Phythian-Sence also add a note of caution, citing Renck-Jolango (2007), Flowerday (2004) and Schwartz (2000) commenting that to be 'effective and empowering' choice needs to be 'informed and meaningful' (ibid, 2008, p.4) and link this to the development of appropriate skills and strategies. Drawing on a review of the literature, Clark and Phythian-Sence (2008, p.5-6) identify strategies in the following categories: clues on the book (title, blurb etc.); elements of the book (genre, or quick sample); cautionary clues (things the reader knows they don't like); recommendations (peers, adults, reviews etc.); and readability (e.g. sampling to check not too hard to read).

In a similar way both Chambers (1983; 2011) and Krashen (1993) identify how learning to browse, assess and choose a book is a skill gained through experience. There is no simple formula that can be taught, but an enabling adult can support a child reader to identify patterns and signals such as genre, style and author that they can use to develop their skill set; as well as the confidence

to take risks. Chambers (2011) focuses on the enabling adult positioned within the reading circle which is a continuing sequence of selection (availability and access to books), response (book talk – formal and informal) and reading (time and space to read). Of particular relevance to this study are his recommendations around choosing books, where he positions the adult in an active facilitative role, using informal conversations, more structured 'try these' and 'have you read this?' sessions and targeted book recommendations.

Alongside academic studies there is also a number of books aimed at parents, encouraging them to read to their children from infancy, to build reading into a daily routine and to model reading within a family (Butler, 1986, 1995; Fox, 2008; Meek, 1982) as well as how to negotiate the thorny issue of restrictions on screen time (David, 2014) and supporting reluctant or struggling readers (Jennings, 2003). There is relatively little about the practicalities of choosing books. Many provide lists of books, which can date rapidly, and, even where the stated objective is not to, create a sense that there are 'good' and 'less good' books to choose. Overall, the emphasis is on understanding and working from a child's interests and offering as wide a range of different books (and other media) that make relevant connections to those interests.

The consistent themes are facilitating choice but also matching a child's interest. Clark and Phythian-Sence (2008) examined the evidence about the role interest plays in reader engagement and how this compares to the impact of choice, highlighting that while 'choice empowers learners and creates personal responsibility to complete an activity' (p.3) matching and securing interest is key in terms of motivation. Research examining what children choose to read shows how diverse and personal interests are. Hall and Coles (1999) compared their findings from their own research with *The Whitehead Study - Children and their Books 1969-74* and found that little has changed in the intervening twenty years in terms of the diversity and range of the books children choose to read and that 'children greatly value the opportunity given to them by book reading to exercise their own choice and

to pursue highly individual interests and tastes through books' (Hall & Coles, 1999, p.137; quoting Whitehead et al, 1977).

As my research progressed it became apparent that our family dynamic and relationships were influencing how my children viewed themselves as readers and the book choices they made. I therefore looked at theories in child development and in particular at attachment theory as developed by Bowlby (Bowlby, 2005; Marrone, 2014) and links to individual psychology as developed by Adler (Peluso et al, 2004; Whiteman, McHale & Soli, 2011). Attachment theory focuses on the nature of the relationship between parent and child and posits that the interaction between parents and child depend on the security of the attachment the child forms with the parent which in turn influences how they perceive themselves and develop wider relationships and behaviours. There is however relatively little research about attachment between siblings (Whiteman, McHale & Soli, 2011) which is where individual psychology, which also links relationships and behaviour to experience of social interactions provides models of sibling rivalry and differentiation of interests and identity as key elements of a family dynamic (Peluso et al, 2004).

Approach and Methodology

In developing an approach to the research, I took parent diaries as a starting point. As traced by Whalen-Levitt (1980) and Arizpe and Styles (2011) parent diaries offer an important contemporary source of information about children's reading. The examples they cite are mainly from the late 20th century and are primarily focused on very young children's reactions to books and the impact reading has on early literacy skills. Mills' (2002-2013) diaries of reading with his son Hal, cover an extended period up to age 11 and there is growing number of parent book blogs such as *Playing by the Book* (Toft, 2015) and *Read it Daddy* (2015) which although less in the form of a diary and slanted towards book reviews, offer insights into children's responses to books over an extended period. Of most relevance to how children choose books are examples of how children develop the beginnings of critical skills, as noted by Arizpe and Styles (2011, p.16) 'the child-readers knew that they could participate in the

making of meaning with the adult readers and also in the evaluation of the texts'. Mills also illustrates how shared reading between parent and child provides a key focus for attachment and security due to the one-on-one shared focus and attention inherent in the activity: 'an experience of being closely connected to the person who looks after you, and feeling safe because of it' (Mills, 2002).

Arizpe and Styles (2011, p.13) acknowledge the limitations of such diaries in that they almost exclusively reflect experience in 'economically and educationally privileged families' where reading is valued, and books are easily accessible. Cochran Smith (1980) questions the extent to which such diaries offer a useful evidence base from which to draw wider conclusions, describing them as 'somehow incomplete and more anecdotal than explanatory' (p.4). Both Cochran Smith (1980) and Whalen-Levitt (1980) argue for more systematic data collection that details more explicitly the context and methods used and includes supplementary data in the form of recordings and transcripts to balance and supplement the diarists' initial and personal interpretation.

While observation (in the form of a journal) forms the core of my data, conscious of the limitations outlined above, I supplemented this with a variety of approaches including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and mini-case studies. The additional methods were chosen to allow my children's voice and opinions to be heard (Green & Hill, 2005). My aim in using such an approach was to build up an understanding from different sources of data in such a way that provides a multifaceted view of the findings and richer detail. While I recognise that it is not possible to triangulate a fixed or definitive interpretation of how my children choose books (Green & Hill, 2005) in selecting a range of approaches to data collection I aimed to support some interrogation of how my perception and interpretation of my children's thinking and actions may differ from their own.

Although this research took place in the home rather than in a formal educational context, I aimed to incorporate key strands of action research in investigating what was happening when my children chose books and examine the impact of changes or

interventions on that process. (Bearne, Graham & Marsh, 2007). The access I had also allowed me to adjust my approach dependent on my children's response, for example interviewing did not work with Ella, but she was happy to draw.

The ease of access I have to my children has allowed considerable informal observation and discussion, but inevitably also places me as an active focus of influence within the research (Dunn, 2005) and brings specific ethical issues into play (Shepherd et al., 2013). I did not want my children to feel obliged to take part and tried to be relaxed about whether or not they chose to participate. I also did not want them to feel that there were 'right' or 'wrong' answers, but they will inevitably have made their own judgements about the answers I was looking for. Although my approach to the research aimed to surface some of my assumptions and behaviours towards my children, there will clearly be others that I have not recognised.

The methods used are as follows:

- A review of literature (outlined above).
- Observation of choice making recorded through a journal (similar to a parent diary), including specific contexts (library, bookshop, home).
- Semi-structured interviews, including: a general overview about how they choose books and focused on specific contexts and books drawing on Chambers' approach of open questioning to frame book talk based on the opening of 'tell me...'. (Chambers, 2011)
- Mini-case studies: which included first chapter trials; looking at the same book in different editions; and exploring 'good choices'.

Findings and Analysis

Both my children, in different ways, have struggled with choosing books. Madison, aged 10, is a voracious reader but tends to read in concentrated phases. Her reading pattern has been to seek familiarity in series, author, or genre. When she has exhausted a particular theme or series she has become quite stuck and frustrated by trying to find her next book. At the start of the research she was very cautious about making an investment in a book she was uncertain about and reticent about trying new styles or genres.

Ella, aged 7, has good functional reading skills for her age, but doesn't read by choice. She loves being read to and listening to audio books and also enjoys writing her own stories. Her preference is however for screen based entertainment. Her pattern is to choose books very quickly and impulsively, and then not like or read them. She often chooses books that are too hard for her and is then frustrated by them.

Madison and Ella were both very clear about their book preferences. Madison looks for adventure and fast-moving storylines, linked to her areas of interests and is increasingly using books to help work out a confusing pre-teen world. Ella also likes adventure and exciting stories but is perhaps clearer about what she doesn't like (fairies and princesses). Ella also demonstrated a greater awareness and interest in what her peers were reading. Both see interest, as much as choice, as linked to their motivation to read, in line with Clark & Phythian-Sence (2008) acknowledging that they have enjoyed books they haven't chosen (mainly at school).

Taking Clark and Phythian-Sence's (2008) framework of choice strategies, Madison identified and demonstrated a range of strategies: looking at the title and author, cover illustration, blurb, clues about the genre and the characters. Her responses show a complex range of judgements, reflecting visual literacy and sensitivity to messages being sent. In the library and bookstore visits, faced with shelves of books with the spine facing out, Madison stuck to finding authors she already knew. Her exploration of books and authors new to her were prompted by

table or shelf displays – with links to other things she had read a regular factor.

Ella identified early knowledge of the strategies she could use to choose books (e.g. front cover and blurb), but is not yet that clear about using them and identifies what she calls “my kind of books” (shorter early chapter books) as hard to find in both bookshops and the library. In the library this meant she avoided looking at the books for some time as these books were mixed in with the reading scheme type of books (regarded as schoolbooks and avoided) and the longer books for older children. She is still learning some key navigational skills (such as alphabetical order) and shelves showing books spine out are very difficult for her to navigate - she can't scan the titles quickly and the front cover is key. She is also very sensitive about the use of age ranges -not wanting to be grouped with 5-year-olds - which contributes to a tendency to pick books that are too hard.

In terms of motivation both Madison and Ella were resistant to extrinsic motivators such as school reading logs and the Summer Reading Challenge (organised through libraries by the Reading Agency). School logs prompt conflict with Ella and for Madison stalled her reading as she felt it turned her reading from something she did for enjoyment to something that was being monitored. Ella was keen on the rewards of the Summer Reading Challenge and being seen to get the certificate but focused on getting rewards rather than reading for pleasure. For Madison it is something she feels she ought to do rather than impacting on her reading where her motivation is very strongly intrinsic. This is in line with Clark and Rumbold's (2006) identification of weak evidence linking extrinsic motivators and reading for pleasure.

In response to my findings about their choice making, I looked at my role as an enabling adult (Chambers, 2011). In encouraging Madison to be more adventurous in her choices, I tried reading out loud to her the first chapters of a selection of books. I struggled to overcome her suspicion of my recommendations until I noticed that she had read and enjoyed one of the books I had read as part of my MA in Children's Literature. I then started more actively passing on to her books I was reading, still reading the first few pages or chapter to her first to help her test out her

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interest before she read it. Although resistant to talking extensively about the books (too much like school), this shared reading has resulted in shared references that have reinforced the reading pleasure (for both of us). This approach also resulted in her reading a very diverse range of books - moving from books mainly from a series or familiar author and in quite specific genres to more standalone books with diverse formats and genres and has influenced her choice beyond books we both read. Figure 1 shows some mini book reviews she did of the books she had read. It is noticeable that the books chosen from early on in the year are representative of whole series that she read (and in some cases re-read). These focus on school stories (St Claire's, Trebizon, Malory Towers) and Greek and Roman themes (Percy Jackson, The Olympians, The Roman Mysteries). The books from later in the year are mainly stand alone and from a much more diverse range of genres and formats, including realism (The Other Side of Truth), science fiction (Phoenix), non-fiction (Girls are Best), and verse (Brown Girl Dreaming). Her star ratings for the later books indicate that there are some that she was not as sure about, but she reported being pleased to have read them.

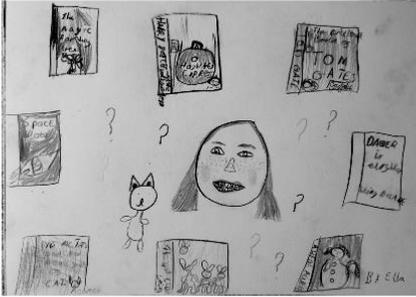


Figure 1: Madison's mini book reviews.

With Ella, I focused in on her interests trying to find books she would both enjoy and could read easily. After a few misses this was successful with the Tom Gates books (Pichon, 2011) which linked into the current school craze for diaries, featuring a (possibly recognisable) annoying older sister and containing text broken up by illustrations. I read the first book and tried to make links with other books she had enjoyed. I also tried to share strategies for testing the readability of books, again with mixed success. Part of this is that Ella finds sustained reading more difficult than I had appreciated (which requires different strategies), but it is also about her attitude to reading and an overall reluctance to read, rather than about not finding the right book.

My children's responses to the questions used in Clark (2011; 2015) and Scholastic (2015), reveal that they have different perceptions of themselves as readers: Madison strongly identifies as a reader, both in a school and home context and sees it as a key leisure activity that she enjoys. For Ella, identifying herself as a (good) reader among her peers and at school is clearly important to her, but she does not see reading as a leisure activity. It was noticeable that Ella defined her choices in opposition to those of her sister ("she's boring"; "not Madison books") and her comments indicate she views Madison as the reader and has created an identity for herself that differentiates herself from this, in line with theories about sibling rivalry and differentiation in individual psychology (Peluso et al., 2004). This is not however entirely straightforward as many of the books that Ella identified as being 'good choices' (figure 2) are books that she has shared an interest in with her sister and have featured extensively in their play together.

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These are drawings of books Ella considered 'good choices'.

Her commentary on a selection of the books is given below (my questions and observations are in italics)

This is me and this is Cat Cat, my favourite toy and I like reading stories to him when I am in bed...

The Magic Faraway Tree, Enid Blyton

Mummy chose it.

Listened to as audio books about 12 months ago - don't remember choosing it but may have suggested it- was one of the first books Madison read herself and Ella was keen to read it too. Tried to read it herself, but got frustrated so asked to have as audio book.

Harry Potter (not specific about which book), J.K. Rowling

I like Hogwarts and magical things. *What made you choose that one?* I just told you that. Because it's got magical things...and you can see that it has? Yeah you can see that it has because 1., I have an older sister who spoils it and 2....

What do you mean that she spoils it? Well she says that it...that it is magical...And does that spoil it or does that sometimes makes you want to read it? It spoils it...

Read series aloud to her last year. Tried to stop after first one (as we had with Madison), but Ella insisted we read on. Has also seen all the films. Reading them to Ella, prompted Madison to read them herself and the characters and stories have been a consistent theme in their shared imaginary play for the last year.

The Brilliant World of Tom Gates, Liz Pichon

Recently I am reading Tom Gates, at the moment...it's like a diary, it's quite funny and its like mmmm.... I like how they are in a band and they keep on practicing and um there is this boy called Dirt ...Doik (giggles) I called him Doik, it's not Doik it's Dirk. And Dirk and Tom are in a band, but Dirk can't play the drums and the keyboard at the same time, so they have to try to find a new band member.

One of the books I found for Ella after discussions with her about what she liked. In the diary genre (current craze at school) and features an annoying big sister. Text broken up with pictures and right level of difficulty. Has been one of the first chapter books she has read through herself.

Figure 2: "Good choices".

Ella's responses also indicate that the way she feels about reading is part of the dynamic in our relationship. Although she values being read to, the pleasure in the story and the individual attention are closely intertwined. Reading for pleasure is not yet a sufficient motivator in itself for her to persevere with reading independently. This is partly about fluency, but also about her attitude to reading. Ella was much more resistant to engaging in the research and has resented the time I have spent on the MA (and not with her). This has given a focus on reading an extra emotional edge. From the parent diaries cited above, I can see that this location of reading in a family relationship is not unusual,

for example, the patterns of my discussions with Ella about reading strongly echo Mills' (2002-2013) anxieties about wanting to do everything to encourage his son in reading but being very wary of creating any sense of potentially damaging disapproval or criticism if he doesn't.

Madison arguably has also positioned reading as a key strand of our relationship - but as a source of closeness and shared interest (and perhaps also differentiating herself from her sister). She has also shown a close interest in the research and wanted to play an active part. This has meant that it is impossible to disentangle the interventions I made from the effect of doing the research in itself. Her knowledge of the research has led to her reflecting on, recognising and questioning herself her patterns of choice and reading. When we discussed this, she acknowledged that this had meant she had started to be more adventurous in her choice of books and described herself as "less self-conscious" and "less worried about what I or her teacher thought about what she was reading" and seems much clearer and more confident about her motivations for reading.

Conclusions

My findings are clearly very specific to my children and our family context and although some of the things I did may work for other children, they do not form the basis of generalisable conclusions. For me, this research has underlined the importance of the role I can have as a parent acting as an enabling adult. It demonstrates that access to books and an environment that values and encourages reading (as is the case in our home) is not in itself necessarily sufficient to engage children in reading for pleasure. Children also need strategies for choosing books and making links with their individual interests so that they can access the pleasure reading can bring. Parents are potentially in a strong position to support this.

These findings also show that where reading is valued within a family, it can also become part of the family dynamic and the extent to which each family member embraces or rejects its importance becomes part of establishing an identity and the relationship with other family members. Both my children's

perceptions of themselves as readers is partly bound up in their relationship with me and with each other. There are clearly further issues to explore here about attachment and sibling positioning in their relationships. Given the vastness of this field, they fall beyond the scope of this study, but would be an interesting area for future research. For our family, the process of consciously observing and reflecting on Madison and Ella's behaviours has surfaced these dynamics and leaves us with the question of what happens now that we have that awareness and how might we shift our behaviour accordingly.

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HOW CAN DRAMA ENABLE CHILDREN TO ENGAGE WITH AND INTERPRET 'TWELFTH NIGHT', BY SHAKESPEARE?

LUCY TIMMONS

As a pedagogue and a professionally trained actress I followed an action research line of enquiry (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010) to see what impact drama experiences have on children's abilities to interpret and engage with Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*. My body of experience is twofold. At the time of this research project I was the Deputy Head of a primary school in South East London, in an area with high deprivation and a lack of social mobility. I had also worked as a professional actress for five years having trained at the Oxford School of Drama from 2010 to 2011, gaining a Diploma in Professional Acting.

In the current climate, schools are under immense pressure to prepare children to take standardised assessments in the form of a selection of questions designed to ascertain their ability to infer, deduce and retrieve from text. Hanke (2014) in her research around guided reading sessions identified continuing concerns about interpretation and implementation. In her book on Hans-Georg Gadamer, Vilhauer (2010, p.3) shared Gadamer's definition of hermeneutics as 'the theory and practice of interpretation'. When explaining Gadamer's view, Vilhauer states that when encountering a piece of art or interpreting a text, nothing 'can replace what is learned in our basic experiences of watching, listening, or reading in which we become caught up in what is communicated to us; no examination of 'facts' can enable us to grasp the meaning that speaks to us through them' (2010, p.4). This view underpins what I aimed to explore through this project: how drama, which involves action to explain or reveal something, can enable children to interpret the meaning of a text. This chapter will analyse the types of interpretations children make in a situation where professional rehearsal room techniques or ensemble-based learning strategies (Franks et al., 2014; Neelands, 2009a) are used as a way for children to engage with and interpret a text.

Rehearsal Room Pedagogy and Theories of Learning

The primary schools I have worked in very much underpin their curriculum design around Vygotsky's theory of learning as an essentially social process (1978). This idea that children learn through engaging with each other is now ubiquitous (Alexander, 2006; Barnes, 1992; Chambers, 1991, 1996; Fisher, 2009; Franks et al., 2014; Smidt, 2009; Taylor, 2012; Wells Rowe, 1998). Barnes' (2008) theory of exploratory talk is based on what he has described as the constructivist view of learning, or social constructivism (Bloome & Egan-Roberston, 2004; Barnes et al, 1969). Barnes suggests:

it is only the learner who can bring the new information, procedures or ways of understanding to bear upon existing ideas, expectations and ways of thinking and acting. That is, the learner actively constructs the new way of understanding (2008, p.4).

Barnes describes this as working on understanding or trying out. He argues, that trying out 'enables us to see how far a new idea will take us, what it will or will not explain, where it contradicts our other beliefs, and where it opens up new possibilities' (ibid, p.5). It is the rehearsal room where trying out or working on understanding takes place. In the rehearsal room, actors use the space, their bodies, their voices, their hearts, their minds and each other to interpret text.

Franks et al (2014) discuss the Royal Shakespeare Company's (RSC) Learning Performance Network, a network designed to involve schoolteachers with the professional theatre company in delivering workshops which explore Shakespeare with children. Franks et al. (ibid) also describe theatre as a co-constructive, meaning-making process. Deborah Wells Rowe (1996) writes about the importance of dramatic play, describing drama as a 'risk free environment for exploration of books' (p.46). I strongly agree with her assertion that 'attention is focused most strongly on the activity itself rather than an end product' (ibid, p.5). I feel this is a great benefit of rehearsal room or ensemble pedagogy; it is the journey, not the destination that matters. The idea of

ensemble pedagogy being more concerned with the process than the outcome, with exploration and trying out, is in line with Bernstein's (1973, p.242) 'integrated code of boundary-less knowledge...the pedagogy which will be less concerned to emphasise the need to acquire states of knowledge but will be more concerned to emphasise how knowledge is created'. Neelands (2009b) describes a project similar to mine, where actors from the RSC worked closely with a group of young people to explore the themes of love, betrayal, identity and parental pressure in Hamlet. An actor on the project, described the young people as 'participants in a journey into the text.' This is precisely what we became in our ensemble approach to exploring 'Twelfth Night'.

Using a Shakespearean Text

I received classical acting training at Oxford, which entailed a lot of work on Shakespeare. I feel that, as a result, I can facilitate modes of learning which are 'an authentic re-creation of the real work done by actors' (Neelands & O Hanlon, 2011, p.240). As well as the practical reasons for my selection of Twelfth Night, I also had reasons based on my own experience and values. When I was at secondary school, my experience of Shakespeare was very much focused on analysing the words on the page. Instead, drama school, transported me to a whole new realm of meaning and a deep respect for Shakespeare's plays. As argued by Rosen, 'for many of us going through school, Shakespeare can come to be some kind of elaborate crossword puzzle...every Shakespeare play offers a multitude of possibilities for people to explore the ideas and meaning through performance' (2004, p.82). This is precisely what my research aimed to explore, children performing the text in order to interpret and engage with the meaning and ideas.

Methodology

The action research project was conducted with a Year 4 class (ages eight to nine years old). There were 30 children in the class. The class represented a diverse range of cultures, educational needs and backgrounds. I was well known to the children as the Deputy Head of the school. For ethical reasons, I obtained

informed consent (Bearne et al., 2007) from the parents and carers to carry out the project and to publish my findings. I also obtained the consent and support for the project from the Headteacher, the class teacher, and the supporting adult.

Analysis

The research was conducted from a 'participant-observer perspective' (Taylor, 2012, p.157). It is important to note here that in my role as Deputy Head, the children responded to me as a participant observer in a particular way, behaving in a particular way for me due to my position in the school, which may be different to how they would have behaved for an external researcher. The children were very familiar with my expectations for behaviour and routines. They knew I had trained as a professional actor and much work had gone into building a relationship of mutual respect. I mention this because this, arguably, could have impacted on the way the children responded to and conducted themselves during the workshops.

I created eight workshops around a number of themes in 'Twelfth Night'. I gathered and analysed a combination of observations, talk and visual methods. This is an adaptation of the 'mosaic approach' (Clark and Moss, 2001, p.9) all obtained through the creation of three interpretive modes:

- Physical interpretation including gesture
- Pupil to pupil communication including group discussion
- Graphic interpretation

Coupled with the mosaic framework, I used elements of Emrys Evans' (1992, p.32) analytical framework 'Response to Literature: a developmental model' which outlines a hierarchical and process-based approach to interpretation, progressing from one to six:

1. Unreflective interest in action;
2. Empathising;
3. Analogising;

4. Reflecting on the significance of events (theme) and behaviour (distance evaluation of characters);
5. Reviewing the whole work as the author's creation;
6. Consciously considered relationship with the author; recognition of textual ideology and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes.

This model enabled me to measure the degree of sophistication in the children's responses to *Twelfth Night*. Throughout my findings I refer to these process stages in italics.

Findings

Physical interpretation including gesture

My first set of findings were largely concerned with how a rehearsal room pedagogy gave the opportunity for the children to interpret the text physically, including use of gesture. It is possible to situate the relevance of physical interpretation in three theories: social semiotics which refers "to a process... the act of meaning making" (Iedema, 2001, p.187); 'intertextuality', which can be seen simply as the juxtaposition of different texts (Bloome and Robertson, 2004) and finally the rehearsal room or ensemble mantra of the Royal Shakespeare Company that is bodiliness or bodies in space (Franks et al., 2014). What rehearsal room or ensemble pedagogy provides is the chance for 'bodily activity intimately connected both with affect and intellect' (ibid, p.172). We used our bodiliness as our act of meaning making to explore the structure of the text, status and character building.

The Structure of the Text

The first three workshops were primarily concerned with grasping the plot of the story or the structure of the text. For analysis, I used the following photos and accompanying comments, using Evans' (1992) framework.

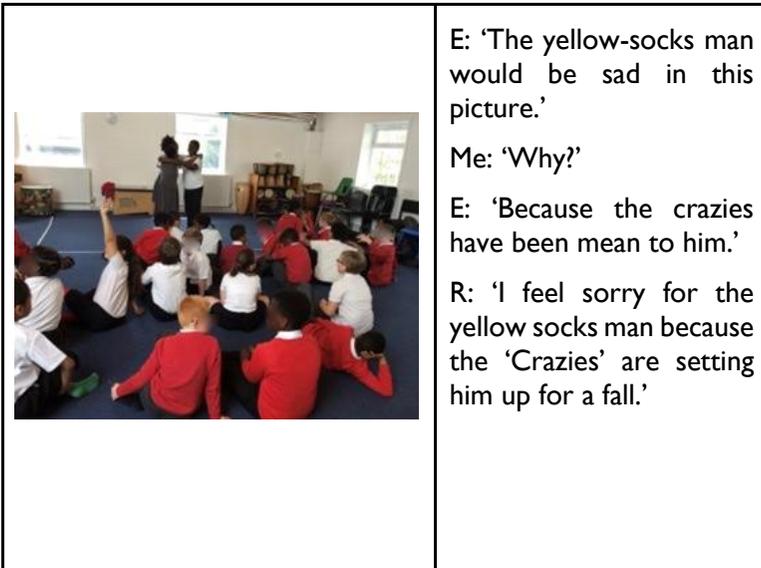


Figure 1: Three children create a montage of Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek and Maria plotting against the character Malvolio.

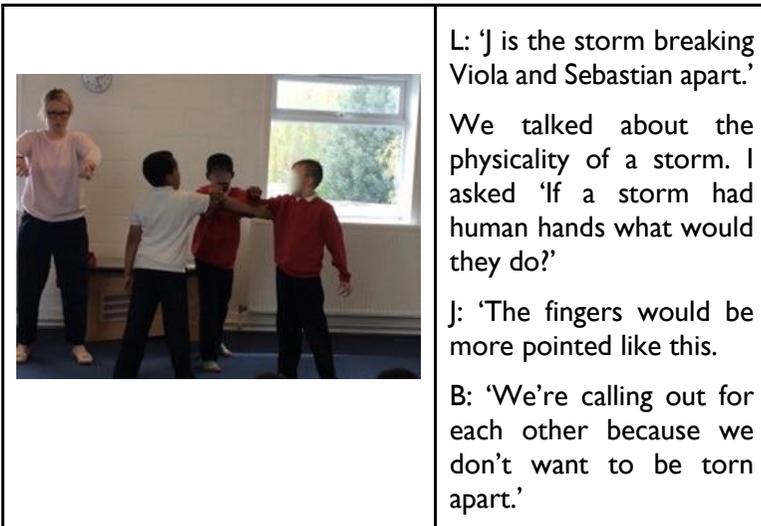


Figure 2: Three children create a montage of the storm which separates Viola and her brother Sebastian.

In these photos, the children are showing developed and subtle empathising with the characters. In figure 1 the group have created an image of the affect of this moment in the play where people are reunited, demonstrated by their hug and comments. Affect here refers, psychologically, to 'emotion or desire as influencing behaviour' (Oxford Online Dictionary). Figure 1 and figure 3 demonstrate developed and subtle reflection on the significance of events and the behaviour of characters. The comments the children make about Malvolio, show sophisticated empathy with the impact of the character's actions, further indicating reflexiveness, bringing their own experience to the identity of the characters, how Malvolio might feel to be ridiculed "sad... because the crazies have been mean to him". They sympathise with Malvolio, while also empathising with the reason for the characters' dislike of Malvolio "he thinks he's better than us" (figure 3). Figure 2 shows a developed and subtle degree of reflexiveness. Through their bodiliness, the children are creating an image of their understanding of the text, using personification to represent the storm, which renders Sebastian and Viola 'torn apart'. The children have demonstrated a secure understanding of the main plot of the story with the 'dramatic story re-enactments provide opportunities for mental reconstructions of story events and the development of story schemas' (Wells-Rowe, 1996, p.9).

The rehearsal room technique of creating tableaux and interrogating them as an ensemble, also gave the children the opportunity to demonstrate complex thinking patterns. Very quickly, they started to categorise the characters. They categorised Toby Belch, Maria and Andrew Aguecheek under the title 'The Crazies' who believe Malvolio 'thinks he's better than us'. Vygotsky (Smidt, 2009, p107) calls this creating 'complexes.' Evans' (1992) classes this as analogising. It was as a result of observing how the children were interested in status and social hierarchy in *Twelfth Night* which led me to plan the next workshop; 'Who's the Top Dog?'

	<p>K: (Audience) 'F and R are the 'Crazies' laughing at Malvolio picking up the letter.'</p> <p>Me: (To F in character as a 'Crazy') Why is that so funny?</p> <p>F: (Rubbing his hands and laughing) 'Because we tricked him.'</p> <p>Me: (To R in character as a 'Crazy') 'Crazy, why do you want to trick him?'</p> <p>R: 'Because he thinks he's better than us.'</p>
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Figure 3: Three children create a montage of the moment Malvolio finds the letter he believes to be from the lady of the house, Olivia.



Figure 4: A child representing high status using her body



Figure 5: The same child representing low status using her body

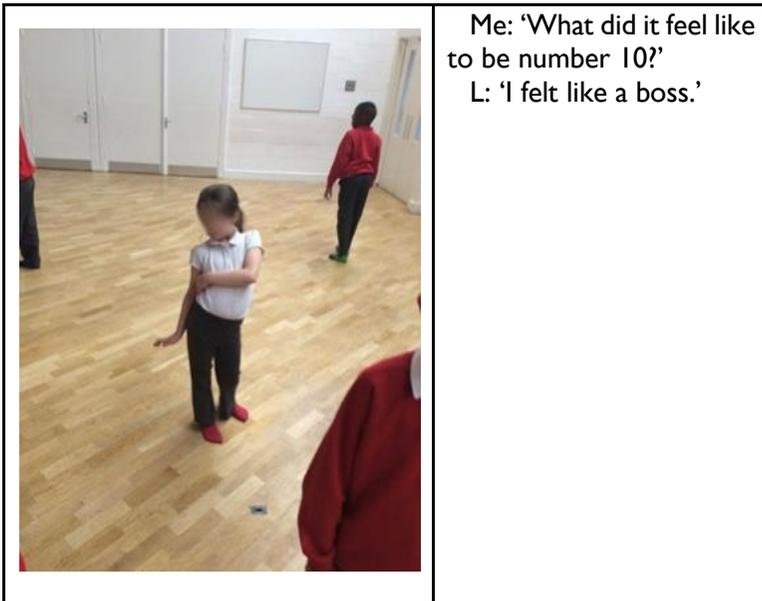


Figure 6: A child representing high status using her body with her accompanying comment.

Status

In figure 4, figure 5 and figure 6, the children are using 'postural intertextuality' (Taylor, 2012, p.163) to interpret what status means. Their bodiliness is enabling them to interpret status in postural acts of meaning making (Ibid.). Figure 4 and figure 6 represent the children interpreting a 'ten' which is a higher status and figure 5 shows a child interpreting 'one' which is lower status. The child in figure 4 and figure 5 has created two very contrasting images, showing how she empathises with the physical interpretation of status; she uses the image of being on the floor to demonstrate the lowest status which, I would argue, demonstrates a developed and subtle degree of reflexivity; she appreciates how we embody personal identity. She is making an intertextual connection by recreating an image from her experience of what status looks like. The children showed a strong active degree of intensity of interest in the abstract concept of status. Their developed and subtle understanding of self is revealed through their comments, for example the child in figure 6 commented that she liked being number ten because 'I felt like a boss'.

However, another child commented:

I didn't like being number ten because too many people want to be around you.

– Y4 child

This child demonstrates how the bodily activity is 'intimately connected both with affect and intellect' (Franks et al., 2014, p.172), giving a reflexive response to this rehearsal room technique.

Figure 7 shows the ensemble having the opportunity to explore and discuss interpretations of status, while some children look on as the audience. In this image the children are using their bodiliness to represent status within a group. They started to collaborate as an ensemble, non-verbally, to show the audience their status number. Immediately, we see children making bold decisions of how to physically demonstrate or analogise their position in the group; some children immediately choose to hide in the corner sitting on the floor, facing the wall. The children in

the audience correctly identified these children as having low numbers, or low status.



Figure 7: Still image from a video capturing the audience observing the ensemble represent status using their bodiliness in the space.



Figure 8: Still image from a video capturing the audience showing a strong degree of intensity of interest in the work being done by the ensemble.

Figure 8 shows the audience showing a strong active degree of intensity of interest in what is happening as a community of learners making connections between the postural intertextuality of the performers and their ideas of status. The audience started

to assign the status numbers to the performers. Not only do they provide reasoning for their interpretations, the children are engaging in dialogue to challenge each other's ideas. The children are able to reflect on the behaviour of the characters to a developed and subtle degree of sophistication.



Figure 9: Still image from a video capturing the children making bold choices interpreting the movement of the character Toby Belch.



Figure 10: Still image from a video capturing a child using her physicality to interpret the character Maria responding, in role, to questions from the audience.

Character Building

In figure 9, we see the children using their bodiliness to explore the character of Toby Belch. Up until this point, we had been exploring a rehearsal room clowning exercise called 'leading with the...' to see what happened to our bodies when we lead from different parts. The children made bold, individual choices, interpreting how Toby Belch may move, evidence of postural intertextuality in their choices. Again, this is evidence of sophisticated reflexiveness where the children are consciously considering their relationships with the characters. Figure 10 depicts a moment in a video where it was interesting to watch how a child uses her physicality to interpret the role of Maria and engages with the ensemble in a question-and-answer session. The children demonstrate how the ensemble is acting as a community of enquiry, curious to understand the motivations and attitudes of the character. They are co-constructing a physical interpretation of the character and encouraging a member of the ensemble to question her choices. Vygotsky (1932, p.5), when discussing the psychology of actors, made the assertion 'art is the social technique of emotion'. The social technique here is the ensemble working together to explore the physical interpretations and what they reveal about the characters. As noted by Rosenblatt, 'we accept the fact that the actor infuses his own voice, his own body, his own gestures - in short his own interpretation - into the words of the text' (1978, p.13). Rosenblatt continues to note that 'a valid interpretation, I believe, must be at the same time an interpretation of my own feeling when I read it' (1978, p.16). Here, Rosenblatt understands the validity of the felt experience of the reader highlighting how the interpretation of text is not simply verbal or written response to questions. Being given a chance to express the felt experience or interpretation of the text through drama, arguably, can give readers a chance to show an even deeper understanding of the complexity of interpreting themes.

Pupil to Pupil Communication Including Group Discussion

The children showed a keen interest in the relationship between Toby Belch, Maria and Andrew Aguecheek, who they deemed the

'Crazies', and Malvolio. Some of the children pitied the trick the 'Crazies' played on Malvolio, as evidenced above, and some thought it was what he deserved, for, as noted by Rosen 'we are drawn into plotting and scheming carried out by people with ideas and opinions about other people's ideas' (2004, p.9). I therefore decided to create a workshop to explore Aristotle's Ideas about Tragedy (1996). The purpose of this workshop was to use a rehearsal room technique whereby the actor makes big choices about a character they are playing. They think of three words they would use to describe themselves, then three words others would use. We then created a graphic representation of Act 2 scene 5 to, plot Malvolio's demise, or in his eyes, rise to success in the scene. Alongside this, the children also plotted the audience's response to what was happening. The following transcript is of a conversation between K and E as they discussed their graphic representations with each other, and they created the graph of Malvolio's perceived rise to success in the scene where he finds the letter. As well as Evans' model, I will also use Chambers' (1996, p.8) 'three sharings: sharing enthusiasms; sharing puzzles and sharing connections' as an analytical framework.

1. K: Eh... Malvolio's going to start at the bottom since because he's just found out that Oli..
2. E: He doesn't even know yet
3. K: No no Malvolio doesn't know yet so he's still servant and slave and... and when... when Malvolio finds the letter he reads it and...
4. E: Now that's most of the beginning because he founds the letter
5. K: Yep
6. E: "recording" finds the letter
7. K: Ok... so... since he's far far...no no no that too high that's too high
8. E: Oh

9. K: just move it a tiny bit up no no no just there just there because he only moves a tiny bit up... because since he just found it ... since he just
10. E: So the so let's write here happy
11. K: Yeah he's happy because he
12. E: He just found the letter...(writing down)...found... the... le...tter... (turning back to K) now at the end of the, he's up
13. K: Yeah and when he finds it he finds out that he finds out that Olivia yeah loves him and I feel kind of happy
14. E: Yeah because he
15. K: But I kind of felt really annoyed as well because he doesn't know that
16. E: Yeah but I feel happy for him because you know he's going to get tricked and I liked what the 'Crazies' planned
17. K: Oh because they're annoying him. So we can what shall we what shall we do? Sad face or happy face?
18. E: (Drawing a happy face onto the graph) Happy face because he's going to get you know
19. OK the last, sorry so what were you saying?
20. K: I actually feel happy for him because since Malvolio loves Olivia he actually thinks that Olivia loves him and
21. E: But it's a lie

This transcript evidences the children sharing connections (lines 1-3). They also interrogate the text and fill in gaps showing that they are reflecting on the significance of events (lines 4-12). What I find interesting about this extract is how the children, through sharing puzzles, have differing views on Malvolio's demise. Lines (13 to 21) show how they have differing opinions. K feels sorry for Malvolio 'since Malvolio loves Olivia he actually thinks that Olivia loves him' (line 20). Whilst E feels happy because 'you know he's going to get tricked' (line 16); both showing a sophisticated degree of reflexiveness and reflection on the

behaviour of the characters and their impact on the audience's interpretation of events.

Graphic interpretation

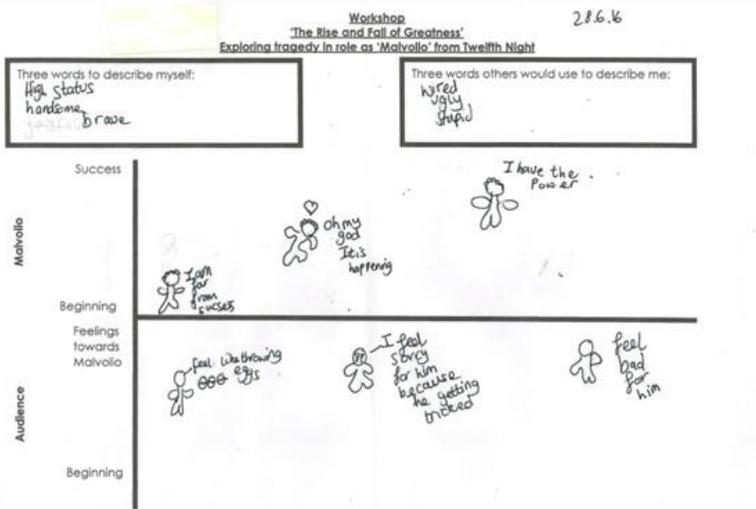


Figure 11: A graphic interpretation by R, following workshop 7

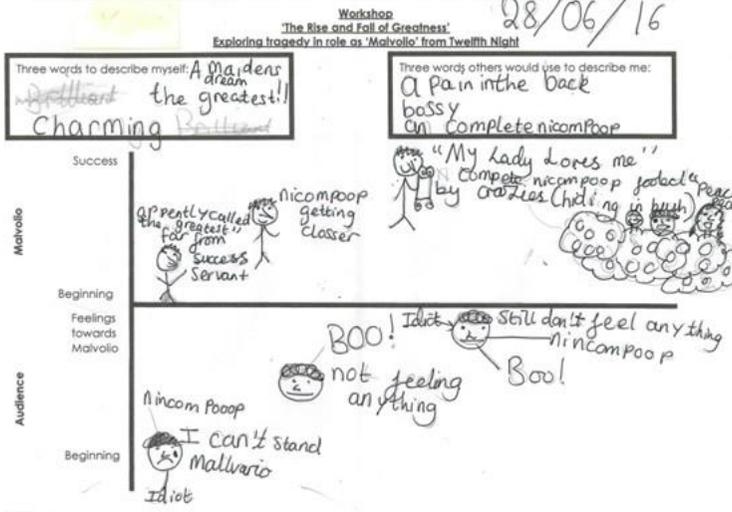


Figure 12: A graphic interpretation by K, following workshop 7

Figure 11 and figure 12 show graphic interpretations from workshop 7 by two children, R and K. Both children have demonstrated an understanding of different perceptions; they have contrasting describing phrases for Malvolio as himself, for example “a maiden’s dream” (K) and Malvolio as others see him, for example “ugly” (R). They are showing a sophisticated degree of analogising and reflexivity. This ability to recognise ‘identity’ is also seen as developing ‘higher order psychological function’ (Smidt, 2009, p.29). R’s graph shows how he is able to separate how Malvolio views the events in this scene - “I have the power” - to how the audience views the events – “I feel sorry for him because he is getting tricked”. There is recognition here of the implied reader in the text and the relationship between the implied reader and implied author. K also is able to recollect key features from the scene, she draws the ‘Crazies’ behind the hedge quoting “Peace, peace”; she is interrogating the text to match the author’s representation with her own.

In the final workshop, I gave the children the chance to brainstorm, without input from me, what drama meant to them. Responses included interpretation, space, ensemble and choices. The children not only were able to interpret complex themes in the text, but these responses also show they understand the purpose of the rehearsal room and how it makes them feel. Through an informal interview with the children, they revealed how drama helped them interpret the text. As one child said, “It inspires you and takes you in more”.

Conclusion

I wanted to find out how drama enables children to effectively interpret a text. My research has shown me that a rehearsal room or ensemble-based pedagogy can create the environment for social constructivist learning and interpretation to take place. The rehearsal room is open-ended, and children can collaborate in discussion both orally and physically. Through the workshops, the children demonstrated profound levels of understanding of relationships, perception and status. My role in the school and my training as a professional actress did have an impact on the research in that I had a catalogue of tools and skills which would make designing my research easier. What is more, the children

respected the ethos with which I delivered the workshops, as they know I am an actress as well as a teacher. The findings have, however, supported what I believed a rehearsal room and ensemble-based pedagogy could achieve; that children are given the forum and challenge to explore and interpret text making intertextual links and showing sophisticated degrees of response to the text. As one child said in our final workshop:

In drama, I feel like I'm interpreting the story. I'm going into the story. I'm becoming a character. When you act it out you're putting yourself in the story.

This is the essence of what an ensemble does in the rehearsal room. The collaborative, constructivist environment enabled the children to participate in the journey into the text.

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LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE: EXPLORING THE USE OF HUMOROUS BOOKS TO ENHANCE READING ENGAGEMENT IN YEAR 1

ELLEN BEER

As a teacher in Year 1, my experience of teaching reading is inundated with phonetic decoding and sound recognition. Once able to master these skills, the children are ready (and excited) to take home their first reading books. However, in many cases I have found this excitement for reading can fade, not only for those struggling to master their phonetic knowledge but also those that are thought to excel at reading. Throughout my own early childhood, I loved to read funny books which I would return to time and time again. However, towards the end of primary school I had begun to believe that reading was boring, something that was intended for school alone. Many studies have found that this is not uncommon and that a child's motivation to read declines throughout their time at primary school (Baker et al., 2000; Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie & Anderson, 1999; Wigfield, 1997; McKenna et al., 1995). For this reason, I became interested in working with a group of high-achieving Year 1 children who hold similar negative views about reading, to see if the use of humour would engage them in school and with reading in particular.

The rigid pedagogy of phonics and an increasing pressure for educators to 'teach to the test' can lead adults and children alike into a 'no-nonsense' approach to reading. However, learning to read and enjoyment do not have to be separate entities. Contrary to popular opinion, '*enjoyment is a synonym for engagement*' (Jalongo, 2004, p.2). However funny books, which are so popular with children, are often disregarded by critics as being good fun but not good literature (Mallan, 1993). It was therefore my hope that this research project would encourage humorous literature to be taken seriously as an educational tool.

Humorous literature has the power to grasp large numbers of children, yet few researchers have studied the impact it has on children as readers. There have been many studies on dialogic learning and reading comprehension in schools (Barnes & Todd, 1995; Chambers, 2011; Maine, 2013; Mercer, 2002; Pearson, 2009; Snow, 2002; Swain, 2010) and children's engagement with reading (Baker et al., 1995; Jalongo, 2004; Kamil, 2000). However, exploring studies which focus on humour as a catalyst for children's engagement reveals a limited amount of research. Though a number of theories on the development of a sense of humour exist (Bergen, 1998; McGhee, 1971), alongside studies on the importance of humour for a person's wellbeing (Morreall, 2008), I believe the lack of research into the impact of humour in children's literature supports my theory that funny books are not seen as worthy forms of literature. Considering this, I took elements from each of these fields of study in order to analyse children's engagement with humorous literature.

Reader-Response

Since Rosenblatt's seminal work on reader-response theory in 1978, much has been written about it in relation to child readers. Reader-response identifies the reader as an active agent who brings their own experiences to a text and creates meaning through these unique interpretations. Therefore, a successful reader 'demonstrates the capacity to enter into the world of the text and to make sense of it through a personal experience with the text itself' (Evans, 2012, p.325). This process is called a 'transaction'.

In more recent years reader-response has been a key element in studies and debates over the teaching of reading in classrooms. Guided reading was first introduced into primary classrooms in England with the creation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS, DfEE, 1998). This saw a shift in pedagogy from teachers listening to individual readers, to grouping children by ability and teaching them 'how to read, understand and create meaning from texts' (Fisher, 2008, p.19). The aim of this shift was to allow children to learn higher level comprehension skills through a social constructivist model, where pupils 'are encouraged to talk, think

and read their way to constructing meaning' (ibid., p.20) through dialogic learning.

Dialogic Learning

Rosenblatt (1978) characterised the transaction between reader and text as individualistic, however, it is important for my research that the social act of reading be studied (Vygotsky, 1978), considering how children might engage in talk to co-construct meaning. As McCarthey et al. argued:

Researchers interested in studying the nature of engaged reading...must consider the social context as an integral resource system rather than as a confounding or extraneous variable in a traditional research design. (1999, p.47)

This intra-mental process, by which readers make meaning from the text together can also be referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a term used by Vygotsky (1978) to explain how effective group interaction can develop skills and strategies beyond those which children might be capable of on their own. Both Chambers (2011) and Mercer (2002) have written extensively on the importance of 'classroom-based education as a dialogic process, in which both talk between teachers and learners and talk amongst learners have important roles to play' (Mercer, 2002, p.141).

Humour Studies

Humour is an inherently social act rather than a 'person-based phenomenon' (Kosslyn & Henker, 1970, p.1). It has been found that 'children's sensitivity to humour increases according to [the] presence of others' (Lyon, 2006, p.5) and my aim is to explore how this shared enjoyment can lead to a greater level of engagement amongst child readers. It is frequently assumed that if a book is amusing then it must not be 'good literature' worthy of a classroom (Mallan, 1993). However, as a teacher, I have observed that children pay more attention to what makes them laugh. As Lyon (2006, p.7) argues:

A funny lesson holds their attention to the material being taught and improves the

chances they will learn. Humour facilitates learning because it is entertaining and light-hearted.

There have been numerous attempts by psychologists and philosophers (including luminaries such as Freud, Kant and Aristotle, among others) to define and explain humour. For the purpose of my study I find the following frameworks set out by Shannon (1999) and McGhee (1979) to be the most relevant and informative.

The magic ingredient in all humour is incongruity (Kappas, 1967; Mallan, 1993); namely, something odd or unexpected, disrupting the normal state of play. This incongruity permeates many forms of humour and in her study on reader-response and humorous children's literature, Shannon (1999) identified four key areas of humour that children favour: superiority; physical events and appearances; the gross or taboo; and language or word play.

McGhee (1971) argues that there are four stages in a child's development of humour, and it is stage 3 (aged 3-5 years) that relates most closely with the children in my study. By this age children have a greater knowledge of the world as Lyon (2006, p.5) notes:

The stage-3 child is often amused by an absurd visual...it looks funny. The incongruity that causes humour at this stage is visual, not logical.

Indeed, strong evidence for this can be found in the large number of humorous picturebooks for children, which I shall discuss further in my methodology.

Defining Engagement

Before looking to the findings of my own study, it is important to define my terms. As Baker et al. (2000, p.2) states:

There are many different ideas of how children demonstrate their engagement in reading. These include watching other children read, discussing the book with their

peers, writing down their response to the text, dramatising their responses, and through other creative outlets as well. Engagement can also be seen when students are willing to stick with a book that might be too difficult for them, when they react to a text spontaneously, verbally or non-verbally, and in their motivation to read similar selections.

These are all types of engagement I hoped to see develop through the shared reading of humorous literature. Furthermore, I consider engaged readers as motivated and purposeful, whilst disengaged readers are unmotivated and passive. This is important in terms of my research as it has been shown that 'engaged students do better academically than less attentive students' (Almasi et al., 1996, p.108). Once again this brings me back to dialogic learning, as Christ, Ming Chiu and Wang (2012, p.395) found that 'children's engagement with several aspects of comprehension...was related to their buddy's engagement'. Furthermore, I suggest that intrinsic motivation (that which stems from a reader's innate enthusiasm for reading) is of greater value to teachers than extrinsic motivation (incentivised reading) and that humour can help to achieve this.

Methodology

This was a teacher-led action research project exploring the effectiveness of humorous books as a tool to engage readers. The project took place over a three-month period. I took a convenience sample of twelve children across my class and that of my parallel teacher and therefore the group does not represent all children nationally. Children were selected to form one of four ability-streamed phonics groups, a regular system that they were familiar with and did not disrupt or damage their learning (BERA, 2011). My group, selected by myself and the Year 1 team, consisted of children recognised as having the capacity to be high attaining readers, but who were not reaching their full academic potential due to disengagement with reading. This enabled me to contextualise my research with a clear focus on increasing engagement, as the children's ability to decode the text was not in question.

Children's Literature in Action

The funniest book I ever read was...

I have no funny books

(Ethan)

The funniest book I ever read was...

I havant ever read
a funny book

(Daphnie)

The funniest book I ever read was...

I dont hav enee funee
storie

(Ela)

Figure 1: Introductory questionnaire – “I haven’t ever read a funny book.”

Children were given a reading enjoyment questionnaire at the beginning of the project (figure 1), where three of the children wrote that they did not own or had never read any funny books in the initial questionnaire. The remaining nine children all wrote titles of books which had been read to them in class. This was followed up with a whole-class semi-structured interview to enable them to discuss and develop their answers. Data was also collected through semi-structured partner discussions, recorded on a Dictaphone in the absence of an adult because ‘the teacher should not always be involved in the response to a book’ (Chambers, 2011, p. 34). Children were given up to three questions on a slip of paper to start their discussions but were encouraged to ask further questions and steer conversations for themselves. Reading journals were also used for children to respond to the texts when not speaking into the Dictaphone.

Their written responses were assisted by a prompt and children were free to illustrate their reactions. Despite my existing relationship with the children as a teacher, these 'special' sessions were kept intentionally informal to create a safe environment where children were not afraid to voice their opinions.

Due to the children's young age and a limited timeframe for the study, it was decided that we would focus on humorous picturebooks. This also suited the age of the children and the developmental stage they were in according to McGhee's (1971) findings that the inclusion of pictures allows for greater visual humour. Our core texts were selected from the shortlist for the year's *Laugh Out Loud Book Award* and the project culminated in the children voting for the funniest book, allowing them a sense of autonomy and a purpose for their reading.

Data Analysis & Discussion

I have gathered my evidence of how the children in my study displayed motivated and purposeful reading into four broad categories.

Engagement through Dialogic Learning

As social interaction plays such a key role in humour, it was fitting that the majority of our responses to the literature were through talk. This played a huge role in the increased levels of engagement I witnessed. At the beginning of my intervention the children's conversations were stilted, or 'disputational' (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997, p.53) yet over the course of the project their conversations become far more exploratory, with 'suggestions offered for joint consideration [and] reasoning more visible in the talk' (Ibid). One child whose progression can be clearly evidenced through the transcripts is Ela, who went from being relatively quiet and under-confident (figure 2) to questioning and debating her peers' opinions on the humour in their favourite books (figure 3, demonstrating ZPD in action). This reflects Maine's (2013, p.154) observation of children's discussion about books, in which she notes that children's language has a hypothetical modality meaning that their ideas 'were suggestions and therefore up for debate, offering the possibility of further exploration or connection to their existing knowledge of the world'.

Children's Literature in Action

TIME	DIALOGUE	NOTES
0:43	<p>ELA: Um, I Need A Wee is best because it's all about 'I need a wee' and the end was from when he wee-d in the trophy. That's why it's the funniest.</p> <p>MICK: Mine is funnier because [inaudible] in this book and he keeps on saying "master of DISGUISE." AND he always wants to eat something, but at the end he [turning pages] eats the pizza.</p>	<p>Ela is able to use the text to provide reasoning for her argument. Visual humour.</p> <p>Mick responds directly to Ela with a counter argument. Verbal humour, incongruity.</p>
2:17	<p>ELA: So why is it funny? From eating a pizza? Like, I think I Need A Wee is bester because he keeps needing a wee and then when he went to the helter-skelter then he need a wee.</p> <p>MICK: [interrupting] I think when he went on the helter-skelter he wee-d his self. Or, he just goed after "oh dear, I need the toilet."</p> <p>ELA: And he kept getting distracted.</p>	<p>Here Ela directly questions Mick's argument, asking for more evidence and adding detail to her own claims.</p> <p>Building on Mick's point.</p>

Figure 3: Ela has developed more skills in exploratory talk by the end of the intervention.

As the children grew in confidence, I noticed more vocalisation and dramatisation of characters and events, a technique which Guthrie and Anderson (1999) describe as a key reading strategy of engaged readers. Further to this, an increase in talk led to greater social motivation to read.

Engagement through Comprehension

As comprehension can only be observed indirectly, listening to children co-constructing meaning from texts gave some insight into their thinking.

(Maine, 2013, p.154)

As children's talk became more exploratory and they were capable of building on each other's ideas, I was able to track a significant increase in their responses to the texts. To analyse children's comprehension in the transcripts, I combined frameworks by Evans (1992) 'six-stages' framework (see table 1) of enjoyment and understanding and Christ et al.'s (2012) which 'codes' children's comments by elements such as story and theme, which sit within and deepen Evans' framework. Where stage one is considered 'unreflective interest in action' (Evans, p.32) or in my terms, unengaged, I found that from very early in the intervention that children were working within stages two, three and four, with some children going beyond this as the project drew to an end.

Process stages: Kinds of Satisfaction.	Process Strategies
1. Unreflective interest in action	(a) Rudimentary mental images (stereotypes from film and television) (b) Predicting what might happen next in the short term
2. Empathising	(c) Mental images of affect (d) Expectations about characters
3. Analogising	(e) Drawing on the repertoire of personal experiences, making connections between characters and one's own life
4. Reflecting on the significance of events (theme) and behaviour (distanced evaluation of characters)	(f) Generating expectations about alternative long-term outcomes (g) Interrogating the text, filling in gaps (h) Formulating puzzles, enigmas, accepting hermeneutic challenges
5. Reviewing the whole work as the author's creation	(i) Drawing on literary and cultural repertoires (j) Interrogating the text to match the author's representation with one's own (k) Recognition of implied author
6. Consciously considered relationship with the author; recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self (identity theme) and of one's own reading processes	(l) Recognition of implied reader in the text, and the relationship between implied reader and implied author (m) Reflexiveness, leading to understanding of textual ideology, personal identity and one's own reading processes

Table 1: Response to literature (Evans, 1992, p.32)

Within the first month of reading and discussing humorous literature, Mick, who was considered by his teachers as one of the most disengaged with learning, was eagerly questioning for information (figure 4). These questions were not 'test'-type comprehension questions but ones that lead 'towards an understanding of causality or motivation' (Maine, 2013, p.154) and drew into focus a purpose for reading. Furthermore, I found the children were beginning to co-construct meaning through a variety of learning styles. For example, when discussing *Slug Needs A Hug*, David and Dennis were able to approximate understandings about slugs and snails. Despite their conversation containing some misinformation, David's narrative interpretation of the text resulted in Dennis' logical-scientific representation (Bruner, 1985) through which the boys were able to decontextualise vocabulary from the book (slug) and create their own meaning (that if slug wanted to be a snail, he would need a shell). Indeed, it was not only each other that the children were happy to debate with and correct misinformation. Over the course of the project, I found my relationship with the group becoming far closer, with the children happy to justify opinions rather than seeking the 'correct answer' in the teacher's head.

Intertextuality also played a large part in the children's comprehension, a stage five process which requires readers to draw on literary and cultural repertoires (Evans, 1992, p.32). One of the first examples of this can be seen figure 5, where Dennis combined the stories *I Need A Wee* and *Hoot Owl*. This led to many other examples of intertextuality as the social nature of the intervention inspired others, including myself.

Children's Literature in Action

TIME	DIALOGUE	NOTES
0:00	<p>MICK: Dennis, was there anything you liked about this book?</p> <p>DENNIS: Yes. It... it was crazy, funny, and... and it was scary.</p> <p>MICK: Was there anything you didn't like?</p> <p>DENNIS: No.</p> <p>MICK: Why?</p> <p>DENNIS: Because, because it was all funny and crazy.</p> <p>MICK: Was there anything you would change?</p> <p>DENNIS: Yes. It would be blasting to space and blast down and land on professor...</p>	<p>Seeking reasoning.</p> <p>Not yet able to explain opinions.</p> <p>Visual humour.</p>
2:20	<p>MICK: What page was your favourite page?</p> <p>DENNIS: My favourite page was the end page.</p> <p>MICK: The end page.</p> <p>DENNIS: Yeah, and the very end of the story.</p> <p>MICK: Huh? What page did you like like.</p>	<p>Reading for purpose.</p> <p>Echoing technique, seeking further evidence.</p>
3:10	<p>DENNIS: Um, the best one was when the professor says you have a very silly car that has just two wheels and a little small house.</p> <p>MICK: Would you like to create the story more and make it more funnier?</p> <p>DENNIS: Yes.</p>	<p>N.B. All questions asked by Mick in this transcript were his own.</p>

Figure 4: Mick questions for information (Christ et al., 2012, p.384).

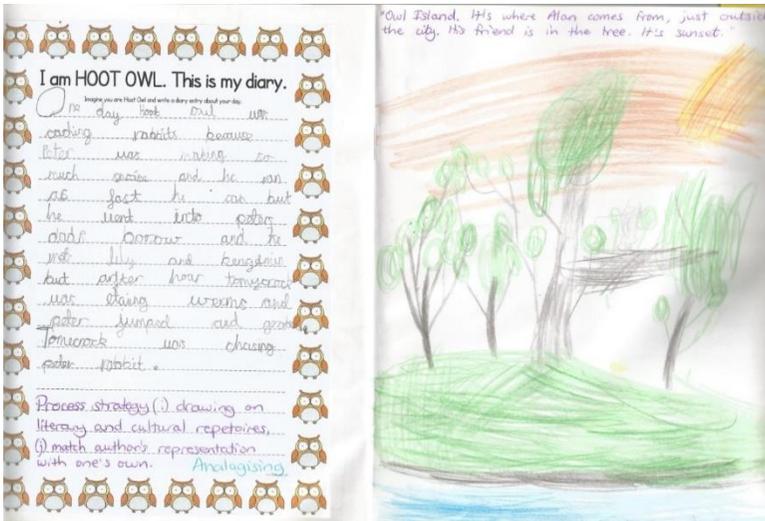


Figure 5: Example of intertextuality.

Engagement with Humour

Of course, the catalyst for this engagement was the nature of the literature we were reading in the sessions. Indeed, my own enjoyment of the sessions modelled an enthusiasm for learning and as the weeks progressed, I found children more vocal when I was reading aloud, anticipating key moments and laughing along with the jokes. This appreciation of humour was expressed in a number of ways, from retelling jokes, creating their own and on some occasions being able to express the author's intent.

I found strong evidence to situate the group within stage three of McGhee's (1979) framework for humour development, with a high proportion of responses focusing on visual humour (examples seen in figure 2, figure 3 and figure 4). Moreover, *I Need A Wee*, which was voted by the group as the funniest book, also confirmed Shannon's (1999) argument on superiority as the children revelled in feeling superior to their younger selves. I suggest that this book resonated most with the children because it was the most relatable text as children of their age 'enjoy toilet humour because they no longer have accidents, but they still remember when they did' (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2000, p.11). In discussion after reading the text, many of the children laughed

and shared stories about incidents when they had needed, or not quite managed to get to, the toilet (this has not been transcribed due to the personal nature of the conversation). In later conversations I began to see evidence that the children were starting to recognise the author's intent and support their arguments with simple statements about the humour, such as Belle's reference to the incongruity in *Slug Needs A Hug* – that slugs cannot hug because they don't have arms (the punchline of the story). She describes this twist as "silly" but also "quite serious", drawing on the common link between comedy and tragedy. Alongside this, the children began to draw on their cultural repertoire to make several references to other humorous books and media. It was particularly interesting to see Ethan draw on another humorous character here, as he had been one of the three children to write "I have no funny books".

Over the course of the project children's responses took more of a narrative focus. This led to a mixture of children retelling jokes from the books and creating their own. What was particularly interesting was that the theme of their own jokes was in keeping with that of the stories they were adapting, showing a clear understanding of the humour in each book. One example that many of the children enjoyed was incorporating their own toilet humour when writing to the brief 'What would happen if Alan met Hoot Owl?' (figure 6).

Engagement outside the intervention

My most pleasing finding was not only that the children were more engaged during our sessions, but also that they were beginning to transfer this into other areas of learning. This manifested in several ways, most notably re-reading texts in their own time; sharing books with peers who were not in the intervention group; using their new skills in other lessons; and higher attainment in their academic reading levels.

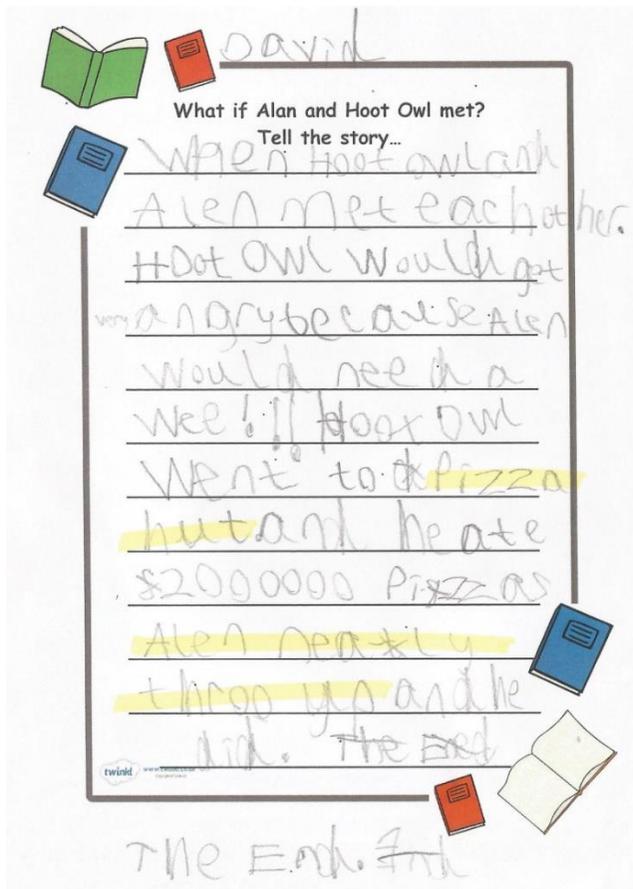


Figure 6: Here David has taken the ideas from his discussion with Mick and Dennis to create his own humorous story. This short story combines the themes of toilet humour (*I Need A Wee*) and hunger (*Hoot Owl*), concluding with David's own attempt at gross humour.

I suggest that the increase in dialogic learning combined with the communal appreciation of humour created a greater social motivation for the children to read. Over the course of the final half term the children in my intervention group would talk about the books we were reading during lunch and playtimes, often attracting the attention of their peers who would ask about the books and request it for independent reading, in favour of construction toys which until this point had been the most

popular free-choice activity. Alongside this there was an increase in spontaneous shared reading and I, together with the rest of the Year 1 team, noted a change in attitude, with children more willing to help each other and discuss the books. Additionally, in their yearbooks all twelve children cited one of the texts read in our intervention as their favourite book. This links directly back to my hope to promote intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation. As Kamil (2000, p.408) argues:

Children who like to share books with peers and participate responsibly in a community of learners by completing needed tasks are likely to be intrinsically motivated readers. Social motivation leads to increased amount of reading and high achievement in reading.

In our regularly timetabled Literacy lessons, I noted that children from the intervention group were using more adventurous vocabulary and attempts at humour in their writing, showing a much clearer awareness of, and attempt to engage, the reader. Similarly in other lessons where picturebooks were shared, children who had attended the sessions were eager to make meaning by sharing puzzles and patterns (Chambers, 2011) with me and their peers. This increase in engagement led naturally to every child making substantial academic progress both in reading and writing, as can be seen by Rose's development over the course of the project (figure 7, figure 8 and figure 9).



Figure 7: Rose's writing in May.

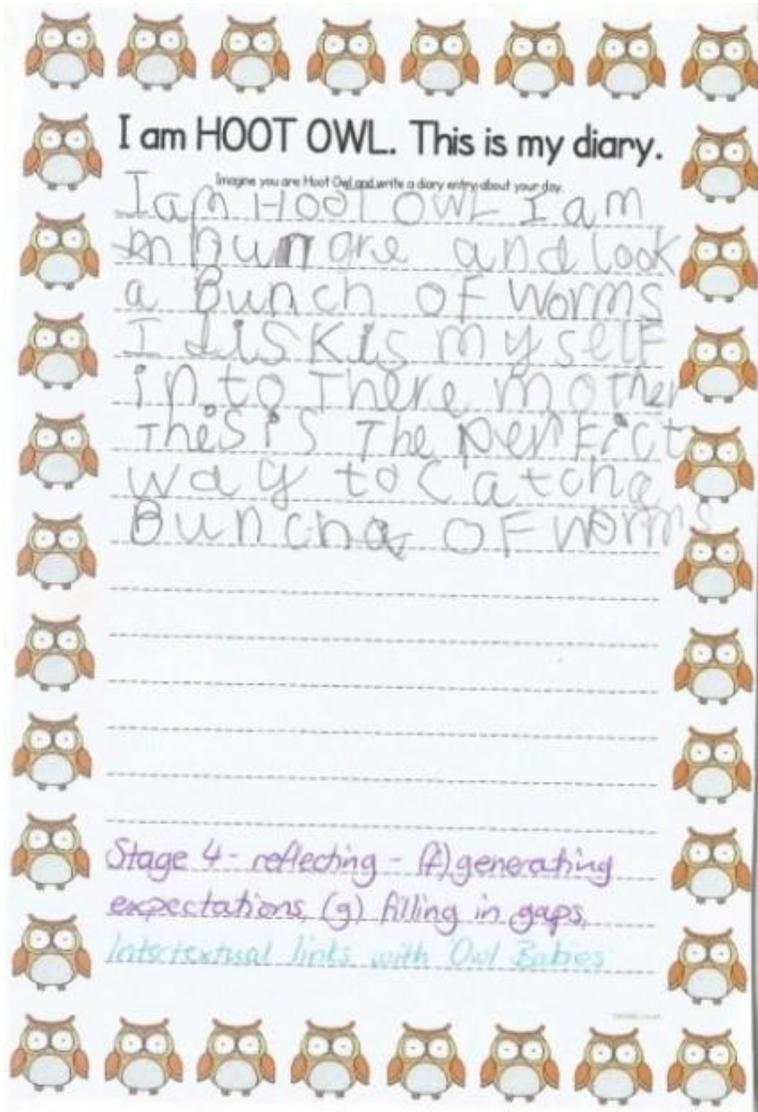


Figure 8: Rose's writing in June.

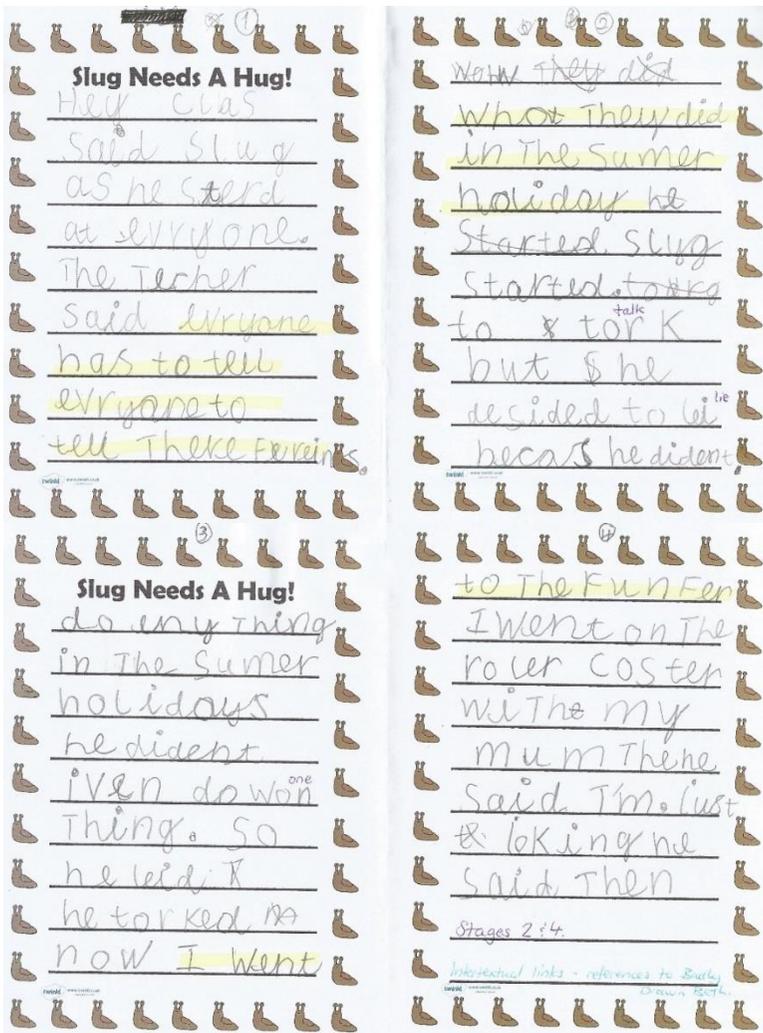


Figure 9: Rose's writing in July, incorporating elements of Badly Drawn Beth and Slug Needs A Hug.

Conclusion

At the end of term, the reading habits of those children who had been exposed to humorous literature were both motivated and purposeful. I propose that this was due to the social bonding fostered by humour and the informal setting in which children were able to express themselves without fear of the teacher judging or censoring the texts they were reading. Given the small sample of this study, this area merits further research, particularly with older children who have reached McGhee's (1971) fourth stage of humour development. However, my findings have led to a dramatic impact on my own teaching practice. Exploratory talk can be hard to achieve with such young children and were I to transfer the findings of this project into classroom practice, more structure and teacher scaffolding would be essential, especially for those children who are less able readers than those chosen for this study. Engagement must not be treated as a secondary target to basic reading skills, or we will fill classrooms with children who elect not to use these skills. However, if we focus purely on engagement, we risk raising children who love to read but cannot. I therefore conclude that the use of humorous literature should be balanced by the support and guidance of a teacher.

Though the subject itself may be amusing, I argue that the inclusion of humour in a child's reading should be taken seriously as it can lead to positive outcomes, as argued by Morreall (2008, p.465):

Humour can foster analytic, critical, and divergent thinking; catch and hold students' attention, increase retention of learned material, relieve stress, build rapport between teacher and students, build team spirit among classmates, smooth potentially rough interactions, promote risk taking, and get shy and slow students involved in activities.

Though my study was small, I can attest to Morreall's arguments about the benefits of humour. The children in my study did not

merely flourish academically through the use of humorous literature, they also developed socially. Humour therefore must be taken seriously as it has the power to unify children and teachers, foster a profound love of reading and even be the medicine needed to cure disengaged readers.

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WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF INTRODUCING SOUTH ASIAN GIRLS TO LITERATURE WHICH THEY CAN CULTURALLY IDENTIFY WITH?

KAREN LONGMAN

Introduction

The focus of this chapter stemmed from a conversation I had with a group of South Asian girls in my class. The book *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017) was on my desk, and a student asked me about the storyline, which sparked a discussion about multicultural characters in books and films. One student said, "if it wasn't for Bollywood there would be no brown faces on TV". Whether this student is right or wrong, the fact that she identified herself with people from a film industry which is arguably made up of actors portraying over the top, often cliched characters is the opposite of her own personality. It surprised me that she chose this example to represent her ethnicity. I began to question, how do students form their cultural identity and what part does literature play in this process?

Arguably, deciding how we define ethnicity is problematic. I would suggest we do this using three potential parameters. Primarily, our parents and families teach us their ideologies which could include, 'socio-religious identities which they inherited' (Schachter & Ventura, 2008, p.469). Secondly, creating social bonds gives us a sense of familiarity enabling us to feel part of a group and a sense of belonging. At school students want to feel, 'personally accepted, respected and included by others in the school environment' (Gummadam, Pittman & Loffe, 2016, p. 290). Finally, as individuals we look to create our own unique identity 'self-separate, from the expectations of his peers, parents and teachers' (Schachter & Ventura, 2008, p.452).

Ethnicity was first measured using classification codes due to 'a concern for redressing discrimination based on colour' (Aspinall 2009, p.1418). Analysing data using ethnicity codes is not always easy to measure because of the variables of cultures. There are

several suggested categories which could possibly define a person's identity. For example, Bhopal (2003) proposes: birthplace, language, religion, migration, history and name. Bhopal also discusses how these definitions have evolved and we now use 'social origins and ancestral roots... but it is ultimately based on physical and hence biological factors' (ibid., p.442). It is possible that students who are part of a multicultural school and community may not think about their racial socialisation experiences and the influence of how they perceive and interact in school (Rudnick, 2019).

Focusing on the South Asian community, Ghuman suggests there are differences in how they identify themselves compared to British society, commenting that 'Asians favour collective commitment, religion and gender role differentiation...Asian girls face: racial prejudice of British society and parental restrictions' (2010, p.197). He continues to highlight the supposed threat to Asian girls' identity because they 'have to straddle two cultures in society and feel alienated by one or both parents, school or home' (Ibid, p.201). Shain (2003) discusses how Asian girls' problems arise from familial and cultural restrictions, with the implied assumption that this background is somehow inferior to western family structure and culture.

In the UK, during 2017 only 1 % of books published had a Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) main character (CLPE, 2018) which may possibly disengage children from ethnic backgrounds. This provokes questions about the role of publishers to provide students from ethnic backgrounds with a wider choice of reading material, 'when children of colour see themselves mirrored in a book, they become more eager to read... reading then becomes a means of self-affirmation and readers often seek their mirror in books' (Fordet al., 2018, p.53). BAME authors in the adult publishing world are poorly represented as stated in the *Writing the Future* report by Spread the Word (2015, p.8) out of '203 published based novelists polled, 30% came from a BAME background' and 97% of literary agents believe that their industry is only, 'a little diverse or not diverse at all'. The author Sayantani Das Gupta (2019, np) explains she started writing because there was 'always something missing but it took me years to understand

this as a problem with the lack of diversity in the stories I was reading and the movies I was seeing and not a problem with myself.

Literature can engage students by enabling them to 'identify with one or more characters, and challenges and interests like their own' (Ford et al., 2018, p.53). There is a possibility that when students from multicultural backgrounds read stories where the characters are predominantly 'White, English and middle class then you may come to learn that your own life does not qualify as subject material' (Chetty, 2016, p. 99). Diversity in schools needs to be undertaken to enable all ethnic minority children to achieve 'better educational outcomes, social justice and cross-cultural benefits' (Diallo & Maizonniaux, 2016, p.202).

When students read a text, they enter into a relationship with the author, 'we must believe that the author's control of the reader's response counts for something' (Harding, 1988a, p. 208). The reader expects the author to engage our attention by creating characters who have done things they have not, 'in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself' (Lewis, 1961, p.89). The reader could create a new identity for themselves by 'adopting the character as a model of imitation' (Harding 1988b, p.66) or feel so connected to the character the reader would possibly want to become them.

When a student does find a book they enjoy reading, they perhaps discuss it with their friends and are usually eager to retell the narrative or certain passages which have meaning to them. The reader may re-read the book or read books from the same author. By doing this, 'we want to explore what has happened to us and sort out what the book has meant and why it is important to us' (Chambers, 2002, p.19). As part of this process, children are influenced by their culture when understanding the meaning of what they read (Harding, 1988b).

Outline and Methodology

I conducted my research at the school where I teach, a secondary community school based in East London, with a total of 895 students: 67% are male and 33% are female. The largest group of students in the school are made up of Pakistani heritage. Nearly

half of the students in our school do not speak English as their first language. The borough is one of the most diverse areas in the country with 48% of residents from a minority ethnic background (Waltham Forest, 2019).

The decision to focus on South Asian girls (from the geographical areas of Pakistan, Indian and Bangladesh) was influenced by school data I had previously undertaken which examined reading attitudes. This group of students showed the most contrast in their views about reading; they were either committed or indifferent. I felt this would give me an honest picture of how they engaged with literature.

I choose female students because 'adolescent girls have been reported to have stronger ethnic identity than boys' (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010, p.3). I wanted to explore and debate with my group the discourse of stereotypical views of Asian girls which is conflicting. On one hand, Asian girls are supposedly shy and timid, they live in dictatorial households in which the fathers 'impose restrictions on her freedom and deny her the privileges afforded by western society' (Shain, 2003, p.5). In contrast many Asian girls reject this stereotype and play 'an active role in the transformation of their cultures' (ibid, p.109) through academic success.

I collected data by using a range of methods, including qualitative analysis via classroom observation, group discussions and group worksheets and quantitative data via a survey. I did this because using more than just one method of research enables the researcher 'to explore specific aspects of further depth or offers opportunities for you to see data from one source confirm or disconfirm findings from data from another source' (Bearne et al., 2019, p.12).

The ethnicity codes I used in my survey were taken from the 2011 census which is 'used for benchmarking purposes and the counts are frequently used as sampling frames for other surveys' (Aspinall 2009, p.1419). When I asked my cohort of students to complete the survey by ticking the box that best described their ethnicity, three students were unable to do so because I had not added a category which represented them. In fact, each of them

produced their own labels to define their ethnicity and ticked them. I was impressed with their creativity but disappointed they had to do this. Recently there has been a move 'in favour of subjective ethnic self-identity' (Parameshwaran & Engzell, 2015, p.399).

My survey allowed me to 'discover what is really happening before you embark on a process of trying to improve things' (Bearne et al., 2019, p.6). My aim was to use the survey as my base line from which I could assess against the answers of my focus group. The survey included multiple choice checkboxes and open-ended questions.

I was aware during my focus group sessions that my opinions may influence the students' views so I was conscious to take the role of participant-observer. I included dialogic teaching to encourage students to explain the rationale behind statements that they made with the aim of creating learning 'as a social, communicative process' (Mercer & Littleton 2007, p.40). The use of open questioning enabled me to 'find out what students are thinking' (ibid, p.36) and gave them the opportunity to 'make longer contributions in which they express their current state of understanding' (ibid, p.36).

Three of the girls from my group (the reluctant readers) only turned up for three sessions. This was frustrating because they were enthusiastic during the group discussions and shared interesting perspectives. Our meetings took place during lunchtimes so I think this may have been the issue. The students said they forgot about the sessions, but I suspect they had another agenda.

The departure of these students changed the group dynamics. Initially the group was not organised as a friendship group but on students' attitudes to reading. I felt some students may have been slightly guarded about revealing their opinions on such sensitive matters such as race with students they were not familiar with. After the departure of the three reluctant readers, the remaining students were very enthusiastic about asking their friends (of the same heritage) to join and we ended up with a less self-conscious group of individuals.

I used the advice from BERA's *Ethics and Guidelines for Educational Research* (2018) to set out the ethical issues which may occur during my research project. I ensured students were aware they could leave the sessions at any point if they felt uncomfortable about the content we were discussing. Students would be directed to staff whom they could speak to about any of the issues which arose. Prior to the start of the sessions with my focus group I gave all participating students a letter of consent for their parent/carer to sign. The letter outlined my research project and explained how I intended to use the research in the future. All students were anonymised, I used colours and letters as a means of identification. All documents relating to my research were stored on a password protected computer which only I had access to. In the event of any disclosures, the school's safeguarding policy was followed.

As the researcher for this study (a British White female) I had fourteen years' experience teaching in a multicultural secondary school. I posed the question to my focus group which I have further explored in Table 1. Does it matter that I am a White person asking them questions about their ethnicity? All of the students commented that because I was someone who was familiar, they felt comfortable speaking to me and did not see my colour as an issue.

Ghuman statement	Students' response	Summary
'Some parents restrict their daughter's choice of school GCSE subjects to maths, science, future careers in medicine or teaching.'	What does your family expect of you and your future? "Be the best." "Enjoy what you do." "Educated." "High expectations." What jobs would you like? Doctor x 3, Engineer x 2 and teacher	All of the careers my students wanted to achieve completely contradict Ghuman's statement.

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<p>'Asian young people (mostly girls) were more likely to say 'no' to such questions as: Do you meet with friends after school? Do you visit other friends' houses?'</p>	<p>Do you meet with friends after school? "Yes." "Yes." "I have to ask permission first." "We go to the cinema." "My parents didn't do that."</p>	<p>Overwhelmingly the answer was yes, but they had to check with their parents first which is what any child would do, this is not dependent on their ethnicity.</p>
<p>'Gender roles are clearly defined with Asian families.' Asians favour gender role differentiation.</p>	<p>What is the role of males in your family? 'Deals with behaviour (dad).' "Gives money (dad)." "Complains about the house." "Very lazy." "Worker." My students expressed strong views about the males in their homes. Brothers were often 'let off' doing chores and were give more freedom than girls.</p> <hr/> <p>What is the role of females in your family? "Praying." "Cooking." "Cleaning."</p>	<p>There is room here to agree and disagree. Ghuman's paper was written ten years ago and attitudes can evolve. When I asked the question: Who is 'in charge' at home? Who is 'in charge' at home? Mum x 3 students Dad x 3 student No gender imbalance x 2</p>
<p>'Asian family honour and the assumption that their daughters intend to enter arranged marriage, place constraints on Asian woman's choice of career.'</p>	<p>What are the expectations if you decide to marry? "Marry a Muslim from anywhere." "Allowed to marry a non-Muslim." "Allowed to marry for love." All students said they wanted to marry for love but their parents had an expectation it would be a Muslim man because they are familiar with their customs and culture.</p>	<p>I asked about students' parents 3 x parents had arranged marriages. One student commented on the idea in their community that you could possibly marry your first cousin and all of the students thought this was odd.</p>

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<p>Asian girls 'confided less in their parents and experiences more control by parents than their White counterparts'</p>	<p>Who do you confide in?</p> <p>Aunt x 1</p> <p>Cousin x 2</p> <p>Friends x all students</p> <p>Mum x 1</p> <p>Dad x 0</p> <p>Sister x 3</p> <p>Brother x 1</p>	<p>Students suggested parents who were born and grew up in Pakistan were stricter. Parents born in the UK were more open.</p> <p>I would consider the fact most teenagers do not confide in their parents but possibly choose their friends as confidantes.</p>
<p>'Employment of Asian teachers should ease the situation as they can provide role models and can also act a bridge between home and school.'</p>	<p>Does it make a difference if your teacher is Asian or not?</p> <p>"No." "Teachers personality is the most important." "They would understand your background." "Familiar."</p> <p>"Stricter." "They have them at Muslim school and you want to learn about other cultures."</p>	<p>In general students were not bothered but when they do have Asian or Muslim teachers the expectation is that they are understand the students in a way that teacher from other ethnic backgrounds do not.</p>
<p>Summary: Students wanted career's which conflict Ghuman's views. The roles of males in their family did match a few of Ghuman stereotypes of gender. A proportion of male relatives in students' families thought they had power to make decisions (mainly brothers) in the home but these views were changing.</p> <p>None of my students had been told by their families they had to have an arranged marriage and all of them could marry for 'love'. My students are Muslim so they would be encouraged to marry a person of the same religion. Students were allowed to go out with their friends unlike Ghuman's statement but had to ask their parents permission first which any child would do. Students were not bothered about teacher's ethnicity but if they did have a teacher with the same ethnicity as themselves some students thought they possibly may have more in common with them.</p>		

Table 1: Responses to Ghuman's statements

Data analysis

The survey enabled me to gain a wider understanding of student's relationship with their book choices and their views about ethnicity in literature. The number of students in my survey from multicultural backgrounds was 69%. The CLPE report states only 4% of the children's books published in 2017 featured BAME characters' (CLPE, 2018). Only 15% of surveyed students had read a book which contained minority characters. I would suggest the literary needs of children from multicultural backgrounds are not being met. However, 73% of student's favourite characters from books had White British or American ethnicity and 61% of students felt it did not matter if books reflected their ethnicity (boys 45% / girls 16%), as commented by Student H:

It doesn't matter as long as you are having fun reading.

Perhaps these students have chosen not to seek mirrors in books as Ford et al. (2018) suggest or they have not been introduced to literature which could open windows into characters' lives who have similar ethnic backgrounds as themselves. Girls choose book titles with a range of ethnic characters which cements the view that 'adolescent girls have been reported to have stronger ethnic identity than boys' (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010, p3).

When students were presented with a range of book covers which purposely included images of White, Black and Asian characters, students (especially boys) rejected the books that mirrored their own ethnicity in favour of books which interested them. Chetty comments that 'children do not attach any significance to racial identities ... because we inhabit a post racial world' (2016, p.97). *The Wimpy Kid* and *Tom Gates* titles were very popular with boys possibly because the characters do things which students would not be 'allowed' to do in real life. Harding (1988b) is right in the sense students look for escapism in their book choices and may mimic characters they admire.

I created a scrapbook/diary to help me 'capture the moments which give insight into your research' (Bearne et al., 2019, p.7). I

explored lists of women's literature and examined them to decipher what proportion of books contained South Asian characters or were written by an author of the same heritage. My aim was to look for role models in literature that mirrored my group's ethnicity and could possibly enable them to further explore their identity. I was surprised by the lack of representation of South Asian characters and authors especially when you consider that the South Asian population is one of the biggest ethnic groups in the world, made up of approximately two billion people (*stats: www.worldmeters.info/world-population/ 2019*).

Using figure 1 as a starting point, my group could not identify any of these significant women. Two students made comments about the women's ethnicity and the lack of Asian representation. On reflection I may have influenced the student's perceptions because I highlighted the different ethnic groups and roles of women. If I had not added these labels then possibly, my students would not have discovered any differences. My group found role models from their friendship groups. One student mentioned 'Zoella' a White female blogger who has also written several popular books as a source of inspiration because she is an entrepreneur. Students confirmed Rudnick's view that they do not always see themselves as 'racial beings' (Rudnick, 2019, p.20) because in this instance they did not see colour when looking for strong role models.

I researched two other suggested lists of women's literatures (figure 2 & figure 3) using the same agenda to assess the validity of my initial analysis. *The Writing the Future* (2015) report substantiates my findings that BAME authors are underrepresented in adult literature. Changes in the publishing industry need to take place to ensure there is equal ethnic representation for all age groups.

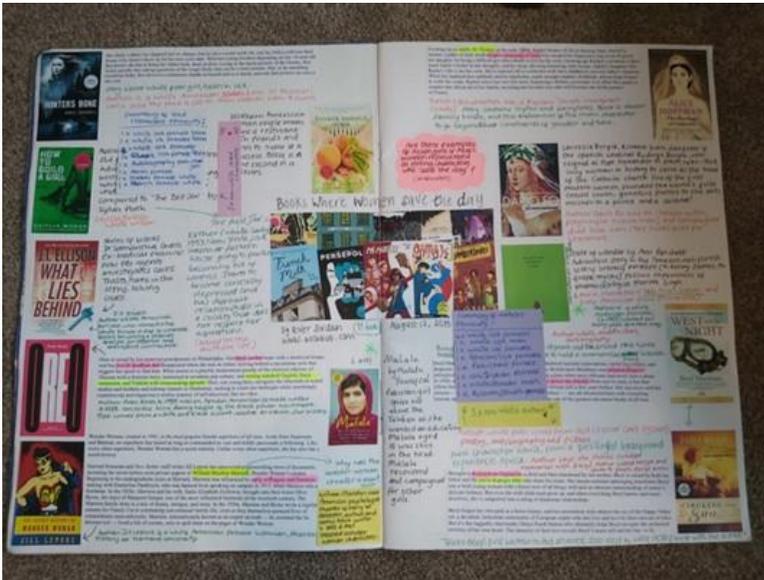


Figure 3: 12 Great Books Where Women Save the Day (Jordan 2015)

If South Asian girls do not use literature to improve their knowledge about their culture, Ghuman suggests that Asian girls' identity is influenced by their religion and family values. When I read Ghuman's study it prompted further examination due to the possible stereotypical statements it contained. I compared his views with the opinions of my focus group (table 1) to ascertain if there was any validity to these comments. My students felt they did not face 'racial prejudice or parental restrictions' (Ghuman, 2010, p.200) nor did they feel alienated by their 'parents, school or home' (ibid). My students wanted to be identified as educated women who had the support of their families.

At this point in my group sessions, I introduced two graphic novels for my students to read in their own time, *Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal* (Wilson & Alphona, 2014) and *Captain Marvel Vol 3: Allis Volat Propriis TPB* (Deconnick 2015). I chose graphic novels because they complement the visual multimedia that students are exposed to nowadays (Hughes & King, 2010). *Ms. Marvel* is about an Asian female teenager who discovers she

is a superhero and *Captain Marvel* has a similar journey, but she is a White female.

As my survey had suggested that my focus group preferred books about White female characters I wondered that if I introduced a book which had a strong Asian female character that they possibly could identify with how would they react to it? I asked students to keep a reflective worksheet whilst reading the books which contained questions based on Aidan Chambers' 'tell me' theory. Chambers' matrix helps students to 'widen the scope of language and references, provide comparisons, and help by bringing into the conversation ideas, information, opinions that assist understanding' (2002, p.172). When we discussed their answers using this matrix it enabled students to critique the text and make sense of their views.

My focus group really enjoyed reading *Ms. Marvel* and were excited to find numerous relatable examples which mirrored their own lives and culture. This confirms Ford et al.'s (2018) theory that when children see themselves in books it makes them eager to read. The group hardly spoke about the *Captain Marvel* text and provided almost no feedback on their worksheet about this character.

I wanted to continue this enthusiasm for reading and found an article online in *Teen Vogue*, *11 Books with South Asian Characters You Should Read in 2019* (Makhijani 2019). I ordered the books but before they arrived the group assessed the book covers. I used Michael Rosen's (2017) matrix of the types of comments which children make about texts to elicit a broader range of responses from my group about their opinions.

The theme of a 'double life' and religion came up several times. My group seemed to feel that the characters in these books had a different hidden life compared to their normal life. Ghuman (2010) states that Asian girls are caught between two cultures at home and school. My students in earlier research (table 1) stated that they did not feel isolated yet in this piece of research they possibly are showing their inner feelings or thoughts about this subject. In my introduction I mentioned the possible ways in

which people identify themselves and a person's family's ideologies have a powerful impact on an individual's identity.

My group were very eager to discuss what they thought of the book covers because "there are so many books with people like me on" (Student E, 2019). Chambers' concept of using talk to discuss the reading experience enabled my students to share collective views about characters which were like themselves. Students previously had neither the time nor space to discover literature which contained characters from different ethnicities, one student said it felt quite "new and revolutionary" (Student A, 2019).

My last piece of research was to ask students to create their own glossary of ethnic codes. The group really enjoyed this task and debated quite heatedly about the characteristics of each race. We used Bhopal (2003) categories as a starting point, but the group did not feel there was enough scope to fully develop each race's characteristics, so they made up their own. They used examples of people they knew at school and home to justify their choices. Some students made bold statements which they could not fully explain how they had come to these conclusions, and I suspect they have been influenced by the media.

The social influences children encounter is greater because of the saturated environments that we live in. The emergence of popular social influencers online means our children are exposed to powerful role models whose agenda is not always transparent. They are paid to post things they think their audience want to see. The reader possibly needs to be selective 'but also conveys what he regards as an appropriate attitude to what he saw' (Harding, 1988b, p.63).

Conclusion

Literature enabled me to learn about myself as a child independently from my parents. The Judy Blume series and *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis (1950 - 56) were memorable books I read. I could become these characters because I identified with them, the fact they looked like me and made cultural references I understood helped. Here lies the juxtaposition, I assume that my students want to read books with

characters that look and possibly act like themselves but in fact my survey showed they did not. I could be imposing my values of equality into this argument and not taking into consideration what students actually want to read.

My focus group showed very few differences from the year group cohort in their views about ethnicity in literature. The South Asian girls in my group identified themselves as “Asian London Muslims” (Student A, 2019). Their families and religion played a large part in how they identified themselves. The group primarily read for enjoyment; ethnicity was not an issue. However, since introducing them to literature featuring characters who come from a similar culture background to themselves, they have realised it could be quite interesting to explore this avenue and find out new ways they could express themselves.

Problematising race could encourage society to have conversations about it and could empower students to learn how race ‘has been used historically to classify groups of people’ (Howard, 2004, p.499) ultimately this could help students to confront the inequality in society.

I think my research could be used to further explore boys’ attitudes to multicultural fictional characters as they showed more resistance in engaging with books outside of popular genres. An interesting concept would be to examine literature containing multicultural characters that possibly have physical or mental disabilities. In secondary schools we experience a number of students dealing with mental health issues, literature can enable students to seek solstice that there are other people experiencing the same problems and advice on coping strategies.

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FINDING MIRRORS AND LOOKING THROUGH THE WINDOW: EXPLORING CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO LITERATURE WITH MUSLIM PROTAGONISTS

AMEENA GAMIET

Growing up in the UK as a child of Muslim South African immigrants, I was acutely aware of my difference in relation to others and understood the essence of being a 'minority' from an early age. I never would have entertained the possibility of reading about a character within the mainstream children's literature market who shared my cultural background or religious beliefs.

I currently work as a Year 6 teacher at primary school near Slough, an area in which 67.4% of primary school children are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds (Slough Borough Council, 2014). Furthermore, the 2011 Census indicates that 25% of Slough's population identify as Muslim. In the school at which I teach, bordering the Slough and South Buckinghamshire divide, the largest minority group in terms of religion is Muslim at 29%, closely followed by families who have not identified any religion (18%) with Sikhs numbering 14% of the school total. Yet during my five years teaching within the school, I found the school curriculum did little to acknowledge and include the diverse range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds within it.

I decided to focus my research on children's books with fictional Muslim protagonists. My objectives were two-fold. Firstly, I aimed to explore children's responses to fiction books which feature Muslim protagonists. To do this, I selected a group of higher attaining children from Year 6 within my own school setting to partake in a series of sessions where we would read, discuss and engage with books featuring Muslim main characters. Our core text for this project was *Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet* by Zanib Mian, first published in the UK in 2019, but we also looked at extracts from other books, including *Does My Head*

Look Big in This (2005) by Randa Abdel-Fatteh, an Australian author of Egyptian-Palestinian descent, *You Must be Layla* (2019) by the Australian-Sudanese author Yassmin Abdel-Magied and *Little Badman and the Invasion of the Killer Aunties* (2019) by British authors Humza Arshad and Henry White. In exploring these texts, I aimed to assess the extent to which these bore a resemblance to the experience of the Muslim children within the group, acting as a metaphorical mirror, reflecting something similar to their family life or personal struggles, and provided something of a 'window' to the non-Muslim children of the group, offering a new outlook and an opportunity to learn something new through the shared reading experience.

The children's responses to these texts form the core of my research. The reference to mirrors and windows in the title of this work comes from comes from Rudine Sims Bishop's seminal work entitled 'Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors':

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined...These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author...a window can also be a mirror...and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences...Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.

(Bishop, 1990, p.ix)

My second objective stemmed from my own early experiences of formulating and explaining my own identity; I wanted to explore the range, or lack thereof, of narratives depicting Muslims in children's literature. The attitudes I encountered in my childhood indicated to me a single narrative of what Muslims are or 'should' be as understood by not just society, but the Muslim community themselves. In her ground-breaking TED talk, Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Adichie, coined the phrase 'The Danger of the Single Story' to describe this phenomenon, stating that the single

story 'emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar' (Adichie, 2009). A single story of Muslims, therefore, would have a detrimental effect not just on the Muslim community in relation to society at large, but also upon minority groups within the Muslim community as well.

Reflecting Realities: the CLPE study

In 2018, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) published a ground-breaking report which looked at diversity within children's literature entitled *Reflecting Realities*. The first of its kind in the UK, the report aimed to 'quantify and evaluate the extent and quality of ethnic representation and diversity in children's publishing in the UK' (CLPE, 2018, p.4). The findings were eye-opening: while 32% of compulsory school age in England were of minority ethnic origins in 2017, only 4% of children's books published that year featured BAME characters, and only 1% of children's books had a BAME main character.

A subsequent study published the following year showed an improvement. The percentage of books featuring a BAME character increased from 4% to 7%, while the percentage of books with BAME protagonists had increased from 1% to 4% (CLPE, 2019). The 2019 report made it clear, however, that a rise in children's books with BAME characters does not solve the problem (ibid.).

The *Reflecting Realities* studies are useful when discussing the presence of Muslims in children's literature. Although the studies make no reference to any religion, the findings are relevant since the 2018 study included a breakdown of ethnic representation in the titles submitted which included Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian backgrounds, noting that only 2.5% of main characters had this heritage. These ethnicities collectively dominate the make-up of the Muslim community in the UK at 59.6% (Ali et al., 2015; Janson, 2012) which gives some indication as to the relatively low presence of Muslims within children's books.

Muslims in Children's Books

Canadian children's author Rukhsana Khan first tried to publish her books through the Muslim publishing industry. She describes

the industry as having a 'nepotistic outlook' (Khan, nd) tending to only publish their own. In an article that refers to a recommended list of children's books with Muslim characters, Khan audaciously mentions Linda Delgado's *Islamic Rose* books (2014) as a series she cannot recommend. She counts Delgado's series as problematic for the mainstream, as the series follows real life (Delgado based the series on her granddaughter) with the grandmother converting to Islam in the fourth book, echoing Delgado's real-life conversion. As Khan states, 'while this is not a problem within the Muslim community, it is if the books were to be included on a mainstream booklist' (ibid.) citing parents' concerns and suspicions about hidden agendas (Shackle, 2017).

The fear of being seen to be proselytising is something that Muslim authors in western mainstream publishing seem to share. Khan is eager to stress that converting people is not on her agenda:

The only ulterior motive I possess is to try and humanise Muslims and create more understanding... because I'm Muslim and there's still a lack of good books about Muslims, I'm called upon to make sure my stories are about Muslims. It's filling a niche.

(Khan, nd)

Many Muslim authors are concerned with presenting their audiences with authentic windows and respectful mirrors (Möller, 2014), showing culturally authentic experiences, rather than preaching about a supposed religious, spiritual, or moral superiority. Yet as Khan suggests, the niche is not entirely filled. Due to the interest in Islam sparked after 9/11, there have been more fiction and non-fiction books published in an attempt to teach children about Islam (Khan, 2006; Hirji, 2018). Yet Khan believes some authors have taken a simplistic approach, taking Western-styled heroes and heroines, and plunking them into Muslim-styled settings, with plots largely based on theocratic regimes and abusive fathers. Khan claims that books with such shallow stereotyping do little to create genuine understanding – in fact, she claims that they indirectly preach the superiority of Western culture (Khan, 2006).

This sentiment ties in with the ongoing debate as to whether authors who are outsiders can accurately and authentically portray a culture (or belief system) of which they are not part (Short & Fox, 2004). Yet finding out whether authors of children's books with Muslim protagonists are, in fact Muslim, is not as easy as it may seem. Torres (2016) noted this problem when reviewing picturebooks with Muslim characters for young children. She discovered that some authors were born into Muslim families but did not identify themselves as being Muslim; some were married to Muslims and were raising their children within the faith but did not self-identify as Muslims and some had converted to Islam at some point in their lives. Torres also noted that within the sample collected, there was an underlying pattern of separatism (Torres, 2016). The illustrations showed Muslim children primarily within the Muslim community, sending a powerful subliminal message to stay in their own distinct spaces (ibid.). It should be noted here that of the books reviewed, only 20% could be considered texts written by Muslims for non-Muslims. Considering Khan's critique and Torres' study, we are therefore left with an apparent dichotomy: books written by non-Muslims about Muslims are in danger of encouraging stereotypes and over-simplifying cultural issues, and books written by Muslims about Muslims (at least, for early readers), are overwhelmingly insular, lacking in depictions of positive interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

While this may have been the case for some time, I do not believe that this stands for more recent publications involving Muslim characters. The books chosen for this study fall firmly within Bishop's 'culturally conscious' category (Bishop, 2012), voicing the experiences of young Muslims with clear cultural markers and depicting the richness of living in multicultural communities throughout.

Methodology

My position as a teacher at the school undertaking this project meant that I was an insider researcher: I had privileged access to certain information, knew the children I was working with beforehand and was aware of the culture and values of the school (Merton, 1972). Yet although I was an official insider, my personal

identity as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman had, at different times during my employment at the school, been the subject of some micro-aggressions from a small number of staff, which served as a constant reminder of the status quo and my place along the margins of it. The fact that I felt it best to avoid initially telling parents that the study would focus on Muslim protagonists within children's literature added to my own personal feeling of not being a complete insider as I worried that some may negatively misinterpret the aims of my research. This sentiment of mine was fueled by the speculation sensationalised by the press in recent years of alleged 'Islamic plots' to take over schools in Birmingham, otherwise known as the 'Trojan Horse' plot (Shackle, 2017).

The environment I aimed to cultivate in my sessions, as a teacher involved in research, was based on the work of Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1992, p.318):

Researching teachers create classroom environments in which there are researching students – students ask, not just answer questions, pose not just solve problems; and help to construct curriculum out of their own linguistic and cultural resources, not just receive preselected and predigested information.

I would be placing myself where the action is, opening discussions about the texts being read, whilst observing and noting the reactions (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2010). This put me largely in the frame of a participant observer: making field notes where I recorded facial expressions or gestures (Corbetta, 2013); keeping a reflexive journal (Janesick, 1999; Koshy, 2010) and listening back on recorded discussions to transcribe and analyse discussions. I also conducted some semi-structured interviews and analysed writing completed by the children which I had set to broaden my qualitative data collection (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2010). My sessions actively encouraged children to ask questions, pose problems and co-construct knowledge through the

provision of a dialogic space (Wegerif, 2011) and exploratory talk (Mercer, 2000).

I felt it necessary to select individual children who, I felt, would help me understand the responses I had already assumed, based on my theoretical understanding of this type of literature and the differences that ethnicity and religion, or lack thereof, may play in forming opinions of it (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Robinson, 2013). I chose children who were judged to be working at Age-Related Expectations (ARE) in reading and writing, or above. This was a key factor, as I felt that selecting a sample that included wide variations in English attainment would have affected some of their ability to access the texts, therefore resulting in skewed data.

After identifying children in the year group who had met the first set of criteria, I used quota sampling (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004) which enabled a flexible approach to choosing my sample, setting out a series of categories, ensuring that I had at least one example of each case (Robinson, 2013; Mason, 2002). The categories I stipulated ensured that I had as diverse a mix as I could use, including a mixed gender, varied ethnic background and children of different religious persuasions (yet ensuring there was more than one child who identified as Muslim in the group) within my final sample (table 1).

Phillip	White British male. Church of England family background.
Eloise	White British female. Church of England family background.
Zoe	White British female. Catholic.
Susannah	Mixed heritage female – White British/Turkish. No religion.
Kain	Mixed heritage male – Black British/White British. Church of England family background.
Sukhmani	British Indian female. Sikh.
Aleena	British Pakistani female. Muslim.
Hasan	British Pakistani male. Muslim.
Laila	British Pakistani female. Muslim.

Table 1: Profile of Participants. All names shown are pseudonyms.

Discussion of Findings

While the overarching themes within the data aimed to group responses as to whether children saw themselves 'mirrored' or 'looked through the window', in practise, the data was more complex. The data is therefore presented under subheadings which reflect the children's growing confidence and articulacy during the project:

- Reading Habits and Experiences
- Talking About 'Race' and Identity
- Finding Mirrors and Looking Through the Window
- 'Eureka' Moments and Reflections

Reading Habits and Experiences

The children gasped when they saw the array of books on the table. They needed no encouragement to dive in. It was interesting to see which books they quickly took 'ownership' of: Susannah for 'Can You See Me', Kain and 'Pig Heart Boy', Aleena with 'The Muslims' and Laila with 'Stories for South Asian Super Girls'.

Reflexive journal entry, 11.3.20



Figure 1: Book blanket

In our first session, the children were presented with a book blanket (figure 1) interspersed with some thinking questions. The

questions were based on James Durran's trigger questions, which were formulated using Rosen's matrix for children responding to poems (Rosen, 2017) I then invited them to partake in a semi-structured interview style where I asked them about their reading habits, favourite books, and whether they had ever experienced a time when they strongly 'related' to a character in a book. As expected from my purposive sampling methods, it was clear that the children read extensively, read for pleasure, and had started to develop their own personal reading autobiographies (Meek, 1988).

For of the girls in the group, reading was relaxing, enjoyable, an activity that provides comfort and escapism. Susannah linked reading to fond experiences: trawling through charity shops with her Mum, reading into the early hours of the morning, receiving books and bookshop gift cards and presents and re-reading books that she particularly loves. The other girls' accounts of their reading habits were similar. Zoe stated:

I usually get books for my birthday...my family know what I like. I read every night, so when my Mum comes in, I usually say 'Can I finish the page?' or, 'Can I finish the paragraph?'

Sukhmani told me her father works in publishing and had a hand in getting *Stories for South Asian Super Girls* by Raj Kaur Khaira published (2019). It was therefore unsurprising that she had an extensive collection of books at home, and that her father was always willing to buy her any book she's interested in.

Aleena seemed to have a narrower reading repertoire than the others, citing Jacqueline Wilson books as her main reading material, reading them almost 'by default':

My older sister used to read Jacqueline Wilson books, then they were just on my bookshelf.

Unlike the others, Aleena did not recount fond memories of trips to the library, going book shopping, or receiving books as gifts. I noted that this was perhaps due to her personality, that she was not as forthcoming as the other girls. Nonetheless, I felt that her reading habits she revealed in the first session were significant as

I continued to record her response to books with Muslim characters.

The boys also willingly and excitedly recounted how they choose books. Hasan told me:

Sometimes we go to the library, sometimes we have them at home.

Kain also listed Amazon, Waterstones, and gifts as his sources for reading material. Out of the boys, Phillip seemed to have the narrowest range of reading experiences. Like Aleena, he rarely reads anything else other than the *Tom Gates* series or the series of football books that he was into. He was, nonetheless, enthusiastic when speaking about them, and clearly derived a lot of pleasure from them.

The last question I asked the children in this initial session was whether they had ever felt, when reading a book, if they were a little bit like a character, or that the character's life, in some way, reminded them of their own. The responses were interesting. Susannah listed a few characters she felt she could relate to, and even commented that she had told her Mum that the main character in *The Huntress* series by Sarah Driver reminded her of herself. She eventually settled on Hermione from *Harry Potter*:

Coz I love doing work. And everyone thinks that I'm like her.

Phillip responded:

A little bit like Tom Gates, coz that's what most boys are like.

Zoe also settled on *Tom Gates*, but commented beforehand:

I'm sure I have, but I can't remember which book it's in!

Even though they were interviewed separately, Eloise's reply mirrored Susannah's:

Hermione Granger's quite similar to me. We look kind of similar, and we're kind of similar in what we do.

The children of BAME backgrounds found this question more challenging. Although Sukhmani's father had helped published a book about inspiring South Asian women, she could not specify a character or book that she felt reflected herself or her family, adding with a giggle:

I don't think so, but I must say my family is quite unique!

When I asked whether she would like to see a book that reflected her life a bit more, she replied:

Yeah, I would like to see something like that, coz, like, it might bring a spark to my family, that I know that could actually happen to us.

Hasan gave an emphatic shake of his head in response. When I asked him whether it bothered him, he simply responded:

I'm fine with it.

Kain expressed a desire to be like *Harry Potter*, although he was clear in his view that there was no character in the series that he could see himself in. Interestingly, both Aleena and Laila likened themselves to the characters in *Dork Diaries* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, citing their relationships with their siblings as the link.

With the exceptions of Aleena and Laila, the children from BAME backgrounds had difficulties relating to any of the characters they had 'met' in books. It is significant to note that even in the cases of Aleena and Laila, the part of themselves that they saw 'mirrored' in books were within the more universal concepts of sibling rivalry, rather than anything specific to their own personalities or family values. Conversely, Susannah, Eloise and Zoe made distinct links between their own interests, personalities, and even their looks when relating themselves to

children's book characters. Phillip's easy comment that 'most boys are like Tom Gates' showed an assumption that what he considers 'normal' is the same for everyone, whereas Sukhmani, Hasan and Kain were not only aware that they had never seen themselves 'mirrored' in fiction but seemed to think of it as 'the way things are'.

Talking About Race and Identity

Susannah reads the blurb from 'How High the Moon' by Karyn Parsons. Hasan and Kain are messing around, making snoring noises until she reads out something about the murder of two white girls. There is an audible "oooh" and Kain sounds disgruntled, asking "Why does it have to say white girls?"

Notes from a recording of participants while unsupervised, 11.3.20

Aleena barely let 'The Muslims' book go once she picked it up. When I asked what drew her to it, she looked embarrassed, uncomfortable, and even started to blush. She said that she read the blurb but forgot what it was about. It's almost as though she didn't want to say the word 'Muslim', let alone admit to being from a Muslim background.

Reflexive journal entry, 11.3.20

From our first session, it was clear that the children sidelined the issue of race in our discussions. It might have been apparent that many of the books I had laid out had characters of multiple ethnicities and religious backgrounds, yet they would not broach it in their discussions with me. In their unsupervised session, any mention of the terms Black, White or Muslim whilst reading the blurbs would stop them in their tracks. They would eventually brand the books as "weird". I took this as an indication that the children had been socialised into the norm of colourblindness. Critical Race Theory asserts that pretending to not see race or

colour perpetuates systemic racism, as it shuts down conversations that need to be had about injustices to marginalised groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). I realised that I would have to broach the subject of race with them directly. To offer an emancipatory form of reading (Anderson & Irvine, 1993), I had to deconstruct their notions of political correctness. Otherwise, I feared, they would continue to ignore the very issues I wanted them to discuss.

At the beginning of the next session, I told the children that we would be talking about issues to do with race and religion in our discussions, and that I hoped that they wouldn't be offended if I talked in terms of being Black, White, Asian or mixed-race, because these are acceptable descriptors as part of identity. I then went on to explain, for example, that I self-identify as a mixed-race, Muslim woman in my mid-thirties, and that these are only some of the things that make me who I am. I later noted in my reflexive journal:

the children seemed to exhale collectively as though they were aware that 'race' had something to do with this, but were too scared to mention it and were relieved that I had.

Reflexive journal entry, 18.3.20

This seemed to help the children relax into the subject further. Susannah followed by stating:

I'm British, but I'm also half Turkish. Not many people know that.

My intervention opened a way of speaking to the children that they previously thought was 'out of bounds', and they progressively felt as though they could talk freely and without judgement (Corbetta, 2003). As a result, we had successfully established a safe reading community (Vygotsky, 1978).

Finding Mirrors and Looking Through the Window

When reading *You Must be Laila* (Abdel-Magied, 2020), the children began to explore the language used:

- Hasan: It's like she's American! (lots of laughing) She talks to her hair!
- Kain: (reading) "breathe in, and out. In, and out. You got this, gurr!"
- Hasan: Then there's this person called Baba! (chuckling) I think that's her dad, I don't know?
- Zoe: Isn't that...religion?
- Aleena: I call my Dad 'Baba'.
- Teacher: So that's something that's familiar to you.
- Aleena: Yeah.
- Zoe: Is that religious, or is it just a name?
- Aleena: Nah, it's just a name.
- Zoe: I just call my dad 'Dad' or 'Daddy'.

This dialogue shows how the text was a 'mirror' and a 'window' for different children at the same time. For Hasan and Kain, it was odd that an author should decide to dedicate the first few pages of a book to her main character styling her hijab. Hasan mentions several other elements of the text that he finds strange and hits upon something that triggers a response from Aleena, who recognises the Arabic term for 'Daddy' - 'Baba' - often used in Muslim families. Zoe is curious to know whether the term has any religious significance, and Aleena responds by informing her that "it's just a name". Aleena, who was typically shy to contribute, sees something of her world mirrored in the text and for a moment she's in a position of authority, answering Zoe's question.

Eureka Moments and Reflections

During a session in which we were reading *Planet Omar* (Mian & Mafaridik, 2019), the children discussed a racist incident in the story:

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- Susannah: When he said “go back to your country”, that’s the part that really made me think he deserved that because that’s just the most utmost racist thing I’ve ever heard anyone say to anyone else. It’s just so rude and racist.
- Teacher: How did you feel reading that part?
- Susannah: I felt ashamed, you know, because they’re basically one of us and that someone was doing that. It just wasn’t right.
- Teacher: This is a story though, right? It’s not real.
- Laila: But I can just imagine it.
- Phillip: There are people like that.
- Teacher: Can you tell me more about that?
- Phillip: Well... I dunno, really. There are people who aren’t really nice who say that kind of stuff. Not everyone.
- Sukhmani: It happened to my Dad when he was younger. So, he told me that once this girl came up to him in the park and told him to go back to his own country. And that was just kind of it. And it just...feels so weird that some people actually experience that.

Omar’s brush with a racist bully provoked profound discussion, which in turn led to deep reflection upon racism in society, and how the lack of children’s books about BAME characters may be linked. Sukhmani’s comment left the children very pensive. They seemed more emboldened in future discussions to express their thoughts on the role literature must play in combatting systemic racism and Islamophobia.

If there were no books about people with different backgrounds, they might begin to doubt themselves and their religion, and think they’re not being noticed because there just aren’t books about them.

– Eloise

I've just had a theory. You know some books, dated back to like, when people thought that whites were better than black people, maybe they're to do with that. Like maybe it's been passed on in the generations of books.

– Zoe

These quotes came from our final session. Zoe's comment summarises the premise of the CLPE's study (2018; 2019) and shows an awareness of the reality of contemporary racism which has evolved over generations, including the long-held view of Muslims as the antithesis of Western civilisation and enlightenment (Said, 2003). It also shows her personal progression of being able to articulate such a view by the end of study, an advancement that I hope was due in part to our exploration of the texts.

Conclusion

I had a preconceived idea that the Muslim participants in the study would find themselves and their families mirrored within the text and that this would be an enjoyable, revelatory experience for them. Laila and Hasan's final comments certainly indicated as such.

I would like to do this again...I think it has changed my interest in books because I could relate to some of the things.

– Laila

This will definitely affect my choice of books in the future as I didn't know these kinds of books that I can relate to exist.

– Hasan

Aleena, however, commented that she "felt a bit weird" throughout the process. There are several possible reasons why Aleena felt like this, ranging from being generally uncomfortable with her Muslim identity to feeling the need to suppress her

'Muslimness' for fear of not fitting in and being marginalised further. Perhaps she might have felt less 'weird' if she had been exposed to texts with Muslim protagonists earlier, within a school context. Had this been the case, the multicultural or Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) genre of writing would have been more normalised, allowing children like Aleena to feel that seeing her Muslim identity represented in books was a normal part of her education. Sukhmani's reflection was less philosophical and more semantic. She might have felt that she needed permission to apply the experience to her own Sikh background, which led to her somewhat limited response. Perhaps, if there were another participant who shared her Sikh background, we would have witnessed richer musings relating to her own religious and cultural experiences.

Susannah, Eloise and Zoe took a lot from the experience; as well as learning more about everyday life as a Muslim child, they considered the deeper question of why they had not read books like these before. Eloise expressed her consideration of her own background, perhaps an indication of her starting to de-centralise the White dominant majority experience as being normal and accepting it as one of several ideologies. Not only had these children 'looked through the window', but they had also started to question the systems that had previously covered the window they had been looking through and realising in doing so that the story of the dominant White majority is just another window for someone else.

Phillip was the only participant who opted out of the study mid-way. As the only White British male in the group, his decision to leave played into a stereotype; since there was a lack of interest convergence (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011); perhaps he did not see the point of reading and discussing texts with Muslim protagonists.

I believe that this study challenged the participant's perceptions of what is possible within children's literature. Despite Aleena's reservations, all of the Muslim participants saw their lives, at least to some extent, 'mirrored' through the texts, even if their reception of this experience varied. The non-Muslim females, particularly those who identified as White, saw this project as

revelatory, indicating that they would make a conscious effort to source more multicultural books for future reading.

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PART 3: POETRY RESEARCH



INTRODUCTION TO POETRY RESEARCH

DEBORAH FRIEDLAND

In the ancient Javanese theatre form of *wayang kulit*, an epic saga is acted out by the shadows of puppets dancing mysteriously across a huge screen. When I once had the chance to watch an all-night performance, it struck me that the shadows were more powerful than the puppets themselves since it is in the shadows that the poetry and the real story resides.

Poetry brings fragments, lost thoughts and inner feelings to the centre of the stage where they can be still, be observed and be understood. Where small is beautiful and where we may find ourselves at what empowerment specialists like to call the 'growing edge' – a place where we stand at a threshold, perhaps feel a little uncomfortable but where there is new understanding and change.

In this section, Deborah Buttery, Beth Ashton, Sara Hirsch and Christian Foley explore how they very successfully use reading and writing poetry with their students to facilitate learning in different contexts. Through poetry, using diverse sources from well-known paintings and French to personal experience, students can find their own growing edge, generate reflexivity and be empowered by language to create and celebrate their own shadow dance.

MOI, JE JOUE: HOW DOES PLAYING WITH POETRY AFFECT ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTITUDE IN FRENCH LESSONS?

DEBORAH BUTTERY

I am a French teacher with experience of working with pupils from EYFS to Key Stage 5. In the summer term of 2015, as part of an MA in Children's Literature I undertook at Goldsmith's University, I completed an action research project to investigate the impact of poetry in the language learning classroom. At the time I was concerned about how best to encourage independent use of French in my Key Stage 2 French lessons. I found that the danger of using the popular communicative approach in lessons to teach 'familiar and routine matters' (*National Curriculum, 2013*) easily led to pupils merely repeating and understanding the language given to them by the teacher but not of appropriating this language themselves and using it for their own purposes. Celebrated psychologist and theorist Lev Vygotsky claimed that pupil development rests on three concepts: higher mental functions, cultural development and mastering one's behavioural processes (Vygotsky, 1986). I wanted to examine whether playing with literature in the MFL classroom could cover these three tenets, improving both the standard of pupils' French and also their attitude towards the subject. This drove my decision to create an action research project, or 'self-study,' (Anderson *et al.*, 2007) where I investigated how changing my own teaching practice might affect learners.

Action research begins with people thinking about what they value, and how they might act in the direction of those values, i.e. how they can achieve what is important to them. Action research is therefore value laden, different from the neutral stance required by traditional forms of research for the research to be value free. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009, p. 19)

When I began my career in teaching, I initially worked as a secondary school teacher and the training I received to do this was very much based around the communicative approach. However, in making the transition to EYFS and Key Stages 1 and 2 later in my career, I had to adapt my teaching as the communicative approach assumes a level of competency in the first language and ability to reflect upon it that EYFS and Key Stage 1 children do not necessarily have. Therefore, with the youngest children in Reception as well as those in Key Stage 1, I had already found myself incorporating a significant amount of play within my approach; teaching French through nursery rhymes, as well as songs and stories, that allowed both for a richness of language and also often provided a cultural bridge between the pupils' native language and the foreign language. 'One may change practice when *new experience* causes re-examination of problems: Intuitively we start thinking of alternative solutions.' (Stake, 1986, p.90).

This experience led me to suspect that the play-based approach rooted in Vygotsky's mediated, social collaborative activity, so enshrined in EYFS (Brooker *et al.*, 2010) and influential in Key Stage 1 (Fisher, 2011), might also be usefully incorporated into KS2 MFL lessons, enhancing learning and increasing motivation. This, therefore, was the focus of my action research.

Both the supporters of the use of literature in foreign language education (e.g. Shanahan, 1997; Hanauer, 2001; Cranston, 2003; Kramsch, 2000; Schultz, 1996; Paran, 2008) and its opponents (Edmondson, 1997; Vandrick, 2003) agree that there is a paucity of research in this area. The popularity of KS2 courses such as Catherine Cheater's *Golden Daffodils* shows an acceptance of the importance literature can play in language learning but there is little insight into why this is so. The research that exists tends to look at foreign language learning at university level, using theoretical foci such as stylistics (Rosenkjar, 2006) or reader-response theory (Tutas, 2006) neither of which I felt captured the nature of play that I wanted to explore. Therefore, I adopted Vygotsky's developmental theories as my focus, specifically his theory of the zone of proximal development in which scaffolded play can 'help the child move from the performance level to the

potential level' (Smidt, 2013, p. 85). Although Vygotsky did not explicitly look at foreign language learning in younger learners, he did refer to foreign language learning in *Thought and Language* (1986). He drew many parallels between learning a foreign language and acquiring 'scientific concepts' (described as the conscious use of phonetic, grammatical and syntactic forms), rather than 'spontaneous concepts' needed for conscious learning: '[...] learning a foreign language, a process that is conscious and deliberate from the start,' (ibid., p. 195). He recognised that learning a second language can offer a different perspective on a speaker's first language; thus learners who have acquired a second language are able to reflect on the structure of the second language whilst retaining the spontaneity of the first. His argument was that it is possible, as well as desirable, to climb up and down between spontaneous and scientific concepts in order to strengthen both: 'Scientific concepts grow downward through spontaneous concepts; spontaneous concepts grow upward through scientific concepts.' (ibid., p. 194).

Play, for Vygotsky, is 'the first step on the road to the development of higher mental functions and of verbal thinking,' (Smidt, 2013, p. 105). Therefore, under Vygotsky, a play-based approach or learning 'from the bottom up', should support or scaffold the scientific concepts of language proficiency.

In play a child is always above his average age, about his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. (Vygotsky, 1967, p. 16).

Incorporating play into MFL is, however, a particular challenge. Unlike science, where a child can play with water and cups to understand such concepts as volume and gravity, a foreign language does not have a material manifestation with which pupils can physically play. So how might one use language as a play tool? Poetry is one, if not the most playful forms of language, and I decided to use a range of French poetry to inspire 'play' in my action research project. Using Vygotsky's approach, French poetry would be the 'artefact' through which pupils could mediate the 'cultural tool' of the French language; as teacher I was there to enable this mediation. As poetry often conforms to

rules, some might argue that one cannot 'play' with poetry; however, Vygotsky believed that there was no such thing as play without rules. In play, taking on the rules of being someone else is what gives the child pleasure and satisfaction. Gravelle, (2000), also argues that language learning is inherently like this: 'Learning a language is a creative process that involves making errors and formulating rules.' (ibid., p. 4).

My study was conducted with pupils attending an independent all-through girls' school in Kent. Pupils at the school were mainly from privileged backgrounds: there was a lower-than-average number of children with English as a second language, none of the children are entitled to free school meals and none of the pupils in the focus group had special needs. Over the ten available 30-minute lessons, my Year 4 French class of 24 pupils incorporated a more Vygotskian play-based approach to create a poetry anthology in French. The children were encouraged to read and interact with a range of poems to inspire them to write their own poetry in French (see figure 1, figure 2, & figure 3).

'Calligramme' par
Appollinaire.
<http://fr.wikipedia.org>
/
Reconnais-toi
Cette adorable personne c'est toi
Sous le grand chapeau canotier
Oeil
Nez
La bouche
Voici l'ovale de ta figure
Ton cou exquis
Voici enfin l'imparfaite image de
ton buste adoré
vu comme à travers un nuage
Un peu plus bas c'est ton cœur qui
bat

OMÉGA PRO

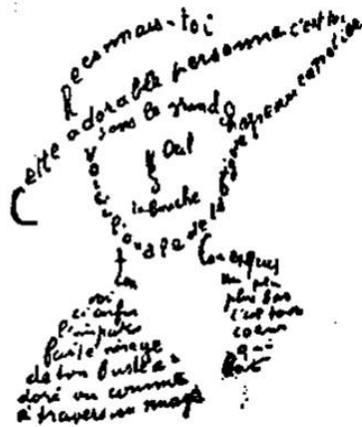


Figure 1

Children's Literature in Action



Figure 2

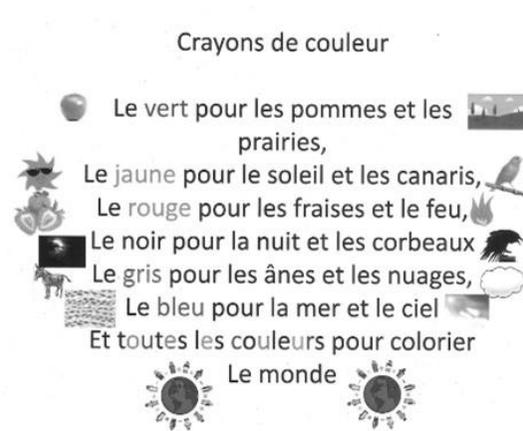


Figure 3

Broadly speaking, each lesson began with a new poem, followed by comprehension and discussion, then a 'quick-write' from pupils to produce their own poem. These 'quick-writes' were gathered at the end of the lesson and formed the basis of discussion in the next lesson (see figure 4).



Figure 4

Pupils were given the opportunity to adapt their 'quick-write' in response to what had been said in following discussions. These lessons were play-based and reflective of Vygotsky's tenets in that: the purpose of the lessons (to create a poem for an anthology) was clear from the beginning; although the activity was not self-chosen, pupils had much more freedom to manage themselves during lessons than I had previously given them and they had full access to the poems both in and out of lesson time; they had lots of opportunities to interact socially, talking about their poems with their peers or the teacher and accepting helpful criticism from these people; finally, they had help in structuring the language they wanted to use and were allowed to do several drafts.

My first step was to create a baseline against which to assess the outcomes of the research. This was a challenge in that there is no national data against which to benchmark pupil progress in French in the way that there is for literacy or numeracy. I therefore had to rely on my own assessment based on the new National Curriculum (2013) and the Chris Quigley curriculum that the school chose to work with (Quigley, 2008), against which I assessed girls as 'working above', 'working within' and 'working below' expectations. It must be acknowledged that without a

Children's Literature in Action

national data set to normalise against there was a degree of subjectivity in this assessment. I also wanted to look at 'intangible outcomes' (Bearne *et al.*, 2007, p. 3), such as attitude towards the subject. I therefore gave pupils a questionnaire both at the beginning and at the end of the project to enquire about their attitudes towards French as a subject (see figure 5).

French poetry writing questionnaire

Name: _____

Questions about French

1. Do you enjoy French? Why? / Why not?
Yes because its fun to know different language
2. Are you good at French?
maybe
3. Do you ever practise French outside of school? How?
No and Yes

Questions about your poem

4. What did you think when Mrs Buttery said you were going to be writing poetry in French?
Yes because you can do it yourself
5. Do you like the poem you wrote? Why? / Why not?
Yes because I am proud of it
6. Did your poem end of being like the first poems you wrote?
No
7. Do you think your poem is good? Why? Why not?
Yes because its amazing
8. Have you read anyone else's poems? What do you think?
Yes okay
9. How does writing a poem in French compare to writing a poem in English?
Not at all
10. Did you use just French in your poem or did you use other languages? Why?
No just french
11. Did you use drawing in your poem? Why? Why not?
Yes to give you a clue of the poem
12. Which French topic did you prefer this year: Tudors; *La Belle au Bois Dormant*; poetry?
Tudors

Figure 5

This allowed me to assess whether, within a more play-based and less teacher-led environment, attitude towards the subject was a stronger determinant towards performance as opposed to ability against assessment criteria. Reviewing the questionnaire results and performance against the assessment criteria at the beginning of the project showed that those pupils 'working above' and those 'working below' showed positive attitudes towards French. There were four responses from children 'working within' that were negative. As regards their own ability in the subject, the results were more varied: those pupils I had marked as 'working towards' tended to regard themselves as poor in the subject. As the research continued, these questionnaires were supported by data collected during these lessons, occasional interviews with children out of lessons, reflective journal writing and teacher field notes. The data were analysed in a number of ways, including thematic coding and narrative analysis.

The headline results from this action research project were that:

- Overall attainment in French worsened (10 girls moved down, 10 stayed the same and 4 went up);
- Overall attitude improved slightly (4 improved, 17 stayed the same, one worsened);
- Overall attitude towards their ability in the subject improved (7 felt they had improved, 11 stayed the same, 4 felt they had worsened);
- Attitude toward the subject at the beginning of the project was not a determinant in achievement at the end of the project. In fact, girls who believed themselves to be stronger at French showed a decrease in attainment.
- There was an overall increase in motivation to use French outside the classroom.

It should be recognised that this is based on a very small sample on relatively subjective assessment and not all girls completed both questionnaires. What is interesting about the results as they stand, however, is that even though the teacher's assessment of the pupil's completion of the task reported a worsening of

attainment, the pupils' own assessment of their attitude towards the subject and ability within it increased. I will now examine three cases in more detail within the research project in order to try and explain why this is so.

The three pupils I focus on vary in terms of ethnicity, learning dispositions and cultural experiences. These pupils were:

Tia – a high-achieving girl of Iraqi / British descent.

Maya – a girl of Nigerian descent who, though achieving fairly well, was described by her class teacher as missing her full potential.

Julia – a white British girl described by her class teacher as achieving below average attainment in literacy.

Tia

Following an exercise looking at the calligram poetry of Apollinaire (see figure 1, above), pupils were asked to work either together or individually to create their own 'quick write' calligram on any topic. This was early on in the project and many girls decided to write national flag calligrams, influenced by previous lessons. Tia, whose parents were from Iraq and who was taking Arabic lessons outside of school, chose to write her poem in the shape and colours of the Iraqi flag using the French 'Je déteste guerre,' (*Je déteste la guerre*). In terms of the linguistic competence, Tia already knew the phrase, 'Je déteste ...' and she then looked up the word 'guerre' in the dictionary asking me for help with pronunciation when she read it out to the class at the end of the lesson (see figure 6).



Figure 6

I was extremely impressed by the power of her simple phrase presented as a political message in the flag and Tia picked up on this, talking to me about her poem as we walked to lunch after the lesson. Tia told me that she wanted to incorporate the same phrase in Arabic into her final version of the poem that would go in the anthology and mentioned that the Arabic would 'mirror' the phrase in French as Arabic is written from right to left. Tia was already showing a high awareness of similarities and differences between languages and wanted to exploit this in her poem.

The child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories, and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations. (Vygotsky, 1986, p.196)

However, Tia was not sure how to say or write the phrase in Arabic. I suggested she go home and ask or ask at her Arabic class but in the subsequent lessons when pupils were working on their final poem, Tia still did not know the phrase and came to me feeling stuck, looking to me to scaffold her learning. With help from another pupil of Iraqi descent (but who is not literate in Arabic) we used an online dictionary to try and work out the phrase together but we could not decipher the writing system and were not sure whether the word we found in the dictionary was 'war' or 'noun'! Tia abandoned her flag calligram saying, 'I liked what the other people had done. I wanted to write about the things I like.' (see figure 7).

Transcript from teacher-pupil conversation at the end of the action research project
Teacher: Do you like your poem?
Tia: Yes.
Teacher: Is it like the first poem you wrote?
Tia: No, not at all. The other poem was about Iraq but I changed my mind.
Teacher: What do you think made you change your mind?
Tia: Well, I liked what other people had done. I wanted to write about the things I like.

Figure 7

Instead of using the Iraq poem, Tia did a calligram on 'Winter' sticking to likes and using the 'J'adore + infinitive' construction with relative accuracy. However, when I asked her to record her poem her performance was interrupted by need for clarification of both meaning and form. Tia had attempted to use her cultural background to inform her poetic voice and, for reasons including lack of scaffolding, and possibly lack of social support in the classroom, she pulled back and wrote something more like her peers. The breakdown of the scaffolding meant that she had 'played safe' and potentially had not internalised the language enough to have appropriated it. 'A word without meaning is an empty sound,' Vygotsky, 1986, p. 212). However, she was still one of the few pupils to use metaphor in her poem and was able to graft what she knew of poetry in English onto her French version (see figure 8).

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to inspire a 'quadruped' poem, as she put it, writing first in Yoruba, then French, then German and then English. Unfortunately, having played with the Yoruba language, she did not use the same process in French but went onto Google translate to translate the poems (see figure 9).

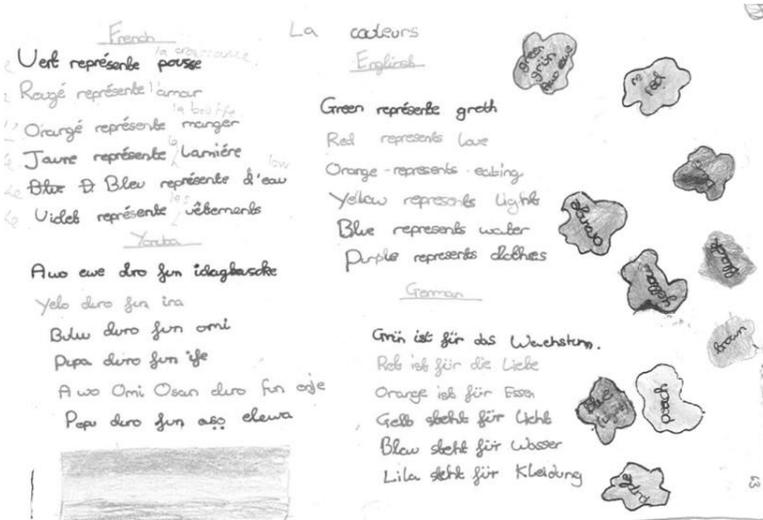


Figure 9

Her position was that she wanted the same poem in four different languages and was working from the mistaken premise that languages can be translated word-for-word, as a computer might do, which for me, was the opposite of play. The important thing for Maya was that it was *her* poem and that her voice shone through; only when she was secure that this had been achieved would she accept help in improving the accuracy of her language. Perhaps it is for this reason that Maya's poem was literal rather than poetic. However, when we came to record the poem, she asked me for help with pronunciation and at this point I suggested some changes to the language itself. She allowed me to help her and, I would argue, began to recognise the differences between languages moving towards more scientific concepts.

Julia

Julia was described by her class teacher in terms of literacy as one of the weaker pupils in the class. However, Julia put in her evaluation that she liked the idea of writing poetry: 'Yay, because you can do it yourself.' It was in the later lessons that she hit on the idea of blending her love of gore and her love of art with a colour poem. She had the idea of setting her poem in a graveyard and having the colours represent horror tropes. However, the scaffolding I provided to the class in the lesson was not enough for her and she came to me for one-to-one help, asking me to translate the following: 'Le vert pour le zombie qui mord; le rouge pour la blessure saignante...' [*Green for the zombie that bites; red for the bleeding wound.*] Once Julia had begun in this vein, she then abandoned the colour poem scaffolding and continued to describe her zombie whom she pictured rising out of the grave with a bloodied hand (see figure 10): '..avec les asticots qui sortent de la terre. Ils marchent pendant la nuit.' [*...with maggots coming from the earth. They wander at night.*]



Figure 10

Julia no longer had to 'play safe'; with the help of the teacher, she was able to create a more individual poem that could have been written only by her – she appropriated the task and made it her own. I scanned it and showed it to the rest of the class at the

beginning of the next lesson. This led to five other pupils (out of a class of 24) abandoning their poems and writing new ones based on a zombie theme. When performing and recording their poems in the final lesson, these girls decided to collaborate and performed the poems together with 'oooooooohs' and scary rattling in the background. Julia's engagement with the task had clearly inspired others to engage and play with the language as a group. Julia still needed help to perform her poem (I said it bit by bit and recorded her repeating it) and in this way she was still dependent on help from the teacher – she had appropriated the poem but not the French. If I were to measure attainment against ability to accurately produce language, Julia was weaker than Tia, as I would have expected; but in measuring language as the ability to convey a sense of self, Julia performed the strongest.

Conclusion

The removal of obligatory linguistic scaffolding by me as a teacher led to a more varied standard of French than I would generally expect. However, it also led to other interesting developments: the linguistic scaffolding was replaced by peer scaffolding through a more collaborative approach, as evinced by Julia, or parental scaffolding, as shown by Maya. In many ways this scaffolding provided greater confidence for girls to experiment and take risks than only teacher scaffolding, sat with Tia, and this is a certainly a point I will use to inform my teaching in the future. However, what was also clear to me is that there are significant risks with this approach as, if pupils are increasingly seeking scaffolding elsewhere, so the risk increases that the scaffolding teaching them the wrong scientific concepts (e.g. Maya's incorrect grammar), potentially inhibiting proficiency in the language.

The girls themselves noted the greater range of creativity and diversity within the French produced by the class, and even the general worsening in the standard of French can be explained using Vygotsky's theories. Vygotsky (1986) argues that internalisation of language (which is essential for true proficiency) changes the complexity of what is done and at first this is for the worse. Therefore, an assessment simply on attainment will show an incomplete picture. This ties in with Gravelle's account of language learning: 'We know that if children are discouraged from

experimenting, they will often 'play safe' and use only those terms with which they feel secure. Errors are often signs of progress and growing in confidence,' (2000, p.5). What this loosening of the linguistic reins did produce was a greater engagement with the ideas, which I believe to be the cause of the improvement in attitude towards the subject. It also introduced the possibility of playing with language in general, not just the French language, as shown with Maya and Tia as well as other instances in the class.

Bakhtin was a great proponent of Vygotsky's theories but challenged and developed some of them in a way that I think is borne out in my action research project: Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* or the linguistic and ideological diversity of life seemed to come through in Maya's 'quadrupled' poem or Julia's zombie hand. These pupils were able to engage in some inner discourse with these ideas, choosing which to accept while rejecting those that were not acceptable, rather than simply internalising what I gave them. This in turn enabled them to find an individual identity and a particular and unique voice which Maya noted in her questionnaire: 'Well I thought they [the poems] were very creative and, Julia [...] she also thinks outside of the box.'

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ART AND ADVENTURE: USING EKPHRASTIC POETRY IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

BETH ASHTON

Introduction

From my early childhood, and through my adult life, as a student of English literature, poetry has always been a deeply emotional, personal, fluid and free art form, capable of revealing deep truths about the world. As a teacher, I have seen how powerful the reading and writing of poetry can be in the process of children expressing themselves through the written word.

In the most recent publication of the National Curriculum objectives for English, the aims stipulated for poetry are few. There is reference to pupils being taught to recognise different 'forms' of poetry, to include free verse and narrative poetry and the memorisation of poetry in order to perform it aloud, specifically so that 'the meaning is clear' to the audience, 'the encounter remains an arid academic exercise that, at best, results in recognition of a category of artworks, but one devoid of personal meaning' (Boyd, Sinner, St. George 2003, p.48). At no stage in the National Curriculum is the impact of poetry on the emotions of the reader discussed.

Art and the Written Word

The power of the visual image in relation to development has been extensively studied. Many of the skills of analysis used in decoding an image, are also present in the analysis of text. One particular schema developed by Clark (1960) cited in Arizpe and Styles, (Arizpe & Styles, 2016, p.9) outlines the process by which children understand a visual image. Clark breaks the process down into four stages of: emotional impact on the viewer; scrutiny on finer detail; recollection i.e., links to own personal experience; and renewal, where the original is re-examined more closely. This scheme provides a structure, or matrix through which to analyse the interpretation of artwork by young children, through listening to their dialogue.

These strands are similar in many ways to the processes by which children engage with written text. In order to reach the stage of *recollection*, viewers must surely engage with processes such as analogising, experiencing and intertextuality (Rosen, 2017).

Given the correlation between the lived experience of engaging with poetry and with visual artwork, I chose to explore the use of paintings as a stimulus for poetry writing with students; ekphrastic poetry.

Corn (2008) argues that genre locate(s) the act of viewing visual art in a particular place and time which gives it a personal and perhaps even historical context. The result is not just a verbal replica of the original painting, sculpture, or photograph, but instead a grounded instance of seeing, shaped by forces outside the artwork. As noted by Freedman (2003), there is a difference between simply using an image and using an artwork. She points out that it is not the fact that we can see and interpret basic forms that makes them worthy of academic study.

Gulla (2018) states that the poems are bound to be as much about the poet as about their 'apparent' subject. The use of the word 'apparent' is key here – the poet is not simply writing a descriptive piece about the subject i.e., the painting, they are using the subject as a way to communicate truths about themselves. Abbs outlines a writing process wherein a student using the form of a fairy tale to communicate their own autobiography, stating, 'in creating the fairy story, Alex found an artistic form for her own Russian cultural experience, a way of transposing what she sees as the essential drama of her life into an allegorical narrative' (Abbs, 2003, p.13).

Context and Connection

Yandell (2003) recognises how meanings constantly interact with each other because any act of meaning-making is in dialogue with already-existing (and competing) meanings. This idea that meaning is inherently related to context, is one which is lacking from the curriculum taught in schools. The search for clarity of meaning by looking at a word only as a syntactical component of a sentence is misleading. This decontextualisation of texts is examined and the argument put forward that texts are

extrapolations from contexts which makes texts context dependent. Therefore, texts have no existence except through consideration of contextualisation. (Harris in Yandell, 2003).

Yandell (2003) asserts that the National Curriculum's implication is that what counts is the knowledge of the word, but not of the world. There is an assumption here that meaning is in the text; the reader's role is merely to understand and respond to meaning that already exists. He examines this process of decontextualisation of literature within the education system with an emphasis on the social interactions between people as it is mediated through history and culture.

Outside the field of educational theory, the focus on the structural and systematic elements of language has been disputed. Bakhtin's (1981) term of heteroglossia of language describes the interplay among social dialects, class dialects, professional jargons, language of generations and age groups and of passing fads and describes a living language which is quite different from the systematic approach so heavily represented in schools (Bakhtin cited in Abrams, 2001).

Freedman (2003) argues that the focus on the structure of texts is not representative of the way that children engage with the arts in contemporary society as nowadays students may gain more information from images than from texts. Further to this, Freedman discusses learning taking place based on cognitive connections which include those relating to emotions and that more connections means greater learning (ibid., 2003).

In relation to ekphrastic poetry, the conversation between art and poetry can yield differing outcomes dependent on context; meaning cannot be made without it. At any given time, the meaning taken from a visual art form will be different. Arizpe and Styles (2016) explain how memories of personal experience crowd in as the painting intersects with our lives in a text-to-life moment.

This deeply personal and contextual approach to interpreting art is echoed by Abbs (2003) who argues that education exists to set up a conversation down the ages and across cultures. Gulla (2018) builds on this idea when saying, 'when we respond to art

with poetry, we enter a conversation that has been taking place across human history' (ibid., p.24). Gulla positions this relationship between the two art forms as almost transcendental. This sentiment is echoed by Abbs (2003) when he describes the arts as inviting us to see again away from the obscuring stains of habit and free from received opinions.

The ideas of context and emotional connection are central to the analysis of artwork. Perkins (cited in Arizpe and Styles, 2016) describes the instant access offered by a work of art. Perkins suggests that using artwork to develop analysis and understanding is profoundly impactful due to its ability to welcome sustained involvement and stimulate engagement. Perkins argues that this very connection is due to the multi-connected nature of art, in that it is capable of connecting social issues, aesthetic interests, current trends, personal beliefs and different cultures.

Ambiguity and Risk-Taking

There has been much dialogue around the necessity of risk-taking in the classroom over previous years. Freedman (2003) looks at how theorising highlights the difficulty involved in two often conflicting forms of practice – education, which seeks predicted learning outcomes; and art, which seeks the unpredictable.

Arizpe and Styles (2017) note the time necessary for children to fully reveal deep understanding of a visual text. They observed how pupils in their study, over the course of several hours, made extraordinary progress in understanding. This way of approaching both poetry and visual art, leaves any potential meaning-making as a process, which may result in many different outcomes, reached by many different routes, rather than something which is pre-determined, and exists in the mind of the teacher (Irish, 2001).

Irish (2001) references the ambiguity of literature, the connection with the unknown through which we learn to take risks. She refers to Bakhtin's idea of a living contact with unfinished, still evolving reality (Bakhtin 1981). The acknowledgement that meaning is fluid and can be interpreted through many different lenses is an essential part of enabling students to embrace not-

knowing, establishing that there is no right meaning and moving towards a social learning process.

Abbs (2003) advocates gaps for the unknown, gaps for reflection, gaps for revision, gaps for contemplation and gaps for questions. The focus on clarity of meaning that is so present in the National Curriculum, seems to stand in opposition to these gaps. Poetry's lack of clarity is one of its most transformative features – it provides a gap in which powerful learning can occur.

Bates (1993) examines artwork as a catalyst for poetry highlighting that when students take this interdisciplinary approach to writing, they produce seemingly disparate but surprisingly creative poetry. Responding to artwork encourages students to, 'rely on the efficacy of their own observations, strengthening their language skills, forcing them to summon up concrete terms that capture depictions on the canvas' (ibid., p.41-45).

Methodology

This study was an action research project spanning a period of five weeks and involving a class of Year 6 girls in an academically selective girls' school in London. Before commencing my research, I addressed any potential issues in line with ethical guidelines, (BERA, 2012) by seeking permission from the Head Teacher, sending letters to parents explaining the intention of the research, and discussing the research with the children themselves. They were given the opportunity to 'opt-out' at any time.

Due to my status as an Assistant Head, Year 6 teacher, and the form tutor of the cohort in question, I was very conscious of the impact this would have on the objectivity of my study, and the impossibility of removing subjectivity from the process. Roulston (2016) writes that problems arise as a result of failures to recognise and account for these relationships and thoughtfully shape a project in ways that manage subjectivity.

The issue of building research based on natural practice is illustrated by James and Ebbutt (1990) who explain that a teacher-researcher has a particular ethical dilemma as they have access to

a constant flow of data merely by being present in the school. The issue of which data to use, and how to distinguish my role as teacher and role as researcher was initially problematic, however, some prior knowledge of pupils, handled appropriately, could be insightful to the impact of the research over time. Roberts et al. (2014) explain that researchers who are grounded in the context of the participants can make use of observations and fieldnotes to provide insights into the lived experiences of participants.

To ensure that the transcripts of focus groups were as unbiased as possible, I removed myself from the dialogue by leaving the room and making the discussion child led. In order to structure the dialogue, the students themselves suggested using the existing framework of Kagan Cooperative learning structures which were already embedded in the class. They were able to use various dialogic tools, in order to structure discussion, ensuring fair turn-taking and equal participation.

Although I recorded some sessions of whole-class teaching, the most relevant discussion arose from the student-led dialogue. The recording of myself facilitating whole-class learning, evidenced instances of recitation script (Lemke, 1990), characterised by teacher-led sets of questions that are often unrelated and require students to respond with factual answers and known information (Chappell, 2014).

After listening to this discourse, I shifted towards a child-led approach to discussion. However, there were still instances where the information gathered could be seen as transactional; students shut the conversation down in a bid to adhere to the boundaries they had established i.e., timed turn-taking. These type of responses seem to close off opportunities for further talk rather than opening up possibilities for more inquiry (Chappell, 2014).

Data Analysis

Each session consisted of an hour in which the same process of analysis was repeated. The cycle followed the pattern of analysing a painting through whole-class questioning, supported by the use of Kagan Cooperative learning structures. Following this period of dialogic learning, the group was shown a poem related to the

painting. The same process of dialogue and discussion followed. The pupils then used Michael Rosen's 'strings method' to show their analysis. I adopted a coding system which allowed me to select key moments that I felt were most significant in answering my research question (Koshy, 201). I then used Rosen's (2017) matrix for analysing talk and was also influenced by Henessy et al. (2016) to adapt these categories.

I introduced a series of Pre-Raphaelite paintings based on Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*. The pupils were not presented with any written information. Pupils annotated their initial responses to paintings portraying *The Lady of Shalott* by Tennyson (see figure 1). The annotations below demonstrate students using their intertextual knowledge to make meaning of the paintings, bringing in understanding of other subject areas in order to begin a 'storying' process.

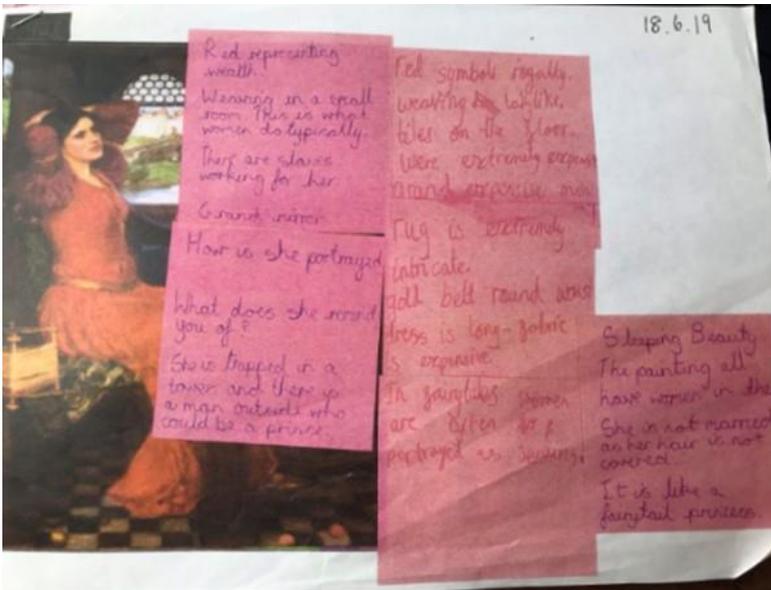


Figure 1: *The Lady of Shalott*

Children showed Clark's (1970) recollection phase of engaging with artwork. Some evidence of analogising was also present (Rosen 2017) and one child saw an element of the painting which

reminded her of a conflict 'between Jews and Germans' – demonstrating the heteroglossia around the painting.

In groups they were asked to interpret the images. Pupils naturally began to 'story' as a result, trying to suggest reasons or narratives as to why things may be a particular way. A culture of risk-taking was quickly established.

I disagree with everyone here because I don't know what these things are on the floor here (pointing to the painting) I don't know what they are! I think they're balls or something?

(Student comment).

Through asking questions of the images, students arrived at the recollection stage of appreciating the artwork (Clark 1970), many independently finding links to motifs from fairy tales. Pupils then read the Tennyson poem, using Michael Rosen's 'strings strategy' to analyse the text. Instead of focusing on structural elements of the poem such as rhyme, I modelled finding themes such as nature, magic and death. Most pupils were also able to identify abstract themes of their own such as confinement. Having established the themes within the poem, pupils began to reflect on how these were represented within the painting. This idea of linking images to literary themes was present in several of the final poems produced by the students.

The second intervention followed the same structure, with a different painting. This time, the pupils analysed *George and the Dragon* painted by Paolo Uccello in the 14th century. Pupils then read the poem *Not My Best Side*, by U.A. Fanthorpe, written in the 1970s. Through taking the stance of the characters in the painting, Fanthorpe produced a commentary on established gender roles. The inner personalities of the characters are revealed in first person, showing a subversion of the roles played in the painting.

Pupils went on to draw out the way that Fanthorpe had subverted the meaning of the painting to challenge the ideology of its original context.

When you look at the photo, the male, is very prominent, it's like over-taking and just showing that, like, women are weak and get trapped by this weird dragon ... so people in-take that, that vision and so they say 'oh women are weak and men are strong'

(Student comment).

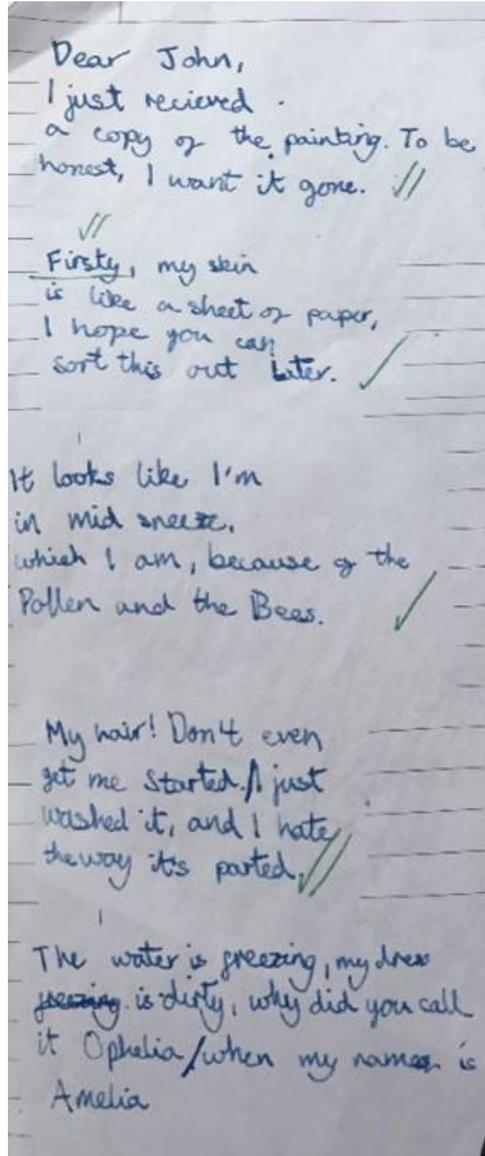
Following analysis of the second painting of *George and the Dragon* and poem pair, the pupils were invited to choose a piece of artwork to bring to class, from which they would produce their own poem. This stage of the research was based on Clark's four phases of appreciating visual art. According to Clark's schema, the first phase of appreciation is that of the 'impact' of the artwork on the viewer, 'if there is no impact, nothing will happen' (Arizpe and Styles 2016, p.9). Therefore, if pupils were going to be able to write creatively from the basis of a piece of artwork, it seemed essential that they select something which had made an impact on them.

Context and Connection

An understanding of how poetry can express social and cultural concerns emerged. One pupil observed, 'I see with the dragon poem it was more about opinions and promoting equality and yeah!'

Another pupil suggests, 'so Sir L has arrived and she was like 'nooooo I don't want to marry him so she takes eh, three, errrr paces through the room and out the window and then she dies'. At another stage in the discussion, a different pupil suggests that she sees *The Lady of Shalott*, 'as if kind of she doesn't want to be taken by Sir Lancelot ... because she's like a free spirit almost'. The different interpretation of the relationship between Lancelot and the Lady shows how the heteroglossia of the poem has affected the meaning – the pupils emerging awareness of how the poem would have been interpreted differently at the time of publication, began to build an understanding of the relationship between context and meaning; they realise that meaning is not a definitive truth, but ever-fluctuating.

This was seen most clearly with outcomes produced by students who used the idea of writing from the perspective of a character within the painting (figures 2a, 2b, 3 and 5). Students did this in very different ways.



Dear John,
I just recieved .
a copy of the painting. To be
honest, I want it gone. //

//
Firsty, my skin
is like a sheet of paper,
I hope you can
sort this out later. ✓

It looks like I'm
in mid sneeze,
which I am, because of the
Pollen and the Bees. ✓

My hair! Don't even
get me started. I just
washed it, and I hate
the way it's parted. //

The water is freezing, my dress
~~freezing~~ is dirty, why did you call
it Ophelia/when my names is
Amelia

Figure 2a: Amelia by Hanna

Hanna has used a similar subversion to *Not My Best Side*. Rather than observe 'Ophelia' through the eyes of the (male) painter, Hanna has used her understanding of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, to imagine herself in the role of the model used to inspire the painting. She has produced a humorous and empowering 'letter' to John Millais as a conversation across time. At the bottom of the painting, Hanna has written a reflective comment, 'I always write sad stuff, so I decided to do the opposite for once' – perhaps writing poetry through an artwork, has challenged the conventions of Hanna's own poetic style (figure 2b).

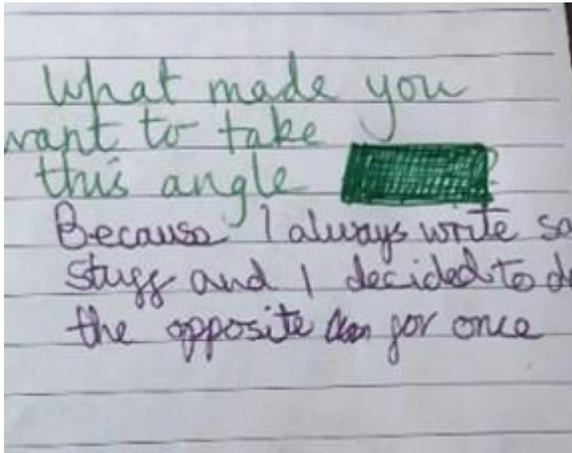


Figure 2b: Comment by Hanna

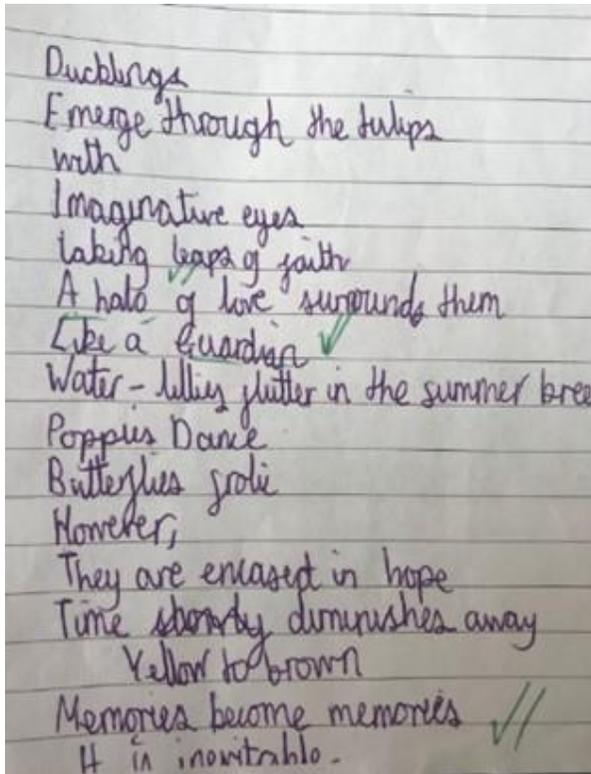
One child, Maya, chose to use Van Gogh's *Starry Night* as her stimulus and personified the different elements within the image (figure 3). She chose to create dialogue between the different parts of the painting, imposing her own imagined emotional context onto the images (Bates 1993, pp41-45), shifting perspective with each verse.



Figure 3: *The Starry Night*, by Maya

Maya's finished poem based on *Starry Night* by Vincent Van Gogh, took the form of a conversation between the elements of the painting, this clearly an example of the 'effect of interactions' strand of engaging with text (Rosen, 2017), as she is characterising elements of the painting, and setting up dialogue between them. Once again, we see the painting acting as a catalyst for students to voice emotions or tensions, layering new meanings over the artform in question (Bates, 1998).

Lene commented, 'when I linked my painting to my poem, I imagined two sisters as ducklings, erm, emerging through this little, like park, but then I kind of linked it as time, and memories and like as well as just love (inaudible) atmosphere, I think that's my idea ...' (Student comment). In this statement, Lene has articulated the stage of recollection – she is asking questions and making connections (Clark, 1960). Lene showed that she has used the idea of using symbolic representation, something she touched on during her analysis of *The Lady of Shalott* and has carried this into her own poetry (figure 4).



Ducklings
Emerge through the tulips
with
Imaginative eyes
taking leaps of faith
A halo of love surrounds them
Like a Guardian ✓
Water-lilies flutter in the summer breeze
Poppies Dance
Butterflies frolic
However,
They are encased in hope
Time slowly diminishes away
Yellow to brown
Memories become memories ✓✓
It is inevitable.

Figure 4 Ducklings – a poem by 'Lene'

Lucy, who chose to study *Waterlilies* by Claude Monet, approaches the painting from a stance of 'not-knowing'. Lucy uses her initial emotional and personal response to annotate the picture (figure 5a).

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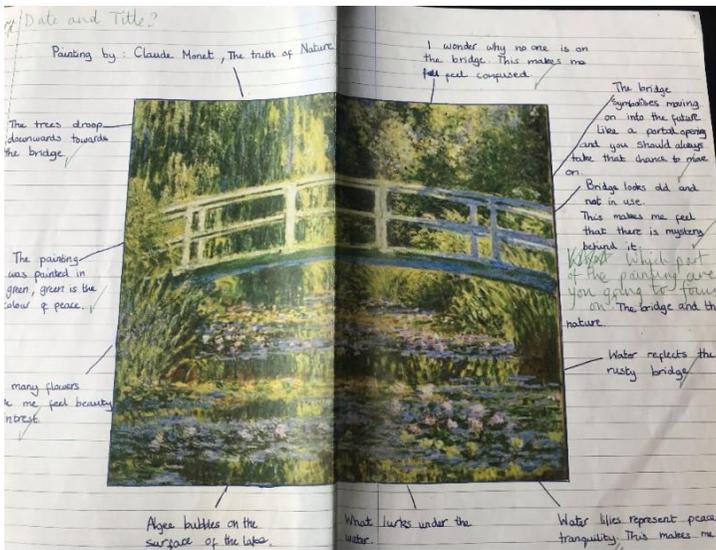


Figure 5a: 'Waterlilies' by Lucy

She comments initially on feeling 'confused' by the presence of the bridge, and why no-one is using it, 'I wonder why no-one is on the bridge. This makes me feel confused' (figure 5b).

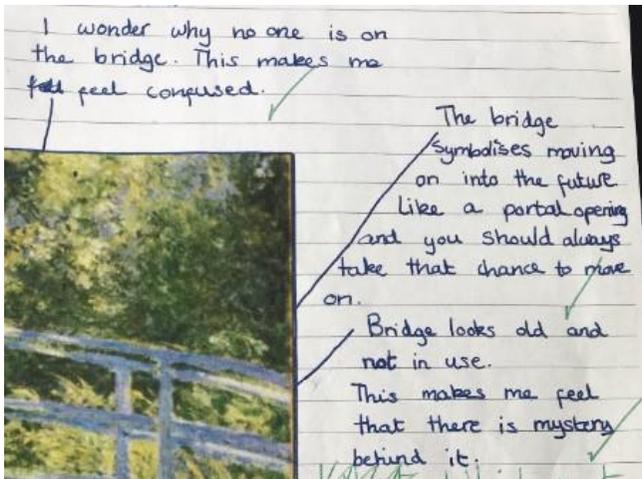


Figure 5b: 'Waterlilies' by Lucy

Lucy uses this 'impact' (Clark 1960) and uses it to produce a poem in which she writes from the perspective of the bridge. (Figure 5c) She has anthropomorphised the bridge and used it as conduit for perhaps her own emotions – she is perhaps using poetry as catharsis (Bates 1998).

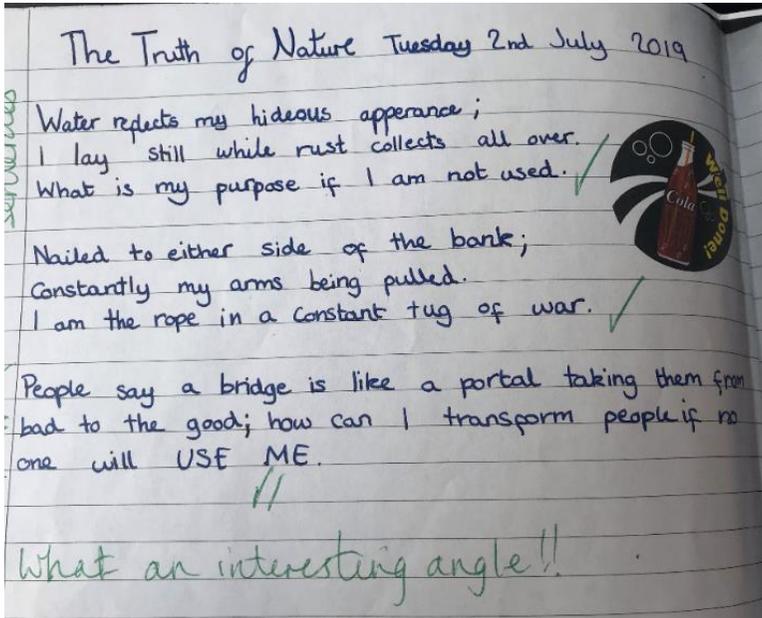


Figure 5c – 'Waterlilies' by Lucy

Edie chose to write a poem based on *Ophelia* by Millais. By using constructs analogous to Fanthorpe's work, Edie has written a poem in the first person as Ophelia, using a humorous, conversational rhyming style, very different to her usual writing (See figure 1). She has used her knowledge of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, which she researched as homework, to take on the persona of the model used to produce Ophelia, turning a melancholy painting seen through eyes of the male-gaze creator into something entirely different, essentially shifting the genre and tone of the original artwork and giving the silent woman in the painting a voice (See figure 1).

Annotations on initial pictures referencing other fairy tales show pupils in the stage of recollection, and using intertextual understanding to decode visual imagery 'in fairy tales women are often shown as sewing' (figure 1). Pupils also showed a high level of analogising, 'she reminds me of Boudica but a helpless girly version of her' (figure 1). Pupils use their knowledge of other subject areas to make speculative judgements, 'she's sitting on a really royal looking gown which has lots of symbols of lions and spears (royal stuff)' (figure 1).

In focus discussions, conversations showing contextual exploration and 'inter-textual' wonderings began to emerge. Pupils began to chain in their discussions around the relationships between the artforms. One pupil exclaimed, 'yeah! You're investigating – ooh what is this? Why is this painting like that, and then when you actually read the text it's like, woooooooooooah'.

Ambiguity and risk-taking

Speculative statements around meaning making emerged such as, 'there was this curse about this mirror breaking or something, I feel like it's something, like, to do with it'. When students discussed the learning process reflectively, they referenced their sense that exploring poetry in an interdisciplinary way results in them feeling like 'detectives' and 'peeling an onion'.

In the transcript from the final session, Ellie stated that she had chosen a painting that, 'could like, you could like, morph it into whatever you wanted, sort of like, clay?' Comments around the fluidity of using a painting were prevalent in the focus group discussions. Students seemed aware that the visual image provided great scope for experimental meaning-making.

In the first session, the risk-taking opportunities afforded by analysing, a visual art-form emerged almost immediately, with one child saying, 'I disagree with everyone here because I don't know what these things are on the floor'. In the final discussion of the project, Lene summed up her experience saying, 'I said confused, confused because I think it's, it's a different way of approaching it, but it's alright to feel confused, and that's why I support your understanding!'

Lene produced a poem based on a painting of two girls. In the first instance, she explained her choice by saying that it was analogous of her own sister and their relationship. By doing so, Lene has demonstrated that she has moved through the first three stages of Clark's schema for appreciating visual art. She said it made her happy; the painting has made an impact. The poem she produced however, was about ducklings moving through a field, 'when I linked my painting to my poem, I imagined two sisters as ducklings, erm, emerging through this little, like park, but then I kind of linked it as time, and memories and like as well as just love (inaudible) atmosphere, I think that's my idea...'. In this statement, Lene has shown that she has reached the stage of recollection – she is asking questions and making connections with her own personal experience (Clark, 1960).

She has created an analogy between the vulnerability of two young sisters and a pair of ducklings. The common thread she had taken from the painting, was not the image, but her emotional experience. When speaking about her work in the focus group, Lene said, 'OK, I'll say, when you do it with a painting, you can kind of take yourself further, like let's say there were humans in the painting, do I want to portray them as humans?... or as, as animals? Or as an object? Whereas when you write a poem without a painting, you don't really have a focus'. In this final stage, Lene has shown the renewal phase of appreciating her painting; she has revisited her original experience and layered over new meanings, pulling out new details.

Conclusion

Having completed this piece of action research, my findings concur with the concept of paintings providing children 'instant access' to the arts and their capacity to act as a catalyst for the creative process. Fundamental to the process is Clark's understanding that there must be an initial impact on the viewer; it is of paramount importance that the process ends with pupils being given the space and freedom to select their own visual artform. The connection between the student and their chosen art form provides a sustained and meaningful foundation which is secure enough to support and inspire children through the writing process, emerging at the other side with a piece of

artwork of their own. The natural and early capacity of children to make-meaning intuitively from images, is empowering and gives students authority. This sense of security when embarking into the often unfamiliar realm of poetry, has the potential to be transformational. Arizpe and Styles (2016) wonder about what children could do if visual texts and art appreciation were given time and status and became a serious part of the curriculum.

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CAN MY USE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POETRY ENCOURAGE DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS TO BECOME ENGAGED IN THEIR WRITING, DISCUSSION AND RESPONSE?

SARA HIRSCH

Introduction

Poetry is often considered an elitist subject (Dymoke, 2003) and therefore the expectation of engagement, particularly from disadvantaged and disruptive students, is lofty. It is hard to dispute that I come from a privileged background. Culture was hand fed to me at school, by my parents and in my extracurricular pursuits. However, in my placement as poet in residence at an East London Secondary school I find myself confronted by a general attitude of apathy when it comes to poetry, mainly grown from fear of the unknown.

I am handed report cards by at least 10% of students at the start of each class. On the back of the reports, I am expected to remark on the student's levels of engagement, moments of disruptive behaviour and number their effort on a scale of 1 or 2, 1 being higher.

According to the 2014 Ofsted contextual data report the school is placed in the highest decile for students on free school meals and for the percentage of pupils supported by school action plus or with a statement of SEN. The school's website maintains that although 54% of students qualify for Pupil Premium Funding (higher than the national average), 'there is a much greater level of disadvantage within the school population than is reflected in the headline figures of disadvantaged students' (School Data, 2016). When defining 'disadvantaged' I also considered the disadvantage inherent in new arrivals, or students with low levels of English or specific language impairments. It has been proven that these linguistic deficits lead to marked effects on such students' written text (Dockrell, et al., 2009). Therefore, when

classifying the students as disadvantaged in this context, I have taken into account both the social and economic considerations.

Resistance

It is commonly understood amongst advocates of a spoken word pedagogic practice, that poetry gives young people, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, 'a space in which to speak, to learn and a platform from which their voices might be heard and finally understood' (Dymoke, et al., 2014). However, the problem with poetry, according to disengaged students, is its perceived difficulty, its apparent distance from everyday life and the manner it is taught – its association with examinations and analysis, all of which creates a tangible resistance in a poetry classroom (Andrews, 1991).

A great fear amongst teachers is that if students have not been exposed to poetry at a junior level, they will have developed a fear of the subject by the time they reach secondary school (Weaven & Clark, 2013). In his chapter in the seminal work *Making Poetry Happen* (2014) Cliff Yates, a poet working in a similar environment to myself, identifies that students have pre-existing perceived prejudice towards what poetry 'should be' (Dymoke, et al., 2014). An interesting parallel I have drawn is the similarity in the lexicon used to describe poetry and that used to describe disadvantaged students. That these students perhaps 'should be' behaving better, writing fluently or reading above the level they are at.

Currently the curriculum 'excludes some while it privileges others' (Thompson & Hall, 2008). As Weaven and Clark discovered in a similar action research project in 2013, it is the fear of teachers, particularly of students with low English ability that their pupils' 'cultural capital' will prevent them from understanding and connecting with a poetry syllabus. However, it is this fear itself that will lead to a 'culture of disengagement' (Weaven & Clark, 2013). Here I hasten to acknowledge that I choose to reject the common misconception that inner-city students suffer from 'cultural deprivation' because they may not be exposed to the same works of literature, museums or cultural hubs as middle-class children might (Labov, 1972). Many linguists

and anthropologists locate 'the problem not in the children, but in the relations between them and the school system' (Labov, 1972). It is suggested that inner-city children are not inferior but that their lifestyle, language and reference points are different from the standard culture of the classroom (Labov, 1972).

I celebrate the argument that students come to school armed with deep 'funds of knowledge', an accumulation of community based and ancestral cultural reference points (Thompson & Hall, 2008) that form the basis of their lived experience.

Relatability

Based on discussions with teachers in the school I have been able to form the impression that what they do lack is a bridge between what they know and what the school system expects of them. To illustrate; many of the poems I used in class refer to political issues also relevant to the curriculum, for instance *Heritage* (Hirsch, 2016, p.34) which is an autobiographical response to immigration and fleeing a war torn country that I used in my Year 8 sessions on power and conflict. In a 2008 study in Australia, researchers Blanchard et al. concluded that young people exhibit a perceived disinterest in politics, despite displaying a clear interest in and knowledge of issues that are 'inherently political' (Blanchard, et al., 2008). How can I encourage my students to dismiss their displays of disengagement and utilise the knowledge and experience they clearly possess?

I agree with a teacher's comment in the 2013 article 'I guess it scares us', that it is a matter of students recognising that poetry already exists and is indeed embedded in their lives (Weaven & Clark, 2013) and I was keen to dispel the idea that poetry was elitist by introducing an authentic autobiographical approach into the classroom. On autobiographical performance, Deidre Heddon asserts that:

Performing the personal in public might allow a connection between the performer and the spectator, encouraging the formation of a

community or prompting discussion, dialogue and debate (Heddon, 2008).

Francis Gilbert (2012) recognises that when teachers share pertinent autobiographical accounts students are more likely to become engaged and that autobiographical writing can be therapeutic.

It has been found that 'using' poems in English lessons rather than 'teaching' poems removes the fear often associated with the art form (Dymoke, 2012). Autobiographical poetry in the classroom encourages students to engage with both the teacher's and therefore their own identities through poetry, helping them to dissect the identities of the poets and subjects of the more traditional literature they study for their examinations (Dymoke, 2012).

Michael Rosen states in his introduction to *Did I Hear You Write?* that we have to 'develop a way of working that makes sense for the children we meet' (Rosen, 1989, p. 1). Allen Ginsberg writes that when he read Kerouac he picked out 'gems of language' and thought to himself 'I can do that' (Bunge, 1985, p. 41) and so when he presents students with texts he is giving them 'permission to be as intelligent as they secretly are' (Bunge, 1985, p.41).

During this action research I wanted to design my intervention to cater to the specific children I was working with. I wanted to replicate Ginsberg's strategy, as, like him I had recognised my own ability through my access to poetry I admired and recognised that my students here did not have this particular advantage. However, they do possess a wealth of experience and cultural intelligence that I do not need to 'teach' them. I therefore appreciate Rosen's approach of encouraging students to write what they know (Rosen, 1989, p. 9).

In a comparable study conducted by The Bath Festival's Write Team, Emma Beynon writes that the yearlong creative writing project, designed to encourage engagement from 'invisible pupils' (Dymoke, et al., 2014, p. 173) had the greatest transformative impact on students when they concentrated on the student's poems rather than the outcomes (Dymoke, et al., 2014, p.180). I

find myself questioning how to balance the expectation and promise that my work increase literacy, communication and written skills as well as my vested interest in developing the emotional wellbeing of the students through writing. It was also noted that the success of the Write Team project could have been partly attributed to the fact that the visiting poets were new 'outsiders', with no prior knowledge or expectations of the students involved (Dymoke, et al., 2014, p.180). This made me consider how I was able to use my position as a permanent force within the English department to replicate similar results from the inside.

Methods

This research was conducted in randomly selected Year 7, 8 and 9 classes and in a weekly extra-curricular spoken word club across one term at a state secondary school in East London in 2016. The classes were mostly lower ability and included one AEL class. I had been working in the school as a spoken word educator assistant for the two previous terms and so my presence was known by most, but not all of the pupils I came into contact with. I had a minimum of three and a maximum of five lessons with each group. I used autobiographical poems in every session, examples of which can be found in my published poetry collection *Still Falling* (Hirsch, 2016).

To ensure this research was ethically sound I have changed the names of all students involved. I had permission from parents to conduct this research, all students were aware of the project and could remove themselves at any point.

I chose to use Emrys Evan's framework for analysing children's responses to literature (Evans, 1992) as a basis for my evaluation of engagement, but, considering the complex and hierarchical nature of his framework, I chose to simplify my criteria for engagement using three of his stages of satisfaction:

1. Analogising
2. Reviewing the whole work as the author's creation

3. Consciously considered relationship with the author; recognition of textual ideology, and understanding of self-identity theme

(Evans, 1992, p.32).

I chose to measure this engagement in percentages, giving each session an average as well as individually recording the engagement of particularly disruptive students. The number was based on whether the student/s engaged in the discussion of the poem, completed the writing exercises, and demonstrated engagement with their own identity in their writing. I took into account verbal and non-verbal displays of engagement.

Data analysis and Discussion

Despite an extensive collection of students' poetry and reflection in my journal, I have chosen to focus this research analysis on one student as well as referencing other factors within the wider context of the research to support my findings. The Year 8 student, referred to here as Isaac, was described to me by his English teacher as 'the epitome of disadvantage within the school, your classic SEN, free school meals student, totally disengaged and apathetic' (Guenum, 2016). He received the lowest percentage of engagement consistently and demonstrated the most disruptive behaviour of all students included in the intervention.

At first meeting, Isaac told me, "You won't get anything out of me Miss, I'm crap." I noted that this statement was interesting in itself. Where was Isaac formulating this self-deprecation? Did this stem from the fact that, as his teacher told me, "He has held a report card from the moment he started this school"? (Guenum, 2016). It has been suggested that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to have agency over their lives, more likely to be excluded from decision making and therefore less likely to feel like their participation is valid (Black, 2011). So, was this a self-fulfilling prophecy grown out of disadvantage and a lack of confidence in his own abilities?

This self-critique is evidenced in his scribbled-out sentence at the top of the page of his otherwise overconfident response to an

autobiographical exercise which reveals the sentence *I am annoying* (figure 1).

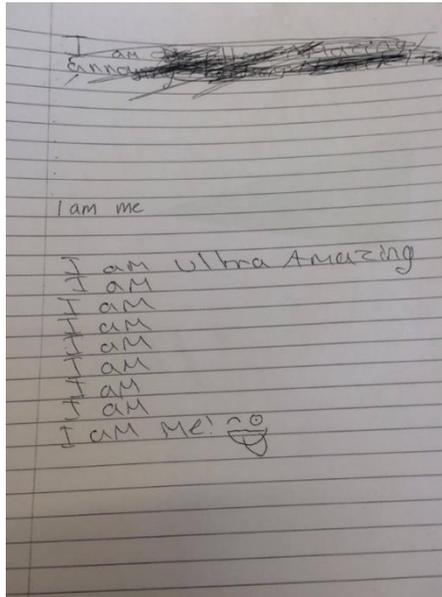


Figure 1

Isaac's response displays a clear 'interrogation of the text to match the author's representation of one's own' (Evans, 1992). Isaac is continuing to harbour feelings of self-hatred and is clearly wanting to express that but, judging from the crossings out, fears the vulnerability this would subject him to.

Another example of this self-censorship is in Mia's poems:

Extract from *I am*

By Mia –Year 7 – the version she did not want to read aloud.

I am mixed and thick.

I pretend it doesn't bother me.

It really does.

I feel alone and singled out.
I touch nice clothes,
then I look at the size.
I worry that people will make fun of me
for being myself.
I cry every day,
but I hide it.

Extract from *I am*

By Mia – Year 7 – the version she re-wrote when she knew she might have to share it.

I am happy and content.
I love the world we live in,
but, however it isn't perfect.
I touch the children's toys,
I touch the bottle of alcohol,
what has the world come to?
I worry that these are their role models in life.
I think about the future,
it honestly isn't bright.

The bombs drop
The terrorists attack.
I am now scared and faded.

The first '*I am*' poem begins with *I am mixed and thick* and reveals a deep sense of insecurity with her own identity and ability. However, as soon as I expressed that there was an opportunity

to read the poems aloud, Mia re-wrote her poem and began with *I am happy and content*, re-scripting her emotions to portray a happy, confident image for her potential audience, but still laced with a deeper sense of fear (*I touch the bottle of alcohol...is this what our role models are coming to?*) this time directed towards the world outside, rather than her sense of self. Perhaps the safer option? Both examples relate to Evans's notes on the third stage of satisfaction, a 'recognition of implied reader in the text' (Evans, 1992); both students were hyper aware of what they wanted to write compared to what they wanted people to read.

Reality

Peter Kahn, founder of the Spoken Word Education Programme, tells us that each session must cater for 'the student that doesn't need to *go there*, the student who isn't ready to and the student who is *dying to*' (Kahn, 2016).

Vicky Macleroy quotes a fellow spoken word educator describing the work we do as poets in London classrooms as being full of 'constant discovery and experiment' (Macleroy, 2014, p. 182). I was interested in how I could adapt my working practice and my commitment to honesty in my work, to allow space for those students who were perhaps not ready to approach autobiography in the same manner as other, more emotionally available, young writers.

Francis Gilbert introduces the concept of 'life fiction', the idea that we naturally edit our own lives when relating them to other people, thus developing a fictitious representation of our own reality (Gilbert, 2012, p. 202). Similarly, Harold Rosen concludes his 2006 addition to an earlier discussion of autobiography with the thought that all autobiography that is produced in such circumstances as my research setting, should be celebrated for its mythical elements (Rosen, 2006, p. 34).

I chose to adopt this reimagining of the authenticity of the 'I' in both my work and that of my students. As a result, one pupil, who was displaying disruptive behaviour in class, when asked to create a fictional character based on an emotion and describe it, wrote that the 'anger looked like death'. This is a clear example of analogising, 'drawing on the repertoire of personal experience'

(Evans, 1992) to make a connection between what he was experiencing and the character of 'anger' I was asking him to describe. This student may have been writing his truth or may have been bending his truth to create a new truth that existed in that moment. Either way, by giving him permission to fictionalise his lived experience I believe I opened the possibility of autobiographical writing to be accessible rather than engendering vulnerability.

The same student later confided that his grandmother had recently passed away, confirming my predictions, adding that he was 'confused and sad' about the fact. This breakthrough in communication arguably would not have occurred if the student in question had not had the opportunity to assign his fear to a fictional character and it served as a fundamental opportunity for the student to attempt to explain his reasons for his disruptive behaviour to the teacher. His behaviour improved dramatically during that session, echoing Gilbert's finding that by helping his students assemble their own life fictions they were able to better manage their behaviour in the classroom and allowed them to feel grateful and reflective of their own lives and explore the complexity of writing autobiographically (Gilbert, 2012).

This student's admission came about as a result of a poem I had written on a similar theme *Epilogue* (Hirsch, 2016, p. 33) however a number of other poems I chose to use in class prompted me to question their relevance to the students' lives. How was a poem about me falling in love going to connect with them any more than the war poems they showed no interest in? Was the apparent distance of my poetry from the student's own lives leading to the resistance I was so afraid of cultivating? (Andrews, 1991).

Jennie Clark (2014), working in a school in Redbridge, close by to the school I work in, has adopted a similar ethos to me when attempting to integrate poetry into the school mentality. She writes that 'we need to let [students] talk about the experiences that they are being exposed to on television, or nearer home' (Dymoke, et al., 2014).

Relevance

My research took place at a time of great political unrest in the UK. The EU referendum fell towards the end of the research period and the backlash after the result was announced had a tangible effect on the students. One teacher commented that their behaviour was 'off the charts' and I found myself questioning why they wouldn't replicate the chaos and confusion projected to them from their role models both in their own spheres and in the news? When I asked the students about the referendum, they were incredibly vocal, expressing their confusion about whether their 'futures were at risk' and why racism seemed to be on the rise, questions stemming from fears for their own safety.

Khimji and Maunder (2012) state that when children formulate stories, they will use the resources available to them, both personal and environmental (Khimji & Maunder, 2012). Indeed, these debates in class, focused on events in the news or social media, were spirited, alive and prompted students to score far higher engagement percentages than previous discussions around conflict.

In the next session I had with Isaac I read the class an adaptation of my poem about wishes, based on my response to the referendum results and written with the students themselves in mind. I chose the poem because it admits fear and disillusionment with the current political situation, which I felt was mirrored in their own feelings both politically and, more specifically, in their perception of the school system itself.

One of the lines speaks directly to the students, *I wish I knew what to tell you whilst others speak to my own fears and insecurities, I wish I was braver*. I also made a comparison between myself and the political leaders, both standing at the *front of the classroom, doing the opposite of jumping*. When I asked the students what they thought I meant, they answered that 'you are scared' when I asked them what I was scared of, they replied 'teaching and the government and of how helpless you are.' They were making the connection between my own experience and how I related that to the world around me through poetry, the clearest example of analogising (Evans, 1992) I had seen from any group. I hoped that,

like Dymoke had found, admission of weakness from the teacher might encourage students like Isaac to feel more comfortable writing about their own selves (Dymoke, 2012).

I introduced the accompanying writing exercises by inviting the students to write about what they were feeling in that instant, for example, if they wished they didn't have to write a poem, that could be in their poem. Rosen expresses that children should be able to discover that 'exactly what they say can be represented on the page' (Rosen, 1989, p. 34) and spoken word educator Jacob Sam-La Rose expressed in a seminar that encouraging 'anti poetry', the rebellious act of writing against the subject, is a really useful tactic when dealing with apathetic students (Sam-La Rose, 2016). Isaac was given the option of rebelling against me, his teachers or the system, should he wish to.

In Isaac's poem *I wish* he responds to things that were actually happening in the room and in his life, e.g. *I wish I didn't have to carry around this report card*. This is clear evidence of Isaac drawing on cultural repertoires to reflect on the theme given (Evans, 1992) which became a direct response to his condition and the way he is perceived in school.

I wish

By Isaac – Year 8

I wish I was Kane
but we only share the first name.

I wish I didn't have to carry this report around with me
but **undecipherable**

I wish I could walk out the classroom
but if I did miss Guenem would stop me.

I wish I had a bomb
but they couldn't handle the explosion.

I wish the world could stop
but I know that's never going to happen any time soon.
I wish school was run by me
but they will not learn anything because there is no teachers.

I wish my family was smaller
but I know my family well.

I wish I knew how to make a bomb
but it will be too dangerous but I will only be able to save
Guenem.

I was particularly drawn to the line *I wish I had a bomb, but they couldn't handle the explosion*. When I asked Isaac if he was aware that this was a fantastic example of metaphor, he smiled and nodded, body language I had not seen from him thus far. This, despite being an example of good technique, was also a positive representation of his anger, although underlined with a sense of threat. It is celebrating his explosive personality, rather than scribbling it out. Isaac read this poem out loud to the class, which exceeded any expectations me or his teacher had of him, and he seemed genuinely proud of himself.

Conclusion

I have concluded that the pedagogic implications of this research are important for future practitioners in the field to consider. I intend to continue working in this way within the school to further interrogate how we can encourage disruptive and disadvantaged students to engage with the curriculum through their own lived experience.

If you compare Isaac's poem with the other material I gathered during this research, such as *Mathematics* or *My Name* (below) which expertly demonstrate the power of the autobiographical 'I' within the wider context of what the students are feeling, it might not meet the standards of what 'good writing' is. However, as Tim Mayers (1996) questions, why, when critiquing creative writing, must the focus lie in the text's formal and aesthetic

qualities while the social and political aspects remain on a lower order? (Mayers, 1996, p. 139).

Khimji and Maunder concur that 'teachers and fellow classmates could learn a lot about pupils by listening to the content of their stories' (Khimji & Maunder, 2012). This research has prompted me to focus on the word 'stories', understanding that the fiction that exists within their own autobiography is as important to their development as their expression of truth.

It is my belief that we must allow pupils to engage with their situations and respond just as we expect all students to engage with the material we present to them, even if this means they are given permission to re-script their narratives in the same manner that we present both real and imagined texts for them to analyse and respond to.

Mathematics

Group poem by four girls in Year 7.

I wish I was better at maths.

If the world was a square
it would be easier to share.

I wish the world was equal
but it is not divided properly.

The correct word to use is 'unbalanced'.

I wish it was possible to even out
the ratio of rich and poor.

I wish I was better at maths.

I wish I could work out the EU,

but I am no good at algebra.
I wish I was old enough
to vote for our future
but they are judging us by numbers,
one plus two does not equal eighteen.
I wish they hadn't minussed us
from our freedom.

I wish I was better at maths.

I wish there wasn't fractions
so there would be no remainders,
no remaining refugees,
refugees on the other side
of the divide sign border.
Sixteen divided by five
equals three remainder one.

There will always be a remainder.

I wish I could be a mathematic pro,
but it takes more practice.

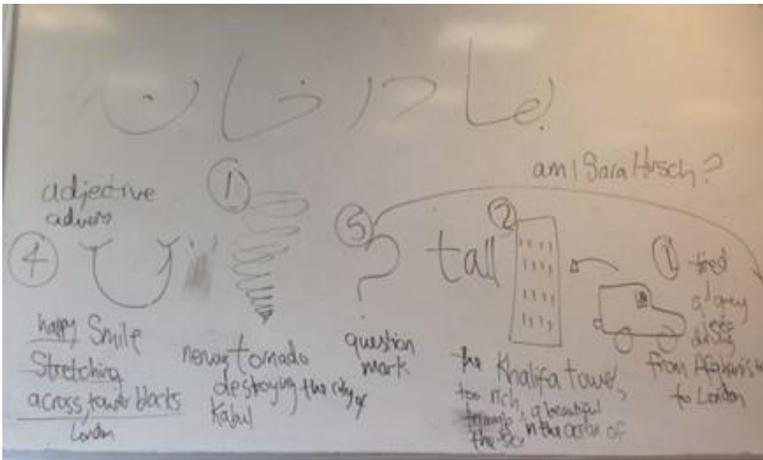


Figure 2

My Name

Group poem by Year 9 AEL students based on the above student's name as written in Pashto script (see figure 2).

My name is a nervous tornado

Destroying the city of Kabul

My name is a tired grey Jeep

Driving from Afghanistan to London

My name is the Khalifa Tower in Dubai

Too rich, a beautiful triangle in the ocean of sky

My name is a happy smile

Stretching across London tower block

My name is a question mark.

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BEYOND THE MARGINS: HOW DOES THE PUBLICATION OF A CREATIVE WRITING ANTHOLOGY AFFECT HOW EXCLUDED STUDENTS VIEW THEMSELVES AND THEIR WRITING?

CHRISTIAN FOLEY

Introduction

Teaching in a Pupil Referral Unit, I meet my new students first in paper-form; their experiences in education condensed into 'starting point' booklets. Ironically, 'starting points' scarcely begin to fulfil their intended function: to explain the origins of a student's exclusion. Understanding the origins of exclusion is a task too wide for the confines of a 'starting point', or of an action research article. My research focus had to be more specific, concentrating on the perceptions of the 'excluded': how do the excluded perceive themselves? Could writing and publishing a student anthology alter this perception?

The Government's perception of excluded children is more easily gauged. According to guidelines: 'during the initial period of up to five school days of any exclusion... the parents of the excluded pupil must ensure that he or she is not present in a public place during school hours' (DfE, 2012). An excluded child is isolated, not for their benefit but as a security measure for their school, the general public and society itself. In agreement, Ashurst and Venn assert that exclusion is more of a 'fundamental need to set an example in the name of protecting the public' (Ashurst and Venn, 2014: 170). Furthermore, the act of the child being publicly visible allows parents to become liable for prosecution. In this sense, exclusion has become synonymous with criminality. Home Office reports, such as Jack Straw's, the former Home Secretary, reiterate this rhetoric, berating an 'excuse culture' (HMSO, 1997, p.2) and implying that regardless of social circumstance, bad behaviour has no excuse. Such reductive thinking is criticised by Quentin Blake in his foreword to Daniel Pennac's *School Blues*. He condemns those in 'Politics and Administration', who

'specialise in failure and exclusion... in an attempt to control an activity which one senses that, fundamentally, they do not understand' (Blake, 2014: Foreword). What Blake does not say, is why Government officials who claim to 'specialise' in exclusion, thus employing it as the 'principal means for dealing with disruptive behaviour' (Ashurst and Venn, 2014, p. 1), do not understand it. It is because their policies do not account for what is most important of all: student voice. How do excluded students feel about exclusion, more importantly – how do they feel about themselves?

Transcript

1. **Christian** (Researcher): We're going to write a book, all of us, together...
2. **Daniel** (Year 10): Why? Who is going to read a book we write?

Upon discussing the prospect of publishing an anthology, in response to Daniel's statement, there were murmurs of assent and further comments from the class.

Transcript

3. **Christian**: Why can't you write a book?
4. **Dogukan** (Year 10): That's for authors.
5. **Christian**: Who is an author?
6. **Dogukan**: The people who aren't normally excluded.

In recent years, as reported by *The Guardian* in an article entitled *Don't Exclude Children from Poetry*, there have been proposals to introduce a 'BTEC equivalent to the English GCSE which focuses on functional uses' (Dent, 2007). The underlying implication of these proposals is that some students are deemed worthy of exposure to poetry; others must be content with travel brochures. This scenario reinforces David Barton's comment that society separates 'who counts as a writer' from 'passive observers' (Barton, 2007, p.168). Considering this, it is unsurprising that my students wrongly believed that writing and

publishing was intended for an *other*. This student viewpoint that society disregarded their voice, situated my project in a more precise context; investigating 'how the excluded perceive themselves?' was too general a question. I also needed to ask: could my project allow my students to feel *included*, not only in the writing world, but in the world beyond the school gates. Yet, how to achieve this?

Freire and Shor argue, 'Students are not silent by nature. They have a great deal to say, but not in the script of the traditional classroom' (Freire and Shor, 1986, p. 117). One challenge of my action research was to rearrange the 'traditional' script and permit its rewriting by the students themselves. As a Spoken Word Educator, when 'unlocking' student voice, facilitating student poetry writing has been my key method. I was asked by some sceptical colleagues, 'Why Poetry?' Heaney explains why: 'finding a voice means that you can get your own feeling into your own words... a poetic voice is probably very intimately connected with the poet's natural voice' (Heaney, 1980, p. 43). Through poetry, and through this re-discovery of voice, I believed that my students could have their *own say* in their experience of education and exclusion. Sue Dymoke develops Heaney's opinion with regards to how a 'poetic voice' is received, she proposes that, 'the personal, emotional and experiential nature of poetry... prevents a teacher-assessor passing final judgement' (Dymoke, 2003, p. 147). Building on this philosophy, I assured students that their poetry would not be judged, censored, or altered: allowing the necessary freedom of expression. My students agreed to the project, as did my teaching colleagues – although they were hesitant. I was repeatedly asked: 'Has this been done before?'

Literature Review

The concept of a school anthology to promote inclusion is not a new one, however, certain case studies highlight the issues surrounding their production. 'Hollytree' Primary School (not real name) is a school in the suburbs of a Midlands city; in 2003 half of its 360 students lived on local council estates. Thompson and Hall curated a project to 'understand more about promoting social and educational inclusion through the creative arts' (Thompson and Hall, 2008, p.89). That year a visiting poet

worked with a Year Five class, twice weekly for five weeks, with the aim of producing an anthology. Upon completion, the school decided not to publish the poetry, having been shocked by the 'gritty' content. The children had written in what Heaney would call their 'natural voice'. The visiting poet stated, 'we ended up with what I thought was a good piece of work but it was very controversial and they didn't print it... I think they wanted a nice project that gave a good portrait of the school and the pupils and it came out as kind of dark' (Thompson and Hall, 2008, p.93). The 'Hollytree' study highlighted that the act of publishing was a process partly built on exclusion, 'gatekeepers' have the capacity to exclude certain voices: in this case it was the school's teachers. How could I overturn this power dynamic? I discussed this with my Headteacher, who assured me that regardless of what was written, we would honour our promise to publish the students' work. The solution was *not* to exclude voices that didn't fit a certain subjective vision.

Publishing should be a process of inclusion, as shown by Dave Eggers in his project 'Once Upon a School'. At 826 Valencia Street, San Francisco, Eggers founded a writing tuition centre providing one-on-one support to students in his community; he formed a 'conduit' (Eggers, 2008) between the students and the publishing/writing community he worked within. Eggers created a workshop space without divide between professional writers and students, 'there was no stigma... there was a publishing company at the back' (Eggers, 2008) which allowed constant dialogue between the two communities. Significantly, the student's work was consistently published to an 'outside audience' (Eggers, 2008). The success of this venture, which led to the creation of a London counterpart, *The Ministry of Stories*, provided a model for my own project. A project which would be carried out in a school environment, akin to Hollytree, but employing Egger's far more inclusive, democratic approach. Eggers demonstrated the value of this publishing approach; he stated, 'the kids will work harder than they ever have worked in their life if they know it's going to be permanent... this is the attention that we give to their thoughts, once they reach that level, they can never go back – it's utterly transformative' (Eggers, 2008). The question is *how* transformative? Could writing

and publishing transform the *excluded* to the *included*? Additionally, would it work in a different environment, not a primary school, nor a workshop but a Pupil Referral Unit?

'Beneath the Hood', a project carried out in 2003 between Daniel House, a Pupil Referral Unit in Hackney, and Eelyn Lee Productions, was the most comparable case study. The yearlong partnership resulted in a 52-minute-long film that incorporated student poetry. Headteacher Annie Cornbleet stated, 'The project confirmed the need for PRUs to remain connected to the wider educational community and beyond' (Cornbleet, 2004). I shared this aim with 'Beneath the Hood', to bridge the gap between excluded students and their educational community. The projects also resulted in similar student work as an outcome. In the film, one student sings: 'thrown in this place and it feels so wrong / But now I have to accept dis is where I belong' (*Beneath the Hood*, 2004). The lyric speaks of exclusion, mingled with a newfound belonging. Another lyric, spoken by a boy in a library reading books, claims: 'This is where you'll find me if you want to understand me' (*Beneath the Hood*, 2004). The student voice in 'Beneath the Hood' showed that students could conceive the arts as a means to inclusion, and as a tool to understand one's identity. This gave affirmation that my project *could* succeed. Although 'Beneath the Hood', like Egger's project, showcased creative writing; the project did not interrogate student attitudes towards the process. This was a fundamental difference between our two approaches.

Methodology

My methods were to implement a programme of writing workshops, alongside a series of interviews, designed to gauge student opinion regarding the process. The project ran from February to July 2015. Overall, 36 students participated in the anthology; I chose to interview a select group of four students, all of whom were in my English class, and were therefore most comfortable with being interviewed by me. Unlike the projects at Hollytree and Daniel House, I was not a visiting artist, but somewhat of an insider, as an English teacher embedded in the school. I had to arrange the project around the constraints of my curricular role.

I ensured that no student was asked immediately to write; rather, the writing followed initial student-led conversations. As shown by the NACCE report *All our Futures*, this approach was more conducive than simply directing students to write: 'asking children to write a poem right away in their best handwriting can destroy the spontaneity they need in the initial phase of generating ideas' (NACCE, 1999, p. 35). Using this strategy, I elicited ideas verbally, before encouraging them to be transferred into writing, at which point the ideas often took on new identities. As Dymoke acknowledges, 'Much of their thinking aloud about a text will not be reflected in the actual written composition' (Dymoke, 2014, p. 22). Although not always visible, the 'thinking aloud' was an integral part of the process. I wrote too, for like hooks 'I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take' (hooks, 1994, p. 21).

While our conversations were either with groups or individuals, the writing process was solely one-on-one. Dave Eggers states, 'it has been proven that 35-40 hours a year of one-on-one attention, a student can get one grade level higher' (Eggers, 2008). Despite recognising the academic benefit – I was not concerned with grades. I chose this format because students were far more responsive without the distraction of peers, and I only had one computer (students preferred to type their work). Dymoke's argument that poetry resists 'final judgement' is not true in my students' perspective. I realised that in a group, students did not write for fear of judgement from their peers. I also acknowledged that I needed to keep the duration of the workshops flexible, but short, (never more than an hour), in order to maximise concentration. The recorded interviews were no more than ten minutes; I often conducted them whilst playing table tennis, as it was a less intimidating environment, and the formal nature of a written questionnaire was drawing reluctant and minimal answers.

Transcript (Table Tennis Interview)

- 7. Christian:** So, I'm going to show this to other teachers, OK?
- 8. Caner (Year 10):** F*** them teachers
- 9. Christian:** They're going to listen to what you think about writing alright ... it's my serve ... so when I say writing, what's the first thing that you think of?
- 10. Caner:** Boring.
- 11. Christian:** Why boring?
- 12. Caner:** Sitting down and writing for a long time is boring.
- 13. Christian:** And at school are you sitting down for long periods of time?
- 14. Caner:** That's a sick rally! What?
- 15. Christian:** And at school are you sitting down for long periods of time?
- 16. Caner:** Yeah.
- 17. Christian:** And what are you writing about?

Another student enters the room shouting loudly...

- 18. Caner:** Oi! Oi! We're recording. It's recording you know when you came in and f***** shouted and ruined it.

Both Interview (and table tennis game) have to be postponed.

Group interactions had the potential to become confrontational in a classroom environment. Overall, the project was a constant process of adapting and reacting to student input. Yet in hindsight, the most striking part of the project was not *how* we made it – it was *what* we made.

Data Collection and Analysis

The sheer volume of creative work produced was testament to what my students could achieve – 125 pages. From this, the selected portfolio extracts act as a valuable gauge of my project's

successes and failures. The most commonly recurring motif in the poetry was the subject of exclusion, and the subsequent feeling of isolation. Given the context, this is perhaps unsurprising. Yet what was revealing was the manner that this isolation was often linked to identity. School exclusion was not the first experience of exclusion that my students have felt. As Ashurst and Venn claim, 'the prevailing views seem to regard the bodies and minds of these children as having been marked from birth with the defects that determined their destiny as future delinquents and burdens on society' (Ashurst and Venn, 2014, p.132). This emphasis of 'bodies' being 'marked from birth' as 'delinquents' gives exclusion a physical characteristic: it can manifest in the corporeal identity of a student. When Carl wrote 'even my skin feels like no-man's-land' – his sense of not belonging was described *physically*.

Extract 1 by Carl (Year 9)

Written after discussing conflict.

No Man's Land

*I feel a
sour brown
tear rolling
down my rough skin.*

*Even my skin
feels like
'no man's land'.*

Extract 2 by Jacqui (Year 10)

Written after discussing isolation

Crooks

*Loneliness, I'm surrounded by it.
I see myself strolling through an ocean*

*of pale faces, making me feel burnt,
reminding me – I can't scrape blackness off.*

*I am brown
I feel like dirt
they tell me I am dirt.*

*Sometimes I want to lock my soul away.
be free from the treachery*

Similarly, Jacqui's 'loneliness' is portrayed as a result of her 'blackness' – it is a tangible, physical description of exclusion. Furthermore, this is also a figurative 'blackness' that cannot be removed – arguably a reference to the irrevocable stigma of being excluded.

Transcript

- 19. Christian:** What does it mean to be excluded?
20. Dogukan (Year 10): Your future has gone downhill
21. Christian: Is it an irreversible situation?
22. Dogukan: Yeah.
23. Christian: Do you feel that once you've been excluded you can't be included?
24. Dogukan: Well you can but it's really hard?
25. Christian: What is an alternative to exclusion?
26. Dogukan: Behaving.

The 'downhill future' here is posited as an irreversible situation. However, in Jacqui's case, writing about her isolation was a way of overcoming it. When commenting on the poems, Michael Rosen supported such a notion: 'that's how we overcome bad things, by telling each other how it is' (Rosen, 2015). Weeks before writing her poem, Jacqui had said 'f*** the book, it's boring'. In July, Jacqui attended the publishing book launch, and brought six of her friends from other schools to hear her work being read.

For a student anthology, the overt references to school were remarkably fleeting, yet illuminating.

Extract 3 by Jack (Year 11)

Written after discussing school

We would never think to stop

*Next day in school in science class you start to cry.
Hoping for a bit of love and attention
but all you get is an hour's detention.*

The poem shows that Jack's requests for care and attention, however they were expressed, were met with punishment. When considering the Home Office criticisms of 'excuse culture' and the criminalisation of the excluded, Jack's experience is reflective of a more systemic problem. Darren echoed this sense of sadness through the projection of an excluded fictional character.

Extract 4 by Darren (Year 9)

Written after discussing friendships

*After school I got in trouble and got expelled.
I went to sleep when I got home, and I silently wept into my pillow.*

Freire and Shor state: 'Education is only one piece of larger lives in an even larger society' (Freire & Shor, 1986, p.22); this is the lens through which I viewed the writing about school. I interpreted these descriptions of school exclusion as microcosms of a wider sense of exclusion, one that was present before the literal decision to exclude. Indeed, Jack's request for 'love and attention' does not seem to be directed only at the classroom. Furthermore, both passages refer to weeping; significantly

Darren's is silent, indicating a co-existing fear of being heard, and a need to be consoled. The descriptions reveal an unanticipated degree of vulnerability within my students that only one-on-one writing workshops permitted.

In the closing months of the project, more students wanted to contribute, having seen that their friends were included, those who didn't want to write, completed artwork or music in my workshops. The work produced in this period was characterised by a sense of optimism.

Extract 5 by Emma (Year 10)

Written after discussing writing

Light

Light. I would write light on wet concrete and let it set. Light is everywhere; sunlight, moonlight, torchlight, lamplight, the light in someone's eyes. It fills every corner and crevice, every deep, dark hole. It's beautiful and blinding and it makes you feel whole. It warms you, washes over you and it makes everything better.

You don't have to be in the dark, you don't have to be alone. There's something beautiful about it – no matter what happens there is always light. There will always be something new.

Maybe 'always' should be written too. It's a beautiful word and it gives you reason – reason for everything.

Extract 6 by Bruno (Year 10)

Written after discussing success

*I come from a place where only one type succeed
I come from a place where the rich and white
succeed
despite that I will still succeed.*

Arguably, creative writing was indeed a form of 'light' – it had become a vessel for optimism in a way that conversation could not be. Jacob Sam-La Rose agreed in his comments about the work: 'poetry has a facility... to shine light in a shared darkness' (Sam-La Rose, 2015). In Emma's poem, the 'light' which she writes, and sets in stone, prevents her from being 'alone'. It is the antidote to her exclusion, the means of her inclusion and the hope of 'something new'. In her words, 'it makes everything better'. Whether it was directly vocalised or not, I perceived that the project had been a cathartic process of working through a 'shared darkness' – it had become an inclusive process, fostering a growing self-awareness in the students. It was an awareness of unconditional possibilities, as claimed by Bruno: 'I come from a place where the rich and white succeed / despite that, I will still succeed'. To me he is saying, 'I am excluded, despite that, I will be included'.

Extract 7 by Aaron (Year 10)

Written after discussing prejudice

Once there was a human being with a face like a rhino, similar to the elephant man. His name was Rambo. He lived in a small village called Zibbeerdy Dock.

People absolutely hated him, and I personally couldn't imagine anyone liking him...

When he was 20 years old WWI broke out, and he decided to go and fight for the British Army. In his first battle he got shot in the face. He wasn't hurt because he had a bag over his face.

He was so shell shocked that he left the army immediately and had bad nightmares for the rest of his life, but the people still hated him.

In later years he became an artist painting his experience of war and people loved his work but still hated him forever.

However, the project had its limits. Although it could arguably challenge how students perceived themselves, they doubted it would alter how others perceived them. Aaron wrote of a disfigured war veteran, 'similar to the elephant man' who 'became an artist painting his experience of war and people loved his work but still hated him forever.' Here, Aaron's work is characterised by a belief that a text exists on its own terms, wholly removed from its creator – a theory also shared by Roland Barthes in *The Death of the Author* (Barthes, 1968). The separation of the 'hated' character from his 'loved' work is a symbol for Aaron's separation from his story, which makes it possible for his work to be shared and praised, but for his sense of exclusion to remain unchanged. In this sense, Aaron did not believe that art or publishing could alter public perception and lead to inclusion.

Through Aaron's work, I acknowledged that while publishing the anthology was an empowering act, the biggest impact of the project was contained in the writing process itself, and its consequences upon the student's self-reflection. Written pieces began to be employed by my students' social workers and counsellors.

Extract 8 by Ian (Year 10)

*Written after discussing betrayal in *Of Mice and Men**

*Dear Lennie,
Lennie, you know I really tried my best to look after you, and I did look after you. You were my brother. You are still my brother in my heart. No one will ever take your place in my life.
I just shot my own brother...*

Ian (not real name) wrote a letter from Lennie to George in *Of Mice and Men*: 'you know I really tried my best to look after you, and I did look after you. You were my brother. You are still my brother in my heart. No one will ever take your place in my life... I just shot my own brother'. A conversation with Ian later revealed this projection of betrayal to a 'brother' was Ian's

mechanism of first processing his feelings toward his father's suicide, an act for which Ian blamed himself, due to his 'bad behaviour'. In this respect, the writing process was a part of Ian's healing process; it allowed a conversation with his counsellor that had previously been inaccessible. Thus, the writing was a therapeutic process both 'transforming and liberating', (Canham, 2003, p. 190) as highlighted by Briggs (2012) in *Waiting to be found: Papers on Children in Care*.

Extract 9 by Kamen (Year 10)

Written after discussing belonging

Superheroes

My name is Jason Brown. I was 7 years old when both my mum and dad passed away. They died in a car crash; we were driving on Jamaica Street, when we made a sharp turn down Black Boy Lane. A car was coming our way at like 85 miles per hour, and before you knew it, that was it.

The next thing I knew was that I was in a cab with the two people, and they took me to a home that looked a mess from the outside. When I got out the cab and walked in the house, it was full of kids just running around doing their own thing - it looked fun, but it was all white kids within the house. I felt odd like an odd number.

A similar transformation occurred with Kamen. He wrote of a fictional character 'Jason Brown' who is involved in a car crash that orphans him. He is then taken to care home whereby 'it was all white kids... I felt like an odd number'. The geography of this scene is significant; Jason Brown's connection to his origin is severed through the death of his parents on 'Black Boy Lane' shortly after making a 'sharp turn' from 'Jamaica Street'. Jamaica Street and Black Boy Lane are separated by thirty minutes of driving, not a 'sharp turn'. Therefore, the reason for the inclusion of these street names was not for realism; instead, using names, Kamen's work was deliberately evoking race and cultural identity;

portraying exclusion through the lens of his Jamaican descent ('an odd number' amongst 'white kids') who is removed and orphaned from his roots. Kamen had written about a topic close to home. In an informal conversation after the writing process, Kamen first told me about the murder of his father in Kingston, Jamaica: a 'sharp turn' of tragedy that contributed to Kamen's isolation in Britain. Although Kamen replied 'nah' when asked if the project had changed the way he felt about writing, the process had clearly allowed him, like Ian, to process elements of the grief he was feeling.

Conclusion

Extract 10 by Isaac (Year 11)

Written after discussing violence

I am Unconditional

*This gang stuff now has got so predictable
they're all the same none of them are original,
this is real life I'm writing, it's far from fictional
just remember that no one's invincible,
to my family, friends and haters too...*

My love for you is unconditional.

Grief permeates the story of *I am Unconditional*, it was a title first written by a student who was murdered. The student's words of optimism for the future: 'to my family, friends and haters too / my love for you is unconditional' represent the desires of the excluded to show love, and to be loved. Daniel Pennac proposes that our society frowns upon talking about love in the context of teaching' (Pennac, 2014, Chapter 6) and he is right. Yet, while the word 'hate' occurs on only four instances in the anthology; the word 'love' is the most frequent single word: over 20 references. This book was one of love born from grief; through writing my students discovered shared belonging born from exclusion. Of course, such discoveries are difficult to measure and monitor.

Although, there are certain means to gauge success, Ashurst and Venn state, 'the inclusive school must offer its students, teachers and communities a sense of empowerment' (Ashurst & Venn, 2014, p. 103). Providing empowerment, this project has fostered inclusivity amongst my students, even if the extent is impossible to determine. Between teacher and pupil, we created what M. Blair, writing about exclusion, calls a 'we rather than a them and us culture' (Blair, 2001, p. 115).

Now that the anthology is published, it may alter societal perceptions of excluded children; however, for the students themselves, the changes to their self-perception through writing have been far more significant. It has been the process and not the product that has been the most illuminating to my action research. Yet, how to further progress?

Searle argues 'the 1988 Act brought in a range of measures which put pressure on schools to deter them from pursuing inclusive Education' (Searle, 2001, p. 27). Amidst this Exclusion-heavy society, I am Unconditional has opened a conversation for my students, about themselves and their environment. Can my student's words impact this environment? Moving forward – the urgent conversation to be had is outside of the classroom – the urgent change towards inclusivity must occur there: beyond the margin.

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PART 4: READING AND RELATIONSHIPS RESEARCH



INTRODUCTION TO READING AND RELATIONSHIPS RESEARCH

DEBORAH FRIEDLAND

This final section of the book contains research conducted during the challenges of the pandemic. It is about finding space: physical space, emotional space, intellectual space. It also reflects a few of the diverse physical spaces and settings and types of relationships in which children may actively connect with different forms of children's literature. As these essays reveal, individual tutors, family members and classroom teachers all offer engaging opportunities for children to enjoy booktalk and develop reading confidence.

Georgia Cowley uses bibliotherapy as an organic process to support mental health and enables a student with dyslexia to find her voice through storytelling. In my own research, I explore finding an online space to enjoy reading and creating stories with my distant grandchildren. Megan Quinn's research focuses on creating space for young children to make meaning from picturebooks and share their playful responses through storying.

These research studies explore three very different reading situations – one-to-one, online and the lively reception classroom – and redefine how creative reading in these tangible and non-tangible spaces can positively affect relationships, self-esteem and understanding.

DOES STORYTELLING PROVIDE A SPACE IN WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE CAN REFLECT ON THE IMPACT OF DYSLEXIA AND IF SO, DOES THIS POSITIVELY AFFECT THEIR ATTITUDE TO READING?

GEORGIA COWLEY

As an SEN tutor my work brings me into contact with many children for whom learning is associated with frustration, embarrassment, and despair, so much so in some cases that they give up on learning altogether. I wanted to represent this story in some way so began working on 'The Letter Lion', a picture book about a little girl struggling to learn to read, who starts to imagine an angry, negative Lion who tells her to give up. With the help of her teacher, the girl eventually teaches the lion to be kinder and more patient; an analogy for the compassion children must develop for themselves in order to persevere with learning. This picturebook was an action research project in itself as it emerged organically from my work with my students, revised and developed as I went along. With the approach of this module, I saw an opportunity to see whether the book had a resonance with the students who inspired it. I hoped to gain insights into the impact of my writing, but in fact I ended up learning much more about the importance of listening to my student; that the real value of the intervention was in the space it provided for her to tell her own story.

This chapter outlines the current literature surrounding the impact of dyslexia and the rationale behind using bibliotherapy to address its secondary emotional and behavioural symptoms. All the names in this study have been changed to ensure the anonymity of the participant and her family.

Dyslexia and Bibliotherapy

Dyslexia is a neurobiological condition, characterised by impairments in word recognition, decoding and processing, typically resulting in reading and spelling deficits (Lyon, Shaywitz

& Shaywitz, 2003). Dyslexia is not commonly diagnosed until the latter years of primary school and, as a consequence, many dyslexics face years of struggling to learn without understanding why or receiving the help they need (Riddick, 1996). Interview studies carried out with dyslexic students, have uncovered that these experiences often leave 'emotional scars' which stay with the child as they progress through education system, leading them to feel, as reported by Riddick (1996, p.129) 'disappointed, frustrated, ashamed, fed up, sad, depressed, angry and embarrassed by their difficulties'. There is also a body of quantitative evidence to suggest that this often causes dyslexic pupils to experience lower levels of self-esteem (how they feel about themselves) and shapes their self-concept (the attitudes they hold about themselves) (Humphrey, 2002). These effects are context specific however, with family attitude, educational environment, age of diagnosis and severity of symptoms all contributing to how the child is effected (Novita, 2015, Rosenthal, 1999). For example, Humphrey (2002) found dyslexic students in mainstream contexts were more likely to suffer from low self-esteem than peers in special schools. He attributed this to high levels of unrealistic peer comparison, humiliating experiences and bullying. Furthermore, in some cases dyslexic students' self-concept is only effected as it relates to academic performance, rather than general self-esteem being diminished (Novita, 2015). This has led to the development of terms such as 'reading self-concept' which specifically describes a child's attitudes to themselves as relates to their reading (Chapman & Tunner, 1995).

In many cases, self-esteem deficits are thought to lead to maladaptive behavioural strategies designed to cope with the anxiety associated with school. Endler and Parker (1999) identified three varieties of behavioural coping; 'emotional' (lashing out or withdrawing), task orientated (competitiveness or increased determination) and avoidant (finding ways to get out of activities which cause stress or staying quiet to become 'invisible'). Alexander-Passe (2006) found that where boys tended to resort to 'externalising' coping strategies, girls were more likely to internalise their anxiety by using avoidance and withdrawal, leaving them more vulnerable to bouts of depression.

Teachers and caregivers can further compound these behaviours by providing insufficient or inappropriate support or by misinterpreting coping behaviours as 'laziness' or 'naughtiness' (Ryan, 1994). These 'secondary symptoms' of dyslexia thus create a negative feedback loop where the child's motivation to learn diminishes with their decreasing self-esteem, in turn compounding their negative experiences of school (Riddick, 1996). This has led researchers to wonder whether addressing the emotional impact of dyslexia might be the best way to improve academic performance, breaking the cycle of negative experience and failure. For example, Lawrence (2006) found that reading interventions were most effective when accompanied by a form of therapeutic intervention which addressed the emotional impact of dyslexia.

The current study uses a form of 'bibliotherapy' to address these behavioural and emotional impacts of dyslexia. First coined by Samuel Crothers (1916), the term 'bibliotherapy' is used to describe the practice of using stories to help children gain insight into their emotional difficulties (Sullivan & Strang, 2012). The method is thought to follow three sequential stages: identification, catharsis and insight (Sullivan & Strang, 2012). The child reader identifies with the character experiencing a similar problem (identification), starts to understand how their problem can be worked through (catharsis) and reflects on their own response anew (insight) (Sullivan & Strang, 2012). Working through these phases is thought to help children make links between their feelings and behaviour, helping them to understand why they reacted in a particular way and giving them the opportunity to make different choices in the future (Hoagland, 1972). Lenkowsky et al. (1987) found that learning disabled students who were given bibliotherapy reported improved levels of self-concept. They suggested that this approach was particularly suitable for children who have experienced repeated educational failure as it allows teachers and students to approach stressful material with an 'affective distance' which can help the students engage (Lenkowsky et al., 1987).

Pardeck & Pardeck (1993) suggest that bibliotherapy should be followed up with activities designed to reinforce the message of

the story and which give the child a space to express themselves. This practice builds on the methods of 'narrative' therapy which in itself is a form of play therapy. These therapies allow children to discuss serious topics within a playful context, with a trusted adult, perhaps rendering them less threatening and easier to discuss. The technique also positions children as the expert on their own lives (Morgan, 2000) and may be particularly important to children with learning difficulties as it contrasts with, what Rahmani (2011) calls 'deficit approaches', affirming the child as knowledgeable and skilled rather than highlighting the deficits caused by their condition. Play therapy has been shown to significantly improve the self-esteem and self-concept of children with learning difficulties, as well as the prevalence of behavioural difficulties (Topper, 2010, Crow, 1990, Packman and Bratton, 2003). Therapeutic intervention has also been shown to have an effect on dyslexic children's actual reading ability. Rahmani (2011) found that a 25-session course of narrative therapy, accounted for a 60 % reduction in the reading errors of dyslexic students. I would argue that this research supports the idea that academic performance is best approached from the perspective of addressing the emotional impact of dyslexia.

The Current Study

Sampling

This study followed a 'purposeful sampling' approach to selecting participants, where participants are chosen based on their level of knowledge of a subject, availability, or willingness to participate (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). I decided to use my one-to-one tutoring students for this study mainly for ease of access, but also because I thought the close bond I had formed with them might be a good foundation for discussing sensitive material. I decided I could only include participants in the study who had an official diagnosis of dyslexia; this excluded all but two of my students. I further narrowed my participant selection to Kate, turning to a case study approach so I could go in-depth into her experience.

My participant, Kate, is in Year 8 of a mainstream school. Kate lives with her mums, her younger brother and her twin sister. I have been supporting her learning one hour a week, for three

years and we have a strong bond. Kate, who was diagnosed with dyslexia in Year 5, is an extremely reluctant reader and writer, with pronounced symptoms of dyslexia. She is however very verbally articulate, emotionally intelligent and intellectually curious. Kate received little support for her learning difficulties in primary school and has struggled to get the correct provision in secondary school.

Methodology

This study was conducted over ten one-to-one sessions. Safeguarding procedures were put in place to ensure Kate was comfortable throughout the intervention and her mums gave written consent for her to participate. Ethical approval was sought and granted before the study began.

This study had two separate aims. Firstly, to determine whether the storytelling intervention successfully provided a space for reflection and secondly to determine the impact this had on the participant's reading self-concept. To address these aims a mixed method approach was taken, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative data was collected in the form of questionnaire responses which were collected at the beginning and end of the intervention. The questionnaire was adapted from Chapman's (2018) reading self-concept questionnaire, which explores three aspects of children's relationship to reading; difficulty, competence and attitude. I reduced the number of questions down from ten to five per category to make the questionnaire more manageable, selecting particularly relevant questions and added my own category of questions relating to the negative emotions experienced during reading as I felt this was particularly relevant to my research. In addition, I added five questions to measure self-esteem, chosen from Rosenberg's (1979) self-esteem tool for use with children. The questions were answered using a 5-point Likert scale indicating the frequency of feelings (never to always) and the degree of agreement (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The resulting questionnaire (figure 1) is quite a crude instrument which would require further research to ascertain its validity but for the purposes of this small-scale study

I believed it would be a good enough measure of any quantifiable change.

<p>Competence:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Can you usually understand what a story means?2. Are you good at remembering words you've read before?3. Are you able to work out new words when you read?4. Do you think you read well?5. Do you learn how to read new words quickly? <p>Attitude:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do you feel good when you read?2. Do you like reading outside of school?3. Is reading fun?4. Do you look forward to reading?5. Do you like reading stories with lots of words in them? <p>Negative affect:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Does reading make you angry?2. Do you ever dread reading?3. Do you ever avoid reading?4. Does reading make you feel stupid?5. Does reading make you nervous? <p>Difficulty</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Is reading to the class difficult for you?2. Do you make lots of mistakes while reading?3. Do you need extra help while reading?4. Do you feel that other kids find reading easier than you?5. Are the books you read at school too difficult? <p>Self Esteem</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How much do you like yourself?2. How much do you think you're good at doing things?3. How much do you think you get a lot of things wrong?4. How much do you feel proud of the person you are?
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Figure 1: Questions from my questionnaire sorted into categories.

Qualitative data was collected to be analysed for evidence of the potential of the intervention to illicit reflection and insight. I made audio recordings of our discussions, then transcribed them to pick out significant moments. I started out with a rough outline of what I wanted to do with the sessions but left room for it to develop; this is one of the benefits of undertaking 'action research', as over time, and with reflection, it can shift and evolve. After completing the questionnaire, we read and discussed my picturebook, linking it back to Kate's own experience. These sessions followed an informal interview format so that the discussion could evolve organically. Occasionally I asked her to

go into more detail, referred her back to the book or made statements linking her ideas, but I tried not to be too directive in my questioning. Kate's appraisal of my book threw up points of comparison and I began to see the book as more of an idealised version of how things should go for struggling students. It became clear to me that I wanted to give her an opportunity to tell her story and, as suggested by Pardeck & Pardeck (1993), the subsequent sessions were used in follow-up activities; writing and illustrating an analogous story about dyslexia which we eventually made into a physical book. Rahmani (2011) suggests that taking a multimodal approach to storytelling inventions, i.e. collecting drawings, making objects and writing, makes them more accessible to children of different learning styles.

Analysis of Data

Qualitative data: Evidence supporting the potential of the intervention to support reflection and insight.

Evidence of Kate's reflection on her emotional and behavioural responses to her difficulties, were identified and analysed using a framework of categories. These categories emerged from previous research, for example the emotions described by Riddick (1996) and the coping behaviours outlined by Ender and Parker (1999), as well as the data itself. I split Kate's emotions from her behavioural reaction because I wanted to be able to distinguish whether she was making causal links between her feelings and her actions. I also categorised the data by the three stages of bibliotherapy: identification, catharsis and insight (Sullivan & Strang, 2012). This was so that I could identify where the stories in the intervention were contributing to the insight she was gaining. The data was annotated using the following framework and highlighted for differentiation:

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Emotional response	Highlighted light grey
Behavioural response	Highlighted dark grey
Identification	<u>Underlined</u>
Catharsis	<i>Italics</i>
Insight	Bold

Overall qualitative data supports the observations of previous researchers that poor provision for dyslexic students provokes strong emotional response and maladaptive coping behaviours. Kate talked about strong feelings evoked by feeling different to her peers, embarrassment caused by struggling academically and the strain dyslexia placed on her relationships with trusted adults. Emotions identified included anger, frustration, anxiety, shame, apathy and despair. Kate also described her behavioural response, for example avoiding work, lashing out, socially withdrawing and the development of a stutter.

The qualitative data also supported the hypothesis that the bibliotherapy would be an effective tool in helping her reflect on these difficulties. Kate first started engaging with the material while reading the book, reflecting on the character's behaviour (see figure 2) and whether her maladaptive coping mechanisms were the 'right way' to respond.

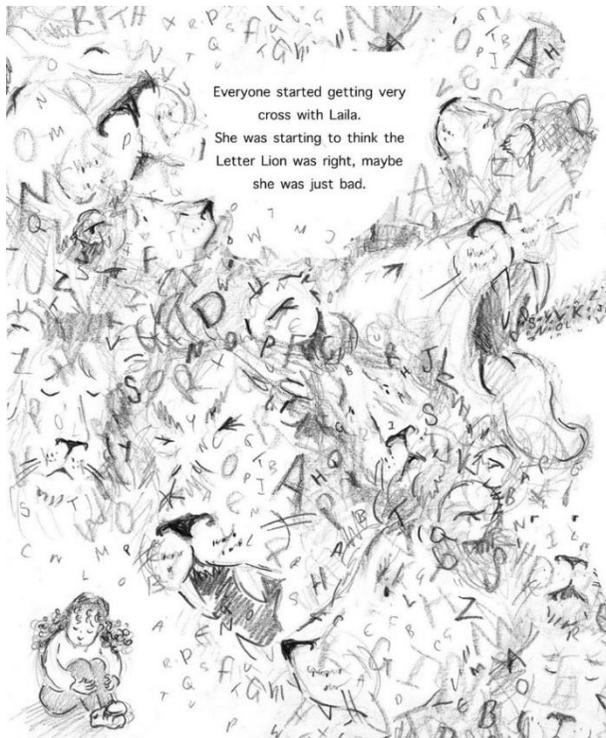


Figure 2. Page 18 from *The Letter Lion*

K: [looking at page 18] Woah, she's become a bad girl. The lion's kind of become her friend now, her bad friend though, like her friend in crime. She's just doing it because she thinks it's the right thing **but it's not the right thing.**

After reading the book, Kate began to make links between her feelings and actions; that she had been driven to give up on learning, avoid work, break things and, at one time, stop talking altogether. We moved back and forth through the stages of bibliotherapy fluidly, relating her experiences to the those of the character and vice versa, using each to inform the other and construct a narrative For example in the following extract Kate moves from talking about the character's need for psychological

help, to her own experience of therapy and being a selective mute at school, constructing her own narrative about how the 'anxiety of reading' made her want to withdraw emotionally from the people around her:

K: But like this girl seems a bit different. She's a bit... um, she needs... someone to talk to?

G: what makes you say that?

K: Because if she's having dreams about it she needs some help...someone to talk to, someone who's good at talking, like a psychologist.

G: And you had some help when you were younger didn't you?

K: Yeah, that was separation anxiety and just anxiety of reading or something.

G: Do you want to say any more about that? You don't have to.

K: Yeah, I didn't talk at all at school so most of the teachers were quite worried about me. Like I don't know why. Most kids go through a phase where they don't talk. I think. And then when I started to not talk at home. Then a few years later I had it again...when I was erm....I had it this year because like we had all these tests. I'm doing fine now because after that I'm fine...I think next year it's going to come back again...

G: When you say it came back, the anxiety or the not speaking?

K: The anxiety more like...But I'd normally don't really speak that much of school. Like this kid literally came up to me. They said d-d-did you [stutters] know you're the quiet girl.

It's like do you think I don't know that I don't talk or something [laughs nervously]. **I choose not to because teachers kind of forget I'm there and it makes it easier for everyone.**

G: So a bit like the girl, **you wanted to hide.**

K: Yeah except she yells. I got quiet.

As the above exchange illustrates, there was often value in contrasting Kate's experience with that of the characters'. Here she identifies that her response to difficulties was to hide herself away from her teacher whereas the character lashes out angrily. We went on to discuss what Kate would do with her anger; instead of directing it at people Kate explained how she would destroy her pencil case when she became frustrated at school, chewing her pens until her mouth bled. Another point of comparison was that the character in the book received more help with her difficulties:

K: The lion listens to the girl. He learns to be kind to her. He has to learn to learn.

G: That's an interesting idea, learn to learn.

K: If you don't learn then there's no point learning. **If you want to learn then you have to go to school, but then if you don't want to go to school... but then you do want to learn...**

G: Maybe it feels like sometimes, what we're talking about is where you learn and how that feels. And in the story, she has a very understanding teacher and she gets all the help that she needs.

K: *My school didn't do that. They didn't want to spend the money on getting me tested so I didn't get tested until I was in Year 5 which was pretty late.*

During this exchange Kate is assimilating the message of the story; that children who struggle with learning have to 'learn to learn', going through a process where they accept and start to make allowances for their difficulties. However, it also highlights how near impossible this becomes in an environment of anxiety and judgement; that a child who dreads going to school and is made to feel ashamed and deficient is unlikely to be able to settle to the task of learning. I was glad that the story had given Kate an opportunity to express some of the anger she had for the system she felt had failed her.

During the next phase I asked Kate to write a story about dyslexia and she came up with this story about a character called Wilson; a black kitten struggling with dyslexia in a world of colourful cats:

The Cat that Couldn't

Once upon a time there was a cat, called Wilson, and his brothers and sisters. They went to cat school, and they all had a cat teacher called Mrs Perrrrrrfect. They all lived in a small cat city in an alleyway with cat sized houses with little lamp posts with cobblestone floors. Wilson was a black cat with orange eyes. All his brother and sisters were different colours like blue purple and red. He was the only black cat on the street. He was considered bad luck. His Mum and dad, worried about him because he was different. One day he started school and everything was cool until year 1. They started to learn how to spell and write and all these different things. But Wilson was not as good at it as the other kids. He gave up on learning things. All the other cats laughed at him. There were other cats who found things difficult too but they were the naughty cats. The teacher cats got worried about Wilson. They said "You should take this reading practice." Wilson quickly got fed up with reading practice but they said it would help him. They made him do baby stuff which he hated. When he moved up to the next year he realised the work he was doing is different to the other students' work. He felt embarrassed. When Wilson grew up and became an adult he got diagnosed with dyslexia and realised that's why he'd been finding stuff hard. His classmates said 'Well done!' He got some help.

The story included many of the themes present in our discussions; the feelings of shame and isolation, being different,

the anxiety of teachers and caregivers and the eventual disengagement with learning. Wilson's feelings of being lumped in with the naughty cats for example, encapsulates Kate's fears that teachers will be cross with her if she gets things wrong. While we worked on the story Kate used it as a way to talk about and reflect on her own experiences, drawing on them to inform the story and making direct comparisons between herself and the character, as in this moment where she transitions from talking about Wilson to talking about her own experience of being patronised by teachers.

*K: But he doesn't really like in primary school,
they make you do like baby stuff. They were
like 'Can you say the letter A?' And I'm like 10 or
something. I can say that and I can read stuff
you've been making me read for years.*

The ending of the story felt very positive and I reflected that the process of deciding on an outcome for Wilson may have given Kate the opportunity to envisage a more hopeful future for herself; one in which she understands her difficulties, develops a more compassionate attitude towards herself and receives the help she needs.

After writing the story, Kate requested that we create illustrations to go with it and the subsequent sessions were spent drawing collaboratively while we continued to discuss the themes and content of the story. Drawing the illustrations opened up opportunities for exploration, particularly this image (figure 3) from the end of the story:



Figure 3: Kate's illustration for the end of the story.

The drawing itself appears as a hopeful expression of acceptance, a future in which dyslexia is overcome and feels like something to be championed but while drawing Kate also discussed how she sometimes feels that other people are jealous of her for receiving special attention. In this way the drawing process helped to uncover and make sense of complex and contradictory narratives present in Kate's experience.

As we neared the end of the project Kate requested, we make the story into a physical book (figure 4). I followed her lead with this idea, and she dictated how the book should be dyslexia friendly with yellow paper behind the text and appropriate text size and spacing. She also suggested we include pointers at the back for teachers to best support pupils struggling with dyslexia. I felt that making space for Kate's own ideas, aligned with Rahmani's (2011) suggestion of empowering her to feel like a knowledgeable expert in her own story. I could argue the book became a physical representation of all the discussion, reflection and processing we had done together.



Figure 4: Photograph of the book created at the end of the project.

As we brought the project to a close Kate expressed that she enjoyed the experience and felt that it had made talking about dyslexia easier. She also talked about needing to ask for help more and wanting her dyslexia to be more visible. In our final session Kate also talked about situations where reading and writing might be fun suggesting an optimism which hadn't been present at the beginning of the study. I would argue that being given the opportunity to attempt to understand and interpret her own feelings and behaviours and to give a narrative to her experiences, made them easier to think and talk about. This in turn, I would suggest, contributed to her feeling she could stop avoiding and denying the impact they had had on her.

Quantitative Data: Effect on Reading Self-concept and Self-esteem

Mean averages were used to analyse Kate's responses to the questionnaire which were coded on a 5-point scale. This was

done with the understanding that averages can only uncover general trends and can be skewed easily by outliers. Further analysis would also have to be carried out to ascertain whether effect sizes were significant.

Having said this, the quantitative results of this research indicate a general trend upwards in all categories of reading self-concept and self-esteem (figure 5). The greatest average increases were in the categories of attitude and negative affect which increased by an average of 1 and 0.8 respectively on a 5 point scale. The least dramatic increase was in the category of perceived difficulty which only increased by 0.2. Further statistical analysis would need to be done in order to determine the significance of these findings, however I would argue that this data suggests that the intervention made little impact on the actual difficulty of reading for the participant but might have had some influence on the way the participant felt about reading. The participant's self-esteem also increased, suggesting that the way she felt about herself may also have been affected by the intervention. These findings are consistent with results of previous bibliotherapy interventions.

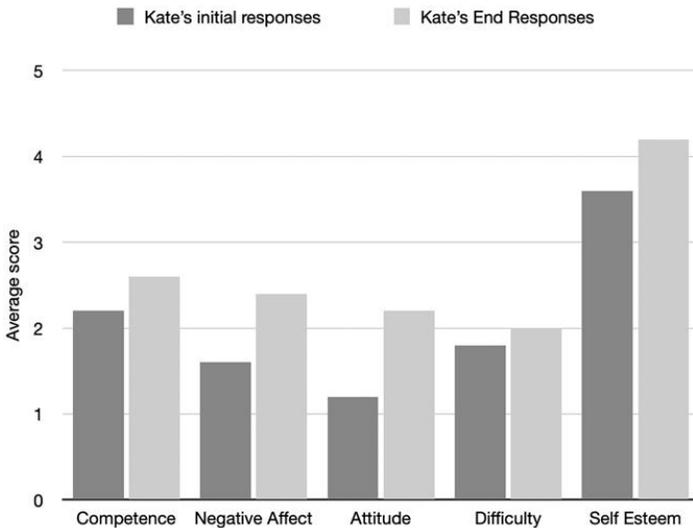


Figure 5: Bar Chart showing the average of Kate's responses to each category of question.

Conclusions and Implications

I think there are several implications that can be drawn from this research. Firstly that storytelling interventions open up a space for reluctant learners to reflect on the impact of dyslexia has on their feelings and behaviour. It could also be used as evidence to suggest they are likely to have a positive effect on how students feel about themselves and their attitude to reading. I would argue that this kind of intervention should be a part of the response to diagnosis of dyslexia, and that teachers should be educated in the emotional impact of dyslexia so that they can relate to students in a sensitive way. Lastly, I think this research shows how important it is that children understand themselves and their difficulties. I would argue therefore that early identification of dyslexia is essential to both the child's development and teachers' ability to put the right support in place.

Conducting this research has been a profound experience for me; one which will forever alter my approach to teaching. For me it demonstrated how, for young people who often have so little say in anything which happens to them in education, storytelling can give them back their voice; encourage them to feel that it is important and useful to talk about their experiences, express their frustrations and anxieties and receive help in processing their pain. I will forever feel proud that a little girl who once felt that it would be easier for everyone if she stopped talking altogether, was able to speak up about her story.

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CREATIVE READING WITH SAFTA: HOW DOES SHARING STORIES ONLINE WITH DISTANT GRANDCHILDREN FOSTER INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CREATIVITY FOR LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND?

DEBORAH FRIEDLAND

Introduction

'Those who write for children are trying to arm them for the life ahead with everything we can find that is true' (Rundell, 2019 p.4).

As a parent and now a grandmother, I would add to this impassioned assertion: those who *read to children* are trying to arm them with truth for the life ahead. In my opinion, children are empowered to construct their own suits of armour out of imagination, curiosity and experience of the world which is to be explored within literature. Stories are wild meadows full of expressive language, sometimes mini-dictionaries of experience through the eyes of a child, sometimes mirrors reflecting answers to our deepest questions and fears, sometimes telescopes through which visions and dreams can be located. A book is a rich and strange forest populated with wild creatures, travellers, sons and daughters and outlaws (Spufford, 2002, p.24-25). And for a young child, there is no substitute for the experience of being read to, turning the pages and exploring the world from the safety of a lap, sofa or bedside.

Reading stories for pleasure is a very accessible way for grandparents to form a positive relationship with grandchildren to whom they are so closely emotionally connected particularly when families are separated geographically as I have been from my two young grandchildren. I first thought about the dynamic of such distant relationships when I was a child myself. Of my maternal grandparents' six grandchildren, I was the only one who

lived nearby. I remember the disappointment in their faces as they waited for those treasured blue aerogrammes to fall through the letterbox from distant lands. The ease with which we can now connect digitally is charmingly demonstrated in the picture book *Tea with Zayde* (Saltzberg, 2016) in which a Jewish grandfather has tea with his granddaughter every day. On the final page the tea party is revealed to be being conducted over Zoom. When I read this story with my young grandchildren (then aged 2 and 4) in real life on my last visit to their home in the US in February 2020, it got me thinking about ways to engage creatively with them at a distance and I thought about writing my own book for them on a similar theme. The seeds of this study were thus sown even before the pandemic ploughed through our lives, scattering our expectations of normal interactions in which 'communicative or discursive spaces that in the child's experience can allow for different types of engagement' (Jessel et al, 2010) became so very restricted.

I am *not* going to discuss the merits of reading for pleasure from the point of view of enabling literacy. I am interested in my grandchildren's development of vocabulary, linguistic fluency and critical thinking skills as a natural outcome of reading and storytelling – of 'learning through play' (Rosen, 2019, pp.227-262) although not as an aid to formal education. Neither am I concerned with any discussion on 'the death of the book' or the paradigm shift from paper to circuit-driven technologies (Birkets, 1998, p. 18). These are also beyond the scope of this study other than to show how the differences between print and electronic technologies affect 'book talk' with young children.

Family Literacy

Grandparents are generally perceived as ideal role models who are well placed to pass on family history, traditions and values (Mansson, 2016, p.143). That grandparents have a positive impact on grandchildren's development is hardly surprising since 'people become emotionally selective as they grow older' and 'choose to sustain primarily their closest (i.e. family) relationships' (Mansson, 2016, p.136). As such, the grandparent-grandchild relationship is highly significant. Five key themes were cited in this research as the best parts of being a grandparent: maturation, mutual

affection, pride, shared activities, and teaching and learning. Furthermore, as people live longer and working patterns change, an expanding body of research into intergenerational relationships is emerging. A special issue of the journal *Contemporary Social Science* published 11 papers exploring contemporary grandparenthood globally (Buchanan, 2018). Closer to home, Goldsmiths University's study *Learning with Grandparents* examined intergenerational learning between children and grandparents in East London (Kenner, 2004). The study documented the wide range of shared activities and explored reciprocal learning that takes place in the home.

Reading for Pleasure

The benefits of reading cannot be underestimated since literacy 'gives children voice, enables social inclusion and literally increases life chances.' (Literacy Trust, 2018). One way to achieve this is by Reading for Pleasure which can be defined as 'the informal interaction that accompanies quality reading to and with children, developing children's language and comprehension and nurturing a love of reading' (Open University RfP). A pedagogy of Reading for Pleasure, encompasses four interlinked practices: reading aloud, informal booktalk and recommendations, and independent reading time within a highly social reading environment. It should be learner-led, informal, social and supported by Texts that Tempt. (Open University RfP). In her webinar produced during the 2020 pandemic, Teresa Cremin further emphasizes the importance of rereading and book chat as well as providing a space for reading (Cremin, 2020).

Children love to read and reread texts as they become more familiar them; they peel more layers off and the familiarity of a well-loved story is deeply reassuring. Lucy Rodriguez Leon argues for 'The power of children returning to texts and the evidence which suggests that, as active participants in the story, their talk and their thinking increases as they became more familiar with the book.' She stresses the importance of dialogic shared book reading; a dialogic approach to book sharing involves a high level of 'book chat'; children are considered active participants in the reading, rather than passive listeners. It is about reading *with* children, not simply to them (Rodriguez Leon).

Grandparents in Children's Picturebooks

As part of this literature review, I also looked at how grandparents are represented in young children's picturebooks. According to one study (Sciplino, et al., 2010) the stereotypical grandparent is often depicted as fairly old even though the average age of an American grandparent is 50. In the children's books investigated, 59% of grandmothers have grey/white hair. The researchers looked at mobility, (how many had walking sticks), and their range of activities such as whether they are seen driving or are independent.

Wondering whether my own perceptions of grandparents in children's literature were now outdated, and to increase my familiarity with more recently published picture books, I visited the CPLE library in London to see if anything had changed since this research. Positive representations of grandparents are shown in numerous recent titles (See Appendix 1) which reinforces the idea that the relationship between grandchild and grandparent is deep, rewarding and reciprocal.

Zoom Fatigue

As this study was conducted mostly online, this review would not be complete without an assessment of the impact of this medium. In a 2021 study, Professor Jeremy Bailenson, founding director of the Stanford Virtual Human Interaction Lab (VHIL) examined the psychological consequences of spending long periods of time on video conferencing platforms. He identifies four ways in which we suffer zoom fatigue (Ramachandran, 2021):

- 1 Excessive amounts of close-up eye contact are highly intense.
- 2 Seeing yourself during video chats in real time is fatiguing.
- 3 Video chats reduce our usual mobility.
- 4 The cognitive load is much higher in video chats.

The study notes that:

‘in regular face-to-face interaction, nonverbal communication is quite natural and each of us naturally makes and interprets gestures and nonverbal cues subconsciously. But in video

chats, we have to work harder to send and receive signals' (Ramachandran, 2021).

Adults may easily adapt and find various fixes to mitigate these tiring effects such as hiding self-view on the screen, arranging the room more comfortably, or taking breaks. But for young children, zoom fatigue is far more difficult to cope with. A young child will simply go off to play, switch off the screen or lose interest making interactive storytelling and reading aloud online much more challenging. I personally often find it to be quite a stressful experience.

Growing up in a Digital World

Researchers argue that children's social relationships seem to be enhanced by digital technology, especially since most of their social circle is now online. (The Lancet, 2018) This applies to an older age group; however caution is advised for parents and teachers of preschool and young children. Professor Michael Rich says that:

Much of what happens on screen provides “impoverished” stimulation of the developing brain compared to reality. Children need a diverse menu of online and offline experiences, including the chance to let their minds wander. “Boredom is the space in which creativity and imagination happen.”. (Bradley Ruder, 2019)

Digital storytelling, storytelling apps such as interactive games and online learning materials are often highly productive and creative for all ages of children, especially in times of isolation such as the pandemic. However, the pleasure and meaning involved may vary depending on the context and preferences of the individual reader. Some studies have found greater learning benefits for print books and some for digital books (Cremin & Kucirkova, 2020). My personal anecdotal evidence based on this study suggests that the younger the child, the more likely they are to lose concentration or be fatigued by online interactions.

Methodology

The subjects of this study are my granddaughter, 'Flopsy', aged five and my grandson 'James', aged three-and-a-half. My son and his wife (Daddy and Mummy in the portfolio) moved to her hometown of Austin, Texas in 2017, where James was born.

What does *Creative Reading with Safta* involve and what methodology was used? My personal definition of 'creative reading' is informal, open-ended, and involves communication, questioning and imagination. The only research method available was to video conversations online. The study is a qualitative one (Bearne 2019, pp. 25-34), given there are only two interviewees and fairly unstructured compared to a study involving a class of pupils who can complete questionnaires. While I set out thinking I would be able to conduct more in-depth observations or generate some creative artefacts from my grandchildren during the study, the young age of the children, virtual environment and time differences quickly made such ambitions unrealistic.

Six of the sessions outlined in the portfolio, were undertaken on FaceTime/Zoom. This was not ideal since in order to fit in with the time difference, and given the children's pre-school and summer camp schedules, the calls had to be made around supertime or bedtime which was six hours behind. We were all quite tired and there were distractions for the children, hunger, boredom, wanting to play, or winding down for bedtime. However, the timings did mean Flopsy and James could have a story with Safta near to bedtime.

Both children (and especially James), have urban southern American accents with some notable features such as vowels becoming merged so that /caught/ and /cot/ sound almost the same, the intrusive /r/ in words like /sport/ and loss of the offglide in /ai/ and soft /t/ so that /right/ sounds like /rahd/. It was up to me to decode these phonological, grammatical (multiple modals e.g. *I might could go later*) and lexical differences (*Y'all staying for dinner?*) (Bailey, 2005). The children are growing up in a household freely using both British and American English with a large sprinkling of Hebrew vocabulary which they learn at their Jewish pre-school. While a sociolinguistic analysis of their

pronunciation and code-switching is an interesting study for another day, it is worth mentioning speech patterns as the children and I often had to repeat ourselves or ask for clarification during our online conversations, especially when sound quality on a digital device is not as clear as during face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, in many stories I read to them by British writers, there are significant linguistic and cultural features that need to be explained which is certainly enriching for them in both breadth and depth. I noticed that American children's books can be quite different; picture books I came across in the Austin public library and in their home for example, are more often written in rhyme than those by British writers for example which requires a different style of reading aloud.

The children call me Safta Debbie, Hebrew for Grandma and in spite of not being able to travel because of the pandemic, we have been in regular contact through phone calls, texts and a photo sharing app where I can peek into their daily lives. In late August, the family moved back to London and I was able to interview the children face-to-face for the final session. This is not something that was anticipated as the decision to relocate to London was one my son and his wife made after the study started.

While I was able to frame the research question in theory, I could not predict how I would conduct it in practical terms other than knowing it would be done online. I decided to explore how different types of storytelling – physical books, home-made books, oral storytelling and co-storying might foster intergenerational relationships and I reasoned that I would be led by the children as much as possible and would intuit how each session would lead to the next.

There are many opportunities for digital engagement with some story reading apps such as *By Kids*, *For Kids StoryTime* and *MeBooks* which work best when facilitated or supervised by an adult, such as when listening in the car, or playing with your phone in a queue. My grandchildren's use of these were excluded from my study but referred to in Session 6.

Data Analysis

Session 1 When Grandma Came

One way I fostered creative reading was to post copies of books to read together online. As they turn the pages, so could I. As I stopped to look at pictures, so they could. What teaches us the nature of story is the medium of 'an adult voice speaking, and saying the same words in the same order each time the story comes around' (Spufford, p. 46). Reading *When Grandma Came*, a loved and familiar picture book was a good way to anchor this research project since '... the depth of the dialogue, and the complexity of children's thinking' increases as they become more familiar with a book. (Rodriguez Leon, 2021) The children were able to follow as I held up the book to the screen, turning the pages of their own copy and pointing to the pictures and words. With some guidance to navigate the text and illustrations at a distance, I could simulate the experience of reading a bedtime story. This worked fairly well with this book as there is only a small amount of text on each page. The language on each spread has elements of repetition and is very rhythmic and poetic which made it extremely easy to read aloud.#

Transcript

Safta: What do you like about this story, Flopsy?

Flopsy: I like it because *you* read it to me.

Safta: What do you like, James?

James: Read it again, Safta!

Session 2 Too Far Away

'Touch is a particularly significant means of communication, used by grandparents and grandchildren to build a secure and confident relationship and to negotiate kinaesthetic learning' (Kenner, 2004, p.8). It follows that grandparents living far away must find new ways to try and compensate for this lack of a tactile connection. James is very much aware that we have to talk on the computer because we are in different countries. He repeats 'You're too far away' several times but still seems to comprehend

the abstract concept of distance and knows that my sharing his pretzel is make-believe.

Because of the lack of opportunity for shared activities, the relationship relies 99 % on conversation which quickly turns into story. We indirectly discussed the lockdown and when flights will open up again. We also were able to analogise this park outing comparing it with one Daddy made as a child.

Extract from reflective journal:

After speaking for a while, J seemed to get stressed and said he wanted to stop. I think the technology, eye contact and concentration required is palpably and qualitatively different from face to face when cuddles, hugs, touch and space play such a big a part in interaction. There is a fourth dimension that is missing. After I chatted with Mummy for a while, J had rested his head on her shoulders, and was relaxing, not really talking much but he perked up and we talked about dinosaurs. So then we talked again about the park and how high he would swing up and up and up. Then again he said, 'You're too far away'.

Session 3 Going to the Park

It may not be possible to go to the park – the most reported activity in the Goldsmiths study (Kenner, et al 2004, p3) - but it is possible to tell a story about going to the park. Storytelling begins with yourself and stories help us construct our identities (Chambers, 1993, pp.44-45). As Francis Spufford argues, we are a story-telling species and reading aloud is a social act. By reading aloud a home-made story about going to the park based on the conversation from Session 2, I was able to transcend the distance between myself and my grandchildren in a way that was very meaningful for them. It demonstrates how they like to situate themselves in the story. The story is theirs and it is ours. Parks are similar but have differences. It is a universal but also an individual experience that can connect the three generations of

the family with. They were enthusiastic about hearing the story several times as they were the protagonists.

Cowritten Story: Going to the Park

'Let's go to the park with Safta, said Flopsy.

'We can't,' said James. 'She isn't here. She is in England.'

'We can go to the park and tell her about it,' Flopsy said.

On the way to the park, Flopsy and James saw cars and buses and roads and rocks.

Flopsy was walking and James was on his speed bike.

At the park, James went on the swing. Mummy pushed him higher and higher.

'Can Safta push me?' asked James.

'No. Because she's in England,' said Flopsy.

Flopsy went on the monkey bars. She saw a squirrel. It was brownish.

She climbed up higher and higher.

'Can I climb all the way to England?' giggled Flopsy.

'I don't think so,' said Mummy.

The brownish squirrel followed them all the way home.

'Do they have squirrels in England?' asked James.

'Yes, they do,' answered Flopsy. 'Because Daddy saw squirrels in the park. Daddy is Safta's son.'

'I think this squirrel wants to see Safta.'

'And I want to!' James said.

When they went home, they called Safta and told her about going to the park and rocks the swings and the monkey bars. And the brownish squirrel. The funniest silliest squirrel in the whole wide world.

Session 4 Go Away, Coronavirus, Shoo!

This session focused on feelings around the pandemic, and I encouraged the children to use narrative to talk about their feelings. Professor Teresa Cremin believes that:

Discussing social and emotional difficulties is not straightforward. But quality picture fiction texts can foster conversations in which children's voices, interests and concerns lead

the way, enabling them to handle uncertainty and overcome adversity (Cremin, 2021).

A recent initiative 'Overcoming Adversity through Hope: Developing dialogue through picture fiction in homes and schools', enables parents and practitioners to support children to come to terms with and understand social and emotional challenges. Dr Sarah Jane Mukherjee explained that the work: '... responds to widespread concern that children's emotional wellbeing continues to be adversely affected due to the ongoing pandemic and seeks to help children handle life's challenges.' (Cremin, 2021).

Transcript extracts

Flopsy: Coronavirus makes you sick. Only if you don't wash your hands.

James: (gesturing with hands on throat) And makes your throat Like (gestures again) all the way .. throw up.

Safta: What would you like to say to the coronavirus? If you could talk to it, what would you say to it?

Flopsy: Go away! Shoo! That's what I say.

James: Stop being here!

Safta: If you wrote a story about the coronavirus what would you put in the story?

Flopsy: Go away! Shoo!

Safta: What else would you put in the story?

Flopsy: Hooray, we can go to England. The coronavirus is over!

James: I'm going to send the coronavirus away. Don't be here! Don't be here. Go away! (gesticulates ...)

Safta: How would you do it?

Flopsy: Only if we pretend. Like can we borrow some of the tissues... (she picks up a paper napkin from the table) ... and pretend we have powers and (She makes the paper napkin into a ball then throws it across the table) 'Boom! Boom!'

Safta: What would you put in the story?

Flopsy: (she waves her hands around in the air in 'magic powers gestures) Make Make (whispers indistinct magic words and smiles

Session 5 Zoom Fatigue

When I have a conversation with the children, it is more relaxed but when there is an activity it does not work as well. I started to read *Professor Puffendorf* (Robin Tzannes & Korcky Paul, 1998) and *The Whale's Song* (Dyan Sheldon & Gary Blythe, 1990) with Flopsy but the illustrations were a problem as they are very detailed and interesting and require some serious discussion. There were some good moments as these are familiar stories but from the video I can see how restless they quickly became using this medium. They found it physically tiring to move their eyes back and forth from the screen to the books they were holding.

Extract from Reflective Journal:

These two books having richer, longer texts made it more difficult to share online. Although James indicated he didn't know the story, he actually knew it extremely well as he started reading it to himself. It is difficult to give them both attention reading two different books at once. James was sitting on the sofa quite a way back and his voice was often indistinct. Video quality and colours were poor. I found myself having to repeat back almost everything they said because of the lack of clarity of their voices which became a frustrating experience.

Session 6 Book Talk

I had this final discussion with Flopsy and James when we were reunited in London. We were physically close and I was able to reassure them, connecting with touch. The softness of bedding, cushions, hands touching and positive body language was an intensely marked contrast with the cold, impersonal contours of a laptop screen. The intimate setting and physical closeness were far more conducive to an honest conversation in which the children might really express their feelings and experiences. Flopsy was about to start school and like most children will have 'benefited from listening to stories and telling their own, many months before they can read or write' (Chambers, 1991, p.47).

I wanted to find out their feelings about the times we had spent online and how it was different now that we could have a cuddle and read a story in real life. After reading them a story 'IRL', I asked them what it was like compared with the online experiences we had shared for the previous 18 months. James expressed the limitations of the digital experience. He finds it difficult as he can only relate to the text and images that are visually available on the screen in front of him. A book is open-ended and browsable.

Flopsy pointed out the enjoyment of sharing a physical book and engaging in 'book talk' with the person reading rather than the lack of interactivity she experiences when listening to an audiobook.

Transcript

Safta: Do you like reading the story on the computer, or do you like reading it as a real book?

James: I don't know how to read yet.

Safta: I know. But what do you like when I read it to you? Do you like turning the pages? Do you like looking at the pictures?

James: Yeah. Yeah.

Safta: Do you like them on the computer?

James: No, because it's too long. The stories are really long and I can't see them very well.

Safta: You mean, on the computer?

James: Yeah. I can't see the pictures.

Safta: And when I sit with you on the bed with the storybook, you can see the pictures, can't you?

James: Yeah.

Safta: And do you like better? Do you like turning over the pages? Is it more fun?

James: I mostly don't hear, I mostly don't see the letters.

Safta: On the computer?

James: Yeah.

Safta: OK. You don't see all the letters on the computer. That's true, isn't it?

James: I'm trying to guess. It's not falling all the way down. So it's really hard.

Safta: And Flopsy. What do you say?

Flopsy: I like turning the pages with my hand. And I like it when people read it so when I want to talk to them, they stop reading for a moment and after I've finished then they can carry on.

Safta: When it is a recording it doesn't stop?

Flopsy: People doesn't let me look at the pictures with them.

Conclusion

I have no doubt that the question I posed at the beginning of this study has been answered – for me at least. Conversations that are stories and stories that are conversations are incredibly important as ways in which the grandparent-grandchildren relationship can not only survive but also grow. Whether rereading favourite picture books, making up stories, bookchat or passing on family stories (not included in this study but nevertheless an important element of cultural and family continuity) all enhance the grandparent-grandchild relationship. My study was neither scientific nor quantitative; there are no graphs or charts to back up my findings which are situated more in gut instinct and life experience than in empirical evidence.

I believe that the benefits of sharing stories online with my distant grandchildren and the power of creative reading to foster intergenerational relationships were proved beyond doubt by the reaction of my young grandchildren when I scooped them into my arms at Heathrow early in the morning on a sunny day in mid-August. They ran up to me excitedly, recognizing me instantly and full of chatter and laughter. There was no awkwardness or hesitation – we were old friends, partners in reading and the soft touch of those beloved grandchildren's hands was worth every penny spent on posting books and every moment of those zoom calls. The virtual experience may often be unsatisfactory, rather like sitting in the upper circle at the theatre with a post blocking your view of the small figures on the stage below. However, a restricted view is better than none.

Appendix I

Representations of grandparents in children's literature

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HOW CAN CRITICAL RESPONSES TO PICTUREBOOKS BE DEVELOPED WITH YOUNG CHILDREN?

MEGAN QUINN

Introduction

Developing a focus for this research project coincided with my first year teaching a class of four- and five-year-old children. Working with a new age group was both refreshing and challenging. I enjoyed sharing and exploring stories and poetry with the children and found myself energised by their curiosity and unguarded wonderings.

During class read-alouds, I regularly considered the discussions that were occurring, and the types of ideas being shared. Whilst I felt we were developing a culture with room for the responses of individuals, I was keen to further explore the possibility of developing the interthinking that Mary Roche writes about when she describes ‘...how a whole classroom could be animated in sharing ideas and learning from each other’ (Roche, 2013, p.7).

Throughout this action research, I worked with a group of reception children and, during focused sessions, explored how picturebooks can be used to support the development of critical thinking. I sought to explore the kind of responses that children offer, and the strategies that can be used to extend their ideas. In doing so, I wanted to develop my understanding of the kinds of things that young children engaging in critical thinking say and do.

The question of what critical responses look like in practice is one I regularly returned to. In the context of a busy classroom environment, and ‘in a culture of high stakes testing, which the UK government insists is here to stay’ (Alexander, 2008, p.113), opportunities to work in such an uninterrupted way are rarely available to teachers. By focusing on children’s responses, I sought to build my understanding of the playful yet complex nature of thinking at this vital stage in a child’s development.

Approaches to Literacy

Roche makes the point that if texts have the power to 'position' readers, then '...literacy pedagogies can also serve to position learner-readers' (Roche, 2015, p.7). The idea that 'the neutrality of education' is a 'myth' (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.38) is central to critical literacy pedagogies. I agree that the approaches we employ to teaching and learning, right throughout the education system, matter. How we explore reading with children indicates to them, and their families, the type of thinking that is of value (Freebody, Luke & Gilbert, 1991, p.435).

Through the development of Critical Thinking and Book Talk, Roche sought an approach which would enable her students to develop ways of thinking that would be relevant to their lives. In relation to this, she states:

The values, dispositions and attitudes that are part and parcel of such teaching may never be measured, yet they may have educative influence in lives long after the teachers' names and texts have been forgotten' (Roche, 2015, p.31).

This comment raises important questions about the purpose of education. Such considerations feel especially important at a time when government education policy prioritises a narrow view of learning. Robin Alexander (2008) notes how the teacher participants in his study felt that 'dialogic teaching's collective classroom ethic' was 'being increasingly compromised by current government policy' (Alexander, 2008. p.113). This project seeks to explore the opportunities that approaches, such as Roche's, can offer to learners and their teachers.

Critical Thinking with Picturebooks

Whilst classroom readalouds in early years settings are common practise (Hoffman, 2011, p.184), Roche states that reading aloud alone is not enough (Roche, 2015, p.74). Her dialogic method seeks to create a 'democratic educational experience' (Ibid, p.6) in which children are 'active agents in their own learning' (Ibid, p.7). Within this approach, picturebooks offer '... a multimodal

language learning opportunity', and by creating opportunities for engagement, adults scaffold the children's learning (Ibid, p.74). Central to this, is an acknowledgement of each child's reading event as a 'unique occurrence' (Rosenblatt, 2005, p.1) and with this comes the opportunity for children to 'learn tolerance of diverse points of view' (Roche, 2015, p.9).

Maine and Hoffman also explore how '...different readers will bring different interpretations to bear when they talk together to make meaning from text (Maine & Hofmann, 2015, p.46). For Hoffman, dialogic approaches offer vital opportunities for developing 'higher level literacy practices' with a focus on 'actively constructing meaning' (Hoffman, 2011, p.184). If children are offered opportunities to develop 'unconstrained' skills and are allowed greater freedom in their responses, then '...meaning making profits from insights of young children that would never have surfaced if they were only permitted to respond to teacher questions' (Hoffman, 2011, p.185).

As Meek stated: 'if there is no place or chance for beginners to demonstrate what they can do, what they know will never be part of their teachers' awareness' (Meek, 1988, p.7). By exploring pedagogies which '...take account of the child-as-reader' (Chambers, 1985, p.1), educators can develop more democratic learning communities in which adults and children can learn together as 'critical co-investigators' (Freire, 1996, p.62). I think such pedagogies have an important place in young children's education. As Evans states: 'the pleasure of an intellectual involvement in reading can begin almost as early as reading itself' (Evans, 1992, p.3). By creating such opportunities in early years settings educators can start learners on their journey towards becoming 'reflective and critical adults' (Roche, 2015, p.11).

The Role of Talk

Alexander's work focuses on the role of talk in developing thinking and builds on his findings that in English primary classrooms opportunities for student interactions tended to be brief (Alexander, 2008, p.99-100). In his research, he explores the important idea that educators can promote different kinds of talk by offering learners the opportunity to engage in discussions

within different types of groups (Ibid, p.97). In offering learners these opportunities, teachers can create 'a different pedagogical relationship' which 'exploits the power of talk to shape children's thinking' (Ibid., p.92).

Alexander's approach, which is 'dialogic rather than transmissive', seeks to enable teachers to employ a 'repertoire of approaches' (Ibid, p.102-106). Central to the development of a dialogic approach is his Repertoire of Learning Talk which works together with four Contingent Abilities or Dispositions (table 1). Alexander also highlights five principles of dialogic teaching which he states is a collective; reciprocal; supportive; cumulative and purposeful learning experience (Ibid., p.105).

Repertoire of Learning Talk	Contingent Abilities or Dispositions
Narrate Explain Instruct Ask different kinds of question Receive, act and build upon answers Analyse and solve problems Speculate and imagine Explore and evaluate ideas Discuss Argue, reason and justify Negotiate.	Listen Be receptive to alternative viewpoints Think about what they hear Give others time to think.

Table 1: Repertoire of Learning Talk (Alexander, 2008, p.104)

Khong, Sito and Gillies also note a 'growing consensus' that the quality of children's learning depends upon opportunities for classroom dialogue (Khong, Saito & Gillies, 2019, p.335). They explore the idea that the promotion of productive talk as a pedagogy should 'ideally target teachers' (ibid., p.335). Within their research, Rojas-Drummond et al also explore how teachers can use dialogue as a means of 'scaffolding' explorations, whilst creating space for 'peer group interaction' (Rojas-Drummond et

al., 2013, pp.12-13). It is important for teachers to consider how they can 'guide' learning and create balance in the 'dialogue between teacher and student' (Mercer, 2010, p.2). As my research progressed, I became increasingly interested in my role: how I could support the development of children's responses whilst minimising my control and influence.

Methodology

This action research project involved weekly sessions with a group of four children, who were 4- and 5-years-old, over a 7-week period. During this time, we explored three different picturebooks (Bibliography: Primary Texts). The length and directions of our explorations depended on the participants engagement levels. I hoped that working with a small group would enable a narrow yet deep investigation in which I could create 'time and space to reflect on, evaluate and to experiment with practice' (Bearne et al., 2019, p.2).

I was driven by a desire to find out more about young children's critical responses to picturebooks, and the strategies which could be used to develop these responses. I sought to use picturebook explorations to deepen my understanding of my participants 'as individual thinkers and knowers' (Roche, 2015, p.116), and to develop my own ability 'to provide further opportunities to develop appropriate ways of learning through enquiry' (Ibid, p.16). I hoped this experience would develop my ability to review the ideas shared, making judgements, in the moment, about the kind of intervention that would move thinking forward (Alexander, 2008, p.110).

Participants & Setting

This research project took place at a large two form entry primary school in North London. The school has a diverse intake with approximately half of children speaking English as an additional language. I tried to ensure that the four participants involved in this small-scale research project were representative of the wider class community (Bearne et al., 2019, p.18).

As class teacher to the participants, I was an 'insider' researcher (Greene, 2014, p1) which presented further considerations when

selecting a sample (Jarvis et al., 2012, p.71). As an example, my pre-existing ideas about the possible group dynamics that certain combinations of children would create will (however hard I tried to avoid this) have influenced my sample choice.

Research Methods

This action research project involved multimodal approaches to gathering data. Ideas were captured using audio and video recording, scribing, drawing, puppet making and retelling stories. As I worked with my very young participants, I found myself regularly reflecting on how my role as 'mediating adult' was impacting on meaning-making (Ross Johnson, 2011, p.135). This challenge dominated much of my journaling, as I sought to understand how I impacted the 'reader-text dynamic' (ibid., p.135) and to experiment with ways to shift, alter and minimise my presence.

Transcribing audio recordings in between sessions played an integral role in enabling me to reflect upon the dynamics at play. This process shaped the research project by highlighting the details of the exchanges occurring and allowing me to consider my next intervention. Regularly writing in my research journal proved to be '...an essential tool for tracking what was going on' (Bearne et al., 2019, p.7) as well as a space to reflect on how engaging with new approaches was taking me outside of my comfort zone (Wiltse, Johnston & Yang, 2014, p.270). Opportunities for sharing and discussing during weekly taught sessions with tutors and peers, also became a vital time for the input of others and for continuing reflection.

As a researcher, I reflected on the 'complex social relations' (Burke and Kirton, 2006, p.1) at work within my research group. Many different elements of my own identity will have impacted my interactions and relationships with the participants. Whilst my pre-existing relationship with the children as their teacher added various complexities, I found that the existing trust in our relationships played an important role in our explorations, particularly in light of the limited time frame for the project. Prior to the project commencing, I had actively worked to develop a class culture in which all ideas were 'honourably reportable'

(Chambers, 2011, p.133) and I feel this transferred to our small group sessions, paving the way for rich discussions to take place.

Data Analysis & Discussion

My initial readings of transcripts were open-ended (Sipe & Ghiso, p.476), and I enjoyed the process of 'making connections' (Journal Entry, 23rd May 2021). I spent a lot of time 'grappling with how classroom talk, critical thinking and children's literary responses overlap and intertwine' (Journal Entry, 23rd May 2021).

In order to analyse the types of critical responses arising within the data, I created a matrix (table 2) which is an amalgamation of elements of Alexander's Repertoire of Learning Talk (Alexander in Mercer and Hodgkinson, 2008, p.104) and Michael Rosen's Matrix (Rosen, 2017, p.21-6). The categories included are those that presented themselves within the data.

Types of Learning Talk: Interacting with each other (Alexander, 2008)	Types of Responses: Interacting with the text (Rosen, 2017)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain • receive, act and build upon answers • argue, reason and justify • negotiate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiential • Intratextual • Interrogative • Analogising • Speculative • Reflective • Storying • Descriptive • Imaginative • Evaluative

Table 2: Matrix of Critical Responses to Picturebooks

Alexander's categories offer a useful framework to consider how the children in the group are interacting with one another (Types of Learning Talk) while Rosen's matrix offers a more specific framework which enables a deeper exploration of the way in which the children are interacting with the text (Types of

Responses). These categories work together as the participants' interactions with one another impact their interactions with the text and vice versa.

To analyse my interventions as researcher, I used Lawrence Sipe's Five Conceptual Categories for Adult Talk (table 3) allowing for an exploration of the 'critical roles teachers play in enabling their students' development' (Sipe, 2008, p.233).

Five Conceptual Categories for Adult Talk
1. <i>Readers</i>
2. <i>Managers and Encouraging</i>
3. <i>Clarifiers or Probers</i>
4. <i>Fellow Wonderers or Spectators</i>
5. <i>Extenders or Refiners</i>

Table 3: *Five Conceptual Categories for Adult Talk* (Sipe, 2008, p.201-2)

Within the transcriptions, the researcher is referred to as RC and synonyms are used for participants.

Session 1 and 2: Rebecca Cobb's *Hello, Friend!*

During our first session, we explored *Hello, Friend!* I hoped the book's focus on friendship dynamics, within a classroom setting, would prompt the children 'to think and talk about social issues that have meaning to them' (Roche, 2012, p.16).

Aisha's unprompted response to an illustration guided the group towards an exploration of interactions between two characters in the story. What followed involved the sharing of different viewpoints, with Aisha and Izzy offering their different opinions. During class readalouds, Aisha seldom offered contributions however her willingness to initiate discussion and argue her point highlights how organising learning using different group types can support children in finding their voice (Alexander, 2008, p.97).

After listening to the transcript of our initial discussion, I created an opportunity to revisit the ideas raised for deeper exploration

(Transcript 1). This further planning and consideration of themes arising supported me in making effective interventions to develop thinking (Alexander, 2008, p.110). During this discussion, Aisha and Izzy engage in explaining; receiving, acting and building upon answers; arguing, reasoning and justifying and negotiating. We see them both engaging in reflective thought when they speculate as to how the characters might be feeling. Izzy also explores the effect of interaction when she begins to shift away from her original idea by considering that maybe the child in the story '...didn't want to share.'

Izzy goes on to interact on an experiential level with the text as she brings her own experiences of social misunderstandings to try to make further sense of the events occurring. She points out the disparities that can exist between someone's intention and how their actions are received. At this early stage in the study, the children were involved in empathising with characters' feelings through thoughtful discussion (Arizpe & Styles, 2015, p.129).

Transcript 1

RC: Some children thought that he was being teased...

Aisha: That was me.

RC: Yes Aisha. And Izzy you thought hold on maybe she is trying to share her food with him...

Aisha: but look it is right on his cheek

RC: Did you feel it was too close to his face? So, if she was trying to share what could she have done differently?

Izzy: Maybe he didn't want to share

B: Mmm maybe he doesn't

Aisha: He wants his own food. It is really close to his cheek

RC: So you think it's actually too close

Izzy: Sometimes people want to share but they are just not really doing it nicely

B: Yes so sometimes people want to share but they are not doing it nicely

Aisha: His face looks like he's sad

Session 3, 4 and 5: Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross' *Tadpole's Promise*

Listening to the audio recordings of the first two sessions left me reflecting on the power I had to steer ideas in the group, even if this was not my intention. I shared these reflections with my tutors and peers and decided to experiment with taking a step back. We had enjoyed watching our class caterpillars and tadpoles changing and I had shared *Tadpole's Promise* with my class. Following this, I gave my participants a copy of the book, along with some paper, pencils and a dictaphone, and occupied myself elsewhere.

Three of the four children in the group chose to respond to the story visually, chatting together as they drew. As Olly created a life cycle drawing, he engaged in unprompted storying (Transcript 3). As Olly draws, he is describing the changes that occur at different points in the story. In this sense his comments are intratextual, although he adds his own details of the time periods which have passed. He also begins to focalise his narrative, as he describes how the caterpillar might be feeling about being trapped in the chrysalis. We can compare Olly's storying (Transcript 3) with his response to my questioning (Transcript 4). The former, which occurs unprompted and without the researcher present, is fuller, more detailed and tells us much more about Olly as a thinker and learner. This offers a glimpse into the benefits that freedom from adult involvement can bring.

Transcript 3

...and then a couple of months later he turned into a big frog and then he ate the butterfly... the butterfly got eaten. The baby butterfly got eaten...eight months later the caterpillar said let me out of here...

Transcript 4

RC: Can you tell me about your drawing Olly?

Olly: This is a frog

RC: Izzy let's look at Olly's he says that's the first one of the frog

Olly: And this is the second and this is the last...and then he jumps

At the end of Session 3, Olly expresses an interest in making puppets which leads us to our next activity. During the next session, the children created puppets inspired by Tadpole's Promise. This exploration offered an important opportunity for the children to experience the new meaning making opportunities that can occur when transferring ideas from one form to another (Mills, 2016, pp.67-68). They have further opportunities for 'knowledge transformation' when they use their puppets to retell sections of the story and imagine interactions between the butterfly and the frog.

Allowing space and time for this creativity led to Olly engaging in more storying as he told the group about his puppet. He played around creatively with point of view when he told us that his puppet was not a frog but a pond. He went on to say 'there is an eye in it where it can spy on the frog. The frog is being spied on.' During this storying, his high levels of investment offer an example of how children who may be labelled as struggling within the confines of the curriculum, when given the opportunity, engage creatively and critically with stories. In this session, Olly has the opportunity to be the expert with his ideas about his puppet guiding the discussion. His sense of agency is notable, and as he shares his ideas '...it is as though he were a head taller than himself' (Vygotsky 1978 in Yandell, 2013, p.54). The discussion illustrates an 'interactive culture' that can be developed through child-led discussions, and the inclusivity this can lead to (Alexander, 2008, p.106).

During our final session exploring *Tadpole's Promise* (Transcript 6), the debate becomes lively after Yasir shares that he finds it 'funny' when the frog eats the butterfly. Both Olly and Izzy strongly protest, insisting that this event is in fact 'sad'. Izzy's contributions show the level of critical discussion that can be achieved if children have the space and time to explore texts creatively. The children's responses show the use of a wide range of interpretive strategies which link to their personal experiences enriching their meaning making (Arizpe & Styles, 2015, p.130). For me, this section also stands out because of the level of emotion and investment that the children display through the

'deep and insightful interpretations' they make of this 'visual text' (Styles & Arizpe, 2001, p.266).

Transcript 6

Yasir: It's funny

RC: You find it funny! Do you?!

Yasir: Yeah

Izzy: I don't find it funny

RC: No?

Olly: (Shakes head)

RC: No Olly you don't either

Olly: It's so sad – you can't eat your friends – it was a shiny caterpillar

RC: Right so Olly says it is really sad. He says ... you can't eat your friends. Izzy, do you agree? What did you want to say?

Izzy: I want to say I feel sorry for both of them. They both have sad ways.

RC: Ahhh. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Izzy: Um it is really hard to explain

RC: Do you think you could have a go? We would love to know a bit more. What are their sad ways?

Izzy: Well, I feel quite sorry for the um ... um frog because um he still loves his rainbow but, but, but his rainbow doesn't like him

...

RC: So, you feel quite sorry for the frog? And what about the rainbow? What about the butterfly?

Izzy: Well, I feel quite sorry for him because the tadpole broke his promise and I also feel sorry for him because he gets eaten.

My own interventions, most regularly took the form of manager and encourager and clarifier and prober (Sipe, 2018). My next step would be to focus on increased interventions as fellow wonderer and spectator and extender and refiner (Sipe, 2018) and to explore the impact this has on the children's responses. Also of note, in terms of discussion is that throughout the transcripts '...the pattern of turns in the groups mostly meant that the teacher[s] took alternate turns' (Maine & Hoffman, 2015, p.50). Exploring strategies for shifting this pattern would have been the next stage in my exploration had time allowed for it.

I also became aware of my use of collective terms. The use of 'us' instead of 'me' may seem to be only a subtle shift but it can have a significant impact on the group dynamic (Taylor, 2016, p.32) signifying that it is not the adult who is the audience for the children's ideas but rather the entire group. I would argue that using the language of collaboration is central to shifting towards dialogic engagement.

Session 6 and 7: Rob Hodgson's *The Cave*

The final text we explored was *The Cave*. The children were offered the opportunity to create a retelling of the story. Izzy used the illustrations which accompany the text to offer a 'competing point of view' (Janks, 2010, p.63), with her narrative centring the experiences of the worm and the snail that appear on each page (Transcript 7). For the most part, Izzy's story is 'unfocalised' (Fox, 1993, p.122) however she uses some causation which begins to give a sense of how her characters might be feeling.

Transcript 7

An extract from Izzy's story

And then the worm managed to get away from the slug and hid in a tree and it got trapped on a box and then it managed to get away and got dug up from its hole and then and then it went it went away because birds tried to peck it and the worm was going back in its hole because there was a thunderstorm and some rain and the snail was in its shell to take cover and the wolf got struck by lightning and so did the worm and its hat nearly blew off in the breeze and then it it got carried away by a bird and then it was looking at a doughnut and then when the bird finally dropped it it saw that somebody had madly put sprinkles on the doughnut so it ate the doughnut, and it went onto the bears tummy that managed to eat the other half of the doughnut so there were loads of sprinkles all over his tummy and slid on his tummy and ate all the sprinkles and when it started to walk back home it got zapped by lightning.

For me, this final item, along with Olly's storying, highlight how young children think critically about texts through playful storying. This offers a fascinating next area of exploration in

terms of the critical thinking of young children which could be further explored by experimenting with approaches such as Dorothy Heathcote's *Mantle of the Expert* (Taylor 2016) and *Helicopter Stories* (Paley, 1990; Lee, 2016). Explorations of these approaches would offer opportunities for adults to further develop roles such as wonderer and spectator and extender and refiner (Sipe, 2018).

Conclusion

In exploring young children's responses to picturebooks, this action research project highlights the sense of agency and engagement that can be fostered when the reader's response is centred. Opportunities for dialogue, and encouragement to share multiple viewpoints, resulted in the participants building on and disagreeing with one another's ideas and offering explanations for their responses.

Through opportunities for multimodal engagement with the texts, the children involved showed high levels of investment, uncovering complex themes, and offering creative ideas. The analysis shows how texts can offer a 'process of discovery for readers' (Meek, 1988, p.19-20), and how educators can evaluate their role and start to uncover different ways to use the power they have (Roche, 2015, p.24) to support this discovery.

Through these explorations, we also see how creative and playful the explorations of young children are as they move in and out of fictional worlds. By making space for creative responses to texts and developing a culture of dialogic teaching, we can seek to have much higher ambitions for learners than current curriculum policy prescribes. In doing so, we can offer opportunities that support young children in the develop of their critical thinking.

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CONCLUSION

VICKY MACLERoy

Reflecting back on the vision of this book and its contribution to new ideas and ways of knowing in the field of children's literature, it is apt to consider the spaces we create for new meanings and possibilities. What do we understand by 'in action'? All of these chapters grapple with the messiness and complexities of 'children's literature in action' and how children surprise us with the unexpected, the taboo, humour and a deep sense of empathy. The research studies presented across all these chapters allow us to see, read and interpret children's literature differently. Pahl (2022) in thinking about 'imagining otherwise' talks about freeing language and therefore literacy from its fixedness, taking risks, and recognising that 'children as active researchers and investigators of their world are a key part of this enlarged way of seeing research and practice as intertwined (ibid., p.319).

The chapters in this book are full of children's thoughts, voices and responses to children's literature. This is a testament to the way these MA students have opened up their practice and research to reflect deeply on the issues, tensions, contradictions of working with children's literature and researching with children. It is not easy to research with children and move beyond the response they believe is expected from reading and engaging with children's literature. These MA researchers have been creative and rigorous in setting up their projects and documenting the research process at each stage. Sharing and critiquing their research with peers has enabled their research to remain dynamic and cutting-edge and for these students to slowly gain the courage to step back and allow the children space to put forward their thoughts and build on their ideas. Andrews and Almohammad (2022) talk about how we can create welcoming learning environments through creative arts approaches. This is evident in the chapters in this book where the researchers have opened up the reading experience to multimodal forms of expression and interpretation.

In my own research, I argue that 'children are often forced to chase after an illusory fixed literacy that seems distant from their own rich and noisy experience of language in its multivoicedness' (Macleroy, 2021, p.205). The research projects presented in this book enable us to tune into what children think about children's literature. The researchers have worked hard to create inclusive and collaborative reading spaces where readers can take risks and come up with their own ideas. The varied contexts and sites of learning where reading happens in these research projects demonstrate how children can and do read differently. The exuberance and excitement of these children as they read and share stories is palpable and resonates long after reading the transcripts of children's talk within these studies.

It is powerful for children to 'actively imagine other lives through literature, films, role-plays, photos and art' (Mercer, 2016, p.104) and there is a lack of research into children's 'collaborative construction of new meanings through imagined experience' (Cremin & Maybin, 2013, p.281). The research projects in this book contribute to understanding how children develop ideational fluency and create meanings in and around stories and poetry collaboratively, creatively and critically. Children are given the tools to dig deeply into ideas held in stories, images and poetry and ask new questions about these texts. This type of research is full of contradictions and tensions because it captures the notion that children's literature is a reflection of our lived and imagined experiences and engages with a concept of culture that is steeped in tradition and experience, complexity and weight, and 'humming with life' (Phipps & Gonzales, 2004, p.51).

The research methodologies advocated and fostered through the 'Children's Literature in Action' module are a vital part of decolonising researcher methodologies to listen to children from very diverse backgrounds, cultures and languages. In drawing on an action research approach, many of the new researchers in this book demonstrate how research interacts with practice and both are changed through this process. The chapters are written by teachers, deputy headteachers, creative writers, illustrators, poets, editors, lecturers, and people working for book clubs and the National Literacy Trust. These research projects are

important as they help to bring about real change in thinking about how children respond to and read children's literature and the books they enjoy reading and why. These projects bring reading in from the margins in thinking about how a comics club can push for new library spaces in a school or how spoken word poetry transforms the way young people talk about their cultures and use language. Picturebooks used with older children demonstrate the sophistication of how they read multimodally and engage with hard and difficult emotions. Researchers interrogate what happens when you move reading relationships online and have to navigate these new digital spaces.

The 'Children's Literature in Action' book demonstrates 'in action' what happens when you have an MA Children's Literature programme that values the different aspects of children's literature that make it such a varied and vibrant form of study. The programme has 3 pathways (Theoretical; Creative Writing; Children's Book Illustration) and this book shows the creative collaboration and work that emerges from these different ways of thinking about children's literature. Playfulness, humour and curiosity bound out from the illustrations and lead us into the different sections of the book. The illustrations connect our reading with the physicality of learning to be literate. This shows how movement is deeply connected to the act of developing literacy with the freedom to roam, to explore, to get lost and to learn to map real and imagined worlds. This draws on the work of Mackey (2010) who developed the notion of 'foot knowledge' or 'reading from the feet up' as many children learn to read 'just at the same time they are beginning to move through their own world more significantly' (p.325).

Research findings from the chapters in this book lead us into new paths of discovery and avenues for children's literature. The research captures the ideas of children from as young as 3 years old to adolescents of 15-16 years old and across different sites of learning (school classrooms, after-school clubs, libraries, drama studio, pupil referral unit, home and online). These children's literature projects are about children and young people developing autonomy as readers, and researchers having a responsibility for making things happen. Researchers in this book

uncover the importance of providing children with opportunities to jointly construct meaning, consider multiple interpretations, and deepen their understanding of a range of different perspectives. They show how children change during the course of the project and start to see themselves as 'readers' in every sense of the word. Children experience different forms of reading across the projects and researchers engage with how this develops their agency in reading and writing. The research also reveals how children need strategies for choosing books to read so they can access reading for pleasure and a wider variety of books. The researchers talk about what happens when children can journey into a text and what happens when researchers challenge children's perceptions of what is possible within children's literature. Findings also open up important questions about stories and how real and imagined narratives become blurred and lives rewritten. Finally, researchers think about the lasting effect of these small-scale research projects. Hopefully, the research in this book is starting to connect these different spaces where children read.

In conclusion, this book is framed by the concept of 'children's literature in action' and thus it advocates opening up spaces for children to play with, respond, enjoy, navigate, critique and create children's literature. This book contributes to a view of reading and children's literature that is transforming how adults and children interact with texts including, *Building Communities of Engaged Readers: Reading for pleasure* (Cremin et al., 2014) and *Reflecting Realities* (CLPE, 2021). We hope you build on the research shared here and create new communities of readers across languages, cultures and contexts.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Beth Ashton

Beth Ashton is currently Assistant Head Pastoral at a middle school in East Sussex and teaches English across key stages 2 and 3. Prior to this role, she was a primary teacher in central London at a large MAT. Beth was inspired to apply to the MA in Children's Literature to explore ways to bring literature to life in the primary classroom. Beth is also interested in the leveling power of art in the classroom, in terms of inclusivity and providing a platform from which all children are able to access the curriculum. Studying at Goldsmiths has been an invaluable opportunity to reflect on teaching and studying the arts and the role they have to play in establishing cross-curricular links, developing children's social and emotional skills, and removing barriers to learning.

Victoria Baker

Victoria Baker currently works at the National Literacy Trust as Schools Resources Manager, providing literacy support to schools across the UK. Prior to this she was a teacher and literacy lead in primary schools in London, where she fostered her passion for promoting reading for pleasure and all things picturebooks. As a member of the UKLA Critical Literacy Special Interest Group, her particular interest and specialism is in critical literacy approaches, which she developed whilst studying an MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths.

Ellen Beer

Ellen is a Deputy Headteacher from London. Her work with children and passion for reading led her to undertake an MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths where she enjoyed studying topics pertinent to the children in her classes. She is a passionate advocate for more diverse representation in Children's Literature and always on the lookout for new book recommendations.

Deborah Buttery

Deborah Buttery is a literature-loving French teacher who has worked the last 16 years in the state and private sector teaching children from EYFS to KS5. She completed her first degree at Balliol College, Oxford University in French and linguistics; her MA in Children's Literature was taken at Goldsmiths University London and she is about to start a part-time PhD in Education at Reading University on a SeNSS scholarship. She lives in south-east London with her family.

Richard Charlesworth

Richard is an Assistant Headteacher, experienced Key Stage 2 teacher and English lead at a primary school in central London. He is an advisor for the Open University/United Kingdom Literacy Association Research Rich Pedagogies website and has spoken at various conferences exploring Creative Writing, picturefiction, using graphic novels in the classroom, and Reading for Pleasure. Having studied the effect that graphic novels may have on their readers in his own research, he is interested in developing children's empathy through a wider range of texts.

Kathryn Conway

Kathryn attained an MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmith's University in 2019. During this time, she developed an interest in the educational benefits of graphic novels and picturebooks. She conducted an action research project in an inner-city London primary school, working with underachieving boys. In addition, she explored the therapeutic benefits of graphic novels and picturebooks with teenage girls experiencing social and emotional health challenges. She is a teacher of English and a qualified SENDCo who has taught in secondary schools in London and abroad for over 17 years. Passionate about inclusive education and multimodal literacy, she continues to use graphic novels and picture books in her work.

Georgia Cowley

Georgia Cowley completed her MA in Children's Book Illustration at Goldsmiths University. Having previously studied Child Development, aspiring illustrator/author Georgia Cowley

takes inspiration from her work with children and young people struggling with learning and mental health difficulties. She is passionate about the use of children's literature as a tool to help children navigate their emotional experiences. (Also see Illustrators)

Katy Donnelly

Katy is a director of the charity Book Clubs in Schools which delivers peer led book clubs in secondary schools. She was the Chair of Governors of an all-age special school for over 10 years and has also held governance roles in further and higher education and as an elected member with responsibility for children's services in local government. Her background is in public sector consultancy working with local government and health, particularly around issues of social exclusion and partnership working with local organisations. Katy completed the MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths in 2016.

Christian Foley

Christian Foley is one of only a few poets in the world selected to complete a 'Spoken Word Education Programme' alongside the Writer / Teacher MA at Goldsmiths University, an incentive which was created to transform professional poets into specialised facilitators. Christian works in a number of schools and referral units in East London, as a Poet in Residence, and is the editor of thirteen poetry anthologies written with children between the ages of four and eighteen. Christian is currently studying a PhD in the Dept. of Educational Studies at Goldsmiths University, funded by the T.S Eliot Foundation.

Deborah Friedland

Deborah is a writer and editor in educational publishing. She has taught ESL and EFL in London's diverse adult education classes and around the world. She works as a lexicographer, materials writer and editor, creating innovative English learning resources in international settings. She was the editor of 'One Dragon' New Standard English (Macmillan China), a multi-level English schools course which has sold 500 million units across China. Core values are compassion, cultural awareness and collaboration. In

Deborah's other life, she is a creative writer, parent and grandparent and completed the MA in Creative Writing and Education at Goldsmiths University in 2021.

Ameena Gamiet

Ameena Gamiet is a PhD student at Goldsmiths University, researching pedagogies to aid teachers in using texts featuring Muslim protagonists for the benefit of all pupils in a diverse classroom. Her passion for incorporating texts with characters from marginalised backgrounds into the English curriculum stemmed from her MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths, where she focused on children's reactions to reading texts with Muslim protagonists for her dissertation. Ameena is also the Head of English at a middle school in Windsor, Berkshire. Prior to this, she has several years' experience as an English subject lead at a primary school near Slough. She has two daughters who are avid readers, and who are also passionate advocates for greater representation of marginalised groups in children's literature.

Natasha Gray

Natasha is a primary school teacher and completed an MA in Education, Language, Culture and Identity at Goldsmiths University. She embarked on this course to further develop her pedagogical subject knowledge. Natasha wanted to establish a greater understanding of some of the barriers children face in education. She is passionate about enhancing children's experience in reading and writing. Having previously studied Fine Art (BA), she is always looking to bring creativity into the classroom through picturebooks and multi-media resources to enrich children's learning environments.

Joanna Hasler

Joanna Hasler is an experienced primary school teacher who has taught in the UK, Portugal and in France. She holds an MA in Children's Literature from Goldsmiths and she has a passion for sharing books with children and encouraging them to tell stories. Joanna is fascinated by picturebooks and the ways in which the text and images work together and has a large and ever-growing collection of picturebooks that she collects on her travels.

Sara Hirsch

Sara Hirsch is a London grown poet and spoken word educator currently based in New Zealand. Sara graduated with a master's in Creative Writing and Education from Goldsmiths in 2017 and has worked with young people across the world to encourage confidence, creativity and communication through poetry workshops and performances. Her work has been published internationally including *Magma*, *The Shanghai Literary Review* and *Poetry New Zealand* and her research is included in *English in Education*, the *Routledge Spoken Word Handbook* and the *EAL academic journal*. Sara is currently Education Director for *Motif Poetry* and new mum to James.

Julia Hope

Julia Hope is Head of the Issues and Debates pathway of MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths (previously Head of Programme). Her early career was spent teaching for 16 years in primary schools in South East London. She studied for her MA and PhD at Goldsmiths and joined the staff in 2003, originally on the Primary PGCE programme, particularly focussing on English and PSHCE. She has taught across the MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths since its inception in 2014, and her PhD was turned into a book "Children's Literature about Refugees: A catalyst in the classroom" in 2017.

Helen Jones

Helen Jones is a PhD student at Goldsmiths University, researching children's comics making. She became interested in Comics Studies and the use of comics in education while studying an MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths. Helen is also a lecturer in Primary Education at the Institute of Education, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society. Prior to this she was a teacher in primary schools in London for twelve years. Helen currently runs an after-school comic club for children in a local primary school. She has three children who are all enthusiastic readers and makers of comics and graphic novels.

Karen Longman

Karen Longman is a secondary school teacher from Hackney, East London. She completed her MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths University in 2021. Karen has taught in a school in Walthamstow for the last fifteen years, and her role as Literacy Coordinator enabled her to analyse her students' book choices and investigate how her students made their selections. The surprising results prompted her essay: 'What is the impact of introducing South Asian girls to literature which they can culturally identify with?'

Vicky Macleroy

Vicky Macleroy is a Professor of Language and Literacy, Head of the MA Children's Literature, and Head of the Centre for Language, Culture and Learning at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work focuses on literacy and digital storytelling; poetry and multilingualism; activist citizenship and transformative pedagogy; linguistic diversity, multimodality and children's/Young Adult literature. Underpinning her research is a commitment to research methodologies that embrace collaborative and creative ways of researching. Vicky is co-director of an international literacy project 'Critical Connections Multilingual Digital Storytelling' (2012-ongoing) that uses digital storytelling to support engagement with language and literacy.

Emily McGrath

Emily McGrath has been teaching for ten years, specialising in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and is currently Deputy Headteacher at a Primary School in South East London. Emily is passionate about holistic teaching, and the value of children reading for pleasure. She became interested in researching the link between picturebooks and emotional literacy while studying an MA in Education at Goldsmiths. In response to her research, Emily implemented an Emotional Literacy programme based on picturebooks throughout her school. Emily now has two young children who she loves reading with.

Megan Quinn

Megan has been a teacher in London primary schools for over a decade. She has worked across different age ranges, most recently teaching in the Early Years Foundation Stage. She has a keen interest in exploring pedagogies that engage and excite young learners, enabling them to develop as critical thinkers and creative explorers. Her love of exploring stories and poetry with her classes, and her desire to deepen her own understanding of these texts and the way children engage with them, led her to the MA in Children's Literature at Goldsmiths.

Michael Rosen

Michael Rosen is one of Britain's best loved writers and performance poets for children and adults. His first degree in English Literature and Language was from Wadham College, Oxford and he went on to study for an MA at the University of Reading and a PhD at the former University of North London, now London Metropolitan. He is currently Professor of Children's Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London where he co-devised and teaches critical approaches to reading on an MA in Children's Literature, having done the same at Birkbeck, University of London. He has taught on MA programmes in universities since 1994. He was the Children's Laureate from 2007-2009 and has published over 200 books for children and adults, including the recent bestseller 'Many Different Kinds of Love' and 'On The Move'.

Lucy Timmons

Lucy Timmons is an Executive Coach and Education Consultant specialising in high-quality drama learning. She has 20 years' experience as an educator and school leader up to and including Executive Head teacher level. Lucy completed her MA in Education at Goldsmiths College. Based in South East London, her keen passion is combining her training and work as a professional actor with her skills as an educator to use rehearsal room pedagogy as both a medium to create a constructivist approach to learning for children and professionals.

ILLUSTRATORS AND CREATIVE COORDINATOR

Picturebook Research, illustration by Jiayang Chen

Jiayang is a Chinese illustrator. She has completed postgraduate studies in Chinese art history in China, and now studies children's illustration in London. She loves to observe life. She loves making crafts and experimenting with different materials to create work. She hopes to use drawing to heal herself and heal people.

Culture, Humour and Creative Reading Research, illustration by Gemma Thomson

I'm an illustrator from London studying on the MA Children's Book Illustration programme at Goldsmiths. I enjoy working traditionally with mixed media and am drawn to children's illustration because of its ability to explore topics, from the happy and fun to the difficult and complex in a meaningful way.

Poetry Research, illustration by Jiaxi Han

I am a children's book illustrator currently studying at Goldsmiths University. I love doing illustrations, especially for children's books. I love to travel, dogs and cats and the freedom of being outside and sketching. I hope to keep challenging myself to draw picture books that warm the hearts of others.

Front Cover and Reading and Relationships Research, illustrations by Georgia Cowley

Having previously studied Child Development, aspiring illustrator/author Georgia Cowley takes inspiration from her work with children and young people struggling with learning and mental health difficulties. She is passionate about the use of children's literature as a tool to help children navigate their emotional experiences. Georgia's work is rich in detail and full of whimsical humour. (Also see Authors)

Creative co-ordinator for illustrations – Makbule Haykiran

Having studied Languages & Linguistics in Galatasaray University, Istanbul and previously worked as a digital producer in culture & art channel of Turkey (TRT 2), Makbule now pursues master studies in Children's Literature Creative Writing pathway at Goldsmiths and aims to always have a close relationship with her pen in order to write screenplays that would hopefully bring kids and adults together by turning into animations.