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**PHD**

**The role of reading in the lives of key stage 3 students**

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*Award date:*  
2003

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**The Role of Reading in the Lives of  
Key Stage 3 Students**

Submitted by

Jane Harrison

For the degree of Ph.D.

Of the University of Bath

2003

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### **Declaration**

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or Diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed: *Jane Harrison*

Date: *30<sup>th</sup> April 2003*

Dedicated with gratitude to

A.W.G. Stables and B.A.Harrison

## **Abstract**

The focus of the research is the role of reading, in the lives of children in England between the ages of 11 and 13.

The work recognises previous research concerned with children learning to read and the reading choices that children make. It also utilises previous research concerning the evolution of reading within all levels of society and the role of reading within education. The way in which the role of reading has changed and continues to do so, according to political and social context is an interest of this work. A second interest is the extent to which the role of reading, in the lives of children varies in relation to economic and cultural capital, and the activities produced by these forces.

The methodology is largely qualitative, although a quantitative approach has been used when appropriate. The findings are based upon a term's case studies conducted in three schools, which included both LEA schools and a fee-paying school. The findings were developed through a theoretical framework provided in the work of Bourdieu.

Recommendations for teachers and parents, concerned with increasing and understanding a positive role of reading in the lives of children aged 11 – 13, are made.

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## Introduction

Reading has become the focus of increasing interest amongst academics, politicians, educationalists. The physiological and cognitive processes of reading, learning to read, the meaning of reading, what children read and how much time they spend reading, have all been a focus of research and discussion which is by no means exhausted. Selected examples of some of this work are referred to throughout this thesis, especially in the opening chapters. My research builds upon previous research, with new empirical and original research, in a quest to identify the role of reading for it is my belief that an attempt to clarify and conceptualise the role of reading has been neglected. Understanding the role of reading in the lives of young students, its function and purpose within a child's life, rather than discussing the act of reading as an ephemeral concept existing in isolation from the child's historical and social context, is important. This research is important therefore as it shows that the role of reading can not be understood in contextual isolation. Understanding the role of reading is essential to understanding the practice of reading, as well as the effect of reading.

It is commonly believed that children spend less time reading now than they used to. By 1977, children aged 12-13 were already spending fifty percent less time reading than their equivalents in 1940 (Whitehead 1977,p.51). Whitehead was concerned that a 'relatively high proportion of young people in our schools [...] appeared, in 1971, not to read books at all, except those they were required to read in lesson time or for home work' (Whitehead in Protherough, 1983, p.105). Distractions such as the television, video, computers and sport are all sometimes held accountable for the decrease in the amount of time spent reading, suggested by previous research. Such an assumption



suggests that the mass media fulfils the same role in the lives of children as was previously fulfilled by reading. This research indicates that the role of reading is wider than such an assumption implies and that it cannot be understood in isolation from social and historical context. More recent research indicates that technology need not have a detrimental effect upon the amount of time spent reading (Hall & Coles, 1999, pp. 123-128). This is supported in my work too, in chapter 6, which indicates that reading plays an essential role for those who participate in sporting or computer related activities.

Questions which inspired the initial research, concerned how many hours an average 12 year old spent reading, and to discover the reading tastes of that age group. Like researchers before me (and some contemporaries) I was interested in learning what and how much children read, thinking that if I knew that, I would be more effective as an English teacher attempting to encourage the practice of reading. This followed a year of teaching during which I regularly took classes to the school library and attempted to ensure that they spent at least an hour a week reading. I was doubtful of the positive effects of such action and well aware that many children would choose a book at random and pretend to read, thinking that was what was expected of them. I was also fascinated to see the different behaviour that occurred in the library. There appeared to be a difference between the choices of the girls and the boys. Some children seemed comfortable in the library and able to select books that they then enjoyed, while others were clearly uncomfortable surrounded by books and loath to read them. This initial aim, to better understand reading choices, developed and evolved until the aim became to identify the role of reading more broadly within the lives of Key Stage 3 learners. This was conducted with the belief that if the role of reading could be identified and

understood, the task of helping young people to become confident, active readers would be made easier, and understanding the readers themselves would be easier.

This research field grew as I realised that the role of reading could not be understood in isolation from the history of reading, nor from social history. Reference had to be made to the fields of History, Politics, Philosophy and Education, in my exploration of the role of reading. It could not be examined without recognising the importance and influence of current cultural, political and historical context. The role of reading is important, as many politicians have realised during the last century. The effect of cultural and political context cannot be underestimated. Indeed, by the end of this research I began to reach the conclusion that the role of reading, within the lives of children, is largely a result of political and social context. The effect of cultural and economic capital upon every aspect of a child's life is explained most clearly by Bourdieu. Some aspects of Bourdieu's theories are used to explain phenomena discovered during the research. It is through Bourdieu's work that the significance of social context, both historical and political, upon the role of reading for individuals, is most apparent. This thesis shows, among other things, that there is no role of reading which is applicable to all: but many roles of reading. The role of reading varies with history and context.

Several years after beginning my research into the role of reading, I continue to be impressed with the number of influential works concerned with aspects of reading which continue to be published. Little exists, however, which focuses upon the role of reading in the lives of children, although many other aspects of children's reading are well saturated. The way in which children learn to read, and what they read continue to

dominate this area of research. The focus of this work upon the role of reading, in context, rather than the process of reading, makes it an original contribution to the field.

A wider understanding of the significance of the role of reading, and recognition of the factors which determine a definition of the role of reading, has the potential to benefit many aspects of society, within and beyond education.

The work is presented in seven chapters:

The first chapter introduces the act of reading, with the history of its evolution. This is followed with a discussion of the growth in literacy and the changing role of reading within this. The effects of industrial and political change are also discussed within this chapter. Previous perceived roles of reading are also discussed within this chapter, with the aim of illustrating how the role of reading has changed according to context.

As notions of readership and literacy have developed, so have theories of how to read. These are discussed in Chapter Two, where different ways in which readers read are seen to be related to the perceived role of reading, which varies according to the context and experiences of the reader.

In Chapter Three, previous research concerned with reading is discussed. It is in this chapter that questions arising from the first three chapters are defined.

Chapter Four outlines the conceptual framework and chosen methodology to research the questions raised in the previous chapters.

The data collected as a result of this methodology are presented and analysed in Chapter Five.

The findings of Chapter Five are discussed in Chapter Six, with specific reference to the questions defined at the end of Chapter Three.

The concluding chapter is Chapter Seven. This chapter presents an overview of the work presented here, and discusses implications of the findings of Chapters Five and Six. The chapter is completed with recommendations for further research which might build upon the work here presented.

## Chapter 1

### The development of literacy and understanding reading

#### Introduction

This chapter begins with outlining problems to do with the definition of reading. It then moves on to discuss the development of literacy in pre modern and modern times. This is executed largely through examination of the history of the book and its readership. The relationship between literacy and education is then explored, and this leads to a brief discussion of the difference between reading to achieve literacy and reading to become literary. The relationship between the role of reading and language is discussed in some depth, here; some of Bourdieu's work is introduced as a useful means of explaining important implications of language development. The chapter then progresses to an examination of the way in which reading has been used to convey cultural and moral values. The political context in which the research was conducted is also summarised in the second half of this opening chapter. The chapter is, as much as is possible, presented in a chronological manner, although there are some historical cross references made and there is some overlap of dates between sections. The aim of the chapter is to illustrate the way in which the role of reading has changed within society through history. Perceptions of the role of reading and the ways in which it is taught have changed. For example, the purpose of teaching children to read is currently less to instil in them a sense of morality, as it sometimes was, than to ensure that they will be able to play a useful role in a technology dominated work force. It seems to me

that the role of reading, in the lives of children, cannot be fully understood without some comprehension of the cultural values of reading, the heritage of reading and the politics of reading. The role of reading within education and its subsequent influence is also an essential area of study. It is for that reason that the literature review is broadened significantly to include a brief overview of the history of literature and reading, especially within English society, the history of literacy education within England and recent global effects of political thinking and technological advances, affecting the role of reading in the lives of children.

The historical and political context of the reader is revealed as significant to understanding the changing roles of reading, the way in which reading is encouraged and the extent to which reading is promoted as a necessary norm within society.

### 1.1 Reading (functional and cultural)

This section summarises the evolution of reading, as well as highlighting the complexities of understanding what it is to read. A dictionary definition is insufficient to convey the contemporary meaning of 'reading'. It is hoped that an understanding of what is here meant by 'reading' will become clear within this chapter. This section will be followed by sections discussing the way in which the role of reading has continued to change and develop through history, under the influence of political and social change.

Approximately 50,000 years ago, paintings were created on the sides of caves, which are assumed to have been drawn with the intention of communicating. The paintings, now admired for their aesthetic qualities, may have been created with more functional

intentions, performing more active roles than mere decoration. The early cave paintings may be the first written symbols in the development of writing, as traced by Gelb (1963), Georges (1992) and Rohr (1994) among others, which progresses through the Egyptian hieroglyphs to the Chinese and Arabic alphabets. At some stage during the evolution of writing, signs became representations of sounds as well as meaning: the act that is now identified as reading was born. If we accept Merritt's definition of reading, that it '*implies a concentrated attempt to translate inanimate shapes on a printed page into significant meaning*' (1971, p.254), then the actual act of reading has not changed since ancient Egyptians first put their marks on papyrus. The role of reading has changed however, as later sections of this chapter will show clearly.

The belief in the usefulness of reading and teaching all children to read, is historically a relatively young concept. The Chinese philosopher Mo Tzu (circa 470 – 391 BC) considered the pursuit of what we now refer to as the arts a waste of time and energy, which achieved no benefit to either state or individuals. He did however believe that individuals within the ruling classes could and should learn from books, but that the masses were unable to assimilate or use what knowledge could be found on printed pages (Pay 2001). Nor did Plato (Republic Book X) consider fiction important or deserving of much attention. There is still a proportion of people for whom the idea of studying literature and spending many hours regularly reading, is regarded as a waste of time, for whom the study of literature is not real work. While the need for literacy is acknowledged within Western civilisation, the need to be literary is not.

The progressive development of reading that corresponded to the increasing sophistication of the writing process, led to greater ability to communicate, which has contributed to increasing intellectual accomplishment. Research suggests that the written signs indicated increasingly specific meanings (Gelb p.963, Georges 1992). It may be speculated that the role of reading at its most basic level, was to gain understanding from written signs, symbols and, later, words. In its simplest form, reading was to gain information and make meaning of text (Raynor & Pollatsck 1989). In the early history of reading, it is likely that there was no differentiation between what we now see as functional and spiritual purposes. The role of reading became a means to success. Within Western culture at least, the ability to read is a basic prerequisite to success. This is true not only of traditional reading (interpreting words from a page) but also of scanning (seeing information and absorbing it quickly), including working with computer screens. The complex process of gathering information, making sense of letters and images and responding to text, is all implied in the word reading. The problem with such definitions is that they fail to acknowledge that the *meaning* of text can vary, depending on who is reading it, when and where it is being read. The written word is not free of ambiguity, which is why children's books can often be enjoyed by both adults and children, each extracting a different meaning from the text. Meaning is affected by the experience of the reader.

Those concerned with education, and especially with teaching children to read, continue to attempt to define reading. Reading may be defined for example as:



*A collaborative act but what form does this collaboration take? The commonest ideas among authors and readers is that they share in the creation of an imagined world* (Benton and Fox 1985, p.2)

Such definitions are clearly only intended to refer to works of fiction. Even so, if accepted, the implication is that one role of reading is the unification of the imaginations of the thoughts of writer and reader. This, too, does not acknowledge the inevitable differences that exist between some readers and some writers. Readers are not blank screens upon which the imagined world of a writer can be projected and the role of reading is not exclusively to access an imagined world of another.

Fish offers a different definition, describing reading as '*an event, no part of which is to be discarded*' (Fish 1980, p.48). His view is in agreement with constructivist beliefs that the act of reading is one which necessitates active participation rather than passive engagement. Their view is summarised here by Hartman who writes that '*in life reading is an open ongoing series of connections and updates*' (Hartman 1991, p.49). Cullner too, supports this, recognising that it is impossible to read in isolation of life experiences or of previous reading experiences. Cullner points out that the act of reading is always affected by what one has read previously and by the culture in which one reads (Cullner 1981, p.12). To read successfully the reader needs to be informed, familiar with language, both written and spoken, and aware of cultural and sociological references and implications within language (language is discussed further in 1.7). During the last two centuries the role of reading was seen repeatedly as a means of imparting culture, or morality. The nineteenth and early twentieth century view contrasted with that expressed by Street, towards the end of the twentieth century, when writing:

*We cannot assume that as people acquire literacy so they will acquire the conventions for using repertoire expected in the imparting culture (Maybin 1994, p.145)*

The point that Maybin makes here is that we should not assume that shared literacy implies shared cultural values, as was assumed in previous centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reading was also used as a means of conveying social superiority. Perceptions of the role of reading as catalyst of culture and morality are discussed in the eighth and ninth sections of this chapter.

Reading is not a simple process. The reader must recognise the written word, and construct a meaning within a specific context. Arguably, to read, the reader has to recognise implications and meanings of the author conveyed through text. To be able to read is to be literate. More than that should not be assumed. To be literate is not the same as to be literary (discussed in 1.3). Throughout this work, *literate* is used to describe an ability to read; *literary* is used to suggest a knowledge and understanding of literature as an art form.

As this brief discussion of the term 'reading' demonstrates, understanding of the word is not universal. Perceptions concerning reading are historically inconsistent. Even within the same culture, different forms of reading, responding to different needs, will take place in accordance with different social practices. Text can be read in a number of ways, each of which might seem appropriate to the context in which it is read (ways of interpreting text are discussed in chapter 2). This overview of different understandings of reading clarifies two key themes. The first is that the word *reading* has more than one

meaning. One reads traffic signals, yet one also reads a novel. The second theme raised here is that reading is context dependent.

As stated above, one definite effect of reading is increased literacy. The growth and development of literacy is interesting, and useful in considering the developing role of reading. A chronological approach is taken to discuss literacy. Pre modern literacy is discussed with reference to the role and place of the book. More modern literacy (from the 1800s onwards) is discussed as much as is useful, in its political and social context, and then with specific reference to the role of literacy within the education system. No discussion of literacy within the twenty first century would be complete without reference to computer literacy, which concludes this section of the chapter.

## 1.2 The role of the book in the development of literacy

There are two reasons why it is worth considering the history of the book as part of the discussion of the role of reading. The first reason is that the history of the book is in some ways as revealing about pre modern readers as it is about itself. From examining the development of the book, it is possible to gain insight into pre modern literacy. As Colclough states; '*books themselves provide important evidence of protocols of reading that existed at the moment of their creation*' (2000, p.iii). The second reason why it is relevant to the role of reading in the twenty first century, is that through understanding the history of the book, understanding of the place of reading within history, and within families with varying degrees of economic and cultural capital, can be attained.

While it is true that no one book can represent the taste or reading habits of an entire generation, or fully illustrate the role of reading within that society (historical or contemporary), the book remains a valid consideration in any discussion of the role of reading. It is with that premise that the following section is included here.

It is in the eleventh century that book making began in earnest in Europe. The rebuilding of the churches in the eleventh century that followed the Norman conquest of England in 1066 gave monks a place where they might write and illustrate beautiful, aesthetically pleasing books. They were usually service books or The Bible and were written in Norman French or Latin. By the twelfth century, there were monasteries throughout the breadth of Britain, containing wonderful books and manuscripts. It was during this period that books came to be used as status symbols among the aristocracy. Wealthy people liked to own and exhibit beautiful, illuminated books (Allen, 1952). It is in this period that the connection between books and economic capital began. For the following centuries, religious and spiritual books continued to dominate the shelves of a minority who could afford to own them. In the thirteenth century the Book of Psalms was most popular, overtaken by the Book of Hours in the fifteenth. These books of moral and spiritual guidance could only be owned by those with the economic capital to buy such hand printed, and expensively illustrated, works. It is reasonable to surmise that this early period saw the birth of two roles of reading which can be identified in more recent centuries: the role of reading is to distinguish between those with economic and cultural capital and those who do not have it, and the role of reading became to enrich oneself, in this case, spiritually. Both of these concepts will be discussed again both within this chapter, and in reference to the empirical study in chapter six. Books, in the middle ages, were a symbol of wealth. To some extent, they continue to be so. Even

if the lower classes could have owned these books, they would have been unlikely to be able to read them. Not until the fourteenth century was the language of the common people, English, used within books, law courts and schools. During this century writers began to write books in English reflecting the people and social life of the age. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is one of the best known examples of such work. During this century too, Wyclif translated the bible into English from Latin. Through church and religion, gradually more people were being introduced to the written word, but still only the wealthy would be able to have books in their homes.

In Italy, the Renaissance revived interest in ancient Greek and Roman literature. It was almost two centuries later when England felt the influence of the Italian Renaissance and looked back with interest at ancient written works. The new interest in old literature coincided with the introduction of printing, making books more accessible to those who could read, though still, only those who could afford them. In 1477, Caxton printed the first English book in England. In theory, such an innovation should have made books and reading even more accessible; in practice, the number of different dialects spoken throughout England, and the fact that only a tiny percentage of the country was literate, ensured that reading remained a pastime of the privileged classes.

However, during the following two centuries, an increasing number of books were printed. They were largely classics in Latin and Greek, Medieval poets and increasingly the work of contemporary authors and travellers, including Sir Francis Drake (Altick, 1957). In the sixteenth century some new schools were founded and books were printed for education purposes. In this century, many plays and poems were published which have become a part of the heritage of English literature and reading took on a larger role

in entertainment than had previously been the case. An interesting discussion of writers and readers of this age can be found in Leavis (1932, reprint 2000, pp.88-119); her list of bestsellers from 1578 to 1930 is also of interest (ibid, pp.330-335). Public libraries were founded in the Eighteenth Century and books could be borrowed from them at a small cost. With the growing interest in education, books written especially for children began to appear for the first time during the end of the Sixteenth Century, yet still only the children of economically comfortable families would have had access to them.

During the Eighteenth Century there were still few schools for poor children, many of whom were working by the age of seven and so unlikely to have the chance to learn to read. It was not only children who did not have the opportunity to learn to read, of course: adults too, unless privileged, were illiterate. One of the reasons for the maintained high number of illiterate people of the lower classes was that the higher social classes believed it to be in their interests to keep the majority of people illiterate.

A common belief among the wealthy is expressed here:

*Outright opponents of the idea of charity schools included Bernard de Mandeville, arguing that the good of the nation depended upon the continued ignorance of those who were needed for drudgery, and George Hadley, a forgotten historian [...] asked whether any ploughman who was freed from subordination to the extent of being able to read would ever be content with his lot. (Neuburg 1977, p.107)*

The implications of such beliefs upon the perceived role of reading are clearly illustrated by this extract. The role of reading for the wealthy was, in part, to distinguish them from those with less economic and cultural capital. Illiteracy ensured that the lower classes continued to be available for manual labour. The fear was that if the lower

classes could read, they might want more of the privileges which thus far were exclusive to the higher classes.

By the end of the Nineteenth Century there were, understandably, more books circulating than ever before, and while class distinctions remained and continued to play a part in the role of reading, an increasing number of people generally, were able to own and read books. While books were more accessible than they have previously been, they were still not cheap to everyone, as much as three shillings in the 1870s. The growth in literacy and in accessible reading material changed the nature of what was written and read. Some saw the growth of fiction for the masses, rather than an elite minority, as damaging. This view is best illustrated in the work of Q.D.Leavis who wrote, for example, that the growth in literacy began a craving for fiction among the lower classes with the effect that:

*A habit of reading poor novels not only destroys the ability to distinguish between literature and trash, it creates a positive taste for a certain kind of writing* (2000, p.136)

She referred to Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, in which he spoke with little enthusiasm of the users of circulating libraries, stating that they did not pass their time in reading, but rather killed (or less dramatically, wasted) their time in doing so. Coleridge believed that it was better not to read at all than to read writing of debatably poor quality. Leavis recognised, however, that despite the growth in literacy and the number of novels being produced, it was still the case that a fair proportion were still illiterate, that not all families could afford to buy books, and there was still a great number of people who would have been unable to read them in any case as Table 1.1 reflects (p.18).

Historically, therefore, books were bought and read by the more wealthy members of society. They were owned by those with economic capital and read by those with cultural capital. During the nineteenth century, as reading permeated the classes, the books that became popular with the lower classes were not the same as those enjoyed by the higher classes. Books were, as much as dress, an emblem of class throughout the century. The National Curriculum, as is discussed in the fourth section of this chapter, attempts to ensure that children of all backgrounds are given access to books traditionally associated with the higher classes. Current educational policy does not agree with Leavis, writing in 1932, that '*the lowbrow public should be ignorant of the work and even the names of the highbrow writers*' (2000, p.35). Given that such a view ever existed, however, it is not surprising that books were not comfortably acquired by all families within the twentieth century and beyond, as families of low income and lacking cultural capital are fighting against centuries of precedent, with books seen as objects owned by classes other than their own. It was not until the introduction of compulsory education for children towards the end of the nineteenth century, that children of all classes had access to some books and the chance to learn to read. Through compulsory education, levels of literacy rose and the role of reading changed accordingly.

What the history of the book reveals is that the role of reading has developed at a different pace for different classes. It also reveals that one of the roles of reading has been to differentiate between social classes, whether intended or otherwise.



The following section summarises the rise in literacy as a result of development in state provided education. Both the history of education and the increase in literacy which resulted from it, have major impacts upon the role of reading, which cannot be fully appreciated without this historical contextualisation.

### 1.3 The history of education and increased literacy within Britain

As has been stated in the preceding section, literacy developed more rapidly for some than for others. It follows, therefore, that the role of reading was far greater in the lives of some than others. It is relatively recently that literacy has been widespread enough for reading to have a role in the lives of the vast majority. Growth in literacy is largely a result of educational developments. These are outlined in this section.

Britain was relatively slow in state provision of education and in introducing compulsory schooling, as is reflected in Table 1.1 below, which summarises acts which led to the introduction of compulsory education for children:

1811	18% of U.K. Children receive some form of education
1833	The Factory Act - requires children ages 9 - 11 to attend school for 2 hours, 2 days a week
1862	The Newcastle Commission concludes reading, writing and arithmetic need to be the essential courses of study
1861 – 1864	Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Rugby, Winchester, Charterhouse, Shrewsbury, St. Paul's, Merchant Taylor's School - emerged as deserving public recognition

1870	Elementary Education Act proposed by William Forster introduces primary schools - Forster claims that the nation's industrial prosperity depends upon elementary education
1876	First attempt to compel children of working class families to attend school
1880	The Education Act makes school compulsory for children ages 10 - 13
1889	The prevention of Cruelty to Children Act prohibits employment of children under the age of 10
1891	Free education is made available for all children
1918	The legal school leaving age is raised to 15

Table 1.1

(For complete listings of acts affecting education etc. see Rogal, 1993)

The causes preventing state education for all children, earlier than the late nineteenth century, continue to persist in some forms and the legacy of nineteenth century ideologies and beliefs was strong enough to have a knock on effect on the policies created and re-created during the twentieth century, throughout which educational reforms have followed one after another, as each administration alters the framework of education with various bias.

Educational reforms continue as consecutive governments attempt to ensure that no longer can it be claimed that:

*England is the worst educated country in Europe* (Henry Brougham, 1818)

Or that:

*England is behind all continental rivals in education* (Balfour, 1902)

Green (1990) suggests a cluster of reasons for Britain's failure to lead the way with education policies which may be summarised as follows:

- aristocratic and gentry opposition to educating the masses
- early and successful industrialisation - leading to complacency
- use of child labour

Green claims that in Britain, as in no other country, education developed more through private and voluntary institutions than through state action. This assumption is based on the growth of the old public schools and grammar schools, which were founded and supported by endowments and controlled by local gentry (and later, religious groups). Strong state action to reform education was absent in Britain until 1870, when the first education act hailed the beginning of state education in England and Wales. The effect of this was that mass schooling did not begin in Britain until half a century later than it had begun in other comparable countries, such as France. The emphasis of early state education was upon teaching children a very basic level of literacy, which was purely functional.

Evidence supporting the idea that state education began from a desire for increased basic literacy, can be found in *The Elementary Education Act 1876* (Owen, 1880). This Act stated clearly that all children between the ages of five and thirteen (other than those who were ill or lived more than three miles away from a public elementary school) must attend school for at least one afternoon or morning each day, for five days

a week (attending school for five whole days a week was not made part of the act, in recognition of the number of children who had to work). Following this act, no child under ten was to be given employment or be allowed to miss school unless they had reached ‘*a certain standard of proficiency in reading, writing and arithmetic*’ (Owen 1880, p.8). This standard was measured by six descriptors (in theory, not wholly unlike the descriptors of competencies used in the current National Curriculum levels). Every child was supposed to reach standard (level) 4, before leaving school. This meant that the child had:

*To read with intelligence a few lines of poetry selected by the inspector*

(Owen 1880, p.159)

The extent to which standards of literacy and expected literacy have risen since that act is illustrated with a further reference to the standard descriptors. The highest standard of attainment in reading for which a child could be rewarded (standard 6) is described thus:

*Reading with fluency and expression, and in day schools recitation of not less than 50 lines of prose, or 100 of poetry* (ibid)

The fact that literacy was measured in this way is indicative of the lack of literary criteria in assessing and teaching reading at that time; it also illustrates how negligible was the role of reading for the majority of children. Reading, it seems, played a very small part in their lives and certainly was not an essential part of their survival. The act introduced even the poorest children to books, however. Each classroom was supposed to hold three sets of books, and the inspectors carried books with them from school to school, with which to test the children’s literacy. There is no suggestion at all within the act that the children were to be taught to read so that they might become literary. For children attending the early state schools, literacy was to enable a child to read, not an

introduction to literature (ways of defining and reading literature are discussed in chapter 2). A considerable gulf existed between between the role of reading in private sector schools, where one role of reading was to instruct pupils in the classics, and state controlled schools where the role of reading was functional. It will be an interesting part of the research into the role of reading, to see to what extent this is still effectively the case.

In England, private sector schools continue to hold appeal for an elite, those with economic capital and traditionally, those with cultural capital. The way in which education was organised in terms of social class has been a cause of concern for some (Tawney 1931 for example) throughout the Twentieth Century. While public and private schools exist in such numbers, the state cannot realistically claim to be ensuring that all children are given the same educational options. Private sector schools exist within other countries, but the lines of demarcation vary from those in England with the result that:

*England is exceptional in having an entirely segregated system of education for the elite within the private sector* (Green, 1991 p.15)

Nevertheless, gradually, the education acts became increasingly sophisticated, and some attempt was made to redress the inequalities within the developing education system. This was first seen in 1902 when the idea of promoting ways in which underprivileged children might have greater academic opportunities, was introduced.

Since the turn of the Nineteenth Century, the proportion of the population considered literate has steadily risen. Literacy became an important political and national issue, as it was a skill which would continue to ensure the strong world position of the country,

and in some ways propelled issues of equal rights, especially gender equality, to the forefront of politics. Statistics representing the growth in literacy (Table 1.2) were kept meticulously and serve to illustrate the differences between the number of men and women who were literate half way through the century, with those by the end of the century (Altick 1957, p.171)

<u>Percentage of those who were literate</u>		
	Male	Female
1841	67.3	51.1
1851	69.3	54.8
1861	75.4	65.3
1871	80.6	73.2
1881	86.5	82.3
1891	93.6	92.7
1900	97.2	96.8

Table 1.2

During the decades that followed the second world war, there was a national effort to nurture equality in education and economy across anachronistic class divides, described in Brown and Lauder (2001, p.60).

Although intelligence tests were introduced in the 1920s, it was during the 1940s that all children at the end of their junior or primary school years were tested to determine the

type of education which were supposed to be best suited to them, sorting them into appropriate schools accordingly, where a suitable education for their ability would be provided. Literacy was expected of the majority of children by this stage and the role of reading was accordingly increasing. Such notions were fully reflected in the 1944 Education Act in England and Wales. This act implemented the idea that secondary education would be provided for all children regardless of class, ability or age. It also led to the tripartite system which was to be the cause of much disaffection in the following decades. Education became increasingly important to the middle classes, who recognised within it a way of sustaining and transmitting cultural capital and upward social mobility.

By the 1960s the 11+ selective system had been largely discredited. It was recognised to be an unsound way of educating many children, as it perpetuated disadvantages within the education of those children who did not come from homes in which they were well prepared to pass the examination requirements. The school curriculum was identified as fundamental to the problems within this education system (Newson, 1964). Despite the intentions of this meritocratic competition to award children places in academic and successful grammar schools on merit of natural ability, rather than social class, gender, race or background, the nature of the test was such that the majority of children who passed it were not of the lower or working classes, and those children were then educated and labelled in the less prestigious secondary modern and technical schools, with no real chance of pursuing higher education or reaping the benefits of attending a university. The tests used were such that children from families with cultural capital would be more successful. This is not the same as saying that cultural capital equates to academic ability. As much research shows, the form (language used etc, as discussed in

section 1.7) of assessments, can disadvantage some children whether they have the ability to be successful in that test or not. Academic and cultural capital are clearly not the same, but cultural capital affects the way in which children respond to conventional academic testing. Comprehensive schools were introduced by the then Education Secretary, Anthony Crosland, in the mid 1960s.

In 1965, neighbourhood secondary schools began to replace the tripartite system and by 1970 most secondary aged children were in comprehensive schools; although this was not done nationally, and some counties in England still administer the 11+. Smith (in Halsey 2000, pp.200-201) argues, with much statistical evidence, that the mid 1970s was the time in which education in Britain received impressive financial government support, which deteriorated thereafter and was least in evidence during the following decade. According to Smith, by the end of the 1980s however, ‘spending cuts took £240 million from education’ (Holmes, 1985,p.114).

The political interest in state education and literacy at this time resulted in part in a speech given at Ruskin College Oxford, 1976, during which the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, called for a great debate in response to the following four questions from the Department of Education and Science (DES):

- *Were children leaving primary school with an adequate level of literacy and numeracy?*
- *Did the secondary school curriculum meet the needs of the majority of children and, in particular, did it prepare people for the world of work?*
- *How adequate was the system of public examinations?*



- *How adequate was the educational system for the majority of youngsters who did not go on to HE?*

(Savage & Robins, 1990, p.132)

The role that education, and increasingly literacy, played in the economy of the society was recognised, and by 1979 education was firmly on the agenda of the General Election manifestos.

Education and literacy continued to be a major concern for the in-coming Conservative government. The leader of the Conservative party, and later Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, moved the emphasis to parental choice. This is illustrated clearly in the annual party conference speeches:

1982 *As parents we want to be sure not just about teaching the three 'Rs' , but about the discipline and about the values by which our children are taught to live [...] we are not afraid to talk about discipline and moral values*

1986 *Why are we setting up new kinds of schools in our towns and cities?[...] to give families in some of our inner cities greater choice in the education of their children*

1987 *It is vital that children master essential skills: reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic. But the key to raising standards is to enlist the support of parents.*

(Harris,1997, p.267-354)

This idea of choice is interesting. It does not acknowledge that choices are affected by habitus. Not all parents could in reality choose where their children were educated. Those with enough cultural and economic capital could choose to move their children from failing schools, but those without such assets had no real choice but to send their

children to the nearest and most convenient schools. An emphasis upon instrumentalism rather than developing individuals' potentials continued to dominate education during this period. It is inevitable that such policies would promote literacy as a necessary skill in the job market rather than as a way of accessing literature for more aesthetic purposes.

Margaret Thatcher promoted the idea that it was up to the individual to behave in a moral way. The individual should be given power to choose how to behave. This contrasted with the socialist view that it was the responsibility of the state to promote moral values.

A spirit of competition rather than mass co-operation was fuelled during the 1980s under Thatcher's administration resulting in growing emphasis *'on the content and quality of education, measured not by inputs and resources, but by outcomes such as examination results'* (Halsey 2000, p.201). This was also a decade in which personal wealth and gain preoccupied many sectors of society. This was a period of materialism in which the general public wanted to see, and reflect, what its money could buy. This was true of public spending as well as private spending. The National Curriculum provided a means of quantifying educational achievement, and in doing so, ensuring accountability in the spending of public money, or trying to do so.

The 1988 Education Act introduced the National Curriculum: the first state attempt to impose the subject matter of schools on a national basis. There was a move from a professional to a 'new managerial' culture, as professionals, including teachers, became accountable to the public for what they delivered. The alleged removal of autonomy and

professional control from the teacher was unpopular within schools, and the political basis of the National Curriculum seen as suspect. It seemed to some (Green 1991, p.29) that the focus of the curriculum was upon testing and labelling, rather than on encouraging or valuing achievement. The prescriptive nature and regular testing within the national curriculum have both been a cause for concern among some educationists, to whom the national curriculum appears to have been imposed by people with little understanding or knowledge of children:

*It would seem quite clear that the 1988 Act, and especially the National Curriculum, have been framed by people whose view of schooling is from the outside and where prime concern is with what education is for rather than what it is [...] there is thus a clear indication here that educational provision is to be planned according to the needs of adulthood rather than of childhood, that childhood is conceived as a period for preparation for what is to follow.*

(Kelly 1990, p.46)

The national curriculum is not particularly unpopular with the general public, although was initially so with the teachers who first had to administer it.

By the end of the 1980s Andy Green (Green 1991) had put together a thesis in which he argues that the British education system has consistently failed to keep pace with, or to be as successful as, the educational systems of comparable countries. He argued that British education was seen as being in a state of crisis in the early 1990s. During this time a wide range of groups, including right wing politicians, pointed out that the educational system was failing to prepare children for the future: *'The egalitarian ideals of the 1960s had been shown to be unrealisable within capitalist society structured by class, racial and gender equalities'* (Green, 1991, p.6). Green argues that financial

retrenchment under Thatcher's term in the eighties led to greater deterioration as the percentage of the GDP spent on education decreased.

Despite the implementation of national policies and numerous education acts throughout the twentieth century, the British education system remains one of disunity and in some ways, one of fragmentation, (see Halsey 2000, p.179). It might be argued, however, that one of the prime reasons for the variety of forms and types of school is the effects of a class system which still allows and maintains public and fee paying schools and the inequality that this produces. Current government policy is promoting the idea of having a greater diversity of types of school than has previously been seen in the United Kingdom. The government program entitled 'Excellence in Cities' promotes the idea of responding to individual needs through establishing a range of schools, referred to as: City Learning Centres, Specialist Schools and Beacon Schools. Specialist schools include: arts colleges, business and enterprise colleges, engineering colleges, language colleges, maths and computing colleges, science colleges, sports colleges and technology colleges. By September 2002, 34% of pupils in state controlled secondary education attended specialist schools. 97% of local education authorities currently include specialist schools within their educational institutions (Crown 2002). It is of some interest that:

*Despite the massive expansion in all aspects of education, and the quite dramatic increases in staying-on rates and qualifications in the last two decades of the [twentieth] century, the relative chances of children from different social backgrounds were still apparently as unequal as they had been at the start of the century. (Halsey 2000 p.219)*

The fact that social birth continues to affect educational progression of children is an issue raised repeatedly by social historians. Goldthorpe echoes Halsey when he writes:

*class differentials in educational attainment have changed very little across successive birth cohorts, from those of the early decades of the century onwards [...] children of less advantaged class origins have remained, to much the same extent, more likely than children of more advantaged origins to leave the education system rather than continue in it.*

(Goldthorpe 2000, p.167)

In Britain, it seems, wealth was a hugely influential factor in education. This situation was not unique to Britain, however. Bourdieu identified similar elements in educational institutes within France, agreeing that birthplace was more of a divide than money alone. It is not only in Britain that ‘where you are born tends to predict with fearful accuracy where you end up’ (Pollard, Willetts, Collins & Lukes 1999, p.4).

The key themes of this section are that literacy has risen, within all social classes, during the last century, as a direct result of political policies recognising the need for high levels of literacy within the work place and to sustain a healthy economy. In the post industrial age, reading is necessary within the work place. The role of reading has largely been to enable students to become useful employees and members of society. Within schools, some effort is made to ensure that all pupils, regardless of cultural or academic capital, have access to literature and are encouraged to recognise literary qualities in a number of works. The emphasis of state school administration, however, seems to be to ensure that pupils become literate, not necessarily literary. The extent to which the role of reading can be identified as to be to create students who may be described as literary, provides a further research question within this thesis. A

discussion of the terms 'literary' and 'literacy' follows, at the end of section 1.7. In this discussion of the rise in literacy, no mention has been made of computer literacy. This is an essential development within literacy, and one that indicates further potential roles of reading for Key Stage 3 children. This issue is introduced in the following section.

#### 1.4 Computer literacy

The area of literacy which appears to be developing most rapidly at the beginning of the twenty first century is that which is referred to as computer literacy. The term refers to reading and writing and understanding text which is produced using computers. Technological advances have created powerful and fast computers, and computer users have had to develop computer literacy skills rapidly in order to be able to make use of computers. The use of computers within schools is debated in depth in Mitakos, (1999). During the late 1990s, developing computer literacy become a new priority within schools. This is the area of literacy in which children have been seen to outpace adults in their learning. Abbott has been proved right several years after claiming that; '*The young people we teach will embrace this new technology with enthusiasm*' (1994, p.15). Through regular use of computer games, programs and the internet, children, are making much greater use of computer literacy. Reading plays a key role within computer use. The pace of development of computer literacy is much more rapid than that of print literacy. A new aspect of language is developing as a result of technological advances, which not everyone is able to understand. This is emphasised by the following extract:

*New acronyms representing a newer generation or of digital technologies and services are being invented at a much faster pace than the general public could digest what they actually stand for*

(Dai 2000, p.2)

The acronyms are a symptom of many other developments brought about by technology. Technological advances are impacting communication between and within societies and communities. One effect of this is the development of a new written language integrating symbols, numbers and letters.

*In other words, the formation of a Super-Text and a Meta-Language that, for the first time in history, integrates into the same system the written, oral and audio-visual modalities of the human condition (Castells, 1996 p.328)*

The language is referred to as 'text messaging' or even 'texting' and is rapidly gaining popularity in technologically advanced societies. Subsequently a new way of recognising meaning and new way of reading evolves. This new language is being received in one of two ways, either heralded as a way of breaking through conventional language barriers, or as reflecting the tragic deterioration of pure language. Castells puts it another way:

*To some analysts, CMC [Computer Mediated Communication], and particularly e-mail, represents the revenge of the written medium, the return to the typographic mind, and the recuperation of the constructed, rational discourse. For others, on the contrary, the informality, spontaneity, and anonymity of the medium stimulates what they call a new form of 'orality', expressed by electronic text. (1996, p.363)*

This language demands a form of reading, none the less, and new methods of communication are exclusive to those who can read. Computer literacy offers

opportunities for engaging with text not offered by paper pages. The text on a screen is not fixed in the same way as is the printed word, encouraging and sometimes demanding greater interaction between text and reader. Within computer literacy, as in no other context, the structure of the writing is determined and manipulated by the reader. This means that each reader not only interprets the text differently, but can also choose to have the text presented in different ways and thus see the text spatially different.

By the mid 1990s, only around 20 million people were computer literate world wide. Computer literacy has taken over from literacy to some extent, as a language catalyst of the fortunate and educated, unobtainable by the less fortunate and uneducated masses. Current trends are globally enforcing '*shrinking room for the computer illiterate*' (Castells, 1996, p.25).

*Computer-mediated communication will remain the domain of an educated segment of the population of the most advanced countries, numbered in tens of millions but still counting as an elite on a global scale* (Castells, 1996, p.359)

This recent method of communication is not used equally throughout society. Surveys reflect that the majority of users are male, and under the age of 35. Regardless of such bias, only those with the ability and the affluence to use the technology can benefit from this form of communication.

This liberating technological form of communication and information retrieval is only, in fact, accessible for those with the literacy skills and confidence necessary to use it:



*Because many sites in cyberspace are text-based, in these, at least, and perhaps until virtual reality technology is further developed and accessible, one must write in order to be read or 'heard'.* (Travers 2000, p.14)

Technological advances have in fact, created another kind of illiteracy. The most well read, respected author who can not access or produce text to be read on a computer is as computer illiterate as is an individual who can not read or write at all. Government initiatives, as well as schools, have recognised the need to create as many computer literate people as possible; and to keep up with computing technologies. Penley and Ross (1991) point out that what they call *technoliteracy* is essential to society:

*not just for the purposes of post modern survival but also for the task of decolonising, demonopolising and democratising social communication*

(in Travers, 2000, p.131)

Children are among those members of society to welcome and engage with technological and digital forms of communication most enthusiastically. This can be a cause for concern. Some young people in Korea, for example, are growing up unable to imagine life without e-mail or mobile phones, and consider cyberspace the best place to meet people (Dai 2000, p.5).

The natural enthusiasm of some children for technology is harnessed within schools, which now include teaching information technology within their curricula:

*Education is the process by which the young learn to master a society's symbolic notational systems [...] it also increasingly means the symbols and languages of information technology, along with the vocabularies, disciplines,*

*applications and uses of all their symbolic systems.* (Hargreaves & Christie 1998, p.84)

Information technology is changing the physical appearance of classrooms, as well as the language and forms of communication used within them. The effect of information technology upon many work places also means that '*the habits and routines developed in school are less useful in the real world*' (Hargreaves & Christie 1998, p.85).

Technology continues to increase the speed of mundane activities, travel and communication. It causes problems as well as solutions, however, and is not seen as being entirely beneficial to modern society. Beck refers to:

*much of the shock, the helpless rage and the 'no future' feelings with which many people react ambivalently and with necessarily exploitative criticism to the latest achievements of technical civilisation* (1992, p. 41)

As employers increasingly demand computer literate employees, those who are not computer literate face economic and social exclusion.

The key themes identified in this section reveal the way in which technological development necessitates greater use of reading, rather than less. This suggests that the role of reading within the lives of young people is growing, rather than diminishing. It would appear that one of the roles of reading is to keep up with technology. The relationship between technology and the role of reading will be explored through the case studies, in a later chapter.

This section concludes the first part of this chapter, tracing the development of literacy and identifying the ways in which the role of reading continues to develop and change

according to social and political, and, more recently, technological needs. Clearly, the social and historical context is important to an exploration of the role of reading at any one time. It is for this reason that the next section is focused upon the political context in which this research was conducted. Some of the issues raised in previous sections, relating to the need for increased literacy and increased uses of technology, are raised again within the following section.

### 1.5 New Labour's educational policies

The British New Labour administration was elected in 1997. Under Tony Blair, the New Labour Prime Minister, education was emphasised as a priority issue.

*Education and training have become the new mantra for social democratic politicians. Tony Blair famously describes his three main priorities in government as 'education, education, education' [...] Who could gainsay that a well-educated population is desirable for any society? (Giddens 1998, p.109)*

Blair's view was that the nation state should become more controlling rather than less in education policy and administration decisions. Blair's 1998 paper entitled *The Third Way: New Politics for a New Century* presents the ideology and aims of many of his government's policies. Education is a key theme within this paper. In the introduction he claims that *Third Way* politics is founded on 'democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism' and that two of the problems to be tackled are 'failing education' and 'social exclusion'. Education is concerned with cultural, social and economic restoration.

In 1998 Tony Blair announced that one of his aims was to ensure that at least 80% of children aged 11 would be able to prove their literacy skills by achieving a level 4, or above, in national standardised tests by the year 2002. The national literacy strategy was introduced in all state primary schools, with the sole aim of raising the standards of literacy. By 2000, the strategy was hailed a success by the Labour Government and plans began for the introduction of a similar strategy to be introduced to all state secondary schools in 2001, with the aim of ensuring that literacy standards continue to raise nationally (although, this did not happen in 2002).

The current Labour government's educational policies reflect an emphasis upon schools providing people for the labour market. This is reflected clearly in the words of Tony Blair:

*Technological advance and the rise of skills and information as key drivers of employment and new industries, destroying old patterns of employment and placing an unprecedented premium on the need for high educational standards for the many, not the few*

(Blair, 1998, p.6)

The suggestion here is that the point of education is to enable each child to play a productive role in furthering the economic state. Blair goes on to explain that the next generation must be prepared to work in an increasingly technological work place, where manual skills are less and less of a requirement.

*The industrial order of the last century was built on raw materials, heavy industry, unskilled manual employment [...] The new economy – like the new politics – is radically different. [...] The main source of value and competitive*

*advantage is the modern economy is human and intellectual capital.*

(Blair, 1998, p.8-9)

Here, Blair states with great clarity the need and desire for high education and literacy levels within the country. National literacy is clearly paramount to the economy, which is why New Labour '*launched a crusade for higher school standards, backed by the toughest targets and largest resources in the history of the education system*' (Blair, 1998, p.11).

### 1.6 The wider perspective

Technological developments during the last decade, and unprecedented communication network advancement, have contributed towards creating Western societies in which individual decisions can have global consequences, and in which we know what is happening in other countries almost instantaneously. Communication is no longer restricted to local communities. The number of people, communities, religions, speech patterns and alternative social norms encountered by children is at an unprecedented level, as they are exposed, through mass media, to people and events on a global scale. Mass communication is revolutionising the lives of children. This results in an increasing number of dilemmas, as well as information for the children (Stables, 1998). Money and information have both become global systems. Such developments have wide reaching effects and implications for all aspects of education:

*A world of instantaneous electronic communication, in which even those in the poorest regions are involved, shakes up local institutions and everyday patterns of life. The influence of television alone is considerable. (Giddens 1998, p.29)*

The following two issues in relation to the role of reading immediately arise:

- For technological progression to continue, literacy is essential, although not necessarily conventional book reading.
- Information Technology Literacy has become so important as a result of global developments. It is likely that the importance of I.C.T. will increase, while the significance of being literary is not necessarily developing at the same rate or in the same way.

It is functional literacy, that can be applied to technology, that is currently in great demand within our society and schools. This is partly the result of political decisions and policies, and is reflected within our schools and within the way in which children learn and approach reading and texts. The second issue raised here is the way in which the television is now regarded by many as the main source of information and even instruction, in morality and social behaviour. Reading is perhaps not now the device it once was, for keeping young people informed. Young people may watch television more now than any generation before them, yet research reflects that young people are more greatly aware of moral concerns than older generations (Giddens 1998, p.36).

During this age of globalisation, in which it is easy for each nation to see and assess each other's data and statistics, literacy has become an increasingly significant issue in national competition, and success and comparisons are inevitably made. For example, the fact that at one time: *'Japan has almost no illiteracy whereas estimates in the United States report functional illiteracy at around 20 per cent'* (Brown & Lauder 2001, p.120) became of real concern. Governments continue to compare the success of one country with another. No British government would want to see statistics reflecting British illiteracy in such a bad light.

Despite several decades of attempting to educate children towards achieving the same goals as each other, and Blair's commitment to inclusion and equality, Brown and Lauder argue that social class cannot be overcome by education:

*The facts are that the best single predictor of educational success is social background* (2001, p.191)

Thus agreeing with Bourdieu as discussed in section 1.3.

#### Liberal democracy, the state and Education

There are a variety of perspectives on the most effective methods of government of contemporary society. The two which have had the greatest following in recent British history are represented by Fukuyama and Etzioni. Fukuyama's neo-liberal beliefs in the positive effects of increased diversity and freedom of choice contrast with Etzioni's conviction that a greater sense of communitarianism and less focus on the individual is necessary within society. Although Britain, in keeping with other industrial countries, has adopted liberal democracy: *'the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe'* according to Fukuyama (1992, p. xiii), Blair's politics have more in common with Etzioni's than Fukuyama's, although some aspects of Blair's policies reflect Fukuyama's beliefs to a degree.

Fukuyama advocates the idea of libertarian free markets as the best solution to social inequalities and is against state intervention within people's lives. Sharing Etzioni's views, Brown and Lauder (2001) conversely, believe that for society to develop in a

successful way, government intervention is necessary in order to reduce social inequalities. Partly as a result of the strength of the middle class, and their demand for political participation and education (one aspect of which is literacy), Britain has become a part of a loop:

industrialisation - calls for education - increased skilled market - industrialisation etc.

Fukuyama signifies the close connection between these three elements of western life, and their politics with clarity:

*The link between education and liberal democracy [...] would seem to be an important one. Industrial societies require large numbers of highly skilled and educated workers, managers, technicians and intellectuals [...] such societies cannot exist without a large specialised educational establishment [...] inequality creeps into the system as a result of unequal access to education; lack of education is the surest condemnation to second-class citizenship*

(Fukuyama 1992, p.116)

Blair's leadership reflects these ideas to some extent. The theory explains one of the reasons for his government's current interest in education and in raising standards of literacy in particular. Within a free society *unequal access to education* is inevitable, regardless of Blair's inclusion policies (see page 47). The concept of equal opportunity is multi-faceted, however, and cannot be reduced to any one dictum in relation to choices. Middle class families choose to send their children to schools that lower class families would not choose to patronise, as they would not necessarily send their children to public (fee paying) school. Fukuyama points out another reason for current interest in Education when he writes: *'it is hard to imagine democracy working properly in a largely illiterate society where the people can not take advantage of information about the choices open to them'* (1992, p.122), thus reflecting that for liberal democracy



to be a success, its society needs to be literate and educated. For Fukuyama, diversity in education provision is a positive force within society.

Within Fukuyama's political system, students are taught to think for themselves, to make decisions, to be tolerant of race, gender and beliefs which may not be their own. According to Fukuyama, much ideological choice leads to a society that lacks natural adhesion; with no shared belief or direction. Arguably, contemporary education is partly responsible for liberating the student from traditional faiths and beliefs giving them:

*More freedom to choose their beliefs than in perhaps any other society in history  
[...] The very variety of choice is bewildering, and those who decide on one  
path or another do so with an awareness of the myriad other paths taken  
(Fukuyama 1992, p.317).*

Under this system, children learn from an early age that they must make decisions, they are not generally expected simply to do as their fathers and forefathers did. Every choice that they make, even as apparently inconsequential as choosing which book to read, or whether to read at all, contributes to making them a citizen of a liberal democracy in which they have that freedom of choice. We are in an age and political system in which shared values, beliefs, ideologies and expectations are in some ways at an unprecedented low, in which; *'Belief tends to separate rather than bring people together, because there are so many alternatives'* (Fukuyama 1992, p.308). Because of this, the role of reading in the lives of children cannot be presupposed.

It is in the West that a belief in freedom of choice is most strong, as the notion that *'more freedom is better than less'* (Etzioni 1997 p.xv) is strongly maintained. Etzioni

is opposed to Fukuyama and reaches different conclusions. Etzioni recognises potentially negative consequences of such freedom upon individuals within a society:

*enhancement of individual liberties, at some point becomes onerous for the actors involved and undermines the social order upon which liberties are ultimately based [...] people abhor an ethical vacuum, one in which all choices have the same standing and are equally legitimate, when all they face are directions among which they may choose but no compass to guide them. In short, after a point, the quest for ever greater liberty does not make for a good society. (1997, p.xv)*

Etzioni explains the way in which the desire for political and social liberation that was perhaps most prevalent in the 1960s, had a greatly damaging effect upon traditions which had fulfilled the role of supplying 'the foundations of social virtue' (1997, p.xvii) thus contributing to the lack of natural social cohesion which has evolved during following decades. He proposes communitarianism as a solution. A communitarian approach to leadership is as follows:

*one that achieves balance between social order and autonomy (1997, p.9)*

The aim of communitarian philosophy is to instil into each member of the society and community that they should:

*Respect and uphold society's moral order as you would have society respect and uphold your autonomy (1997, p.xviii).*

This is reflected in Blair's leadership, through which the idea that individuals cannot assume rights without responsibilities is prominent.

Followers of Etzioni might claim that such is the fragmentary condition of Western states such as Britain, that state leaders may be in need of working towards recognition

of beliefs such as communitarianism. Unlike Fukuyama, who is sceptical of government intervention, Etzioni, like Brown and Lauder, believes that greater involvement is necessary. A successful (liberal) democracy such as Blair's Britain aims to:

*convince people of the value of their position, relying on the moral voice of the community, education, persuasion and exhortation (Etzioni 1997, p.16)*

Etzioni's theory is that the combination of these aspects of society will combine to create a solid moral infrastructure. Schools and education must play a large role in the creation and maintenance of a moral infrastructure. Curricula can be manipulated to ensure that each school is teaching shared community values and responding to social needs, as recognised by the state:

*the content of the core courses needs to cover some shared elements and not be merely a patchwork of different ethnic, racial, and gender-based narratives. The underlying principle that needs to guide schools and colleges is that it is necessary that those who graduate will have some shared heroes, respect some shared symbols, and relate to some shared narratives, all reflecting the core of shared values (Etzioni 1997, p.213)*

Nowadays we accept that education for the masses is highly desirable, both internationally and nationally: to have a reasonable chance of keeping up with technological developments and to maintain a respectable first world global position Britain needs to educate children and young adults to levels which will ensure that there is a supply of skilled workers available. Alongside this, Etzioni discusses the necessity of rediscovering a sense of community. Domestically it is through education that Blair can hope to create a moral infrastructure that will sustain elements of social unification and shared aspirations, expectations and values.

*The product of educational activities is a change in the state of the mind and character of those educated [...] the role of education is becoming even more important with the transition from the modern to the post-modern period.*

*Formal higher education geared to specific industrial, technical, or professional needs (as distinct from 'diffuse' religious or humanistic education) is a typical feature of modern societies and is a component of modernisation in developing countries (Etzioni 1968, p.200)*

In the way that education for all in Britain was once seen as potentially threatening to political leadership positions, education is now an essential factor in sustaining the current political administration and an important instrument in New Labour's policies for inclusion. Under these circumstances, the role of reading appears vital to the creation of a literate work force and citizenry.

### 1.7 Life Politics

Life politics is present in the lives of people of all ages, including children. As they make choices and begin to form their identities they are participating in *a politics of choice* (Giddens 1998, p.44). The choices children make determine the opportunities that they will later have. Choosing to read or not read habitually, is an example of a decision that can be made at a young age, which may have long term effects.

It can be argued that the motivation of Blair's interest in Education is the desire of New Labour to enable greater social mobility to take place. Education, and especially literacy, is pivotal in creating greater social mobility. Social mobility is not the same as equality. Despite Blair's claim that 'the progressive left must robustly tackle the

obstacles to true equality of opportunity' (Blair 1998, p.3), for some it appears that the former is more at the heart of current educational policy than the latter:

*New Labour's take on education, reflecting its wider view, is that it is not about equality of opportunity or equality of anything, but social mobility. (Pollard, Willetts, Collins & Lukes 1999, p.6)*

### 1.8 Equality

*Equality is important above all because it is relevant to people's life chances, well-being and self-esteem (Giddens 1998, p.41)*

According to Giddens, New Labour took over Thatcherite legacies including *acceptance of inequality* (Giddens, 1998, p.8). Inequality remains a feature of Britain, despite Third Way politics. An area in which it remains particularly prevalent is within education. Despite the decline of the Grammar School Vs Comprehensive Vs Technology College system and the 11+, schools remain varied in type, and in 2002 seem likely to become even more so, and are associated with differing levels of achievement and different values, as discussed on page 29. The type of school attended by a child remains largely the result of economic capital and cultural capital held by the child's parent(s). Children therefore learn, within an unequal system, despite the belief that:

*The pursuit of equality has been a major concern of all social democrats, including the British Labour Party. (Giddens, 1998, p.10)*

Equality can mean many things. For Third Way politicians, equality is the result of inclusion policies. Giddens suggests that meritocracy is inevitable:

*a meritocratic society is likely to be highly unequal on the level of outcome. In such a social order, the privileged are bound to be able to confer advantages on their children - thus destroying meritocracy (p.102)*

The inequality of the education system has some responsibility for perpetuating inequality of chances within society, or is at least symptomatic of such. Having been to a particular type of school (traditional, well established, academic, fee-paying) still gives children chances that they might not have had if they gone to a different type of school. It is not true that children who go to such a school cannot succeed. It may be true, however, that different standards of education and different perceptions of education will guide a young person towards one type of job rather than another:

*access to work is one main context of opportunity. Education is another, and would be so even if it weren't so important for the employment possibilities to which it is relevant (Giddens 1998, p.103)*

There are clear correlations between actions and consequences, which will in turn generate one scale of income rather than another. Having been taught in one way rather than another may, in time, contribute to social inequality. Lack of education of a certain standard or type will produce lack of job opportunities which will cause disaffection among those still within education, who will in turn leave school without the essential skills for secure, highly paid jobs.

*High unemployment is linked to generous benefits that run on indefinitely and to poor educational standards at the lower end of the labour market - the phenomenon of exclusion. (Giddens 1998, p.122)*

It may well be true that *'The cosmopolitan nation helps promote social inclusion'* (Giddens 1998, p.69), but inclusion cannot be put into practice as it is dependent upon economic capital. Social inclusion of children is dependent partly upon what school they attend and what they do within those schools. For example, a child who reads literature prolifically is perhaps unlikely to be socially included within a group of children who do not choose to spend any of their time reading literature; the reverse is equally true.

### 1.9 Inclusion

Inclusion has become a key word of Blair's policies. Reading clearly plays a role within the concept of inclusion within schools. At its most simple, those who can read can be included in more aspects of school life, than those who can not. This section, briefly, discusses the use of the word 'inclusion', in its current context.

*We seek a diverse but inclusive society, promoting tolerance within agreed norms* (Blair 1998, p.12)

'Inclusion' rather than 'equality', 'inclusive' rather than 'equal' are the words used in Blair's Third Way politics:

*'Inclusion' has become something of an international buzz-word [...] it is now de rigeur for mission statements, political speeches and policy documents of all kinds. It has become a cliché – obligatory in the discourse of all right thinking people*

(Thomas & Loxley 2001, preface)

Peer and Reid define what is currently meant by the word *Inclusion* as:

*Inclusion is a human rights issue founded on the principle of social equity and justice, as enshrined in international legal conventions. It represents a positive valuing of the immense difference and diversity that characterises human experience in terms of gender, disability, class, race and other distinguishing factors.*

(Peer & Reid 2001, p.30)

Within schools it is defined as:

*Inclusion is about providing a framework within which all children regardless of ability, gender, language, ethnic or cultural origin – can be valued equally*

(Thomas & Loxley 2001, p.119)

It is indeed a word which appears far more in current political orations than in those of previous governments. A foreward by David Blunket begins:

*I am committed to inclusive schools as part of the journey towards a fully inclusive society* (Peer & Reid 2001)

According to this view, inclusive schools, providing inclusive education are to lead to inclusive societies. Recent curriculum developments emphasise the necessity of inclusion, highlighted in a general inclusion statement within the National Curriculum, stressing that:

*Teachers should aim to give every pupil the opportunity to experience success in learning and to achieve as high a standard as possible [...] teachers set targets for learning that build on pupils' knowledge, experience, interests and strengths*

(Peer & Reid 2001,p.23)

The idea is plausible, but in terms of literacy, narrow. Although the national curriculum list of prescribed texts is quite long, it does not allow the possibility of building on the



knowledge and interests of all disaffected or low ability pupils. The suggestion, clearly, is that pupils of all abilities, interests and experiences are to be included in teaching all aspects of the national curriculum. Their interests can only be built upon if they conform with those recognised as being of value within the inclusive society. The language used within schools may not be one which includes the language experiences of the children. A further problem is caused by the reliance on an inclusion policy being implemented by teachers, who are prone to recognise (or fail to recognise) differences within children in different ways: *'inclusion can not [...] be effected simply on the basis of the way that teachers and academics conceptualise differences'* (Thomas & Loxley 2001 p.88). Children who are unable to read, or who have limited reading skills, are automatically excluded from some aspects of the school curriculum. For example:

*Children within the mainstream system who have been recognised as dyslexic are often at a disadvantage in terms of access to appropriate teaching, particularly so in the light of the pedagogic structures of the literacy hour* (Peer & Reid 2001, p.29)

Children can only be included if they can read. It follows, therefore, that one role of reading is to enable a child to be included.

Many inclusion policies have been created in recent years. The following statistics illustrate the extent to which some of the policies, accepted in theory, have been implemented in practice. A survey of local authorities conducted in 2001 found the following results of the social inclusion strategy:

41% had established a social inclusion policy

20% had not done so and had no immediate plans to do so

22% were currently working on such a policy

17% planned to have a policy in place within 6 months

Table 1.3

This table shows that inclusion is still an ideal rather than a reality.

That literacy has been recognised as fundamental to the economic and social success of England since the early twentieth century at least, and that it has become an increasingly high priority concern of politicians, is clearly reflected in this section. The key theme of relevance to the thesis is that the political role of reading is to ensure continued economic strength. The rise of education and literacy has been traced here. It is worth discussing the role of reading within schools and the subject of English to gain understanding of the way in which the role of reading is wider than has been suggested in this section of the work.

### 1.10 English and the role of reading within education

Contextualising the role of reading within English and education is important, as it is within educational institutions that the role of reading within the lives of young students is to be explored.

#### Introduction

Previous studies suggest two dominant distinct roles for reading within education. In this sense, English is a unique subject in England as it *'is both a subject and a medium of instruction for other subjects'* (Stables 1992, p.2). The first is the functional role. Reading is necessary to all areas of the curriculum, even in subjects which are not essentially or traditionally text based, such as Mathematics and Physical Education, to varying degrees. The role of reading in many areas of school life, it would seem, is

instructional. A second role of reading within education is to facilitate the acquisition of language. It can be argued that this second role contributes greatly to the perpetuation of social strata, as language is a form of empowerment. This is discussed in detail in the following section. One implication of previous work is simplified in the following way:

Role of reading – language acquisition

Role of language acquisition – reproducing social inequalities

Therefore (a possible) Role of reading – reproducing social inequalities.

The two dominant roles of reading listed above, are discussed in this section which divides into two parts. Considerable reference is made to Bourdieu, in an attempt to clarify the role of language within social reproduction in the second half.

### Functional reading in schools

To be able to read is to be literate. The priority of school is to produce literate children, to produce children who will be useful to society. To be literate is not necessarily to be literary, however. It is not generally conceived as being the priority of the school to create literary students, although the dilemma remains that to be considered well educated, one must also be literary. These two different aspects of the role of reading within education, to create literate or literary students, will be further explored through the case studies. It is useful to consider the use of reading within the curriculum first, however. The literary canon is a part of the National Curriculum, requiring all students to have experience of Shakespeare and other pre 1914 literature from a suggested list. The majority of fourteen year old students attending state schools within the United Kingdom, sit an examination on a prescribed Shakespeare text each year in the National

Curriculum Tests. Schools are judged, in part, upon the results achieved in these tests. Teachers are under pressure to prepare their pupils to perform as well as possible in these examinations, this can result in a narrow experience of the Shakespeare play in question, with little time available to experience other works of literature. Not all of the pupils who read prescribed canonical works will become literary. The writers of the canon who are now compulsory subjects of study for students of this age, represent English history and traditional culture. The way in which they are used as a catalyst of cultural traditions has been further strengthened in recent curriculum developments, as the children are now expected to show historical, cultural and contextual knowledge of such texts in examinations, as much as appreciation of the text as a piece of literature (see Appendix 3).

When English first began to be studied as an academic subject, the role of the reader was to recognise meanings and intentions of writers objectively. Leavis and Richards fought for recognition of English as an academic subject worthy of study, arguing the value of studying literature. They argued that through the study of literature, students would learn discipline and of the minds of great past writers, who were responsible for developing England's culture. Leavis and Richards perceived the study of English as worthwhile for a minority, and did not foresee the subject becoming compulsory for all school children. A century later, school children are taught to respond to what they are reading as objectively as possible to satisfy examiners' criteria. Interpretation is taught within schools for a variety of reasons, not all of sole relevance to learning analytical skills: '*interpretation will continue in the classroom, since it is through interpretation that teachers attempt to transmit cultural values*' (Cullner 1981, p.16). It is not possible to be purely objective when reading. Whilst the act of reading may be a solitary one, it

is impossible to read in a vacuum; *'we take our ideas, our tendencies and prefaces - ourselves to a text'* (Eagleton 1974, p.20). Previous experiences, including previous experiences of reading, affect the approach of the reader to each text. It is a part of the role of the reader to consider ideas presented in the text, which will either be accepted or rejected by the reader. Different levels of experience will make this task more or less achievable. The text is a transitional tool, with different outcomes dependent upon the reader. Young children, for example, are not always able to respond with objectivity to a text, using the text instead as a tool through which to develop understanding of the subject and relating the text specifically to one's self. Benton and Fox (1985) suggest that when a child reads, his/her whole person is reflected as the child brings stored experience to each text, drawing from knowledge of their world and of other fiction, to make meaning from the text. They also stress the uniqueness of every reader, stating that *'The variables are so many that they make the whole area of reader response both fascinating and elusive'* (1985,p.16). Discussion of the way in which children read is made later in this chapter, where specific reference to Barton is made. Understandings of texts may vary to such a degree that it would be impossible to have commonly shared views relating to the text. The formula leading to a reader's response to a text is further clarified by Benton and Fox:

*Each reading is partly shaped by the words on the page, the immutable constants; but as the reader translates words into meanings, his own experience – the individuality of his own life, his own sense of story and the expectations he brings with him - all have a marked effect upon his interpretation. (Benton and Fox 1985,p.16)*

Brice Heath, too, emphasises that the way in which children respond to reading and reading material and the expectations of the role as reader, is determined by their

cultural context, family and community: *'ways of taking from books are as much a part of learned behaviour as are ways of eating, sitting, playing games, and building houses'* (Maybin 1994, p.73). Children's perceptions of the role of reading are closely related to wider cultural habits and expectations: *'children growing up in mainstream communities are expected to develop habits and values which attest to their membership in a 'literate society''* (Maybin 1994, p.74). Through the act of reading, children prove that they are literate. Making use of reading skills also prepares children for educational success, which is conventionally out of grasp of the illiterate child.

The final role of the reader that is here offered is to read successfully, to make good readings:

*the "best" reading would consist in giving oneself up to the most idiomatic aspects of the work while also taking account of historical context, of what is shared* (Derrida, ed. Attridge 1992 p.68)

This view differs a little from that held by the school of thought known as New Historicism which is reflected in recent curriculum changes, which insists upon children demonstrating knowledge of historical context of studied literature to gain high grades in public examinations. Such a way of reading may be regarded as supportive of a conservative agenda, interested in maintaining and reinforcing traditional cultural values. Within schools at least, the New Historicists are right in so far as the way in which texts are read is affected as much by the historical context in which they are read as that in which they are written.

One of the roles of reading within education, it appears, is to fulfil examination requirements and gain pleasing academic grades. A further role of reading, especially

although not exclusively, within education, is to gain greater knowledge and understanding of language. This aspect of reading is explored in the following section of this chapter.

### 1.11 Education, Reading and language

It has already been suggested that one of the roles of reading is to acquire linguistic skills. The language acquired and encountered through reading may have wide reaching effects upon the reader. The Cox Committee (1989) indicated that the role of English within schools was, among other things, to recognise the way in which children learnt language through literature and to prepare students for '*the language demands of adult life*' (Stables 1992, p.2), to ensure that they would be able to understand the different levels of language used within their eventual workplace and to respond appropriately to spoken language. There is more to linguistic capital than the ability to communicate in a work situation, however.

With language acquisition comes empowerment. Reading is a vehicle towards command of language and the associated power: '*those who have an articulate control of language have potentially more control over other people than do those who are perceived to be less articulate*' (Birch, 1989, p.57). Successful use of language is an identifier of cultural capital, which illustrates one of the ways in which reading can contribute to gaining cultural capital. The way in which we use language communicates a great deal about us, and has many uses: to protect as well as achieve. Sartre wrote of language: '*it is our shell and our antennae; it protects us against others and informs us*

*about them, it is a prolongation of our sense, a third eye which is going to look into our neighbour's heart'* (Sartre 1948, translation 1978, p.11).

Much learning can be achieved through reading, not only the learning that is done through reading facts repeatedly to pass exams, but also the learning that helps children develop and to recognise and experience a range of emotions and events. For some, this is the most important reason for teaching children to read. Hewitt (1960), for example, expresses the opinion that the most valuable reading is that which conveys and shares feelings, experiences and general humane aspirations. Through such reading, children learn to relate the experiences of others to oneself. This may not be the recognised primary role of reading from the child's perspective, however, despite being an important role of reading in the eyes of some educationalists. Children read without necessarily being aware of the wider effects of their reading. They may read to excel at school and to gain academic capital. They may read to please teachers who offer them material prescribed by the National Curriculum, for which choices have been carefully made;

*Control of the National Curriculum can lead to control of the way children think. A National Curriculum in English influences attitudes to both class and race. (Cox, 1995, p.23)*

The belief that reading is to be used as a tool, through which ideas and attitudes are embedded, does not recognise the possibility of the value of reading literature as a way of learning literary techniques. The above extract of the Cox report implies that it is the subject matter that is important, not the literary form of presentation. There is, currently, little emphasis upon the literary value of reading. Success within school depends largely upon the ability to read and understand language. Merritt (1971) stresses the emphasis



put upon language within schools, concluding that schools demand that pupils understand printed as well as spoken language, recognising meaning within it. Understanding language is essential to a successful school pupil. One of the roles of reading may be to support language comprehension.

The close connection between language development and reading was recognised in the Bullock report in which '*a major theme of the report is the importance of conceiving the reading curriculum as an interwoven part of the total language curriculum*' (Marlow 1977, p.19).

During the 1970s, much reading theory focussed upon the ways in which children '*drew upon their oral language skills*' (Dickinson 1994, p.2) when faced with written text. The theories developed to recognise that through reading children also developed further knowledge of language which could be applied to both oral and written communication. Reading material introduces children to varieties of language from informative to dramatic fiction. Few educationalists would argue with the significance of exposing children to different forms of language through reading and some, indeed, would argue that it is essential:

*The most important single lesson that children learn from texts is the nature and variety of written discourse, the different ways that language lets a writer tell, and the many and different ways a reader reads.* (Meek 1988, p.89)

One reason why language development through reading is recognised as being so important is that while children rapidly familiarise themselves with different types of oral language, it is not as readily expected or practised that written language forms may (and should) also vary, as Littlefair (Chapman 1987; Littlefaire 1991) highlights the

speed with which children realise that language used within the playground differs from that used within classrooms. Meek points out that this recognition of different linguistic registers does not happen in isolation from other experiences, claiming that it is through reading that children learn and accept that different registers are used in different contexts:

*[...] As they read more complex storybooks they meet language which is increasingly removed from their everyday spoken language. As children begin to read more advanced explanations and descriptions they meet increasingly decontextualised language. (Meek 1988, pp.87-88)*

In order to develop linguistically, children must read. Through reading children learn one aspect of communication. Through reading they may become more aware of language and become more able to control language in both written and oral communication (Ninio and Bruner 1978 p.217)

The cultural, social and academic significance of language is illustrated in Bernstein's early work in which the relationship between social structures, as reflected in language and educational achievement, is explored. Bernstein simplified types of language associated with social class through codification, talking of Restricted and Elaborated Codes. The Restricted Code represents a predictable, simplistic form of speech while the Elaborated Code represents more complex, analytical and unpredictable speech. He also identified children with Restricted Code as sometimes more imaginative and less self-conscious than children with Elaborated Code. Although Bernstein later dropped this coding practice, the idea remains of interest. The former code is more commonly connected to lower social class and the elaborated to the higher classes although neither code is mutually exclusive to either social class:

*access to the codes is broadly related to social class - that is, there is a relationship between the working class, positional family and the restricted code; between the middle class, person-orientated families and the elaborated code (Reid 1978,p.184)*

and

*Language, however, is not simply a vehicle for thought. Besides a vocabulary more or less rich, it provides a syntax - in other words, a system of categories, more or less complex. The ability to decode and to manipulate complex structures logical or aesthetic would appear to depend directly on the complexity of the language first spoken in the family environment, which always passes on some of its features to the language acquired at school. (Bourdieu, Passeron & de St. Martin 1994, p.40)*

One of the ways in which children develop their linguistic skills is through reading. Children, as well as teachers, are aware of this particular role of reading, as the data analysis of the case study in chapter 6 confirms. The linguistic development is consequential to their habitus. In the same way in which historical and cultural context determines the way in which a reader understands a text, the social context of a conversation determines the way in which the speakers understand each other: all aspects of communication through language depend upon shared understanding, gained through a combination of experience, cultural heritage and academic teaching. This is illustrated by the way in which children from one class or area with a strong dialect or accent cannot immediately understand children from another class or area of dialect or accent, even though both may be speaking the same language. It is also evident in problems of communication between generations, as younger generations with little

cultural or economic capital are prone to using vocabulary in a contrasting way to that of older generations, especially those who have cultural and economic capital. For example, the word 'wicked' does not have the traditional meaning of particularly bad or naughty of the previous generation, when used by a twelve year old today, but means 'really good'. Many similar examples can be found to support the belief that '*words most commonly used to express tastes often receive different, sometimes opposite, meanings from one social class to another*' (Bourdieu 2002, p.40). Language can only communicate meaning successfully if both the speaker and the listener understand that a meaning is intended. Bourdieu is useful in explaining the significance of context to comprehension of language. He explains that:

*Each recipient helps to produce the message which he perceives and appreciates by bringing to it everything that makes up his singular and collective experience [...] Connotation refers to the singularity of individual experiences [...] it is constituted in a socially characterized relation to which the recipients bring the diversity of their instruments of symbolic appropriation* (2002,p.39)

Language, whether oral or written, is understood by the recipient according to the temporal and spatial context in which it is received. Here, context includes both social position and history. A child accustomed to language of high cultural capital will understand that language and, in time, use that language in a position of authority. A child unaccustomed to such language may not understand the language, be unable to assimilate its meaning and become unable to use it, using instead language of subordination. Thus, a vicious or virtuous circle appears to emerge regarding the role of language and, implicitly, the role of reading. This supposition leads quite directly to the following question: to what extent does the role of reading contribute to the reproduction of social class? This is a question to which an answer is sought in the later

stages of this thesis. Before attempting to answer it, however, it is worth examining Bourdieu's theories on language, and especially the way in which language is used within schools, in more depth. This is useful because it will clarify an approach taken to language within the thesis and reinforce the close relationship between the role of reading and the role of language. If it is indeed true that language *'is no doubt the principal support of the dream of absolute power'* (Bourdieu, 2002, p.42), then surely one of the roles of reading is to facilitate that support.

Bourdieu is interested in the linguistic inheritance of the social class of a family; he does not codify the types of language connected with a class, as Bernstein does, but in his discussion of the unfair advantage given to those born into a class able to use language effectively, he differentiates in the same way:

*language is the most important part of the cultural heritage because as syntax, it provides a system of transposable mental postures which themselves completely reflect and dominate the whole of experience [...] Apart from lexis and a syntax, each individual inherits from his milieu a certain attitude towards words and their use [...] the hierarchy of intellectual values which gives the impressive manipulators of words and ideas a higher rank than the humble servants of techniques* (Bourdieu 1966 ed. Eggleston 1974, p.40)

Using the terms of both sociologists clarifies the importance of language and its effect upon social and financial progression:

Teachers and educators usually use one code

Lower class children usually use another code

It therefore follows that:

Lower class children will have problems understanding and responding to teachers (as their codes do not match). If they do not understand their teachers, they cannot learn from them and are subsequently denied access to elaborated code which, in turn, would allow them to gain academic and social capital. Such positions make clear the ease with which social and academic capital circulates according to the spoken code of each generation of children and teachers.

Bourdieu differs from Bernstein, however, as for Bourdieu (as will be seen repeatedly throughout this thesis), behavioural characteristics and norms, including use of language, cannot be understood in isolation of context. Bourdieu criticises Bernstein for not relating his linguistic theory to *'the social conditions of its production and reproduction, or even, as one might expect from the sociology of education, to its academic conditions'* (Bourdieu 2002, p.53). He goes on to explain the need for contextual consideration further:

*One cannot fully account for the properties and social effects of the legitimate language unless one takes account, not only of the social conditions of the production of literary language and its grammar, but also of the social conditions in which this scholarly code is imposed and inculcated as the principle of the production and evaluation of speech. (ibid. p.61)*

During the research which follows, academic and social context are both acknowledged and considered in reference to the role of reading.

Language, learnt in part through reading, is more than a description of an instrument of communication. It is also a determining factor of social and political power. Amongst young students, those who are most adept in the manipulation of language have the best

chance of succeeding academically, and of being leaders rather than followers within their peer groups. The children who are most exposed to written language, which illustrates sophisticated manipulation and varied vocabulary, are likely to be most successful at emulating the language of the dominant class. This leads quite naturally to a question within this research; are those who read more widely (and more traditionally conceived challenging books), more able to be articulate? This will be discussed with reference to the case studies in chapter 6. To use Bourdieu's terminology, the greater the linguistic capital, the greater the chances of gaining further academic and cultural capital.

It is Bourdieu's premise that one of the roles of educational institutions is to ensure the continuance of a linguistic community, defined by Bloomfield as '*a group of people who use the same system of linguistic signs*' (1958, p.29).

In schools, reading is one of the mechanisms through which specific types of language are taught. Teachers choose (often, but not always, guided by a prescribed syllabus, as discussed above) to direct young students to read texts which are usually written in standardised, socially acceptable, language. Through school texts, young students learn to recognise and accept a type of language which should be used in written (especially formal) communication, as well as oral. The acceptable language which identifies members of a society with each other, and that ensures that codes of behaviour are understood, is referred to by Bourdieu as the '*single linguistic community*' (Bourdieu 2002, p.46). Shared reading of texts, or class readers, exposes classes to a shared ideal language. One of the roles of reading within schools might then be described as to assist in the unifying of language through illustrating language in a purified form. It is, of

course, not only language which is being passed on to school children through reading, but also accepted norms of morality and culture. The role of reading as administrator of morality and cultural norms is discussed in depth in a later section of this chapter, in sections 1.13 and 1.14. The sharing of a language is an essential part of maintaining social order and governance. One of the responsibilities of the teacher, according to Bourdieu, is to inculcate the mastery of a regulatory language. The following quotation reflects Bourdieu's understanding of the role of the teacher in France; with the exception of 'patois', this description could be applied equally well to teachers in England:

*By virtue of his function, works daily on the faculty of expression of every idea and every emotion: on language. In teaching the same clear, fixed language to children who know it only vaguely or who even speak various dialects or patois, he is already inclining them quite naturally to see and feel things in the same way; and he works to build the common consciousness of the nation*

(Bourdieu 2002, p.49)

This theory leads to an important question concerning the role of reading within educational institutions. If it is accepted that one of the roles of reading is to develop the acquisition of language (and a particular type of language at that, as is discussed in more depth below), it may be that a role of reading is to implement the social values implied through the language being read. As has already been said, the way in which reading has been used as a means of teaching morals and culture, will be discussed towards the end of this chapter. The way in which such a theory might be applied to the role of reading by young students in the current climate will be explored in later chapters.



This language taught in schools and through many texts, is the one used on all formal occasions and can thus be seen as the '*state language*' (Bourdieu 2002, p.45). The role of the teacher in imposing this language as the accepted linguistic norm is great. Teachers, Bourdieu claims:

*Are empowered universally to subject the linguistic performance of speaking subjects to examination and to the legal sanction of academic qualification*  
(ibid)

There is an implication that written, standard language is correct and therefore that conversational or colloquial language is inferior. Colloquial language, or slang, is devalued in schools. Consistent use of slang in written examination is not rewarded, and passages presented to test reading skills are unlikely to use such language. Language may be closely related to the cultural and academic capital of its user, and this may be true of both spoken and written language. How easily each type of language is used or understood depends upon familiarity with that language, gained through the family or education. For some children, the language of the school may be unfamiliar to them. If they cannot adapt to the language used within the school they are likely to be exposed to it less than those who can do so easily, and in turn, have less chance of mastering that language. It seems logical that children who regularly speak and write with one type of language will also be most comfortable reading that type of language. Reading choices, in this sense, may reflect a child's preferred style of language and imply the amount of cultural capital held. It is a part of the National Curriculum that children be taught to recognise dialect in some speaking and listening activities, and reading within their understanding of language. The National Curriculum advises teachers to encourage pupils to use 'appropriate' language for the context and tasks, thus placing the responsibility for the determination of what constitutes appropriate language with the

teachers. Encouraging use of dialect in written work is not a part of the National Curriculum, however, and examination boards reward use of standard English. Schools acknowledge (and indeed teach) different types of language, but not without prejudice. Different types of language are placed in a hierarchy from those acceptable within positions of power, to those which are not. Bourdieu explains why this is important:

*The position which the education system gives to the different languages (or different cultural contents) is such an important issue only because this institution has the monopoly in the large-scale production of producers/consumers, and therefore in the reproduction of the market without which the social value of the linguistic competence, its capacity to function as linguistic capital, would cease to exist. (Bourdieu, 2002, p.57)*

Those who can neither speak nor read the *state* language with comprehension cannot succeed academically, as a result of which further academic and cultural capital may become inaccessible to them. The language of the ruling classes may be inherited with other aspects of cultural capital, or learnt through education. It is, Bourdieu asserts, within schools that the linguistic norm is learnt. As linguistics are taught in schools partly through reading, it follows that a role of reading must be to teach the linguistic norm of which Bourdieu speaks (2002, p.53).

This history of the rise of education and literacy in the late twentieth century reflects the growing emphasis placed on literacy and the essential role played by reading. It reflects this role as being instrumental. It does not suggest other potential roles of reading, which have been clear in history, for example, as a conveyor of morality or cultural heritage. Nor does this section allude to the role of reading as a mechanism for creating people who are literary. It is important to recognise that these are different ways of

looking at reading. The second half of this chapter is committed to discussing these potential roles of reading in the following order: to create literary people, to convey culture and morality.

### 1.12 Being literate and being literary

No tables reflecting the number of people who can be described as literary at any stage of history exist. The introduction of the National Curriculum may be seen as an attempt to ensure that all Key Stage 3 children are at least introduced to the works of Shakespeare and other pre twentieth century authors and literature. This is re-enforced through tests with a focus on comprehension of selected scenes of a Shakespearean play. The main concern within English is no longer (if indeed it ever was) to develop literary appreciation or *'the enhancement of the individual's intellectual powers'* (Kelly, 1990, p.47). Students must be literate, that is to say: they must be able to read and write in ways which will be commercially useful. This is a trend which has ebbed and flowed as any other. Towards the end of the nineteenth century some educationalists felt that the lack of literary culture in the lives of some children (who were literate) was a grave problem. As Seeley wrote in 1870:

*In his own home perhaps he [a school boy of a middle or lower class] sees no books at all, or feeds only on monstrous romances, or becomes prematurely wise and rancorous and cynical by perpetual reading of newspapers. I am pleading for a class which have no intellectual atmosphere around them; in the conversation to which they listen there is no light or air for the soul's growth; it is a uniform gloomy element of joyless labour, bewildering detail, broken with scarcely a gleam of purpose or principles. (Altick 1957, p.183)*

One consequence of the growth in literacy is that no longer can it be assumed that the majority of those who are literate are also literary. 'Literary' is used here and throughout the thesis, in the nineteenth century sense of the word, reflecting aesthetic appreciation. The political, economic and global implications of a literate society are clear and are at the heart of educational policies and understood by the masses; no such political clarity or national emphasis has been put upon the need to be literary.

With the implementation of regular testing and assessments came the lament that the opportunity to teach for the sake of imparting knowledge was lost forever. An implication of the 1988 Education Act for many teachers was that children must be taught to be literate and to pass exams reflecting levels of literacy.

*Thus we must note the loss, if not the positive rejection, of the notion that education may be, perhaps should be, concerned with study for study's sake, with the pursuit of knowledge whose value may be claimed to be in some way intrinsic, that, for example, the main concern of the study of English might be to develop literary appreciation - coupled with that enhancement of the individual's intellectual powers and capacities which language development can bring - rather than to ease commercial transactions or ensure quality of business correspondence. (Kelly, 1990, p.47)*

It is now expected in England and Wales that children will be taught to read; indeed, reading is an important aspect of the national curriculum (of which more will be said later), and an activity upon which the teaching of most disciplines depends. The

children who identify learning and enjoyment as being among reasons for reading are surely not wrong, but there are other reasons too with other implications, of which a young child would not be expected to be aware.

Whether or not a child becomes ‘ literary’ is not only a result of national educational policies. It may be a result of the cultural capital held by the family, as discussed earlier, it may also, however, be a result of the child’s sense of self and search for identity. If a twelve year old wants to be friends with other twelve year olds who appear literary, that twelve year old may also want to appear literary and read accordingly. The idea that one role of reading is to form self identity is raised here, and returned to in later chapters. Harré (1994) is useful in explaining such searches for self and is discussed in more depth in Chapter 7.

Barton (1994) suggests that the way in which students are taught to develop critical appreciation of literature which is widely considered to be literary, has a negative effect upon the maturing reader, who is taught to accept and be passive about the greatness of some writers and the canon of books, mutely assuming that any cultured person will, and should, have knowledge of the literary works and is so given the impression that:

*culture is a small club with members quipping Shakespeare quips to each other*

(p.169)

It is a club which some (who are literary) may join and others (who are merely literate) may not. Barton explains that there are two aspects of literacy:

*the skills discourse of learning to read and write and the literary discourse associated with an elite view of literature* (p.161)

The distinction between the literary and the literate is, in our culture, a decisive one with potential long lasting effects for children becoming one or the other at an early age. As Barton points out:

*literacies are not equally valued. They vary in what purposes and whose purposes they serve [...] Literacies are identified culturally as such. Different literacies are associated with different domains of life* (p.39)

Another contemporary assumption connected with reading and reading literature is that it will be done through use of a book. The book itself is an artefact historically associated with higher social class and cultural capital; through examination of the history of the book the reading heritage of children is discernible, as is the close connection between books, culture and social capital. National literacy is clearly of paramount importance to the economy, which is why the New Labour government '*launched a crusade for higher school standards, backed by the toughest targets and largest resources in the history of the education system*' (Blair, 1998, p.11). The word *creativity* is interesting in this context as it seems to acknowledge the arts; acknowledging perhaps that the literary has a role to play, as much as literacy. Whether the word is a deliberate acknowledgment of this kind or not, the fact that reading is regarded as an essential skill to be acquired by all children is clear. Everyone has a literacy heritage (literate or illiterate) with their cultural identity entrenched in history as family habits of the past continue to influence contemporary choices.

### 1.13 Moral development

In a similar way as the British colonists recognised the way in which reading might be used to cultivate the Indians (Eaglestone 2000), the International Board on Books for Young People hoped that the act of reading could be used to ensure that the youth of the late 1940s would understand and respect cultures other than their own, and could contribute to creating a society that would embrace, rather than fight with, other cultures: *'encouraging children from different nations to read each other's literature would lead to greater understanding between them and so make the possibility of a third world war less likely'* (Reynolds, 1994) . That literature can stand as a lone force which can be used to persuade children to behave in a way which is seen as commendable by the society in which they live, is currently a matter of speculation. There is little empirical evidence to support the claim, yet some continue to believe that some good may come from the practice of reading stories:

*If it seems to be a highly dubious proposition that stories enable us to live well and have the morally efficacious effects that are claimed for them by the Leavisite school, nonetheless, the process of interacting does engage the reader in a form of knowing that can be a force for good. Stories do not help us to live better; they help us to understand living better. (Benton and Fox 1985, p.15)*

Bloom, too, argues against the idea that through reading, we become intrinsically more socially responsible individuals:

*You cannot directly improve anyone else's life by reading better or more deeply. I remain sceptical of the traditional social hope that care for others may be stimulated by the growth of the individual imagination (Bloom 2000, p.22)*

It is inevitable however that *stories* and other forms of literature can only *help us to understand living better* if the text being read is accessible and makes sense to the reader. If the ideas within a story are totally alien to the reader, it seems unlikely that the

story could add to that reader's understanding of anything, let alone of *living better*. If, as was suggested earlier, every reading is unique to the reader, dependent upon the experiences that the reader takes to the text, then it follows that not all readers will take the same message away from a text. Therefore, a text which is assumed to be useful as a means of conveying standards of behaviour to its readers, is unlikely to be read in that way by all who encounter it.

Not only are texts read differently according to the experiences of the reader, they are also read differently according to the expectations of the reader: *'Your reading of any text is strongly affected by what you think it is'* (Freeborn 1986, p.185).

Faith in the power of the written word was perhaps at its strongest following the First World War. It was then that E.M.W. Tillyard and I.A. Richards sought to use literature in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge as a way of restoring a sense of humanity to the world. Their belief in the power and necessity of literature is reflected here; *'England is sick [...] literature must save it. The churches (as I understand having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature has now a triple function: still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our soul and heal our state'* (quoted in Eaglestone, 1983). Coleridge too had recognised in literature a potential power akin to that of religion and saw the role of both as *'the perfecting and the pointing out to us the indefinite improvement of our nature, and fixing our attention upon that'* (Coleridge 1930, pp.111-112 cited by Beck 1996, p.186).



#### 1.14 Reading and Cultural indoctrination:

In the early 1930s Cyril Norwood explained:

*that in his view the primary object of the secondary school curriculum should be to 'inculcate a measure of English culture', whereas 'At present pupils tend to leave school with a very slight knowledge of the history and manners of the country in which they live'. ( Norwood in McCulloch 1994, p.43)*

A dominant aspect of the curriculum through which cultural values and beliefs might be transmitted, is through the guided reading of literature.

A close relationship exists between ideas of culture and reading, as Street points out:

*What it is to be a person, to be moral and to be human in specific cultural contexts is frequently signified by the kind of literacy practices in which a person is engaged. (Street in Maybin, p.141)*

When British colonists wanted Indian people to become more British, or more civilised, they realised that one way in which they might achieve their aim was through teaching the Indians about British culture and morals through the use of certain books. English was taught with the intention of civilising (more accurately Westernising) the native population (Eaglestone, 2000). British Administrators used English literature to control the native Indians. Literature was '*set up as the highest example of empirical reasoning*' and was used as the vehicle to achieve '*the transmission and perpetration of cultural tradition, the argument by which the learned classes had retained their hold over the native population, English literary study had its beginnings as a strategy of*

*containment*' (Viswatham in Maybin 1988, p.228). The politics behind the initial teaching of literature and literary material was very strong:

*the meaning and uses of literacy practices are related to specific cultural contexts; and that these practices are always associated with relations of power and ideology, they are not simply mental technologies* (Street, 1984, 1993, quoted in Maybin p.139)

As their ideas were not unsuccessful, similar policies were adopted on the British mainland in the nineteenth century.

Reading presents the reader with cultural and political ideas, and reflects the way of life or the culture of the audience for whom the material was written. This is reflected in Williams (1958, p.137). By presenting the nineteenth century (and indeed twentieth and now twenty first centuries) with images of a rural England that has passed, with idealistic or even fictitious country perfection and now antiquated ways of living, the reader is reminded of cultural heritage.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the power of literature was fully recognised. It was thought that *'the study of literature would restore a sense of humanity to the world'* (Eaglestone 2000 p.14), and literature was revered with a religious awe; seen as a reflection of the soul (Newbolt, 1921). Nearly a century after The Newbolt Report, the idea that *all should worship*, everyone should read, is an important one that is upheld within educational policies, and reflected in the oft made comment *'I don't read as much as I should'*. We live in a literate society: we *should* read. Through reading, we will gain different benefits, ranging from cultural, academic capital, to knowledge which can be utilised and provide skilled labour. Whatever the purpose or motivation, in

western culture it is assumed that to be able to read is desirable, if not essential to contribute towards and be a useful member of society. For society to function, the individual has to function and vice versa.

The word 'culture' has been used repeatedly in discussions of motives for prescribed reading. It has changed in meaning since the eighteenth century, as summarised here by Williams:

*It came to mean, first 'a general state of habit of the mind', having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean 'the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole'. Third, it came to mean 'the general body of the arts'. Fourth. later in the century, it came to mean 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual'. (1958,p.16)*

When the ruling classes, educationalists and politicians talk of conveying culture through reading, it is a particular type of culture. They do not mean to suggest that low, popular or folk culture should be passed from one generation to the next. It is a word which itself raises questions. As has been discussed already, it is often used to imply the culture of an elite, minority group of society, to suggest the aesthetic and a legacy of taste in the arts and the values characteristic of major public schools, and Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Conversely, as social historians will point out, each class and each generation has an associated culture, as Marwick comments in a discussion of the popular culture that arose in the 1960s:

*The very pace of technological change, the very multiplicity of new inputs, meant the opening of a gulf between the proponents of the new culture and the older generation [...] the new culture was much more widely diffused than any*

*avant garde culture had ever been; and it was not necessarily, anyway, in any sense progressive. But the tension between old and new was undoubtedly there [...] there was an almost un-British vibrance in popular culture, in verbal expression, and in the arts and entertainment, which adds up, as far as anything ever can, to a cultural revolution. (Marwick 1990, p.125-126)*

The word cannot be used in ignorance of the different types and varieties of culture that are prevalent within modern post industrial societies.

A traditional role of reading is as cultural validation. Cultural inheritance is communicated through the written word and accessed and absorbed through reading. Reading connects the reader to the writer and provides the reader with the opportunity to share ideas and beliefs.

Reading is an important means by which to share and convey culture. In 1995 SCAA (Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority) recommended that the English literary heritage could be used to reinforce cultural ideals. It is unlikely that the colonists of the 1800s intended the Indian people to absorb and practise lag (British prisoners sent to Australia, Keneally, 1987) culture of the time, anymore than the Conservative Government of the 1990s or the subsequent New Labour intended to endorse popular , club or drug culture through the English curriculum.

*the national culture which actually emerges is emphatically not a simple continuation of one of these local folk cultures; rather , a successful nationalism `revives, or invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted culture of its own', albeit one which draws selectively on earlier folk styles dialect and other traditions' (Beck 1996, p.175)*

A recognition of the uses of the word culture is essential in the discussion of the ways in which reading is seen as a positive means of ensuring the progression and sustaining of culture.

The type of culture inferred in the above discussions may be referred to as 'high culture'. One definition of high culture is literate culture, but not necessarily a literary one (Gellner, 1983).

*Gellner focuses upon a literate culture primarily as an indispensable means of communication - required first and foremost for the effective functioning and administration of modern, industrial [...] economies and policies. (cited in Beck 1996, p.174)*

This understanding of culture has none of the concepts of traditional values and heritage associated with the conservative use of the word. In Gellner's understanding of culture, to be literate is essential to succeed within modern culture. This is not the same as to be literary, which is necessary to succeed within the sections of society in which cultural capital is appreciated. Scruton characterises high culture as the aspects of society 'in which aesthetic values are paramount' (1987, p.127) which Beck refers to as 'probably its most common usage' (1996, p.192). Beck goes on to give a further definition of high culture:

*where 'high' is understood as embracing the whole of that intellectual culture which had its origins primarily, though by no means exclusively, in Europe, but which is increasingly global in its sources and influence' (1996, p.194)*

Scruton defines culture as 'a pattern of social unity' (1987, p.132). According to Scruton, 'Culture is, for him, above all else the key and indispensable source of social

*unity*' (Beck 1996, p.188). According to this view, cultural traditions need to be preserved and transmitted from each generation and values and beliefs shared for cultural survival.

In 1995, when Dr Nick Tate was Chief Executive of the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority in England, his use of the word 'culture' and implications of its meaning caused considerable controversy:

*the teaching of the majority culture, with the emphasis on the English language, English history and literary heritage, and the study of Christianity and the classical world [were] at the heart of our common culture and our national identity. (Tate, The Guardian 1995 p.12)*

Such statements, it can be argued, attempt to assert the superiority of traditional English culture above others and ignore the needs of people of other cultures to learn of their cultural heritage and history, expressing a nationalist pride combined with intellectual snobbery and ignorance. The suggestion is that if educational institutions do not successfully indoctrinate their students with shared values, beliefs and understanding of heritage, of culture, the country's social stability is at risk. Such policies are common world wide, and it is common to use school curricula to promote national cultural values and beliefs. It happens in Norway and it happens in the United States of America (Marum, 1996). Five years earlier the sociologist John Thompson pointed out that such beliefs were highly questionable;

*There is little evidence to suggest that certain values and beliefs are shared by all (or even most) members of modern industrial societies. Moreover, there is little reason to suppose that the stability of complex industrial societies*

*requires or depends upon a consensus concerning particular values or norms.*

(Thomson 1990, p.8)

Dr Tate's views are certainly problematic within the multi cultural and globally aware England of the twenty first century. It is inevitable that some children will not have prior knowledge, or understanding, of English history or literature, and for these children such a nationally prescribed curriculum might cause exclusion rather than integration, which could itself ultimately be damaging to the fabric of society.

Many writers have concerned themselves with defining culture, including Arnold and later T.S.Eliot in Notes Towards the Definition of Culture (1948). Arnold and Eliot may both be regarded as symbolic of influential schools of thought regarding culture, literacy and society at specific periods in time.

Arnold's notions of culture are centred in aesthetics and beauty: '*culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred; culture has one great passion; the passion for sweetness and light*' (ed. Allmott 1991, p.215). Arnold held an idealistic view of the role of culture, which would overcome class boundaries:

*It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this of that sect of its own, with ready-made judgements and watch-words. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light; where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, - nourished, and not bound by them [...] the men of culture are the true apostle of equality* (1991 Allmott, p.216)

This description of culture and what it should do is in keeping with liberal humanist ideals.

According to Eliot, *'Culture may be described simply as that which makes life worth living'* (p.27). Eliot's ideas of culture are value laden and judgmental. He also points out, however that culture cannot be characterised by a single element. Culture is a combination of many qualities:

*People are always ready to consider themselves persons of culture, on the strength of one proficiency, when they are not only lacking in others, but are blind to those they lack. An artist of any kind, even a very great artist, is not for this reason alone a man of culture* (p.23)

Having impressive knowledge of the Western Canon is insufficient to claim culture, therefore, although it does provide an amount of recognisable cultural capital.

Eliot recognised that the transmission of culture was an aim of education: *'it attempts to pass on to them its culture, including the standards by which it would have them live'* (p.96). Eliot was wary of the idea that education could be used to have beneficial effects upon the continuation of culture and its desirable progression, and was clearly unconvinced that education could in fact foster culture: *'we know, that whether education can foster and improve culture or not, it can surely adulterate and degrade it'* (p.108). He pointed out that there is more than one definition of culture, emphasising that we can *'distinguish between higher and lower cultures'* (p.18), and saw the dangers of ignoring the lower culture, which plays as important a role in society as higher culture;

*To treat the 'uneducated' mass of the population as we might treat some*



*innocent tribe of savages to whom we are impelled to deliver the true faith, is to encourage them to neglect or despise that culture which they should possess and from which the more conscious part of culture draws vitality [...] it is an essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority, that it should continue to be a minority culture (pp.106-107)*

Eliot believed in the inevitability of the existence of an elite minority culture. He did not feel that a minority elite culture was a negative aspect of a society, unlike Bourdieu who believed that the idea of a minority culture is exclusive; it excludes those who are not in possession of it and is therefore divisive within societies. Bourdieu deplores the way in which educational establishments applaud minority elite culture, failing to recognise the value of any culture other than that belonging traditionally to academic institutes. Both Eliot and Bourdieu acknowledge that such a divide, caused by, or illustrated by cultural practices, exists within modern societies. While Eliot admired the notion of minority culture, believing a divide between cultures to be a good thing, Bourdieu sees such divides as regrettable, negative and damaging. Eliot held a pessimistic view of culture in the post war years, stating that:

*We can assert with some confidence that our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago; and that the evidence of this decline are visible in every department of human activity (p.19)*

He did not see use of literature as a prime source for bequeathing culture to younger generations (*culture is the one thing that we cannot deliberately arrive at (p.19)*); clarifying instead the idea that one is born into a specified culture, which can not be inherently undermined:

*The primary channel of transmission of culture is the family: no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment (P.43)*

This conclusion is discussed again later in a later chapter.

Eliot asserts that culture and religion can serve similar functions within society. However, the idea that any aspect of culture or education can fill a void left by the absence of religious faith is a mistake: according to Eliot '*no culture can appear or develop except in relation to a religion*' (p.27).

Gellner, writing decades after Eliot, makes clear that cultural beliefs and shared systems are an inescapable part of each individual:

*Anyone who observes, investigates or interprets the world, inevitably deploys concepts which are carried by an entire culture/linguistic community*  
(1998, p.6)

He holds the position that it is possible to move from one culture to another:

*Cultures are not terminal. The possibility of transcendence of cultural limits is a fact; it is the single most important fact about human life* (1998, p.187)

An individual might gain an amount of cultural capital, for example, and thus become an active part of a culture different from the one into which that individual was born. One contributing factor to such a move might be becoming more literary than is common within the original cultural group.

While it may remain true that one aspect of language and communication is the continuance and shared development of cultures, it is also an aspect of expression of individuality and sense of self:

*Digital language is both integrating globally the production and distribution of words, sounds and images of our culture, and customising them to the tastes of identities and moods of individuals* (Castells, 1996, p.2)

Many contemporary sociologists doubt the survival of traditional cultural values within western societies. Castells argues convincingly that while technology has made inter-cultural and global communication accessible, it has also played a part in decreasing the strength of national institutions and social movements, with the result that societies are increasingly full of individuals who have the barest conception of their cultural or social place, and are searching for identities. With the growth of globalization comes the blurring of national culture and religious beliefs, the loss of which causes the desire of societies to possess definable identities:

*In a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning. This is not a new trend, since identity, and particularly religious and ethnic identity, have been at the roots of meaning since the dawn of human society.* (Castells, 1996, p.3)

So lacking are we in shared identities and beliefs in the 21st century that there is within societies now to some extent '*the acceptance of full individualisation of behaviour; and of society's powerlessness over its destiny*'. (Castells, 1996, p.40). In the search for new identities (including collective) in the global context, some are actually highly retrospective (for example, Islamic fundamentalism).

Beck also discusses the role of, and search for, individualism at some length, although he stresses more fervently the need for the individual to make singular choices and decisions, and to take control of their lives, in reaction to the failure of their culture to provide a clear pathway:

*Status- based social milieus and lifestyles typical of a class culture lose their lustre. The tendency is towards the emergence of individualised forms and conditions of existence, which compel people - for the sake of their own material survival - to make themselves the centre of their own planning and conduct of life. Increasingly, everyone has to choose between different options, including as to which group or subculture one wants to be identified with. In fact one has to choose and change one's social identity as well* (1992, p.88)

Beck regrets what he sees as modern trends to turn away from cultural heritage in the search for individuality: *'Among the negative effects of individualisation processes are the separation of the individual from traditional support networks'* (1992, p.93). This shows that Beck's idea of cultural heritage differs from those discussed within the previous pages. Beck, however, recognises some of the benefits of progressing from social conventions as well: *'People are being removed from the constraints of gender, from quasi-feudal attributes and givens'* (1992, p.105).

For Beck, this is a critical period in which people can be free of social class and expectations. He cites education as one of the processes through which people begin to make choices which will determine their later life experiences:

*Schooling means choosing and planning one's own educational life course. The*

*educated person becomes the producer of his or her own labour situation, and in this way, of his or her social biography. As schooling increases in duration, tradition orientations, ways of thinking, and lifestyles are recast and displayed by universalistic forms of knowledge and language. (1992, p.93)*

It is likely that decisions made before schooling begins will affect the educating process, which will, in turn, determine the later labour situation, rather than merely the individual choice of the child, although choices can exist, even within constraints. However, if the role of reading is to preserve cultural identity, it would seem, according to Beck, that it is failing in that role.

Summary of key themes identified in chapter one.

I have argued in this chapter that the role of reading is various and that it has developed over a period of time. I have indicated that the role of reading is a consequence of the social and political context of the reader. The role of reading varies within that context, depending upon the cultural and economic capital inherited by the reader. I have also indicated that the role of reading may be to equip a young reader with linguistic abilities and cultural knowledge. This chapter identifies specific questions concerned with the role of reading.

The role of reading, and hence the role of the reader, as this chapter suggests, changes according to context, as do notions of readership, and how one should read have developed into schools of literary theory and criticism. An understanding of these concepts, as well as what is understood by literature, is useful to gaining further understanding of the possible roles of reading that are to be explored through the case

studies. It is for this reason that the next chapter is concerned with attempts to define literature and an overview of different ways of approaching it and its role.

## Chapter 2

### Notions of literature and how to read it

#### Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the development of literacy and the different roles played by reading through that development. It indicated that the role of reading has become increasingly important, and that reading now plays a large role in the lives of the majority, including school children. As literacy grew, so did understandings of the different ways in which it is possible to read. Some of these ideas have developed into literary criticism. One function of literary criticism is to suggest ways in which written texts might be read, understood and interpreted. These vary according to the context of the critic and may reflect the ways in which the role of reading varies according to the context of the reader.

Any discussion of the role of reading may include references to literature. It is for this reason that a discussion of what is meant by the word 'literature' is relevant, before the presentation of the research data and its analysis. The first part of this second chapter is concerned with various interpretations of the word 'literature' when used by adults. This will be followed by an exploration of the different ways of theorising literature in English, which have developed during the last century and a half. Ways in which people read and interpret a text are clearly related to perceptions of the role of reading. It is with this idea that the chapter is concluded.

## 2.1 What is literature?

Before attempting to understand the role of reading, some discussion must concern that which is read. For school children this may be seen as falling into two categories that might be regarded as 'literature', and 'not literature'. An understanding of what literature is, will also lead to an understanding of what it is not. A common perception of children of the role of reading, is that it is to teach them English (this is illustrated in chapter 5). It is not particularly uncommon for children, though also for some adults, to regard books, especially fiction, as being literature, and other forms of writing (leaflets, brochures) as being not literature. The issue is not as simple as that. This is demonstrated by the belief, expressed by Q.D. Leavis, which many people today would find so contradictory, that novels are not literature (2000, pp.132-136). The bulk of the English curriculum in England and Wales is taught through literature, referring to poetry, drama and prose. If consideration is to be given to the concept that a role of reading is to learn 'literature', an understanding of what constitutes literature is necessary. Many reading adults have attempted to define literature, as the following overview illustrates.

*It is easier to understand literature not as something that can be defined, but as something that overflows or escapes from any attempt to limit it or put it in a box. As you try to give it a definite meaning, literature slips through your fingers like water. (Eaglestone 1983, p.50)*

As both Culler (1981) and Barthes (1972) point out at some length, no complete or definitive histories of literature have been written; *'We have only fragmentary or*



*anecdotal histories of literatures*' (Cullner 1981, p.6) and *'the history of literature as a signifying system has never been written; for a long time, we have written the history of genres [...] we have not yet written the history of literature's being'* (Barthes 1972, pp.153-268). This is clearly not, therefore, an attempt to rectify the omission of historians through writing a complete history of literature, but is rather intended as an indication of the different understandings of literature that have been held, and maintained, within western civilisation. The following does not offer a singular answer to the questions which critics (Sartre 1949, Eliot 1933) and theorists (Cullner 1997) have asked and pondered. What is offered instead is a number of different responses to the question, highlighting its complexity as much as suggesting responses.

The meaning of literature and its perceived value has an interesting and complex history. For Plato (c. 427 - 348 B.C.) literature was a poor imitation of life, little more than a copy of a copy:

*The poet's representation or imitation of our world is thus a representation of what is itself an inadequate and ephemeral representation of the truly real. Literature stands in other words, not at one remove from reality, but two removes* (Blamires, 1991, p.6).

Plato was suspicious of imaginative writing which he believed to have harmful properties, as it presented images of life which were not real. He made every effort to control the reading matter of the young elite in his care and stressed that *'Poetry is not a vehicle of learning but of inspiration'* (Blamires 1991, p.4). Plato saw no direct educational value in poetry and certainly did not use it as a tool through which his students might develop any profound understanding of life. Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C.),

similarly, did not use literature as an educational device, although (unlike Plato) he saw in imaginative literature an '*accessibility to universal truth*' (Blamires 1991, p.11). Plato's view that only mathematics and philosophy could give true insight into life remains, arguably, the dominant view within education in liberal and humanistic societies. Literature and aesthetics have traditionally been perceived as less significant than skills based writing, and arguably continue to be so. Policy makers appear to value science and mathematics above aspects of literature, poetry especially, believing literature to be less rational and less mentally taxing. (A counter argument to the idea that science is more valuable than the arts is presented in Stables, 2002.)

The meaning of the word 'literature' had changed from its meaning in ancient Greece, by the fourteenth century. Then, it referred to a knowledge of books. Such a development is inevitable. When the word was first used, there was not such a plethora of diverse types of reading material demanding the use of different words to indicate different types of qualities of writing. This was still true in the nineteenth century, when literature certainly included writing that is now categorised more precisely as biology, geology, physics, philosophy etc. During the nineteenth century, a large output of reference books and dictionaries gave the firm impression that the essential qualities of literature were universally shared: '*they always imply a static conception of literature*' (Wellek 1983, p.142). The most common understanding of literature at this time was that it was a reflection of the spirit and moral thinking of the nation, when it was produced. Morley (1822-94) defined literature as '*an embodiment of the religious life of England*' (Wellek 1965, p.144), a sentiment reflected to some extent by Arnold in his belief that a function of literature was to educate mankind in truth, morality and beauty: '*most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by*

*poetry*' (quoted in Wellek 1983 p.156). Arnold expressed the belief that poetry would be the salvation of humanity, in an increasingly technological and godless age.

During these centuries, not only did the meaning of the word change, but also social connotations of the word 'literature', and those who indulged in it. Notions of readership and the role of reading were beginning to develop, as was indicated in the history of the book, in chapter 1. During the later sixteenth century, for example, the Puritans declared that literature, especially poetry and drama, was a catalyst for moral degradation. Controversy over the moral qualities, or otherwise, of literature was rife, provoking defences of poetry such as that of Thomas Lodge (1558 - 1625):

*I reson not that al poets are holy, but I affirm that poetry is a heavenly gift, a perfect gift, then which I know not greater pleasure* (Apology for Poetry, 1579)

and Sir Philip Sidney:

*Poore poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing-stock of children.* (Defense of Poetry, 1595)

This puritanical view suggests that one of the roles of reading was to encounter impure images and thoughts. It is interesting that this particular form of literature, poetry, has aroused such contrasting and strong reactions from readers and those concerned with the morality of society. During the next century, poetry was being hailed as the form of communication most divine, by men such as Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson, who argued that only men of high and beautiful morality could write successful poetry:

*For if men will impartially, and not a-squint, look toward the offices and function of a poet, they will easily conclude to themselves the impossibility, of any man's being the good poet, without first being a good man.* (cited in Blaimires, 1991, p.64)

Such references also indicate the extent to which what is termed poetry has developed during the last four centuries.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, literature has reflected specifically creative, artistic work, or work which reflects thinking (in a non philosophical kind of way), such as biography, essays and journalism. Orwell defined literature in 1957 thus: *'above a quite low level, literature is an attempt to influence the viewpoint of one's contemporaries by recording experience.'* It is more than history books then, it is communication with bias and thought. It is thought provoking, engaging; a mirror of the society and time in which it is produced, presented through a variety of forms. Or, as Eagleton put it: *'Literature, then, we might say, is 'non-pragmatic' discourse: unlike biology textbooks and notes to the milkman it serves no immediate practical purpose'* (1983, pp.7-8), although it is not possible to define literature as *'the definition of literature [is left] up to how somebody decides to read, not to the nature of what is written'* (ibid).

It is during the twentieth century that discussions of literature have moved most far away from its content, while schools of thought concerned primarily with its form have evolved. The formalist school of thought, for example, was concerned with the *literariness* of a text; *'the literary devices employed in the work, and should seek a scientific account of the character and function [...] technical devices which differentiate literary language from ordinary utterance'* (Blaimires 1991, p.357). Jakobson developed formalist theories by emphasising the significance of distinguishing *the poetic* from purely linguistic terms, leading to the creation of linguistic criticism.

These theories in turn led to structuralism. A structuralist reading focuses upon the text in terms of the linguistic relations within it.

Barthes (1963) claimed that there was indeed no one way to read literature. The number of possible interpretations of literature are infinite, as it can convey no single meaning, rather a series of signs to be interpreted. Barthes also stresses the role of the reader in literature. Typical of the structuralist approach, Barthes defines literature not through its meaning but through its signifying procedures i.e: writing '*literature [...] derives from the signifying system par excellence, language*' (Barthes 1972, p.152). The ways in which literature has been used to convey cultural practices will be discussed below. For Barthes; literature does not offer answers or solutions to civilisation's problems, but:

*literature today, is reduced to putting questions to the world, whereas the world, being alienated, needs answers [...] Literature is then truth, but the truth of literature is at once its very impotence to answer the world's questions and its power to ask real questions* (Barthes 1972, pp.154-156).

An interesting aspect of the search for the substance of literature reveals so many contrasting ideas; the change from literature being seen as satanic to divine has already been touched upon. Here, Barthes finds in literature a sort of truth, whereas Plato found in it falsehood. Perceptions of literature and hence the role of reading continue to change.

The semiologists' view of literature is as '*not a simple aggregate of discrete words but a conceptual space which can be coherently organised*' Cullner (1981, p.7) explains that the semiotics of literature is based upon two assumptions which can be questioned. The first is that literature should be considered a means of communication and secondly

that since communication takes place, it is possible to identify significance: *'by attempting to describe conventions and semiotic approaches responsible for these interpretations.'* (Cullner 1981, pp.48-49) The form of a piece of writing and way in which it has been crafted are contributory factors in naming it as literature or not. This second assumption is also an aspect of formalist theory. The words used within literature differ, in some way, from the way in which words are used in writing that is not considered literature. An artistic, imaginative or effective use of language may be identified as another element expected in literature, but not necessarily in other forms of writing. Within literature, different genres may also be identified as Fish points out:

*a distinction between prose and poetry, which is actually a distinction between ordinary language and poetic language. Poetry, it is asserted is characterised by a high deviance from normal syntactical and lexical habits*

(Fish 1980, p.30). Freeborn, too, (1986) discusses the importance of the use of language in literature and the way in which it differs from other forms of communication. Freeborn illustrates his point through discussing the perception of The Bible as literature. After revealing ways in which messages within the Bible can be conveyed with equal clarity in different forms of writing, including journalese, Freeborn concludes that *'it is not content that makes a work literary'* (1986, p.183). If it is not content that creates literature, then surely it is form or reader response.

Aristotle believed that literary forms allow a writer to communicate ideas which cannot be communicated in non literary forms. He reflected in ancient Greece that whilst the historian could only express what had happened, the writer of literature would express conceptions of what might happen. Poetry especially, according to Aristotle, is

philosophy and as such more valuable than history which can only convey the particular (Moxon (ed) 1934).

Those who read and recognise literary forms may be literary, whereas non-literary forms, such as historical cataloguing, can be read by anyone who is literate. Conversely, Fish is convinced that literature is such, because it is perceived as literature. This is similar to the way in which modern art is such, because the artist claims it to be art, even though it may not always be recognised as such by the viewing public. The cultural context in which a piece of writing is read is as responsible for it being read as literature as the writing itself. Fish (1980) argues that what is perceived and accepted as literature at any one time and place, may not be considered as such in different historical circumstances. Like Fish, Calvino (1990), recognises the significance of context to what is seen as literature. He asserts that literature reflects the society in which it is written and is the product of different codes and ways of thinking within that society. In his discussion of the political use of literature, Calvino goes on to identify mistakes that are often made in assumptions concerning the use of literature; one of these is the belief that it is the function of literature to convey values and heritage to the reader (or culture as was discussed earlier), claiming that behind such thinking is the misconception that there is:

*a set of established values that literature is responsible for preserving, the classical and immobile idea of literature as the depository of a given truth. If it agrees to take on this role, literature confines itself to a function of consolation, preservation, and regression (ed. Walder 1990, p.9-11)*

For Calvino, literature is more than a mechanism for transporting ideas and ideologies, it is a way of writing in which the form is open to judgement as much as is the content.

Unlike Fish or Calvino, the structuralist Althusser is more concerned with the use of literature than its form, claiming that literature does not only reflect the time in which it was created, but is used by institutions which *'participate in making state power and ideology familiar and acceptable to the state's subjects'* (Branningan 1998, p.6). In Althusser's opinion, as literature reflects values, customs and ideals of those in power over society, it may be seen as a useful tool to coerce the society into agreement. Althusser expands on such an idea, building on Lenin's concept of Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), describing both education and literature as playing dominant roles in the perpetration of class inequality. It is through school, and through literature as used within school, that the state *'drums into them [children] (...) a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology'* (Althusser, 1976, p.29).

As a Marxist, Althusser reads literature as though it is politically charged and influenced by the political, historical and social time in which it is created. As such, literature transcends the ideological limitations of its writer and reveals tensions of its times. A further, post modern theory of reading, which is in contrast to that presented in the work of Althusser, can be found in the writing of Derrida. Derrida, following the line of thought of Barthes, aims to show that all texts inevitably undermine their own claims to a determinate reading, and emphasises the role of the reader in producing meaning. Both Althusser and Derrida are useful as representations of different reading theories which have been influential in the later half of the twentieth century.



Unlike Althusser, Derrida does not focus upon the way in which literature may be manipulated to perpetuate social inequality, but sees it instead as a symbol of individual empowerment and freedom. Derrida claims that:

*What we call literature [...] implies that licence is given to the writer to say everything he wants to or everything he can, while remaining shielded, safe from all censorship, be it religious or political* (ed. Attridge 1992, pp. 36-37)

For Derrida, language always clouds any attempt to define it. One role of reading therefore, may be to learn and embrace the ideals of the writer. True as it is that within literature any ideas/beliefs can be expressed, it is not true that literature is in fact safe from censorship. As even the briefest reference to Nazi Germany will reflect, the writers of literature are certainly not safe, either, from persecution of religious zealots. In the late 1990s, the writer Salman Rushdie was persecuted for his literature. Derrida is aware, however, of historical contingency and refers to literature in a time context, and said that Greek and Roman literature cannot be discussed in the same way as can that of the twentieth century. Derrida's description of literature above is not without problems. Less problematic is a second description of literature, in which Derrida illustrates the complexities of the task of attempting to define the essence of literature:

*No internal criterion can guarantee the essential "literariness" of a text. There is no assured essence or existence of literature. If you proceed to analyse all the elements of a literary work, you will never come across literature itself, only some traits which it shares or borrows, which you can find elsewhere too, in other texts, be it a matter of the language, the meaning of referents [...] And even the convention which allows a community to come to an agreement about the literary status of this or that phenomenon remains precarious, unstable and always subject to revision.* (ed. Attridge 1992 p.73)

The discussion of what is or is not literature began with explaining that it is not something easily definable. The final quotation of Derrida's above, takes us back to the starting point. It also emphasises, however, other points made within this discussion, notably that an understanding of literature is context based, and any perceived role of literature may be seen as equally transient.

There is a possibility that too much faith is being placed in literature and its role, or that readers and students of literature may be in danger of struggling so much to understand the function of literature that they miss a more innocent and more straightforward purpose of the writing, as Eliot wrote in his essay The Modern Mind;

*If in the seventeenth century Moliere or Racine had been asked why he wrote, no doubt he would have been able to find but one answer; that he wrote 'for entertainment of decent people' (1964 p.128).*

As Eliot also goes on to expound, each generation of readers demands something new in their literature and it is quite conceivable that the role of literature changes with the times in which it is read, as does the role of reading.

Having acknowledged the fragile nature of definitions of literature, it is still useful to recognise the current use of the word, in the context in which this work was conducted. A common current use of the word is in relation to the quality of a piece of writing, *'in this sense literature doesn't just mean words on pages, but a certain sort of highly valued and important writing'* (Eagleton 2000, p.51). Such definitions are not entirely satisfactory, however, as Eagleton points out *'by and large people term 'literature' writing which they think is good. An obvious objection to this is that if it*

were entirely true there would be no such thing as 'bad literature' (1983, p.10). It would be possible to argue, for example, that work identified within the canon, is considered as good writing by some and is therefore regarded as literature. Other written works are considered good writing by others, and therefore also deserve to be placed within the literary canon and respected as literature. It is for this reason that the canon cannot be used as a satisfactory example of what literature is as this would suggest that only work reflecting western values could be regarded as literature. There is some irony in the fact that the literature of the canon, knowledge of which is a prerequisite to achieving a level of cultural capital, and which is considered to be some of the greatest work of some of the greatest writers: *'resulted in part from their ear for the language of the ordinary people'* (Beck 1996, p.182). Eagleton dismisses such collections of universally accepted literature as the western canon on the grounds that what constitutes literature is so fluid: *Literature, in the sense of a set of works of assured and unalterable value, distinguished by certain shared inherent properties does not exist'* (1983, p.11). What is considered valuable within literary writing is not necessarily the same from one generation to the next, let alone from one century to the next or between different cultures. As globalisation increases, the ability to define a list of great literary works exclusively from the western canon, becomes increasingly difficult and open to criticism:

*As knowledge and cultural production expands at a rate which it has become fashionable to describe as exponential, the aspiration of laying down a definitive list of essential 'great works' becomes increasingly futile, as well as self-defeating.* (Beck 1996, p.195)

The debate surrounding the defining qualities of literature has raised questions consistently throughout the last century. It is a discussion that is likely to continue, as no definite answer can be reached, especially for post structural theorists such as Derrida, for whom no universal definitive meaning can be given to language, and that is possibly wherein the true interest in asking the question lies:

*If the question of literature obsesses us, and especially this century, or even this half century since the war, and obsesses us in its Sartrian form ("What is literature?") or the more "formalist" but just as essentialist form of "literarity," this is perhaps not because we expect an answer of the type "S is P," "the essence of literature is this or that," but rather because in this century the experience of literature crosses all the "deconstructive" systems shaking the authority and the pertinence of the question "What is...?" and all the associated regimes of essence or truth (Derrida ed. Attridge 1992, p.48)*

Paul de Man (ed. Newton 1982) contributes to the same discussion, asserting that no truth or certainties are to be gained from literature and that literature is not 'a reliable source of information about anything but its own language' (ibid. p.160). Here, de Man counteracts all previous arguments concerning the role of literature suggesting that it has no reliable role, other than to use and reveal language. Paul de Man's reading is more narrow than that of Derrida. If that understanding of literature is followed, the role of reading literature is not to learn about social history or philosophy, but to learn about language.

What is certain is that literature is a type of material which is usually intended to be read, and by the twentieth century the intended reader could be of any class. Once published, a work of literature (as any other type of writing) is available to any literate

member of society, and it is no longer the exclusive right of the upper classes to read and enjoy literature. The categorisation of a piece of writing as literature, however, should not alienate any reader from reading it, as Virginia Woolf wrote in 1940:

*Let us trespass at once. Literature is no one's private ground; Literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves.*

(cited in Lee 2000, p.20)

Paradoxically then, it is transcendent yet potentially open to all. It is inevitable that the search for a definitive understanding of literature will continue and that the role and purpose of literature will continue to evolve. As well as being an interesting debate, it is one which is useful in understanding the role of reading in general which, for some readers, is interwoven with response to literature.

The key themes identified within this section are that what constitutes literature has changed over time, as have reactions to it and readers of it. The role of reading literature relates closely to the definition of literature. The role of reading literature is to access whatever literature is: if literature is a reflection of the cultural norms of society, the role of reading is to access those norms. This reinforces the idea that one of the roles of reading is the indoctrination of culture that was discussed in chapter 1. Reading is not a passive act, however: in accessing ideas conveyed through literature, the reader also plays a role. The following section discusses the role of the reader.

## 2.2 The role of the reader

The role of the reader is closely related to the role of reading. Derrida claimed that '*A reader is not a consumer, a spectator, a visitor, not even a receiver*' (Derrida, ed. Attridge 1992, p.51), so, what is a reader, and what is the role of the reader? Literary criticism reflects the extent to which it is possible to read, and respond to text in a variety of ways (Appendix 1 summarises European development in literary criticism from the nineteenth century). Different perceptions of the role of the reader can be traced back through the centuries, as influential critics such as Coleridge, Hazlitt, Arnold and Richards discuss the aims of criticism and thus the role of the reader. During the late nineteenth century the importance of context, historical, political and cultural, upon a reader was recognised. This is shown in the work of John Morley (1838-1923) who described the aims of criticism as being to:

*trace the relations of the poet's ideas [...] through the central currents of thought, to the visible tendencies of an existing age* (Wellek 1965, p.142)

The role of the reader, then, is to understand the intentions of the author; the author's voice is more important than the context or experiences of the reader.

During the same century Arnold gave a more profound and pure, yet complex in its simplicity, definition of the aim of the critic '*the endeavour [...] to see the object as in itself it really is*'. (Wellek 1965, p.157). The problem of such a seemingly straightforward description is that when discussing literature 'what it really is' is not constant. Richards, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century highlights this problem:

*Talking to one another we assume, nine cases out of ten like the merest simpletons, that our readings agree, and that when we differ in our opinions it is something else, not our experiences but our judgements about them which are at variance* (Richards, 1995 reprint of 1924 p.162).

Not only does each reader apply different experiences to reading, but he/she also reads for different reasons, which will affect his or her understanding or interpretation of a piece. The reasons for reading are discussed in a later section. By the late twentieth century it was accepted that interpretation of the text could vary according to the reader and that indeed, part of the role of the reader was to interpret the text rather than simply draw an accepted meaning from it. Two such theorists are Fish and Eco. A brief discussion of their arguments concerning the role of the reader follows.

Schoolteachers traditionally have employed the method of teaching young readers to 'recognise and then to discount whatever was unique and personal in their response' (Fish 1980, p.7). In this way pupils are taught that their primary role as readers is to recognise a given and widely understood meaning within a text, to read in a way that conforms to the expectations of older readers. Fish objects to such formalist assumptions 'that the reader's job is to extract the meanings that formal patterns possess prior to, and independently of, his activities' preferring instead to adhere to the concept that it is the reader and not the text that contains the power of interpretation and meaning. He argues towards freeing the reader 'from the tyranny of the text' (Fish 1980, pp.7-8). For Fish, the role of the reader is to make literature through reading, through interpreting and through responding to written material with the knowledge and assumptions of society :

*the reader is identified not as a free agent, making literature in any old way, but as a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature 'he' makes* (1980, p.11)

It follows that one aspect, at least, of the role of the reader is to perpetuate an understanding of what literature is through a given communal expectation of what it will be seen to be. This will of necessity vary with context. Although the reader may be freed from the 'tyranny of the text', the reader cannot be freed from 'a matrix of political, cultural, and literary determinants' (Fish 1980, p.49) which contribute towards the reader's expectations and understanding of the role of reading, prior to any engagement with reading material. It is such reasons that make it possible to assert that '*literature is a kinetic art*' (Fish 1980,p.43).

More recent is an attempt to differentiate between the *real* reader and the *implied* reader: '*The real reader is any person who reads the text, but the implied reader is an idealised figure which the text anticipates or constructs*' (Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss & Mills, 1992 p.223). This moves the emphasis to make meaning towards the text itself and assumes that an amount of shared prior knowledge already exists between the text and the reader, as discussed in the previous section. In this case, the role of the reader is essentially to receive the text. The role of the reader is to make meaning from the text: '*the reader shapes the text; via the use of images, into a meaning*' (Benton 7 Fox 1985, p.5). In doing so, the reader makes the text exist as it does; as Derrida wrote: '*there is no text before and outside reading*' (ed. Attridge 1992, p.58). Eagleton, too, recognises the role of the reader in identifying text and naming it literature, as is suggested in his manipulation of Shakespeare's line in *Twelfth Night*, '*Some texts are*



*born literary, some achieve literariness, and some have literariness thrust upon them'* (1983, p.8). I wonder if the same can usefully be said of readers? It may well prove to be the case that some readers are born with literary expectations into a literary environment, while others have *literariness* thrust upon them through their schooling. The point, however, is clear: it is the readers' interpretations of a text that make it what it is. Eagleton illustrates this at considerable length, as does Eco.

The role of the reader, this overview suggests, is clearly dependent upon the reader's context and the intended purpose of reading, or the perceived role of reading. For example, if the reader is reading a piece of text in order to answer examination questions upon it, the reader may assimilate the text in a different way from that when reading purely for pleasure or to gain simple information.

### 2.3 Interpreting the text and theorising literature

One role of the reader is to interpret text. Interpretations will vary, according to the understanding and knowledge of the reader; the reader interacts with the text rather than simply pulling meaning from it. Eagleton discusses the importance of context in interpreting text in his introduction to *Literary Theory* (1983). Umberto Eco discusses ways in which the reader interprets a text in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (1992). Here, he also discusses the extent to which it is the role of the reader to interpret the text. This is discussed in some detail in the following pages. A different approach is taken by critics grouped together under the title of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, who emphasise the importance of history upon text. This is discussed in the concluding paragraphs of this section.

For Eagleton it is inevitable that each reader will approach reading material with an element of narcissism and it is for this reason that some works are said in various classes and seminars to have a timeless quality, as the concerns of the age and place of the reader are transmitted to the text, thus making the text appear to reflect issues of relevance to the current situation, whatever that may be:

*The fact that we always interpret literary works to some extent in the light of our own concerns - indeed that in one sense of 'our own concerns' we are incapable of doing anything else - might be one reason why certain works of literature seem to retain their value across the centuries (1983, p.12)*

It is thus a role of the reader to give the text contemporary relevance:

*All literary works, in other words, are 'rewritten', if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a 're-writing'. (ibid.)*

This is almost a paraphrase of Rosenblatt, writing two decades earlier: 'Every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense created anew' (1968, p.113). Eagleton goes on to explain the way in which the social, political and economic situation of the reader is such a fundamental part of that reader, that no reading or interpretation of text can be free of it. He argues convincingly that it is not possible completely to put aside integral prejudices and beliefs when responding to a literary work, thus a pure, non biased literary critical judgement is unfeasible.

Such a premise also puts into the question the traditional methods of teaching children to appreciate and value particular qualities of a piece of writing, at the cost of acknowledging other aspects which might appeal more naturally to that child, although

in some ways, more individual and original responses are rewarded at higher levels, such as AS [an examination taken between GCSE (General Certificate of Education) and A Level (Advanced Level), usually by seventeen year olds] level and beyond, see appendix 2. The AS Level, which was introduced in the United Kingdom in 2001, is more new historicist than the legacy A Level. The requirements of the public examinations suggest that one of the roles of reading within education it seems, is to instil in the young reader common notions of what is good and what is bad, in a literary sense at least. In doing so, cultural prejudices as well as ideals, are shared. It can be argued however that what we esteem and believe is so deeply embedded within each of us, prior to reading texts, that attempts to sway basic beliefs are futile, hence the depth of feeling with which we interpret texts. The value judgements made are rooted in deep structures of belief.

Theories of reader response continued to change and to be challenged by the end of the twentieth century. Rosenblatt realised that any reading would be determined in part by the reader:

*The reading of a particular work at a particular moment by a particular reader will be a highly complex process. Personal factors will inevitably affect the equation represented by book plus reader. His past experience and present preoccupations may actively condition his primary spontaneous response.*

(Rosenblatt, 1968, p.79)

She suggests that rather than learn of morality etc. from reading, it is the function of the reader to impose those beliefs upon the text:

*The student will bring to his reading the moral and religious code and social philosophy assimilated primarily from his family and community background* (1968, p.94)

It is remarkable perhaps that such concerns are not more widely recognised within the teaching of literature, despite the work of theorists and the urging of writers such as Rosenblatt, for teachers to take into account the impact of context upon the responses of reader to texts.

Cullner, too, recognises that the reader will inevitably interpret a text according to the time in which it is read, rather than according to the time in which it was written, claiming that:

*The reader, like the new poet, is a latecomer bound to misconstrue the text so as to sense the meanings required by his own moment in literary history* (Cullner 1981, p.14)

As a result of this, Cullner is critical of some aspects of New Criticism theory concerning idealistic reader roles:

*The New Criticism's dream of a self-contained encounter between innocent reader and autonomous text is a bizarre fiction* (Cullner 1981, p.11)

In 1964, Eliot wrote that '*what a poem means is as much what it means to others as what it means to the author*' (1964, p.130). Eco goes beyond this, stating that it is the aim of the text to produce a model reader, that is '*the reader who reads it as it is in some sense designed to be read, where that may include the possibility of being read so as to yield multiple interpretations*' (Collinini, 1992, p.10). Eco, more of a pure theorist than Rosenblatt, asserts that there is no one correct way of interpreting a text:

*'interpretation is indefinite. The attempt to look for a final, unattainable meaning leads to the acceptance of a never-ending drive or sliding of meaning'* (1992, p.32). Eco develops a sophisticated argument in which he emphasises his point with reference to both the text and the reader:

the text:

*Any text, pretending to assert something univocal, is a miscarried universe, that is, the work of a muddle-headed Demiurge (who tried to say that 'that's that' and on the contrary elicited an uninterrupted chain of infinite deferrals where 'that' is not 'that')*

the reader:

*To salvage the text - that is, to transform it from an illusion of meaning to the awareness that meaning is infinite - the reader must suspect that every line of it conceals another secret meaning; words, instead of saying, hide the untold; the glory of the reader is to discover that texts can say everything, except what their author wanted them to mean; as soon as a pretended meaning is allegedly discovered, we are sure that it is not the real one; the real one is the further one and so on and so forth; the hylics - the losers - are those who end the process by saying 'I understood' (1992, p.39)*

Eco recognises that readers have individual levels of prior knowledge and expectation with which they approach a text. For that reason it is acceptable that different interpretations and readings of texts will be made:

*it is legitimate for a sensitive reader to find what he finds in the text, because these associations are, at least potentially, evoked by the text, and because the poet might (perhaps unconsciously) have created some 'harmonics' to the main theme (ibid.p.62)*

It follows, too, that the role may be multifaceted. Experience and expectations help a reader to be a model reader, i.e. to read the text as it was meant to be read. Recognising forms and styles helps the reader to identify the type of text to expect; from that expectation comes recognition and understanding:

*If a story starts with 'Once upon a time', there is a good probability that it is a fairy tale and that the evoked and postulated model reader is a child (or an adult eager to react in a childish mood)(ibid. p.61)*

Yet it is only possible to recognise and to be the intended model reader for such a story, with prior knowledge of such stories. This emphasises the point that everything we read contributes to our understanding of, and response to, encounters with new texts. The way in which the reader approaches a text is governed largely by past experiences of text. Eco later acknowledges the truth of this as he claims that authors recognise that the text they produce will be read in different ways, varying with the experience and social place of the reader:

*the author knows that he or she will be interpreted not according to his or her intentions but according to a complex strategy of interactions which also involves the readers, [...] every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader's world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an economic way*  
(ibid. pp.67-68)

Developments in literary criticism towards the end of the twentieth century encouraged the recognition of the reciprocal significance of history and text. This is illustrated clearly in the work of Montrose who writes that: *'The writing and reading of texts, as well as the processes by which they are circulated and categorised, analysed and*

*taught, are being reconstrued as historically determined'* (in Newton, 1988, p.240).

New Historicists are defined as having '*a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history*' (Montroe in Newton 1988, p.235). They emphasise the importance of the historical context in which the text was created, one of the aims of which is '*to expose the political interests*' (Fromm 1991, p.215), although it must also be remembered that '*History does not tell us what the text is, because we decide what history is*' (ibid.). The historical context in which a text is read is as significant in its reading as that in which it was written. Fromm writes that:

*In our current political climate, the emotional power has been stripped from literary texts in order to turn them into something over which the critic has no power [...] removed from the type of sensuous world we associate with music and the visual arts and translated into philosophy, history, or blueprints for changing society, they can be regarded simply as 'writing'* (Fromm, 1991, p.224)

Such theories of reading have been labelled New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. A discussion of these reading theories will follow. It is interesting that the National Curriculum currently seems to be following this line of critical thought more closely than others. Nationally imposed, recent, changes in the English literature syllabus of all examination boards in England, insist that students are taught the historical context (and if possible, political context and potential aims) of the literature to be studied for national examination. This is true at all levels of testing, from Key Stage 2 (when the children are usually 11 years old) through to A level (usually sat at 18years). The new AS level exams reward highly evidence of historical contextual knowledge. Appreciation of traditional, Leavisite values are less well rewarded than factual recollection of monarchy or political power at the time of writing (see Appendix 5). Fromm goes on to write of New Historicists that:

*They are draining the affective power from works of art, arrogating all such power to themselves as puritanical intellectual tradesmen amassing academic capital* (Fromm 1991, p.226)

The curriculum changes which were put into effect in 2001, in England and Wales go some way to supporting Fromm's conclusion of a decade earlier, although the situation is not currently quite that extreme. It might well be argued that to gain academic capital, young students must prove knowledge of historical context rather than a literary appreciation of literature. The implication may be that within schools the emphasis upon literacy negates appreciation of the literary, as literature is used for other means than to appreciate literary values.

Cultural Materialism shares the preoccupation with the relationship between history and literature of the New Historicists. Cultural Materialism is explicitly grounded in Marxist didactical materialist theory. A premise of Cultural Materialism is that *'the specific historical conditions in which institutions and formations organise and are organised by textualities must be addressed'* (Sinfield in Newton 1988, p.251). Both schools of thought argue that:

*History is not objective knowledge which can be made to explain literary text*

(Brannigan 1998, p.3)

(The national curriculum leaves them at this point.) Nor is literature:

*Simply a medium for the expression of historical knowledge. It is an active part of a particular historical moment (ibid.)*

Sinfield argues that the traditional role of the school, to teach students the correct way to appreciate literary values of literature is obsolete. The National Curriculum does not



claim this, however. According to Sinfield, educational institutions should not be socialising students to believe in the more traditional ways of reading literature but to '*shift the criteria of plausibility*' (in Newton 1988, p.251) within their different readings.

This section demonstrates the constantly developing theories concerned with ways in which to read and interpret text. They share a simple assumption; that there is value in reading. An attempt to justify this assumption is presented in the following section.

#### 2.4 Reasons to read

A discussion of the motivation for reading is essential as a foundation upon which to build an understanding of the role of reading. In 1887, Leslie Stephen gave the following advice to young readers:

*Read what you really like and not what someone tells you that you ought to like; let your reading be part of your lives*

(Leslie Stephen 1887, cited in Lee 2000, p.20)

But why should anyone let reading become a part of their lives, and why do people read? For children, there are two obvious reasons for reading:

- children read because they want to;
- children read because someone else wants them to.

To simplify further: literate children read as a result of choice or necessity. This is illustrated through the discussion of the case study findings in Chapter 5, and again in the conclusion in Chapter 7. All acts of reading are committed essentially for one of these reasons, regardless of the class or ability of the reader. It is the material chosen (or

used) that differentiates between those with more cultural capital and those with less, rather than the act of reading itself, as is illustrated in Chapter 5. *Reading* is not class related; material read and its effects are. The quantity of material read may also be seen to be social class dependent, as well as the amount of reading conducted. It may be the case that those with greater cultural capital spend more time reading.

The motivation underlying the reasons for reading are briefly discussed here.

Any research concerned with children's reading habits, in which children are the subjects of interviews, is likely to include the question 'why do you read?' or 'what do you think is the point of reading?'. A typical range of answers might include that children read for pleasure (or '*to satisfy their pleasure seeking narrative greed*' as Watson put it in 1993) and to learn to recognise the different uses of reading (Conniff, 1995). Both reasons are valid and it is useful for children to recognise these two functions of reading as they learn. Robinson and King (1995) also stress the value of recognising that reading can be a source of pleasure as well as education and language acquisition for children.

Whilst it may appear that technology has devalued the book, ironically in this age of global communication, reading as a skill is possibly more essential than it has ever been before. The popularity of text messages, rather than speaking to someone on the telephone, is a simple illustration of how this may be seen to be the case. Children need to be able to read to have a chance of keeping up with technological advancements and to maintain acceptable (sometimes impressive) levels of computer literacy. This is increasingly essential for both job prospects and leisure time activities.

The role of education has gone beyond teaching the three 'Rs' and providing a manual workforce.

*Education is the process by which the young learn to master a society's symbolic notational systems [...] it also increasingly means the symbols and languages of information technology, along with the vocabularies, disciplines, applications and uses of all these symbolic systems (Hargreaves & Christie 1998, p.84)*

Young students need to become literate not only in the traditional sense, but also computer literate, if they are to have a realistic chance of social and economic success when they leave education. The internet, in theory, provides access to information to everyone with access to a computer terminal; those who remain illiterate, however, are no more able to retrieve information from a computer screen than they are from the pages of a book (Travers 2002, p.14). Developing technology makes literacy skills more necessary for students, not less. Those who cannot read are excluded from an increasing number of aspects of contemporary life. (This is discussed at greater length in the following chapter under the subheading 'Inclusion').

Jessica Munns is optimistic that technological development will '*extend opportunities for curricular choice*' (Gorak 2001, p.xvi) claiming that:

*The world wide web, as we all know, has initiated an explosion of information, and the current availability of a wide range of texts has, and must, directly affect all attempts to police the margins [...] we can all make our own canon [...] the emergence of women's literary studies, allied with computer technology, has*

*made this a potential future [...] The canon is dead: long live the pick and mix*

(Munns in Gorak 2001, p.16)

This may be true for those who are literate and have the necessary skills to read and select information on-line, allowing them to become more informed than was previously possible, but those who are not literate are left further behind their literate counterparts than ever before, and the gulf between what those who are literate can access and those who are not literate, widens as a direct result of developing technology.

## Summary of Chapter 2

The concerns in Chapter 2 have been with what, how and why people, especially children, read. I indicated in the opening of the chapter that the term ‘literature’ is an illusory one, which does not have any one definition, yet is used often in reference to discussions of reading. This led to a discussion of the role of the reader, and the ways in which readership is influenced by the reader’s experience. I have argued that the role of the reader varies, depending on context and the material being read. It is for this reason that so many schools of criticism, advocating different ways in which to interpret texts, have been able to co-exist. The role of the reader, in short, is dependent upon the role of reading. This demonstrates the importance of understanding the role of reading. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the motivation for reading. These issues are also of concern within the following chapter, where the focus will move to an exploration of previous research that has been conducted in this field. Chapter 3 will also indicate that the role of reading is not a subject which has been previously researched in this way, thus attempting to demonstrate that the following empirical work will contribute towards the field in an original way.

## Chapter 3

The priorities of previous research concerned with reading

### Introduction

The previous two chapters have shown that literacy has increased greatly during the last century. They have also revealed that interest in all aspects of reading, especially the potential uses of reading and ways in which to read, has developed with increased literacy and continues to develop. The history of literary criticism suggests that new schools of the theory of reading will continue to emerge. With such an opus already existing in this field, one might wonder at the scope for new research, yet as the previous two chapters have also illustrated, the progression of literacy and theoretical development raise as many questions as they answer. This is in some ways especially true of the role of reading in the lives of young students. A vast amount of research has been conducted in the field of reading and children and it is certainly true that the reading debate is not new (Styles and Drummond, 1993). The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the areas of research in this field which have been researched most vigorously and to indicate why my research into the role of reading will add new understanding to the field. Previous research concerned with children and reading can be divided in many ways. I have chosen to divide it into three classifications, concerned with the amount children read, the perceived importance of reading and the mechanics of reading: these are the three areas which I have identified as having been the focus of the majority of research to date.

### 3.1 How much children read

At parents' evenings in schools, one of the most commonly asked questions of the English teacher is 'does my child read enough?' The question suggests that there is a definitive number of books, periodicals, articles or any other form of reading matter, which a child *should* read. The question which would usefully follow is 'enough for what?' It could be argued that whether or not a child is reading as much as s/he should depends to some extent upon the role of the reading. For example, if the role of reading in that child's life is purely functional, then reading instructions, bus time tables etc. is *enough*. The demands of functional reading are much higher than they were even fifty years ago in Britain, as more sophisticated reading is necessary on a daily basis. It is understanding the role of reading with which this research is concerned. This is different from simply deducing how much time children spend reading, which is the focus of the first section of this chapter.

Much of the research previously completed on the issue of reading was specific to reading within particular contexts. The significance of the wider context soon became apparent to me, however, as it is clearly apparent to others concerned with research involving school related issues:

*It is important to recognise in any analysis that the individual classroom is part of a much larger system and it is therefore important to take into account the influences and forces outside the classroom (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989, p.44)*

Much concern has been expressed throughout the twentieth century about the amount of time spent reading by children. This is reflected in the number of quantitative studies which have been completed in order to support notions that the amount of time spent reading is in decline. A selection of this work is presented here.

The first major quantitative survey of children's reading preferences in England was conducted by Jenkinson (1940). Jenkinson conducted a survey of 30,000 11 year olds asking them to name favourite books, authors and genre. This is an interesting study from an historical comparative viewpoint. Many of his findings over 60 years ago were not hugely different when his surveys were replicated as closely as possible by Whitehead (1971), or indeed by a survey conducted by the author (albeit on a smaller scale) in 1997 (see appendix 2). Jenkinson reported, for example, that teachers had little positive effect upon reading choices of teenagers, and that adult reading preferences rarely shared any common ground with teenage reading preferences. Much of Jenkinson's report comprises figures and lists of authors.

Jenkinson's work was followed at regular intervals by other researchers keen to know which authors and texts children would respond to most positively. The two which I found most interesting were Whitehead (1971) and Hall & Coles (1994); both works made interesting reading and went further than pure quantitative surveys. Through comparison of their work, reading trends are clearly discernible, as Table 3.1 illustrates:

Most Popular Authors with KS 3 readers

1977(Whitehead)	1994(Hall&Coles)	1997(Harrison)
Enid Blyton	Roald Dahl	Roald Dahl
Charles Dickens	Enid Blyton	R.L.Stine
Agatha Christie	Judy Blume	Dick King Smith
R.L.Stevenson	Stephen King	Terry Pratchett
W.E.Johns	Francis Pascal	Judy Blume
Alistair Maclean	Dick King Smith	Enid Blyton
Ian Fleming	Ann Martin	Chris Pike
C.S.Lewis	Virginina Andrews	Brian Jacques
H.G.Wells	R.L.Stine	Michelle Mayain
A.C.Doyle	J.R.R.Tolkein	Stephen King
Anthony Buckeridge	Sue Townsend	Francis Pascal

Table 3.1

Favourite authors continue to change, reflecting trends in reading choices. By 2002, the popularity of J.K.Rowling's Harry Potter series was unrivalled and Tolkien had become popular with young students again, in part at least as a consequence of the success of the 2001-2003 films of *Lord of the Rings*. These lists show that the authors children choose to read have little in common with those prescribed to them by the National Curriculum. It might also be assumed that one of the roles of reading, for the children choosing these authors, is relaxation and escapism. These lists show, too, that few children's authors enjoy popularity from one generation to the next. Here, only Blyton retained popularity from 1977 to 1997. This suggests that when parents or teachers recommend books to



children, because they enjoyed them when young, they are unlikely to be making popular recommendations with a younger generation.

A study of relevant literature reveals that there are potential risks with qualitative data, especially that of not proving validity or of potentially producing a set of anecdotal observations which are very fragile evidence of theory. It also revealed that qualitative methodology has its advantages, ones which I decided would be particularly useful to my endeavour:

*Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to 'get close to the data', thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself - rather than from the preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly qualified techniques that pigeon hole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed*

(Brenner, Brown & Canter 1985, p.148)

This area of research has emphasised gender differences: in particular, that girls seem to spend more time reading than boys, and that girls read more fiction than boys do, has been stated repeatedly. Jenkinson (1940) interestingly, concluded that age, rather than gender, was the major cause of different reading tastes and habits. In this, he is at odds with subsequent research, the majority of which indicates gender being the most notable identifiable cause of different reading habits. Whitehead recorded that boys preferred nonfiction texts (1977), and questioned whether this was a result of boys recognising a utilitarian role of reading that girls did not recognise. A study conducted by Shropshire LEA (Local Education Authority) in 1993 recognised marked difference in reading preferences between boys and girls and recommended that this be noted and

accommodated within schools. It has been noted that girls have a more positive attitude towards the subject of English, and reading within it, as well as within other subjects, than boys (Stables, Davies, Hendley, Parkinson, Stables & Tanner, 1995) and boys have been seen to make slower progress in learning to read than girls (Drummond, 1993). Such findings have led to hypotheses and research concerning the possible causes of such gender differences. The traditional differences between the roles of men and women, boys and girls, within society, have been identified as a possible cause. This view is illustrated in the work of Reynolds (1995), for example, claiming that the difference between the reading habits of boys and girls is due to the way in which girls are guided towards the passive act of reading fiction, while boys are discouraged from such an act, as it is not seen as one which will make them socially powerful.

What children read, and differences between the reading choices of boys and girls all contribute towards a discussion of the role of reading. An area of research within this field which has been discussed in greater depth is the importance of reading, with a multitude of reasons being given to support the general belief. The following section outlines recent and current views on the importance of reading.

### 3.2 The importance of reading

The second category of previous work, of interest here, concerns the discussions on the importance of reading: what do young students gain from reading? Chapter 1 indicated some potential reasons for encouraging reading, including that children would learn to enrich their linguistic skills from reading and thus gain language empowerment, which in turn might lead to different forms of success. Chapter 2 reflected upon the beliefs that

cultural and moral norms and codes of behaviour could be learnt from reading. Much of the published work in this area stresses the importance of reading for teenage children, clarifying the positive aspects of reading and regretting that not all children are able or enthusiastic readers.

Burmeister (1974) states that children must read, and read widely, to enable them to become familiar with different types of text and to become adept at reading for different purposes. Again, he signals the importance of the role of reading, without investigating it any further. Garton & Pratt (1989) refer to a number of publications which emphasise that children must realise why they must learn to read, as through doing so, literacy will be improved. One of the most commonly given reasons for the importance of reading remains that of improving literacy. This suggests that concerns regarding the growth of literacy, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, as discussed in Chapter 1, continue to dominate discussion of reading practices. A second common feature of research concerning why children should read remains the relationship between reading and language acquisition, again, as discussed in Chapter 1. This is particularly true of work published since 1980, by which time there was a growing appreciation of a holistic approach to teaching language (Styles & Drummond 1993, Reynolds 1994, Rayner & Pollatsck 1989, DeLoache & DeMendoza 1987 and Crowder 1982).

The social implications and consequences of reading, as well as its role as a catalyst for linguistic development, have been the focus of research for others. Styles and Drummond (1993), for example, point out that children who do not or cannot read are often treated as though they are inexperienced, and that they often come from homes with less cultural and economic capital than children who can and do read. The very act

of reading is a social one, especially for children who learn to read through listening to others read, and learn how to choose books from sharing the experience with others and talking about them. Through reading, children from all backgrounds learn communication skills.

For others, the most important reason why children should be encouraged to read remains to gain pleasure. Lurie (1990) suggests that children can gain enormous pleasure through reading children's literature which illustrates subversion and undermining of the adult world. Reading for pleasure can also introduce children to a wealth of life experiences of others, from which they might learn (Robinson & King 1995). Bettelheim illustrates the views of both schools of thought when he writes:

*what are needed are beginning texts that fascinate children and convince them that reading is both delightful and helps one to gain a better understanding of oneself and others'* (Harrison & Coles 1992, p.49).

Other work has been largely concerned with the way in which teachers encourage, or fail to encourage, young students to read. The emphasis of much of this work is upon the role of the teacher in encouraging a love of books and a desire to read, in children, although as the discussion of the role of reading within the curriculum in Chapter 1 reflects, encouraging literary aspirations or passions is not essentially in fact, a part of the formal curriculum which is assessed by public examination within schools in England. It may be argued that the role of the teacher is to encourage reading with comprehension first.

As early as 1940, this, too, was a concern of Jenkinson, who recognised that there existed a gulf between the reading tastes of adults and those of their children. He also noted, that teachers seemed to have little knowledge or understanding of the type of reading material enjoyed by their pupils. More recent publications echo the same message for teachers. Phin (in Harrison & Coles 1992) recommends that it is the duty of teachers to introduce children to as wide and rich a reading diet as possible, exposing children to a wide range of material from an early age. The same sentiment is echoed by Bettelheim (Harrison & Coles 1992). The problem with such sentiments is that they fail to acknowledge educational policies. More importantly, they do not attempt to understand the role of reading in the lives of young students, but instead they express a personal view of the role of reading and suggest that it should perform the same role in the lives of those who are at least one generation away from them. Historical and social context of children is ignored in such statements, which fail to recognise that for the young, reading might perform a role other than sentimental. The focus of Ousbey's work is upon the imagination and its significance to reading (Harrison & Coles 1992, pp.29-35). The message is again that it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide the child with stimulating, enjoyable material, blaming the teachers for the dullness of some of the books meant to help children learn to read, for reluctant readers:

*There is no greater barrier to entry than non-stories. Certainly basic readers of reading schemes, with their jerky rhythms and emotionally threadbare situations, are unlikely to prove much of a draw [...]*

*Good stories enable children to enter this world, and teachers who share such tales with their young children know with what ease and delight they do this* (Harrison & Coles, 1992, p.35)

The focus of such work appears to be that children should read material which enlivens their imaginations; the role of reading suggested here is that it is for pleasure. It is also suggested that this pleasure is denied many children by the failure of the education system to direct children towards books which they will enjoy. That teachers do not contextualise reading material, or give a wide enough selection, is an extension of this same theme:

*It is reasonable to suggest that we explain to young readers the implication of different text forms when it is appropriate* (Littlefair in Meek 1988, p.85)

and

*It does seem that fiction texts are given an overwhelming predominant position in many primary classrooms, both in terms of what gets read and what gets written [...] children are given much more access to fiction texts to read and are encouraged to write largely in fictional terms* (Wrong & Lewis 1997,

p.16)

This section illustrates a general agreement that children should read, and read widely. There are many suggested benefits in doing so: social, linguistic, educational and to gain pleasure. It has also highlighted a commonly conceived problem as being the distance between what teachers want children to read, and what children want to read.

The final category identified within this field is that of the way in which children learn to read. This category covers the greatest area of research in the field, as attempts have been made to understand the physiological and psychological process of reading, as well as the ways in which children learn to recognise and identify word and sound patterns. This area of research is summarised in the following section.

### 3.3 The process of reading

This is an important area of research as it endeavours to explain how we read (as opposed to how we understand or interpret text, as discussed in Chapter 2). It is a complex process, and not one which it is the aim of this research to define.

Barton (1994) recognised that there was more to reading than a psychological process. He points out both common approaches to understanding reading and the complexity of so doing. Different approaches to understanding the process of reading and what it is to read will follow. The reading debate has been predominantly concerned with the best ways in which to teach children to read. During the early 1990s the use of phonics in teaching reading regained popularity following the discovery that we do not read through partial clues within texts but from scanning back and forth over words; spelling and reading are closely linked (Adams 1990). In *Phonics They Use* (2000), Cunningham is persuasive in establishing the advantages in using phonics whilst teaching young children to read. She points out, among other things that *'all good readers have the ability to look at a word they have never seen before and assign it a probable pronunciation'* (p.viii). She discusses equally convincingly other aspects associated with teaching children to read, including environment and concepts such as shared reading, print concept, phonemic awareness and counted words. Meek refers the reader to the fact that *'reading to children is firmly established as the most positive link between early print and picture experience and success in learning to read at school'* (1994, p.x). She goes on to discuss the many elements which contribute to make a child a 'good reader', including behaving like one (p.29). Many works are published on, it

seems, all possible aspects of teaching children to read, including psychological (Furnell & Stuart, Oxford, 1995) and cognitive approaches (J.B. Beech, 1985).

The way in which children learn to read is an area which will benefit from further research. If the way in which we learn to read is fully comprehended, teachers will be better equipped to teach children to read. The way in which children learn to read, is not, as stated above, a focus of this work.

A secondary popular area of research within the field of reading has been a concern with what is being read and how best to encourage children to read more widely and more successfully. Important questions have been raised and it is to be hoped that this is a debate that will continue. It is my belief that an understanding of the role of reading, will contribute in some way to this area of research.

These three categories of previous research concerned with reading and children, identify that reading tastes and trends change, that many writers lament that children are deprived of the pleasurable experience of reading that they had in their youth, and that much concern focuses upon the process of reading. The role of reading, for the individual, although implied in some of the work, is not identified or clarified in such work, nor is the significance of context upon the role of reading discussed. The importance of context upon approaches to, and uses of, reading, was indicated throughout Chapter 1. It will be useful to understand further why it is so important, as previous work has not acknowledged this. It is for this reason that the work of Bourdieu



is again discussed, in reference to context and, especially, educational context, within the concluding section of this chapter.

### 3.4 Bourdieu

In an attempt to understand the role of reading, it is important to have some understanding of the influences working upon children and the subsequent choices that they make. This has a direct relevance to the roles played in their lives by institutions such as schools and to activities including reading. The work conducted by Bourdieu concerning the effect of habitus and capital upon society is of particular interest in this respect. A considerable amount of Bourdieu's work is concerned with the effect of schools upon the children who attend them, and the reasons for these effects. His beliefs provide a useful theoretical framework for this study. Bourdieu's work on capital, education and culture is of direct relevance to a study of the role of reading. The aspects of Bourdieu's work which are here of immediate interest can be categorised as:

- Time and Context
- The Role of the School

### 3.5 Time and Context

One of Bourdieu's concerns is with the significance of historical time on actions and choices within society. The brief discussion of literature and the development within education policies under different administrations above illustrate Bourdieu's point clearly, as all of these aspects have combined to create social habits peculiar to a

historical time. Bourdieu examines the way in which taste is dependent upon historical context, as is the difference in tastes and habits between social classes:

*for example, tennis or even golf if not nowadays as exclusively associated with dominant positions as in the past, or that the noble sports, such as riding or fencing [...] are no longer specific to nobility as they originally were [...] An initially aristocratic practice can be given up by the aristocracy - and this occurs quite frequently - when it is adopted by a growing fraction of the bourgeoisie, or even lower classes (Bourdieu 1989, p.4)*

Inseparable from changing habits throughout history is the differing role and purpose of such habits. To refer to Bourdieu's above example: the role of tennis for the aristocracy was perhaps as social interaction and to gain some fresh air. This is very different from the current role of tennis for professional tennis players, for whom it is a source of economic capital and to some extent social capital. They are watched and recognised by international audiences, who would have paid no such attention to them if not for the vehicle of tennis playing. Theatre attendance serves as another example of changing social habits, affected by the role of the activity. Theatre stalls were once the sites of cloth clad, rotten fruit throwing masses who having paid their pennies, were leaning on the stage or standing to watch an act. The role of the theatre was entertainment for the masses. It has since changed its role, becoming now, instead, a space in which a minority gain or replenish cultural capital, frequented by the middle classes, behaving with suitable decorum. The role of reading is manifested in some ways by children's current reading habits. The role of reading has been affected by demands of perceptions within society as much as other leisure and learning activities. Reading literature was once, as has already been illustrated, an exclusively upper class activity. Literature is

now made accessible to the majority of the West and is indeed a compulsory element of the current British education curriculum. The role of reading is clearly no longer simply a pastime for the genteel. The current role of reading, for children, can be considered in view of Bourdieu's belief in:

*the relationship between social positions (a rational concept), dispositions (or habitus), and position-taking (prises de position), that is, the 'choices' made (Bourdieu 1989, p.6)*

Here, Bourdieu states that the decisions we make are a result of our social class. This is as true of children as of adults. This will form a significant part of the thesis. Bourdieu's theories are applied to the data analysis as a means of understanding the findings.

It is Bourdieu's belief that social positions are achieved upon what he refers to as the 'two principles of differentiation' being 'economic capital and cultural capital'. The contribution of the role of reading to both types of capital is of interest here, as is the way in which the role of reading might not only contribute to, but also be a consequence of, academic and linguistic capital, which may result from cultural capital as well as economic.

Bourdieu's theory relating to class, social position and taste is directly relevant to an investigation of the role of reading. He states:

*To each class of positions there corresponds a class of habitus (or tastes) produced by the social conditioning associated with the corresponding condition and, through the mediation of the habitus and its generative capability, a systematic set of goods and properties, which are united by an affinity of style. (Bourdieu 1986, pp.7-8)*

This suggests that the children who share social class will use reading in a similar way and with similar outcomes. It may be possible to isolate the role of reading of children according to the cultural and economic capital of their milieus (not only of their families). The assumption that class, cultural and economic capital determine all choices, could have a dangerous and significant social effect: if no attempt is made to educate those who would naturally rather not be educated, the development of society will be damaged: privileged families will continue to be those who are empowered and thus retain an elite status whilst working class children will be deprived of the opportunity of gaining more cultural capital than their parents or grandparents and thus have no chance of gaining in academic, economic capital. This is not to say that children born into the working class do not aspire to possess more cultural and economic capital. It is however easier for the middle class to gain than it is for the working class. It is Bourdieu's view that educational institutes see one of their roles as being to perpetuate inequalities. It may be argued that the National Curriculum is a response to such assumptions in England and Wales, as it implements the teaching of the same subject matter in all state schools, regardless of the social class of its pupils. Bourdieu's claims are not directly addressed within it, however.

### 3.6 The Role of the School

*the school institution contributes to the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and, consequently of the structure of social space* (Bourdieu 1989, p.19)

Bourdieu believes that schools are places not of inclusion or equality where each individual is encouraged to fulfil academic potential and to be socially confident, but spaces in which historical social positions and power are reinforced:

*It maintains the preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital [...] the system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it* (Bourdieu 1989, p.20)

It is largely those children who are already in possession of significant levels of cultural and academic capital who succeed in gaining more such capital through schooling, up to a point. One of the ways in which teachers prevent those who do not already have academic capital from succeeding, is through their use of language. The importance of language and the role of reading in the development of language has already been discussed. It is worth reiterating that different levels of language knowledge between children can be a contributing factor towards their progress and social inequality. Teachers use language that many pupils will not (by nature of their background) understand, and the pupils thus become failures:

*the teacher who, without acknowledging it and without drawing all the inferences, suspects he is less than perfectly understood, can, so long as his status authority is not contested, blame his students when he does not understand their utterances.* (Bourdieu 1977, p.111)

Those who have shall have and those who have not shall gain nothing.

*Capital breeds capital, and holding positions conferring social influence determines and justifies holding new positions* (Bourdieu 1988, p.86)

Bourdieu's argument is that teachers who are in possession of an amount of cultural capital will teach most effectively to children who share similar amounts of cultural

capital. Some children who lack cultural capital aspire to gain the capital that surrounds them and become socially mobile.

Bourdieu ridicules the notion that social inclusion can and will be achieved through schools:

*It is probably cultural inertia which still makes us see education in terms of the ideology of the school as a liberating force and as a means of increasing social mobility, even when the indications tend to be that it is in fact one of the foremost effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities* (1966 in Eggleston 1974, p.32)

It is through schools, then, that cultural heritage and inequalities are passed on to each generation. This can be seen in the prescribed reading of the national curriculum, much of which is still concerned with sharing past cultural heritage with the child reader.

Individual teachers (Bourdieu claims) cannot delete the cultural capital with which a child is endowed before school entering age, and it is the cultural capital rather than any other influence that will:

*determine behaviour in school and the attitude to school [...] it seems that the major determinant of study is the family attitude to the school* (Eggleston 1974, p.35)

Indeed, good intentions and the attempt to treat all children the same and so pursue a notion of equality, regardless of their cultural capital, can lead to further injustices. By treating all pupils as though they are equal, the teacher neglects to acknowledge or value the differences between pupils.

*In other words, by treating all pupils, however unequal they may be in reality, as equal in rights and duties, the educational system is led to give its de facto sanction to initial cultural inequalities* (Eggleston 1974 p.38)

This is clearly illustrated with reference to reading material. Accepting that in a class of 30 it is unlikely that all children will have identical backgrounds and so will have differing amounts of cultural capital on entering the classroom, it cannot be assumed that any one book will appeal to, or make sense to, every child in that classroom. By treating all of the children as though their cultural experiences allow them to appreciate *Oliver Twist*, for example, those children who do not are disadvantaged. This supports the counter argument to the idea that all children must be treated in exactly the same way and be taught the same curriculum.

The inability of some children to respond in a positive way to such texts is at least partly a result of the cultural capital of their families. Bourdieu's argument revolves around the belief that children from families with low cultural capital are ill prepared for gaining academic capital as they:

*Receive nothing from their family of any use to them in their academic activities except a sort of undefined enthusiasm to acquire culture* (Eggleston,1974, p.39)

Here one is reminded of Rita's thirst for knowledge and culture in the play *Educating Rita* (Russell,1981).

Bourdieu's theory concerning the role of the school as preserver and protector of inequality is one explanation of the fact that children from higher social classes continue to outperform and gain more academic capital than children from lower working class

families. It is not a view shared by all theorists however, as Goldthorpe indicates what he sees as a weakness in Bourdieu's theory:

*It is simply not the case that children from less advantaged class backgrounds have been excluded from, or have themselves rejected, the educational system to anything like the extent that these theorist would suggest. As Halsey, Heath, and Ridge (1980: esp. ch.5) have argued specifically against Bourdieu, education expansion - in many respects demand -led - implies not the reproduction of cultural capital but rather its very substantial growth. In Britain, as these authors show, and indeed elsewhere, the majority of children entering more selective and academic forms of secondary education during the post-war decades were 'first generation' and by now, the same thing could also be said of those entering higher education. In other words, proponents of theories of cultural reproduction would appear to be betrayed by their rather gross misunderstanding of the degree to which in modern societies opportunities for upward educational - and also class- mobility between generations have indeed been enlarged and exploited (2000, p.169)*

It seems to me that Goldthorpe, however, has ignored the fact that during the past sixty years of which he speaks, the goalposts have been moved. It is true that more working class students enter higher education than ever before, yet it is also true that the range of courses available has been broadened and university places have increased to make it possible for those who have not gained cultural capital to enter higher education. The first generation post-war to gain a full school education may have acquired more cultural and academic capital than their grand-parents and parents, but they still gained less than the generation of the same age who came from families with greater cultural



capital, and the cultural hierarchy has remained more or less intact. Greater numbers of students from all levels of society now enter University and complete a degree than ever before, with the result that a degree no longer holds the same value that it once did.

Recent research has shown that teachers have little positive effect in their attempts to encourage young students to accept a wider role of reading in to their lives. Collins, Hunt and Nunn (1997), for example, were disappointed to realise in their survey of 8,834 children that most teachers appeared to have little influence upon the reading habits of those they taught. They felt that this indicated, among other things, the need for the school to take a more proactive approach towards promoting the role of reading. My own survey, although much smaller, also indicates that children were unlikely to read on the recommendation of a teacher. This is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

### Summary of chapter 3

In this chapter I have indicated that while much research has been conducted concerning various aspects of children's reading, the role of reading has not in itself, been a significant focus of previous work. The vast amount of previous work does not answer the questions raised throughout Chapters 1 and 3, concerning the role of reading. The role of reading is important as it is through this that the amount read, the reasons for reading and expectations of reading can be understood. In the concluding section of this chapter, I referred again to the work of Bourdieu, to illustrate the significance of context, which has not previously been explored in relation to reading, or, more importantly here, the role of reading.

The questions raised during the last three chapters concerning the role of reading in the lives of Key Stage 3 students may be simplified thus:

To what extent is the role of reading a result of context?

Is the role of reading generally functional, aesthetic or a combination of the two elements?

What is the role of reading within schools?

Is a role of reading to contribute towards characteristics which will identify the potential cultural, economic and social capital of a young student?

Is the role of reading to help a young student form self identity?

Does a universally recognised role of reading exist?

What aspects of a child's life determine the role of reading within that life?

These questions are not answered in previous research, as Chapter 3 indicates.

Having identified the research questions and explored previous research, the initial question to be answered is that of the most appropriate methodology to answer the research questions. The first three chapters are considered, as methodological decisions are made and discussed within Chapter 4. The purpose of the following chapter is to identify an appropriate methodology and methods for conducting the empirical study and to justify this in relation to other research within the field.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The preceding three chapters have indicated the ways in which reading, readership and ways of reading have developed over time. I believe that they also indicate the way in which the role(s) of reading have diversified as a result of historical, political and social context. It follows that context is an important consideration in a discussion of the role of reading. It is for this reason that the work of Bourdieu has been referred to, in both Chapters 1 and 3. The theories of Bourdieu, relating to the role of context in the form of cultural, economic and social capital, has been useful in forming the conceptual framework under which this research was conducted. This will be explained further in the first part of this chapter. By the end of the third chapter, the various questions to be addressed within this exploration of the role of reading, had been clearly identified. Consideration of the best ways in which to answer those questions led to the chosen methodology, which is outlined in the greater part of this chapter.

#### 4.1 Conceptual framework

The aim of the conceptual framework is to explain, in the most simple form, the key factors to be studied during the empirical research and the presumed relationships among them. In this case, the key factors are the children who are to constitute the case

study, and the apparent role of reading within their lives. It is presumed, from the literary review of the previous chapters, that the context of the children will affect the relationship between the individuals and the role of reading in their lives. Diagram 4.1 below outlines the key factors for investigation and their presumed relationships.

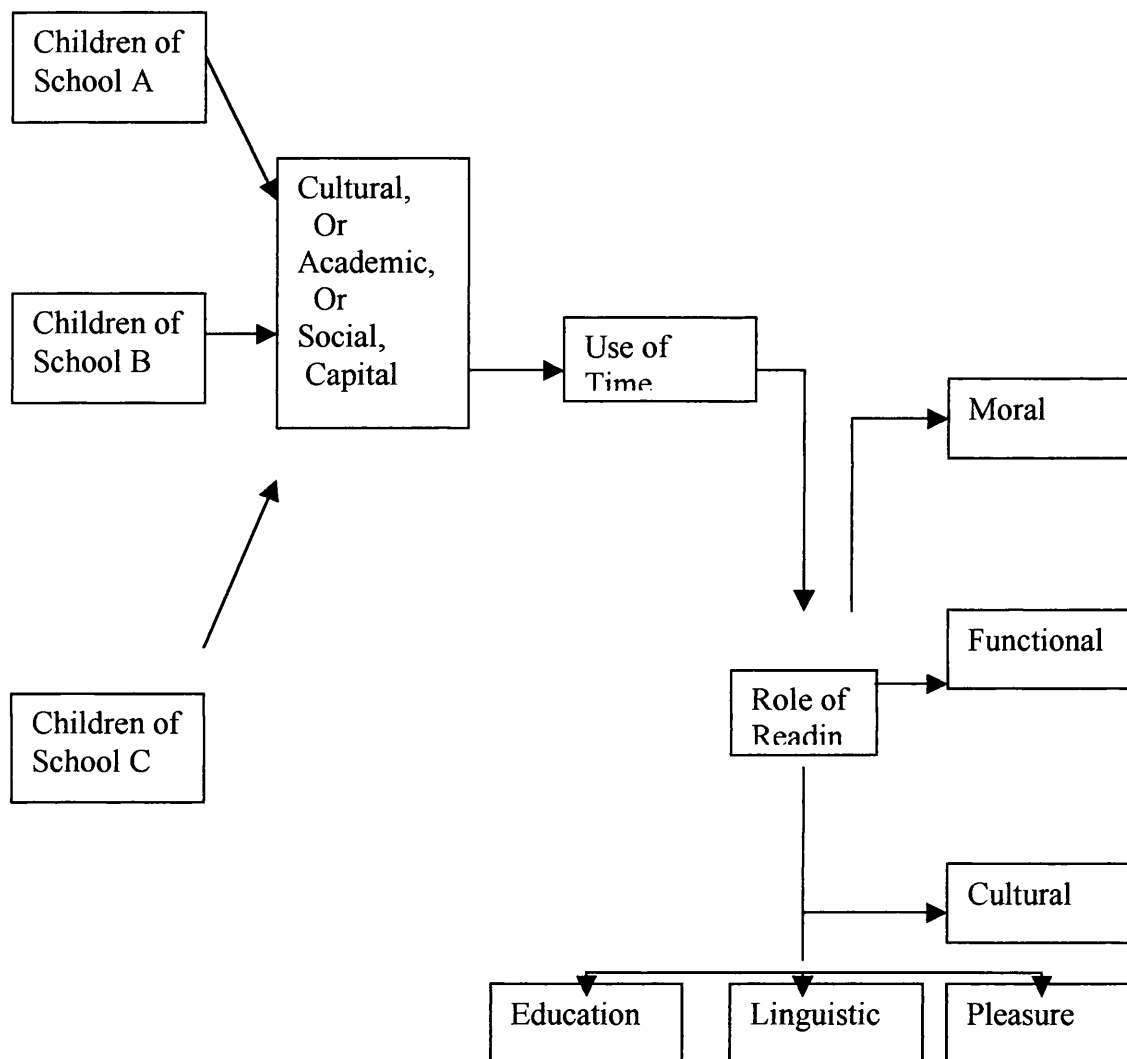


Table 4.1

The literature search indicated potential roles of reading, as indicated in the boxes on the right of the diagram. The aim of the research was to discover if these were indeed the roles of reading for a representative range of Key Stage 3 pupils, indicated in the boxes on the left of the diagram. A further aim was to see how useful were Bourdieu's

theories in helping to account for the variety of roles of reading in the lives of individuals. The research design is specified as follows:

- survey
- mostly, multi method case studies (Yin, 1994) – involving interviews and supporting documentation: qualitative data collection and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

Other research designs were considered. Quantitative research is of some use in understanding the amount of reading and the type of reading conducted by young students. It is the type of research most commonly conducted in relation to this field, as has been discussed in previous chapters. Other research concerned with reading had been conducted through surveys. This form of research was recognised as being of some use, as through it information which could be compared and analysed could be collected. It is for these reasons that the empirical research began with a survey. The survey was not considered sufficient to answer the specific questions in depth, however. Such research was not helpful to gaining an understanding of the role that reading plays in the lives of these children. It seemed that the only way in which to collect data that would lead to such an understanding was to embark upon qualitative research. The aim of the research was to gain understanding of patterns of behaviour rather than quantitative data. The following definition of qualitative research is useful and applicable to this work:

*It can refer to research about persons' lives, stories, behaviour, but also about organisational functioning, social movement or interactional relationships.*

(Strauss & Corbin 1990, p.17)

In this work, the *persons* are the Key Stage 3 students, their *stories* are their cultural and economic inheritance and their *behaviour* is the use that they make of reading. An aim of the research was to discover the role of reading in their lives, both in school and at home or during leisure hours. I was therefore interested in their *organisational functioning, social movements* and *interactional relationships*. Having decided upon the suitability of qualitative research, I then considered a number of potentially useful qualitative approaches. The three that seemed most likely to be appropriate were: action research, ethnography and qualitative case studies.

As I am a teacher, and the research concerned the study of pupils, the method known as ‘Action Research’ was an option. Action Research is a methodology used by teachers acting as researchers. This is defined by Cohen and Manion as:

*Essentially an on-the-spot procedure to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation* (Cohen and Manion 1989, p.223)

An important aspect of the action research model is that the researchers constantly review and improve the practice being researched. One aim of action research is to collect data which will be used to instigate changes within the environment of the research. Following an initial phase of action research:

*Hypothesis may then be generated about what actions likely to lead to the desired improvements in practice. Such action will then be tried out and data on its effects collected; these data are used to revise the earlier hypothesis and identify more appropriate action that reflects a modification of the general principles.*

(Brown & McIntyre 1981, p.245)

It was not my intention to attempt to implement changes in the lives of the students in whom I was interested. This method was, therefore, considered unsuitable despite my being a teacher, as the subjects of my study were not where I worked, I was not therefore *on the spot*, nor did I intend to influence or affect my subjects in any way.

A second style of research that appeared in many ways was that of ethnography. The ethnographic approach, developed by anthropologists, is time consuming and dependent upon close observation of the subject(s), thus enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of the experiences and habits of the subject. Such a method was likely to provide much useful and relevant information concerning the role of reading in the lives of young students. Measor & Woods (1991) describe ethnographic projects as being *by intention and definition open ended* in which problems were unspecified *in advance of fieldwork discovering what they are in particular circumstances [...] Research design and theory making is ongoing* (cited in Walford 1995, p.60). Such an understanding of the nature of ethnographic research dissuaded me from considering it appropriate. A further factor of ethnographic research which made it unpractical for me was the amount of time such work demands:

*Participant observation takes time [...] The researcher has to be accepted by the individuals or groups being studied, and this can mean doing the same job, or living in the same environment and circumstances as the subjects for lengthy periods.*

(Bell 1993, p.10)

Interesting as this would be, such a methodology was not practical in this instance. A lone researcher could not observe a sufficient number of children, from different homes

and attending different schools, for sustained periods of time. Ethnographic research was therefore rejected in this case.

The most satisfactory way in which to create a useful picture of these students, and to understand the way in which they used reading daily, was through a case study. The case study seemed the best methodology to use as the aim of my research was to discover the role of reading within the lives of contemporary young students, to gain understanding not only of what was read but of the motivation for the reading. The following definition of the case study clarifies its relevance to this aim:

*The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented and with what result.*

(Schramm, 1971 cited in Yin 1994, p.12)

My case studies would rely heavily upon the following methods: interviews and triangulation. These methods, and the way in which they were implemented, are discussed later in this chapter.

#### 4.2 Structure of study

The initial research was in the form of a survey, the intention of which was to verify the findings of previous research. This will be discussed further in the following section. This was used in conjunction with the literature review, to help define research questions and consolidate the conceptual framework. While this work was useful, at no stage was it intended to provide the key data to be analysed within this research.



Following the analysis of the findings of the survey (discussed in the following section), I planned to spend two academic terms collecting further data for analysis, in schools. As the research was to be conducted within schools, an interpretive approach was most suitable (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989, p.38), as what the children revealed about the role of reading in their lives could not be pre-categorised with any certainty. The approach also had elements of ethnography, although it was not essentially an ethnographic study. What is meant by this is that in response to the conceptual framework, which implied that habitus and context were key elements within this work, ethnographic elements necessarily played a role in the study. It was necessary for example, to learn something of the every day lives of the pupils who were the case study subjects. An interpretive and in some ways, ethnographic research approach also allowed the collecting of naturalistic data from a range of sources, all of which would be useful in understanding the role of reading. The data were gathered largely through the ensuing multi method case studies, which proved to me that qualitative data analysis is indeed '*a continuous, iterative enterprise*' (Miles & Huberman 1984, p.23).

#### 4.3 Survey

An initial and exploratory survey was conducted into the reading habits and choices of Key Stage 3 students (this is the term used to describe the schooling period of children in British schools between the ages of 11 and 14). The survey was designed to discover if reading habits and patterns recorded in previous work continued to reflect the reading of Key Stage 3 pupils during the last decade of the twentieth century. The findings of the survey contributed towards defining the research questions listed at the end of the previous chapter. The survey was administered through the completion of

questionnaires by 435 boys and 392 girls who were at that time in the Key Stage 3 years in fourteen schools in England. The schools were chosen through random selection with every eighth school on a randomly selected page of a directory being invited to participate. Both qualitative and quantitative data resulted from the survey, with (Pearson) chi-square tests (see Appendix 8) revealing a number of significant gender differences. (This is described further on page 144). For example, the amount of time that girls said they chose to spend reading varied significantly from the amount of time that boys said they chose to spend reading. Such findings confirmed findings of previous research (Whitehead 1977, Hall & Coles 1999). Answers to questions relating to the types of reading material chosen by boys and girls also varied significantly. The structure of my survey enabled me to tabulate some of the results against previous findings, in particular Jenkinson (1940), Whitehead (1977) and Hall (1995). Doing so revealed the extent to which children's taste in reading material has changed during the decades; it also highlighted the enduring popularity of some authors. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the survey was conducted before the Harry Potter series had become so very popular: a survey conducted later would yield different choices again. It seemed likely that the reasons for differing or consistent reading trends could be usefully informed by research into the role of reading, in the lives of children of this age range.

The questionnaire was designed with the intention of collecting information on children's preferred reading choices, their perceptions of who influenced their reading choices, the amount of time that they spent reading and the differences that they perceived (if any) between what they read at school and what they read at home. Types of reading material were divided into two categories: books and magazines. Many of the questions were designed to yield quantitative data, such as how many hours a day they

might spend reading. The majority of the questions were closed, limiting the possible responses in a way that would make it possible to compare the data easily. The most open question of the questionnaire was ‘what is the point of reading?’ This resulted in many interesting responses. A copy of a blank questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

The questionnaire was piloted in two mixed ability classes of 30 Year 9 students in a large comprehensive school in Wiltshire. Instructions were given that the questionnaire should be completed individually and in silence, although students could ask the teacher present to help read or explain any questions that they did not understand. The students were not required to write their name on the completed questionnaire and were encouraged to be honest in their answers. Some attempt was made to persuade the students that it was neither a test nor a competition, and that their answers would be treated confidentially.

The completed pilot revealed that the majority of the questions had been understood and were accessible to the students. The wording of two questions was altered a little, to avoid possible misunderstanding. The pilot also revealed that thirty minutes was sufficient time for pupils of all abilities to complete the questionnaire comfortably. None of the answers suggested that students had felt awkward or uncomfortable in answering any of the questions, although some students had taken the task more seriously than others. This acted as a reminder that young students could not always be relied upon to give valid answers.

Having analysed the results of the pilot and made necessary adjustments to the questionnaire, I wrote to a number of schools. The schools were chosen to be representative of schools attended by the majority of pupils in Britain, and had to have pupils between the ages of 11 and 14. Other than that, the schools were selected randomly. I explained my intentions briefly in the first letter that I sent and asked the Head of English of each school if s/he would be interested in administering the questionnaire to pupils. A positive response was followed by the delivery of questionnaires and administration instructions. The answers on the questionnaires were then analysed with the help of Microsoft Access and SPSS.

The effect of the results of my survey, echoing those of previous researchers was to give me a secure foundation upon which to begin the major parts of the research in the form of the multi-method case study.

The findings of my survey were turned into graphs which can be seen in appendix 2. The graphs indicate reading habits and trends of boys and girls from the ages of 11 – 14. Points of interest have been highlighted. The graphs suggest that a significant difference between the reading habits of girls and boys was detected in several areas, notably: girls spent more time reading than boys, read more magazines than boys and read more books than boys. Girls were more likely to choose to read horror, murder, plays, poetry, romance and stories about animals than boys were; they were also more likely to choose a book by its cover, from the recommendation of a friend or be familiar with an author, than boys were. Boys, on the other hand, spent more time reading from a computer screen and were more likely to read adventure or science fiction, or factual reference. More boys than girls claimed to enjoy reading from a computer screen and more boys

than girls recognised that they read during maths lessons. Both boys and girls were equally unlikely to read a book as a result of teacher recommendation or television serialisation. The genre of history was the most unpopular with both boys and girls.

These statistics, as with previous quantitative results, are interesting, especially as they imply the differences between the reading tastes and habits of boys and girls. They tell little of the role of reading, however. The statistics suggest that the role of reading may be different for girls and boys, which would explain the variance in the amount of time that each spends reading. Such statistical approaches cannot fully take habitus and context into account, which I believe to be vital to understanding the role(s) of reading in the lives of young students. The most important result of the survey, for me, was to confirm that a more qualitative approach was indeed necessary, if the role of reading was to be fully understood and recognised. This led to the concept of a multi method case study.

#### 4.4 Multi method case studies

The method of case study allowed me to investigate the role of reading in the lives of three groups of students. The case studies were conducted in three schools. The three schools were deliberately selected as between them they represented the range of schools attended by the majority of children in Britain at the time:

##### School A

School A is an academically successful, fee paying, traditional grammar co-educational school, that is able to select its pupils. The school sends several students to Oxford and

Cambridge Universities annually. As well as being academically successful, the school promotes competitive sports and dramatic and public performances. One of the aims of the school is to *'help pupils understand themselves, others and the wider world'*. The school prides itself on recognising and stimulating the needs of individuals, which is one of the justifications for deliberately maintaining no more than 500 on roll.

#### School B

School B is an over-subscribed Local Education Authority (LEA) co-educational school in a comparatively affluent, yet mixed, geographical area in which academic results were consistently above the national average. The school has approximately 1000 pupils on roll, and has recently expanded. The school claims that *excellent achievement in the classroom is the school's central aim*. The school prospectus also lists the following aims of the school:

A purposeful and supportive society which encourages self-discipline and consideration for others and the environment

Encouragement of good citizenship and the promotion of moral, social, cultural and spiritual development

The ability to question and discover, which will enable all members of the school community to be lifelong learners

The school maintains good relationships with the community and values sporting achievement, music and drama.

#### School C

School C is an under-subscribed LEA school with Christian foundations, in a less affluent geographical area, in which academic results were consistently below the

national average. The school aims to *challenge every student to aspire to the highest possible level and to achieve beyond their expectations by creating a calm, purposeful learning environment*. The school is proud of its Special Education Needs centre. A range of sport, music, drama, computer courses and a Christian Union are offered in its extra-curricular programme.

The intention of this purposive sampling was that the case studies would be representative of the types of schools attended by the majority of children over 11, in Britain, and in this way would include a representative range of children from a variety of backgrounds. An English teacher within each participating school was asked to select ten Year 8 children (ages 12-13) representing the top, middle and lower ability range between them, with as even a mix of boys and girls as was possible. I decided to ask for ten participants as, although this was a large number for a lone researcher to work with, I was conscious that as they were children they were likely to give less information and data than adults in similar research. It seemed the right number for the purpose and I was well aware that *'there is no hard and fast rule for how many people you need to interview'* (Travers 2001, p.3) and the number of cases to interview varies depending upon the needs of the case study and the research questions. Documentation, including previous test results and samples of work, was collected and the English teachers were interviewed as a profile of each child was drawn. Although, as was stated in the opening section of this chapter, this is not essentially an ethnographic study, as it is the role of reading with which I am concerned, this necessitates an understanding of daily practices of the children.

Some time was spent during and prior to the interviews, in building a mini biography for each child involved in the case studies. The purpose of these was to collate an image of each child, especially of their home life and their academic progress to date within their education system. The collection of life histories also offered the potential to make *'macro theories but from a base that is clearly grounded within personal biography'* (Goodson 1980, p.74). The information presented within the following mini biographies is by no means exhaustive. The names used here are not the real names of the children. No attempt has been made to analyse or discuss the factual information that the subjects gave about themselves. All of the children were asked to describe their families and ambitions. Some children were unable to tell me what occupations their parents held.

Mini biographies of the subjects of the case studies.

School A

Andrew

Andrew's father owns, and manages, a company that sells Land Rovers; his mother is an accountant. Andrew is familiar with seeing his sisters and mother read frequently. Andrew has three sisters. Andrew spoke in standard English and was articulate, despite laughing at himself occasionally when he thought he had said something that sounded funny. He said that he enjoyed reading and read from choice occasionally, but would rather walk the dog or go out on his bike. Andrew considered himself a low achiever in comparison with his classmates, as he got mostly B grades in his school examinations, while his friends achieved mostly A grades. Andrew swims at a competitive level. A



second sporting hobby is karting; he owns his own kart. Andrew expects to go to University, as he thinks that his parents expect him to do so. He had no firm ambitions, claiming that he would probably either go into business of some kind, or become a marine biologist.

### Ann

Ann's mother is an editor and her father is a solicitor. She is familiar with seeing both parents read and was able to describe the kind of reading material that she thought they enjoyed. Ann was an only child. Ann was very confident speaker with a wide vocabulary, which she used appropriately. The way in which she spoke of books and reading indicated that she enjoyed reading a range of material, which she obtained from a variety of places, including the city library. She appeared highly motivated and keen to do well in academic tests and exams, which she enjoyed passing. Ann played tennis at a competitive level. Ann expected to go to University and thought that she might like to become a journalist.

### Christian

Christian's parents are both professionals, although he was unable to tell me exactly what they did. Christian has one older brother and one older sister, both at University. Christian appeared relaxed and confident in his speech. Christian's exam results were average or above for the school. Christian said that he enjoyed reading and was able to talk about his preferred reading material with fluency, although he preferred to play on

his computer rather than read. Christian expected to go to University, but was not sure what he might do after that.

### Hattie

Hattie did not tell me what her parents did for a living, nor did she speak about her family. Hattie was a little reluctant to speak, although articulate when she did so. Hattie was a keen sportswoman, playing most sports available at school to a competitive level; tennis took up a great deal of her time. Hattie did not see herself as especially able in an academic sense, although she is keeping up with the work perfectly well. She enjoys reading some books and reads most nights. Hattie rarely reads magazines or newspapers, unless the articles concerned sport.

### John

John's father worked for Nestle and his mother owns and manages a mobile home park. John's father works away from the family home during the week. John was used to seeing his mother read, and seeing his siblings read to each other. John has one younger sister and one younger brother. John enjoyed reading magazines, especially about sport and computer games. He was not a voracious reader, although he read for some time most evenings. He was a keen footballer and enjoyed playing computer games. He was conscientious about homework and felt under some pressure to revise for exams. He felt that his exam grades were slightly above average, and had no special interest in any subject. John did not know what he wanted to do in his future but didn't think that he wanted to go to University.

### Jon

Jon did not discuss his family. He was the most immature of the subjects of School A, with a less sophisticated vocabulary and an apparently short attention span. He talked with confidence about how at primary school he would read every break time, returning the books to the librarian to look after them for him. Jon was of relatively low ability in relation to his classmates. He did not express any clear aims for his future or describe any specific interests.

### Richard

Richard did not discuss his family. Richard was less confident and articulate than most of the group from this school. Richard was not an enthusiastic reader, although he would occasionally choose to read magazines about music and sport, and enjoyed reading about the subject of war. Richard enjoys playing football and plays the guitar. He did not reveal any particular ambition. Richard had the lowest academic ability of the subjects of his school.

### Robert

Robert described his father's occupation as 'head-hunter'. His mother did not work. Robert's parents both read frequently at home and he saw his sister read regularly. Robert's brother was reading Philosophy at university and had inspired an interest in that field in Robert. Robert recognised that he was an able pupil. Robert expected to go

to university, and hoped for a career in the music industry eventually. Robert enjoyed playing the guitar, and on his computer. He said that he read in bed most evenings.

### Simon

Simon's father manages a car dealership and his mother works part time, teaching English in the city college. He sees them reading at home often; he also sees his older sister read a lot in the home. Simon was academically able. Simon enjoys reading, but enjoys playing on his new game boy more. Simon participated in after school clubs. He also plays football and tennis for the school and sings in the Abbey choir. He spoke enthusiastically and with confidence about all of his interests. He claimed to read for at least an hour every evening. Simon was ambitious and hoped to secure a job in sport journalism when he left university, which he fully expected to attend.

### Will

Will did not mention his family, except to say that his mother criticised him for not having broad reading tastes. Will spoke with enthusiasm about books, describing stories in great detail. He claimed to read for an hour most evenings. He was a confident speaker, who would sometimes interrupt to make or add to a point of his own. He was keen to do well at school and aware that he was not in the top group of all of his classes. He was not sure what he would want to do as a career, but expected to go to university.

(School A was a Boys' school until five years ago when it began to admit girls. Around twenty per cent of the school is currently made up of girls. This is why more boys than girls were interviewed at the school.)

#### School B

##### Anna

Anna did not tell me what her parents did. Anna has two younger sisters, to whom she reads occasionally. Anna said that her parents read a lot, especially her father. Anna spoke with confidence and maturity. She was one of the most able of the subjects from this school. She seemed well motivated. She spent her spare time completing homework, reading and learning sign language. She was unsure what she might like to do when she left school, but thought she might like to work with children.

##### Andy

Andy's parents own and manage a software company. Andy sees them reading at home on a regular basis. He also sees his older brother reading, and could name the type of material that his brother enjoyed. Andy was neither excelling nor failing in his academic work. Andy enjoyed playing on the computer, and going out on his bike. Andy was enthusiastic about mountain biking. He said that he did not know what he might want to do when he left school.

##### Claire

Claire was not a confident speaker and did not go into great detail on any subject. She said that she liked reading books but not magazines, which she considered to be a waste of time. She also enjoyed watching television. Claire was of relatively low ability. She had no clear ambition and did not know what she might like to do when she left school.

### Felicity

Felicity did not discuss her family in any detail. Felicity said that her mother read a lot, and would often tell her to read more. Her father also read in the home. Felicity said that she read most evenings, books that her mother gave her to read. Felicity seemed to spend most of her free time completing homework, or checking her email. Felicity said that she had no idea what she wanted to do when she left school. Felicity was coping well with her schoolwork and regularly gaining satisfactory grades.

### Frank

Frank's mother is a masseur and his father runs a shop. Frank was defensive throughout the interviews. Academically a low achiever, he spent time making his peers laugh and arguing with his teacher. His speech was more articulate and mature when his friends were not within earshot. Frank claimed never to spend time reading, although he did look at skateboarding magazines. His greatest interest was skateboarding. He had ambitions to become a professional skateboarder.

### Hannah

Hannah's father works in a bank and her mother is training to, but Hannah could not tell me what she was training to be. Hannah could identify the type of reading material most enjoyed by her parents and was aware that her mother was in a book group. Hannah claimed to read every night. Hannah was one of the most confident and able of this group. Her speech was articulate and she used a mature vocabulary. She seemed well motivated. Hannah participated in after school clubs and played in the school orchestra. She like to make things (she was unspecific about what sort of things). Hannah appeared ambitious. She intends to go to university and, later, to become a vet.

#### Lucy

Lucy's father works as a plasterer and Lucy's mother works somewhere, but Lucy wasn't sure where it was or what she did. Lucy is an only child. Lucy claimed to spend no time reading at home, and little time completing homework. Lucy enjoys spending time with her friends, walking around the area near where she lives, or visiting local shops. She also enjoys spending time on her computer. Lucy had a limited vocabulary and lacked confidence in her speech. She was of low ability academically. Lucy wasn't sure what she might do when she left school, but mentioned that she thought she might become an airhostess or a beautician.

#### Natalie

Natalie did not discuss her family. Natalie was a quiet and reticent speaker. Natalie was vague about what she enjoyed doing and did not express an interest in anything in particular.

Paul

Paul's mother is an artist and his father works with computers. Paul has a younger brother. Paul regularly saw his parents read, but was not sure what they read. Paul said that he enjoyed reading and listening to music. These two activities would take up most of his time and would only be stopped in order to complete homework. Paul did not appear to interact well with his peer group. Paul has specific learning difficulties. He was keen to please. His vocabulary was unsophisticated. Paul said that he would like to be a chef when he left school.

Richard

Richard's father is a postman and his mother is a civil servant. Richard has a half sister, whom he rarely sees. Richard spent some time each evening at his father's house where he would often watch television or play computer games or do homework, before going to his mother's house where he would spend time doing the same activities. Richard was of average ability within his class. Richard hoped to go to university to read Physics, before gaining employment within the field of science.

School C



### Charley

Charley's mother is a school dinner lady and her father is a taxi driver. Charley has one younger sister. Charley, like her friend Kate, likes to spend her free time in town with her friends and her sister or watching television. Charley did not appear to have any specific interests, but said that she would like to be an RSPCA inspector or work with animals in some way when she left school.

### James

James's mother was a primary school teacher and his father was the deputy head of a primary school. He had one sister. James had few interests and said that he spent his evenings watching television or doing homework, he said he would usually *mope about the house* (C3,1.2). He usually read when he went to bed. James was well spoken, but not enthusiastic about anything. James had the highest academic ability of the subjects in this school. James said that he might like to become a writer, writing fiction, when he leaves school.

### Jimmy

Jimmy's parents work in a Chinese restaurant. Jimmy did not seem to have any interests at all. He spoke politely with limited vocabulary. Jimmy said that he would like to do something with computers when he leaves school. Jimmy appeared to put little effort into his studies and it was difficult to determine his ability.

Kate

Kate's father works with computers and her mother is a secretary. Kate has an older brother and a younger sister. She often sees her brother reading. When Kate is not doing schoolwork, she likes to spend time in town with her friends and her sister, or watching television or playing on the computer. She could not specify exactly what they did. Kate has a clear ambition and wants to work with babies or young children when she leaves school.

Liam

Liam's father is a lorry driver and his mother is a van driver. Liam lives with his mother and sees her read magazines. Liam was very happy to talk and seemed to enjoy having attention. Liam was quite a low ability pupil with a limited vocabulary. He recognised that he had behavioural problems and that he often needed to calm down. Liam has specific special learning needs. He said that he enjoyed reading, especially books that he had seen televised. He preferred to read from a computer screen. He did not have any specific interests, and said that he enjoyed playing in the evenings before going to bed. Liam said that he would like to be a special needs teacher when he leaves school.

Matt

Matt's parents both work for the M.O.D. (Ministry of Defence) Matt was the most aggressive subject of the case study, and the only one who shouted in response to questions. He was also defensive. He told me that he could not read at all because he

was so dyslexic. This was not confirmed by his teacher, although she clearly found him a difficult pupil to teach. Matt later told me that he was learning to read, but he did not read anything. He did not appear to have any specific interests. He spent his time in the evening with friends, walking around the area in which he lived, or going to a nearby canal. He said that he never did homework. Matt had no idea what he might do when he left school.

### Nicky

Both of Nicky's parents work, although she could not tell me what their jobs were. Nicky had one brother. Nicky said that she enjoyed reading, watching television and playing on the computer. Nicky said that she did not know what she might do when she left school and seemed not to have any ambitions.

Respondent validity was considered, but rejected as the case studies were children and such a form of validity might be unreliable and have limited usefulness. Indeed, as much data as possible, of relevance, was collected before the interviews. This follows the advice of Hitchcock & Hughes (1989) and King (1987) that '*we should suit the method to the issue or topic being explored*' (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989, p.42). The children were then regarded as a primary source of data collection and their accounts analysed through a process of content analysis, thematic analysis and qualitative analysis (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989, p.43). I was aware of potential problems of using the children as informants. I was encouraged, however, by knowledge of previous successful work, including; Woods (1980), Pollard (1987), Beynon (1984) Ball (1985), Corsaro (1981), Rudduck et al (1999) and Davies (1982) and so was confident that with

sensitivity and awareness, I would be able to collect useful and valid data from case studies involving children.

I discussed my plans first with an English teacher in each school, who then got approval from the Head Teacher for me to conduct the case studies and interviews on school premises. Letters were sent to parents giving brief explanation of the research and telling them who I was. Consent forms were signed by the parents and returned to me before the case studies began. I am aware that parental consent has not always been sought by researchers: however, as a teacher, I was in the habit of securing parental consent before commencing any project involving the children's extra curricular time.

With awareness of the natural inquisitiveness of the case study subjects, I decided to take a fairly open approach with them. I told them that as well as being a teacher of English, I was conducting research about the role of reading. They were assured of confidentiality and that their teachers would not be told what they had said. I also told them that they would not be named when discussed in any resulting pieces of writing. Through doing so, I believe that I gave them enough confidence to speak honestly about their perceptions of reading, although I was aware of exaggeration at times. This was apparent, as what they said did not always fit with other information gained elsewhere. The exaggeration was the result, not of the children deliberately lying, but wishing to say what they thought I wanted to hear, and in some ways responding to me as a teacher and out of the habit of responding in a way that they believe the teacher wants them to respond (Cullner 1981, p.63). Very few of the children asked me questions about my research, but if they did, I answered them honestly but without breaking any confidences. I told them I was unable to tell them in exactly what form their words

might appear as at that stage, I was unsure. I did not otherwise discuss what I was doing and certainly did not give them any more information that was needed; in that sense I chose not to be entirely open with them, and agree that '*All research is secret in some ways and to some degree - we never tell the subjects 'everything'*' (Roth 1961, p.283)

## Interviews

During the planning phase of the research, it became apparent that one of the best ways to discover the role of reading in the lives of young students was to listen to them, agreeing with Edwards and Westgate (1994) that '*talk is so important a source of data*' (p.15).

Most of the data were collected through interviews over a period of one academic term. The interview questions can be seen in Appendix 9. Interviews were conducted on a fortnightly basis, although this was not always possible, owing to students occasionally being absent from school, required elsewhere or forgetting the appointment. Information was gathered through structured and semi structured interviewing of the selected children. On each occasion, I had a small number of questions which every student was asked. Leading questions were avoided. The questions were open ended, with the intention of giving the students the opportunity to answer as fully as they chose. Prompts were used when answers were very short and occasionally it was necessary to reword a question. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed within a day of recording. Transcripts of some of the interviews can be found in

Appendix 4 (all other transcripts are held by me and can be available for further analysis).

As I was interested in discovering the role of reading, rather than simply what was read or how much time was spent reading, the interview appeared the most useful method of collecting data. This is because the flexibility of the interview allowed space for the children to express themselves and so to provide as much material as possible, through both their expression and the content of their speech (Robson 1993 p.229).

The initial interview in each school was the only one to be totally structured, to ensure a systematic approach to collecting initial data which could be collected with objectivity. The majority of the interviewing was conducted with individual children in a semi structured fashion. The interview schedule can be seen in Appendix 9. Questions were written down, and the same questions were asked of each child so that comparison would be possible. There was, however, also space and time left to allow the children to answer each question as fully as they wanted to and to allow them to elucidate on issues which they felt relevant to the initial question. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989, p.83) explain reasons why research in education often makes use of semi-structured interviews, as educational researchers appreciate the way in which semi-structured interviews allow the interviewee to expand and explore questions and responses. The semi-structured interviews were successful as they served the intended purpose.

Transcribing the interviews within a day of recording them ensured that I had time and space to make preliminary analysis of the data and so construct the next semi-structured interviews in a way which would be of most use. I found myself in agreement with

Sjoberg and Nett (1968, p.2) in recognising the importance of reflective time, as to maintain objectivity and focus: the researcher must allow time in which to consider the situation and data, before attempting to collect more.

Faithful transcriptions in which all audible words were written, lost something of the subtlety of the spoken language. Halliday's advice to '*include in the transcript whatever features are necessary to the researcher's purpose*' (1989, p.76) was followed as was my initial instinct to keep to a relatively simple format. This was not intended as purely linguistic research, as it was the content rather than the delivery in which lay the main focus of the data collection. It was not necessary to indicate every intonation and change of pitch. Notes were made as the interviews were conducted, to help with the transcriptions later. When the transcriptions were complete, lines were numbered as well as transcript pages. This referencing system has been used throughout the thesis.

### Data Collection

In the process of data analysis, a summary of guidelines from Hycner (1985) given by Cohen & Manion (1994 pp.279-303) was useful and interesting, as were the guidelines of Strauss & Corbin (1990). The data were collected and analysed along the following steps: transcription, open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

### Coding

I began the coding process after the first week of interviews. This began to ensure that the questions were well enough focused, yet flexible enough, to allow the children to give answers which would answer my research questions. As the coding process

continued I was ever conscious of the context and time in which the interviews had taken place. For example, interviews concerning leisure time activities asked shortly after a holiday would gain a different response from the same questions asked immediately prior to exams. The following was borne in mind throughout the data collection:

*the unlimited purpose of the data collection must be to obtain valid information from those questioned [...] we can never assume that the accounts given are simply answers to questions; they are the joint product of the questions as perceived by informants and the social situational circumstances within which the questions were put to them* (Brenner, Brown & Caner 1985, p.151)

## Coding

*Coding has been defined by Kerlinger as the translation of question response and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis*

(Cohen & Manion 1994,p.286)

*Coding represents the operations by which data are broken down, conceptualised, and put back together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data* (Strauss & Corbin 1990, pp.57-58)

The transcripts of the interviews were to be open-coded following a careful content analysis. The decision to postcode, rather than use predetermined coding categories, was made in order to allow for inductive theory generation, taking account of the student voice. It also ensured that all of the data would undergo thorough analysis.

## Open Coding



*The process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising, and  
categorising data* (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p.61)

During the open coding process, the analysis of the interview transcripts led to the identification of several recurring, related concepts which were collected into ten categories, with various properties appertaining to each category. The labelling of categories was kept simple and logical, making it easy for me to recognise the component parts of each category during the analysis. For example, a concept which was common within the transcripts relating to reading habits, was the place in which students read, through choice or necessity. The location of their reading was categorised as 'Context'. This is illustrated in Diagram 4.2 below:

## CODING CATEGORIES

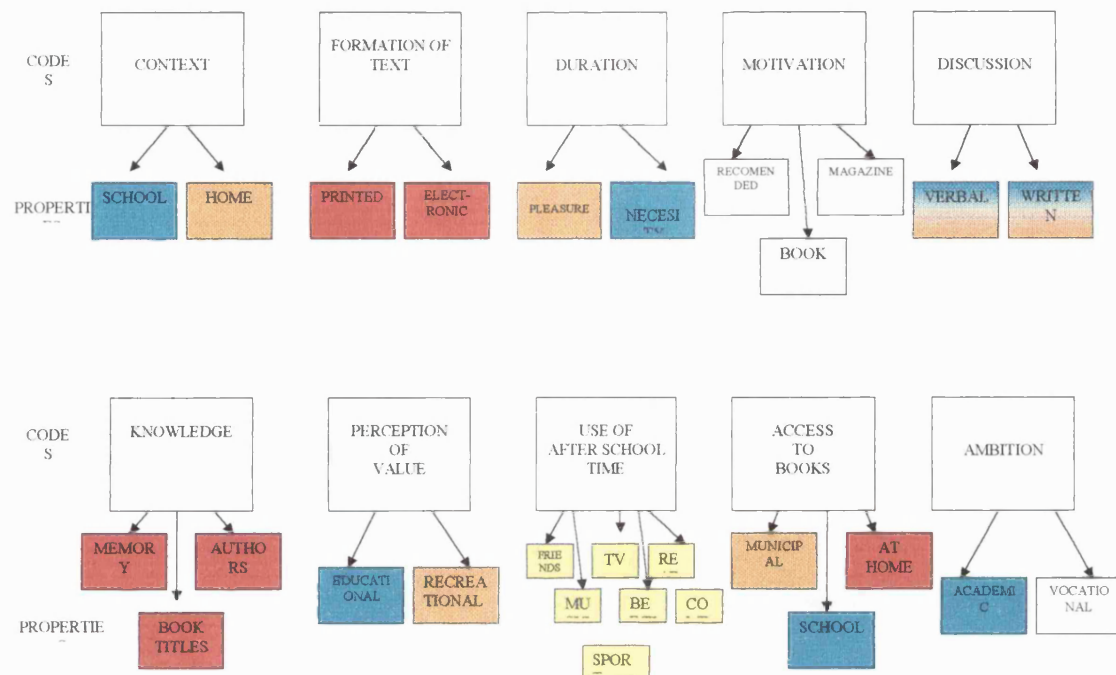


Table 4.2

Having identified the properties of each category it was then possible to subdivide each category again, through the properties, finding dimensions within them. These are illustrated in table 4.3 which follows:

Category	Properties	Dimensions
Context	In School	Reading aloud, adult enforced
	Home	choice, in bed, living room, elsewhere
Format of text	Printed	Books, magazines
	Electronic	Computer, T.V. 'Phone
Duration	Reading for pleasure	
	Necessity	

Motivation of choice	Recommendation	Friend, family member
	Book	Teacher, T.V., film
	Magazine	Blurb, cover, title, author Hobby, peer group
Discussion of reading	Verbal	Articulate – monosyllabic
	Written	
Knowledge about books	Memory	Early childhood – present
	Authors	
	Book Titles	confident – ignorant
Perception of value	Educational	Subject specific
	Recreational	Calming, enjoyable, hobby, relaxing
Use of after school time	With friends	Specific, unspecified
	T.V.	Alone, with friends, with family
	Reading	Alone, in company
	Music	Singing, playing, school, abbey
	Sport	Tennis, football, skateboarding, Swimming
	Computer	Games, internets, school work, email
	Bed time	Fixed – unspecified
Access to books	Domestic	Own, parents, brothers, sisters
	School	Library, class rooms, friends
	Municipal	Bookshops, library
Ambitions	Vocational	Precise, vague, lacking

Academic

Hard working, aimless

Table 4.3

I asked questions of the data repeatedly throughout this process in the attempt to ensure that I remained focused upon what was there, and to clarify its potential relevance. The ever present questions in this initial stage of the coding process were:

- in what way does this category illuminate the role of reading and how does it reflect that role?
- who is affected by this category?
- where is this category apparent?

The answers to these questions were used to determine the dominant categories and to then conduct the axial coding.

Through further systematic coding, I was able to identify some aspects which had been discussed by previous researchers and compare findings. An example of this, is the category that I initially labelled 'Duration', as the amount of time spent reading by boys and girls within this age group had been a specific focus of previous work.

### Axial Coding

The axial coding, by which I mean the process of coding used to identify the key features of the data, was not entirely detached from the open coding. A more honest description is to say that axial coding was a process which occurred sporadically during, and then in a more sustained way after, open coding:

*Though open and axial coding are distinct analytical procedures, when the researcher is actually engaged in analysis he or she alternates between the two modes. (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p.98)*

During axial coding, the relationships between one category and another were examined. Both similarities and differences in the causal conditions and consequences between categories were sought. The categories which had been identified in the open coding process were explored again within the resulting axial coding. This is illustrated in Diagram 4.4 below. Through this process, the following codes were identified as the dominant ones: Need, Pleasure, Time and Access.

#### AXIAL CODING

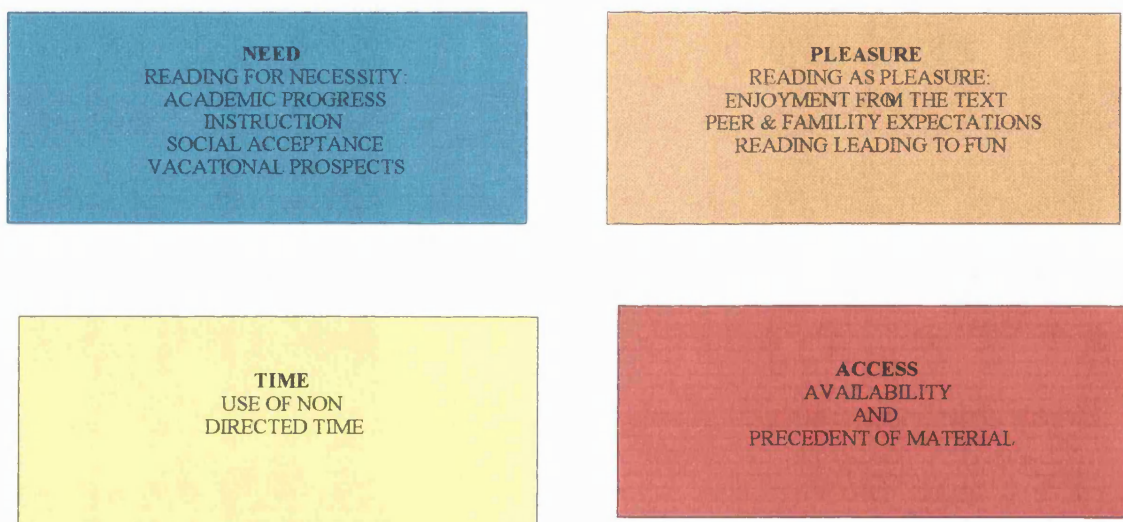


Table 4.4

The term 'precedent of material' here is used to describe whether or not there is a precedent of possessing reading material within the family household.

The identification of these codes led to the conceptualisation of the relationship between them, illustrated here in Diagram 4.5:

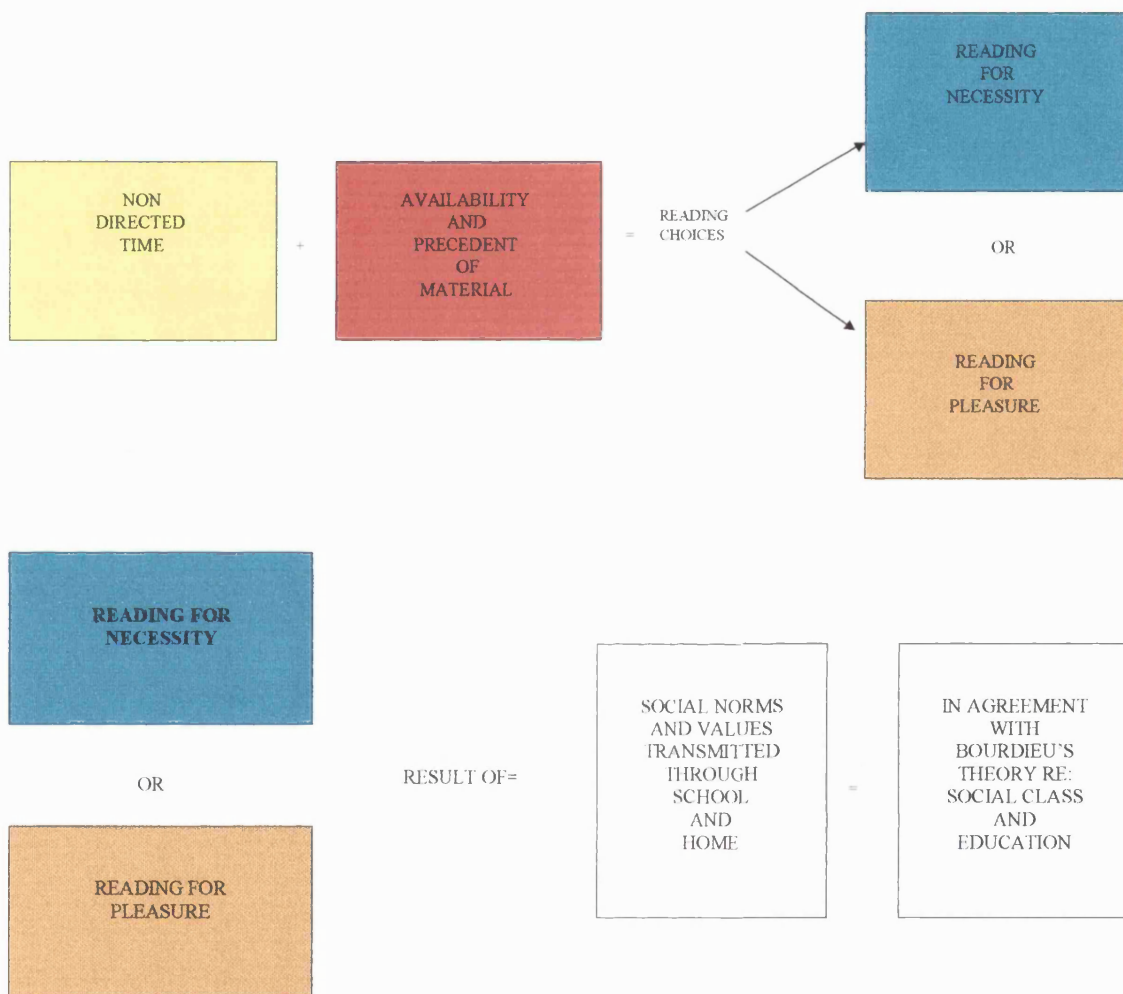


Table 4.5

Selective Coding

Categories were cross-referenced with one another and against data, in the quest to support or refute possible connections and thus selective coding took place:

*The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development* (Strauss & Corbin 1990,p.116)

A great number of conditions (both causal and intervening) were found with an array of potential and probable consequences. These were tracked through use of notes, memos and diagrams, eventually leading to a valid story line connecting and validating relationships and identification of the core category, which was identified as Use of Non Directed Time.

#### 4.5 Myself as researcher

Throughout the research process I have been aware of my own interests, as a teacher of English. As such it is inevitable that I had some preconceptions about the role of reading in the lives of pupils the same age as some of those I teach, or perhaps that there were some things that I wanted to find. It is also instinctive for me to try to encourage children to read and to help them secure their knowledge of reading material. Being aware of these aspects of myself, I have been able to avoid the temptation to coax or to advise the children who have been the subjects of my research. I was keen that I should not influence the children's talk and deliberately did not use the children with whom I work on a daily basis as subjects and thus avoided a situation in which *'the observer*

*and subject have to a large degree merged'* as can happen with teachers conducting research (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989, p.44).

Although I chose not to research in the same institution in which I worked, I found that being a teacher gave me a certain advantage with the children who were the subjects of my case studies. I could tell them honestly that I was a teacher in another school, and this they accepted without question. The children recognised me as a teacher rather than as a stranger whom they could not associate with their context or experiences. As a teacher I am naturally used to talking with children appropriately, yet needed to be aware of child behaviour, bias and speech patterns, as well as those of my own.

#### Summary of Chapter 4

In this chapter I have argued that a qualitative approach is most useful in addressing the questions raised throughout the first three chapters. I have indicated that this research followed the following pattern: survey to confirm and consolidate previous findings followed by case studies conducted in three schools over a time period of two academic terms. The conceptual framework indicating the key questions of the study and presumed relationships between them, has also been indicated. It is the conceptual framework under which the study was conducted that chiefly distinguishes this research as original. Identification of the codes used throughout this work has been made. The dimensions of the codes have been identified, and are explored in detail in the following chapter.



## Chapter 5

### Data findings and analysis

It is in this chapter that the data referred to in Chapter 4 are presented in detail. Each dimension identified through the coding process is discussed and then analysed, with reference, when useful, to aspects of previous work discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. A considerable amount of direct quotation of what the pupils said, is used within this chapter, as it is their words that indicate the role of reading in their lives most clearly. The analysis presented within this chapter, leads to the major findings, discussion and recommendations of the concluding chapters of this thesis.

#### 5.1 Initial Category - use of after school time

This category describes how the children concerned spent their undirected time, how much time they chose to spend reading, and which activities they chose rather than reading. It begins with a discussion of the children's responses to questions regarding how much time they spend reading, with some discussion of their beliefs concerning whether or not they should spend time reading. Properties of this category are identified and isolated following this discussion.

Some of the children, when asked how much time they spent reading, during an average evening, suggested in their responses that they did not feel that they spent enough time reading and that they felt that they should be spending more time reading but were unable to do so as other activities, or pressures, consumed their time. For other children,

reading in their own time was not something that they considered a part of their regular routine, and did not feature largely in their noted habits, even though they did not seem to have a great many other formalised interests or activities that would take up their time and thus preventing them from spending time reading. One of the interesting aspects of this phenomenon is that all of those who regularly participated in many activities, and felt they should spend more time reading seemingly come from one type of background. Those who apparently do little and do not feel the need to read greatly in their free time, come from another.

Specific properties and dimensions identified within the category of use of After School Time are discussed later. The focus here is upon the effects of time demands upon children, and their feelings concerning the amount of reading that those time demands allow them to do.

Responses to the question “do you spend much time reading?” generated the following answers at School C

*it depends if I've bought a magazine or not (f)*

*I read about half an hour a night (m)*

*about half an hour sometimes I get really tired and I read less (m)*

*I read now and again magazines and stuff like that (m)*

No evaluation about the amount of time spent reading was made by these pupils . They did not seem to feel that they read a great deal nor that they spent insufficient time reading. Similar information was given in response to being asked how a typical evening might be spent, of which more will be said later.

The responses to the same question at School B were very different in one respect but almost identical in another:

*in about a day of school I would say about twenty minutes to about an hour*  
 was the response of one boy who claimed not to enjoy reading at all. When asked if he thought he spent a lot of time reading he replied

*it's too much.*

Other responses were:

*in a day I think about two or three hours (m)*

*I read about two hours (m)*

*on school days I read about half an hour or something at weekends I don't read at all (m)*

*about two or three hours (m)*

*I might read or watch tv for about half an hour (f)*

*I read at school and then before I go to bed about an hour (f)*

*about two hours (f)*

*about the same (f)*

*I only read at school about half an hour(f)*

These responses were surprising and interesting for a number of reasons:

Several of the boys claimed to spend more than two hours a day reading. This does not correspond with the findings of my survey concerning the average amount of time spent reading by boys, or any other published statistics on this subject. That the boys in this group on the whole seemed to spend more time reading than girls of similar background and similar ability, was also surprising and not reflected in national surveys. It is likely that the boys, especially, felt under some pressure to claim to spend a substantial amount of time reading. This is supported by responses to later questions in which they

were on the whole unable to name books that they had recently read and indeed admitted that they had not completed a reading book for some time, several years in some cases (this will be illustrated under a different category heading). Not all reading is book reading however, and it is possible that the boys had spent as much time reading as they claimed, despite not having read books.

The motives for such exaggeration are of interest. If, as seems likely, the boys felt the need to inflate the amount of time they spent reading, the natural question to ask is why the boys of School A did not feel a similar obligation; why did these boys? They are mostly from backgrounds with proportionately more economic and cultural capital than those of School C. Reading is associated with cultural capital. The boys in School A are being educated in an environment that is actively and publicly geared towards achieving and recognising potential, a competitive environment in which pupils have perhaps learnt to say what they think will sound impressive. Pupils in schools B and C are perhaps less self confident and more concerned with being thought of as doing the socially and culturally acceptable thing. This expectation, that is not apparent in School C, has possibly been instilled in them by their school.

A fortnight later I asked the same group of children from School A, whether they read (usually) during the evening. Their responses consisted of the following comments:

*if I have a good book then I will but if I don't I won't unless my mum tells me to(f)*

*if my brother's watching tv and It's something I don't want to watch I might read (m)*

*I read most nights but some nights I stay up really late so I'm too tired to read (m)*

*[I will] read for maybe at least an hour or more (m)*

*I go to bed and read and sleep (f)*

*[I will] spend half an hour reading it depends if I'm tired or not so usually I read every other night (f)*

These answers did not fully support their earlier claims, although were sufficient to suggest that they spend more of their time reading than the children of School C, and felt to some extent that they ought to spend at least some time reading regularly.

When I asked the children at School A whether or not they read a lot, they felt that they did and defined a lot as generally about half an hour a day, which would superficially suggest that they spent less time reading than the group at School C. These children had more to say, however, and expanded on their initial answers with some insightful material. One boy and one girl discussed the issue:

*f: in the holidays I read much more, but, in the week about half an hour or an hour at bed time.*

*m: sometimes it can be quite hard to read in the week days, especially now as we have to revise for exams and we have home work*

*f.: yeah quite a lot of home work*

*m: and I do quite a lot of sport's activities I don't get that much time during the nights during the week... say for home work we have to read a chapter or twenty pages or something I might play on my nintendo, if we hadn't had any reading to do I might read in my spare time*

A second boy joined in:

*m2: I don't really set a time to read ... I don't really have much time when I get home from school anyway... I do what I can*

The points being made here suggest that these children feel quite genuinely that they are prevented from spending as much time reading as they might otherwise choose, by other pressures, mainly the amount of home work they were expected to complete. Later conversations revealed however that even though they did not claim to spend many hours reading each night, they actually did spend considerable time reading actively on a regular basis, as was borne out in the confident manner with which they could discuss books and the detail with which they could relate the contents of the books that they had recently read. The children explained to me that they could not always spend much time reading due to other pressures:

*I try and read every night if I can but sometimes things get in the way and I can't*

The sorts of things that this girl felt got in the way, were usually *sports activities or extra homework*. She said that she read about an hour a night, usually only managing to do so five nights a week. It was generally agreed that if a large amount of reading had been set for homework, then an inversely proportional amount of time would be spent reading from choice.

Another girl echoed her sentiments when she said

*I enjoy reading I love reading but during the term time its difficult to read because there's so much to do I do try and fit it in but I read a lot over the holidays*

One of the boys admitted that *unfortunately* he did not spend as much time reading as he thought he should. The way in which these children use their time is clearly dictated to some extent by external forces, including their school and extra curricular activities. Reading takes second place to other demands, yet there is a strong feeling that reading is something worthwhile, that should be done throughout the year. Homework demands and other activities related to school take up a considerable amount of time. This results

in difficulties in finding time to read for pleasure. Although much of the homework must involve reading, doing homework is not recognised as time spent reading unless it is isolated reading, i.e. not instrumental reading in order to answer questions, solve problems or complete projects. Perceptions of what it is to read will be discussed under another category heading. For these children, reading is accepted as something that ought to be done. As well as being beneficial, it is regarded as a pleasurable activity to be indulged in when time allows. Such beliefs may be a reflection of the contextualising cultural expectations and precedent, set by family, friends and school. Another boy from this school stated:

*I don't really ever get the time to read but I do enjoy reading*

Again, the desire to read is constrained by other activities which are more pressing.

The more I spoke with these children, the more apparent it became that they do indeed lead busy, active lives, yet they also read actively, even though they didn't always feel they had the time to do so. Several of this group mentioned that they spent time at weekends reading, and this was not a common factor with the other groups interviewed

A summary of findings so far :

low achieving school = pupils who openly do not choose to spend much time reading

relatively high achieving comprehensive school = pupils who spend more time reading and are competitive in their responses to how much time they spend reading

high achieving independent school = pupils who choose to read actively yet feel that they do not read as much as they should, due to other school based pressures

Gender does not appear to be a distinguishing factor here, apart from in School B. This is interesting as the surveys referred to in Chapters three and four suggest that there is great difference between genders illustrated through reading habits. What appeared to determine the role of reading more than gender, here, was school type. The type of school attended is, in this case at least, largely a result of the cultural and, or economic capital possessed by the family. This has implications which are discussed in Chapter 6.

Understanding the use made of after school (or leisure) time by students, is integral to answering questions concerning the role of reading. The activities that the children fill their time with vary widely, with different effects upon their reading habits. It is interesting to note this variety, in relation not only to the individual differences but also in relation to differences in the habitus: in this case, type of school the child belongs to. The habitus of each child is indicated in the life histories in Chapter 4. As each of the three schools represents a different balance of backgrounds in terms of capital, both cultural and economic, here is a chance to test Bourdieu's theory that such capital pre-disposes habits and behaviour.

The following properties and dimensions have been identified within this category, and will now be discussed:

Properties	Dimensions
time with friends	specific, motivated, aimless
tv	alone, with family, with friends
reading	alone, in company, through choice, enforced
choir	school, abbey



sport	tennis, football, skateboarding, swimming
computer	games, internet, school work, email
eating	tea, snacks, dinner
home work	keeping up, trying to improve, taken seriously
unspecified	time with parents, brothers, sisters
specified bed time	in place, not in place

Table 5.1

Some of these properties were common to pupils in all three schools, such as watching tv and playing sport, although the amount of time spent on these properties and the dimensions within them varied. Other dimensions were unique to specific school categories.

## 5.2 Time with friends

Simply spending time with friends did not feature as a significant, regular habit, to many of the children involved in this work. This was common to all three schools, as only one child in each school mentioned that they regularly spend free time in the evening with friends. Lee of School C said that after school he would '*get changed and do my home work and get changed and go out and play*', Lucy of School B said that a normal evening for her would consist of: '*I go on the computer and then I go out with my friends and then come home*' and James of School A included in a description of his typical evening: '*I'll probably do about another hour of home work I might do yet another hour then I might either play football outside with some friends or..*'.

While few of the children specified spending time with friends as a regular occupation, clearly spending time with friends was one aspect of their other activities, such as participating in sport, for example. One point of interest here is that pupil perceptions of how they spend their own time are not always entirely complete. One pupil of School A made a reference to a specific activity participated in with the friends, whereas the other two pupils were unspecific about what they did with their friends, answering with a vagueness that is in some ways characteristic of their answers generally, but especially when talking about books and reading, as will be seen in further evidence in a later section of this chapter. The language used by Lee reflects a lower level of maturity than that of James; Lee chooses to *go out and play* whereas James *might play football*. The unfocused and immature nature of Lee's response perhaps is indicative of a lesser level of cultural or at least, linguistic capital in his life.

It is interesting that time spent with friends appeared to take the time of so few of the children's non directed time, with only one in each school recognising this as a regular pastime. The data indicate that time spent with friends, is understood as time spent with friends in unspecified or irregular activities, i.e. it is not the same as time spent playing sport, which presumably might also be time spent with friends.

One's choice of friends is a determinant of other choices, especially perhaps for children, for whom the need to be accepted amongst their peer group, and to have friends with whom they share similar interests and experiences, may be great. Social psychologists argue that peer groups play a large role in helping individuals recognise their sense of self, through recognition of shared beliefs, understandings, values and norms:

*I am located in a network of mutual obligations and commitments to a manifold of other people and even to some animals. Finally, I have a social place, a location in a manifold of persons, ordered by status, age, reputation and the like.* (Harré & Gillett 1994, p.104)

Of the three children who described spending time with friends in the evenings, none of them spent regular time in the evenings reading. These three children were low or middle ability children, two of whom were lacking in motivation. This is indicated in the way in which they were unable to speak of any activity with enthusiasm. Spending undirected time with their peers, consisting of similarly low ability children with low motivation perhaps contributed towards a negative perception of the role of reading. They did not spend their time together (reading or indeed) partaking in any activity for which reading might be seen to be of some use. Not only does such use of time ensure that less time is available for reading, it also indicates to the child that reading is not necessary for their social survival or acceptance within their peer groups. None of them can be spending time reading when they are all outside playing or walking around town together. In fact, to read, for these children would identify them as different from their peers. For the two children from Schools B and C, no obligation to read was felt. Their activity, which did not regularly include reading was structured '*in the light of prescriptive norms or discursive validations*' (Harré & Gillett 1994, p.117). The child attending School A appeared to feel some guilt at time spent with friends, claiming that he felt he ought to spend more time reading. It seems that his personal identity was at odds to some extent with his social identity in Harré's terms. He spent less time in an undirected way than the other two children. He was aware that his friends spent time reading as did his family. Spending undirected aimless time was not in fact the norm for him or his peer group, more something that was done occasionally. He does not follow

his social norms rigidly, a phenomenon which may be explained by Harré who points out that:

*In being trained to follow a rule, a person is equipped with a disposition to respond to certain conditions in certain ways but is not causally compelled to do so.* (Harré & Gillett 1994, p.120)

This also explains why the boy in School A felt that he should read (due to the cultural capital within his school and the economic capital within his family, it was his social norm to do so) while the children in Schools B and C did not share that consciousness.

Television is commonly condemned as the cause of a decline in the amount of time spent reading, by children, during the last sixty years. The next section discusses the data relevant to this debate in consideration of the effect of television viewing upon the role of reading.

### 5.3 Use and effect of television viewing

Spending some time watching television was a common feature of all three schools and groups. Only one child, a boy in School B, did not live in a home with a television. It is this boy who claimed to spend two to three hours a day reading, although he could not be specific about anything that he had read. Vague comments such as “I read too many books to keep track of them” (B11.41) were characteristic of this boy, although that may have been true. There was a difference in attitude towards and use of television. Overall, use of television did seem to affect the children’s reading habits.

Ann, of School A, explained that if she had free time in the evening she would watch television because “I don’t want to waste the time so I watch television, because I always know that I can turn on my light and read, but I know that after quarter to ten, I can’t watch television downstairs so I use my time wisely” (A211.2-3). This implies that watching television is not seen as a waste of time, even within a busy life, by someone who enjoys reading. She is allowed to read later at night but not to watch television, so she chooses to take advantage of the chance to watch television, while she can thus postpone her reading to later hours when she is likely to be more tired etc. and in the isolation of her room. (The significance of where the children read is discussed fully in the category below entitled Context). Another girl in the same school echoed this belief. She said that although she found it hard to find the time to read during a typical evening *“I like playing sport or watching tv”* (A111.43). It is interesting that watching television is such a natural part of these girls’ lives that they do not recognise it as a time consuming activity preventing them from doing other things. On the contrary, watching television constitutes so great a part of natural life for some that other activities, including reading, can easily be done at the same time. In response to being asked where John did his reading he replied *“normally I do it in the lounge just normally in front of the television... I normally don’t watch I sometimes glance up but I listen”* (A1411.11-17). Both activities can thus be carried out at a superficial level.

The following table indicates the number of children who said they watched television, in response to a question asking them how they would spend their time having arrived home from school in the evening:

	Watch TV	Didn't mention TV at all
School A	7	1
School B	5	1
School C	6	1

There is no significant difference shown in these figures. The answers reveal a difference in use of television however.

Watching television and reading a book are perceived as interchangeable activities by many of the children, as is illustrated by their comments below. Both activities are in competition with each other for the same time slots in the lives of busy Year 8 pupils, who feel they have little spare time for either. Both activities have to be fitted in around other timetabled or social activities, such as sport and clubs (discussed later), or spending time with the family. The children in School A, including Ann, as already seen, who enjoy reading, do not place more importance on reading than watching television. Several of the children made little distinction between time to read and time to watch television. When asked what he did when not working during the evenings, one boy said, *“mostly television or reading”* (A15l.41). Another said *“I don't really set a time to read or watch t.v. [...] before I go to bed I generally watch t.v.”* (A21l.6-7) He went on to explain that he watched the television with his family at weekends but was unlikely to read during that time: *“Sundays no one really does anything that I know of in my family we basically watch t.v. all the time [...] we don't often read but we do in the week days”* (A21l.14-15). Watching television in this instance has one great perceived advantage over reading. Watching television can be done as a family activity, to occupy joint leisure time. It is an activity to be enjoyed simultaneously by the whole family.

Reading is an activity to be conducted alone, when there is perhaps no one else to share the same leisure time as the reader. Reading is not then perceived as a sociable activity but one of solitude. Another boy of the same school: *"I tend to watch t.v. sometimes I read books but that's not very often only at weekends would I read the books"* (A161.4).

The answer of one boy in School B illustrates the way in which the television and books can substitute for each other, clearly:

*if my brother's watching tv and its something I don't want to watch I might read*

*I: what if your brother isn't watching something?*

*then I'd watch t.v (B511.2-6)*

For most of the children interviewed in School A, reading and the television are equally likely to be enjoyed during leisure time. Some of the statements made by pupils in School A reflected a judgmental attitude towards the television, i.e. they said that if there was nothing on that they considered of great enough interest to them, they would do something else, often read. Such a value criterion was less apparent in comments made by pupils in other schools.

It is quite characteristic of children in Schools A and B that they will look to see if there is anything on the television that they want to watch, if not, only then will they do something else. One child in School C also did this:

*normally I watch a bit of television if there's nothing on I'll do my home work or whatever (A411.7-8)*

*if there's something on television I might watch that (A101.5)*

*if there isn't anything good on t.v I would read my book if my book isn't brilliant  
I'm more likely to watch t.v. (A16l.10)*

*maybe do some home work and watch some tv and then do some more home  
work (B4l.3)*

*if there's nothing on telly I read (C12l.20)*

For the children quoted above, television choice precedes reading choice. The children with less structured time, those who did not appear to be involved in many extra curricular activities, clubs or teams, were generally more vague in describing their routine evenings. With fewer organised activities they were less conscious of time and put less value on it. For these pupils (mostly from School C), reading was not seen as an equal alternative to watching television.

*sometimes I speak to my mum or watch tv or something (B3l.9)*

*from school I will watch some telly then I will have some tea then I will do home  
work*

*then I will maybe mope about the house (C3l.2)*

*eat my dinner watch tv (C4l.2)*

*usually watch some tv (C12l.18)*

*most of the time I'll get home and sit and watch telly (C14l.6)*

*stay in and watch telly (C14l.6)*

It seems from this evidence that the less organised the activity of the children, the more likely they are to watch television indiscriminately, and not to consider reading as a realistic alternative to television viewing. Where watching television was identified as the predominant activity during free time in the evening, the children had less concept of time or of exactly how they spent their time. Children who made a conscious choice between reading and watching television (regardless of which activity won their



attention ultimately) were more time conscious and felt that they did something constructive with their time.

It is apparent that the lives of some children are structured in such a way as to prevent them from being able to enjoy quality reading time of their own. Time management is clearly the key here. Habits are formed early that exclude comfortable reading in favour of television viewing, which may be more in the control of the present adult than of the child. An environment that is inconsistent or routinely interrupted is not necessarily one conducive to reading for pleasure. Richard's leisure reading is confined to later hours of the evening, while much time earlier in the evening is employed watching television:

*I go to my dad's I watch a bit of tv do my home work play on the computer then I go back home to my mum's and watch a bit more tv do a bit more home work then I play on my game boy or my saga then I have dinner and I watch a bit more tv and finish off my home work and go upstairs and read until about eleven when I go to sleep (B6ll.2-5)*

Richard reads every night, after completing a cycle of home work, tv and computer games. Watching television does not appear to be an equal alternative to reading here. Paul, in the same school, who is the only child in this case study who does not have a television, gave a remarkably similar answer to Richard, if reading is substituted for watching t.v:

*first I will lay on the sofa for about half an hour maybe even an hour if I'm feeling tired and read a book and listen to some music and then I will get on with my home work and then after I've done that I'll probably have my supper and then read for maybe at least an hour or more um have a bath and after that relax and maybe read again (B7ll.2-5)*

Both boys are in the same class in the same school and live in the same area, so it is not these secondary influences that have affected their different behaviour patterns. Richard is a more able boy than Paul, so it is not lack of ability that dissuades Richard from spending more time reading and less time in front of the television. If it is the case (as I have already suggested) that reading and watching television serve the same role in occupying the same lone leisure time, and so often are in competition with each other when both options are available, it makes sense that when only one of the two is easily available, that is indulged in, rather than a totally different activity. It seems that there are certain times during the evening when the majority of children interviewed in these case studies would either read or watch television. Some have to make the decision each day, others are more inclined towards one than the other and for others, the decision is already made and no choice is available. Whichever category the child falls into, one result is constant: Time spent watching television has a detrimental effect upon time spent reading. It does not necessarily affect the quality of what is read, however, or the level of learning or enjoyment gained from the reading.

I was interested to note that only one child (C21.14) named television viewing as a positive influence on his choice of reading material. My preliminary survey suggests that a number of children (both boys and girls) choose their reading material under the influence of a film adaptation or television series of the book in question, however.

More children in School A saw reading and watching television as equal claims to their leisure time; this was also a feature of some of the children in School B. For most children (from all three schools) watching television was not seen as a time consuming activity, although clearly could be such. Children from Schools A and B tended to

watch television in the evening and read later at night, often immediately before sleeping. More children in School C did not consider reading a realistic alternative to watching television. Children in this school were more inclined to watch television, without stating that it had to be something that they considered 'good'. The greatest exception to this is a child from School B, who does not have regular access to a television.

Television watching is an activity that took some of the time of the majority of case study subjects, regardless of social class or academic ability. The way in which television was viewed, and its effect upon reading habits, was not consistent across the three schools. This, too, seemed a consequence of the different ways the children organised their time. For busy, achieving children, watching television was a conscious decision for a given amount of time or a specific programme. Children in School A were unlikely to watch television if something did not especially appeal to them. They would choose another time filling activity instead, often reading. For those with less definite ideas about how they spent their time the television was often on while nothing specific was being watched. These more passive television viewers were unspecific about how much time they spent watching television or what they might enjoy watching.

Watching television and reading fulfilled the same role for the children and are activities which can fill the same time slots. For example, having returned home from school and before eating, or later in the evening, are times when both activities are common amongst school children of this age. Both activities can take place comfortably within the house and are associated with specific rooms, the sitting room or the bed

room. My data suggest that both were activities which sometimes resulted from the lack of another obvious option.

The effect of television viewing upon the reading habits of the sample was not obviously positive, as it was in direct competition for time and only one child suggested that he made reading choices as a result of watching television programmes.

An activity which took up far more time than the television, for some children in the sample, is sport. The effects of sporting interests and implications upon a role of reading are discussed in the following section.

#### 5.4 Sporting demands

Sport is an activity that takes up a lot of the time of some, and no time at all, of others. A study of the influences and effects of sport upon the reading habits of these children was interesting, in part because it varied so much between the three schools. A brief statistical summary of my findings will demonstrate this and act as a useful prologue to the presentation of the qualitative data that follows.

All of the children were invited to discuss their typical evening or weekend activities. The question was deliberately open and did not lead them to talk about sport unless they chose to do so. A consequence of this is that some children did not mention sport at all. From this, I drew the conclusion that sport does not play a major role in their lives. Of those who did include sport in discussion of the way in which they spent their leisure

time, there were more boys than girls, and more from School A than from Schools B or C:

	School A	School B	School C	Total
Boys	3	3	1	7
Girls	2	0	0	2
Total	5	3	1	9

Table 5.2

The types of sport mentioned were equally diverse, and specific in many cases to the school.

	School A	School B	School C
Biking	1	2	0
Swimming	1	0	0
Tennis	2	0	0
Carting	1	0	0
Football	1	0	0
Skateboarding	0	2	1

Table 5.3

While these numbers are too small to be conclusive in any way, they are interesting and support the following suggestions to a degree.

Different economic capital = Different types of school = enjoy different types of sport

The sports enjoyed by those of School A tended to be sports that had to be organised or prearranged, either by the school or by a club. The sports enjoyed by those attending schools B and C (e.g. skateboarding) were more likely to be sports that did not need to be prearranged or to be played at a specific time or venue. A wider range of sports were included in the discussions of pupils from school A than from Schools B or C.

The data infers that being interested in sport (any sport) has two noticeable effects upon reading habits:

- initially it seems detrimental as it takes time, often scheduled and unnegotiable, although it seems that children who have scheduled activities such as sport are in fact more likely to use their remaining time constructively and may find time to read (see below)
- positive – specialist magazines focusing on how to improve particular sporting skills etc. are read, often by children who do not choose to read anything else and who do not see themselves as people who read for pleasure.

Amongst the children who were dedicated to sport at competition or club level, sport invariably came first (with the exception of home work), and would be chosen above all other activities, including reading. Andrew felt that he had little time to read:

*I go swimming most nights then I come home and have about an hour before I go to bed I generally watch t.v. I don't really set a time [For Reading], I do what I can really (A211.7-8)*

During the same interview, Andrew told me that he was interested in carting as well as swimming and had recently spent a lot of time reading about it in order to learn more:

*I know most of it now so I don't need more but for the last two weeks I have been reading loads (11.56-57)*

This statement reveals several things about Andrew:

- a. he is interested in carting;
- b. he chooses to read specifically about that which he is interested in;
- c. when he feels that he has learnt as much as he can/wants to, he does not read any more.

This is indicative of the largely instrumental role that reading plays in the lives of boys such as Andrew, and is in keeping with the notion that boys will choose to read fact rather than fiction. It also explains that he is reading for a specific purpose and with a specific aim that fiction cannot satisfy. The fact that Andrew's reading choices are limited to his interests is supported in a later comment that he made, suggesting that he doesn't really know what is generally available to him, but will look for and find material related to something he is interested in:

*that's all magazines are these days isn't it, games and sport (A31.10)*

There are in fact magazines that are concerned with other interests, but Andrew is only aware of the ones that interest him and appears quite ignorant of the broader spectrum.

In a later interview Andrew told me:

*most evenings I have to go swimming training (A16.1.5.)*

The use of the word *have* is interesting in this context, as it is one that was not used in relation to reading in this way. Sport, and other organised activities 'have' to be done. There may be a sense of letting someone (team, coach, school, parent, peer group etc.) down, if one does not commit to and attend such activities. There can be no such sense connected with reading which is, usually in the cases of these children, an isolated act in one's own company. It is easier not to read than it is not to turn up to a sports practice -

the demands are equal and it is not therefore surprising that sports players feel that they *have* to play sport, but no one feels that they *have* to read. The notions that the children have of what they should spend their time doing, is closely connected with their sense of self and identity, as discussed in the opening section of this chapter. It is also reflective of their cultural and economic capital. This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6.

Hattie, also in School A, does not read specialist magazines but does read the sports pages of newspapers. She was in a minority of children who said that they read a newspaper, in part or whole, so in that sense her interest in sport has had a positive effect on her reading habits although:

*I try and read every night if I can but sometimes things get in the way [...]*

*I've got netball particularly at the moment then I've got school that's outside school I've got school sports aswell that's tennis this term (A111/12-20)*

While she clearly felt that her sport prevented her from spending much time reading, her answer when asked what she enjoyed doing when she was not working was

*I like playing sport or watching tv (A111.43)*

It is interesting that those who feel they have not sufficient time to read as much as they feel (for whatever reason) that they should, most consistently report that they spend time watching television. I think that this says something about the way that these children perceive both activities; perhaps it is that reading requires active engagement and can not be turned on and off, in the way that a television set can be passive entertainment.



Sport can clearly have a positive influence upon reading in so far as it can stimulate the most reluctant of readers to read. Frank and Robert from School B, both claimed that they did not enjoy reading, that they found it boring and that they did not ever choose to read, and could recognise no positive role of reading in their lives. They both enjoy skateboarding however. Frank was adamant that he read nothing, answering the question “Are you reading anything at present?” with

*No nothing, well I read a boarding magazine (B21.1)*

Similarly Andy told me

*nothing currently except magazines [...] mountain bike magazines things like that (B511.7-9)* The language used within such magazines is often very sophisticated, making use of specialist and, at times, complex vocabulary. These magazines are not purely factual and are quite demanding upon the reader’s engagement. The boys clearly did not recognise the magazines as being material that one talks about reading. Their concept of reading must not include reading magazines. They quite possibly think of reading as being reading books, more especially, reading fiction. Frank uses magazines in the same way as Andrew (School A): to find specialist information about his preferred sport. Frank saw reading as a useful skill because:

*when I want to go to skateboarding competitions I have to read magazines to find out where they are and things like that (B1011.24-26)*

For these boys the role of reading is an instrumental one, a means to an end. Reading enables them to find out more about the things that they enjoy doing and the things in which they are interested. If they were interested in nothing, it is likely that they would read nothing, as they do not read for the pleasure of reading and do not enjoy fiction. This is also suggested by a boy in School C, who, like the two in School B, did not

claim to enjoy reading but did enjoy skateboarding. When talking about the last time he chose to read anything, he told me that he'd:

*read the latest skate board magazine about a month ago (C11.33)*

He was the only member of this school to express an interest in sport, the effect of which was to increase his leisure time reading:

Even the keenest of readers will put it off if they are also interested in sport, in favour of the sport. Simon is an enthusiastic reader who reads

*most nights unless its like apart from Wednesdays when its football (A101.42)*

His current ambition is to be a sport presenter or commentator or journalist, however, and he recognised the value of reading to support his interest.

Sport sometimes puts the children under time constraints and makes them feel that they have no spare time:

*I rush home from tennis because I do tennis club on a Thursday (Ann A411.6-7)*

after which she would typically watch television or do some homework before going to bed, where she might read (see below).

It was not uncommon for those who were especially interested in a sport to read material concerning that sport:

*I like reading about sport, football and golf [...] not football books because they're not very good, but magazines, which tell you about football information [...] I do quite a lot of sports' activities ( John A111.10-45)*

It is a commonly held belief that children who spend considerable time playing sport are less likely to read than those who do not. Quite the reverse seems often to be the case. Those with an interest in sport are likely to read about it, even if they are unlikely to read any other material from choice.

The role of reading appears greater in the lives of busy active children than of those with fewer interests or time consuming activities. The reasons for this are summarised below:

- they read about things they are interested in - if they are interested in nothing or little, this limits the number of things they will be interested in reading about;
- they are active (physically and mentally) and have a greater appreciation of time and greater desire to do something with it - this might involve reading; and they have time management skills;
- reading is not always recognised as an activity that must be done, but more something to be fitted in around other activities. If there are no other activities for it to fit around, it is less likely to be done.

In Bourdieu's terms:

- Those with more cultural and economic capital are able to give their children a broader range of activities and interests, including an inherited interest in books;
- It is the children who are in schools which are chosen by parents with more economic (at least) capital who read more and are more confident when talking about reading.

The greater the length of time the children have at their own disposal, it would seem, the less likely they are to spend any of it reading. It is the families with economic and

cultural capital who can most easily provide activities and interests which take up time and thus encourage their children to use small amounts of spare time to read by themselves, for pleasure. Having taken part in activities with peers, these children are content and confident enough to spend time reading alone. Children with fewer organised, focused activities are less well focused generally and are less comfortable with the idea of withdrawing from their peers or family to read by themselves - not wanting to be seen to be different.

One of the most interesting aspects of this data analysis was realising that the desire (or ability) to use time to play sport of any kind was greatest in School A, followed by School B, with only one child in School C recognising sport as a regular and time consuming activity of choice. This finding was contrary to stereotypical expectations, i.e. that sport is taken most seriously by those who are under least pressure to perform well academically. The converse appeared to be true: that those children attending School A were encouraged to be high performers, to be competitive and possibly to be team players and supporters with the result that more children from this school than from the other two schools put together dedicated time to playing sport. The children from School A played organised sport, while the only sportsman of School C enjoyed sport in a different way; skateboarding on the streets and in parks. Varying amounts of cultural capital are reflected in these different sporting preferences. Consideration of the context in which different sports are enjoyed as well as the costs, makes this finding less surprising. The majority of the sports enjoyed by children from School A (swimming, tennis, carting, football) are all sports which can involve an amount of specialist equipment and purpose built areas, which often need to be hired. (While it is true that football is not a sport which necessitates great amounts of expensive equipment, the

reality is that in England boys, especially, are encouraged by advertising to wear the correct strip, play with the right boots and balls etc, thus making it a more expensive team sport than it needs to be.) They are also sports which adults, teachers and parents might play or enjoy watching. This is less likely to be true of cycling, which was the named sport from School B, and even less likely to be true of skateboarding. Social, economic and cultural capital all seem to be contributing forces to the sporting choices of these children.

Some of these sports involve team training. Children who are playing team sports may be doing so for social inclusion as much as for the enjoyment of the sport. In all schools, more boys than girls chose to spend time playing sport. Britain maintains a traditional culture which assumes that boys will play, or support, team sports such as football or rugby. A shared interest in such games is a socially acceptable way for boys to bond with each other and enjoy the company of their male peers.

Whilst sport inevitably used time which might otherwise have been used for reading, the overall effect of this activity upon reading was a positive one, as the sports players talked of reading about their chosen sport to learn more about it, or of special events relevant to it. Many of the most ardent readers were also keen sport players. The data suggests therefore that sport does not have a detrimental effect upon reading, although it does little to promote reading fiction, and that those who do not play sport do not necessarily spend more time reading than those who do so. (This is an example of the children recognising the value of reading as literacy. It is unlikely that the sport manuals or magazines could be said to have great literary value.)

### 5.5 The role of the computer and computer games

The twenty first century is a technological age in which global communication is at its most accessible, yet the activity of reading is still essential to such communication. All children in the UK are now (in theory at least) given computer access in schools, and many also have computer access in their homes. Computer games have remained popular big sellers, encouraging children to respond increasingly to images and text upon a screen of varying sizes - to read the screen. It has been stated by some researchers that children spend less time reading now than children of previous decades, yet at the same time they become more and more computer literate, which is surely a form of reading. The concept that more boys than girls spend time reading from a computer was supported by my survey, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 5.4 gives a summary of responses indicating the numbers of children who described making regular use of computers in their free time.

	School A	School B	School C
Boys	4	3	4
Girls	0	3	3

Table 5.4

As computers and computer games are not inexpensive it would seem reasonable to assume that those with greater economic capital would have and use them more than those with less economic capital. It might also seem likely that boys would think of such things as being a regular part of their lives than girls. The case study reflected the

different ways that girls and boys, in each school, incorporated technology into their lives, and the effect of it upon their reading habits. There appears to be an inverse relationship between cultural capital and computer use.

One of my expectations was that some children would feel that they did not read a great deal as they preferred to spend time using their computer. This was confirmed in part by a boy in School A:

*I don't really read all the time, I prefer playing on the computer all day (ChristianA11.47)*

This is a boy who earlier had said that he enjoyed reading, especially things that he found funny such as Terry Pratchett, and was able to discuss his favourite type of books and authors confidently. So, although, as he says here, he does not choose to read all of the time, he does read actively. Playing on the computer is not, in fact, preventing him from doing so, although it does perhaps affect the amount of time that he spends reading (I repeat that even playing on the computer necessitates reading). Despite these points, Christian does not include reading when describing his typical evenings, repeating instead:

*I generally just play on the computer [...] then probably play on the computer (A211.10-12)*

This suggests that Christian does not recognise the time that he spends reading and puts higher value on the time spent playing on the computer, as an activity which does not include reading. It was in talking about computers and accessories that Christian's perception of what reading meant became most clear:

*I don't read manuals because they aren't very interesting*

*(I) what about computer magazines and cheats?*

*I generally borrow them off people instead of buying them*

*(I) you're still reading them?*

*yeah [...] playstation magazines, looking at the new playstaion and stuff new games (A31l.1-9)*

Christian clearly spends some considerable time reading about computer games, but did not recognise this, as he made no effort to buy the magazines himself, and possibly did not recognise such magazines as being material that needed to be read in order to be understood, or counted as reading. This suggests that, for Christian, reading involves books and probably fiction; brief facts accompanying images do not justify the term reading.

Christian's recognition of the role that computers play in his entertainment was echoed by other boys in his school, but not the two girls girls:

*usually I play game boy (Simon A10l.5)*

*go up on the computer (Robert A12l.3-4)*

*might just play on the nintendo (John A14l.7-8)*

From Simon's other responses, it is clear that he is a keen reader, so it was something of a surprise when he explained to me:

*the thing is I have a colour game boy which I have to say I do find more fun than reading [...]I got the colour game boy about a year and a half ago whereas before that I used to read all the time but now I don't read as much (A15l.3-6)*

The amount of time that Simon, like Christian, spends reading books has been affected by the introduction of electronic games to his life; it has not been entirely replaced by it, however. Both boys still read books despite spending time playing computer games. If it is acknowledged that computer games demand that the player responds to visual text



and therefore involves reading, it might be argued that they actually spend more time reading now, and a more diverse range of material. Their perception of reading is such that this is not recognised. It may be that computer games may be seen as a form of reading that is more sociable and has more peer group status than reading books.

The popularity of computer games shown here, in boys of School A, was also common to boys of School B, who also enjoyed playing games or spending time in front of a computer. Pupils of School B used the computer in additional ways to those in School A. One boy told me:

*I spend quite a lot of time in chat rooms and I'm making my own web site so I do that a lot* (RobB21.47). Pupils in School A did not use the computer as a social meeting place or as a form of keeping in touch with friends or as a research tool. School A is a more traditional school which attracts families with an amount of cultural and economic capital; the responses of the children suggest that they are more likely to keep in touch with friends, socialise and research in more traditional manners than via the internet. (It is possible that this is no longer the case, as technological advances continue to affect pupils creating a transient context.) Several of the children, including girls in School B, identified using the internet as a time consuming occupation. There was no apparent difference between the number of girls who spent time on computers and the number of boys who did so in this school. This may be a reflection of a less traditional approach to technology. There were some who did not choose to use a computer and others who would do so if they felt they had to:

*if I have to go on the computer to do my home work then I go on the computer*  
(LucyB311.2-3)

Children who use the computer in School B do not choose to read books or magazines a great deal and would rather use the computer for research than those of School A, who are more in the habit of using books. It seems likely, therefore, that the role of the computer has replaced the role of the book to some extent. It has also encouraged children who are not keen readers, to read. This likelihood was recognised by a boy in School C who had already told me:

*I hate reading it's boring [...] I just can't be bothered to be honest and I'm not that good at it and it gets on my nerves a bit* (RobertC11l.5-25)

Robert clearly lacked confidence with books and was frustrated by his inability to handle large amounts of printed text. He did not choose to sit and read but recognised that he had to at times, to do the things that he did feel confident about, such as playing computer games:

*when I'm playing on the computer stuff comes up on the screen so I read that* (C11l.15-16)

This suggests again that the computer is in fact a positive influence on reading, despite not being a traditional one. Two of these boys said that they would prefer to read from a computer screen than from a book; perhaps if they were in a technology college where that was more commonly practised they would achieve more academically. Insufficient economic capital prevented them from using laptops. In School C, more girls did choose to spend time playing on or using a computer than did not do so.

The majority of the children in School C were not keen readers, nor were they confident when talking about books. It does not appear that computer games claimed time that would otherwise be spent reading books. Through continual use of computers, some of

the less academically able children were able to access and understand text that may have seemed too daunting and inaccessible in a book.

Summary of main points:

- computer games and websites take up a considerable amount of time of some children;
- time spent using a computer may be recognised as time spent reading;
- computers make text more accessible to some children, especially useful to low ability children;
- children who enjoy and are confident reading books will not stop doing so at the introduction of a computer into their lives, but will instead divide their time carefully;
- computers help some children (esp. those with less economic, cultural capital) to communicate more successfully than conventional pen and ink reading and writing. The computer has social and peer group consequences for these children, that books do not have.

The evidence here, also, supports the theory that the more children have to do, the more they will read, although it might not always be a traditional printed text let alone in literary work. Computers are an integral part of the lives of the majority of these children, regardless of their economic capital. The way in which children use computers seems to vary, however, according to their cultural and academic capital. This is equally true when examining the different effects that computers have on reading habits between girls and boys.

Earlier quantitative work, as discussed in Chapter 4, has revealed that boys of this age spend less time reading than girls, and that they are (generally) less interested than are girls, in fiction. The data showed that there is an exception, however: if the reading material and fiction are on a computer screen. The results of the data collection show clearly that more boys (11 in total) than girls (6 in total) recognised spending time working on or playing on a computer, as a time occupying activity. Although not all of these children recognised using a computer as spending time reading, making sense of what comes up on a screen and reacting to it through use of a mouse, keypad or other method, is a kind of reading. Playing games in which the player takes on a role and has to be a character in a strange land, or a hero of some kind or other can be interpreted as a form of interactive reading of fiction. It is the boys of these case studies who are most prepared to spend time during such. While spending time in front of an active computer was given as an activity that detracts from potential reading time, it is, in fact, time spent reading. Other uses of the computer also necessitate reading, using it as a form of contact (email and chat rooms) and research (internet).

Spending time in front of the computer was equally popular within all three schools. It is not currently an activity restricted by cultural or even economic capital, despite their cost. Children with relatively little economic capital, in Schools B and C, talked of having computers at home, but did not talk of having books that they could read at home.

In relation to previous definitions given within this thesis, this is another form of reading that is a result of reading for literacy rather than to become literary.

## 5.6 Homework

Schools B and C have a published homework policy (see Appendix 7) suggesting that pupils may expect a reasonable amount of homework within their capability each day. The time spent accomplishing homework, as well as the type of home work set, has varying effects upon the reading habits of these pupils. It was notable that while the majority of children in School A reported spending time doing homework as part of their regular routine, as did many of School B, few in School C did so. The data suggest the following specific ways in which homework might affect reading habits:

- If reading homework was set, children were less likely to spend time reading for pleasure;
- If the children feel under pressure from having a great deal of home work or revision to accomplish they are less likely to read additionally for pleasure;
- If reading was the result of homework, it was not likely to be perceived as pleasure but as work - it could not be seen as both simultaneously;
- Those who recognised homework as part of their daily routine were likely to read at some stage of the evening if they had time, usually either in bed or immediately before going to bed.

*I do my homework* was a common phrase amongst the majority of children when describing a typical evening

Two conscientious students in School A, who claimed to enjoy reading, felt that it was not always possible to do so, especially during term time, as so much time had to be spent doing home work;

*sometimes it can be quite hard to read in the week days, especially now as we have to revise for exams and we have home work (A11l.42-43)*

At such times, when there was much schoolwork to be done, time might be found for the television or a computer game rather than reading. It is possible that a physical break from the printed page was desirable, after studying and revising. John later explained that the choice to read would not be made if a certain amount of prescribed reading had to be done.

*Say for homework we have to read a chapter or twenty pages or something I might play on my nintendo if we hadn't had any reading to do I might read in my spare time (A21l.4-5)*

For others, it is only the fact that reading homework is set that inclines them to read during their leisure time. Two boys from School A suggested this in response to being asked about the last book they read:

*its just one we had to read over the holidays (A21l.27-28)*

*The last book I read was in the holidays and it was school work really [...] we have to read quite a lot for school (A21l.27-34)*

Frank, in School B, told me that the only time he would ever spend significant time reading at home would be

*when I'm doing my home work at home sometimes in English we have to read a book so probably then (B101l.4-5)*

Other evidence reveals that Frank had only actually read one book throughout Years 7 and 8, which makes me feel that while setting reading home work can have a positive effect upon reluctant readers, it alone will not be enough to create enthusiastic or regular

readers. They will do what they have to, but no more than that, and will not see themselves as readers as a result of enforced reading homework at this age.

The high achieving children in School A, who enjoyed reading, felt that reading as an act in itself would not help them to achieve high marks in their school work. As a consequence, if there were home work or revision to be done, reading would be postponed until a less demanding time. A girl in School A explained to me;

*I don't like working but I do like getting good result ...reading doesn't get me marks*  
(A511.34-35)

Reading for pleasure is not seen as an educational activity, but one of recreation (as the television), unless it is directed reading. The children clearly do not recognise a role of reading as being to increase their cultural capital and social awareness. Directed reading is regarded as being different from chosen reading. When asked whether they regarded reading as work or pleasure, a common response indicated that it depended what the reading material was and their motives for reading it. If it were homework or reading enforced by school, it was likely to be regarded as work. The following is one example to illustrate this point:

Q. *Do you think of reading as work?*

*not at home sometimes when its school stuff it is when its boring* (A1011.32-33)

*depends if I have to do something for home work* (B51.35)

*If I'm reading something for school then its work if not then its pleasure*  
(B61.31)

If it is directed reading, it seems that it cannot simultaneously be reading for pleasure. The amount of reading purely for pleasure that is done, is inversely proportional to the amount of directed reading set by the school. If an amount of reading has been set for

homework, it is possible that reading will not then be a chosen activity to relax in any free time that is left (A14ll.18-22).

The conceptions of reading as laborious or pleasurable are discussed more fully towards the end of this chapter. The pressure of homework during term time was identified by some as a reason for not choosing to spend much time reading for pleasure. These children recognised that they spend relatively more time reading during the holidays than they did during term time;

*I went to France and I read lots [...] I read a lot over the holidays* (A4ll.26-28)

Homework was offered frequently as a time demanding activity, especially by children in School A and by some in School B. Sentences would often begin with ‘after doing my home work I ...’ Apart from when reading was set as a home work, the children did not seem to think that homework was in fact a form of reading, although there can be few subjects in which homework can be completed without reading. The children in School A identified a precise amount of time that they would regularly spend on homework and some explained its importance. The children in School B were generally less specific and all of the children in School C gave the impression that little time was spent on homework, even though it was a regular part of their evenings.

The setting of reading (for the sake of reading) as a homework had two diverse effects:

- It could have a positive effect and ensure that reluctant readers who would not choose to read, did so;
- Making a child read a given text would discourage them from wanting to read anything else.



Children in School A especially recognised the importance of homework, but not the place of reading within their homework. The potentially educational role of wider reading was not recognised by these students.

The amount of time that these children have varies according to the times at which they go to bed. As has already been discussed, those with precise and regular bed times read more often than did those without specified bed times. Letting a child know how long they have before they must sleep gives the child the opportunity to structure that time and so put a reading time in a regular place.

The data suggest that the amount of time that a child has to read is irrelevant if that child does not have access to reading material or a suitable context in which to read. For this reason, access is the second most important contributory factor to children's reading choices and their perceived value of reading.

### 5.7 Specific bedtime and its consequences

Whilst discussing a typical evening, some children mentioned a specific time at which they were regularly expected to go to bed. Some children did not and others claimed that they had no specific bedtime or that it varied according to what they were doing, in other words, that the decision of when to go to bed was left to them, rather than the wishes of a parental figure. The data suggest that children who have a regular recognised bedtime are likely to read in bed before sleeping, on a regular basis. The

following table serves as a summary of the data collected in this respect. (All of the children were asked the same questions, although the answers were not always clear):

	<u>specified bedtime in place</u>	<u>read in bed</u>
School A	yes 4	4
	no 1	0
	sometimes	0
(In all three schools those had a specific bedtime in place were the same children as those who read in bed regularly.)		
School B	yes 3	4
	no 3	3
	sometimes 1	1
School C	yes 1	2
	no 3	2
	sometimes 1	1

Table5.5

- everyone with specific bedtime in place regularly read in bed;
- those who had a general or more vague bed time were more likely to read than not;
- those with no bed time in place were least likely to read in bed.

Of those who made relevant comments, 10 said that they regularly read in bed, 6 that they never did and three that they sometimes would do so. The school which had the

highest percentage of children who read in bed and had a regular specified bedtime, was School A. School C had the lowest percentage of children reading in bed or with a regular specified bed time.

The children who knew when they would be expected to go to bed could plan their time accordingly, as is shown by Ann:

*I know I go to bed at 9.30 or a quarter to ten [...] I always know that I can turn on my light and read (A211.1-2)*

Reading before the lights are turned out seems as much a routine as cleaning their teeth before retiring for the night, to some children. It is a well established routine that takes little time to organise or think about, something that is always done. Ann's words were echoed by others:

*I'm nearly always in bed by nine and read till half nine quarter to ten lights out about quarter to ten but in bed about nine [so I read] for about half an hour three quarters of an hour in the holidays its more in bed by ten lights out half ten (A1011.6-49)*

*I go to bed at about half nine and I read from about half nine to about half ten (A1211.4-5)*

*[I] go upstairs and read until about eleven when I go to sleep [...] I probably go upstairs about ten so I read for about an hour (B611.5-9)*

*read when I go to bed spend about half an hour reading and then I go to sleep (B91.4)*

*I will get in to bed about half nine ten o'clock and then I will read for about half an hour (C311.5-6)*

Such a routine is conducive to establishing a habit of reading. There is always a block of time available when little else but reading could be expected to be done, thus reading in bed becomes an established norm. If the bedtime is altered for any reason, then the routine is disrupted, as a boy in School B (who is quoted above) pointed out:

*I read most nights but some nights I stay up really late so I'm too tired to read*  
(B61.9)

This emphasised the importance of established routine to encourage the children to maintain habits. The routine of these children was summarised neatly by Hannah in School B:

*I go to bed and read and sleep* (B81.3)

Two girls in School C were unusual in this respect as they both have a specified bed time but did not report that they spent time reading in bed before sleeping. They were in a clear minority.

Those who did not have a specific bedtime were much more vague about whether or not they read before bed, than those who did. The habit of reading before bedtime was developed as a consequence of a precise bedtime. Lack of a precise bedtime resulted in children not forming regular pre-bedtime reading habits. In answer to being asked if she ever read before bedtime one girl, with no specified bedtime in place, responded:

*sometimes I do when I'm in I might read my magazine or something like that*  
(B311.9-11)

another similarly responded with

*if I have a good book then I will but if I don't I won't unless my mum tells me to*  
(B41.7)

One boy who went to bed at *ten or eleven* (C41.4) said that he would sometimes read in bed, but it was clearly not a routine part of his evening.

Developing themes which emerged in this category are summarised here:

- a regular bedtime often, but not always, supports regular night time reading habits, supporting the idea hypothesised that time management is an essential part of incorporating reading into the lives of children in a non threatening way;
- children in School A are most likely to have a regular bedtime and children in School C least likely (School B fell in between these two near extremes); this may be a result of cultural capital or a manifestation of time management..

The children talked confidently about their bed times, and their sporting interests. The way in which they were able to talk about reading and books was less consistent, but equally useful in an attempt to understand the role of reading within their lives. This is discussed in the following section.

### 5.8 Ways of discussing reading

The importance of linguistic capital has already been discussed in Chapter 1. There, the notion that one of the roles of reading was the acquisition of increasingly sophisticated linguistic skills was suggested. The way in which children talk about books and reading, reflects their linguistic capital to some extent, as well as indicating the common role of reading and books within their lives. The ways in which the case study children discussed books and reading varied a great deal, and can be seen as an indicator of confidence. The extent to which a child is confident in discussing books and reading is

reliant, in part at least, on their knowledge of books and their role in their lives. Some children talked articulately and in depth, while others had to be prompted and gently persuaded to give their monosyllabic answers. This is evident in all categories, and a few specific examples will suffice to clarify the point.

Initially, all of the children were interviewed in a school group, as has been described earlier. The first question for each of the three groups, to which all present were encouraged to respond and given equal opportunity to talk was 'Do you enjoy reading?' The question was deliberately open and did not specify what constituted reading, or any particular sort of reading, in order to gain a first response that was not meant to fit a specific. The way in which the children responded to this question established a precedent that was to become a pattern throughout the term of interviews. The children in School A answered with varying amount of detail, often giving information that had not been specifically requested but was relevant nonetheless, in a confident and articulate manner. Some children in School B answered thoughtfully, fluently and in a relevant manner, but most gave less general information and made fewer connections with other related issues. The children in School C all tended to give much shorter answers, some of which were purely negative and gave little information away. The answers of some of the children in School C are best described as guarded and monosyllabic, suggesting an uneasiness when talking about the subject of reading. Typical responses to the first question given to the subjects of the case studies *Do you enjoy reading?* follow:

School A:

*I do enjoy reading but I prefer reading magazines I'm attracted to pictures if it looks good*

*I'll read it if not I'll just put it back down yes I do I read every night for about 50 minutes if I see a good book I don't always read it sometimes if I'm reading a good book it takes me a while to get in to it and sometimes I just get hooked on reading one book and if its in a series I won't try anything else that's what my mother criticises me for I do enjoy reading I've been reading for quite some times at my old school I used to read a book practically every break I mark the pages and then return them to the librarian to keep them for me as I lost them at the moment I'm reading two books at first they seemed very boring but then I don't really ever get the time to read but I do enjoy It I don't really read much I prefer looking at things I don't mind if its a really good story*  
(A6ll.2-13)

Many of the children in School A gave much more information than was required, without prompting from the interviewer, including type of reading material preferred, motivation of choice, amount of time spent and previous reading habits. Effective use of standard English is made and the answers reflect a reasonable amount of confidence.

School B:

*No*

*Yes*

*Yes*

*No*

*Yes*

*Yes*

*Generally*

*Yes*

*Sometimes*

*Sometimes (B111.2-11)*

Despite the fact that more children were involved in this group than the first, less information is given. The children gave a direct response to the question asked and nothing else; no additional, relevant information was offered and answers were kept as brief as possible. This became a typical characteristic of the children in School B, who would answer only the direct question asked and needed prompting, and more questions, than those in School A to give similar information. These children were used to answering questions rather than discussing subjects raised within questions. It is possible that this is a result of their school environment.

School C:

*Depends what I'm reading*

*um yes*

*I hate reading its boring*

*I like reading but I don't like reading aloud (C111.2-6)*

As with School B, little information is given and the question is answered. Unlike the other two schools, one of these responses is entirely negative and three of the four are quite negative. While there were reluctant readers in all of the schools, it was only in School C that absolute negativity concerning reading was encountered and expressed through aggressive language. As the interviews in School C continued, the responses did not become any more forthcoming and, again, many questions had to be asked to gain information. With two exceptions, children in School C were reluctant interviewees. With no exceptions, their answers were brief, often monosyllabic, sometimes negative and generally lacking in confidence. They were not used to discussing issues in the way that the interview questions invited them to discuss



reading. They lacked confidence both in their answers and their expression of the answers.

Possible explanations for the differences in the way the three groups responded to the questions and expressed may be summarised in the following four points:

- *School* - Schools in which teachers spend more time with students may have greater capacity to nurture discussion rather than foster a culture of rapid questions and answers with little time for exploration;
- *Cultural Capital* - An effect of cultural capital is a feeling of confidence and a willingness to discuss ideas and listen to opinions of others, and a value put upon such symbols of culture as books;
- *greater familiarity with books* - the more familiar one is with a subject, the more content one is to discuss that subject;
- *ability* - more able children, or children who have been taught successfully, may have a greater command of language and a more impressive vocabulary with which to express their thoughts. They were able to respond to me as an interviewer most fluently.

A combination of circumstances might enable a child to discuss reading and books confidently. The fact that remains, without such speculation, is that children in School A were able to discuss books more coherently, thoughtfully and knowledgeably than the children in either of the other two schools. A small number of children in Schools B and C had negative attitudes towards reading and books and expressed these in their answers. The only child to display aggression through his responses to this subject was a member of School C. Children in School A typically gave lengthy in-depth responses

to questions. Children in School B gave adequate amounts of information. Children in School C, generally, had less to say. For the children who had little to say, in a truly Pinteresque fashion, the silences became as significant as their words, as they betrayed a lack of confidence and enthusiasm for the subject in question, suggesting that the role of reading was slight within their consciousness. Pauses of more than a few seconds are indicated on the transcripts.

### 5.9 Knowledge about books

As the children responded to questions arising from an interest in their chosen reading material, the extent of their knowledge about books and authors became apparent. Many children were able to name a favourite or current author or the name of a book; some did so unprompted. Some children classified books, recognising the differences between children's and adult's literature. Others named genre of reading material but were unable to be any more specific and some had negligible knowledge of any kind about books. These collected answers and comments are of interest as the depth of knowledge about books displayed is an indicator of the role of books in these children's lives. Some characteristics were more common in one or two schools than others, which may indicate the effect of cultural capital or school influence. The following dimensions of this category have been identified and will be discussed: recognition of different books for different ages, specific knowledge, general knowledge and negligible knowledge.

It was a minority which acknowledged that some books were written with a specific age in mind, and referred to memories of books read when younger, in response to this question. Ann a member of School A was one of these;

*When I was ten I used to read point horror I've matured a bit from that (A11.32)*

and John, also a member of School A another:

*When I was younger I used to read science fiction, Goosebumps and stuff like that (A11.33)*

and Will, also a member of School A another,

*I used to read Biggles when I was about ten I got absolutely hooked on that (A61.19)*

Seb referred to previous preferences in a similar way:

*I used to like sort of animal ones but like the Redwall series and the Deptford Mice (A151/8)*

As well as regarding certain types of books and authors as being primarily for a younger audience, these statements reflect the role of books in the lives of these children:

- books are a part of their early childhood memories;
- developing taste in books is a part of growing up;
- books play such a large part in their lives that they are as comfortable talking about them and their changing taste in them, as they would be in talking about food or clothes in a similar way.

All of the above suggest that books play an integral and essential role in the lives of these children.

Ann continued to illustrate her understanding of the different intended audiences for some books in a later discussion:

*I don't read really always children's books I like not necessarily adult books but more grown up books I read Driving Over Lemons as we went through Spain and things like that (A511.26-27)*

One of the roles of books, in the interview context, it seems, is to act as an indicator of Ann's maturity. She is keen to let people know that she has grown up to some extent, and the reading material she chooses reflects this. The choice of such books suggests that while Ann is only 12, she is mature in her taste of reading material.

#### 5.10 General knowledge

A common characteristic of all three schools was that the children would name a general type of book that they liked initially, before most of them would go on to be more specific:

*I prefer to read magazine type of things (John A11.25)*

*I like reading point horror (Andrew A11.29)*

*in a way thriller and adventure stories (A1114)*

*I tend to read teenage stuff (A121.15)*

The initial response of the children in School B was to give a general indication of their preferred reading material:

*I like short stories, not that short, but quite short*

*I like adventure stories*

*I like adventure too*

*I like most stories*

*everything really, science fiction*

*I like horror (B111.13-20)*

None of these children in School B gave more specific details until prompted to do so, and then some of them could not remember the name of the author or title of the book they had last read. It had clearly been a while ago in many cases. Members of School C

also gave some fairly general responses to being asked to name a book recently read or especially enjoyed:

*I like reading scary stories and funny stories*

*I like reading horror some scary books (C11l.8-15)*

Although less specific, one of the answers given by a boy in School C echoed one of Ann's answers;

*I like books that make you think about how people are feeling (C11.8)*

This is almost identical to the beginning of Ann's response and therefore raises questions. If two children, of the same age and in the same town, feel that they like the same kind of literature, what prevents one of the children from being able to talk about specific examples of that literature with knowledge? I would suggest that these two responses illustrate the effects of different habitus, more than different schools.

### 5.11 Specific knowledge

Most of the children in School A responded to being asked what type of book they most enjoyed, telling me specific titles and authors. They also indicated the books that they did not enjoy and ones that they may have enjoyed previously. On the whole they were able to name a book that they had read recently, both at home and in school.

Ann, from School A, was particularly confident in talking about books and could discuss both those that she liked and those that she did not like, with equal ease:

*I don't like science fiction books or Terry Pratchett books or things like that... I like books that like are about people's lives like I read a book during Easter by*

*the woman who wrote Falling Leaves I like books like that and I like books with kind of feelings in (A11l.13-15)*

Ann described the book effectively, showing that she was aware of other books by the same author and of their style. She did give a specific example of a type of book that she did not like. These facts suggest that not only has Ann read widely, but she has done so in an active manner, making judgements and comparisons as she expands her knowledge of literature and determines her preferences. Although Christian spoke at less length, he, too, had a clear idea of the type of book and the author whom he currently favoured:

*I generally like Terry Pratchett, science fiction (A11.21)*

as did many others:

*Soul Music (A21.31)*

*I'm reading Goggle Eyes*

*We're reading Merchant of Venice as the moment*

*We read My Family and Other Animals last (A21l.39-41)*

*at the moment I'm really into the Adrian Mole books (A61.16)*

*The Hound of the Baskervilles by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle [...] I've read quite a lot of Sherlock Holmes stories (A71l.2-4)*

*I'm reading Harry Potter again (A81.2)*

*third book of the Robin Jarvis set (A111.36)*

*The thirty nine steps (B11.46)*

*The day I ruled the world by David Copperfield (B81.7)*

*Shakespeare I've got a book with all short stories [...] my dad reads sort of John Grisham books (B91l.12-18)*

*The Tangle Wood Secret a week ago (C11.31)*

*Watership Down in the holiday a few weeks ago (C11.35)*

*Roald Dahl (C51.6 and C141.25)*

*Jaqueline Wilson (C114.42)*

Ann commented:

*I'm not really reading anything in particular at the moment I'm reading Hans Christian Anderson Classics they're fairy stories I've got that under my pillow at night (A411.11-12)*

This is interesting as, while she clearly identified a book that she is currently reading, she did not regard it as something worth acknowledging because it is a child's book. Ann, as other evidence suggests, is an avid reader and confident speaker. She has judged this particular book as being one for young children and not of any significance, which is how she could think that she wasn't really reading anything at the moment. As well as suggesting that one of the criteria that Ann uses to judge the quality of her reading material is the age of the intended audience, this suggests that her perception of reading is influenced by the material - one is only reading if the material is worthy of being acknowledged as having been read. This is complex. This may be another piece of evidence of the effect of cultural capital on reading habits.

#### 5.12 Negligible knowledge

Although some children had said that they enjoyed reading and claimed to spend considerable amounts of time reading, they were unable to name favourite authors or books, or even the book that they had most recently read, and some acknowledged that they had not, in fact, read a complete book since attending primary school. This leads

one to question how it is possible for able children to go through two years of secondary school without reading a book:

*I don't actually know, I've forgotten*

*I read too many books to keep track of them*

*Don't know*

*I think it was a couple of years ago I think it was called my teacher glows in the dark or something*

These responses are from both boys and girls in School B, although there are more boys in this sample unable to name a book that they have read recently than girls.

### Summary

This category indicates that, while many children will at first give a generalised account of the type of books they think they enjoy, fewer of them are able to be more specific and fewer still are able to discuss their preferences in context or with much supporting knowledge. A large gap exists between the way in which, overall, children in School A are able to talk about their preferences and children in School C. Even at this elementary level of asking children to name preferred or recently read authors or book titles, children in School C were less confident than children in School A. Children in School B were also less confident than children in School A, but there was more general confidence than in School C. Nevertheless, it became apparent that there were children who had not recently (within the last month) completed a reading book, of their choice, in both Schools B and C. The following points are suggested by the data:

- more children in School A were able to recall names of authors and titles than in either of the other schools;



- children in School A discussed their preferred reading choices with more confidence;
- children in School A had read more since leaving primary school than children in the other two schools;
- There were a small number of children in Schools B and C who were able to discuss books they had recently read with confidence;
- There were a small number of children in Schools B and C who had not read a whole book of their choice since leaving primary school;
- one role of reading identified in this category was as a reflector of increasing maturity.

### 5.13 Duration

All of the children were asked how much time they spent reading during a typical day. From the answers, it is apparent that the children did not include time spent reading for information, instructions or reading with a specific use, as time spent reading. Time spent reading, for them, meant time spent with one specific book or magazine, reading over a sustained period of time, for pleasure. Answers given to this question were among the most unreliable, as a child who would tell me that he read for two hours every evening would later, in the same interview, tell me he'd read nothing for days. Such anomalies were common in discussion of this aspect of reading, with answers to other questions frequently not substantiating or supporting the claimed amount of time spent reading. Even with this in mind, some interesting data were collected.

The amount of time that children said they spent reading ranged between no time at all and three hours a day. Most of the children in School A claimed to spend between half

an hour and an hour, whilst some children in Schools B and C claimed to spend two to three hours a day reading. This was interesting, as in other categories it has appeared that children in School A had more knowledge, confidence of reading and read more frequently than those in the other two schools. It is possible that those in School A were more aware of the way in which they spent their time.

The children in School A were asked during the initial group interview if they spent much time reading, to which they all answered 'yes'. When asked how long they considered to be a long time reading, two of them answered:

*about half an hour (A11.40)*

*In the holidays I read much more but in the week about half an hour or an hour (A11.41)*

This was echoed in the precise responses given during individual interviews that followed:

*normally read for about an hour (A411.8-9)*

*I read every night for about fifty minutes (A61.4)*

*I'm nearly always in bed by nine and read till half nine quarter to ten [...] for half an hour three quarters of an hour in the holidays its more (A1011.5-49)*

*about an hour at least five [nights a week] (A1145-49)*

*I read from about half nine to about half ten most nights not every night about every other night at least (A1211.4-38)*

*I usually spend at least an hour a day going on an hour but when I have an amazing book like Harry Potter I read those in a day I'll just read for five hours one stop until I've finished (A1511.12-13)*

All of the children who responded to the question from School A (above) had a precise idea of how much time they spent reading for pleasure. Such precision is possibly the result of regular reading at the same time, for the same length of time. Other categories have reflected that these busy children have a strong awareness of time and how much time is spent on each activity. These responses support other data that suggest that reading is an activity which these children involve themselves in regularly and as a matter of routine. It also reinforces the significance of a regular bedtime and that reading is likely to happen immediately before sleep.

The children of School B were asked in their initial group interview how much time they spent reading. The answers were more extreme than those of School A. The answers from School B varied from one extreme (no time through choice) to another (three hours):

*in about a day of school I would say about twenty minutes to about an hour*  
(B11.25)

*in a day I think about two or three hours* (B11.29)

*on school days I read about half an hour or something at weekends I don't read at all* (B11.30)

*about two or three hours* (B11.34)

*about an hour* (B1.33)

*about two hours* (B1.1.34)

*I only read at school about half an hour* (B11.36)

The amount of time that children in School B claim to spend reading is quite similar to the amount of time discussed by children in School A. A difference between the responses of School A and School B is that none of the children in School A said that

they only read at school or on school days, whereas this was the case for three of the children who responded to this question in School B to this initial question. Responses to individual interviews varied a little:

*I read for about an hour [...] I read most nights ( B611.7-9)*

*read for maybe at least an hour or more (B71.4)*

*spend about half an hour reading [...] usually I read every other night (B911.4-6)*

The use of words such as *most*, *maybe*, *usually* is a little more prominent in the answers of School B. The children here still have a more than vague concept of time and do things such as reading less as a routine, although it is, for some, an activity which they claim takes up much of their free time.

The lengths of time that were initially given by children in School C in response to how much time they spent reading, were more similar to those of School A than School B :

*I read about half an hour or something every night (C11.29)*

*about half an hour (C11.20)*

*about an hour a night (C21.6)*

The response of one of the girls in School C serves as an example of the inconsistencies that were apparent in relation to this category:

***do you spend much time reading?***

*yeah*

***how much time do you spend reading a day do you think?***

*I'm reading between one and two hours*

***is that everyday?***

*sometimes it's more sometimes it's less*

***do you read every night?***

*no last week I didn't read at all (C1211.8-28)*

Another girl told me that she read for about an hour every night, but later said that she hadn't read a book for about four weeks (C13).

These claims suggest that the role of reading is more prominent for children in School A and School B, than it is for children in School C.

These responses are interesting, more for what they suggest about perceptions of reading than the actual amount of time spent reading. I do not think that the inconsistencies arise from a deliberate intent to be false, more from a desire to give what is hoped will be the right response, or a lack of self-knowledge.

**Summary and points**

- children in School A generally have a much more precise idea of how much time they spend reading than children in the other two schools;
- some children in School B claim to spend the most time reading;
- children in Schools B and C tended to have a similarly vague concept of time spent reading;
- Children in all schools seemed to recognise sustained reading for pleasure as reading when answering this question, with the exception of the three in School B who said that the only reading they did was that which they had to do in school;
- these responses suggest that structured time creates routine reading time.

#### 5.14 Motivation of choice

The effect of hobbies, such as sport, upon reading habits, has already been discussed. The concern of this section is reasons for choosing to read material, other than as a direct result of an interest in the sport/hobby to which it relates.

My survey indicated that, far from adhering to the adage of not judging a book by its cover, that was exactly what a large percentage of young readers regularly did. Looking at the picture on the front and reading the blurb on the back were common incentives to the children to entice them to choose one book rather than another. A second finding of the survey was that the least likely reason for choosing to read a book was because it had been recommended by a teacher. In fact, a teacher's recommendation seemed to have an adverse effect on the majority of the children who responded to the question. Interested in finding out more about the motivation that was behind the reading choices that children made, I asked children in all three schools about reasons for choosing to read the material that they did. The responses from School A were informative and suggested clear reasoning behind the choices; those from School C were less conclusive and choices seemed to be made more randomly and with less clear idea of the reasoning behind the choices. The reasons for children in this age group making the reading choices that they do can be summarised as follows:

- recommendation of a friend/family member;
- impressive cover;
- it is one of a series that has been begun;
- familiarity with author and style of book;
- the result of having seen a televised or filmed version of the book.

### Recommendation of a friend

As with many other issues, the opinion of the peer group is highly valued by young teenagers with respect to what they should do, including what they should read. Whether or not an individual regarded reading as a norm depends in part upon the extent to which his or her friends read. The choices of reading material are, equally, partly dependent upon what is expected. e.g. in schools where it is known or felt that everyone has read a certain book, it may be the norm for a child to ensure that s/he had also read that book, so as not to feel left out. In a school in which it was not common openly to acknowledge having read anything, recommendations from friends might be less common and there would be less pressure on the child to make sure that s/he had read any specific book; indeed, there may be more pressure on them not to read to any significant extent, as they might not want to stand out against the norm; being too individual could lead to vulnerability. I think this goes some way to explaining the different responses between the three schools. Children in School A appeared to have a greater shared interest in reading and a greater knowledge of what their friends were reading, for example, than did children in School C. For many children, however, the recommendation of a friend would be taken as worth following.

One boy, whilst talking of Harry Potter, recognised;

*everyone in the class has read nearly all of them (A151.18)*

*My friends recommend them to me (B21.34)*

### Recommendation of a family member

Some pupils were more greatly influenced by a family member than by a friend. Older brothers and sisters especially wielded an amount of influence. A boy in School A illustrated this clearly;

*I'm trying to get my hands on a copy of The Clockwork Orange because my brother says its brilliant (A211.47-48)*

The desire to read this book was great and the response was enthusiastic. The brother in question was a final year university student, clearly admired by his year 8 brother. This is not a book which a teacher or parent is likely to have recommended to a 13 year old, as it would be deemed unsuitable reading material for a child; that is possibly the factor that makes the recommendations of older brothers and sisters so appealing. Free of the restraints of such responsibility, the older brother could recommend it and thus generate great enthusiasm.

An amount of trust is placed in an older brother or sister and it is assumed that they will recommend enjoyable books, partly because of a closeness in age and partly because they know the child so well:

*my sister's only seventeen and she can remember being thirteen and she sort of knows what I'd like*

*Do you always take your sister's recommendation?*

*usually*

*does she get it right?*

*yeah (A1511.34-35)*

Despite the age gap however, parents' recommendations are also taken seriously and trustingly. The same boy talked about Harry Potter:



*my mum got the first one ... she bought it like a week after it came out before it was big and I enjoyed it ...usually my mum chooses them for me (A1511.15-32)*

Three children in School B echoed these sentiments when discussing how they chose what to read:

*for Christmas I got a selection of classics so I'm just reading through them (B21.25).*

*I usually get given books by my parents (B21.26)*

*my mum usually just brings them home and I read them (B21.32)*

#### Judging a book by its cover

For those children who have no firm idea of authors who they enjoy, or specific types of books, it is inevitable that when asked to choose a book for themselves, their first judgement will be made upon the cover. If something on the cover of the book attracts their attention they will pick it up and often then turn to the blurb on the back. If that satisfies them they will choose the book on a cautionary trial basis until they have become familiar with it:

*probably the front cover sometimes I might just look at the back to see what its about um but I'd read the introduction then I might like start reading it (A1411.42-43)*

I think it is interesting how cautious and wary children are when choosing unfamiliar books. They do not always display the same discrimination or caution with other leisure time activities, such as watching the television. They are not prepared to invest time in reading an unfamiliar book that they are not sure they will enjoy, but will spend time

watching a television programme that they know little about. The importance of an appealing cover is emphasised by a girl from School B, who also suggests the influence of advertising and commercial institutions:

*I just went into Waterstones just looked at the teen table just picked it up just looked at the cover (B21.33)*

For low ability readers there seems little choice but to choose a book by its cover, as they have insufficient foreknowledge to use any other criteria:

*I flick through pages and look at the back (C51.6)*

*If it sounds good on the back of it (C131.37)*

*I look at the cover (C131.39)*

### Familiarity

Without guidance, many children develop their reading tastes slowly as they are inclined to read something that they have already read and know that they like, rather than explore unfamiliar reading genres or unheard of authors. For example;

*I'm reading Harry Potter again ... cos I like it every single time (A811.2-7)*

Such books are returned to in the same way as a familiar place where one feels comfortable and secure. The role of such reading is to reinforce feelings of comfort and security. The reader knows what will happen and is not challenged or provoked to wondering or worrying about the outcome. Series of books are popular for this reason. Having enjoyed one book of a series, young readers are likely to want to read other books in the same series:

*I'd already read the other books that followed it up so I thought it would be good to read that one because I really enjoyed the first one (A1111.31-32)*

Having engaged successfully with one of the series, the reader is encouraged to continue to read on and discover more about the story or characters involved, knowing that the style of the book is one that they can enjoy and understand. This is true of both boys and girls:

*I've been reading one of his books which is the first book I got by him and the next time I go to the library I'll get the next book (A12ll.15-16)*

A negative aspect of a series of books is that some children can become so involved with them that they are loathe to try a different or unfamiliar book, believing that they will not enjoy something different. These series contribute towards a fear of the unknown and do not nurture an adventurous spirit. This is especially true of reluctant or low ability readers:

*its normally point horror or something that's all I like (B2l35)*

Children in School A talked the most and seemed to have the clearest ideas about why they read what they read. Children in School C offered the greater contrast to them, offering much more vague responses when they offered any response at all, in answer to the question. Children in school A named a parent or older brother/sister as the greater influence in their choice of reading material, more than any other one contributing factor, and more than the children in other schools. This suggests the effect of cultural capital in the home environment. Children in School A also showed a greater knowledge of what their peers chose to read. This suggests the effect of a positive attitude towards reading nurtured within the school environment. The familiarity of series was sought by children in Schools A and B. Children in all of the schools have a tendency to look at the cover and the blurb on the back; children in School C are especially likely to choose a book on that criterion. Children in School C seemed to

have less guidance, whether from family members, friends or school, than children in the other two schools. Some of the evidence here hints at the significance of reading being seen as a norm within the family, an effect of cultural capital.

If children of this age need are not encouraged to read by someone, a family member or the school, then reading is not likely to play a significant role in their lives. If those around them do not seem to value the pursuit of reading, children of this age are unlikely to develop the habit as a routine part of their lives. The evidence also suggests that many children, especially such as those in School C, are not familiar with choosing books for themselves and lack confidence in choosing books, which explains the popularity of series of books in part. Another way of looking at this might be to recognise that the children are so used to being told what to read that they are unable to make the choice for themselves.

### 5.15 Ambition

During the individual interviews, the children were asked about their preferred career choices at this early age. The idea behind the question was that it would be interesting to see if any patterns formed that suggested there was any effect upon ambition caused or affected by reading choices. Whilst some patterns did emerge from the responses given, they were not ones which linked directly with the role of reading in their lives. They are still of interest, however, as they do add to an understanding of the children's habits and choices and thus indirectly connect with their reading habits.

Many children began their response by saying that they didn't know what they wanted to do when they left school before offering a possible choice:

*I don't know I'd quite like to do something to do with radio [...] or sports journalist or something like that (A101.20-21)*

*not really sure I'd like to do something towards music if possible or acting (A1211.21-22)*

*I don't know yet um there are lots of things which I'd like to do (A141.51)*

*if he's (father) still got the business I'll probably take that over which I wouldn't mind doing actually [...] I'd like to be a marine biologist (A161.38-A171.13)*

*I don't know I either want to be an air hostess or a beautician or something like that (B31.23)*

*I don't mind really I haven't really thought about it [...] I want to do something with child care*

*working with children (B911.20-22)*

Some of the children claimed to have no idea at all about what they might like to do and lacked any apparent ambition:

*I haven't a clue (B41.20)*

*I have no idea (B51.23)*

*I don't know really (C111.50)*

A small number of the children felt confident about what they thought they would like to do. Ann, of School A is one such child:

*probably like a journalist [...] something with English or reporting that kind of thing [...] but if that's not a good option I might go for law or stuff because I can argue quite well (A511.14-23)*

Ann is a girl who reads regularly and talks about books and reading confidently. The careers that she is presently interested in require skills which may be enhanced through regular active reading.

Least articulate in their answers about reading, but equally confident in their ambitions for the future, were Kate and Charlie:

*work with children and little babies (C141.28)*

*I want to be an RSPCA inspector and work with animals (C141.33)*

There is not enough evidence here to claim that it is the role of reading alone that has led her to these ideas, or indeed, that it has affected them at all. Richard in School B is another avid reader who had some clear ideas about his possible future ambitions:

*well I want to go to University and do physics I want to be either a kind of scientist or an ordinary office job (B611.23-24)*

As is Paul:

*I think I'd quite like to be a chef actually (B71.46)*

Hannah (also School B) talked as confidently about reading as Ann, although at less length. She also had a very precise idea about where her ambitions lay:

*I want to go to university and become a vet*

It cannot be claimed from the evidence that children who read always have ambition, or that the ambition they may have is a direct result of the role of reading in their lives. This point is emphasised by boys like Liam who also have a clear specific idea about future ambition:

*be a special needs teacher in a blind school (C21.27)*

despite the fact that reading played a relatively minor role in his life and he was unable to discuss reading and books in a sustained way. The answer given by James (also in School C) was one that should have connected closely with the role of reading:

*I'd quite like to write books [...] ugh um fictional books (C31.18)*

yet he too appeared to have little knowledge of books and was unable to discuss the subjects of books or reading in an informed way.

It seems more likely that aspects of their lives other than reading currently have more influence over the ambitions of these children. The possibility that one of the roles of reading might be to inspire career choices cannot be dismissed: the children are still young and not enough evidence has been found here.

## Summary

The patterns which emerged in relation to ambition suggested more about the differences between all three of the schools and pupils within the schools and social classes, than about the influence of reading choices upon career choices.

- All of the children in School A intended to go to university, two of the children in School B intended to go to university and none of the children in School C mentioned university;
- the career interests of all of the children in School A could be described as arts related;
- only three children had no idea at all, they were from schools B and C but not A;

- the suggested career choices of those in School B resembled those of School C more closely than School A, with one girl in both schools B and C interested in a career with children and one girl in both schools B and C interested in working with animals, but neither career was mentioned in School A.

The different levels of ambition and differences between the schools reflect the nature of the schools (and families) and possibly relate to the different priorities within the schools.

#### 5.16 Non-Directed time

The data suggest that whether or not children are able to spend time reading is a result of their time management. The better a child is able to manage her or his own time, the more likely s/he is to have time to read. The data analysis highlighted the effect of time upon the reading habits of these children. Not having enough time was given repeatedly as a cause of spending little, if any, time reading. The way in which the children spoke of time and explained what they did with their time was interesting .

Children who are not disadvantaged by illness or other causes of failing to attend school, spend over eight months of the year in school. All of the subjects of the case studies attended schools five days a week, with some variation between the daily hours of each day: School A had a school day which finished at 4 , School B finished at 3:30 and School C at 3:15. This leaves the children with at least four hours of time each evening which is not necessarily directed time, and at least ten weeks during which their



days are not taken up by school. The use that the children make of that undirected time affects the amount of time spent reading.

Some of the children are given freedom to choose to spend this time as they wish; they are given individual freedom, although Westcott argues that individual freedom is not something that one is given, but rather something that one does:

*Human freedom is not something that one has; human freedom is something that one does. One negotiates, constructs, and practices human freedom differently at different times and under different circumstances, with varying degrees of success. (Westcott 1992, p.27)*

It appears paradoxically, that those children for whom time has been organised most efficiently in real terms, have greater freedom than those for whom time has not been organised purposefully: those who were organised have more freedom and ability with which to organise their own time. This is a counter intuitive finding which is explored more fully in the concluding chapter. Children with little experience of organised time have redundant leisure time. Those who seemingly do little with their time believe that they have little time in which to do anything. (As Shakespeare's Richard II put it rather more eloquently: *'I have wasted time and now doth time waste me'*.) The two categories of children have differing conceptions of time which may be described as conscious and unconscious use of time.

The largest sub-categories of uses of non-directed time have already been identified as: time with friends, watching television, using a computer, listening to or playing music, playing or watching sport and reading. The significance of a specified regular bedtime has also been indicated within the data analysis. The analysis reveals the contribution

of each of these sub categories to the reading decisions and reading perceptions of each child.

These case studies suggested that little guidance is given by teachers, when children are given the opportunity to choose a reading book from the school library. There is a suggestion that as long as something is chosen, what it is does not really matter:

*it was school work really we had to go to the library and we had about five minutes to choose a book so I just chose that one its a point horror (A2ll.32-33)*  
*I think I read a point crime I wouldn't normally choose it its just one we had to read over the holidays (A2 ll.27-28)*

The time restraints meant that these children put little thought into what they chose to read, instead, selecting something familiar with no motivation other than the fact that they had been told to choose something to read over the holidays. The aim of such choices is ambiguous. It was not prescribed reading as such, yet nor was it chosen because the children thought they might enjoy it, but because they had to choose something.

#### 5.17 Preferred place to read

The data in the above section suggest that the bedroom is a favourite place to read, certainly it was the place named most often as a place where the children might choose to read. A few other domestic locations were named:

*if I'm not allowed to watch the television I'll go into the sitting room the blue sitting room and I'll lay on the sofa and I'll read my book [...] I read in the bedroom and in the sitting room (A4ll.20-22)*

*I read in the living room if there's nothing to do in the weekend or something but I mostly read in bed (B6l.11-12)*

It is interesting that both girls (different school) suggest that they only read in the sitting room for want of something else to do, something that they would usually do in the sitting room such as watch television. Their usual place for reading, however, remains the bedroom. James in School C repeated the same idea telling me that he usually read in bed but:

*occasionally I go down to the sitting room and do a bit of reading (C3l.8-10)*

A boy in School B had a different routine place for reading:

*normally in the sitting room on the sofa sometimes in my room but that's all (B7l.7)*

The choice of rooms was the same, but the preferred one was different from the girls quoted. One reason for such a choice of places is comfort. Both the bedroom and the sitting room are presumably rooms in which one might feel comfortable and be able to position one's self in a relaxed position without much fear of interruption or of physical discomfort. As Ann said:

*I like to be comfy when I'm reading (A4l.31)*

A girl in School B told me that she always read in bed because:

*I'm all relaxed (B9l.8)*

The children who choose to read have places to read where they feel safe and comfortable. The second half of Andrew's response that he would read

*In my bedroom downstairs anywhere really (A16l.14)*

was a little unusual, as most of the children in his school were quite specific about their places to read, as Ann's response above illustrates. Andrew is not such an avid reader;

however, he does not read as much or as regularly as some of his peer group. Reading is less a part of his daily routine, and so the context of reading is less firmly entrenched within him. A girl in School C similarly reported that she read:

*mainly in the living room (C121.33)*

Of the children who identified preferred specific spaces for chosen reading, the bedroom and the sitting room were the only rooms mentioned. It seems important to the children to have somewhere comfortable (both for physical and psychological comfort) in which to read. Another common aspect of their chosen places was that they were places where the children could be alone, as reading is seen as an individual's occupation rather than as one to be shared with friends or family. To be in a room alone the children need to have an amount of self confidence. The children who told me that their typical evening consisted of them going out with their friends to unspecified locations and with no specific purpose, did not report reading regularly in a preferred room within their house.

A summary of this dimension follows:

- to read regularly, a place where this can happen must be provided;
- the preferred place will be comfortable and safe;
- reading is done in places where the children can comfortably be alone;
- all three of the above points may be regarded as related to cultural and economic capital.

### 5.18 Context of reading

That the majority of children who enjoy reading do so in their bedrooms has already been shown. Another context in which children invariably read, is at school. In reality, it is likely that most children in year eight will spend a considerable amount of time reading whilst at school, whether it be reading a mathematical problem, a part in a play or a table of facts relevant to a geography or history lesson. In discussing their reading habits, the children had little to say about such reading: indeed, the acknowledgement that they read anywhere other than in an English lesson was rarely made. This highlights the question of what is understood by the term reading and what is considered as reading, which will be addressed later. When reading in school was discussed, it was generally either in a neutral way or in terms which suggested that it could have a negative effect on attitudes towards reading or towards the material being read. The children in School A had more to say about this than the children in the other two schools.

### 5.19 In the library

It is not uncommon for school English departments to use the school library as a resource with which to introduce young readers to a range of reading material and to teach them to use libraries and to choose books by themselves. At least two of the schools involved in this case study were in the habit of regularly taking entire classes to the school library and giving them time to choose a reading book, which they would then be expected to read by themselves. The theory is good, but in practice if insufficient time is given and inadequate guidance, children will make random choices

which do not have any benefit to their attitude towards reading books or their ability to choose books for themselves. Instead of finding books which might engage their interest, children felt under pressure just to choose a book, regardless of suitability or merit. John describes a typical use of the library in an English lesson:

*we had to go to the library and we had about five minutes to choose a book*  
(A211.33-34)

If an enjoyable or stimulating book is chosen under such circumstances, it is a result of luck rather than judgement. I observed several library lessons in School B, which reinforced the description given by John of School A. They, too, were given a short time and told simply to choose a book. I watched the children walk around in groups, picking books from shelves, glancing at the cover before returning them, until they were told to get their books stamped and go. The experience of such library lessons, despite all good intentions, could have little positive effect upon the reading choices of the majority of children involved.

The habit of going to the library was just that, a habit with little reason or motivation. The fact that a book was chosen to be read during a library lesson did not, in fact, mean that it would be read. I'm sure that Rob was an honest example of others of his year when he told me, following a library lesson:

*I just keep this [library book] in my bag so I don't get told off* (B21.6)

In other words, he was aware that he would be asked to produce a reading book at times, and be expected to read it; as long as he could produce such a book he would not be in trouble; whether or not he actually read it was unlikely to be ascertained. For him, choosing a library reading book at school was something of a charade.

## 5.20 In the classroom

During English lessons was seen as the most common time to read during the school day. Andrew told me *In English we are always reading* (A21.35)

This was accepted by the rest of the group who were present. They could all name the books that they were reading or had recently read in School A:

*I'm reading Goggle Eyes*

*We're reading Merchant of Venice at the moment*

*We read My Family and Other Animals last* (A21.39-41)

They all agreed that what they did with these books was:

*we all have to read the same then write a review afterwards* (A21.37)

John added:

*We're reading Shakespeare in class at the moment I'm reading this golf book*  
(A21.49)

This illustrates the difference between books which must be read as part of a curriculum and books which are chosen as a result of a specific interest.

When asked to discuss specifically in which subject lessons were they likely to read, few subjects were named. Simon told me that he:

*had a look at R.S. text books but that's all* (A71.6)

but then added:

*usually just English and that's sort of a play its usually quite boring and as you're reading it everybody talks* (A71.12-13)

Ann's response was similar:

*I looked through some revision notes on the way to school and we looked*

*at some revision notes in our lesson (A8 ll.11-15)*

The use that both children have made of the verb ‘looking’ is interesting. Here, it is used to imply a kind of reading, but one that is thought of as too superficial to justify the verb ‘reading’. Or, is looking at reading material something quite different from reading in the minds of these children? Ann continued to explain that in a usual school day she might expect to read in the following lessons:

*English an’ RS maybe an’ we read a bit in French maybe but not much during the day we read in English because we’ve got a reading book but apart from that nothing really (A8ll.21-22)*

It is improbable that other lessons do not involve an amount of reading. All subjects, whether arts or sciences, must necessitate an amount of reading for effective learning. What is suggested by this response of Ann’s is that it is only subjects in which a teacher is likely to say ‘now we are going to read...’ or something similar, that she thinks of as subjects in which reading regularly takes place. When the reading is a means to an end (such as in a maths lesson) it is not recognised as reading. Such perceptions of reading and when reading takes place are useful in understanding the role of reading.

Some children, if they did not read at school, might not read at all. Three of the children of School B claimed that they spent an amount of time reading during an average school day, but spent no other time reading (at least, deliberately reading). The three are represented fairly in Lily’s answer,

*I only read at school (B11.36)*

The children in School B also identified exam times as being a time when an amount of reading was done at school, as both papers and notes had to be read.



One child in School C identified the following subjects as ones in which they sometimes read as drama, history, English, science.

The children who identified subjects in which they regularly read, tended to associate reading in class with reading aloud. This activity was associated with few positive qualities.

*It's usually quite boring and as you're reading it everybody talks (A711.12-13)*

People talking whilst reading is taking place is not the only problem with reading aloud in class, as Robert illustrated:

*I liked it the book when I read it but when we read it at school we read it much slower and it um I went off it because of that [...] if there are slow readers I don't want to be mean to them but it's you want to go faster especially when there are huge gaps when if you read on you're going to just read it again [...] it generally puts me off a bit but if its a good class and we read it and its a good teacher who gives a good structure to the whole reading then its good but if It's slow it puts me off a book generally (A1211.35-50)*

Robert has identified the damaging and detrimental effect that reading aloud around the class can have upon able students. Not only is Robert (and all like him) being made to read a book that he has already read once, he is being made to do it in such a way that the book itself is ruined and no enjoyment is to be had. Robert has also identified a role of the teacher as being to ensure that an appropriate pace is maintained when such an activity is in progress.

Reading aloud in this way was no more pleasurable for less able children. Fay's first response to being asked whether or not she enjoyed reading was to tell me:

*I like reading but I don't like reading aloud (C11.6)*

This Dickensian habit of making children read aloud around the class seems to have few merits. If managed well it can be a stimulus to encourage children to read fluently, but if managed badly it can be an instrument that has such a negative effect as to put a child off a particular work, or to discourage them from wanting to read anything.

### Summary

This was an area in which there was less obvious difference in attitudes and opinions between the three schools. Children from all three schools failed to recognise the amount of reading that was done during an average school day. Children in all three schools saw English lessons as being the time when they were most likely to read. The amount of reading done in school was not a subject which the children of any of the schools had a great deal to say about generally, although the children of School A perhaps had a little more to say than the others.

Some children felt that the only time that they read, was at school, although in reality this is unlikely to be the case, as the same children in later interviews talked about reading various magazines, and other things such as cereal boxes and labels in shops.

One of the most interesting aspects of this classification is what it suggests about the children's perceptions of what reading is. Reading instructions and facts is as likely to

be an element of science lessons, yet is rarely acknowledged as reading at all. A further implication of the responses is that the children, in fact, spend so much time in school reading that they are not conscious of the activity and that is why they found it difficult to identify specific times when they were reading. In this sense, the amount of reading that they actually do is not represented in their answers: What is represented is the amount of reading that they are aware of doing. In the same way as a person might not be conscious of breathing all of the time, but is so when told to breathe after an aerobic exercise and then deliberately focuses on breathing, these children are not always conscious of the fact that they are reading, but are so when told specifically to read and then concert their efforts to focus upon the activity of reading. This implies to me as researcher, that the role of reading may be wider in the lives of these children than they are aware of themselves. It is possible that they did not tell me about all of their reading activities.

The themes that developed during this section of the work are summarised in the following points:

- Reading was not recognised as a regular part of all subjects taught at school;
- The word *looking* can be used by children when talking about passive or superficial reading;
- Only when a teacher identifies an activity as reading does the child acknowledge it as such in school;
- Children are not conscious of reading every time that they do so;
- Reading aloud in class can have detrimental consequences;

- Without appropriate guidance and sufficient time, poor use is made of school libraries to encourage independent reading - both are needed to help children of this age learn how to choose books that they might enjoy, rather than choose book because they have been told to do so and wish to avoid reprimand.

These perceptions of the students of their own reading, imply their reading habits. Some are able to say a lot about their reading habits, others are more vague. The implication is that the role of reading is more clearly defined for some than others.

The children in my case studies were given reading diaries to complete on a daily basis. This exercise did not yield especially useful data. It did confirm, however, that some children are far more aware of when they are reading than others, and are more inclined to acknowledge the act.

#### 5.21 Access to Reading Material

The given responses suggest that there are three main sources of reading material for children of this age: school, home and municipal buildings (such as libraries and shops).

Although the influence of the school upon reading habits and the amount of reading done within the school is not always positively recognised, the current nature of schools is such that vast amounts of reading material are presented to children within them. It is largely in school that children of all abilities are introduced to different types of reading material, whether it be instructions, explanations, fiction or journalism. School is a place where all of the children are obliged to go, unlike a town library. A school,

regardless of its size or type, is also bound to contain different types of reading material; not every child's home will do so.

Public libraries were mentioned very little, and in a way which suggests that it is not currently the norm for children of this age to belong to, or regularly use, a public library. Such places play a small part in the lives of these children. Whether or not books were available in the home did not seem to vary greatly according to school.

### 5.22 School

It is recognised that text books and class readers are available to children within lessons, and they are obliged to read or study them. The focus of this section is the use that children choose to make of accessible resources relating to reading material: specifically the school library. As has already been noted, all three schools have a school library. Relatively few children mentioned the school library from any of the three schools. Responses from School A suggested that the children there made more use of the school library than children in the other two schools, however, although not always to find reading material:

*I basically finish all my homework in the library (An A41.3)*

The school library is an important place for children developing or nurturing reading habits:

*at my old school I used to read a book practically every break I mark the pages and then return them to the librarian to keep them for me (A611.8-10)*

*I go up to the library in the school (A151.28)*

*I was going to go and get a book this afternoon out the library (A161.28)*

*when I get to school I go to the library and read (C31.8)*

The variety of material that school libraries have, can affect the way in which they are used. For reluctant readers, a school library can be a daunting or confusing place. Given the choice of hundreds of books with little guidance or information, they often are not the inspirational places that they should be:

*if I'm bored in the library I might read a magazine then (B21.19)*

Children who do not successfully select a book which interests them, or who pick up the first book they see under time constraints and are then expected to sit and read a book which might be too complex for them, or simply concerning something about which they have no interest, may often find themselves bored in a school library. For such children, magazines are a welcome relief. They will have an understanding of what is expected within the magazine as soon as they pick it up. It will be written in language which is not too taxing and be about subjects thought to be of interest to teenagers, with plenty of pictures. A school library needs to have reading material that is accessible to all abilities, although this in itself does not compensate for lack of guidance in reading choices. A child of any ability should not really be able to say:

*there's nothing in the library I want to read at the moment (C51.12)*

or *I don't often find what I'm really looking for in it (C6127)*

Whether or not to choose a book and to read it, is, in theory, the choice of the child. Some children are not equipped with the necessary skills for making such a choice, however. For those children, the teachers and librarians may appear threatening rather than helpful. It is possible that the way in which school libraries are promoted and used is damaging to pupils' perceptions of them and the subsequent use that they make of them:

*It is vital to change the existing attitudes of the teaching staff within the schools, so that the library will be considered an information-resource centre standing at the centre of the educational process with the student as an independent information seeker* (Sever 1995, p.25)

The implication here is that the current role of the library is to provide a nucleus of information: the role of reading is to gain access to that information.

### 5.23 At home

Children of a young age learn in part through imitating their parents, learning parents' habits and attitudes. A number of the children asked, claimed that they regularly saw a parent or other family member read at home. This might be relevant to the role of reading in their own lives:

*my mum edits books and she's in a book club or something sad so she does read*

*I see them [parents] reading on holiday ...my mum reads other times*

*but mainly on holiday I don't see her reading in the house (A411.50-55- A51.2)*

*my mum and sister read all the time my dad claims he does but he reads like magazines and newspapers he does read books but not as much as my mother and sister (A1011.15-16)*

*my mum and dad both read quite a lot (A121.12)*

*my mum sometimes she like to read quite a lot (A14124)*

*she [sister] reads like four books in a day and she's got a huge selection so quite often I get them from there (A1511.31-32)*

*my mum reads all my sisters read (A161.16)*

*my mum reads a lot she reads all kinds of stuff book and magazines (B31.19)*

*my mum reads often (B4l.16)*

*he [brother] likes Ben Elton and things like that [parents read] papers  
magazines different books and things (B5ll.15-19)*

*I see them read quite a lot (B7l.18)*

*My mum is in a book group my dad likes reading about countries (B8l.13)*

*My dad reads sort of John Grisham books um and biographies um my mum  
reads I can't remember what he read but she does (B9ll.12-13)*

*my mum's a massager so she has to do all this work my dad always*

*reads he's got his own shop s work stuff about the shop (B10l.11-13)*

For some children, because of the books that their parents or brothers or sisters have, their home offers a more tempting or accessible selection of books than their school library. As we sat in the school library of School B, one girl told me that she would read the book she had selected there but;

*I'm going to get another one from home (B2l.11)*

As well as seeing family members read and having access to their books, some children described having their own books at home, often in the same room as their computer:

*in my bedroom (C5ll.19-14)*

*in my room and in my sister's room and in the loft (C6ll.25-28)*

A further source of reading material which was found in some homes is a regular newspaper. From seeing this, children might include discovering recent news within their perception of the role of reading.

*my mum reads my dad reads the newspaper (C12l.27)*



This is an interesting comment suggesting that some reading material has higher status than other forms.

*I looked at the newspaper for about two minutes (A8l.11)*

Ann told me when discussing what reading she had done that morning. Looking at headlines and scanning other sections of a newspaper is common practice amongst older people, and some of this age group were clearly developing, or mimicking, the same skills. Hattie told me that she would read some sections of a newspaper regularly and then specified:

*the sport or the headlines (A11.1.10)*

*I did read the Sunday Times on Sunday [...] not all of it (A16ll.24-28)*

If a newspaper is not taken regularly in the home, then the child cannot include it as a part of their daily routine and that element of the role of reading is not available to them. In some homes, television listings were read more commonly than newspapers, as one girl commented:

*At home I normally read telly magazines (C13l.17)*

#### 5.24 Public libraries/ shops

Only one child, a girl from School A specifically mentioned the town library as being a place used to find reading material.

*I don't go particularly often I'm not a regular there or anything but I go before a holiday or a half term or if I need to get some books out and there's not much here there is a selection in the library but I get them from [town] library because its easier because the holidays you can't come here and take books out (A4ll.38-44)*

There are several points of interest here. The first line is defensive. Ann does not want it thought that she spends much time in the town library. It is clearly not a place that children of this age especially want to be associated with. This is supported by the fact that none of the other children mentioned it. Ann makes it clear that she goes there when she cannot go to her school library. It is not her first choice. This point is valid. If children mostly access reading books through their school or school library, then they only have access to such a variety of books during term time. This means that during the holidays, when they have unusual amounts of leisure time to fill, they are not able to borrow and change books. If the only place where they can access books is the school library, then they have no access to such reading material for approximately a quarter of the year.

As being a member of a public library is not income dependent, the fact that so few children within these case studies chose to use the municipal library is not related to the economic capital of their family. As all three schools are within a five mile radius of the town library, nor is it, in this case, based on geography. It must therefore be based upon something else, possibly cultural capital. Some children are not brought up to go to libraries. Some children, in this case, especially those from School C, are unlikely to feel comfortable in public libraries, because they are not in the habit of choosing books for themselves and may feel they have little in common with other library users. Comparative research concerned with library users supports this view:

*We find that, generally, special provisions for young adults go no further than the supplying of books for one or more shelves, placed in the area between the children's and adult sections [...] libraries hardly give the impression that they*

*are particularly interested in the special needs of young adults* (Sever 1995, p.37)

One girl in School B, who is a reluctant reader, described using shops effectively as a library. She told me that she and her friends might look at magazines *if we go up the shops we do* (B31.19), but she and her friends would never venture into the town library to carry out the same activity.

### Summary

Within these three schools, the children have access to a similar number of books within their libraries or the town library. Children from all schools have access to reading material at home, although children from School A, on the whole, seemed to be aware of families that they saw reading for pleasure, more often. Access to reading material is not enough to create readers. While books or newspapers may be a permanent feature in the lives of children, both at home and at school, having access to material is, of course, an essential element of the role that reading plays, without it, reading plays no role. Children of this age, however, need more than access to reading material. They also need information and guidance about it before it can play a role in their lives.

Children in School C (those with least economic or cultural capital) were least satisfied with their school library. They, more than any other group of children, felt that the school library did not meet their requirements. The data therefore suggest:

- public libraries do not contribute significantly to the reading habits of children of this age;
- school libraries have an important role to play;
- many children regularly see parents (especially mothers) or other family members read at home;
- without guidance, children of this age are not always able to make good use of resources such as school libraries or being surrounded by reading material at home;
- school libraries do not always play a positive role in encouraging children to read as they do not always enable the reader (especially a reluctant or low ability reader) to find what they are looking for.

The most important places where the children might have access to books were school and home; only one child mentioned or made use of the municipal library. From the way in which she spoke of her use of this library, it was clear that it was not a particularly acceptable thing to do within her social group. The fact that not one other child discussed using the municipal library, supports the view that they are not places where children of this age tend to go, and so have little effect generally upon their reading habits. Despite the existence of a children's section within the library, the place itself is not especially child friendly.

#### Access in school

All three schools used in the case studies had school libraries with librarians.

I regularly witnessed 'library' lessons in School B. During these lessons, children were taken to the library by their English teacher and told to select a reading book. Before they could do so however the librarian regularly gave them a talk, often including warnings or criticism about behaviour in one way or another. I watched the children choose books. Some did so with a serious and mature attitude, others picked up the nearest book to them and clearly pretended to read and others made no effort at all to select a book. All children in the class were given equal access to the books, by which I mean that all of the children were in the same library and given the same amount of time in which to select reading material, yet the access opportunity was not, in fact, equal in every way. Access to books does not exclusively mean being in near physical proximity to books. Other issues also affect access, including cultural capital, personal and social identity, ability and confidence.

This understanding is in some ways akin to the dated proverb 'you can take a horse to water but you cannot make him drink': the horse will not drink if it is not thirsty, if it can not reach the water, if it does not like the water or if it does not have faith in the purity of the water. Similarly, taking children to a room full of books is not the same as giving them access to the books: the children cannot be made to read simply because there are books all around them. They will not select or read books if they do not want to read at the given time, if they do not feel that there is anything being offered to them that they think they will enjoy reading, if they do not feel confident that they can read the books on offer or if they can see no point to reading.

The children who made the greatest use of their school library and who were most confident in discussing it, whether individually or with their peers, were those attending

School A. Their discussions suggested that they were encouraged to use the school library as a place of work and research as well as a place to choose and read books. They were familiar with the school library and what it had to offer and were comfortable using it. In other words, making use of the school library was a regular activity which was natural to them through habit. The comments that these children made about the library were positive. They were able to practise an activity in keeping with their social identities through finding material which suited their sense of self identity, written in language that was familiar to them. There was no question that they would not be able to manage to read the books on offer and they had the confidence to select various books and discuss them knowledgeably, admitting that they did not like all of the books that they read at school, but were not discouraged from reading because of this.

Not all children are able to make effective use of a school library. The subjects of the case study in School B were taken regularly to the library and in that sense were familiar with the room. They were allowed to go to the library by themselves at specified times, but were not encouraged to stay there or to work there, merely to choose a book as quickly as possible and to leave. Less than half of the children chose to go to the library by themselves suggesting that this was not a place where they felt particularly welcome or comfortable or a place where it was socially acceptable for them to spend any time through choice. They were allowed access, but their cultural capital was such that they did not choose to gain access to the many books which bore no marks recognisable to them, on the shelves.

The library lessons appeared to have limited success in encouraging the children to make use of their reading options. One boy boasted that he'd had the same book out for over a year which he kept in his bag so that he didn't get into trouble for not having a reading book. There was no suggestion that he would get into trouble for not reading the book; he had to choose one, not necessarily read it. The library was to some of these children either a boring place or a place to play. At best it seemed somewhere to choose and exchange books. I was not surprised that so few of those in the case study referred to the library as a positive element in their reading habits. The library lesson consisted of a group of thirty children sharing a small, communal reading area and being given a few minutes randomly to select a book from the shelves. Little guidance was given. Both the teacher and the librarian watched the children carefully as they made their choices. The aim clearly was to ensure each child had a book, not that each child had a book that might be either understood or enjoyed.

Some of the children in School C spoke about the library when discussing their daily routines and their reading habits. One boy described going to the library where he would read (voluntarily) when he arrived at school in the mornings. The library seemed to him (as to one of the boys in School B) a refuge: a place where other children were unlikely to go and where he could spend unthreatened time alone. The other two children who discussed the school library, in School C, did so in derisory terms, expressing their dissatisfaction with the place and what it had to offer. A lack of guidance in this library was clear, as was their negative attitude towards it. It certainly was not a place they would choose to spend time. The culture of the school was perhaps not one which would encourage these children to feel comfortable in the library or to make regular use of all it had to offer. The effect of the library upon children in this

school was to confirm that they would never find a book which they would enjoy reading and that it was a waste of time trying to do so.

#### Access to reading material at home

Some form of reading material was available in the homes of all children within the case study. The type of reading material and their use of it varied, as did the number of children who lived in homes where parents or brothers or sisters regularly read. The majority of children in School A told me that their parents regularly read books: Some of them could name favourite authors or types of books enjoyed by their parents. In School B the children told me that their parents often read quite a lot. Some were again able to name favourite authors. Magazines were mentioned often, by children discussing what their parents read, in School B. Newspapers were named as the most common type of reading material regularly read by the parents of the children in School C. A further difference between the reading material that the children in School C saw their parents read, and those from the other two schools, was that children in School C described the reading material of their parents as work related, having to do their accounts, ordering and reviewing. Reading in these homes was out of work related necessity, rather than for pleasure or literary advancement. The reading of books in the homes of children from School A was usually seen as a form of relaxation or pleasure.

The data suggest that in those houses where books are prominent, they are often in a variety of rooms, with the children's bedrooms being the most common place for them to be found. This explains to some extent why so many children choose to read before going to sleep at night; if that's where the books are, then it makes sense that they will



be read in the same room. Reading at bedtime saves interrupting other activities or parts of the day.

This again indicates a division between the literary and literacy: cultural reading as opposed to instrumental reading.

#### 5.25 Perceived value of reading

Children in School A discussed this point with confidence, with at least half of them quickly identifying an educational value to reading and claiming that they learnt much through reading. The children in School B and some in School C agreed. Interestingly, learning about literature was not cited as one of the educational values of reading. The children in all schools recognised instrumental criteria, believing that reading would help them gain information, learn words, punctuation and grammar. i.e. its benefits contributed towards greater literacy but not an understanding of the literary at this age. A small number (from Schools B and C) could recognise no educational value in reading.

Children in School A gave some indication of recognising the non instrumental value of reading and described one point of reading as being to relax, recognising the escapist quality within some works of fiction. The value of reading was identified by one child in both Schools B and C as having a calming influence upon them. For these children it was the activity of reading (sitting quietly, undisturbed) rather than the material read that was important.

For some children in all three schools, reading particular books was a way in which to identify with a social group. Children in School A were particularly aware of what their classmates had read and of wanting to have read the same book(s) so as not to feel left out. Here, the individual reading practices are clearly influenced by local, social norms. The strength of the power of the social self upon children of this age (and younger) is illustrated in the recent success of the Harry Potter books: there can be few children who have not heard of these books and within certain social groups, even fewer who have not read them. To have read at least one of this type of book is currently the norm within children of this age, and those who have not are, in some ways, social outcasts. Children who are friends with other children who spend time reading and who tell them about books with enthusiasm, are (all other things being equal) more likely to read than children who are friends with other children who do not read. Children in School B were less aware of their friends' reading habits than those in School A, and children in School C showed no awareness at all of what books their friends might read, although they sometimes shared magazines with them.

The reading choices the children make are clearly dependent to some extent on their reasons for reading. For example, as has already been discussed, the children who have specific sport interests will read about that sport with the intention of learning more about it. A combination of recreational and educational motives were identified as being the aim of reading by the children in this group of case studies. The precision of the answer varied according to the school, with those in School A explaining their answers at some length and those of School C in little detail. The three main benefits of reading, according to the children asked are:

- to learn;
- to relax;
- to enjoy.

### Reading to learn

Some of the children identified reading as a factor which helped them improve their vocabulary:

*I think I learn quite a lot of words from reading (A51.25)*

*you learn you like know so much more words and you learn history (A101.30)*

*in knowing about words and knowing what words mean and in conversation*

*someone might say something and you don't know what it means and if you read*

*so yeah(A1211.32-33)*

Another positive aspect was the way in which it could be inspirational at the same time as helping to improve spelling;

*it helped me by um my spellings when we write a story in English it helps me*

*with what to think up and ideas ... yeah it helps my spellings my reading helps*

*with ideas come into my head when I'm writing stories (A1711.21-24)*

A low ability girl in School B thought that reading probably had advantageous qualities, but she could not identify what they might be (p.B3).

*it helps with spelling and learning new words and stuff like that (B51.27)*

*it helps you learn lots of stuff and ugh and you become more creative if you read*

*more and it expands your mind (B611.28-29)*

*authors generally put in one or two facts that you keep in your mind (B7 1.50)*

*it helps you with English it gives you lots of imagination and ugh when*

*you're writing stories you can pick ideas from books (B8ll.21-22)*

*in English it can teach you more you can pick up punctuation and spelling*

*because you're more used to looking at it (B9ll.29-30)*

*I use it to find information and things (B10l.27)*

*it helps me learn stuff I need to learn (C2l.29)*

*to get information (C10l.10)*

Girls in School C were very unspecific and vague about possible benefits and aims of reading (C16) with the following responses:

*I don't know really it probably does*

and *I suppose it does but I don't really know (C14ll.31-35)*

### Reading to Relax

Not all of the children thought of reading in educational terms. An important role of reading for a small number of children was to help them to relax. Felicity (School B) identified the way in which reading helped her:

*relieve stress (B4 l.24)*

A boy in School C was the only other participant to echo her feelings telling me that he read:

*to calm me down (C2l.52)*

### 5.26 Pleasure or work

Reading was not perceived as something that was always pleasurable, nor was it something that was always work. The differentiating factor often derived from whether

or not the material was prescribed by school. The following answers were given in response to being asked whether reading was work :

*reading books I don't like that we have to do yes not reading books that I just choose to which is most of them no (A12ll.35-36)*

*yes and no I see like magazines and some books as just you know fun but say Shakespeare I would see that as work I don't particularly enjoy reading that (A13ll.17-18)*

*It's like riding a bike really or walking the dog It's a pleasure thing I don't have to do it's not work work you have to do or you don't have to do I mean but no reading books is not work (A16ll.21-22)*

*no (A17l.26)*

*sometimes it's work so I'm actually doing something with my mind (B4ll.26-27)*

*if I'm reading something for school then it's work if not then it's pleasure (B6l.31)*

*it depends like at school it's more work but then at home it's more pleasure (B9.ll.32-33)*

*sometimes it can be work (C10l.13)*

Reading choices and perceived value of reading are closely connected with motivation for reading. As has already been stated, the data supports quite clearly that there are in fact only two fundamental reasons why children read: they want to (pleasure); they have to (necessity).

Reading for pleasure is undertaken in order:

- To relax;
- To enjoy a story;
- To fit in with friends;
- To share an experience.

Reading for necessity is undertaken in order:

- To complete school work;
- To find out where and when things are happening;
- To make academic progress;
- To further vocational prospects;
- To fit in with one's peers.

Some children read for elements of both categories; for example, the majority of children in School A read for all of the reasons listed under pleasure as well as many listed under necessity. Those of School B, and a small number of children from School C, read for both pleasure and necessity. Some children read only for reasons listed under the heading of necessity; their experience of reading differed greatly from that of the children for whom there is an element, at least, of pleasure in the activity of reading. This returns to the question of why some children perceive the activity of reading so differently from others.

Pleasure

While many of the children in the case studies described reading regularly, the idea of reading for pleasure was largely conditional upon one aspect of the reading material: it was only for pleasure if they had chosen to read it themselves.

Having the opportunity to read self chosen material is clearly a significant contributor to children reading for pleasure. If children of this age only see reading as a pleasurable experience when they have made the decision to read, they have to be in a position to make such a choice. For that they need:

1. the ability to read
2. time given or time made
3. a comfortable environment in which to read
4. a range of material from which to choose material to read

All four of these elements are necessary for reading to be an act of pleasure. Recognition of this helps to explain why certain types of children appear to enjoy reading more than others. Children from homes with cultural and academic capital are generally more likely to be in the position of fulfilling the above requirements than those from homes with negligible cultural or academic capital. Similarly, a child who cannot read fluently is less likely to consider reading a pleasurable experience than a child who can.

It may be argued therefore that the ability of a child to regard reading a pleasurable experience and thus to choose to read widely is predetermined by social circumstances and is in place before the child is of schooling age. The role of the school currently is not so much to ensure that children enjoy reading as it is to attempt to ensure that all

children can read. The aim of the school is to teach as many children as possible to be literate (to be able to read), not to enjoy reading or to be literary.

### Necessity

As has already been mentioned, reading is an element of all subjects taught within the secondary school system (physical education may be an exception in some cases, although not necessarily so). The majority of children entering secondary school can read and the curriculum is based upon the assumption that the pupils have a level of literacy. For those who cannot read, a minority, separate syllabuses may be followed, with different expectations. The illiterate child is not literally labelled in the way that children who continued to speak Welsh in Welsh schools were following the imposition of the English education system in 1870 (Evans, 1992, p.395), but is singled out nonetheless as teachers and peer groups become aware of the illiteracy and make concessions (whether kindly meant or not). Reading is then, a necessity at the most basic level, as it is a necessity to be among the majority and thus to be considered 'normal', regardless of academic ability or social standing.

Most of the subjects of the case studies regarded reading as a necessity for academic progression. Five children specifically mentioned learning spelling and punctuation as being one of the aims of reading. Another five said that they learnt ideas and information through reading, and a total of fifteen recognised some form of learning



resulting from reading, including a girl of low ability in School C who was unsure of anything specific that she gained from reading but felt that she gained from it in some way or other.

For those children who cannot read, the idea of reading for pleasure may seem ludicrous. This was exemplified in the aggressive, defensive responses of a boy in School C, who told me firstly that he hated reading, and secondly that he could not read. He was the only one of my sample who had no evident literacy skills at all.

The majority of children who have at least some level of literacy are expected to read, whether they enjoy the activity or not, throughout their school lives. If they do not read they are denied access to a wealth of information that is essential to passing examinations, which in turn are helpful in securing employment or places in higher education.

The amount of time spent reading which is the result of necessity e.g. set as homework, appears to have an inverse effect upon the amount of reading conducted for pleasure. Although, the more their time was organised, the more they found time to read. Even the enthusiastic readers in School A told me that if they had had a lot of reading set as homework, they were unlikely to read anything else the same evening. Reading that was dictated was rarely seen as pleasurable reading, regardless of the content. The fact that a teacher had prescribed the reading made it an act of necessity rather than pleasure: *If I'm reading something for school then its work if not then its pleasure* (B61.31). Time management is clearly about more than homework, other activities are valuable, if not essential in teaching time management.

It is increasingly necessary for children to read when they are not in school. To make sense of signs, time-tables, products etc. reading is necessary. The recent trend of communicating through text messaging, rather than voice on the telephone, reinforces this necessity.

Being able to read is a necessity for all children in the western world, regardless of class or ambition. It is no longer an activity reserved for the ruling classes. The same is not necessarily true of gaining pleasure from reading or becoming literary. The distinction between those who are taught to be literate and those who are taught to be literary seems, on this limited evidence, to remain as class bound as it always has been.

#### Summary of Chapter 5

The case studies show that while some characteristics affecting the role of reading are shared between the three schools, there are also some aspects affecting the role of reading which are common only to two of the three schools, or, in some cases, exclusive to one school. This is summarised in diagram 4 below:

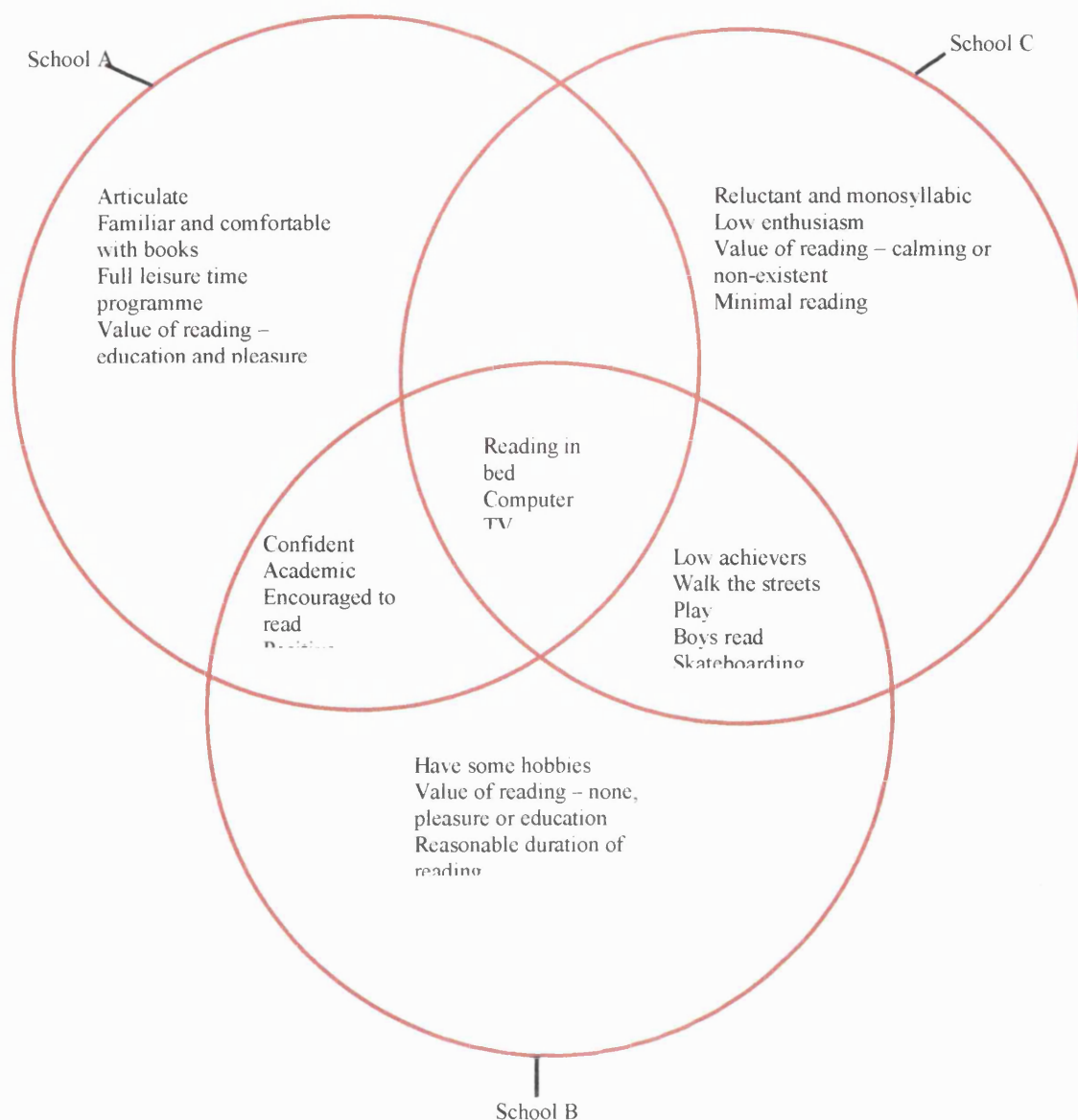


Table 5.6

A wealth of information suggesting the many various roles of reading within the lives of Key Stage 3 readers has been presented within this Chapter. Here, I have indicated that gender affects the role of reading less than cultural or economic capital, and that the roles of reading vary to some extent between the three schools, which reflect different levels of cultural capital. I have argued that one of the greatest contributory factors determining the role of reading is the organisation of time. This contributes towards the field in an original way as the effects of time organisation upon the role of reading have

not previously been explored or illustrated. The persisting differences between the role of reading in the lives of those with cultural and economic capital, and those without, illustrate with clarity that the role of reading is not the same for all children and possibly should not be taught/treated as though it were. The points here summarised are the focus of discussion in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6

### Relating the findings to the research questions

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the findings resulting from the data analysis of the previous chapter, and to use those findings to answer the questions raised at the end of Chapter 3. The first part of this chapter is divided into six sections, responding to each of the six questions defined during Chapter 3, relating to the role of reading in the lives of Key Stage 3 learners. The second part of this chapter discusses a finding which is relevant to all questions asked within the first part of the chapter, which is the relationship of time organisation to the role of reading.

#### 6.1 To what extent is the role of reading related to context?

In this question, the word 'context' is multi dimensional. It relates to physical place, school or home. It also relates to historical place in time, as well as the social context of each child. All forms of context, both spatial and temporal, here identified, were seen to have an impact upon the role of reading.

A historical study of the growth of literacy reveals that a higher percentage of people can now read, than was the case two hundred years ago. It also reveals clearly the reasons for this: literacy was once within reach only of the privileged classes (as discussed in depth in Chapter 1, 1.4). The role of reading was such that the ruling

classes did not consider it necessary, or useful, for every member of society to be able to read. There was no need for the lowest classes to be able to read, and even if they could, what would they read? Books were a luxury and expensive commodities. Being literate was at one time inseparable from being literary. To be literary one also had to possess economic and social capital so strong, that even should a member of the lower classes gain literacy, becoming literary remained a difficult if not impossible task, as Hardy's Jude Fawley is reminded in his attempt to enter university, having studied hard to do so:

*Such places be not for such as you – only for them with plenty o'money*

(Hardy, 1985, p.163)

Literacy is historically connected with class, social, cultural and economic capital. This legacy is partly responsible for the different roles of reading today. It is what makes the role of reading vary, in accordance with cultural, economic and academic capital.

The role of reading has clearly changed during its history. One of the most important factors which has changed, is that literacy is now expected of all children, regardless of social background or potential. Learning to read is now an essential part of growing up. The skill of being able to read is therefore, no longer one possessed only by those with economic or cultural capital. What use is made of the acquired skill is what constitutes the role of reading, and this still varies according to economic, academic and cultural capital of the reader. There remains a correspondence between social positions of the reader and the role of reading. The type of school attended is likely to be a consequence of the cultural and/or economic capital of the family. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that it is cultural and economic capital that determines the way in which a child uses non directed time. Use of time, as is discussed in the second half of this chapter, contributes greatly to the role of reading

The fact that the skill of reading is shared by all classes, is insufficient to make the role of reading common to all classes. Being able to read is only one prerequisite of being able to choose to read. The circumstances of the choice to read and use of the skill of reading, condition the role of reading at any one time. The role of reading for children of this age is affected by their *dispositions (or habitus)* (Bourdieu, 1998,p.5) and *position-takings*. This is explained through Bourdieu's words in the following paragraph.

The amount of cultural and economic capital possessed by the child (or family of the child) affects the habitus, which in turn causes choices which determine the role of reading:

*The habitus is this generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods, practices [...]*  
*They make distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar.* (Bourdieu 1998, p.4)

It is the habitus that causes children to enjoy one type of reading material rather than another, or to value reading over another activity or vice versa.

While it may appear that children of a certain class possess predispositions which enable them to enjoy reading with some ease, they are not pre-programmed to do so as an element of choice remains. The choices the children make are likely to be, however, a result of their material and social environment, in which they mimic the actions of

those around them and thus behave in the manner most appropriate to their immediate surroundings. The actions of the children at this age will in part be caused by a desire to please others. The children who can read fluently and enjoy reading will want to share this skill and to have it acknowledged. They are well read and in so being, stand out against the crowd. Harré explains:

*Private knowledge of success is worthless to most human beings. We prefer to risk the contempt or pity consequent upon public failure for the chance of the respect and even admiration to public success.*

(Harré, 1979,p.22)

Historically, as has already been explained, it was those with economic and cultural capital who read and possessed books. Part of the role of reading, traditionally, for the higher classes was to distinguish them from the lower. They read partly to distinguish themselves from those who did not. More recently, they read certain types of work for the same purpose: they read to be literary, not simply to practise literacy.

For the children of families with less economic and cultural capital, reading is still important, but for a different reason. Here, the role of reading is a progressive one, i.e. it is an essential stepping-stone towards social and economic progression. Children who lack cultural capital may gain no pleasure from reading prescribed texts at school, but few will positively choose not to do so. The majority recognise that something may be gained from reading at school and persevere, despite a propensity to feel alienated from the chosen texts.



One physical context in which children spend a great deal of time is within the school. The institution of the school is a socially complex one, containing various social groups with different priorities and concerns. The majority of those within schools behave in the way that is expected of them; they can fulfil a role within the school.

The nature of schools in developed, capitalist countries is such that education is not delivered without prejudice. Rather than closing the gaps between social spaces of children, schools reassert the strength of that space, which is firmly fixed within the social space inherited from the cultural and economic capital of their parents. Bourdieu states that:

*School institution contributes[...] to the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and, consequently, of the structure of social space [...] The reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital is achieved in the relation between familial strategies and the specific logic of the school institution. (ibid,p.19)*

Bourdieu discusses reproduction strategies, including education, as a tendency of each social group to ensure their continuance as such. The amount which a family will invest in education is proportional to their cultural and economic capital. Some families, it follows, have greater interest in education than others. Families who share similar amounts of cultural and economic capital will send their children to similar schools, expecting to receive similar standards of education; certain schools then become monopolised by a particular social class. Once the parental choice of school has taken place, the systems and means of communication within schools, Bourdieu argues, continue to perpetuate social gaps:

*The educational system [...] maintains a preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital. More precisely, by a series of selection operations, the system separates the holders of interited capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseperable from social differences according to inherited capial, the system thus tends to maintain preexisting social differences [...] The school institution institutes social borders analogous to those which formerly separated nobility from gentry and gentry from common people. (ibid,pp.20-21).*

Children from homes with a greater amount of cultural and economic capital enter school with advantages, which are perpetuated throughout their school lives. They speak with the same vocabulary as their teachers. They share the same ideals and know how to respond in a pleasing manner to them. They are aware of the expectations and respond to the pressure to succeed in a conventional ways, which educational institutions applaud. They are judged on ability, but the ability to succeed in school is inbuilt by the economic and cultural capital of their home:

*The school institution lays down its final judgments and its verdicts, from which there is no appeal, ranking all students in a unique hierarchy of forms of excellence [...] Those who are excluded are condemned in the name of a collectively recognized and accepted criterion [...] the criterion of intelligence. Therefore, in order to restore an identity in jeopardy, students have no recourse except to make a violent break with the scholastic order and the social order (ibid,p.28).*

For example, within academically achieving schools, those who are not academic, rather than be regarded as failures, will reject that which is offered by the institution.

The role of reading in a child's life is more determined by the child's cultural and economic capital than by the school, attended (although, the school attended is partly a result of cultural and economic capital). This explains why the role of reading within any one classroom of children will be so diverse. It is most diverse within comprehensive schools, i.e. within schools in which children are drawn from the widest range of backgrounds, in which a child with little or no economic capital may sit next to a child with vast amounts of economic capital. Within fee paying, 'public' schools, the social space between the children in terms of economic capital and potential cultural capital is likely to be less within their class rooms, it is likely that there will be a greater sense of shared habitus. In schools which are not successful academic schools, in which there is not much cultural capital, there will still be a number of children who have an amount of cultural capital in their homes, and act accordingly, despite their schooling rather than because of it.

The role of reading for any one child is less a result of the school attended than of their home environment. However, the school they attend may be in some cases a result of their home. Children who had factors other than their school in common, gave similar responses to questions regarding the role of reading in their lives. While the role of reading varied between the three schools studied in the case studies, factors other than the school itself were primarily the cause for these differences. The greatest factors can be summarised as follows:

Habitus

Sense of self

The obvious direct effect of the schools upon the way in which the children viewed and used reading was negligible. There were differences in the way the children viewed and

talked about reading within the schools, but the cause of this difference seemed more deep rooted than the school attended. It was more a result of their cultural history than school attitude. This is most clearly apparent in a review of the data collected at School B, the most socially diverse school. Here, although the children were taught in the same classes and given the same class readers and access to library etc, the role of reading differed considerably between individuals, indicating that those with greater cultural or/and economic capital enjoyed reading, and had greater knowledge of literature, than those with little capital of these types. Yet, these were still distinct within school characteristics.

Social levels of inequality advantage some children and disadvantage others: those with cultural and economic capital are better placed to provide their children with skills and norms, which will be rewarded in a conventional, academic environment and fulfil traditional educational expectations. Bourdieu is among those who believe that schools ‘amplify differences and are not meritocratic’ (cited in Pollard 1985,p.198). In no curriculum is it set out that the role of the teacher is to enforce disadvantages. In the current climate of inclusion, in theory, the opposite is true. The reality may be however:

*Very few teachers like to think of themselves as being involved in producing or reproducing social differentiation in society: it is hardly an educational aim.*

*However, in that teachers are concerned with the growth and development of children, it is inevitable that they will be engaged in the differentiation process to some extent, whatever the age of the children they teach (ibid)*

*Whilst the teachers display a moral concern that every child matters, in practice there is a subtle process of sponsorship [...] where opportunity is [...] offered to some and closed to others (Sharp & Green 1975,p218 in Pollard 1985,p.199)*

6.2 Is the role of reading in the lives of Key Stage 3 learners purely functional, or does it have a more aesthetic role?

One of the strongest emerging themes within the data, was that the role of reading varies between individuals. For the majority of the subjects of the case study, one of the roles of reading was functional. This came as no surprise, following the discussion of the necessity for literacy in an increasingly technological society, that was discussed in Chapter 1. Reading was a means to an end, whether that end be completing homework for any subject, finding out where the next skate boarding competition would be held, or emailing a friend. The role of reading was shown to be exclusively functional for some; for reluctant readers who claimed not to enjoy reading at all, the role of reading was to gain information. For the majority, however, reading also had a more pleasing role. The role of reading, as well as being functional, was to provide images and stories, which would entertain and inspire the readers. This form of reading was not usually associated with reading concerned with school work, but was the result of wider reading and therefore only applicable to those children who were able to choose and read books for pleasure.

6.3 Can the role of reading be identified as contributing towards characteristics which indicate the potential to gain cultural, economic or social capital?

Families with cultural and economic capital are likely to send their children to similar schools. The children will then form peer groups with other children who have a heritage of cultural and economic capital. Reading is the norm within such peer groups, and within such schools. Schools may be seen as intensifiers of contextual conditions.

Here, the role of reading is greater than to achieve literacy. The way in which the children of School A, for example, were able to talk about books with such fluency and confidence, suggested that for them, the role of reading was to become increasingly literary, as well as literate. Becoming literate is no longer dependent on class and economic capital as it once was, as is discussed in some detail in Chapter 1. Becoming literary however remains class based. It seems that the role of reading is dictated to some extent by birth, as could be predicted through consideration of Bourdieu's work, as seen in Chapters 1 and 3. Thus, a cycle appears to be in place controlling the role of reading within the lives of Key Stage 3 learners. The cycle is either virtuous or vicious.

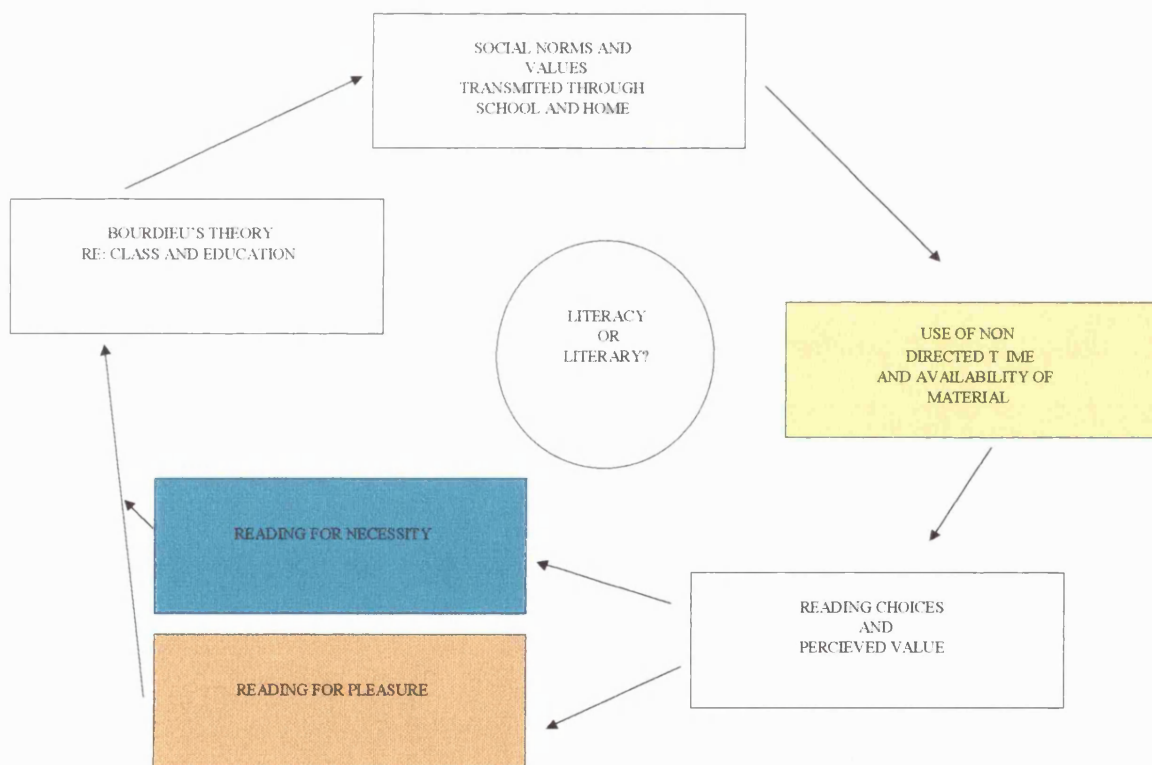


Table 6.1

#### 6.4 To what extent is the role of reading to create a sense of self?

For children the role of reading is not only instrumental, it is also a device through which pleasure is obtained, a way of identifying oneself with others. A role of reading indicated within the previous chapter was its function in the development of self-identity. One child, for example, saw the development in her choice of reading material as an outward sign of her maturity. The act of reading, whilst often conducted in privacy, is also a public one, and what is read is a symbol for children of this age, of the identity and character of the reader.

The reading choices that the children make put them in a specific social space. They choose to occupy a space, which is close to that of those with whom they have something in common. For example, a boy who chooses to read only magazines about skateboarding is choosing to put himself in a space near to that of other children who choose to read similar material, and distancing himself from children who choose instead to read Lord of the Rings or Little Women. The distinctions made within reading choices are symbols of discernable taste. It is this that allows them to differentiate between a painting or a print, different types of music or instructions and works of fiction and between the writing of Shakespeare and the writing of Roald Dahl. The distinctive reading choices of a child also reflect whether they are literate or interested in what is literary. This distinction is deeply embedded within their social space.

Within society, each individual, including children, is faced with decisions concerning the extent to which they wish to be accepted by each social group. In simple terms, if a child wishes to be accepted in to a group of children who are known to enjoy reading activities, that child may choose to participate in such activities to fit in. Reading plays a role in forming the identity of the child and consolidating that identity within society. The type of material a child chooses to read or reject, can be observed by any interested member of their society, and the choice contributes to the child's reputation. Harré argues the creation of reputation is one of the most significant motivations within life:

*The pursuit of reputation in the eyes of others is the overriding preoccupation of human life [...] It is the product of the recognition of one's worth by others.*

(Harré, 1979, pp.3-4)

Reading or rejecting a piece of writing is an intentional action, which is a symbolic indication of the child's perception of his or her chosen place within the social context where the action takes place.

The choices that children make are a consequence of their strategies for surviving in a position in which they feel comfortable in school. Pollard identified a

*Four part typology of pupils' strategic and adaptive responses through their school careers to a range of curricular and social structures*

(Filer & Pollard 2000, p.140)

These strategies are summarised as follows:

1.anti-conformity: some rejection of school career structures, expectations and norms; oppositional learning and social agendas, characterized as deviance



2. non-conformity: some indifference and lack of concern about school career structures, expectations and norms: little perception of risk because pupils have their own learning and social agendas, characterised as independence
3. conformity: reification of school career structures, expectations and norms; low-risk conformity to others' learning and social agendas, characterised as adaptation
4. redefining: personal identification with school career structures, expectations and norms; high risk strategies for fluency learning and social agendas, characterised by negotiation and challenge

What counts as conformity varies from space to space. Conformity within School C may have been seen as anti or non conformity in School A.

Reading has a role in these strategies. In a school in which conformity includes an appreciation of reading and books, choosing not to read is an act of non conformity. Pollard found that children tended to follow patterns conforming to these four strategies. They do not exclusively do so, however, and strategies can change:

*Patterned responses were liable to disruption where, for instance, changing classroom contexts and expectations meant that a pupil's accustomed orientations and strategies become no longer appropriate or viable [...] pupils, for example, moved towards greater or lesser conformity in response to a particular pedagogic style or learning context [...] gaps between conformity and anti-conformity, non-conformity and redefining are potentially sites of tension. Such tension may occur between an individual pupil and a teacher or between individual pupils and their peers as a result, for instance, a learning stance or*

*expression of identity which contravenes the structural norms or relationship expectations* (Filer & Pollard 2000, p.140)

Is it possible for outside forces to affect the taste and choices of an individual to such an extent as to alter their position within social space? In a way, it might be argued that that is one of the aims of the inclusive policy of the National Curriculum, i.e. that all children must be given experience of pre 1914 literature including works identified as those of the canon, as well as post 1914 literature which is perceived as being of a good quality. While it is clearly possible to make children of this age read the same texts, the texts will not hold the same meaning for each of them, as they will be read in their contexts. Nor, through ensuring that they read the same types of literature, is it possible to ensure that all children will enjoy or subsequently choose to read the same type of literature. Bourdieu explains this again through referring to the concept of social space:

*If I am a political leader and I propose creating one big party bringing together both industrial employers and workers, I have little chance of success, since these groups are very distant in social space* (ibid,p.11)

This theory goes some way to explaining the varying perceptions and subsequent roles of reading, within any one classroom full of children, or within a school, or within a city. The habitus of each child, and their need to identify themselves through their choices ensures that their approaches to acts such as reading cannot be wholly uniform, despite attempts of educationalists and politicians.

*What exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as something to be done.* (ibid,p.12)

Indeed, it is Bourdieu's belief that such mechanisms reinforce such social difference. Schools, especially, he asserts:

*Guarantee the reproduction of social space and symbolic space (ibid,p.13)*

According to Harré, individuals seek ways of deserving social recognition, whether it be respect or contempt, through a multitude of daily activities. Here, then, is a further aspect of the role of reading in the lives of children of this age. The ability to read, as has already been discussed, is expected throughout secondary school. For those children who can read well, this is one way in which to gain the respect of both teachers and peer group. It is also however, a potential cause of contempt. Illiteracy is not an aspect of a child's individuality which is easily hidden within a school; indeed, it is something which is likely to draw attention to the child, and can cause tension and resentment (as displayed by one of the boys of School C discussed previously). Harré's explanation of the behaviour of some adolescents describes possible results of frustration caused by an inability to read:

*Some recent studies of adolescence have shown many young people to have an almost obsessive interest and preoccupation with the maintenance of dignity and the careful scanning of the social environment for occasions and acts of possible humiliation[...] some adolescents may undertake violent retaliation, which in their view has the aim of restoring dignity that they have lost in the eyes of their peers before whom, and only before whom, they have been humiliated.*

(Harré , 1979, p.25)

The tense dynamics within social life, form another discussion point of Harré's, which can also be used to explain social aspects of the role of reading. Children, as adults,

manage social acts in order to influence perceptions of their social persona. Within some families, the act of reading will create a positive impression of admiration, whilst in others the reverse may be true.

Pollard found in his research examining oral work of Key Stage 2 children (with Filer, 2000) that young children were highly conscious of the effect of what they said, and the way in which they talked, upon their peer group as well as upon their teacher. Concern was shown about being perceived as a 'show off' to such an extent that they made choices to talk about less impressive subjects than they might otherwise have done. One boy was:

*Prepared to forgo some measure of status that the socio-economic circumstances of his home life gave him access to in favour of the much needed support and friendship of some of his low status peers*

( Filer & Pollard 2000, p.94)

Filer and Pollard here identify one way in which the school does make a difference to the choices made by school children. This same self conscious desire to portray oneself in a certain manner and to fit in with one's peer group, also governs the reading choices of some Key Stage 3 children. The reading choices made in public, i.e. within a class room or school library, express a social function greater than the desire to read or not. Through such public expressions of choice:

*Statuses, identities and affiliations are being shaped and reinforced both positively and negatively. Reputations and relationships are in the balance.*

(Filer & Pollard 2000,p.96)

Each action of a child indicates their sense of self. It is through their actions that others gain an understanding of who the child is, of their likes and dislikes:

*By their everyday acts of meaning, people act out the social structure, affirming their own statuses and roles, and establishing and transmitting the shared system of values and knowledge (Halliday, 1978 in Filer & Pollard 2000, p.87)*

Just one of the roles of reading in school is to assert a sense of identity upon the reader, so, too, does the act of classroom reading perform a role for the teacher. Reading may be used in classrooms as a means by which control is asserted and maintained. It is an act which may be used to settle a class down, to calm down individuals, as one of the boys in School C recognised the main role of reading to be. If a school child is reading, that child is likely to be behaving in an appropriate way for a classroom in which learning can take place. One of the roles of reading for children is to maintain a standard of behaviour, to control. It follows therefore that from that child's point of view, reading may be perceived as a controlling mechanism. As with all forms of control enforcement, this in itself will be enough to make some children want to respond in a negative way.

It is worth noting here, however, that one role of reading can be in a sense, to escape from one's self identity. The role of reading was described several times to me as being a means through which to escape from aspects of daily life, of escaping to a land of fiction and characters who were perhaps, not like those known in reality.

### 6.5 Does a universal role of reading exist?

The data-analysis reveals with clarity that there is not a single role of reading which is universal to all. It shows that there is a role for reading in the lives of every Key Stage 3 learner, but the role may vary between individuals, most significantly between those who come from homes with different levels of cultural and economic capital.

### 6.6 Time organisation and the role of reading

One of the ways in which the children spent their free time was in watching television. The way in which the children watched television mirrored the way in which they read; the activities were seen as interchangeable by the majority. This suggested that one of the roles of reading for them was to provide an activity through which they might relax with passive engagement. A second role indicated by the same data is that of filling in time spent in solitude. The pupils (mainly of Schools A and B) who were more discriminating in what they watched, choosing not to waste time watching something in which they had no interest, were also those who spent time actively reading for pleasure. It was interesting to see that a difference existed between those who would read passively, for example by flicking through a magazine and with no real structure, and those who would be more engaged in reading something that had been deliberately chosen for that purpose, in a specific time and place. This echoes the assumption of Leavis (discussed in Chapter 1) that some read for relaxation and others for education. Through the analysis of the relationship between television viewing habits and reading, Chapter 5 indicated that an awareness of time, and what could be done with it, was a contributing factor to a positive role of reading.

Within such groups, being involved in organised activities and thus organising time carefully is the norm. Chapter 5 showed that it is for those children who are most active, and who organise their time most consciously, that the role of reading is most prominent. It appeared that the more interests a child had, the greater the role of reading within their lives. Interests, activities and sports can be expensive, however, and it is fair to assume that in many cases, the children with the greatest number of interests are also those with the greatest economic capital.

The nature of the activity seemed irrelevant; any type of sport could lead to an instrumental role for reading. Use of, or interest in, computers, generated a further role for reading, to advance computer literacy and all that comes with it. Computers, and the contemporary need to be able to use them, have increased the role of reading in the lives of all of the children of this age, but especially those who come from homes with little literary heritage for whom the role of reading would have been negligible in their lives even two generations previously.

Organising time had such an effect upon the role of reading that even having a bedtime in place seemed to increase the role of reading in the lives of these children.

The data analysis clearly implies that some of the children felt that the pressures of schoolwork prevented them from indulging in reading for any purpose other than academic progression. Despite feeling that they had not enough time to read, however, all of the interviewees included spending time watching television or playing computer games as a regular leisure time activity. Schoolwork alone can not be blamed for taking

so much of their time that they have no time left for other activities, including reading. During the course of the case study this was verified, and it became apparent that instead of other activities preventing children from reading, the more structured the use of the child's time, and the more activities that filled it, the more likely they were to read. The activities that the children undertook had little bearing on whether they made positive use of the role of reading or not: it is not what they do with their time that makes the difference so much as having the ability to manage time in a way which allows them to do anything. It is time management, rather than any specific non reading hobby, that is common to all of the children who saw the role of reading as beneficial to their lives.

For some children, use of after school time is dictated by homework, sport and other extra curricular activities. These children learn the value of time management as they get into the habit of organising their time carefully and making use of their time. It was apparent that the children who were most active were also the children who spent the most time reading and were able to talk about books with the greatest ease.

Other children are not under the same time constraints and are free to do as they wish with their free time. It is these children, who spend their evenings in a more aimless and less structured way, who spend negligible amounts of time reading from choice.

For boys especially, having a specific interest, whether it be sport or music, is likely to stimulate reading, as they search for facts, information and guidance. Thus, even a hobby as seemingly distant from reading as carting, will lead to reading about that subject, while without such an interest, such reading will not take place. Of the minority



of children who said that they read at least a part of a newspaper regularly, the parts they read were connected with sport. The desire to find out more about particular sports led both girls and boys to become familiar with aspects of both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. An interest in sport seemed to provoke the most reluctant readers to read. Frank has been quoted several times throughout this work. He is a reluctant reader in School B who after telling me that he never read:

*When I want to go to skateboarding competitions I have to read magazines to find out where they are and things like that*

For boys such as Frank, reading is instrumental; it has an important role in their lives, however. It is a means to an end, with the end being to develop skills in a chosen sport. It would seem that it is also, therefore, a relaxing and invigorating activity. The lack of such an interest would leave them with no motivation to read and so they would read less.

Even an interest in computer games can generate the desire to read. Through frequent computer use, children are learning to read and absorb information increasingly quickly from screen format, as well as to respond quickly to written instructions. They are not turning pages, but they are reading. Some children read more as they search for information on websites than they would ever have done given books; some children simply prefer the speed and 'high tech' images that are connected with computers. Computers are modern; books are old fashioned. Reluctant readers especially read far more as a result of an interest in computers than they would without it. The way in which computers make text accessible is especially appealing and useful to low ability students, who all confirmed that given the choice of reading from a book or a computer, they would choose the computer screen. Many of the children in the case studies spend

a great deal of time using computers for games or work or communication. The case studies suggested, however, that the children who enjoyed reading books would not stop doing so at the introduction of a computer to their lives, while the children who did not enjoy reading books would at least read from a computer screen.

The significance of effective time organisation upon reading and its role was emphasised by the data dealing with bedtimes. It was clear that having a regular bed time helped the children organise their time well and put in place a time to read before sleep. The children with a specific bedtime in place regularly (if not always) read in bed before going to sleep. The children with no bed time were unlikely to read in bed, and read less generally. The role of reading for those with a regular bed time appears to be to assist the transition between the activities of the day and necessary inactive time during which to sleep. A regular bed time gave the children security of knowing when they were expected to go to bed, and read, and turn the lights out. Reading before sleep became for these children as much a part of their nightly routine as cleaning their teeth before retiring for the night. Routines are clearly conducive to establishing a habit of reading. There is always a block of time available when little else but reading can be expected, or done, thus reading becomes the established norm.

The findings suggest that diverse roles of reading exist for children who are active and organise their time well for the following reasons:

- Children read about things in which they are interested; if they are interested in nothing or little, the number of things that they will be interested in reading about is limited;

- Children who are active mentally and physically have a greater appreciation of time and a greater desire to do something with it, this includes using it to read;
- Children sometimes see reading as an activity which should be done between other activities. If they do not take part in other activities, nor are they likely to read.

The role of reading is varied for active children, who will spend more time reading than those less active. The role of reading for less active children is more instrumental than it is for active children.

Those children who had most to say about their reading were those who were also most conscious of other pressures on their time.

It was apparent that the children who were most active (and spent the most time actively reading) most commonly attended School A, while those who had the least number of specified activities and seemed under less pressure to organise time effectively, most commonly attended School C. Different levels of cultural and academic capital seemed to contribute, therefore, to the activities of the children, and thus to the ways in which they read.

Televisions, once the exclusive possessions of the middle and upper classes are now common household items. Television viewing has yet to gain the same cultural capital as attending the theatre, or reading. Television has been blamed in recent years for the

decline in the amount of time that children spend reading . Television viewing seems to have some impact upon the role of reading.

Children without specific interests, or activities to keep them occupied and interested, and to challenge them mentally and physically (possibly as a result of insufficient cultural or economic capital) have more spare time in which to watch television. They may do so indiscriminately and passively. Such television viewing is unlikely to have a positive effect upon reading habits. Only one child in the case studies mentioned television as a positive influence and the cause of a particular reading choice; having seen the televised version, the child was keen to read the book. Here, the role of reading was to reinforce or to repeat an media experience. But such a role appeared rare. The recent popularity of *Lord of the Rings*, can be attributed to the success of the 2001 film of the same name. The opposite seems more likely to happen as the box office success of the film of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 2001 illustrates.

More active children, with a greater sense of time, appeared to regard watching television and reading as interchangeable activities, fulfilling the same role. Their television viewing was more selective than that of the less active children, as was their reading. Informed decisions were more common in this group of children

In a world in which the literate and, in particular, literary carries so much cultural, social and academic capital, a view of reading time as 'rare goods' as exemplified by the active child, may not be entirely unhealthy; indeed, it recalls for us in certain respects the exalted status of the book in the days before mass printing. For some of the young people interviewed, reading time was precious. Unfortunately, this sense of any allotted

time having particular importance declined, with some notable exceptions, as cultural, economic and academic capital declined.

### Summary of Chapter 6

In this chapter I have explained the findings of the data analysis, in relation to the questions raised by the end of Chapter three and in relation to the original conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4. I have argued that the role of reading is context related in that it varies according to the personal, historical context of young students, and that the role of reading is not purely functional. I have indicated that the role of reading contributes to what I have called a vicious or a virtuous cycle, the result of which is that while the role of reading is likely to be literacy for some, it will become literary for others. I have indicated, too, that the role of reading is to help create one's sense of self: you are what you read, and to escape. In answer to the final question raised, the role of reading is not universal. One of the greatest determinants of the role of reading in the lives of young students is their use of time, and the way in which they organise their time, possibly as a result of their cultural and economic capital. From this, it is suggested that the role of reading is determined by cultural and economic capital. The implications of these findings are discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

### Introduction

The last chapter indicated a number of aspects to the role of reading in the lives of Key Stage 3 learners, with reference to data and discussion presented in the preceding chapters. The aim of this chapter is to clarify the way in which these aspects were found, to discuss the implications of this research and, finally, to suggest possible outcomes of this work in the form of recommendations.

#### 7.1 Overview and Reflection

This work began with consideration of the development of literacy within England, and the way in which readership and the role of reading changed especially during the last two centuries. The opening chapter illustrated the way in which the need for literacy had grown so much by the beginning of the last century, that educational policies were developed in an attempt to ensure that all children learnt to read, in a functional way at least. Literacy has remained on the political agenda ever since. Reasons for this were suggested throughout Chapters 1 and 2. That many aspects of reading have been (and continue to be) of interest to politicians as well as those interested in education, was illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3, by the end of which specific questions concerning the role of reading in the lives of Key Stage 3 learners had been defined. The following chapter identified ways in which research might be conducted that would answer these

questions and the data produced from this research was presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Some of the data presented was not counter intuitive, as it replicated patterns indicated in the initial survey, which in turn had supported findings of previous surveys (see page 145 and appendix 2). The survey had suggested that there was a difference in the reading habits and choices of girls and boys; data was collected in the case studies which verified this. Similarly, the survey analysis suggested that the amount of time that boys were aware of spending reading differed from that of girls. The findings, discussed in Chapter 6 indicated that there are many roles of reading within the lives of Key Stage 3 learners, all of which should be recognised as valid. The findings indicated, too, that one of the greatest indicators of the role of reading was the way in which the subjects of the study organised time. This had not been indicated in previous research. Having recognised the diversity of the role of reading and the effects of time upon it, some implications and recommendations resulting from the research can be drawn. They are suggested in the following sections.

Looking back on the way in which the research was conducted, I feel that a case study approach was the most appropriate for the work. The circumstances under which the case studies were conducted varied between the schools, and I regretted that I had less control than I would have liked over these circumstances. For example, in School B, the subjects of the case study were always where I expected them to be and I was always able to speak with them in a room, undisturbed. The conditions for interviewing were good, there. In School A, subjects of the case study were frequently late. In School C, subjects of the case study were not as available as we had agreed they would be and a space had to be found. Sometimes interviews were conducted in corridors. These differing circumstances quickly led me to learn to value all of the time that was spent

with the subjects of the case study, as I could not take for granted the availability of further time with them. Fitting interview schedules in school hours, whilst working full time, was a challenge. Had more time been available, a more ethnographic and longitudinal approach would have been useful, although neither proved essential to answer my research questions. Retrospectively, I would have liked to have been able to have a larger and therefore more secure data set. It would have been interesting, too, to have been able to examine the degree to which the role of reading changed over a period of time. More positively, accurate transcription of the interviews was a vital part of this research, enabling methodical analysis of the new data constantly provided.

It was important to read around my interest before constructing the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 4, but it was important, too, to read and consider the thoughts of others, as I collected and analysed my own data. My literature search continued throughout the period of research.

I feel I have learnt a great deal through this work. I have a greater understanding of the role of reading than I had before. I have also realised the significance of political and cultural context to this role. I have learnt to use research methodology and to theorise and present supported findings. I have learnt that research does not satiate a desire for knowledge, but stimulates an aspiration to learn and understand even more.

## 7.2 Implications

Educational policy dictates that reading be taught to all children with the aim of increasing literacy levels. The role of reading within schools is seen as, above all else,



instrumental, as a means through which something else might be achieved. Even within English lessons, the role of reading is largely comprehension of text. Computer literacy has contributed towards this perception of reading. For most children, within most schools in the state sector it could be suggested that the prime role of reading is to become literate rather than literary.

The role of reading is not the same for every child, but this is not recognised by a curriculum that dictates the same reading aims for all children. The fact that one role of reading is also to form a sense of self is similarly ignored through the prescription of texts.

A further implication of the findings is that the role of reading is determined largely by the amount of cultural and economic capital within a family.

The final, and in some ways most surprising, finding is that the way in which a child learns to value, or organise, time has an implication of the role of reading within that child's life. The findings imply that the role of reading within the life of a young student is proportional to the number of activities with which that child fills his/her time.

This work appears largely to support Bourdieu's theories concerning the effect of class and habitus upon education and, more specifically here, upon the role of reading.

### 7.3 Recommendations to teachers

The findings are relevant to all teachers of English and, as such, must be related to English in the National Curriculum. The history of English within education was discussed in Chapter 1, specifically in 1.3. In this chapter, the birth of the National Curriculum in 1988 (p.27) was recognised as relevant to research concerning the role of reading. The National Curriculum has undergone a number of changes since its initial implementation. In 1995, greater emphasis was put upon the teaching of grammar within English and:

*Under reading, two pages of highly detailed specifications about the kinds of literature to be studied were provided [...] Study of media was also mentioned briefly under reading, although the revised curriculum insisted that any magazine, newspaper, radio, television or film texts that are studied 'should be of high quality', thereby confusing the whole issue. (Hardman 2001, p.19)*

The major responsibility of English teaching, as dictated by the 1995 National Curriculum, however, was *teaching about general literacy* (ibid). The role of reading was to be promoted as utilitarian above all else. This role of reading is well recognised by the subjects of the case studies, especially those of Schools B and C.

The third version of the National Curriculum (1990) is less prescriptive than its predecessor and the suggested reading material is more contemporary and shows greater awareness of context (historical and political):

*More attention has been given to recent literature written for young people and adults and from different cultures and traditions, to the use of drama and ICT (ibid).*

This change in emphasis is a step closer towards recognising the diversity of the roles of reading in the lives of young students, yet some feel that it has not gone far enough in ensuring that the students are fully prepared for the various texts they will encounter. Carter (1997) expresses the belief that English should be taught through a combination of:

*Popular fiction, advertisements and political speeches as well as media texts, such as television or soap opera and radio comedy programmes, so that literary texts would be seen as continuous with all other kinds of texts*

(cited in Hardman 2001,p.32)

Such texts should, Carter suggests, complement canonical texts, rather than replace them. Broadening the curriculum in this way would, my data suggests, make the subject of English more accessible and apparently more relevant for a wider section of the students for whom it is intended. It could be broader still, if, for example, magazines about sport were a part of the curriculum. The students who enjoy reading such material would recognise the role of reading in their lives, rather than thinking that if they do not read books, they do not read.

The principal focus of this work is not upon teaching, but some of its findings may be of interest to teachers and schools, who have the potential to teach their pupils to recognise the possible vastness of the role of reading within their lives. Through doing so, they might also help their pupils to have a positive approach towards reading and to appreciate the many different ways in which they can benefit from it. The first step in accomplishing this, is to ensure that teachers recognise the role of reading, within their own lives, as well as within the lives of their pupils.

Exposing pupils to books is not addressing the problem of their perceptions of reading. Reading has numerous roles and ranges, which are not necessarily affected through weekly class visits to the school library.

The research indicated that the role of reading contributed towards what was identified as a virtuous or a vicious cycle (page 291), which determined whether a child was likely to be literary or only to be literate. A characteristic of those considered literate is the ability to consider, discourse and philosophise about literature, or, put more simply in the case of children, to be able to read, think and talk about what they have read. The case studies revealed that such metaknowledge was inconsistent within the three schools. The children in School A appeared to have a greater awareness of the role of reading in their lives and a greater ability to recognise and discuss the act of reading than the children in the other two schools. The pedagogic implication of this is that children can be taught to be literary (and thus gain more cultural capital), through being taught to recognise the diversity of the act of reading and more importantly here, being taught to reflect upon what is read. Teachers interested in encouraging literary awareness within their students, must teach them the act of reflection as well as that of reading. The message for teachers here is a simple one: the more your students become aware of their reading, the more they will gain from it. At present, many children undertake a great deal of reading (such as during school lessons) that they do not even acknowledge as such; conversely, others, with greater cultural capital, clearly gain a great deal even from literature that is neither 'great' nor profound. As an act of interpretation, reading is of little value when interpretation is also severely limited.

Ideally, teachers of Key Stage 3 pupils would spend time discussing and illustrating the role of reading with their pupils, in the same way as other issues considered important, are discussed. To help students recognise the role of reading, teachers need to have time in which to help students share reading experiences. One of the three schools in my case studies seems to have begun to recognise this. School A includes in its Key Stage 3 scheme of work for English *surveys of attitudes to television, music, sport, reading*. This means more than each member of the class discussing which book they have most recently read. The school teachers must attempt, too, to recognise the feelings of their pupils towards reading and to encourage the children to consider its role themselves. All forms of reading matter should be acknowledged and considered worthy of consideration.

This research has indicated that effective time management enables some Key Stage 3 pupils to read more than those who do not manage their time as effectively. If teachers want their pupils to read widely, they must take more responsibility for teaching them to manage time and to be aware of their uses of time, from an early age. It seems likely that effective time management has a positive affect upon other areas of the school curriculum. This research shows with clarity, the importance of time management. Time management could, and perhaps in the light of this research should, be taught within the school curriculum.

An awareness of the different habitus and likelihood of subsequent life choices, would also be beneficial to teachers who wish to encourage their students.

#### 7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This research, as with much research, raised as many questions as it answered. This work may be seen as preliminary to further research and with that in mind, several recommendations for potential research follow. The nature of this research is such that it has consequences for all concerned with children's reading, especially, therefore, for parents and teachers (as well as for policy makers). Some recommendations specifically for parents and teachers follow.

Activities and routines are conducive to reading habits. Those who are interested in helping children to read would benefit from ensuring that children are encouraged to participate in many activities and to develop a variety of interests. This research has demonstrated that the more active the child, and the greater their range of interests and awareness of time, the greater the role of reading in their lives. Although the research here indicated that the children who were most active, by nature of their interests, were also those with greater amounts of cultural and economic capital, cultural and economic capital need not be a prerequisite to varied interests and active lives. Children from homes with less cultural and economic capital can also be taught awareness of time.

All who are interested in increasing the role of reading within the lives of young students should recognise that the role of reading is multi dimensional. As was indicated in Chapters 5 and 6, the role of reading is not simply functional in the lives of all children, but neither is it simply aesthetic. All roles of reading should be recognised. These can be summarised as: contributing towards a sense of self; creating a space into which a child may escape that sense of self; functional; pleasurable; contributing

towards becoming literary and educational. The roles of reading vary between children, and it seems that this is a result of cultural and economic capital. It is important to remember, too, that children do not always recognise the role that reading plays within their lives. It should not be assumed that reading plays no role in the life of a child who claims never to read.

The role of reading in the lives of young people is far from exhausted. As technology continues to advance rapidly in the West, the role of reading is likely to continue to evolve. One interesting possibility for further research is a detailed, authoritative account of the effects of technological developments on reading practices and its role.

As technology becomes increasingly a part of our lives, it is hard at times to remember that there are still countries whose people have yet to see a television set, hear a phone ring or experience the speedy communication of the internet. During my reading I encountered several papers written about the reading habits and overall effect of the introduction of modern technology upon developing countries, including Africa and India. I was especially struck by the parity between some aspects of the work of Sandhya Rao and my own research. Rao studied the effects of the introduction of technology to a large Indian city. Among other points of interest she notes that:

*Most people spent time reading and chatting with friends and relatives in 1978  
[...] whereas, in 1996 TV viewing was ranked number 1*

*(Bangalore in Melkote and Rflo, 2001, p.119)*

She also found that with the introduction of televisions into homes, the homeowners read fewer newspapers, but spent more time reading those that they did read. They chose different newspapers and the choices reflected a greater interest in international

affairs than previously. Comparative research between countries as well as cultures would be fascinating.

Challenging theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism through their application within less literate societies than either the U.S or the U.K. would be another potentially illuminating cross-cultural comparative study.

The role of reading in the lives of young students involved much more than the material they read. One of the most interesting aspects of this research was realising the extent of the influence of habitus, and cultural capital within the political climate. All three contributed to the role of reading, and to how enjoyable or resented, enlightening or nullifying, edifying or inaccessible, reading was to these students. The entwining of culture and reading is a subject that offers much scope for further research.

Analysis of the case studies conducted for this research suggests that time management plays a crucial role in the lives and choices of Key Stage 3 children. This hypothesis could be used as the basis of a larger study, dedicated to discovering the effect of time management skills upon lives of young students.

### Summary of Chapter 7

In this concluding chapter I have indicated the implications of this research. I have also shown that the research contributes to the field of reading in presenting an argument claiming that the role of reading in the lives of children is diverse. No single role of reading exists, instead a number of roles exist, the importance of which has not



previously been acknowledged. The second way in which the research is shown here to contribute in an original way, is the finding that the organisation of time has a direct effect upon the role of reading. Recommendations, resulting from the findings, are also made within this chapter. The final recommendations recognise that this field of research is wide and that much scope exists for further useful research concerning the developing role of reading.

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## Appendix 1

Some of the European foundations for building theories of literary criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- 1800 DeStael *Literature in its relations to Social Institutions*  
 Wordsworth *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*
- 1807 Schelling *On the relation of the plastic arts to nature*
- 1817 Coleridge *Biographia Literaria*
- 1819 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and idea*
- 1820 Shelley *A defence of poetry*
- 1836 Gautier *preface to Mlle de Maupin*
- 1842 Belinsky *Discourse on Criticism*
- 1843 Emerson *The poet*
- 1846 Marx & Engels *German Ideology*  
 Poe *The Philosophy of Composition*
- 1850 Ste-Beuve *What is a classic*
- 1855 Chernyshevsky *Aesthetic Relation of Art to Reality*
- 1863 Taine *History of English Literature*
- 1865 Arnold *Essays in Criticism*  
 Pisarev *The destruction of aesthetics*
- 1873 Nietzsche *Truth and sensitivity in an ultramoral sense*  
 Pater *The Renaissance*
- 1874 James *The art of fiction*

- 1889 Wilde *The decay of lying*
- 1896 Mallarme *Mystery in Literature*
- 1900 Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams*
- 1914 Hulme *Romanticism and Classicism*
- 1917 Shklovsky *Art as Technique*
- 1919 Eliot *Tradition and the Individual Talent*
- 1924 Richards *Principles of Literary Criticism*
- 1927 Valery *Remarks on poetry*
- 1929 Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*
- Woolf *A Room of one's own*
- 1930 Empson *Seven Types of ambiguity*
- 1932 Leavis *New bearings*
- 1936 Tate *Three Types of poetry*
- 1941 Bakhtin *Rabelais and his world*
- 1946 Wimsatt & Beardsley *The Intentional Fallacy*
- 1949 De Beauvoir *The Second Sex*
- Poulet *Studies in human Time*
- 1951 Leavis *The Great Tradition*
- 1955 Levi-Strauss *The Structural Study of Myth*
- 1957 Frye *Anatomy of Criticism*
- 1960 Gadamer *Truth and Method*
- 1967 Jauss *Literary History as a challenge*
- Derrida *Of Grammatology*
- 1968 Barthes *The Death of the Author*
- Holland *Literary Response*

1971 De Man *Blindness and Insight*

(Harland 1999, pp.245-246)

Resulting Schools of literary criticism:

1760s British Sensibility Criticism

1800-1830s English Romantics

1830-1860s Russian Social Criticism

1862-1902 French Naturalism

1873-1889 [British]Aestheticism

1867-1907 French Symbolism

1914-1930s Anglo-American Modernists

1917-1929 Russian Formalism

1929-1940s School of Bakhtin

1932-1950s Leavisites

1930s-1959s New Criticism

1950s-1970s French Structuralism

1960s-1970s Reception Aesthetics

1960s-1970s French Poststructuralism

1960s-1990s Reader Response

1970s – 1990s Deconstructionists

1968 – Postmodernist

*End of twentieth and beginning of twenty first century:*

Marxist

New Historicism

Cultural Materialism

Feminist

Post Colonialist

## Appendix 2

### Graphs showing results of survey

Initial results of the first survey; September 1997.

In June 1997 questionnaires were sent to twelve, randomly selected, schools across the breadth of England. The questionnaires were distributed amongst key stage three learners of all abilities, and administered under test conditions. It is hoped that the answers given were, on the whole, honest and as reliable as possible. The questionnaires were completed by the following:

#### **Year 7**

*168 Boys*                      *129 Girls*

#### **Year 8**

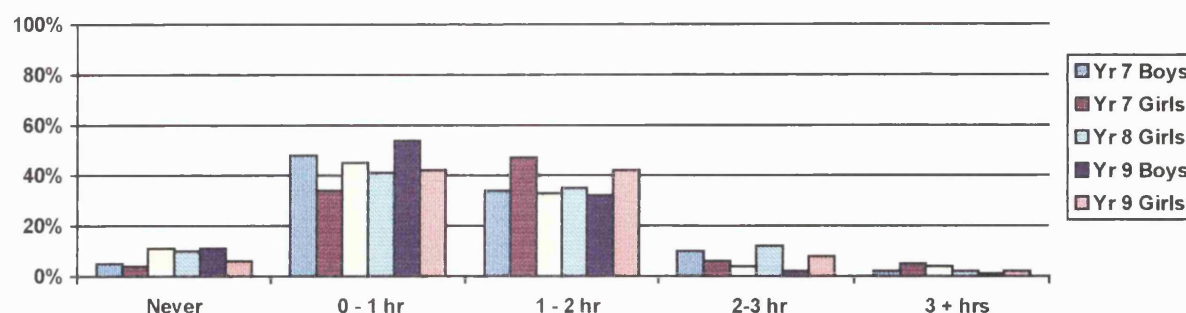
*134 Boys*                      *134 Girls*

#### **Year 9**

*133 Boys*                      *129 Girls*

The amount of data collected was immense, and few facts leapt from the pages of statistics immediately. One fact that appeared in the data of all year groups, of both genders, was that the number of learners who would read a book on the recommendation of their teacher was small.

The first question asked how many hours the children spent reading.



Over 10 % of learners in Year 8, and of the boys in Year 9, spend less than an hour a week reading, although not surprising when we compare it with the findings of Whitehead, Capey, Maddren and Wellings who noted in, 1977, that in their survey carried out in the same year, 33.9 % of the boys and 33.4% of the girls between the ages of twelve and thirteen (present year 8) read no more than one to two books a month (*Children and Their Books, 1997, p.52, table 13*)

More girls than boys spend over three hours a week reading, year 7 having the largest proportion of readers who do this. More girls than boys spend between two and three hours a week reading, year 8 in particular, and, more girls than boys spend between one and two hours a week reading. This was also the conclusion of the Schools Council in 1977 see *Children and Their Books, p.51*. Both boys and girls spend less time reading



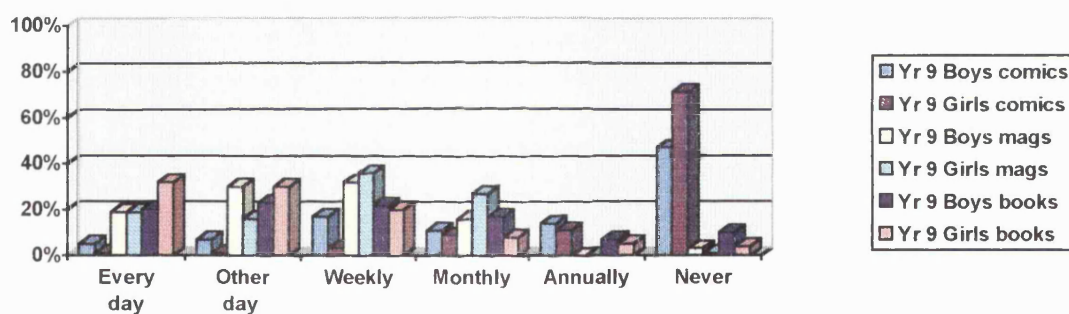
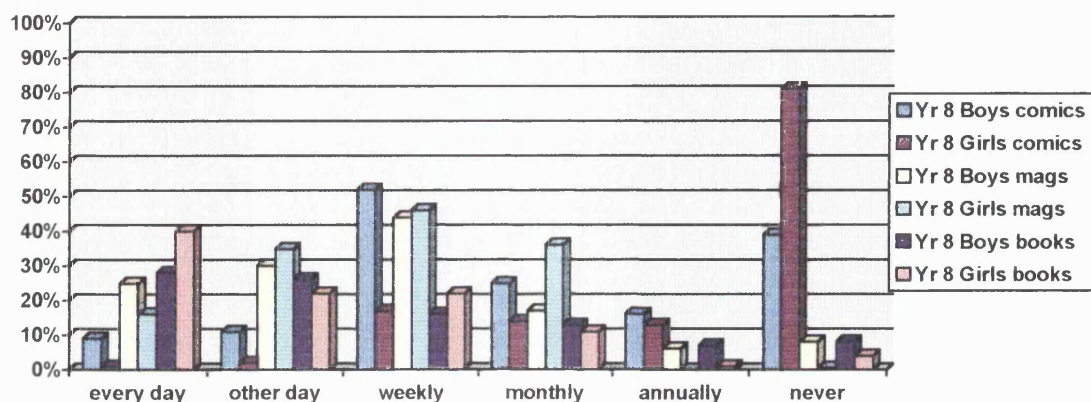
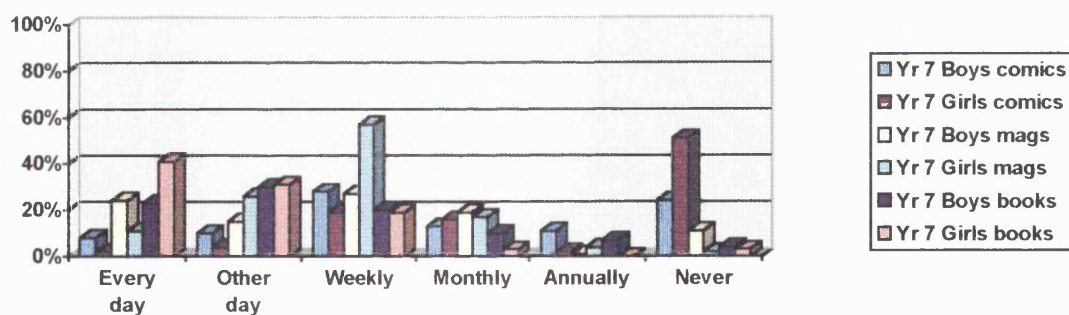
now than they did then, and by 1977 children were already spending fifty percent less time reading than their equivalents in 1940 (Jenkinson).

While current figures indicate that girls read more, the differential between the boys and girls is not vast. I had expected much greater discrepancy between the habits of the boys and the girls. The graphs also show clearly that the amount of time spent reading, by both boys and girls, does not, in fact, vary a great deal from Year 7 to Year 9. Experience in schools had lead me to expect that year 7 would spend considerably more time reading than the older learners. It is a little encouraging to see that children do not, in fact, stop reading when they reach their teens. The figures suggest that reading habits formed by Year 7 are likely to continue throughout key stage three. This re-enforces the importance of stimulating active reading in the early years.

### *Comics and Magazines*

The most striking feature of these results is the discrepancy between the habits of the girls and boys in relation to the frequency with which they read comics. While over 50 % of the boys are still reading comics on a weekly basis at this age, a remarkable 80 % of the girls are claiming that they never read comics.

A greater number of girls read magazines on a weekly basis than boys however.



The graphs indicate that the patterns do not change greatly as the learners mature, and that the percentages of girls and boys who read comics etc in Year 7, is similar to that in years 8 and 9.

### Which Magazines?

Boys in key stage three are more likely to read a sports related magazine than any other. Sports magazines (largely football) are the only category to maintain position throughout the three year groups. In Year 7, music magazines are the second most popular, with computer related magazines in third place. The older the group of boys, the more diverse their choices. Magazines relating to science, geography and cars are mentioned for the first time in Year 8. The second most popular category, however, are computer related magazines, with music in third place. By Year 9, astronomy and animals must also be added to the lists. Music is the second most popular category and computer magazines are the third most popular category, as with Year 7. There was little difference between the choices of boys attending state schools and those attending public schools

The girls' choices bear little resemblance to those of their male counterparts. The girls' tastes are far less diverse than that of the boys. There appears to be more of a tendency for the girls to read exactly the same magazine as their peers, than for the boys. The most popular magazines are those aimed almost exclusively at 11 – 14 year old girls, such as *Bliss*, *Sugar* and *Mizz*. The second most popular are music magazines and the third most popular category are those intended for older teenage girls, including *Just 17* and *Looks*. The only immediately note worthy differences between the preferences of those at state schools and those at public school, was that in Year 9, nine girls in state schools mentioned women's magazines (*Cosmopolitan*, *Marie Claire*), while only one girl in a public school did so; while none of the girls in state schools in year 9 mentioned sport magazines, four public school girls did so.

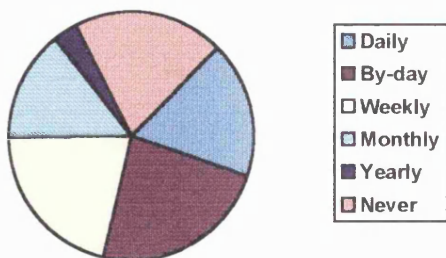
Reading from a computer screen.

Information technology and mass media are as much a part of their life (often at home as well as at school) as are books, if not more so in some cases. With the popularity of such programmes as *Encarta*, and the *Internet* it is likely that many children would choose to search for information with the aid of a computer terminal, rather than scan reference books. It is not always a quicker method of information retrieval, but is perceived as being less tedious.

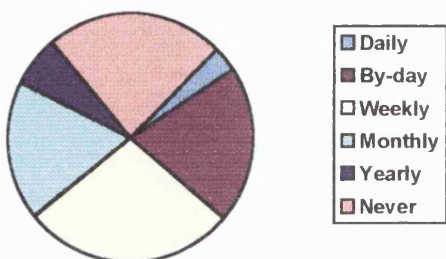
Out of the 134 boys asked, in Year 8, 41 claimed to read from a computer screen every day, while only 8 of the girls did. Thirty seven girls said that they never read from a computer screen; only fifteen of the boys said they were in the same position. Not one of the girls surveyed mentioned reading computer related magazines. There is clearly a gender issue here.

Frequency with which children choose to read from computer screens:

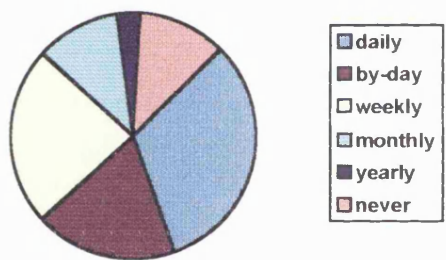
Year 7 Boys



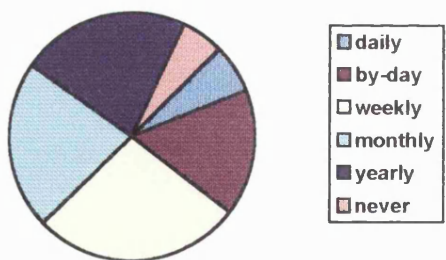
Year 7 Girls

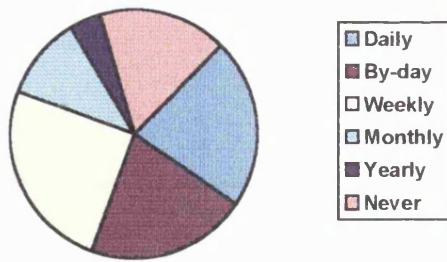
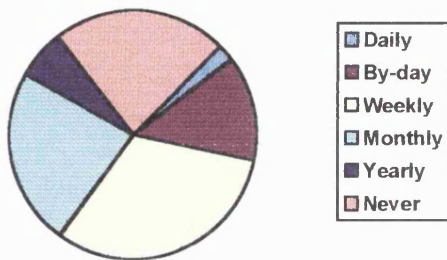


Year 8 Boys



Year 8 Girls



Year 9 BoysYear 9 Girls

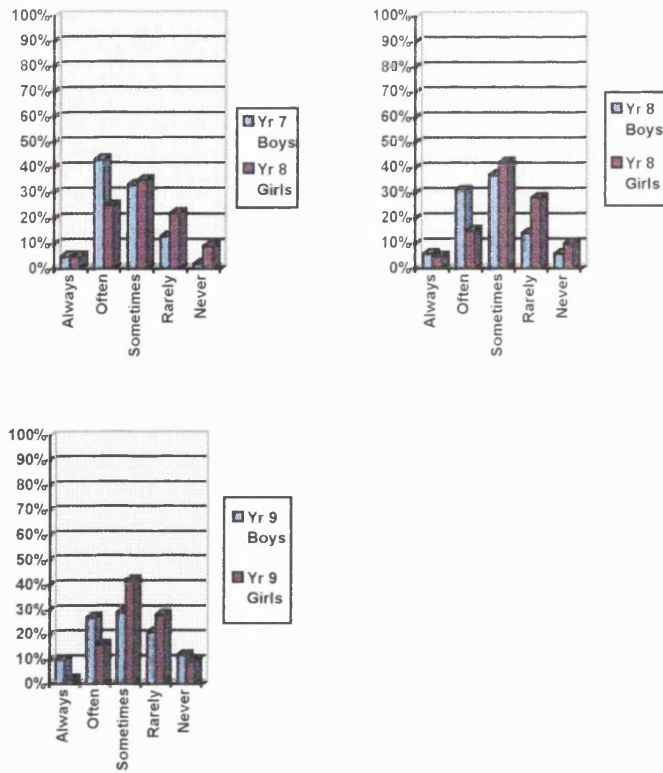
Three times as many boys read from computer screens daily, in **all** year groups as girls.

### Books

Books are read daily by both boys and girls in Year 8, more than magazines. Girls are more avid readers than boys at this age. Fifty three girls read books daily, in comparison to thirty eight boys. The number of boys who never read is almost exactly twice that of the girls.

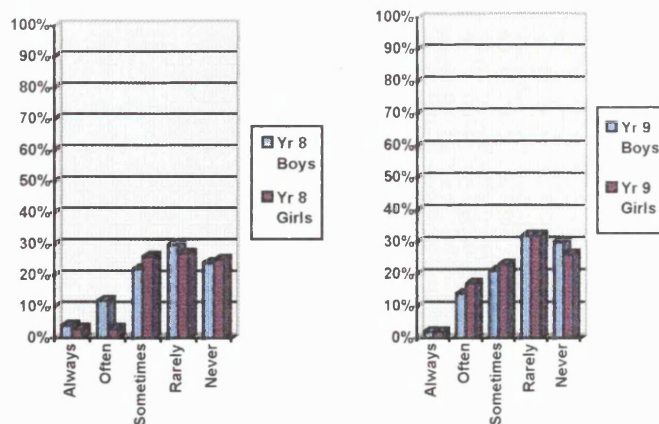
General types of books chosen:

## Adventure



The popularity of this broad category is similar in all three years of key stage three. The number who would always choose to read adventure is never more than 10%, this is remarkably similar between the girls and the boys, although the girls in Years 7 and 8 are more likely to choose adventure often, than their male class mates. Between 8% and 10% of girls would never choose to read adventure stories.

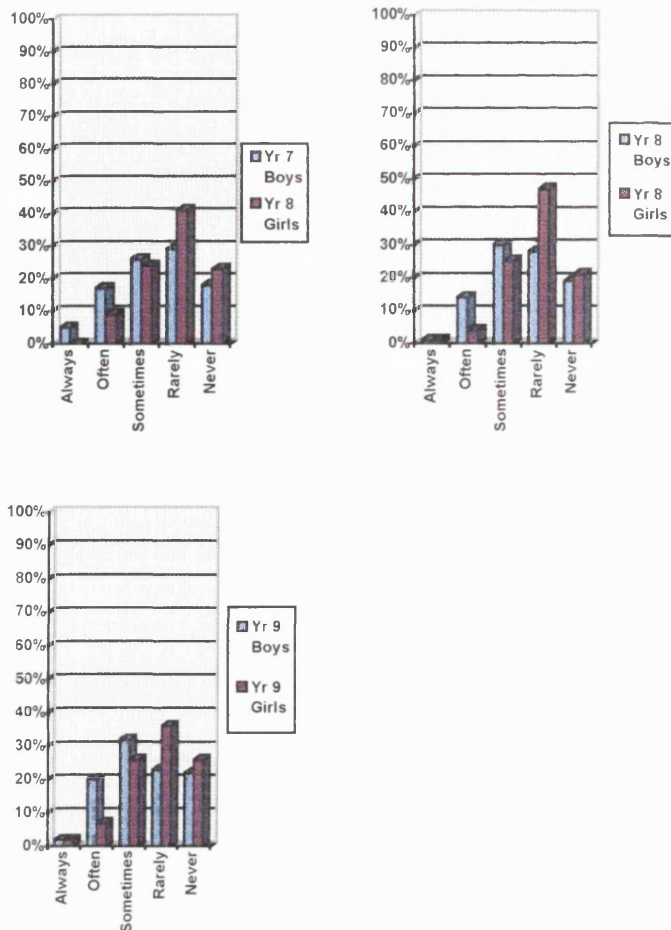
## Detective



As with Adventure stories, the pattern of the numbers of boys and girls who choose to read this category is similar throughout key stage three. It is clearly not a very popular category, with between 18% and 19% of the learners claiming that they would never choose to read detective fiction. Less than 5% of any year group always choose it.

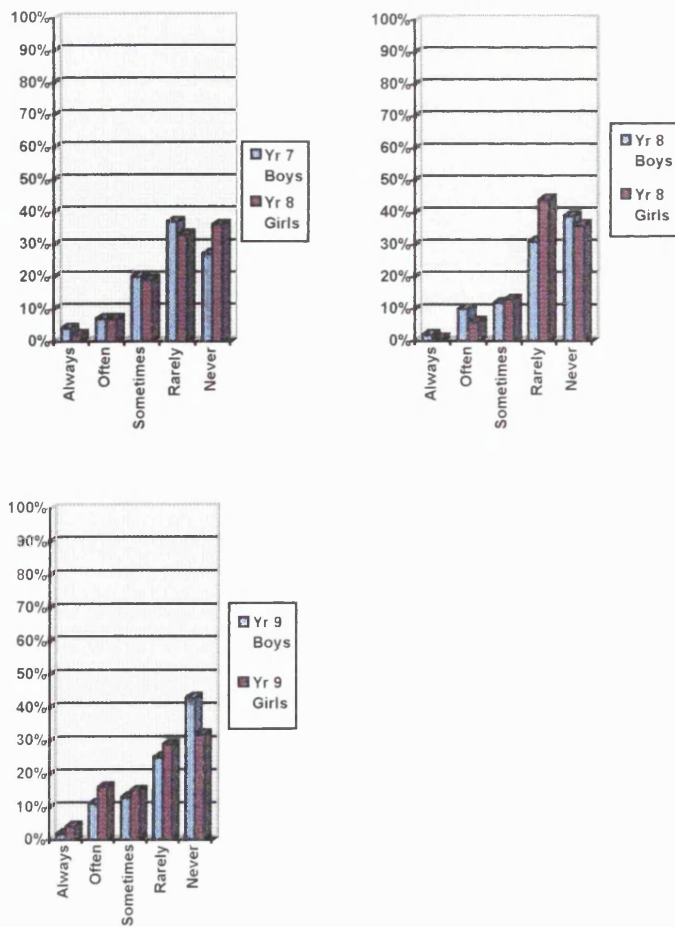
## Facts





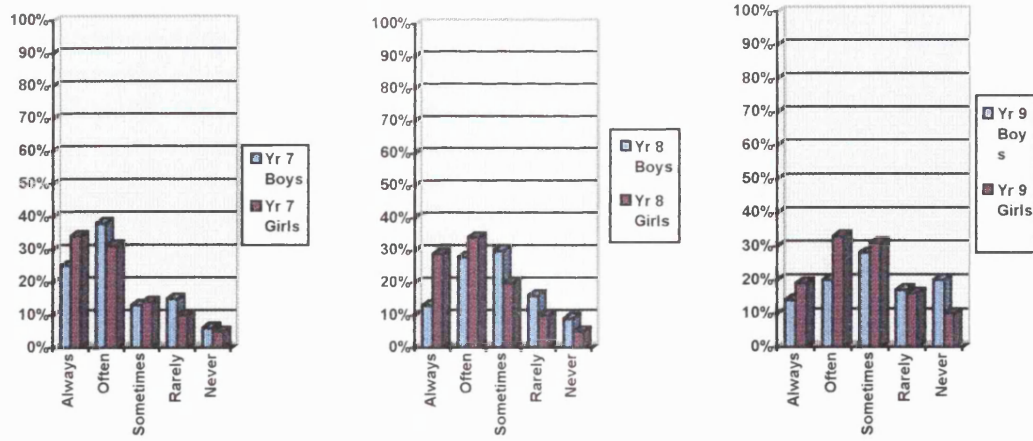
This category is interesting in that it reflects a difference between the answers of the girls and the boys. For anyone who has ever watched children in a school library making their choices, the results are quite predictable. More boys choose factual reading matter than girls, in all age groups. Fact options become increasingly popular as the learners age, with year 9 boys choosing factual literature the most, while 25% of girls would never chose to read facts. One of the implications of this, is that if the boys are choosing to read factual books, they cannot be spending as much time reading fiction as the girls.

History



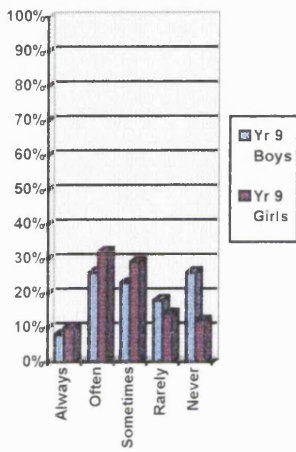
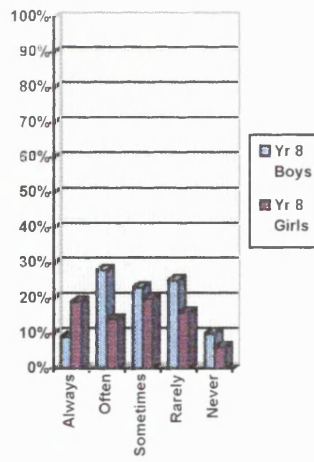
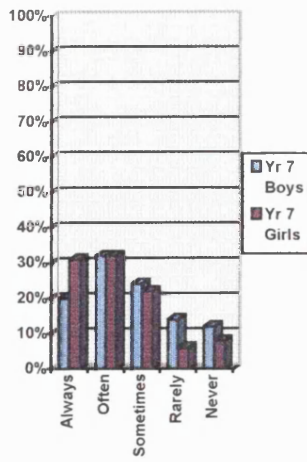
History is not a popular option in any year. The group most likely to choose it are Year 9 girls. It is particularly unpopular in Year eight. The patterns between boys and girls are again, very similar, in all three years.

Horror



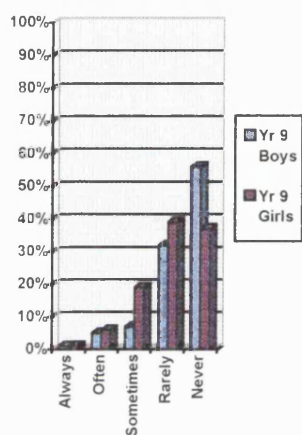
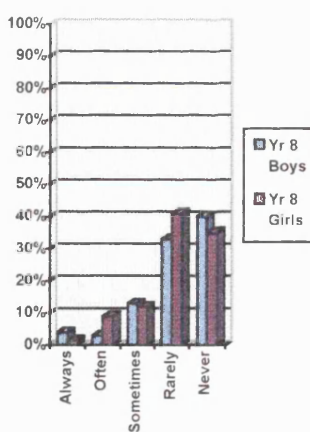
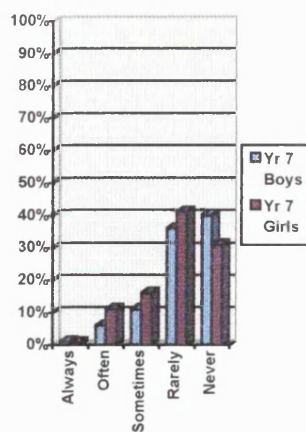
Horror is a popular option, in all year groups, with both boys and girls, declining in popularity slightly in Year 9.

Murder



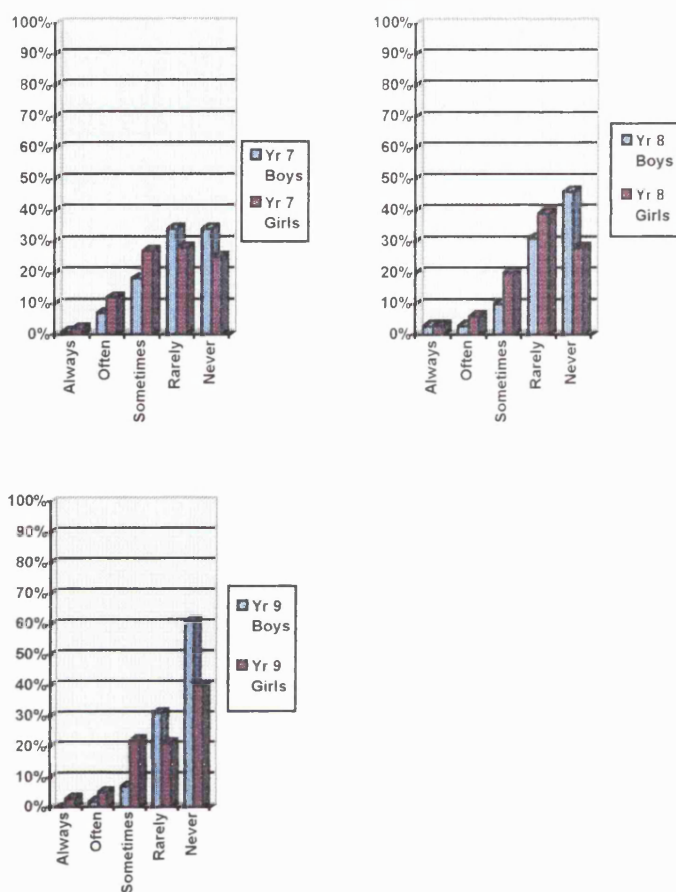
Murder is also a popular category, amongst all categories of learners.

Plays



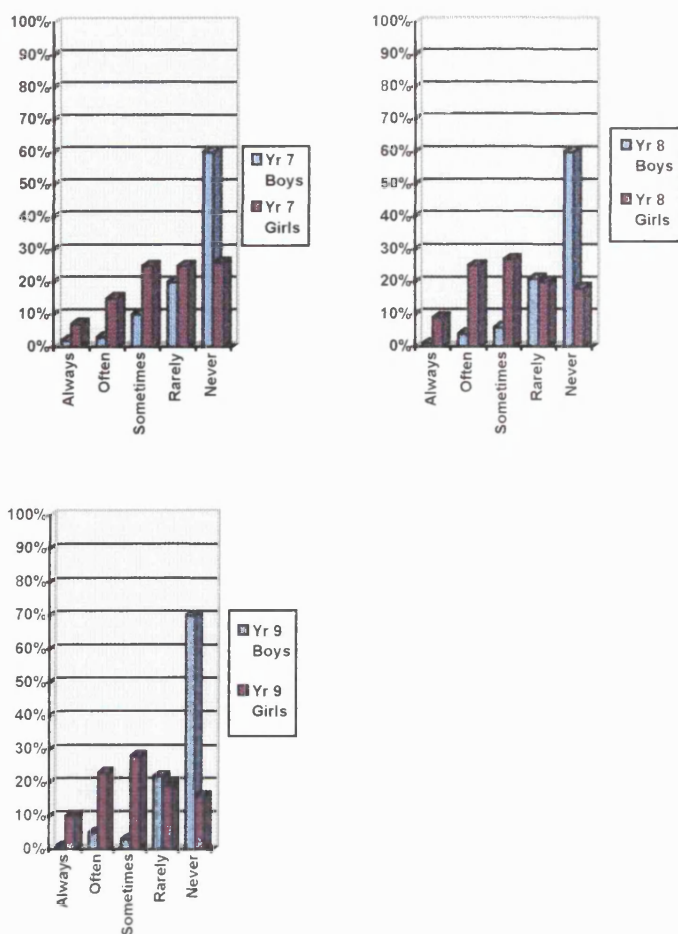
Not too surprisingly, plays are one of the least popular categories. Less than 4% in any age range would always choose them, while between 30% and 52% would never do so.

## Poetry



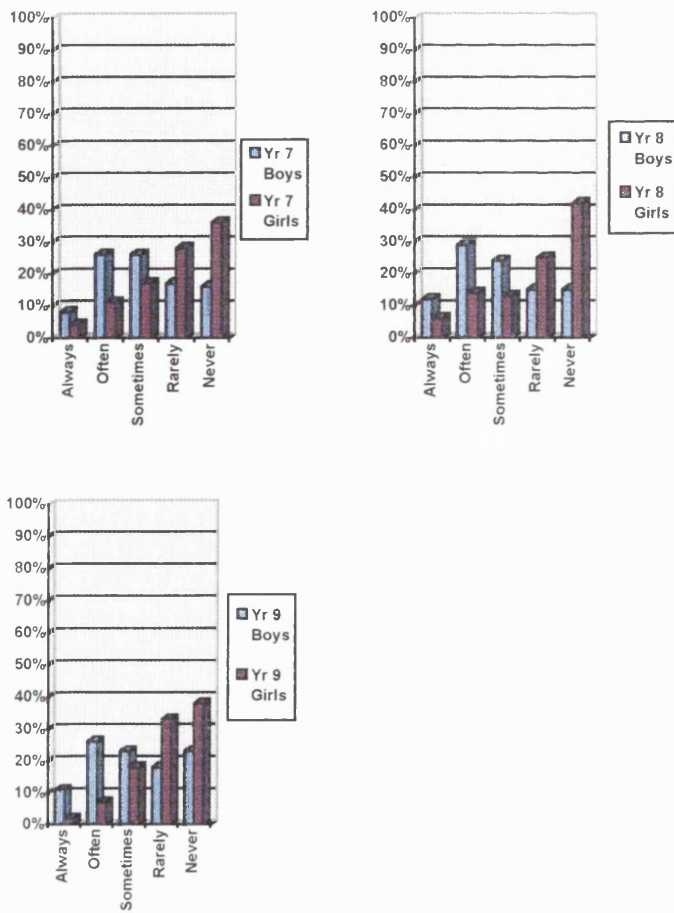
Girls are more likely to choose to read poetry in all years. 45% of boys in Year 8 and 60% of boys in Year 9 would never choose to read poetry. The older the learner, the less likely he or she is to choose poetry. There is a very strong negative feeling towards poetry as reading material.

## Romance



Stereotype dictates that girls are more interested in romantic fiction than boys, who must be masculine in all that they do, including choosing books. Romance is more popular with girls than with boys. This category stimulated the most negative reaction in the boys. 60% of Year 7 and Year 8 boys would never choose romance, this is increased by a further 10% by the time they reach Year 9.

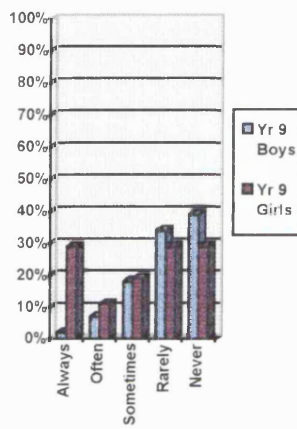
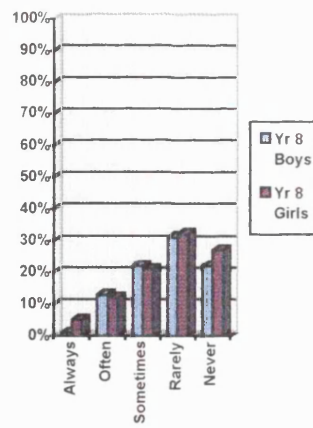
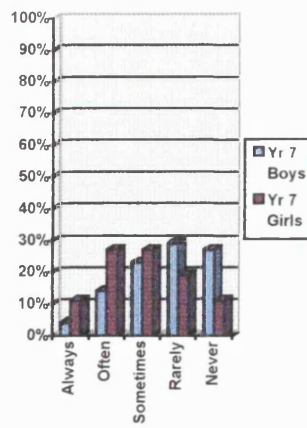
Sci-fi



In all years more boys would choose science fiction than would girls. It is at its most popular with year 8 boys, but 42% of girls in the same age group would never choose it.

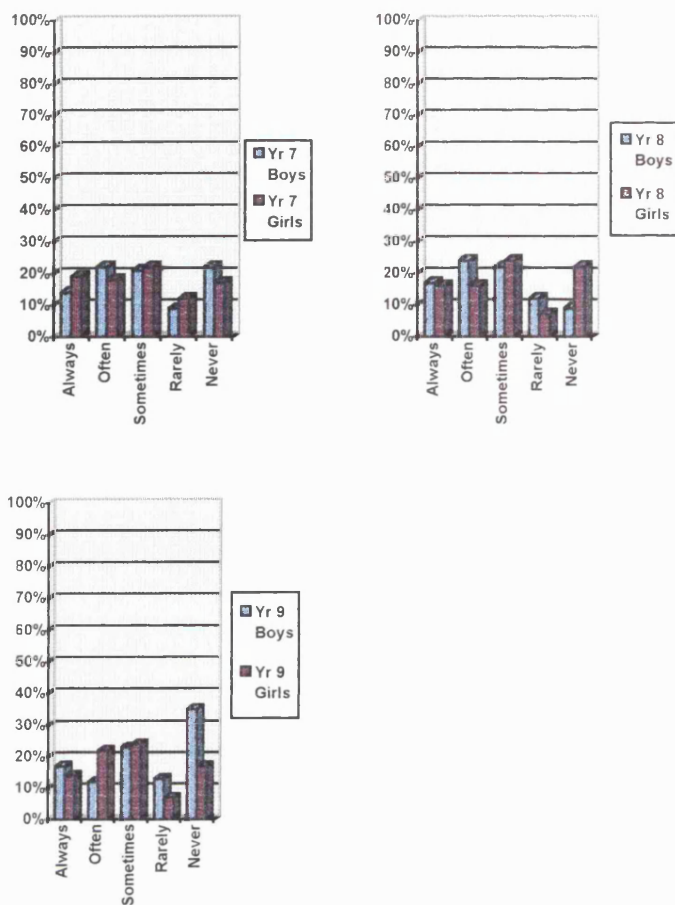
Animals





Animal fiction is most popular with girls, especially Year 9 girls. It is quite popular among Year 7 learners.

Other



The pattern is fairly similar among all year groups, boys and girls.

These general statistics indicate that there are few dramatic differences in taste between the Years of 7 and 9. There are some differences in choice of subject: girls favour romance, while boys favour fact. The most popular categories for both boys and girls are horror and murder.

More specific findings were generated when the learners were asked to list their favourite authors and book titles. All authors and titles mentioned by the learners were recorded. Those mentioned more than once were counted. The following table shows the authors most commonly mentioned by boys and girls in years 7, 8 and 9. The first

name is the author mentioned the largest number of times, while the last name on each list is that of the author who appeared the fifth most popular in each category.

Year 7		Year 8		Year 9	
Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
R Dahl	R Dahl	R Dahl	R Dahl	R Dahl	R Dahl
J Blume	D King Smith	R L Stine	T Pratchett	R L Stine	T Pratchett
R L Stine	T Pratchett	J Blume	D King Smith	J Blume	S King
E Blyton	B Jacques	D King Smith	R Westall	D Hoh	R L Stine
D Hoh	C Pike	F Pascal	B Jacques	M Maguin	D King Smith

Most favourite authors in key stage three:

<u>1971</u>	<u>1994</u>	<u>1997</u>
Enid Blyton	Roald Dahl	Roald Dahl
Charles Dickens	Enid Blyton	R L Stine
Agatha Christie	Judy Blume	Dick King Smith
R.L.Stevenson	Stephen King	Terry Pratchett
W.E.Johns	Francine Pascal	Judy Blume
Alistair Maclean	Dick King Smith	Enid Blyton
Ian Fleming	Ann Martin	Chris Pike
C.S.Lewis	Virginia Andrews	Brian Jacques
H.G.Wells	R.L.Stine	Michelle Mayain

A Conan Doyle

J R R Tolkein

Stephen King

Anthony Buckeridge

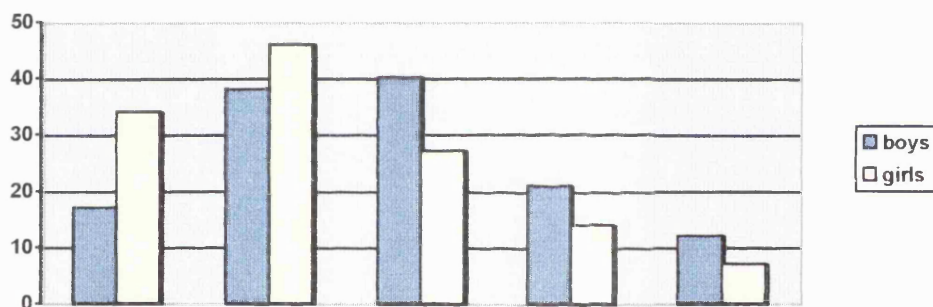
Sue Townsend

Francine Pascal

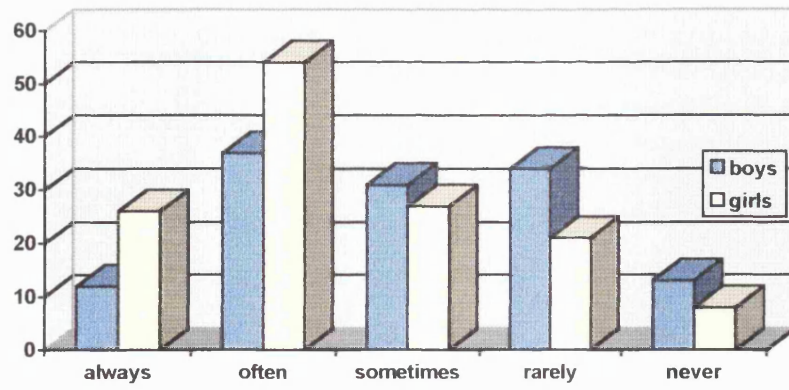
See Hall & Coles *Children's Reading Choices: Questions of Quality*

Roald Dahl's enduring popularity is confirmed in the lists of favourite books chosen, numerous titles of his appear in all year groups. On the eight of September 1997, *Matilda* was voted the Nation's Favourite Book.

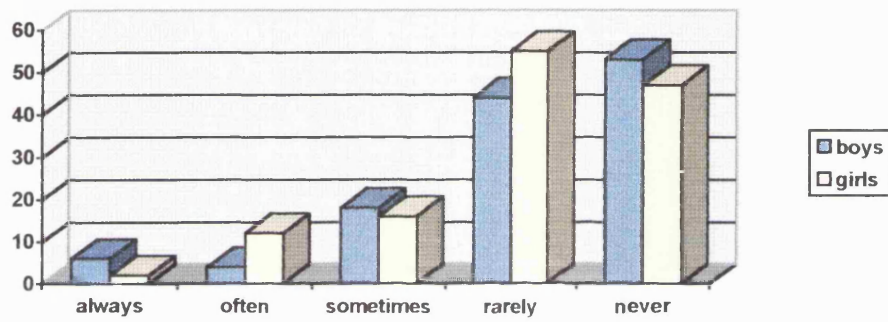
### Horror



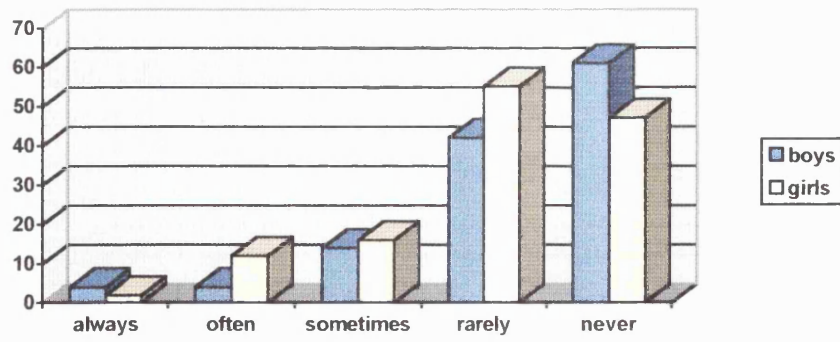
### Murder



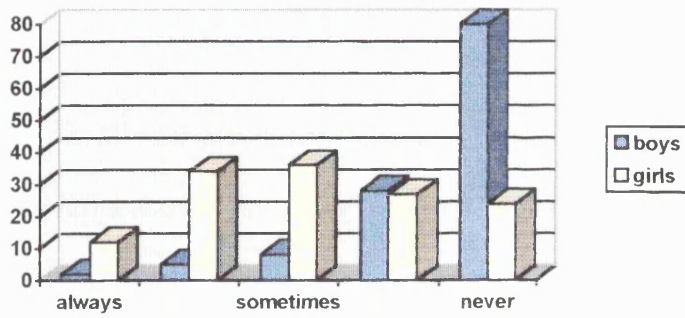
### Plays



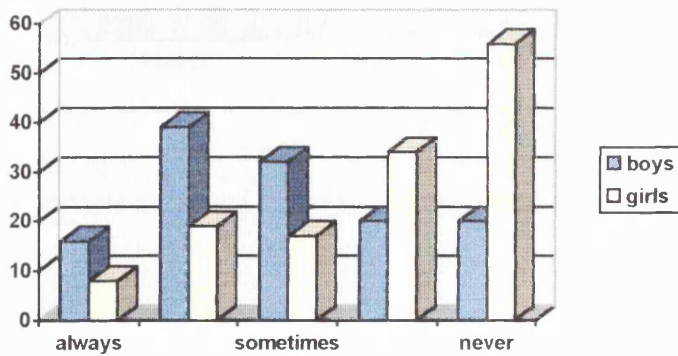
### Poetry



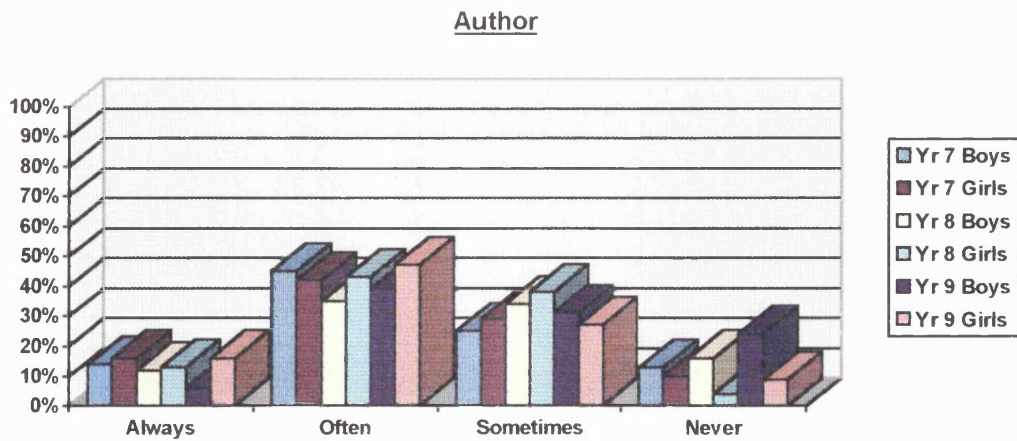
Romance



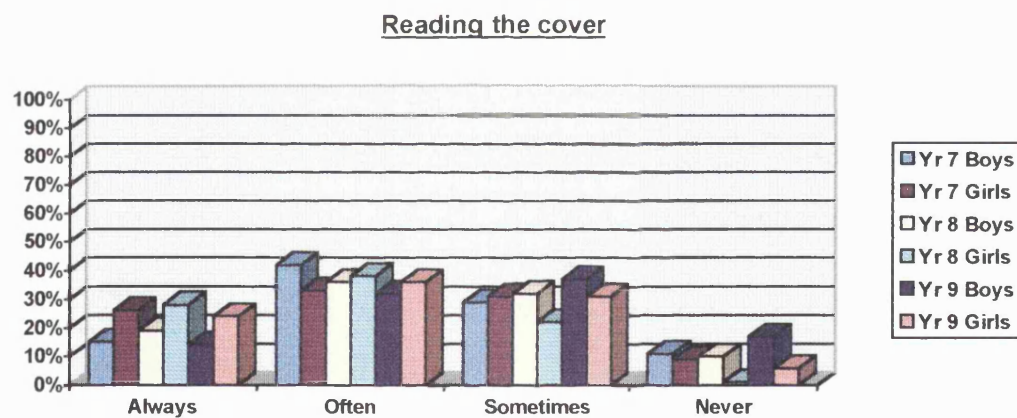
Science Fiction



### How learners select what to read

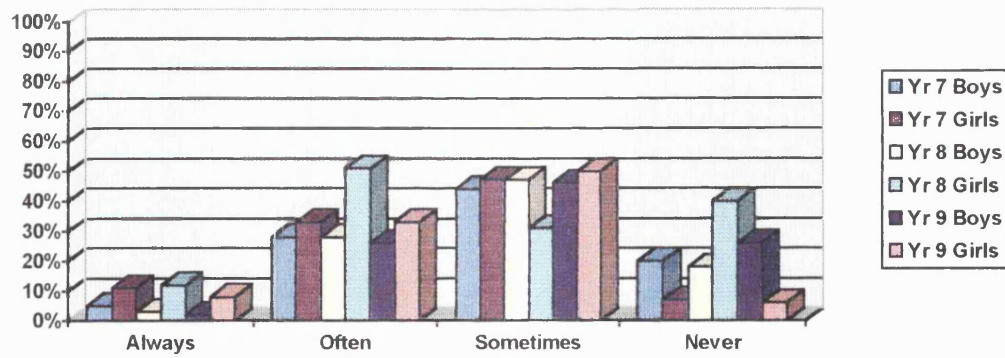


Learners in all year groups are influenced by the author of the book more often than they are influenced by any other factor when choosing.

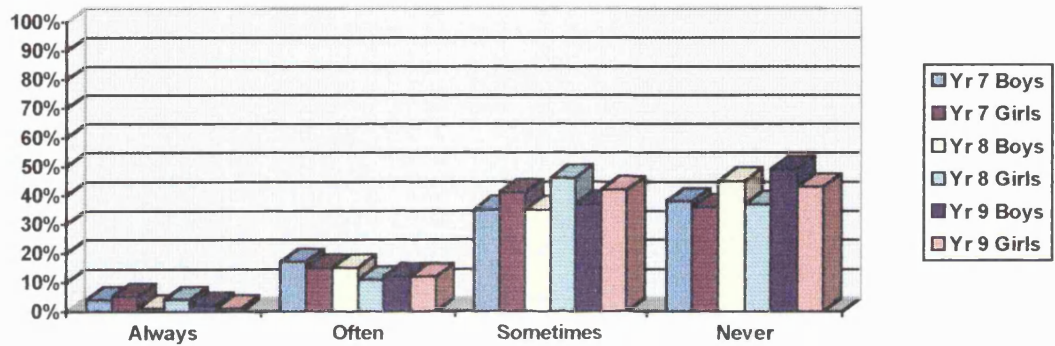


More learners answered 'always' to this question than any other.

### Asking a friend

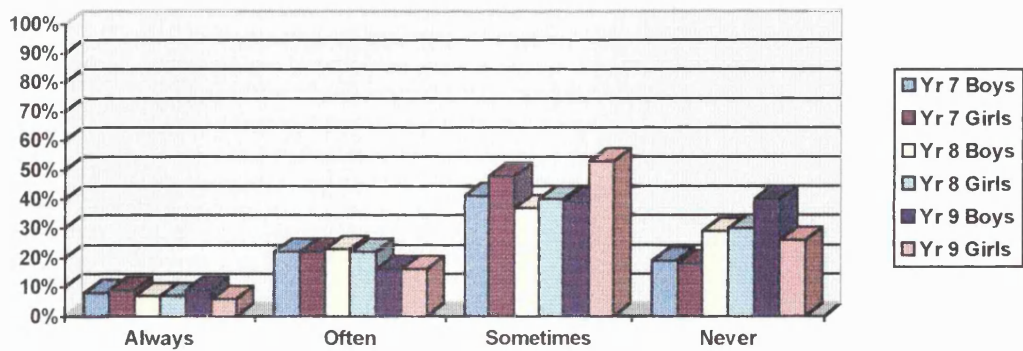


### Asking the Teacher



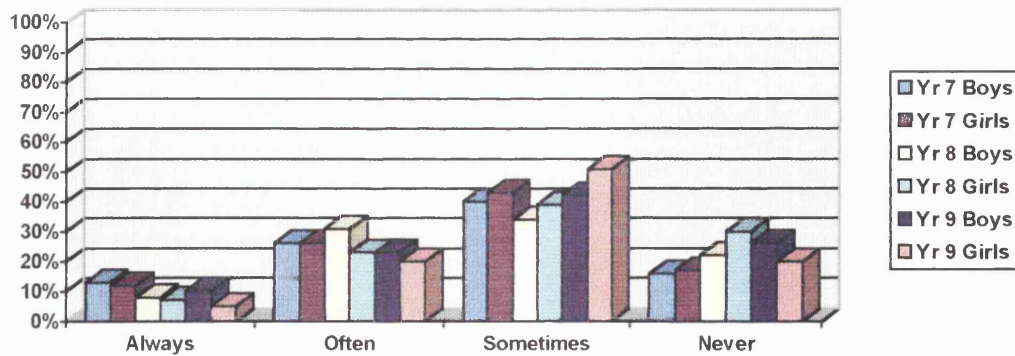
Between 35% and 50% of children asked, **never** ask for, or relay, on the recommendation of a teacher. Somewhere around 5% would always do so...

### Saw the T.V. series



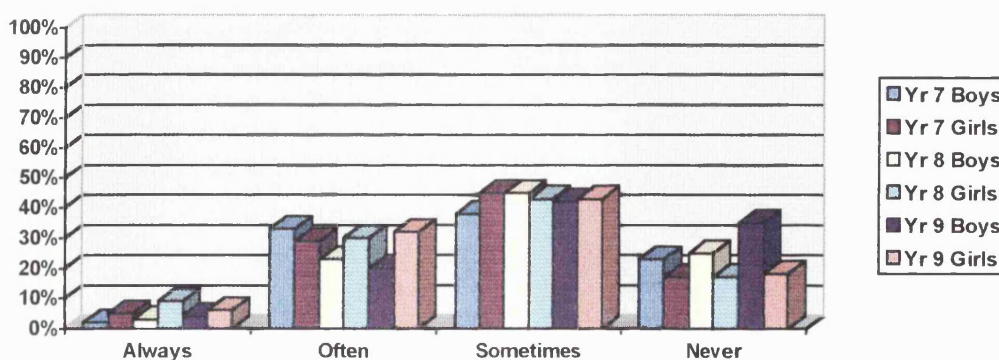


### Saw the film



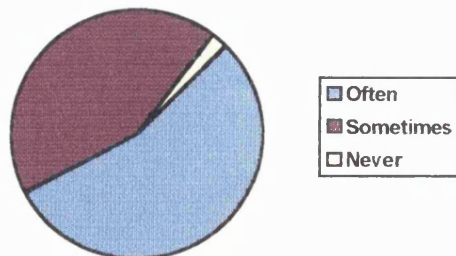
Over 5% of all years answered always to this question. 40% of Year 9 boys and 50% of Year 9 girls answered that they were sometimes influenced by having seen the story on the television or a film. This influence is reflected greatly in the lists of favourite books that were compiled. *Jurassic Park*, *Red Dwarf*, *Sweet Valley High*, *Star Wars*, *X Files* and *Jumanji* were all mentioned as favourites by Year 7 learners; *Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Star Trek*, *Dante's Peak*, *X Files*, *Jurassic Park* and *Sweet Valley High* by Year 8 and *X Files*, *Red Dwarf*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Sweet Valley High* were all mentioned by Year 9 learners. All of these are currently popular television programs or have been successful films. Again, many titles are popular throughout the age range.

### Recommended by family members

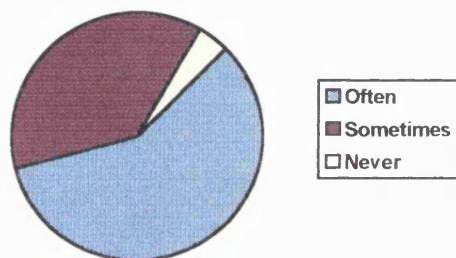


The learners were asked how often they saw someone reading at home. The answers are represented in the following charts.

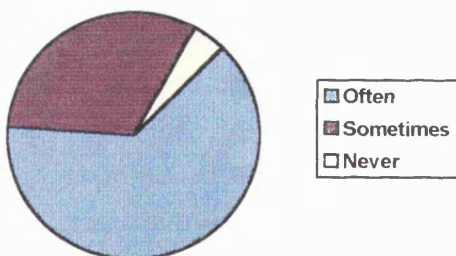
Year 7 Boys



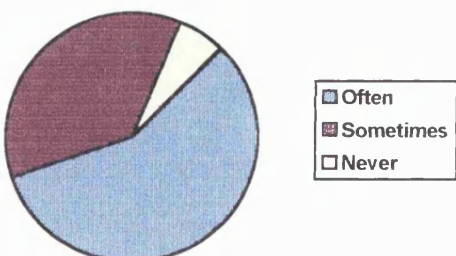
Year 7 Girls



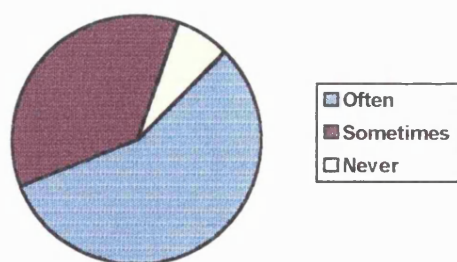
Year 8 Boys



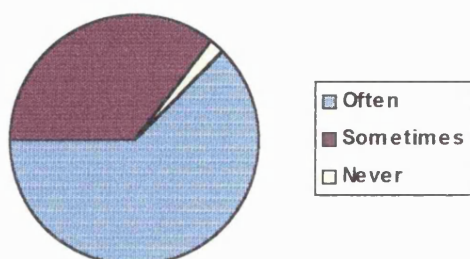
Year 8 Girls



Year 9 Boys

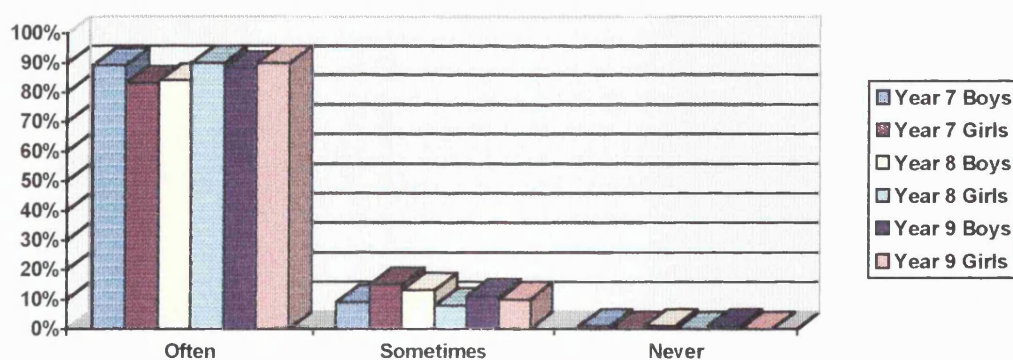


Year 9 Girls

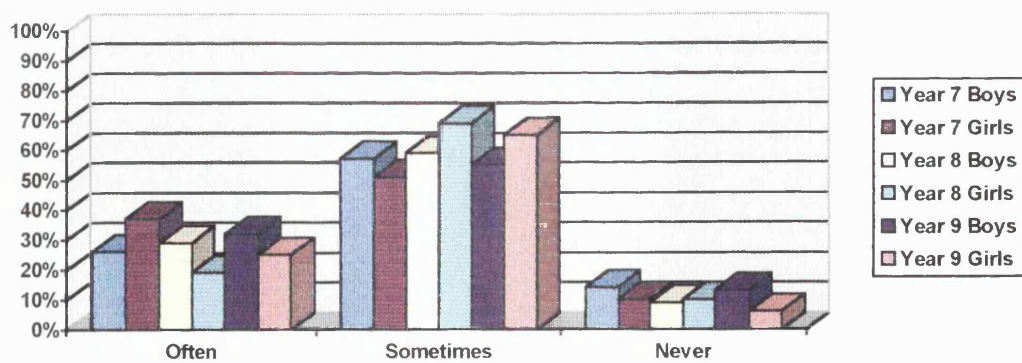


How often do you read during lessons at school?

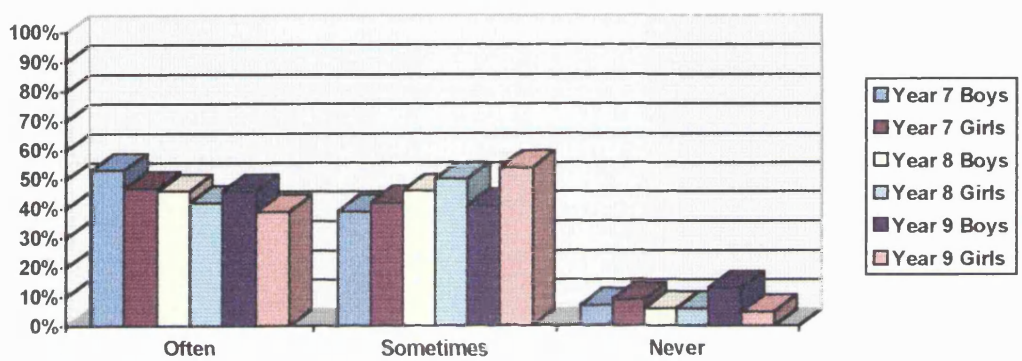
English



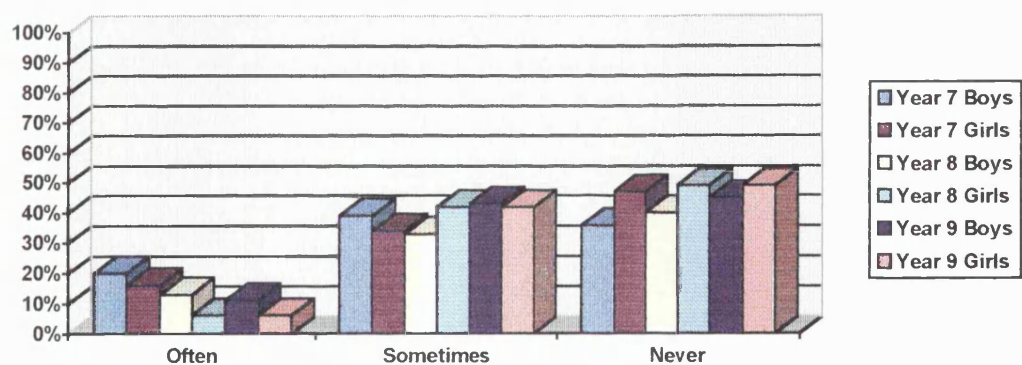
### Geography



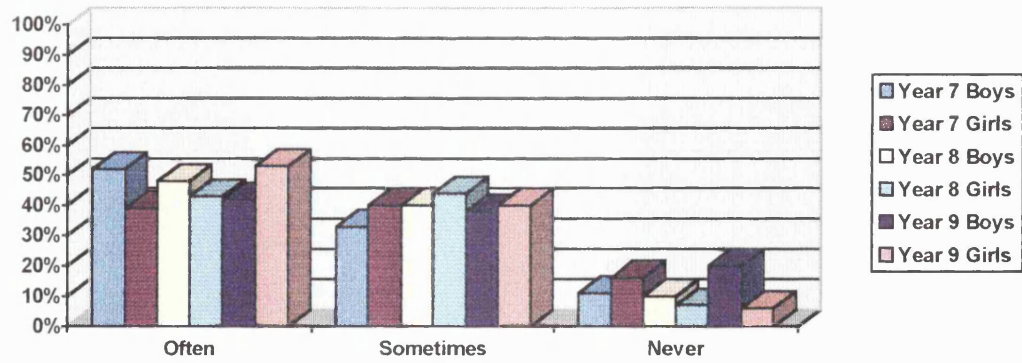
### History



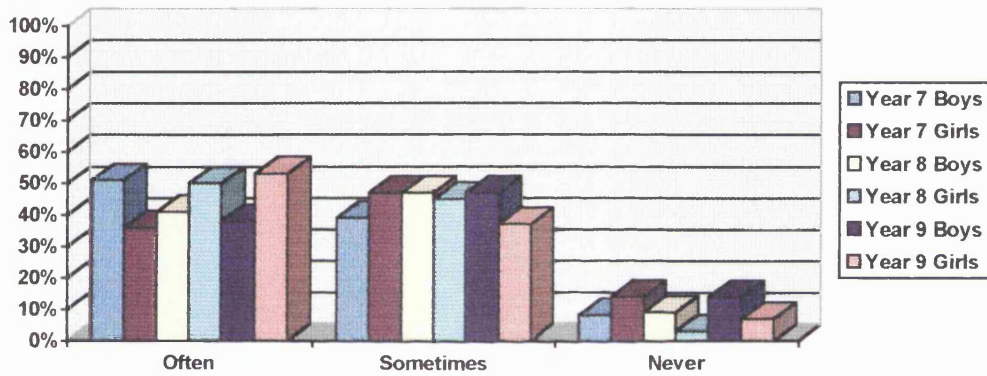
### Mathematics



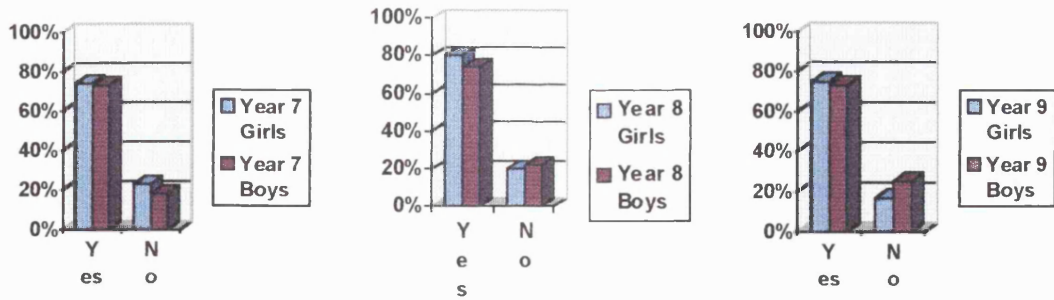
### Modern Languages



### Religious Education

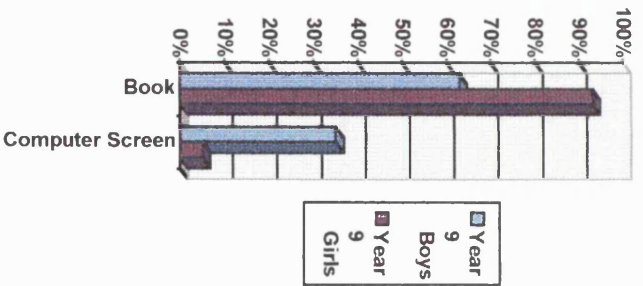
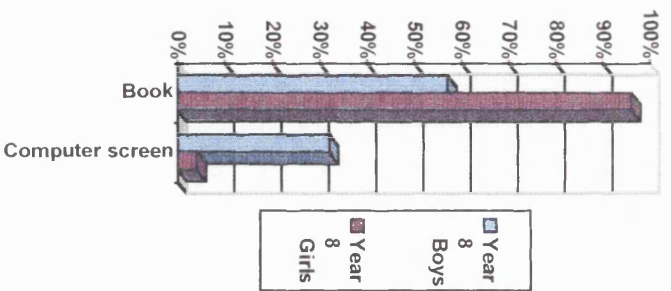
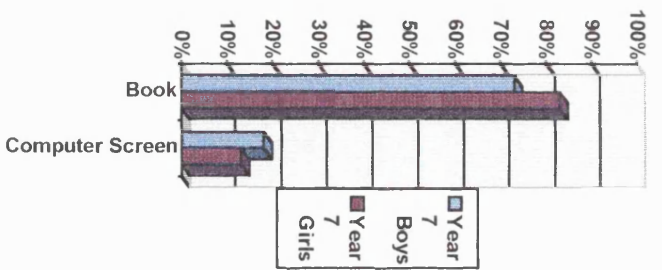


Learners were asked, *are books that you choose to read at home different from those you are given to read at school?* The following answers were given:



It is clear that the vast majority of all years thought that the books they chose to read at home were not similar to those they were given to read at school.

Learners were asked, if they could choose to read from a book or a computer screen, which would they choose? More girls than boys, would choose a book, in all year groups.



### Appendix 3

#### Questionnaire for Readers in KS3

This questionnaire is part of a study of what you think about reading and what you enjoy reading. It is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Please answer honestly.

Name:.....

School:.....

Are you                      Male                      Female                      (please circle)

Your age in years..... Your date of birth.....

Home postcode.....

#### At Home

Question 1    How many hours a day do you spend reading for pleasure at home?

Never    Less than 1    1-2    2-3    more than 3

Question 2    How often do you read the following?

Every day    Every other    Once a    Once a    Never  
Day                      week                      month

Comics

Magazines

Books

Text on

A computer



Question 3 When you choose to read a book, which sort of book are you likely to read?

Always      Often      Sometimes      Rarely      Never

Adventure

Detective Stories

Factual Books

History

Horror

Murder/mystery

Plays

Poetry

Romance

Science Fiction

Stories about Animals

Other

Question 4 How do you select which book to read?

Always      Often      Sometimes      Never

Reading the cover

Familiar author

Recommendation of friend

Recommendation of teacher

Seen the television

Seen the film

Recommendation of family

Question 5 Name your favourite:

Authors

1.....

2.....

3.....

Books

1.....

2.....

3.....

Question 6 Write the name of the magazine or comic that you are most likely to read:.....

Question 7 Do you see someone else at home reading?

Often Sometimes Never (please circle)

In School

Question 8 During which subjects do you read at school?

Often Sometimes Never

English

Geography

History

Maths

Modern Languages

R.E.

Question 9 In your English lessons, which book have you read most recently?

.....

Question 10 What is your opinion of the book?

.....  
.....  
.....

Question 11 Name the book that you have enjoyed reading the most at school?

.....

Why have you enjoyed it?

.....  
.....  
.....

Question 12 a. Are the books that you are given to read during English lessons at school different from books that you choose to read at other times?

Yes No (please circle)

b. If you think that they are different, in what ways are they different?

.....  
.....  
.....

Question 13 Do you prefer to read from:

A book A computer screen (please circle)

Question 14 What do you think is the point of reading?

.....  
.....  
.....

## Appendix 4

Example of interview transcript

School A 28 April 2000

Ann (A)

John (J)

Chris (C)

Andrew (An)

**Do you enjoy reading?**

C: yeh

J: yeh

A: it depends really what kind of thing you're reading but most yeh I don't like science fiction books or Terry Pratchett or things like that

J: if you enjoy what you're reading if you take an interest in that thing you probably enjoy it

**What sort of things do you enjoy reading?**

J: what do you mean novels or

**If you were choosing, what would you choose? Would you choose Terry Pratchett for example?**

J: probably not I like reading about sport football and golf I like and ninetendo magazines science fiction books are ok I prefer to read magazine type things

A: totally the opposite to me I hate reading football books and stuff like that I like books that like are about people's lives like I read a book during easter by the woman who wrote falling leaves I like books like that and I like books with kind of feelings in it not books like oh we went to a football match we lot five nill what a shame and its over

**Is that all it is?**

J: no not football books because they're not very good but magazines which tell you about football information

C: I generally like Terry Pratchett science fiction my favourite types are probably murders

**What is it about Terry Pratchett you like?**

C: its very funny its how pointless and meaningless it is

**Do you enjoy reading A?**

An: yes I do I like reading point horror I read lots of them and quite a few books I've read none of them are quite serious ones they're more I don't know really

**Does anyone else here read Point Horror?**

A: when I was ten I used to read point horror I've matured a bit from that

J: when I was younger I used to read science fiction goosebumps and stuff like that

A: but they are really quick you're going to get through them in a night or something

**Do you spend much time reading?**

A: yes

J: yes

An: yes

**How long is much time?**

An: about half an hour a day

A: in the holidays I read much more but in the week about half an hour or an hour at bed time

J: sometimes it can be quite hard to read in the week days especially as we have to revise for exams and we have home work

A: yeh quite a lot of home work

J: and I do quite a lot of sport's activities I don't get that much time during the nights during the week

C: I read a bit I don't really read all the time I prefer playing on the computer all day and stuff like that

**Imagine you've done your home work what do you choose to do when you've got some time and its before bed time?**

A: watch television because I know I go to bed at 9:30 or a quarter to ten I don't want to waste the time so I watch television because I always know that I can turn on my light and read but I know that after quarter to ten I can't watch television downstairs so I use the time wisely

J: say for home work we have to read a chapter or twenty pages or something I might play on my Nintendo if we hadn't had any reading to do I might read in my spare time

A: I don't really set a time to read or watch or anything I don't really have much time when I get home from school anyway I do my home work I go swimming most nights anyway then I come home and have about an hour before I go to bed I generally watch television I don't really set a time I do what I can really

C: I generally just play on the computer

**How long do you spend on your home work?**

C: an hour I watch the telly and then probably play on the computer

A: at the weekend I don't tend to read books very much cos usually I'm out doing stuff on Saturdays and Sundays no one really does anything that I know of in my family we basically watch tv all the time or go out on bikes we don't often read but we do read in the week days

**Do you have any brothers or sisters?**

An: three sisters

C: I've got a brother and a sister both older

**Does your brother like playing on the computer?**

C: yeh a bit but he's got to revise for his degree

J: I have one younger Jessica and two older

**What's the last book that you read, not for school but for pleasure?**

A: I read some book called turning to stone it was really weird

**Was it good?**

A: it was the worst book that I've ever read but it was ok

An: I think I read a point crime I wouldn't normally choose it its just one we had to

Read over the holidays

**Why did you have to read it was it home work?**

An: well sort of

C: soul music

J: the last book I read was in the holidays and it was school work really we had to go to the library and we had about five minutes to choose a book so I just chose that one it's a point horror we have to read quite a lot for school

A: in English we are always reading

**When you read in school do you get to choose the books yourselves?**

All: no we all have to read the same

**What was the last book you read in school?**

A: I'm reading goggle eyes

An: we're reading merchant of Venice at the moment

C: we read my family and other animals last

**What did you think of that?**

An: its quite good I've got the tape at home which we listened to when we were

travelling around france and stuff so I've heard it a few times

A: when I have a book and I'm half way through reading I don't like it as I tend to loose books before I finish reading them I kind of like to read fiction like the snow queen like baby books

C: I'm not reading anything at the moment I'm trying to get my hands on a copy of Clockwork orange because my brother says its brilliant

J: we're reading Shakespeare in class at the moment I'm reading this golf book

**So what about manuals and things like that do you spend time reading them?**

J: yes

A: yes

**What do you spend time reading?**

A: karting actually

**Do you spend a lot of time reading about karting?**

A: yes I know most of it now so I don't need more but for the last two weeks I have been reading loads

**You go karting?**

A: yeh I've got a kart

C: I don't really read manuals because they aren't very interesting

**What about computer magazines and cheats?**

C: I generally borrow them off people instead of buying them

**You're still reading them?**

C: yeh

A: I don't read manuals of how to play golf or how to kart but I red catalogues sometimes not read them but look at all the cloths the only magazines I read are girls magazines J17 sugar bliss



**What other magazines?**

J: playstation magazines looking at the new playstation and stuff new games

A: that's all magazines are these days isn't it games and sport

## Appendix 5

Specification summary of AS syllabus requirements for English

The specifications cover knowledge and understanding of the following areas:

- The ways in which the study of language and literature inform each other:
- A range of literary and non-literary texts, covering the literary genres prose, poetry and drama; literature published before 1900 and (in A2) before 1770:
- Linguistic concepts and key features of frameworks for the study of spoken and written language, drawn from the different systems of phonology, lexis, grammar and semantics;
- The ways in which forms and meanings in language are shaped by variations in mode, use, time or place;
- The ways in which spoken language and written text relates to the contexts in which they were created (AS) and have been interpreted by different readers or listeners at different times (A2).

Advanced Subsidiary is assessed at a standard expected to be reached at the end of the first year of a two year Advanced GCE award and can be taken as a stand-alone specification or as the first part of the full Advanced GCE course.

## Specification Aims

The chief aim of these OCR specifications is to enable students to enjoy the study of literature and language. Specifically, they aim to encourage candidates at Advanced Subsidiary GCE and at Advanced GCE:

- To study language and literature as interconnecting disciplines;
- To develop their ability to use linguistic and literary critical concepts and analytical frameworks in commenting on a wide range of spoken language texts and written texts
- To develop as independent, confident and reflective readers, enabling them to relate literary and non-literary texts to the contexts in which they were produced; also to develop their skills in speaking and writing for different purposes and audiences.
- To make comparisons and connections between a range of texts, and to make independent judgements about the range of approaches that can be adopted in understanding the inter-relationship between language and literature.

## Spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural issues

The subject demands from candidates an understanding of the cultural contexts from which spring English language and literature, in their many forms and varieties. In dealing with English as a spoken and written language candidates become aware of cultural perspectives as they affect others. Analysing and responding to the way language shapes themes, characters and perspectives in literary texts requires candidates

at all times to define their own moral and ethical viewpoints. The topics offered for individual study.

### European dimension

English language and literature as a subject cannot have a specifically European dimension, since the texts to be studied must be taken from English Literature. Nevertheless, issues of translation and discussion of English as a world language may appropriately include a European dimension. Aspects of cultural and historical influences – both in the shaping of the English Language and in the contextual settings of texts – provide opportunities to consider the European tradition in storytelling, for example in relation to the study of Chaucer and Shakespeare. The investigation of cultural and historical influence is also invited by topics chosen in the internally assessed.

### Specification Aims

The specification aims to give candidates opportunities to explore their literary interests and to learn the skills necessary for literary study.

The specification encourages candidates to develop:

- The ability to read, understand and respond to a wide range of literary texts, and to appreciate the ways in which authors achieve their effects;
- Awareness of social, historical and cultural contexts and influences in the study of literature

- The ability to construct and convey meaning in speech and writing, matching style to audience and purpose

Candidates must demonstrate their ability to:

- Respond to texts critically, sensitively and in detail, selecting appropriate ways to convey their response, using textual evidence as appropriate
- Explore how language, structure and forms contribute to the meaning of texts, considering different approaches to texts and alternative interpretations
- Explore relationships and comparisons between texts, selecting and evaluating relevant material
- Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions

## Appendix 6

### Interview Schedule of the Case Studies

#### School A

28 April 2000

5 May 2000

12 May 2000

19 May 2000

#### School B

2 May 2000

17 May 2000

7 June 2000

14 June 2000

#### School C

17 May 2000

24 May 2000

21 June 2000

29 June 2000

25 July 2000

25 July 2000

## Appendix 7

### Homework policies

#### School A

School A is the only school of the three that does not publish a home work policy within its prospectus. Instead, it emphasises the high expectations and achievements of its pupils within all areas of the school. Each child has an individual home work time table, typically including three subjects a day.

#### School B

Homework provides an important challenge for all students and is set and checked on a regular basis. We believe that homework reinforces and extends classroom learning, as well as teaching important life long skills, such as self-reliance, good organisation, and the meeting of deadlines. The amount of homework set varies in different years and subjects. Each student has a personal planner which indicates clearly what is expected. Success at homework also involves parental support. Parents are asked to look at the planner and sign it on a weekly basis, so they are aware of the range and nature of homework that is being set.

#### School C

The purpose of homework is to encourage students to develop skills, motivation and confidence to study effectively on their own, to consolidate and reinforce skills and



understanding developed at school, to extend school learning, to encourage involvement of parents/carers in the learning of students to enable students to meet particular demands of external examinations.

The time allocation for homework is:

Year 7 – 10 hours per fortnight (generally 1 hour each night)

Year 8 – 13 hours per fortnight

Year 9 – 15 hours per fortnight (1 hour 30 minutes each night)

A homework timetable is issued during the first week of term for Key Stage 3

## Appendix 8

### Pearson Chi Square testing

The statistics generated by the survey (shown in full in Appendix 2) were subjected to Pearson Chi Square testing with the aim of discovering whether or not there existed any significant differences between the choices and habits of girls and boys. The purpose of the Pearson Chi Square test of independence is to analyse patterns and relationships within and between two independent variables.

The Pearson Chi Square test was considered the most appropriate measure, and is most commonly used in research to determine the relationship between two dichotomous variables (in this case the variables were boys and girls). The test is used to calculate the difference between the statistical data presented and to consider the given marginals. The results of the test give an estimate of the associated probability value. A Chi Square probability of 0.5 or less is commonly interpreted by social scientists to suggest that a significant difference exists between the variables.

The data from the questionnaires was entered onto an Access database and transferred to the statistical analysis program, SPSS, for statistical analysis. Given that the data related to counts of pupils in categories, the Pearson Chi Square test was deemed to be an appropriate test for:

- Displaying the cross-tabulation of results;
- Determining whether the results observed were significant or otherwise.

The SPSS program shows both the cross-tabulation and the statistical significance of the result. It works by calculating the values expected in various cells if no gender or other effect was present. For instance, in the following example, the number of boys and girls expressing a preference for a certain type of reading material is shown. Clearly, in this example, boys prefer comics and girls prefer other fiction material. What the table doesn't show is whether the result observed here is statistically significant or if it is likely to have arisen by chance.

Observed frequencies:

	Comic	Fiction	total
Boys	14	7	21
Girls	8	15	23
Total	22	22	44

The Chi Square works by looking at the values that one would expect should there be no relationship between gender and preference of reading material. For each cell in the table, the expected frequency must be calculated. The expected frequency for a given cell is the product of the column total and row total, divided by the number of pupils in the sample. The pupils expected in each cell, should there be no relationship between gender and reading preference, is shown in the table below:

	Comic	Fiction	Total
Boys	10.5	10.5	21
Girls	11.5	11.5	23
Total	22	22	44

Through the use of these expected frequencies it is possible to determine whether the difference between boys and girls is statistically significant. The Chi Square test uses a

formula that indicates the difference between the observed table (what happened) and the expected table (what would happen if groups were simply apportioned). The formula for the Chi Square test takes the difference between the expected value (E), the observed value (O) for each cell and squares it. This squared value is then divided by the expected value for the cell to yield the overall Chi Square statistic. In this instance the Chi Square is 4.5.

In this thesis, results are reported as statistically significant if there is less than a 5% likelihood of the results occurring by chance. Conventionally, this is reported as being 95% confident in the results.

## Appendix 9

Structural questions used during case studies

Do you enjoy reading?

What sort of things do you enjoy reading?

Do you spend much time reading?

Imagine you've done your home work, what would you choose to do when you've got some time spare before bed time?

How long do you spend doing your home work?

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Do you think s/he enjoys reading?

When you read at school, do you choose the reading books yourself?

What was the last book that you read at school?

What would you choose to read?

Describe a typical evening.

What are you reading at the moment?

Do you read every day/night?

Where in the house do you read?

How often do you go to the library?

Why do you take books out for the holiday?

Do your parents read?

Do you see your parents read?

What do your parents do?

What do you see them reading?

Do you think you will take A levels?

What do you want to do when you leave school?

Do you think you will go to university?

Do you read newspapers?

Do you think reading helps you in any way?

What grades do you aim for in your school work?

Does school work always take priority over reading?

What have you read during the course of today?

In which subjects at school do you read?

Do you read from a computer?

Do you prefer to read from a computer or a book?

Is reading work or pleasure?

Where did you get your last reading book?

Why did you get it?

Why do you read?

Do you ever read during the day?

What might you read during the day?

What's the last book you finished reading?

Do you read magazines?

Do you read with your friends?

Do you know what your friends read?

Are you reading anything at the moment?

Are things you read at school like things you read at home?

What is different about them?

Do you like the books you read at school?

Describe what you read at school.

Do you read aloud in class?

What is the effect of reading aloud in class on your opinion of the book?

What grades do you get in your exams?

What is your favourite subject?