University of Glasgow

Farrar, Jennifer (2017) *"I didn't know they did books like this!" An inquiry into the literacy practices of young children and their parents using metafictive picturebooks.* PhD thesis.

"I didn't know they did books like this!"

An inquiry into the literacy practices of young children and their parents, using metafictive picturebooks.

by Jennifer Farrar MA(Hons), PG Dip, MEd.

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Abstract

Critical literacy is widely acknowledged as a crucial component of 21st century literacies, with a growing number of researchers providing inspirational examples of what can happen when teachers create critically literate 'niches' or spaces in their classrooms (O'Brien 1994; Leland et al 2005; Souto-Manning 2009). Despite this increase in scholarly interest, schooling's traditional focus on code-breaking and comprehension-type literacy practices (Leland et al 2005) has meant that critical literacy still remains on the margins of many classrooms and curricula, as a buzzword, add-on or extension task that is often reserved for the eldest or most able (Comber 2001). Consequently, researchers have found that a critical stance still does not come "naturally" to readers within schooled contexts (Ryan & Anstey 2003; Scull et al 2013), a situation that cannot be remedied until critical literacy is widely used and valued by readers both *inside* and *outside* of schools (Carrington & Luke 1997). Responding to this context and motivated by an absence of research into the critically literate practices of families, a key aim of this study has been to find ways of making space for more critical "ways with words" (Heath 1983) to emerge in places other than classrooms.

Underpinned by a theoretical understanding that a powerful and productive relationship exists between the *effects* of metafiction and the broadly-agreed *aims* of critical literacy, this thesis is an account of what happened when a group of eight parents and their eight primary school-aged children encountered the complex, surprising and disruptive demands of metafiction in picturebooks. Discussions about the picturebooks were located across a range of school-based and out-of-school settings and the resulting qualitative, analytical inquiry focused specifically on the literacy resources that dominated these readers' responses when they engaged with metafiction.

While establishing what a critically literate response looked like in the context of this study proved challenging, comments that emerged with a 'critical edge' always did so in direct response to the provocations of metafiction, a significant finding. More specifically, this study has also identified the ability of metafiction to provoke *resistance as a reader response*; an experience that made it possible for some readers to interrupt and question their 'natural' literacy practices. In addition, the effects of metafiction made it possible for readers to develop *metaliterate understandings*, a term used here to describe a heightened awareness of language in use and of reading as an active, social process of meaning-making. In both cases, the effects of metafiction helped to foreground the often invisible dispositions that give shape to understandings about words − and pictures − and, simultaneously, about the world (Freire 1985).

By unpacking some of the taken-for-granted assumptions that can underpin *what counts* as reading, this study has highlighted the need for increased dialogue between schools and families, particularly if new understandings about critical and visual literacies are ever to flourish or become 'natural'. In addition, by exploring how differently-aged readers responded to metafiction *without explicit instruction or scaffolding,* this study has provided a tantalising indication of what else might be possible from these exciting, playful, heterodoxic texts.

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Acknowledgements

Dedication

To my wonderful children, Connie and Lochie, whose insightful responses as readers, thinkers and wonderers provided me with such inspiration in the first place. This thesis is also dedicated to Steve, my husband and best friend. Without his unending support, generous patience and unwavering enthusiasm, these words would not have materialised. Finally, this thesis is for my parents, Alan and Mary, who have surrounded me with unconditional encouragement, belief and love, always.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:

Printed name: Jennifer Farrar

Chapter One:
An introduction and some context

> *Matthew: It's not a proper book.*
>
> *Jennifer: What does a proper book mean?*
>
> *Ben: It means it has to have a happy ending.*
>
> *Jennifer: Does that mean you don't like this book?*
>
> *Matthew: I do like it.*
>
> *Niamh: I'm confused now!*
>
> **(Primary Two, discussing *No Bears*)**

The question of 'what counts' when it comes to reading − what makes it seem *proper* − is one that still dominates mainstream discussion about education in the UK; a context in which scaremongering about sliding literacy standards frequently makes headline news (Harding 2016), and where governments seek to narrow curricular boundaries in order to boost pupil proficiencies in what are still assumed to be the 'basics' (BBC News 2015: online). At the same time, rapid developments in communication technologies continue to transform our literacy landscape beyond recognition, intensifying the sense that there is an ever-widening gap between the practices used and valued inside and outside of schools (Marsh 2003), and that consequently there must be a 'best' or 'worst' way of doing things, despite the common points between literacies 'old' and 'new' (Thomas et al 2007). As the children's comments at the top of this page illustrate, thinking about *what counts* can be confusing, particularly when what you enjoy or prefer seems to contradict what is widely assumed to be normative. It is against this broader backdrop of questions, assumptions and confusion that this study has taken place.

Unfolding in these pages is a research story about a small group of parents, their primary school-aged children and their responses to a set of disruptive picturebooks. It is a story about *what matters* to these readers about books and reading during this changing and challenging era of multiliteracies (New London Group 1996). It is also a story about the

picturebooks themselves and their capacity to make readers think more deeply about their own thought processes. In this chapter, I show how my interest in this topic is rooted firmly in understandings that have grown out of my experiences as a secondary school English teacher; as a parent of two children (aged almost four and five when this study began), and also as an emerging researcher within the expanding field of children's literature and literacies. Drawing on these three aspects of my researcher's self, I explain what these understandings are, suggest how they emerged and also describe how they have been moulded into a PhD study involving picturebooks, pupils and their parents.

Critical literacy…

While the term 'critical literacy' does not appear in the list that concluded the previous paragraph, nor in the title of this thesis, it is a concept that is at the very heart of this study. Given the nature of critical literacies as "multiple and locally negotiated…[and] not a singular new orthodoxy" (O'Brien & Comber 2001: 157), I agree that it is inadvisable − in fact, antithetical − to try to pin the idea of 'being critical' down to an individual, succinct definition. Instead, following Simpson's astute advice (1996: 18), my intention here is to "focus on what [I] believe it does or should aim to achieve". My understandings of what critical literacy is and what it can do, have been heavily influenced by the work of Australian scholars Barbara Comber and Jennifer O'Brien, who have variously described critical literacy as: "practising the use of language in powerful ways to get things done in the world" (Comber 2001b: 1); or as "questioning and challenging the way things are in texts and in everyday life" (O'Brien & Comber 2001: 152); and also as:

> …an evolving repertoire of practices of analysis and interrogation which move between the micro features of texts and the macro conditions of institutions, focusing on how relations of power work (Comber 2013: 589).

As these descriptions suggest, critical literacy is not a set method or pedagogic procedure, but a stance or an "attitude" (Luke 2012) constructed upon understandings drawn from critical theory that can pervade the teaching of all text types. According to Jones, an American teacher and researcher, critical literacy can be understood as representing "one

attempt at transforming a powerful theoretical perspective into classroom practice" (2006: 61); a comment that embodies the spirit of critical literacy by making it clear that many other attempts are also possible.

Although I trained and qualified as a teacher in 2003, the first I heard of critical literacy was as a Master's student in late 2011, when I returned to part-time study shortly after becoming a mother for the second time. As Freire suggested might be the case (Freire cited Shor 1993: 27), "discovering" critical literacy for myself was a powerful experience that helped me to consider (with some unhappiness) the kind of politics I had previously enacted in the classroom as a young, white teacher in a 'challenging' inner London secondary school. Looking back, I fervently wish I had encountered critical literacy earlier in my career, both as reader, thinker and teacher. Keenly pursuing a reading trajectory that spiralled off from Freire, I soon read (and agreed with) Luke (1992) that an inevitable consequence of teaching children (or adults) to read is that a process of "selective socialisation" takes place, in which readers are inducted into "versions of the world, into possible worlds and into versions of the horizons and limits of literate competence" (1992:6). Soon after that, I encountered Bourdieu and realised how helpful his sociological model was for thinking about literacy as both social and individual. As a thirty-something, I grasped for the first time just how significantly my own readerly subjectivities could impose limits on others, while considering the limits imposed on me by the policy documents and structures I had always regarded as fairly benign. As a consequence, I looked again at how I had read in the classroom and also at how I read to my own pre-school children at home. What was I teaching them when I read aloud? What did the books we shared teach us? What sorts of stories about words and the world were we telling, between us? What was prioritised and what was ignored? Having scrutinised my own teaching and parenting practices through these newly-acquired critically literate "eyeglasses" (Jones 2006), it then became difficult to 'unsee' literacy as always sociopolitical in nature and textual practices as anything but neutral (Comber 2013). I soon realised that critical literacy had become part of my philosophical plumbing (Midgely 1992).

…and picturebooks

Studying for a Masters in Children's Literature and Literacies also introduced me to a new world of picturebooks, a compound term I use to emphasise the "synergy" that exists between the different modes at work in such texts (Sipe 1998). Although I had read books containing both words and pictures to my children (and had read them myself, as a child), I had no idea that the relationship between images and text could be so inventive, so sophisticated or so wonderfully playful. As Chapter Two explores in depth, I became particularly intrigued by picturebooks that can be described as *metafictive* in nature, a term that refers to the self-referential and interactive devices employed in such texts[1]. According to Grieve, metafiction can be understood as:

> a fiction about fiction − that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity. It is also a fiction preoccupied with problematising the mimetic illusion and laying bare the construction of fictional reality (Grieve 1998:5).

I grew especially interested in the disruptive effects of metafiction − this ability to 'problematise the mimetic illusion' referred to, above, by Grieve − and perceived links between it and critical literacy, my other 'discovery' from that same period of study. To me, the ability of metafictive devices to "shatter reader's expectations…and [to] raise questions about what is being read" (Goldstone 2004: 197), resonated loudly with critical literacy's broad aims to question and challenge "the way things are in texts and in everyday life" (O'Brien & Comber 2001: 152). In Chapter Two, I explain how I developed a specific focus on the possibilities of the relationship between the *effects* of metafiction and the *broad aims* of critical literacy and describe why metafiction can help to support the emergence of a more critically literate stance, by drawing readers' attention to *how* texts work.

As a Master's student, I began to explore this idea by embarking on a piece of small-scale empirical research (Farrar 2016) that was pedagogic in its focus and showcased young children's responses to a metafictive picturebook within a schooled context. Having only

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[1] A list of metafictive devices appears as Appendix A and a more detailed explanation is included in Chapter Two.

just 'found' critical literacy, I was keen to discover what it might look like in practice and decided to explore how a class of Primary One children (aged between 4.5 and 5.5 years) responded to my adoption of a more explicitly critical stance when sharing a picturebook with them. Modelling my approach on O'Brien (1994, 2001) and Souto-Manning (2009) among others, I deliberately foregrounded the authorial decisions David Wiesner had made when constructing his version of *The Three Pigs* (2012) and drew the children's attention to the text as something that had been consciously constructed. In addition, I paid close attention to how the children reacted to Wiesner's use of metafiction. Impressed by the critically literate potential of their responses, I used my conclusion to suggest that a more 'critical edge' seemed to have been made possible by my stance *in combination* with the surprising impact of the text's metafictive devices (Farrar 2016).

After submitting my Master's dissertation, I began to find fault with what I had done. While I was delighted with the children's responses to the text and the potential they suggested for developing critical literacies inside the classroom, what troubled me most was what would happen to these newly-hatched awarenesses *next*: would they, could they travel beyond the classroom walls? Would they simply fizzle out once I left? And given the negative, political connotations of the word 'critical', I wondered if the concept could ever be widely accepted and embraced as normative. I was – and remain – concerned by the lack of guidance, definition or explanation provided for Scottish educators about what critical literacy actually means, despite frequent and consistent references to the term in curricular documents (see Scottish Government 2004, Education Scotland 2015). Indeed, judging by the on-going difficulties I have encountered when trying to engage with policy makers at Holyrood[2] (in order to ascertain what they think critical literacy means in theoretical terms, and what it could look like within a Scottish context), it is clear there are many gaps and multiple silences around this topic (Stone 2012) that warrant further investigation. From my wider reading, I knew that other teacher-researchers had argued for the creation of "niches" or spaces in which critical literacies could flourish and develop within school settings (O'Brien 1994; Leland et al 2005; Souto-Manning 2009) and, although I agreed with such assertions, again I had doubts. How could, I wondered, such

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2 The Scottish Parliament, in Edinburgh, Scotland

niches be sustained and developed for more than a handful of readers? How could these fledging ideas ever grow strong enough to be able to 'fly the nest' of their specialist niche status, or withstand changes in teaching staff, with different pedagogic priorities? What would happen to the children's emergent critical ideas when reading in different contexts, with different people who had different ideological underpinnings? What might happen at home?

…and parents

Soon after that, having read a Bourdieusian-framed argument put forward by Carrington and Luke (1997), I understood more clearly that a concept such as critical literacy would always be unlikely to thrive *inside* classrooms and schools unless it was also widely accepted as normative practice on the *outside*; within the social fields that abut onto a school's, in places and spaces such as homes, churches and other community settings. If, as other scholars have insisted, it is time for educators to shift away from outdated, print-centric models of literacy education (Marsh 2003; Pahl & Rowsell 2005) towards more fluid and wide-ranging conceptualisations of literacy as "an ensemble of communicative practices" (Rowsell & Pahl 2015: 14), then, following the logic described above (Carrington and Luke 1997), I realised that understandings about new concepts, such as critical literacy or picturebook theory, needed to be disseminated outside of classrooms, and shared with parents, families and communities if they were ever to be embraced and firmly entrenched within existing ways of being and doing. Not only that, but in order for them to be accepted as meaningful, they needed to be promulgated in ways that that could encourage the experience of ideological dissonance; moments of destabilisation and change that occur when existing taken-for-granted assumptions are unsettled and then reconfigured to reflect what has been altered, newly learned or recognised (Marsh 2006), a concept I explore in Chapters Two and Five.

Parents and picturebooks…

Aside from my interest in spreading the word about critical literacy and picturebooks, my decision to work with parents was also influenced by the the ways parents are often

represented – or sidelined – particularly in picturebook studies. For the most part, projects involving picturebooks have been understandably pedagogic in their focus, often located in classroom (or classroom-like) settings, meaning that it is primarily the children's responses that take centre-stage. While reviewing the literature to be included within this thesis, I noticed that when parents (or other adults at home) were included as participants, it was usually in order to examine their role as facilitators of children's reading in quite an instrumental sense, including their responses to quite specific literacy training (Lim & Cole 2002), or by observing how they directed their child's attention while reading (Phillips et al 2008). While helpful in some respects, the tendency to position parents in such a way also seemed to undermine the efforts of agencies such as the National Literacy Trust (McCoy & Cole 2011) to highlight and increase parents' awareness of their vital roles as their children's first teachers in far more than a functional sense, while also ignoring the socially constructed nature of literacy practices. In another sense, the lesser status of parents within picturebook studies seemed to reflect long-standing, far wider debates in education about the impact of subordinating familial knowledge to that of the school's, in spite of the valuable insights and connections that can be made by exploring and celebrating links between them (Pushor & Murphy 2004; Gonzalez et al 2005). Another aim of this study, therefore, has been to *make more room* for the voices of parents in picturebook studies by addressing the importance of their roles as co-readers, co-responders and thinkers in their own right, in addition to their roles as decoders, pronouncers or observers of children reading texts.

The idea of creating a research project that aimed to position parents as reflective readers and thinkers was also motivated by my own experiences at home. In spite of the theoretical knowledge I had gained as a student of children's literature, not to mention the years of practical experience I had teaching from English in secondary schools, reading metafictive picturebooks with my own children at home wasn't always straightforward. On tired and grumpy days, sometimes it just seemed too much like hard work to make sense from the disjointed narrative structures; to remember to read **both** the images and words, while also factoring in time for all of the intertextual clues and tiny details the children had spotted while we read. Sometimes, I would sit quietly out of sight, listening as my husband

dutifully read through the picturebooks I had earmarked as 'interesting' to our children at bedtime, feeling secretly quite pleased if he struggled to work out where the story had gone, or if he too found it difficult to translate the pages of blank space into words. Other times, I enjoyed listening to the ideas that flowed between Steve and the children, and came to appreciate why Sipe and McGuire (2008) had likened such books to "linguistic and visual playgrounds" (2008: 283), especially when shared between readers of different ages. On different occasions, while rifling through the boxes of books in the children's section at our local library, my ears would prick up when I heard other adults steering their child towards (and also away from) specific text selections. Sometimes the grown-ups would say things along the lines of, "*No, that doesn't look like a good one. This one looks better*"; or "*This one is too babyish. This one has more words. Let's have it instead.*" While, of course, there was nothing wrong with what these parents were doing or saying, my interest as an emerging, Bourdieu-inspired researcher was in the shaping function of such comments, and how they would, in turn, help to mould younger readers' dispositions and ideals of *what counted* when it came to reading.

Parents, picturebooks and critical literacy…

Given my own struggle to read metafictive picturebooks aloud at home (of which more in Chapter Six), I often wondered how other adults would make meaning from the non-linear and often disruptive metafictive devices employed in these texts. How might other parents go about reading them out loud? Would they, like me, feel unsettled by the fact that these books just simply didn't *work* in the way that I expected them to? What sorts of conversations might the books provoke? Prompted by many such questions and bolstered by my overarching interest in exploring readers' normative assumptions about picturebooks at a time of theoretical flux and technological change, the project I describe here is also a product of the three, interrelated strands or interests I have identified within this chapter:

- the perceived need to disseminate understandings and increase awareness about critical literacy beyond the classroom walls;
- the relationship between the effects of metafiction and the broadly agreed aims of critical literacy;

- the tendency to position parents "off the landscape" in broad terms (Pushor & Murphy 2004: 224) but particularly in terms of picturebook research.

Yet the issue of ***how*** to communicate these new ideas and theoretical developments to parents, families or other groups in ways that could be both meaningful, ethical and *authentic* was complicated, in part, by the impact that historical, hierarchical tensions have had on the nature of the relationship between home and school contexts, as I describe in the final third of Chapter Two. In Chapter Four, where I provide a methodological overview of the approach I devised for working with parents, I outline how I responded to some of these tensions by developing methods aimed at decentring or "decolonising" (Phipps 2013a:17) the relationship between the researcher and those being researched, using approaches that were in keeping with Freire's emphasis on critical discovery and authentic reflection (1996) rather than transmission or direct instruction.

The structure of the study: a brief explanation

As I also explain in Chapter Four, the project involved eight families (usually one parent and one child aged between four and six at the time of the study) recruited from the same Scottish primary school. Each family pairing was asked to read and discuss the same four metafictive picturebooks, all of which had been sent home 'raw', that is, without any intervention or instruction from their class teacher or myself. Within days of each book being sent home, I made arrangements to speak to the children, in two small groups, within a school setting, and their parents (individually) across a range of different locations outside of school (as shown in Table 3, in Chapter Four). My decision to work with the adults and children separately, rather than as a unit, was influenced by several factors that all relate to my professional and personal interests. Firstly, I wished to find out how the children responded to the metafictive devices 'naturally' – that is, without any explicit teaching or schooled scaffolding with a view to considering how the books might be promoted as helpful pedagogic tools, although I discuss the problematic connotations of this term in Chapter Five. More specifically, I wished to pursue the idea that a relationship existed between the effects of metafiction and the aims of critical literacy, something that

had not yet been explicitly explored by researchers working in this field, although I acknowledge the significance of research into metafiction by scholars such as Sylvia Pantaleo and Frank Serafini. As a teacher, parent and emerging picturebook scholar, I wanted to explore the potential of these texts for myself; to ask, could they really act as vehicles for more critically literate conversations in classrooms, especially when read with a minimum of support from school?

Secondly, I wished to engage with both sets of readers when discussing the books, and realised that this would not have been possible had I carried out an ethnographic study of the parents and children reading metafictive picturebooks together at home. With no experience of ethnography, but far more knowledge of talking to readers about books and reading, I decided that a dialogue-based approach was far more in keeping with my own "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez et al 2005). Thirdly, my decision to present the responses of the children and their parents alongside one another − albeit in separate sections − enabled me to offer a richer and deeper cross-section of reader response; one that makes visible the interplay of ideas and assumptions between readers across a generational gap, and thus emphasises the multilayered, transitory and socially constructed nature of literacies in practice. Fourthly, and finally, my decision to include both sets of responses was linked to the fact that it would have been impossible to present the adults' comments in a vacuum; in other words, without any acknowledgement that they had been made while 'in role' as parents reading a children's book to their child. Equally, it would have been a challenge to ignore the influence of the parents' guidance on the children as readers, given the ecological, social nature of literacies in practice (Pantaleo 2009b). As I describe in Chapters Five and Six, the nature of the project meant that both sets of readers embarked on it from different starting points. To a large extent, the children responded in ways that resonated with the roles and ideals promoted by our school-based surroundings and my role as a teacher-like figure. The adults, on the other hand, offered me responses from a wider range of perspectives: as parents, as former pupils of reading, as observers of their children and as readers in their own right.

Thesis structure

In many respects, the structure of this thesis resembles that of the project, in that the children's and parents' responses have been discussed and analysed separately, for reasons I have already explained. On some occasions, I noticed links, echoes or contradictions between the adults' and children's accounts and, where possible, I have used the footnotes as a facility to highlight where these often amusing and interesting moments occurred − a feature I also hope will help to convey a sense of this study's intensely dialogic and overlapping nature. While I have already made some links to key points or chapters in the paragraphs above, a more concentrated structural summary follows here:

Chapter Two: Mapping out the field. Comprised of three, separate literature reviews, this chapter is intended to show where the project sits in relation to existing scholarship. In the first sub-chapter, I describe how I have applied understandings about critical literacy to this study. In the second, I review existing research into picturebooks; suggest what makes metafiction so exciting in general, and provide a fuller account of the promising relationship between metafiction and critical literacy. In the third, I provide a topographical review of the field of literacy studies, with a particular focus on the impact of the home-school 'divide'. In an additional, slightly detached sub-chapter, I explain how Turner's concept of liminality (1985) has helped me to envisage aspects of the study, a set of ideas I return to at various points during the thesis.

Chapter Three: Introducing the picturebooks. In this chapter, I provide an account of each of the four picturebooks used in this study, justify their selection and provide more details of their metafictive features.

Chapter Four: Ways of talking with readers − a methodological overview. Falling into two separate parts, this chapter begins with an account of the research design for the school-based part of the project, followed by a description of the approach I adopted for talking to parents in out-of-school spaces and places.

Chapter Five: Talking about the books - how the children responded.

In the first part of this chapter, I describe the analytical frame I applied to the children's responses and propose a Bourdieusian-inspired version of reader response theory. In the second half, I provide a detailed commentary for each of the four picturebooks and focus my attention closely on the children's responses to the metafictive devices at work in each text.

Chapter Six: Talking about the books - how the parents responded.

Following the same pattern as Chapter Five, my description of the parents' responses to the picturebooks is prefaced by an account of how I analysed the parents' responses and why they required a different lens from the children's. As with the previous chapter, my commentary on the books follows the order in which the books were read by the families.

Chapter Seven: A text that can teach - lessons learned from the project. In this final chapter, I begin by discussing some of the main ideas to have emerged from both the children's and the parents' responses to metafiction, including the power and potential of their resistance and the insights made possible through the experience of 'metaliterate moments', in which a more heightened awareness of the text as a *text,* or reading as a *process,* became visible.

In **Chapter Eight,** after offering some concluding thoughts and identifying some of the project's limitations, I make recommendations for further study and suggest how aspects of this research could be used to inform future practice and research both inside and outside of schools.

In this first chapter, I have explained what initially drew me towards this area of study, as a teacher, a researcher and also as a parent. Operating under the intentionally broad title, *An inquiry into the literacy practices of young children and adults, using metafictive picturebooks,* I also pursued the following research sub-questions, which I respond to throughout the chapters that follow and return to once again in the closing pages of this thesis. They are:

- How do parents (or other adults at home) and young children respond to the non-linear, often disruptive and multimodal metafictive devices employed in the following picturebooks: *The Bravest Ever Bear* (Ahlberg & Howard 1999)*, No Bears* (McKinlay & Rudge 2013)*, The Three Pigs* (Wiesner 2001) and *Black and White* (Macaulay 1990)?

- Can reading and discussing metafictive picturebooks make adult readers more aware of the "force of the habitus" (Fowler 2000: 1) by drawing attention to the literacy practices they employ while reading with young children?

- Can the metafictive picturebooks' non-canonical status help to disrupt the dominance of schooled literacy practices at home by offering parents and children the chance of a 'third space' to construct meanings independently (McGonigal & Arizpe 2007)?

- Can adults and young children be encouraged to develop critically literate practices as a result of reading and discussing metafictive picturebooks at home?

As the structure of this introductory chapter indicates, this study draws on thoughts, ideas and theories that can be classified under three main headings: parents, picturebooks and critical literacy. Beginning with the latter, I offer a review of the literature pertaining to each topic in a bid to sketch out this project's starting point, or, to return to Midgley's analogy (1992), to lift the floorboards on the theoretical understandings that underpin this study.

Chapter Two:

Mapping out the field

"I know what it's about! It's about problems!"

(Sarah, Primary One, on *Black and White*)

1. Problems with critical literacy: a literature review

As Sarah's comment suggests, this is a chapter about problems. While it is ostensibly a literature review that synthesises and summarises what seems most pertinent about critical literacy scholarship to the aims of this study, this section also aims to explore and explain some of the issues that can be related to adopting a critical stance. Before tackling these problems in greater depth, first I describe what I understand critical literacy to mean and summarise its position within 21st century literacy frameworks. Following that, I review what critical literacy has looked like in other studies and contexts, consider what can be problematic about this stance, and finally begin to suggest the relationship of critical literacy to this project.

Critical literacy – the concept and some context

Much has been written about critical literacy in recent decades, with scholars such as Comber (2013) and Luke (2012) providing thorough accounts of its origins, development and uptake in classroom contexts around the world. In recognition of its growing theoretical and pedagogic significance, the critical dimension has now achieved more of an equal footing with cognitive and affective aspects of literacy in several major literacy frameworks (New London Group 1996; Luke & Freebody 1999; Serafini 2012). Despite this rise to prominence and the inevitable, accompanying shift across into mainstream policy (see Scottish Government 2008), scholars continue to insist that the very ethos of criticality means there cannot and should not be one way of 'doing' critical literacy (Simpson 1996, Comber 2013). To defend critical literacy from attempts to reduce it to a standardised checklist or a process with a guaranteed outcome (Aukerman 2012), it is often

depicted as an "evolving repertoire" of practices (Comber 2013) − a phrase that aptly conveys the breadth and plurality of literacy practices developing from within this field. At a methodological, macro level, critical literacy is an overtly political approach, one that:

> melds social, political and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences and in whose interests (Luke 2012:5).

At an individual level, critical literacy can be thought of as a lens or pair of "eyeglasses", helping readers to see beyond their familiar and comfortable understandings about language practices and texts (Jones 2005: 67).

As emphasised above, while many approaches are possible, most draw from a set of commonly-held assumptions and increasingly well-formed 'traditions' (Rogers & O'Daniels 2015), although I use this word guardedly. These include the understanding that literacy is a social and cultural construct (Street 1984; Cook-Gumperz 1986; Luke 1994); that literacy's functions and uses are never neutral (Kamler & Comber 1997; Janks 2010); and that meanings constructed by texts are always ideological and bound up with (im)balances of power (Kamler & Comber 1997). According to Aukerman, a critically literate reader is one who reads from a position of "textual authority", a stance that is underpinned and informed by the following understandings: the multiplicity of perspectives; the contingency of interpretation; the ideological nature of texts and reading (2012: 43).

The need for critical literacy

Given the complex range of multimodal texts that now dominate contemporary societies, it is increasingly agreed that there is an urgent need for readers and viewers to understand not only the meanings of the words used, but also the power these words and images contain (Janks 2010). Understanding the relationship between forms of language and power is important, in fact, critical, for 21st century readers and viewers, because "we are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become"

(Shor 1999: 1). Not only does this comment succinctly reflect the duality of literacy – its ability to both transform and constrict – but it also suggests how our individual literate practices − our *literate habitus* (Carrington & Luke 1997: 100) − can constitute a form of embodied capital with the potential to shape and condition our trajectories through different social fields, all of which are characterised by differing sets of dynamics and rules (Grenfell 2007).

In particular, it is argued that the early years stage is an ideal place to embed critically literate practices for future growth because young children arrive at school in possession of a "rich repertoire" of analytic resources from their lived experiences, as well as a heightened awareness of "what's fair and what's not" (Comber 2001a: 170). Dyson's extensive ethnographic work in primary schools (e.g.1999, 2001) has provided ample evidence of young children's abilities to contest and subvert existing power structures when composing new texts, suggesting the powerful shaping influence of their experiences at home and in the community. According to Dyson, "children enter school with words and symbols indexing their prior travels on Bakhtin's voice-strewn landscape, that is, in families, churches, sidewalks and playgrounds" (2001:14). Having observed how young children can appropriate and recontextualise different cultural materials from "across symbolic, social and ideological borders" (2001: 14), Dyson has argued that approaches to literacy must recognise the sophisticated nature of these abilities. Yet the dominance of developmental theory and "its attendant assumptions of the naturally developing child and emergent literacy" (Comber 2013: 558) has often meant that in school, critical literacy tends to be reserved for older, more able pupils, rather than their junior colleagues. This is ironic because younger children's assumptions about the world have not yet been fixed (McClay 2000; Kress 2003), therefore engaging with them in discussions about power, the word and the world could prove especially fruitful and beneficial.

Cultural clashes and critical connotations

To me, the theoretical arguments for embedding critically literate understandings into the early years of schooling are convincing because they begin from the assumption that young

learners are capable of engaging with 'what really matters' – which is, in this case, how language can work for them and how it can work in the world (Morrow & Richards 1996: 97; Comber 2001a: 178). Indeed, critical literacy is said to credit young children as agentive rather than dependent (Marsh 2010) by positioning them as capable of sophisticated forms of analysis that transcend the reductive and simplistic skills-based approaches that can often characterise literacy in primary schools (Comber 2001a; Maybin 2013).

Yet a teacher's adoption of a critically literate stance can be perceived as a risky step; one that sets out to deliberately disrupt dominant ideologies that depict childhood as a time of innocence and literacies as neutral practices. Due to its clash with the "hint of Eden" that still prevails in idealised perceptions of childhood (Carpenter 2009: 58), enacting or endorsing a shift towards a more critical stance might seem too radical. Equally, using the word 'critical' in an early years' setting risks transforming literacy from a set of apparently inert and "decontextualised practices" (Luke 1992) into a radicalised approach that makes learning to read and write seem pleasure-free and almost dangerous, while turning young children into jaded cynics (Comber 2001a: 169). Writing about her teacher colleagues' response to her work with critical literacies and young children, O'Brien described their hostility as "vehement" and their perception of her work as invalid, destructive and manipulative (O'Brien 2001: 165). As O'Brien and Comber have suggested, one of the 'problems' of critical literacy is that to some, its aims appear to jar with the equally constructed but apparently more benign ideals of childhood. By inference, a similar sense of ideological jarring might be expected from parents, whose assumptions about 'what counts' in childhood may reflect those of the school and may not ordinarily extend to positioning children as analysts when responding to texts.

While researchers including Vivian Vasquez (1994), Mariana Souto-Manning (2009) and Jennifer O'Brien (1994) have provided in-depth descriptions of how they have successfully negotiated critical literacies with the young children in their classrooms, research of this type still remains comparatively rare with younger learners, especially in countries where

critical literacy has not been officially recognised by policy (Comber 2013), or in places where teachers' curricular freedoms are limited, including England, where critical literacy has been "slow to catch on" outside of an academic context (Smith 2004: 414). These observations have been reconfirmed by a more recent synthesis of critical literacy scholarship, spanning the years 1990 to 2012, which has called for increased research into developing critical literacies with children at the very start of their schooling (Rogers & O'Daniels 2015: 74).

There are also increasing concerns that critical literacy is a term often misapplied and misunderstood in policy and classroom contexts, including Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (Stone 2012), something that could possibly explain its slow uptake in classrooms. Borrowing from Reay's critique of researchers' overuse (and misuse) of habitus (2004), perhaps it could be said that the policy makers in Scotland have had the same tendency to sprinkle, as a final flourish, the word 'critical' over their documents, in the hope of "bestowing gravitas without doing any intellectual work" (2004: 432), such as providing a theoretical backdrop, which remains absent from curricular documents (see Scottish Government 2004 and Education Scotland 2015). According to Cervetti et al (2001), liberal-humanist approaches to critical reading are commonly conflated with those rooted in critical social theory and critical pedagogy, an opinion that Comber appears to share, given her dismissal of so-called 'critical' approaches that fail to extend pupils past "spot-the-stereotype-on-this-page" type activities (2001: 171). A problem with critical literacy, therefore, is the risk of it being misunderstood or conflated with other literacy subtypes or approaches (such as information or media literacy, see Education Scotland, (undated)), because this may lead either to a watering down of its potential or, at the other extreme, of it being rejected outright as too dangerous and radical for primary children.

What the literature tells us: developing critical literacies inside the classroom walls

Despite these risks and concerns, critical literacy's rising profile has led to a rapid increase in research projects and published works across education in general. According to Rogers

and O'Daniel's research synthesis, 147 articles about critical literacy were published in the three years between 2010 and 2012, a significant rise from the 89 articles published during all of the 1990s (2015: 72). Areas of notable growth were secondary and post-secondary education: a category that included higher and teacher education (2015: 74), leading the authors to call for increased research involving critical literacy and younger children.

Existing research with younger children is encouraging in many respects, especially because a growing number of researchers have used children's literature – picturebooks in particular – as a 'way in' to critical literacy. Clarke and Whitney (2009), for example, have suggested that picturebooks and chapter books employing multiple perspectives can act as a bridge to critical literacy practices because they can help to make pupils aware of "how things change when seen...[from] a different vantage point" (2009: 532). Additionally, Crafton et al have claimed that pupils' understanding of key critical insights, including authors' purpose and reader positioning, can be initiated and enhanced by reading picturebooks that foreground issues of power and inequality (2007: 513), such as *Piggybook*, which deals with the problems caused by everyday sexism at home (Browne 2008) and *Ruby's Wish*, which explores traditional assumptions towards girls and higher education (Bridges 2002). In a similar vein, Souto-Manning has described multicultural children's books as "conversation starters" (2009: 52), a phrase that suggests the potential of these texts to stimulate discussions that might catapult pupils into a new awareness of social or cultural issues and how they might relate to their own lives (2009: 65). As these examples illustrate, other researchers have used the diverse and sometimes controversial themes found by picturebooks to encourage critical literacy, rather than taking advantage of the text type's affordances, such as the "synergy" created between the different modes (Sipe 1998).

Interestingly, many of the classroom-based critical literacy projects involving children's literature have used methods that encourage reading as a shared (rather than solitary) activity, suggesting the inherently dialogic and social nature of practices in this field. Simpson (1996) used reading circles – small groups of between five and seven pupils who

met frequently to discuss aspects of a shared text – as a space in which to explicitly develop students' capacities as text analysts (Freebody & Luke 1990). While Simpson's project involved slightly older primary pupils, Leland et al (2005) reported that Huber, the first-grade class teacher in their study, set out to challenge her own notion of what was 'appropriate' for readers of this age by deliberately selecting picturebooks that concluded ambiguously rather than happily, and often dealt with challenging social issues such as homelessness and racism (2005: 260). Instead of focusing on decoding and comprehension tasks, Huber, like Simpson (1996), used the shared space of story-time to ask explicitly critical questions such as *Whose story is this*? and *Whose voices are not being heard?* in an attempt to broaden the scope of classroom book discussions and to develop pupils' critical understanding as text users and analysts (Comber 2001a).

In a similar vein, Souto-Manning (2009) used the concept of Freirean culture circles to help to create a learning community in her first grade classroom; one that valued multiple perspectives over the "right answer, the best way or the absolute truth", while simultaneously introducing children to the "cultural nature of their own growth and development" (Rogoff cited Souto-Manning 2009: 59). While her emphasis on the 'cultural' aspect helped to bolster the notion of literacy as a "dynamic, evolving, social and historical construction" (Luke 1994), Souto-Manning's approach also supported the idea of reading as involving the "dynamic interaction…between individuals and their environments, their interrelatedness and their reciprocity" (Pantaleo 2009b: 76).

What the literature doesn't tell us: critical literacy beyond the classroom walls?

As the heading above indicates, in this project my interest in critical literacy begins where many other classroom-based studies end. It is important to emphasise here that my issue is not necessarily with the concept of critical literacy, nor is it with how other teachers and researchers have enacted it in their classrooms, although I have explained some of the limitations associated with commonly-used approaches. What has troubled me since 'discovering' critical literacy for myself is what might happen next in these classroom-

based studies: how are these positive analytical practices sustained and developed beyond the classroom walls? How might teachers go about sharing their critical understandings with the families of the children they teach, given the important role families play in children's education (McCoy & Cole 2011)? Or indeed, if such approaches and practices already exist at home, are they received and supported by schools? How is this done? While the authors of classroom-based studies are understandably keen to attribute any positive changes in their pupils' conduct to the development of more critically literate reading practices in school (eg Leland et al 2005), there is rarely any discussion of what might happen when pupils change teacher, or how such practices might be received − or, indeed, already exist − elsewhere.

In their synthesis of critical literacy research, Rogers and O'Daniels (2015: 74) noted that the majority of studies they uncovered had occurred in formal classroom contexts, prompting them to call for more research to be located in informal learning sites and community spaces, although this was not something they explicitly linked to sustaining the practices. Addressing the issue of sustainability more directly, Comber has referred to cross-generational engagement as a potential area for growth (2013: 597), although once again, how to do this was not addressed explicitly or developed in any depth. When viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, the need to extend critical literacy outside of the classroom wall becomes increasingly clear. If, as has been has argued, there is a:

> need for a critically literate citizenship, one that can unpack the systems of meaning that operate in texts to position readers in particular ways as well as to endow them with ideologies they may or may not wish to take on…(Beach et al 2009: 142)

then there is also a need for the ideas and principles of critical literacy to be made visible not only to emerging readers and their teachers, but also to those who read, work and think alongside these readers and teachers, across many differing fields and contexts. Given its status as a product of 'New Times' (Anstey 2002), and its absence from many classrooms, as mentioned above, it seems highly likely that readers from certain generations will simply be unaware of what it means due to the timings of their own educational experiences. As suggested in the introductory chapter, Carrington and Luke (1997) have

used Bourdieu's interrelated concepts of habitus and field to argue that attempts to create such critically literate populations within schools are unlikely to succeed unless these new textual practices are accepted as valid by those who already inhabit the social fields that border onto the school's. They claim:

> unless this new habitus configuration is valued outside the school field,
> that is, unless there is a complementary shift in the power distributions
> of other fields, no amount of critical literacy and valorisation of difference
> will alter the social access of this emergent literate (1997: 109).

In other words, critical literacy cannot survive and thrive if confined to classrooms alone. For it to be sustained, for ideas about critical literacy to 'stick', transformation needs to occur at the level of the habitus, both individual and collective. According to Carrington and Luke, this could possibly be initiated through a 'broader public pedagogy'; an awareness-raising drive to disseminate revised understandings about literacy that would extend "far beyond the classroom door…with the aim of influencing and altering 'what counts'" (1997: 110). In a small way, this project's approach is intended to form part of this broader, public, pedagogic push.

Critiquing the critical

Common to the majority of the studies cited here is the crucial role of the teacher as a living embodiment of a critical perspective through the questions they pose and the attitude they project. As recommended by the New London Group's "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" (1996), many of the practitioners in these projects can be seen to offer readers access to texts via critically constructed frames, while providing explicit or overt instruction in order to scaffold and support pupils' developing understandings of different literacies in practice. In many respects, it seems hard to dispute the good that can come from these approaches (increased cultural understandings or raised awareness of multiple perspectives, for example), yet it is also important to recognise the limitations that can be imposed by a teacher's critical stance, however well-intentioned.

When analysing common trends in critical literacy scholarship, Aukerman (2012) found that much of what gets "celebrated" as good practice is in fact not too distantly removed from teacher-centred pedagogies of transmission, the antithesis of Freire's libertarian education (1985). One common approach is to treat critical literacy as an outcome; an orientation in which teachers use specific texts to highlight or pass on predetermined understandings about social justice issues, such as racism or inequality (Aukerman 2012: 43). As Aukerman has argued, this can be contradictory because "the ideas/beliefs at stake […] function almost like any other academic content knowledge standard in a transmission-oriented pedagogical setting" (Aukerman 2012: 44). In other words, there is still an expectation that the children will align themselves with their teacher's ethical and moral position on a text, even if it is one that does not sit entirely comfortably with their own beliefs.

Equally, critical literacy can be taught as a procedure, where children learn to use a particular set of tools for critique and analysis. According to Aukerman, this risks the preservation of a teacher's textual authority, meaning that students learn to adopt a critical stance "via mimesis" (2012: 45) rather than as a result of independent thought, application or appropriation, and reflection. Again, as Aukerman has suggested, by positioning the teacher as the transmitter of 'right' knowledge and by expecting pupils to "parrot [their] ways of reading critically in order to get a good grade" (2012: 45), it is doubtful that such an approach could ever truly be said to encourage critically literate practices. The limitations of critical literacy as a classroom practice have not been lost on other scholars in the field. Reflecting on her decision to adopt a critical stance at school, Vasquez has described the precarity of the balance between a teacher's projection of critical literacy for learners' empowerment and the possibility that it may simply represent the blanket imposition of yet another ideological perspective (1994).

As an alternative to the classroom-based orientations described above, Aukerman has suggested that critical literacy can also be approached as dialogic engagement (2012:46). Under this approach, children's voices "emerge in conversation and constant tension with

multiple other voices", while teachers relinquish their conventional role as text experts and function more like "air traffic controllers" (2012: 46) who marshall the flow of ideas and opinions without explicitly evaluating their content. While Aukerman does not propose this as a sure-fire, problem-free solution that can somehow neutralise the power inherent in the teacher's role, she does suggest that it may be one conscious way to ensure that "the teacher does not serve as the arbiter of what the text means" while enabling children's voices to "really get the floor" (2012:48). As I describe in Chapter Four, the approach to literature circles modelled by Short (1992) and Souto-Manning (2009) appears to be compatible with the dialogic engagement Aukerman has recommended (2012). Indeed, as I describe in the same chapter, my decision to send the books home from school 'unscaffolded' and to adopt a co-readerly role while reading has been influenced by Aukerman's arguments about the risks inherent within a critical stance.

Reflective summary

To an extent, Aukerman's concerns with critical literacy and how it gets translated into practice have helped me to unpick the problems I have had when articulating what critical literacy means to this study. By far the biggest issue for me has been in defining the relationship of critical literacy to my stance as *researcher* rather than *teacher* in this study, given that my interest has been in exploring the critical potential of readers' responses to metafiction, rather than in trying to promote critical literacy through my words, actions and attitude, like so many of the practitioners referenced above. By advocating the merits of a classroom stance that can promote critical literacy via group dialogue and minimal teacher intervention, or "decentering" (2012: 42), Aukerman has made it clear that it is possible, in fact preferable, for critical literacies to emerge via the "unfolding of social heteroglossia" (ibid: 46) that can enable readers to "come face-to-face with multiple, contingency and ideology" (ibid: 47) themselves, rather than via specific outcomes or procedures.

In this chapter I have explained what critical literacy means and also what it can look like in a range of schooled contexts and settings. I have also started to explain what critical

literacy looks like in this project, although it is a theme I develop throughout this thesis rather than simply in one section. In the next literature review, I discuss the role of picturebooks, provide more detail about metafiction and explore how they can be related to critical literacy.

Chapter Two:

Mapping out the field (continued…)

2. The surprising potential of metafictive picturebooks:

a literature review

"I didn't know they did books like this!"

(Diana, Niamh's mother)

An aim of this sub-chapter is to justify the use of picturebooks in the project by taking an especially close look at the potential of texts containing metafictive devices when read and explored in the classroom and beyond. In addition, I aim to use this review to establish that a relationship exists between the broad aims or 'ethos' of critical literacy (Comber 2013) and the effects of metafictive devices, an idea I pursued as a master's student (Farrar 2016), a time when I also spent many hours exploring picturebooks with my two small children. To achieve this aim, I provide a brief introduction to picturebooks, define some key terms and describe how this study makes use of the multimodal, dialogic affordances these texts can offer. After offering a more in-depth exploration of the concept of metafiction, I review how texts containing these devices have been used by other researchers and to what effect. Finally, I pull together key ideas from across both fields of research in order to suggest the potential of metafictive picturebooks as vehicles for critical literacy practices and explain how such a relationship underpins this PhD study. First, I establish why the rapidly changing communicative landscape of the 21st century means there is a need for picturebooks, and what these texts can offer to both children and their adult co-readers.

Background – the need for picturebooks in a multiliterate world

As discussed in the previous literature review, readers in a multimodal and multiliterate world are bombarded by an increasing range of sophisticated text types (New London Group 1996; Janks 2010). Consequently, it is argued that younger readers need to be given

supported access to a broad range of texts and modalities in order to "develop [their] understanding of the nature of stories and the multiple ways that narratives can be written, represented and told" (Pantaleo 2011: 61). For schools, this involves extending students' experiences and knowledge beyond the text types that adhere to Western conventions (Pantaleo 2004: 212) while also providing a literacy education that can reach beyond the contested 'basics' of literacy as predominantly consisting of reading and writing printed texts (Serafini 2005: 61; Pahl & Rowsell 2005; Walsh 2008: 101).

However, it is not simply younger readers who need access to new understandings about literacy and how it is transforming. For many children, the postmodern is encountered at every turn and can therefore seem everyday or normal (McClay 2000: 91); indeed, this world of rapidly changing communication may seem "utterly unremarkable" (Bearne & Kress 2001: 89) to those born into it. Yet it may be less straightforward for those *not* born into it, such as the parents, teachers and others who have been tasked with the social and moral responsibility of providing children with support and access to these brave new forms of communication − creating a sense of unease and uncertainty about *what counts now* and in *which context,* given the rapidly changing face of reading and writing.

A sense of the mixed messages that can be sent between home and school, or between literacies 'old' and 'new', emerges from a warmly-written paper on this topic, in which Cook (2005), a teacher, mother and researcher, depicts her secret struggle to come to terms with the fact that at home, her own children do not adhere to (nor did she enforce) the literacy practices she projects and prescribes to her pupils' families as their educator. According to Cook, "my children do not do their homework in a quiet, uninterrupted place in our home. My children do theirs at the kitchen table, at the end of the day, when our home is buzzing with activity" (2005: 420). Putting her finger on the sense of dislocation between what happens 'naturally' with literacies at home and what may be enacted or required by schools, Cook's paper highlights the contradiction between what she tells others to do in her "teacher voice" and what she actually carries out as a parent herself. "In

this respect," she concludes, "my educational word is not aligned with my real world" (ibid).

According to Bearne and Kress (2001), this lack of alignment, its resultant anxieties and inherent contradictions have been caused, in part, by the reconfiguring relationship between image and writing, in which writing, for so long the dominant mode, has started to become less powerful. As a result of this change, the authors have claimed that:

> some of our culture's most profound notions are coming under challenge: what reading is; what the functions of writing are; how we are to think about language and its relation to thinking, to imagination, to creativity (2001: 89).

A consequence of this gradual, modal shift has been the creation of a generational split, a crack that could, perhaps, widen over time if the perception of an old/new divide is allowed to persist unchecked or unexplored. From this perspective, on one side are the children who "live in a world that **is beginning** to be dominated by the logic of display", while their teachers and parents remain on the other, "in a world that **was** dominated by the logic of narrative, of structures, of events sequenced in time" (ibid: 91). Despite the sense of difference or gulf created by Bearne and Kress' shifting tense (see above, in bold), these 'worlds' are far from discrete, with many adults and children highly aware of what happens, or 'what counts' on either side, and especially in schools, as Cook's example of her family's own diverse practices has illustrated with such reflective honesty (2005).

As texts that can blur the boundaries between modes while disrupting readerly expectations of what a book (for children) *should* contain, it is my view that picturebooks make the ideal medium for straddling this intergenerational gap between literacies 'old' and 'new', as described above. In the following section, after establishing what I understand the term picturebook to mean, I explain why the affordances of these texts may help to promote greater discussion and foster inter-generational understandings about what counts as reading, or even how books work.

Picturebooks: definition, context and affordances

Given the upsurge of scholarly interest in picturebooks in recent years, it is not hard to

locate a definition of what picturebooks are, or more importantly, what such texts can do.

Among the most frequently cited by other scholars, Barbara Bader's definition of a

picturebook still has "the measure" of the text type, to borrow Lewis' apposite phrase

(2001:1). According to Bader:

> A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture
> and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and,
> foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the
> interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two
> facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page. On its own terms
> its possibilities are limitless (Bader cited Lewis 2001: 1).

Taken together, the "interdependence of words and pictures" that Bader highlighted by her

use of the compound word, can create a tension that Sipe (1998) has also defined as a

"synergy"; a combined effort in which the "total effect depends not only on the union of

the text and illustrations but also on the perceived interactions or transactions between

these two parts" (1998: 99). As Sipe's use of "perceived" suggests, an effect of this tension

is to produce a highly subjective, reflective and recursive reading style, one in which

readers can be pulled one way by the linear direction of the printed text, and in another

direction by the spatial nature of the images (ibid), depending on the context of the

response and their own interests. What sets picturebooks apart from more traditionally

illustrated texts, in which images often play a supportive or reflective role, is that a

"satisfying understanding of the text can only be made by combining the two levels of the

narrative" (Grenby & Reynolds 2011: 211), something Lewis has described as a process of

"mutual interanimation" (2001: 36), a helpful phrase that once again suggests the necessity

of interpreting both modes simultaneously while also indicating a need for openness and

flexibility (ibid). As the final sentence of Bader's comment indicates, when accepted on

"its own terms", a picturebook's intrinsically plural nature (Lewis 1990: 141) can offer up

a more open-ended "writerly" experience, as opposed to the more traditional, linear

trajectories presented by "readerly" texts (Barthes 1970). By challenging readers to extract

and assemble meaning from across the different modes (Nikolajeva 2003: 243), rather than

"assuming the pictures to be in the service of the words" (Lewis 1990: 141), the interpretive, interactive possibilities of a picturebook can feel "limitless" in comparison, as Bader has suggested (Bader cited Lewis 2001: 1).

Yet, given the traditional dominance of the printed word over the visual mode, as described above, the picturebook's twin focus on both words and images can come as something of an intellectual surprise to older readers who may have been taught to "skip and scan" over pictures as less significant (Meek 1988). According to Millard and Marsh (2001), the effects of such schooling can result in:

> a rather simplistic correlation between 'looking at pictures' and a deficiency in literacy, as it is frequently assumed that only those who are unable to read the words have a need for illustration. Visual literacy, except in the highest manifestations in the work of designers and classical artists, is rarely granted status within our education system. Teachers have been educated to consider the movement from pictures to words largely as a matter of intellectual progression (2001: 27).

With the traditional "division of labour" between image and writing under increasing challenge from the fluid multimodality of texts (Bearne & Kress 2001: 91), scholars including Arizpe and Styles (2016) and Serafini (2015) have issued calls for a far greater recognition of visual literacy in classrooms, given its "indispensable" role in developing creative and critical thinking (Arizpe & Styles 2016). Of course, the social nature of literacy means that such awareness should also be raised with parents and families, but, as discussed in the next literature review, this needs to be done in ways that can complement rather than supplant existing out-of-school practices (Brooks & Hannon 2013).

Described by Lewis as "bifurcated" in nature (1990: 141), the dialogic affordance of picturebooks can be rendered visible by the ironic interplay between the words and pictures (Nodelman 1999), a characteristic that can make them ideal vehicles for provoking discussions about how books work, or how meaning is made: initial exploratory questions with the potential to lead into more reflective discussions about what counts as literacy,

why these assumptions may exist and how (and why) literacy practices may have changed. In many contemporary picturebooks, the gap between the modes is not smoothed over, or blurred, but can be "prised open…pushing the [words and pictures] apart and forcing the reader/viewer to work hard to forge the relationship between them" (Lewis 1990: 141). The force of this dialogic potential is also emphasised by the fact that these texts are often read aloud, by readers across a generational divide who bring different − and sometimes contesting − sets of understandings to the shared reading experience. As scholars such as Meek (1988) and Nodelman (1999) have suggested, picturebooks have a great deal to teach readers of all ages. One such lesson can be to "make their audiences aware of the limitations and distortions in their representations of the world" (Nodelman 1999: 79). If this is the case, then picturebooks have the potential to stimulate discussions that are more critical in nature by helping to highlight the ideological nature of any text or any representation of reality. While I support this premise in broad terms, in the next section, I suggest that certain types of picturebook are more ideally suited to this task than others.

Picturebooks and postmodernity

What makes a picturebook postmodern is a question that continues to interest scholars working in and across the field of children's literature. As Goldstone has explained, the term postmodern is used to refer to:

> theoretical and fundamental changes in attitudes, styles and academic disciplines that emerged in Western culture after World War II. It rejects canons and universal truths of earlier 20th century movements, philosophies and artistic traditions… and in their place inserts anarchy, fragmentation, chance, play and anti-authoritarianism (2004: 197).

Several scholars, including Goldstone (1999, 2004), have noted how key features of postmodernism, which include (but are not limited to) indeterminacy or blurring, fragmentation, irony, subversion, playfulness and self-referentiality, can also be found in many picturebooks published in recent decades (Lewis 2001; Anstey 2002; Pantaleo & Sipe 2008; Sipe & McGuire 2008). [For a more detailed list, see Appendix A.]

According to Serafini (2008: 23), unlike the "harmonious" and ordered linearity found in traditional picture books, those described as postmodern often contain "non-linear plots; self-referential techniques…, playful intertextual references, and a sense of pastiche or borrowing from a variety of different literary genres and classic images." By disputing and disrupting what has gone before, picturebooks described as postmodern are those that consciously "celebrate heterogeneity and relativity of viewpoint… [and where] uncertainty, ambiguity and paradox are privileged over consistency and the unitary viewpoint" (Lonsdale 1993: 27). As an influence, a "reaction" (Lewis 2001: 88) or "impulse" (Nikola-Lisa 2004: 35), the impact of the postmodern spirit in contemporary picturebooks has been variously welcomed by scholars for its ludic capacity to "work with the grain of childhood" (Styles 1996: 23); for stimulating the creation of children's texts that can present "unexpectedly varied ways of seeing the world" (Nikola-Lisa 1994: 37), and for offering:

> the greatest possibilities for developing students' interpretive repertoires by forcing them to assume an active role as navigators of the picturebook format and constructors of meaning (Serafini 2008: 25).

While using the adjective postmodern to describe specific picturebook traits and trends has been acknowledged as offering a "useful starting point" (Lonsdale 1993: 25), application of the term has also been contested by scholars, such as Nikolajeva, who have found the dilution of its "temporal designation" problematic (Bagelman 2015: 12). Indeed, Lewis has also observed that the label has often been applied as a descriptive term when there appears to be "little continuity between the books and the wider [postmodern] culture to which they are supposed to belong" (2001: 99). In such instances, according to Lewis, the term 'postmodern' seems to have become a shorthand reference to the text's structural and formal features, rather than to its authors' "cultural sensibilities" (2001: 99). Making a similar point, Nelson (2006) has observed that the devices often described in relation to the postmodern − such as metafiction − can predate this period and therefore "need not inevitably be approached in terms of postmodernism" (2006: 223).

Yet others continue to describe picturebooks through a postmodern prism, with Pantaleo (2014) arguing that the presence of such strong "commonality among the theorists and researchers who have written about specific strategies or characteristics evident in [these books]" (2014: 325) make it highly likely that some "postmodernising influences" would impact on the texts to have emerged during recent decades (Lewis cited Pantaleo 2014: 325). Using Eliza Dresang's Radical Change Theory (1999), Pantaleo has also explained how the influence of more recent social change (eg the impact of the "digital world") can be traced into contemporary children's literature, including picturebooks (Pantaleo 2007: 62). Indeed, the ecological nature of literacy would suggest that any characteristics or practices originally inspired by time-specific, cultural and social phenomena, such as postmodernism or more recent digital changes, could easily become embedded in the mainstream habitus, enduring long after the movement was officially decreed to have ended.

To circumvent the complexities raised by this issue, a shift in focus has been recommended (Lewis 2001). In her PhD thesis, Bagelman (2015) referred to picturebooks as "critical" instead of postmodern, a term she adopted to convey the "same complexity attributed to postmodern picturebooks, but avoid[ing] the… correlation of a shift from the modern to the postmodern with particular textual features," (2015:12). Following the clarity of this logic, I have referred here to the picturebooks used in this study as metafictive in order to highlight the primacy of my interest in the nature (and effects) of the structural and literary devices that are commonly found in texts also described as 'postmodern'. Without wishing to neglect or negate any connection between postmodernism and the metafictive, my intention here has been to sidestep these labelling problems by instead "making a case for the metafictive" (Lewis 2001: 100).

Making a case for metafiction

As a continuation of the debate referred to above, some scholars have argued that 'metafictive' can be used interchangeably with 'postmodernist' (eg Serafini 2005). Yet others have taken a more nuanced approach, highlighting the need for carefully-worded

distinctions between postmodernism as a cultural and historical phenomenon and metafiction as a set of literary devices not necessarily rooted to a specific tradition (Pantaleo 2004). As the overlapping definitions presented in Appendix B illustrate, the relationship between the two is so close that metafiction has been described as "essential to the postmodernist enterprise" (Lewis cited Panteleo 2004: 228).

As alluded to in the section above, what can make a picturebook *seem* or *feel* postmodern − even if it can be argued that the label has been inappropriately applied − is commonly attributed to the effects of metafiction, an approach or set of devices that can interrupt or undermine readers' expectations by deliberately drawing attention to the "artifice of fiction" (Anstey 2002; Pantaleo 2004: 212) or the constructedness of a text. An in-depth description of metafiction has been offered by Waugh:

> Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text (Waugh 1984:2).

According to Grieve, an impact of the heightened, ontological self-awareness that Waugh describes can be to remind the reader of the book's identity "as an artefact and of the reader's own role in realising the text…Metafiction is both a process and a product which denies the reader a passive role" (1998:13). Interested by the idea of metafiction as both 'product' and 'process', I wondered what sorts of reading journeys or cognitive processes could be kickstarted by the experience of unsettlingly self-conscious questions about how meaning is made and how reality is represented. As Wyile has noted, the "marvellous artifice" of a metafictive text, coupled with the surprising nature of its disruptive textual interventions, should be able to stimulate more "overt" levels of narrative engagement among readers (2006: 176), especially those who may be more used to a "stable interpersonal system", in which authors and their readers share less radical assumptions about how books work (Lewis 1990: 138).

What metafiction looks like in picturebooks and picturebook studies

According to Mackey (1990), a metafictive text for children "is to stories what the Pompidou Centre in Paris is to architecture: all the pipes and fixtures are displayed on the outside" (1990: 184). As this excellent image suggests, metafiction draws attention to how fictional texts work by making all of the editorial 'workings' visible: boundaries are broken by narrators who directly address the reader or other characters; plot-lines become multiple and subject to fragmentation or frequent dispute; and any sense of "narrative logic and consistency" is surrendered to playfully carnivalesque displays characterised by excess, inversion and indeterminacy (Lewis 1990: 144). Commonly recognised metafictive devices can include non-traditional ways of using plot, character and setting (Anstey 2002); the use of multiple narrators; non-linear narratives (Pantaleo 2004) and the use of contesting discourses (Anstey 2002). Given the disruption these devices can bring to traditional structures and conventional forms of storytelling, making meaning from them can pose new and different challenges for readers, not least because of their ambiguity and the uncertainty this can cause (Meek 1988). Through the effects of metafiction, readers can be "drawn in, pushed back or allowed to participate from a comfortable distance by the pictures' focus, layout and detail" (Wyile 2006: 176), with Wyile's choice of verbs underscoring the active nature of the reading process in these instances.

In children's literature scholarship, metafiction has often been written about in conceptual terms. Authors such as Grieve (1998), Phillpot (2005) and Sanders (2009) are among those who have provided theoretical accounts of the effects, function and potential of metafiction in texts for children. Less frequent are studies that document children's responses to the metafictive devices found in picturebooks, with Syliva Pantaleo leading the way in this sub-field, although, to return once again to the issue of the contested, indeterminate boundary between metafiction and postmodernism, several other prominent scholars have explored younger readers' engagement with *postmodern* aspects of texts, including McClay (2000), Arizpe and Styles (2002/2016); Serafini (2005); Arizpe et al (2008); and Sipe (2008), sometimes without explicitly acknowledging the role of metafiction. Indeed, the boundary between metafiction and postmodernism could be described as (at worst) blurred or (at best) permeable in my MEd dissertation (Farrar 2016) on children's

responses to *metafiction* in a *postmodern* picturebook; a distinction I have subsequently tried to clarify and sharpen in this more recent exploration.

Broadly speaking, classroom-based research into children's responses to the (metafictive) features and structures found in picturebooks (that can be described as postmodern) suggests the power of these texts, especially when read with primary-aged readers. According to Serafini (2005), the students he worked with were most challenged by the texts' metafictive aspects, such as their ambiguous conclusions, non-linear structures and contesting visual and written structures (2005: 59-60). Despite encountering some student resistance to these "weird books" (ibid: 59), Serafini felt that any new understandings gleaned from such challenges would help to create readers far more adept at navigating the non-linear, hyper-texts that exist outside of school, than those who had always been limited to traditional, linear text types and structures (ibid: 62).

When considering how pupils had responded to the picturebooks used in their original study, Arizpe and Styles concluded that a benefit of using "well-crafted" texts − in other words, those "that are multi-layered or display interesting tensions between word and image or have postmodern features or are aesthetically challenging" (2016:182) − was that opportunities for in-depth engagement, "critical thinking and meaningful learning" were far more likely (ibid: 181). Indeed, having explored what children made of the contradictory relationship between words and pictures in *Lily's Walk* (Kitamura 1997), Arizpe and Styles found that some readers under the age of six offered responses that fulfilled National Literacy Strategy benchmarks set for 10-11 year olds (2002: 238), suggesting the potential of such texts to engage higher order thinking skills, while also highlighting the low reading expectations set for younger readers in analytical terms. Similar conclusions emerged from McClay's study (2000), which explored how differently aged readers − teachers and pupils − made sense of the complexities of *Black and White* (Macaulay 2005). Like Arizpe and Styles, McClay found that the younger readers responded with positivity and flexibility, by devising sets of reading strategies to help them cope with − and enjoy − the text's metafictive complexities. Yet many of the teachers

voiced dislike for the text and struggled to make meaning individually or as a group (2000: 97;101). In addition, some teachers assumed that because they had found the text inaccessible, their pupils would automatically struggle too (2000: 101). McClay's study, to which I refer on several occasions during this thesis, is significant not simply because it illustrates the mismatch between adult expectations and young readers' capabilities, but also because it shows how the *process* of reading and discussing a metafictive picturebook can prompt readers to reflect on the assumptions they bring with them (2000:103), leading to the "sedimenting" of new literacy practices within the literacy habitus (Pahl 2002).

Writing more explicitly about readers' responses to metafiction, Pantaleo's extensive body of research has revealed that young readers are more than capable of dealing with the sophisticated demands of metafictive devices, including pupils who may be considered to be under-performing according to official benchmarks (2004: 227). Over the years, her research has documented how children (aged between 6 to 13 years) can "competently comprehend and interpret" the visual and narrative metafictive devices found in picturebooks (2014: 329; see also 2002; 2009a; 2011), while developing a metalanguage to talk about the devices they encountered (2014: 330). As a result, Pantaleo has recommended engaging with metafiction as a way to help "enrich the development of students' literary understanding about the structure of stories, as well as enhancing their knowledge about the way stories work" (2014: 329). The value of understanding metafiction has been confirmed by Nikolajeva, who has described it as "quite an advanced skill" that can support readers' understandings of fictionality, something she believes is a "key element of literacy competence" (2010: 35).

Indeed, Pantaleo and Sipe (2012) have found that exposing young readers to texts with "narrative diversity" − an umbrella category that includes metafiction − could help to create more "critical readers" because from such texts it is possible to "learn that stories may be told from various points of view, and that those points of view do not necessarily overlap easily with one another" (2012: 13). In addition, because the presence of metafiction can turn a picturebook into a "semiotic playground" (Sipe & McGuire

2008:283), a place where rules or conventions are flaunted, boundaries broken, words toyed with and narratives fractured, I suggest that such texts can also point to the act of authoring and the decisions that publishers, authors and illustrators have made when constructing and disseminating a text (O'Brien 1994: 40).

Lessons in critical literacy from metafictive picturebooks

As this last point begins to suggest, there are clear parallels between the effects of metafictive devices in picturebooks and the broadly-agreed aims of critical literacy practices. Given metafiction's ability to highlight the constructedness of texts, Mackey has suggested its potential as an "engaging ally" for developing readers' knowledge of how texts work (1990: 179), and, by extension, for increasing critically literate awareness. Pursuing a related point, Sipe and McGuire (2008) have noted that:

> self-referential, metafictive elements are precisely the right stimulants
> for encouraging children to become more aware of their own thinking:
> engagement with metafiction encourages metacognition. In other words,
> it is the startling and unexpected qualities of postmodern picturebooks –
> and their drawing attention to the behind-the-scenes work of writing,
> designing and producing a book – that jar children out of the 'comfortable
> practice of reading' and make them aware of their own behind-the-scenes
> reasoning processes as they engage in the hard intellectual work of making
> meaning from these texts (2008: 286).

Extending these ideas further, I suggest there are several areas of agreement or overlap between the effects of metafiction and the broad aims of critical literacy, which can be summarised as:

- the positioning of texts as deliberately-constructed objects or artefacts with a "history" (O'Brien 1994; Pahl & Rowsell 2005: 27) and the subsequent positioning of readers at a distance from a text (Mackey 1990; O'Brien 1994)
- the development of multiple interpretations from diverse, often marginalised perspectives (Pantaleo 2014; Sipe & McGuire 2008; Souto-Manning 2009; Aukerman 2012)

- an intention to interrupt and challenge the status quo (O'Brien & Comber 2001; Pantaleo 2004)

The first parallel, that of positioning a text as an object or artefact, is an idea that is central to critical literacy pedagogies (O'Brien & Comber 2001: 154; Pahl & Rowsell 2005: 27) and definitions of metafiction (Waugh 1984: 2; Grieve 1998: 5). O'Brien has described how she deliberately drew her pupils' attention to the decisions an author made about characters and their activities to invite them to wonder how the same story would read if different decisions had been made (O'Brien 1994: 40; Comber 2001a: 173). Such positioning of the text as an object, as something that has been deliberately constructed, can help readers to "understand the work of the text and how it has been accomplished" (Comber 2001a: 176); a stance that resonates with Grieve's depiction of metafiction as "a fiction preoccupied with problematising the mimetic illusion and laying bare the construction of fictional reality" (1998:5)

To sustain the idea of a text as a deliberately constructed object, metafictive devices can help to keep readers at more of a distance from a text, in order to heighten an awareness of the narrative construction process and the selective practices it involves. As suggested above, the effects of metafiction can help to support, or act as a vehicle for, critically literate practices. By refusing to permit readers access to a vicarious, or lived-through story experience (Sipe & McGuire 2008: 284), metafiction can instead create a sense of space between readers and the text and thus encourage reflection on why such a space might exist and what it might reveal - or conceal. Similarly, Mackey has suggested that the lessons learned from engagement with metafiction can create readers who approach texts with a more:

> reflective and detached awareness of how the processes of fiction
> are operating as they read. They are simultaneously caught up in the
> story and standing back from it, watching it work (1990:179).

Bound up in this comment, to which I return later, is the vision of an 'ideal reader' as someone who can read for pleasure, escape and knowledge, while always remaining aware of texts (and the act of meaning-making) as perpetually particular, partial and never neutral (Serafini 2012). In this respect, Mackey's description of a reader as detached while simultaneously engaged resonates with the critically literate pedagogies advocated by O'Brien (1994), in which teachers seek to help their students "stand back from their texts and view them critically" (1994: 40).

The second parallel between the aims of critical literacy practices and the effects of metafictive devices is the development of multiple interpretations from diverse, often marginalised perspectives (Sipe & McGuire 2008; Souto-Manning 2009; Aukerman 2012; Pantaleo 2014). Common to many critically literate approaches is an aim to develop readers "who must recognise that their own reading of a text is one of many possible understandings" that are always socially and culturally contingent (Aukerman 2012: 44). As Sipe and McGuire have noted (2008), a benefit of reading picturebooks with metafictive devices is that they tend to have multiple narrators and perspectives, meaning that readers can come to accept it as normative that "texts have no absolute, authoritative, unshakable meaning. Respect of other readers' interpretations follows" (2008: 287). Indeed, Sipe and McGuire have also made a broad link from metafiction towards a more critical stance by noting that the development of this particular understanding is particularly important if children "are to develop into critical readers" (ibid).

A third point in common is a shared aim or intention to interrupt or subvert assumptions, although, as I explain below, the idea of subversion is a contested notion. Teachers committed to critical literacy try to interrupt taken-for-granted reading practices via textual analysis (O'Brien and Comber 2001:158). This could be done, for example, by highlighting, challenging and transforming taken-for-granted, stereotypical representations of 'key' characters or plot motifs, such as princesses or stepmothers (ibid: 158) in a bid to consider alternatives and to deconstruct the cultural assumptions inherent in the text. Metafictive devices can also help to interrupt or frustrate traditional reading expectations

and practices (Pantaleo 2004: 214) by interrupting normal narrative approaches, exposing the structure of the creative process to the reader and then showing how it could be presented differently. For example, in *The Bravest Ever Bear* (Ahlberg & Howard 1999), the first text we read during this study, the bear protagonist interrupts the narrator from the very first page by voicing his discontent at the content and direction 'his' story has taken.
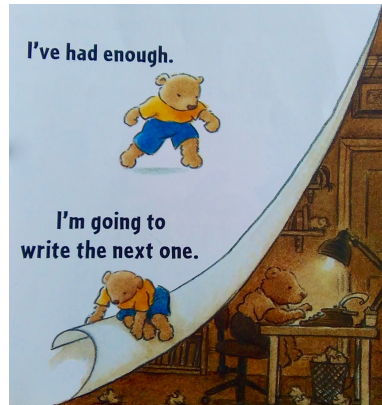
(Image 1: a detail from *The Bravest Ever Bear,* showing the
Bear at work as author and editor)

As I describe in Chapter Three, the Bear's sense of irritation and frustration grows so intense that he usurps the dominant narrative by writing the next instalment in a way that suits his own preferences and worldview. The Bear's intervention inspires other characters to do the same and soon we see a princess, troll and dragon all hard at work on the typewriter, rewriting their own stories. By highlighting the possibility of different versions and by playing with readers' expectations of narrative conventions, texts such as this can invite re-tellings that reflect alternative and perhaps marginalised voices.

Yet the notion that texts containing metafictive devices have the potential to be "liberating, anti-didactic and consistently subversive" has been critiqued by Sanders (2009: 350), who has taken issue with the idea that metafiction alone can "provide a pea − or if that fails, a pumpkin − beneath the mattress that causes the formerly comfortable reader to stir" (Sanders 2009: 350). In particular, Sanders has cautioned against the idea that metafiction in children's texts should be celebrated for its subversive or "disconcerting" relationship with its readers, even although it may poke and prod readers into assuming more active roles, because this subversion is ultimately limited by the fact that such texts

will usually hold up the idea of reading as "a comfortable authority in whose wisdom the reader is told to rest" (ibid 351). While acknowledging that a relationship between metafiction and criticality exists, Sanders has disputed the idea that subversion is an adequate way of expressing what happens when a child engages with metafiction. According to Sanders, the usually friendly relations enjoyed between reader and text make any "cantankerous opposition" unlikely in books read at this stage (ibid 354). Instead, Sanders has advocated an understanding of metafiction that strips away the idea of subversion from a critical stance, a subtle distinction on which I try to build here. Citing the work of Stephens and McCallum, Sanders has suggested that metafiction can be more powerfully understood as offering readers access to a critical stance, from which more "interrogative" actions are possible (ibid 353). In his own words:

> Metafiction is not necessarily prodding the reader out of a comfortable position, but giving the reader a solid position from which to prod dominant ideology (ibid 353).

Therefore, for Sanders, being critical need not necessarily involve a reader "defeating" or rejecting the ideas offered by a text, but should involve engagement via robust questioning and challenge; a position that has much in common with the explanations of critical literacy already offered by scholars such as O'Brien (1994); Jones (2005) and Comber (2013). Indeed, this claim resonates with the playful sense of humour that pervades the picturebooks used in this study, which might help to open up new avenues for questioning while making it a little harder for the books to be rejected in the "cantankerous" spirit that Sanders has suggested is associated with subversion.

Reflective conclusion

While I acknowledge that my account is not exhaustive, the parallels I have described in this chapter are intended to construct a 'solid position' from which I hope to prod and poke at the dominant discourses and ideologies surrounding this project, to borrow Sanders' image (2009). The impact of the lessons such texts can teach (Meek 1988) is visible in the classroom-based research of Pantaleo (e.g. 2004, 2005, 2011), in which pupils were given explicit guidance and teaching about what metafiction is, what it could look like in

picturebooks and what it might cause readers to do, think or wonder. Yet, unlike Pantaleo, I decided not to provide the adults or children in this study with any overt instruction or critical framing about metafiction (New London Group 1996) for reasons I expand on in Chapter Four. Yet, I still begin from the theoretical assumption that metafictive picturebooks have the potential to act as vehicles for the types of analytical or critical literacy practices that are often lacking or absent from the early years of schooling (Comber 2003; Scull et al 2013). By foregrounding the fictional nature of textual construction, I suggest that picturebooks with metafictive devices have the potential to support a more critically literate stance by placing readers at a greater distance from a text, while gesturing towards the ideological decisions made by its authors.

In the next chapter, the third and final literature review, I provide a topographical review of the field of literacy studies, with a particular focus on the concept of the home-school 'divide'.

Chapter Two:

Mapping out the field (continued…)

3: Mapping out the field: Topographical tensions between home and school? A literature review.

"*I wonder if, as parents, we need more guidance.*"
                                             (Helena, Clare's mother)

An aim of this sub-chapter is to construct a sense of the landscape − theoretical and political − in which this project has taken place. More specifically, it aims to tease out how families have been positioned by existing research in this broad field, with a particular focus on the representation of parents in relation to schooling. In this chapter, and in the thesis as a whole, I have used the words 'parent' and 'family' interchangeably to represent the figure of the more experienced adult co-reader who reads alongside a child. In this project, all of the adult readers were parents although I recognise that family groupings are far from uniform. After a discussion of how research into literacy has influenced the hierarchies of school and home, I describe how emerging understandings about literacy practices as fluid and hybrid (Pahl and Burnett 2013) have helped to reconfigure this relationship once again, by disrupting and decolonising existing assumptions about the place or status of out-of-school literacy practices and by making more visible the dynamics of power.

Setting the scene: home versus school

Until the early 1970s, the term literacy was used to refer to the 'basics' an individual would require to decode and write printed script; discrete sets of skills that were usually transmitted to learners from within the formal confines of a schooled context. Those in possession of these socially constructed, arbitrarily imposed 'schooled literacies' had advantages over those who did not, leading to a sense of a divide, or binary opposition. In turn, this helped to stoke literacy myths related to the perceived correlation between a lack

of schooled literacy ('the basics') and a lack of intelligence or civilised behaviour that was imagined to stem from home (Graff 1982: 13; Cook-Gumperz 1986). With governments' assumption of responsibility for mass schooling in the previous century (Luke 2003: 13), schooled literacy practices were able to enjoy unchallenged dominance. As a result, family − or out of school − literacies were kept subordinate while learners set about acquiring the sets of 'basic', autonomous literacy skills deemed most important, yet without any explicit recognition of the ideological implications of this view (Street 1984; Pushor & Murphy 2004).

Turning away from the old: new understandings about literacy

Grounded in emergent socio-cultural understandings from across a range of disciplines, the advent of the New Literacy Studies in the final decades of the 20th century (Street 1984; Gee 1998; Lankshear 1999) signalled a theoretical 'social turn' (Gee 1998) that also had an impact on the status of the home as a valid context for learning. Under this reframed view, literacy was no longer seen as individual and psychological but was understood in broader terms as a set of practices that were also inherently social and cultural in nature (Barton et al 2000). Through this new, more critical perspective, the political nature of literacy suddenly became visible, a theoretical shift that, as Luke has described, had clear implications for teachers of reading but also, by extension, for parent co-readers too:

> Try as we might to avoid it, literacy historically has been tied up
> with the constitution of ideology, of beliefs, of identities. When we teach
> the word, we also disburse a way of reading the world, with all of its wrinkles
> of power and politics: what counts as 'right' reason and action, what is
> apparently 'natural' about men and women, blacks and whites, what an
> 'authentic' response to literature looks like, and so forth… At the heart even
> of skills or rote learning agendas are powerful selective traditions: reading and
> writing are always about something (Luke 1992: 7).

Some 20 years on, understandings about literacy as situated (Barton et al 2000) and ideological rather than autonomous (Street 1984) have been well entrenched into the literature about family literacy, given that there is now widespread agreement of the home as a crucial site for learning in which parents are recognised as their children's first

teachers (McCoy & Cole 2011). The home has also been acknowledged as a "powerful environment" (Tizard & Hughes 1986) that can both consciously and unconsciously teach individuals "how life is lived" (Pahl 2002: 48) within their particular context, at a particular time. The work of Heath (1982;1983), whose extensive ethnographic study into the literate lives of American families within different communities is regarded as seminal, helped to reveal how the process of enculturation was a key part of mainstream success. Writing at a similar time about the lives of learners and their families in deprived parts of Glasgow, Grant (1989) also described the impact that socially constructed assumptions could have on parents' confidence about their aptitude as their children's natural educators. Drawing conclusions that chime with Grant's own, Heath found that children from school-oriented parents were most likely to succeed because the practices they had learned to value and use at home were already closest to those privileged by the school system and beyond (Heath 1982). An important implication of such research was to reveal how family literacy practices could shape an individual's trajectory through the school system, depending on the level of conflict or accord between the practices valued both at home and school (1982: 50). Using different terms to make a similar point, Bourdieu has also described how the habitus acquired in the family provides the basis of the structuring of the school experience, an idea that reflects the "durable and transposable, structuring and structured" (1997: 72) force of family knowledge, despite its frequent reconfiguration throughout an individual's life. What counts as literacy at home – "who has the right to speak, when, about what" (Luke 1994:24) – is therefore a crucial part of a young child's emerging literate habitus.

Against this theoretical backdrop, it can be seen how the culturally-specific literacy practices of families have become increasingly valued as an integral part of what counts when it comes to understanding how children learn to read, write or make meaning in other ways, both inside and outside of school (Gonzalez et al 2005). As a consequence, 'official' recognition of the family and home as integral to children's learning has become more visible within the discourse of some national policy documents, in which parents are described as "partners" (Scottish Executive 2006), or as *participants* working in "partnership" with their children's schools (CCEA 2006:7), with these words carefully

chosen to position families as both active and agentive in relation to policy and pedagogy, although this is not the case in all parts of the UK. Yet, as I discuss next, enacting a shift from research recommendations into policy rhetoric into classroom and community reality can be problematic, due, perhaps, to the difficulty of disrupting or unseating the dominance of school-centred assumptions about literacy in order for them to be accepted as valid and sustainable outside of the classroom, an idea I have already touched on in relation to critical literacy. Before exploring how some researchers have tried to deconstruct the socially constructed barriers between home and school, I describe briefly how the concept of family literacy has emerged and evolved alongside developments in literacy studies in order to show where it sits in relation to this project's aims and design.

Literacy in families: background and definition

Emerging as a response to research that revealed differing levels of congruence between the literacy practices found in homes and schools (eg Heath 1982; Tizard & Hughes 1986), family literacy has always been framed by sociological understandings that have continued to evolve and sharpen over time and though critical scrutiny.

Initially coined by Taylor as a term to describe how literacy practices can be "transmitted within the context of families, often with minimal awareness on the part of children and parents" (Compton-Lilly et al 2012: 34), the concept of family literacy grew into programmes of support targeted at families thought to be most at risk of "educational disadvantage" (Ponzetti & Bodine cited Tett & St Clair 1996: 364) – in other words, those without access to the powerful literacy practices highly prized by schools. Since then, family literacy has evolved into a broader, exploratory concept that has recently been summarised as "a way to describe how parents and children read and write together and alone during everyday activities" (Paratore 2005: 394). Under these newer, expanded terms, which emphasise how families 'naturally' draw on diverse literacy practices according to the demands of their daily lives, the social fields of school and home can begin to be envisaged as parallel, connected and contributing to one another rather than separated by gulfs in understanding.

Yet, in its original inception, remnants of which are still visible today, family literacy was more narrowly focused: a deliberately constructed programme of intervention with the aim of teaching parents how 'best' to support their children's learning. As my use of 'intervention' and 'best' indicate, an effect of such programmes has been to continue to privilege, reproduce and impose dominant schooled forms of literacy at the expense of those deemed to be outside of the mainstream (Auerbach 1989; Tett & Crowther 1998). Indeed, by asking parents to uncritically accept that academic success was predicated on the need to read and write in particularly school-oriented ways, such approaches risked subjecting families to yet more dominance instead of greater empowerment, (Luke 1994) especially if their own practices were viewed as deficit or deliberately held in abeyance as a result of such interventions (Auerbach 1989; Brooks & Hannon 2013). Yet, the continued need for such programmes has been strongly argued for on the grounds that the families they target would not otherwise gain access to the powerful literacy practices already favoured − and demanded − by the mainstream. In addition, as Brooks and Hannon have emphasised (2013), the idea of deficit need not always be negative:

> In a sense there is nothing wrong with deficits − with learners
> acknowledging they have them or with teachers seeking to address them.
> None of us would ever engage in any conscious learning if we did not feel
> we had some deficit we wanted to make up (2012: 195).

Having warned against the negative impact of narrow approaches that required families to transfer or "perform school-like literacy activities within the family setting", Auerbach (1989: 166) argued strongly in favour of a social-contextual model of family literacy, one that combined theoretical insights from critical scholars including Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, with key understandings from New Literacy Studies (eg Street 1984) and ethnographic research (Heath 1983).

From this broadened perspective, which still continues to evolve, it has become possible for researchers to frame any sense of difference or indication of deficit within a wider, social context, given that the aim of such studies is not to "question **whether or how well** children can read and write, but rather to ask **what** children know about literacy and **how** it

is intrinsically informed by their social and cultural upbringing" (Rodriguez-Brown 2011: 734, my emphasis). For scholars currently working in the field, this heightened awareness of literacy as a social practice has become translated into a greater methodological responsibility to ensure that families are offered access to different or additional literacy practices through "collaboration and negotiation rather than imposition" (Brooks & Hannon 2013: 196). As a result, a significant and ongoing challenge for researchers working with families today is to find ways of "using and valuing what families already know in order to teach them what they do not know", which, as Brooks and Hannon have cautioned, is a "subtle process that can easily go wrong" (ibid). As discussed in the methodology chapter, for me, part of this challenge has involved finding ways to disrupt existing power structures and normative assumptions in order to reveal a glimpse of 'what counts' when it comes to reading.

Rethinking relationships at home: putting theory into practice

Following a study that explored whether young children's home literacy practices were reflected by the content of their school nursery's curriculum, Marsh (2003) found that many families' literacy lives were not adequately recognised in school. Likening the flow of ideas and information to a procession of "one-way traffic", Marsh concluded that the relationship between the two contexts was marked by a sense of "dissonance" (2003: 369), given that certain (predominantly middle class) practices were privileged while others were marginalised.

As this image suggests, the home/school relationship Marsh observed back then, more than 15 years ago, was still characterised by a unidirectional flow of instruction and guidance in spite of the already "standard and routinely practised discourses" that urged educators to recognise and embed family literacy practices into their school programmes (Marsh 2003: 369). As the last point indicates, unseating the extractive, school-focused approaches that have dominated work with families requires more than recommendations made at policy level. As mentioned previously, Bourdieu's logic suggests that deeply entrenched, orthodox understandings (or doxa) can only be changed through an experience of "crisis", when

ideas that have been considered as "beyond question" are suddenly held up to new scrutiny (Grenfell 2007: 56), causing them to reconfigure. Therefore, it would seem highly unlikely that policy-level rhetoric directing teachers and parents to regard each other as partners could ever really provoke the necessary "crisis of practical faith" in individual thought and understanding as indicated above (Grenfell 2007). Instead of being imposed from above, it would seem that new understandings have a better chance of emerging and becoming internalised through processes of dialogue and reflective practice. Reflecting on her own "crisis" in understanding, Hilary Minns, a primary school teacher (1993), described how her teaching practice was transformed after recognising the inherently social nature of literacy:

> I [could] see that the advice I offered took no account of the different linguistic and cultural expectations of the parents and children who were on the receiving end … I was writing for an idealised 'culture-free' audience − one which does not exist…Once there has been a recognition of the social nature of learning, the family's own literacy traditions have to be given status within the school. This is truly a democratic process and it is not easy to find ways of going about it because the process involves changes in practice and changes in the nature of the relationship between schools and the communities they serve (1993: 27).

As Minns' comment indicates, the difficulties of affecting wide-reaching change of this type means there is still much to be done to level out the power dynamics between home and school, if, indeed, such levelling is ever possible. In recent years, prominent family literacy scholars such as Rodriguez-Brown (2011) have continued to restate how urgently schools need to learn, understand and apply understandings about families' culturally and linguistically specific literacy practices to their curricula and classroom approaches (Rodriguez-Brown 2011: 748). While I agree with this, I would add that change must also come in the other direction, from families and community members who may themselves have been schooled into unthinkingly privileging scholastic literacy practices over and above their own. How to go about reconfiguring these assumptions in ways that are ethical and equitable is a focus of my methodology (Chapter Four), as well as the section that follows here, in which I describe how other practitioners have attempted to divert the flow of traffic between home and school from a "one-way" stream (Marsh 2003: 369) to a "two-way street" (Rodriguez-Brown 2011: 748).

Inspired by their own experiences as teachers, researchers **and** parents of school-aged children, Pushor and Murphy (2004) set out to challenge the idea that they had ever been truly positioned as partners in their children's education, despite policy claims to that effect. Critical of the approaches employed in the North American context in which they lived and worked, the authors noted that they were left feeling "subservient and relatively unimportant" as parents, despite having fully engaged with all of the activities that were *supposed* to make them into partners, such as school-oriented tasks like reading at home, communicating with school, supporting homework and volunteering (2004: 224). According to Pushor and Murphy, the roles they were offered did little to rectify the power imbalance, something that caused them to feel "positioned off the landscape of schooling" (2004: 224). As Cairney and Munsie have noted, this is perhaps because the onus has long been on "what parents can do for teachers, rather than what schools can do for families" (1992: 5), a comment that resonates with Marsh's notion of "one-way traffic" (2003). While Pushor and Murphy did not explicitly ascribe their schools' unidirectional agenda to critical issues of power, the imagery they employed to describe it implicitly acknowledged the home/school relationship as a socially constructed narrative, one in which parents (the "antagonists") and teachers (the "protagonists") are expected to assume well-worn "character roles", and where the "plot line" of parental involvement in schools is a "well-known and well-rehearsed story" (2004: 222), suggesting its taken-for-granted status.

Frustrated by the meaninglessness of the empty political rhetoric and concerned about its impact on other parents with less power than themselves, Pushor and Murphy used their roles as teachers to explore ways of working "alongside" their students' families in a bid to rewrite traditional narratives about school and home (ibid: 222). In a sense, it became possible to disrupt conventional protocol and to bring about new understandings, both at home and in school, by drawing on insights from their experiences as parents in conjunction with their privileged teacher knowledge. This was largely achieved by changing how, when and where they communicated with the parents of their students. Rather than sending home formal, impersonal letters or expecting parents to come to school, they visited their students' families at home or in other out-of-school contexts in

order to consult with them on the best ways to improve their child's performance, or to find out what other factors might be influencing certain behaviours in school. By doing so, they acknowledged parents' status as "holders of knowledge" about their children's lives (2004: 223), while emphasising how powerful these insights could be when "laid alongside" a teacher's curricular and pedagogic knowledge, equably rather than hierarchically (ibid 234). According to the authors, both parents and teachers gained confidence and new, positive understandings from the experience.

Other scholars, including Gonzalez et al (2005) and Jones (2005), have employed similar approaches in order to transform the dynamics of power that usually condition home-school relationships. In her study of girls, social class and critical literacy, Jones (2005) met with students' families in spaces outside of the classroom as part of a bid to "dismantle the carefully assembled barriers" (2005: 106) that existed between her, as a teacher, and the home lives of her students. By enacting shifts in practice, such as becoming more visible in the community and by giving parents the freedom to change the location of parent-teacher meetings from school to their homes, local cafes or other community venues, Pushor, Murphy and Jones (and others) all aimed to recalibrate the balance of power by positioning parents as experts with crucial insights into their own children's lives and education. As will become apparent in later chapters, these ideas and approaches have influenced and shaped the project I describe here.

New understandings: new metaphors

As I have explained, research in this field has long been presented in binary, for-or-against terms (Compton-Lilly et al 2012), a characterisation that has contributed to an increasing sense of dislocation between home and school over time (Marsh & Thompson 2001: 267). As a result, metaphors involving bridges are frequently invoked to describe initiatives or projects that aim to provide a link or connection between two apparently disparate sides. In many respects, the PhD project I describe here is contingent on the perception of difference between home and school literacy practices. Indeed, it is precisely because schooled

literacies remain largely dominant that there can ever be a 'need' for research that examines why such practices might remain immune to challenge.

By deliberately placing family knowledge *alongside* (rather than below) that of a school's, research by authors like Pushor and Murphy (2004) and Jones (2005) has emphasised the continuities that also exist between contexts, in addition to the disconnections and gaps; a trend that resonates with current directions in literacy research (Pahl & Burnett 2013). In a recent review of research trends in out-of-school literacy practices, Spencer et al (2013) also noted a blurring between in-school and out-of-school literacy practices, something they have attributed to the influence of sociocultural studies (2013: 134). Consequently, different metaphors are necessary in order to describe the flows and connections between the two locations, while also recognising the structural, societal and macro aspects that work to keep them apart. Inspired by Tett and Crowther's description of pupils' diverse experiences as a patchwork of influences (1984), I suggest that the same image could be used − unfolded, perhaps − to illustrate the relationship of homes and schools. Just as the differently-patterned squares of fabric within a patchwork design represent "neither a unity nor fragment" (Griffiths 1998: 12), the different literacies of home and school can also be visualised as existing alongside one other, without hierarchy and yet offering a variety of perspectives. In addition, the work of the stitches between squares (which can be unpicked and re-sewn) can be seen as representative of the potential flow of common or shared literacy practices, while simultaneously suggesting the social, cultural and historical barriers between them. Focusing on these areas of interface or connection can be productive because, as Bourdieu has suggested, it is from encountering such difference that new or transformed knowledge can emerge (Marsh 2006, Grenfell 2007). Indeed, by acknowledging the dynamics of power − the stitches − that are always at work both unifying and separating, it may be possible to resist the "zealous defining and fixing of others" (Phipps 2013a: 12) that have contributed to the home and school 'divide' in the first place.

Reflective conclusion

As with the previous chapter on critical literacy, the process of mapping out the literature in this field has helped me to dissect some conceptual problems that have been thrown up by this study's transient nature and its indeterminate location somewhere in between home and school. Indeed, as my use of 'somewhere' indicates, this project's location has proved hard to pin down and categorise. As I describe in depth in Chapter Four, for reasons of ethics and child protection, I met with the young readers within their school building, although our literature circles took place in shared spaces outside of their classrooms. In addition, the books we shared had no link with their existing schoolwork and had not been read with their teachers or peers: only a family member. Yet they were picturebooks, a traditional middle-class oriented media form (Marsh 2003), read with me, a teacher-like adult, in a room within the school building. So in that sense, the 'work' enacted by the project was school-like, while also *unlike* school, a subtlety I tease out further in the chapters that follow. In a similar way, the project cannot truly be said to be 'of the home' for several key reasons:

- the reading that the adults and children enacted at home did not occur 'naturally' or spontaneously as an 'everyday event' (Paratore 2005) but as a response to my research requests, meaning it could also be interpreted as a form of schooled intervention;
- with only two exceptions, my conversations with parents did not take place in the home, but occurred in and across a fluid range of locations in and around the school grounds, including the local play park, outside of the school gates and the school bike shed.

While I recognise that schooled or family literacy practices do not actually have to take place in the school or home in order to achieve that title, my broader point here is to highlight the impact of place, space, context and positionality on response (Madison 2011; Pahl & Burnett 2013), and to suggest how impossible it is to decide where home ends and school begins, and vice versa. Or, to return to the quilt metaphor, how difficult it is to decide which square represents the beginning, or origin, once all of the patches are assembled together. As a result, the perspective I have adopted has focused on the presence

of links and continuities and not only the gaps that exist between home and school, although this is not to discount the important work that seeks to expose the gulfs and inequities within this complex area.

In this chapter, I have outlined how historic tensions between home and school have positioned parents in relation to the field of education. In addition, I have started to map out the peripheral or 'betwixt and between' nature of this project when considered in relation to the fields of home and school. In the next sub-chapter, I develop these issues further still by introducing the concept of liminality and by explaining why it has been helpful to visualise the project as a liminal space.

Chapter Two and a half:
Taking a liminal view - **the project as a liminal space**

"Hang on, is this me as a reader or me as a parent?"
(Brendan, Eve's Dad)

It seems both highly appropriate and somewhat ironic that this mini-chapter about liminality − a concept that is concerned with the transformative power of transitional places or in-between moments − should have caused me so much anguish as a writer, largely because it proved so hard to decide where to locate it within this dissertation's overall structure. Indeed, given that liminality, like critical literacy, is a concept that has had an epistemological influence and methodological impact on my approach, it also seems fitting that it should end up in this location, in a separate yet also interconnected section, sandwiched between the literature reviews and methodology chapters. By presenting this short introduction to liminality here, just before more in-depth details of the project are revealed in Chapter Four, my aim has been to provide a context and justification for my application of this important concept, to which I return at several points, including the methodology.

Liminality − a brief introduction

According to Turner (1985), liminality is of vital importance for effecting regeneration and change in individuals and cultures. Writing about ritual processes within an anthropological context, he noted that the state of being "betwixt and between" two places (such as adolescence and adulthood) could be threatening, anxious-making and disorientating as well as liberating − in other words, a state replete with possibility as well as challenge (ibid). As the phrase "betwixt and between" suggests, liminality is an "interstitial" stage or state that occurs during a process of change or development (Conroy & de Ruyter 2009: 5). But it is more than a mere passing place or somewhere to simply journey through: its significance is also linked to its ability to "suspend or negate" what has previously passed as normative, permitting a brief and transitory space for

contemplation, questioning and the possible reformulation of understandings and ideas (ibid).

As Bourdieu's concept of doxa also suggests (Grenfell 2007: 56), such moments of ideological crisis or dissonance are crucial for individual learning and growth because it is thanks to these encounters that taken-for-granted assumptions can be destabilised, allowing new forms of knowledge or experience to emerge. With this in mind, liminal spaces can perhaps be visualised as sites of intellectual struggle; temporary meeting places that spring up to accommodate the demands made by differing types of knowledge; conceptual spaces that can be instrumental to the forging of new understandings. For Turner, the essence of liminality lies in its ability to "make possible the deconstruction of the 'uninteresting' constructions of the common sense" (1985: 160), a phrase that echoes anthropology's great aim to *make the familiar strange*, and, indeed, the Bourdieusian ideal of being able to "grasp the habitus" (Fowler 2000: 1). Once provoked into a liminal state by the discovery of knowledge that seems "troublesome" due to its difference (Cousin 2010: 2; Land et al 2014: 200), learners are said to engage with these new concepts, while reformulating those that already exist (Cousin 2010: 3). Once mastered, any concepts learned at the liminal threshold are "transformative… and usually irreversible", acting as portals to new perspectives (Land et al 2014: 200) and understandings.

As Meyer and Land's work on threshold concepts has exemplified (2005), Turner's original theory has been widely applied in fields outwith anthropology in order to illustrate political and cultural shifts and the processes involved in deep learning. To account for this diversification, Turner also coined the word *liminoid* to describe events that may have liminal-like qualities, but which differ fundamentally from those found within more traditional cultures, particularly in terms of their relationship to broader social processes (1982: 41). Following the examples set by other researchers in the field, here I use the broader term *liminal* rather than the more nuanced *liminoid*, although I acknowledge and embrace the distinctions I have mentioned above

Liminality and literacy

My interest in liminality has been influenced, in part, by the recent shifts or 'turns' of literacy scholarship that have aimed to highlight the spaces or gaps that exist in between the "bounded or unitary" binary-like constructs that have traditionally dominated the landscape of literacy research in educational settings (Pahl & Burnett 2013: 3). As already discussed in Chapter Two, a consequence of this new focus has been an emphasis on finding ways to explore and express the continuities and flows that exist between practices, contexts and readers (Pahl & Burnett 2013). As the following example illustrates, the concept of liminality has already been applied to family literacy classrooms in order to describe the potential of the understandings that can be reconfigured there.

Creating 'third spaces' for family literacy

Describing family literacy classrooms as literal and metaphorical threshold spaces where the discourses of home and school can be recognised and validated, Pahl and Kelly's study (2005) explored the shared activities that took place in a standalone family literacy classroom, where parents, their children and teaching staff collaborated on a range of joint projects. Drawing on Bhaba's theorisation of liminality as a concept that can offer access to a "third space" between two extremes (Kalua 2009), Pahl and Kelly emphasised the fact that because neither home nor school could dominate in these classroom settings, new sorts of relationships could develop (2005: 92). Interestingly, the classrooms they worked within were both located within larger, institutional 'schooled' settings: one in a government-funded Sure Start centre and the other within the grounds of a state school. As a result, it is debatable that such settings could actually ever be free from schooled dominance, given their physical location within authority-owned buildings, not to mention the initiative's part-focus on developing parents' understandings of National Curriculum benchmarks (Pahl & Kelly 2005:93). However, it is also important to acknowledge the impossibility of finding a physical setting that could ever be 'truly' free from any such influence, while remaining accessible enough for parents, children and their teachers to meet without difficulty. According to Pahl and Kelly, any issues caused by the "material reality" (for example, the nature of the setting) were "superseded by the context of…both discourses" (2005: 92). In other words, as a consequence of working together within these

family-oriented, school-based, in-between spaces, Pahl and Kelly's study created a context that enabled parents to gain in confidence as their children's co-teachers, while their children learned to value their parents' skills. Of particular significance to this study is Pahl and Kelly's claim that the sites' liminal nature and intermediate location also helped teachers to improve their knowledge of their pupils' out-of-school literacy practices, given that the texts produced in the family literacy classrooms often highlighted forms of knowledge that might ordinarily have remained hidden or neglected (2005: 96).

In addition, by labelling the family literacy classrooms they created as 'third spaces' (or liminal − the terms were at times used interchangeably in the paper), the researchers sent a "signal to teachers [about] the nature of what they [were] doing by working with parents … at the threshold of home and school" (2005: 96). As their use of *threshold* suggests, an important function of this classroom was to offer an intermediate venue for the different discourses to co-mingle and reconfigure. Yet the paper did not make it clear how transformative the experience was, especially for the teachers involved, who may have been responding to the researchers' identification of a need for an intervention, rather than necessarily arriving at any new awarenesses via a more active process of discovery. Therefore, the notion of a liminal space seems to have been symbolic in this case; used to identity the significance of the classroom's location in between two discourse worlds. As this example shows, applying a liminal lens to their study enabled Pahl and Kelly to highlight the positive transfer or exchange of literacy practices that had occurred across both sites and some of the changed understandings that emerged.

Inspired by Pahl and Kelly's project (2005), I recognised that locating this study in spaces and places that lay *somewhere* in between home and school might make it possible to accommodate aspects both fields while self-consciously privileging neither. Yet unlike the study described above, in which the creation of a family literacy classroom provided a tangible representation of a mid-way point, this project had no such consistent or cohesive location, relying instead on a fluid range of settings that shifted according to availability and, to some extent, the Scottish weather. As I describe in Chapters Four and Five, my

conversations with the children took place in a range of spaces within the school building, all of them outside of their usual classrooms and separate from their teachers and peers, in places where slightly different dynamics held sway. And while the presence of the school building loomed large in most of my conversations with the parents, both metaphorically and literally, our conversations took place in a different range of 'in-between' settings, including the school gates, street corners close to the school and the local play park, none of which belonged entirely to the realm of home or school.

The picturebooks as liminal objects

Like the spaces we co-inhabited during the project, I also conceptualised the books we read together as liminal in nature. In part, this was aided by the status of the texts I had selected, none of which were regarded as mainstream best-sellers for young readers at this age or stage. In addition, the picturebooks were also very unlike the reading scheme books that the school usually sent home to involve parents in their children's literacy development (Marsh & Millard 2001). At the time, it occurred to me that some readers may have thought of picturebooks as texts they had long outgrown. Therefore, to be asked to read such texts (within an official research project) may have seemed a bit unusual, almost a retrograde move, in light of commonly-held developmental assumptions linked to reading. According to Marsh and Millard (2001), commonly-held misconceptions about picturebooks as an "age-related phenomenon" and visual literacy as an "unambiguous and automatic" skill can lead to assumptions that such books are no more than:

> a kind of prop which sustains and supports the initially incompetent beginning
> reader. Often implicit is the belief that the sooner the children's behaviour
> resembles that of the adult reader, seen as routinely and skilfully absorbing pages
> of unbroken and unillustrated print, the better (Marsh & Millard 2001: 27).

Belonging to neither home nor school in a pedagogic or canonical sense, the metafictive texts we shared offered familiarity through their format, feel and, to a more limited extent, through their fairytale and nursery rhyme-rich content. Yet, given metafiction's ability to unsettle existing ideas about reading and reality by "self-consciously and systematically" drawing attention to a text's fictionality (Waugh 1984: 2), I wondered if the books'

disruptive nature might also prove *catalytic* in a liminal sense, by helping to carve out spaces for new understandings to emerge. Intrigued by the liminal potential suggested by the combination of the books, my own role (which I describe in Chapter Four) and the spaces we had occupied, I wondered how readers might respond to the discovery that such unruly, unconventional and challenging texts were lurking within the familiar-looking covers of a picturebook. Could reading and talking about the books within the temporary confines of the project prompt further reflection, leading readers to recalibrate their existing understandings? If any threshold concepts were to emerge (Cousin 2010), what might they be?

Framed by these ideas, in the next chapter, I introduce each of the four picturebooks in turn, describe the process of selection and provide a justification for their inclusion in this study.

Chapter Three:
Introducing the picturebooks

Jennifer: And what did your mum and dad think of the book?

Niamh: I think they thought it was quite weird.

Described variously as "*weird*", "*funny*" and "*strange*" by readers in this study, the picturebooks selected for use and the order in which they were sent home are of central importance to the research design. In the previous chapter, I explained what makes metafictive picturebooks so interesting, especially in relation to critical literacy. In this section, I provide an overview of each of the four books, with an especial focus on their metafictive characteristics. First of all, I provide details of the critical content analysis process that enabled me to assess and arrange the books into an order that reflected their increasing complexity, before sending them home from school with the children.

Content analysis is a tool that can allow researchers to interpret texts by coding and identifying their themes and patterns. According to Beach et al, approaches can be "intuitive, impressionistic [and] interpretive" as well as systematic (2009: 129). As described by the same authors, the process involves the creation of analytical constructs or theoretical frames that are then used to filter and focus how the content is explored. What makes a study critical, they claim, is not the methodology "but the framework used to think within, through and beyond the text" (2009: 130). With this in mind, the framework I have constructed reflects this project's grounding in understandings from the New Literacies (Street 1984; Anstey 2002; New London Group 1996); postmodernist-influenced approaches to children's literature (Anstey 2002; Goldstone 2004; Pantaleo 2004) and critical literacy (Simpson 1996; Comber 2003/13). By drawing together these resources, I formulated a table of key understandings (Appendix B). It is important to note that while the table is representative of the main theories and theorists who have influenced my approach, it does not account for the many readings and ideas that may have informed my stance less explicitly.

Following Jenkins (in Beach et al 2009: 135), while reading through each of the four picturebooks, I marked up the places where I felt that 'textual gaps' or points of interest occurred. Describing these "oh!" moments as places containing the "genesis of inquiry or interpretive discussion" (2009: 135), Jenkins has suggested they can be used by researchers (and, by extension, teachers or other co-readers) as signposts to indicate where further collaborative and open-ended inquiry may be possible within a group of readers. To give structure to my thoughts, I made notes on each text that were focused on the key understandings described in Appendix B. These spontaneous scribblings on sticky notes were then expanded into more detailed, written commentaries on each of the texts.

Writing in the same paper (Beach et al 2009: 137), Rogers outlined a different approach to content analysis, one that involves the examination of the gestural, spatial, linguistic and visual designs of a text on a page-by-page basis. Doing so enabled Rogers to identify the modes present in a text and to observe how they patterned together to privilege some readings or meanings above others. Given the synergy that exists between words and pictures in picturebooks (Sipe 2008) and this project's interest in the ways that metafictive devices may help to undermine the dominance of 'schooled', predominantly text-centric approaches to literacy, I also thought it might be useful to read the texts with an eye on the interaction of the modes and the possible influence of metafictive devices.

In order to analyse each text (*The Bravest Ever Bear*, *The Three Pigs*, *No Bears* and *Black and White),* I made detailed notes under headings that reflect the project's theoretical perspectives and show the influence of the approaches referred to above (Beach et al 2009). These notes are presented in table form in Appendix C. As the extract provided in Table 1 shows, in the second column ('Brief content description'), the details I refer to have been tailored to reflect the analytical lens of the third and fourth columns, which are 'metafictive devices' and 'critical literacy practice and/or understanding' respectively. The overlaps and correspondences that are evident between the final two columns also reflect and support my underpinning theory of a powerful and productive relationship between the broad aims of critical literacy practices and the effects of metafictive devices.

The Bravest Ever Bear Page ref	Brief content description	Metafictive device(s)?	Critical literacy practice/ understanding?
First page	Page contains a sepia-coloured image of a typewriter with an almost blank piece of paper inserted. The 'paper' reads: 'This Walker book belongs to' with a space for the reader to write their name.	The image hints at the reader's role as a co-author and draws attention to the text as an artefact that has been deliberately constructed.	The use of the word 'belongs' draws attention to the fact that readers will approach texts differently and will draw on different resources to fill in the 'gaps' left by authors. Reader engagement is demanded from the outset.
1st DPS: containing publisher's details, title page and contents.	Moving from L-R, we can follow Bear as he gets ready to start the story: he wakes up in bed, dries his hair after a bath and finally hops about in anticipation close to the point where the reader will turn the RH page and the story will begin.	Bear's preparations draw attention to his role as a character or a performer and therefore the fictionality or performativity of the text. The list of chapter headings reads like a list of characters, also suggesting the nonlinearity of the narrative?	Bear's 'awareness' of his acting role highlights and celebrates the text as a constructed object. By showing us where the *real* story experience begins (when we turn the page) Bear's actions already begin to subvert more traditional approaches to narrative.

Table 1: An extract from Appendix C, an example of critical content analysis.

The process of analysing the books in this way was important in that it enabled me to appreciate the breadth and complexity of responses that *could* be possible to these sophisticated texts. It also made me think deeply about the texts' scope and potential − both with and without schooled scaffolding or teacherly instruction. As data, the analytical content I generated was intended to inform but not constrict the discussions I had with parents and children. Like Jenkins (in Beach et al 2009), I wondered whether the 'oh!' points I identified would resonate with any other readers.

The following paragraphs provide a broad overview of each of the picturebooks. For more in-depth descriptions of the metafictive devices at work on each page (although my accounts cannot claim to be exhaustive), the tables of content analysis are provided as Appendix C.
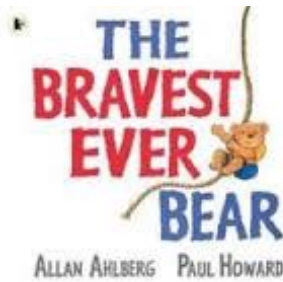
Ahlberg, A. and Howard, P. (1999) *The Bravest Ever Bear,* **London: Walker Books**

(Image 2: front cover, *The Bravest Ever Bear*)

The Bear's story begins on the title pages (which double as the publisher's page) when he gets out of bed, gets washed and 'ready', emphasising the performative nature of the story that lies ahead. The first double-page spread ('The Bear'), which consists of white space and contains three images of the Bear, also carries written text in two main fonts of differing sizes. The larger typeface, which carries the dominant narrative voice, is a serif font that suggests this voice is linked to well-established traditions of print and story-telling. The smaller one, which initially carries the Bear's voice, is sans serif, printed in bold and is suggestive of a more vernacular, conversational style. The function of this font, or voice, is metafictive in that it is used by the majority of the characters, including the Bear, to interrupt, challenge and subvert the version of reality that is presented by the more imposing-looking 'narrative' serif font. However, the divide between imposing and imposed upon is not as clear cut as this account might suggest, because the dominant voice also has a metafictive function. As the verbal and visual exchanges on the first double-page spread illustrate (see Image 2a), the story delivered by the dominant narrative voice is far from traditional and toys with the idea of 'what counts' as a story. The first story, 'The Bear' consists of only two sentences: '*Once upon a time there was a bear. The End*', causing the Bear to exclaim, with arms outspread in a gesture of disbelief: *'What's going on?'* By the seventh 'chapter', the Bear, who has by now become thoroughly irritated with the disruptive, non-conventional approach of the dominant voice, peels back the white page of the 'book' to reveal a back office, where he settles at a desk among piles of crumpled-up paper to work on the version of the story *he* thinks should be told.

The story that he creates − *The Bravest Ever Bear* − is extremely conventional in that it follows a linear, chronological structure, is peppered with superlative references to his own strengths and achievements and ends with his defeat of a dragon and his marriage to a princess. However, it is at this point that the Princess, who objects to her passive inclusion in the Bear's story, also climbs 'back page' to take over the story, changing its direction

and outcome to suit her own expectations and preferences. This pattern continues for the rest of the text, with a variety of characters – including the 'baddies' (the troll, wolf and dragon) – all taking turns to write their own stories, seizing the opportunity to challenge existing assumptions or stereotypes about themselves along the way.

The Other Bear

Once upon a time there was *another* bear.

No, no, it's still me!

The   End

This is no fun.

(Image 2a: contesting narrative voices in *The Bravest Ever Bear*)

The story has at least two endings: in one sense, the Bear's narrative comes full circle and concludes with him back in bed, exhausted after such a chaotically busy day. Another version is more open-ended and sees the penguin, a minor character who has, until now, existed only on the margins of other stories, taking his turn in the writer's chair. His closing comment: 'Now let's see…' emphasises that stories are not static but are subject to constant revisions and re-workings, according to the demands of the author and context.
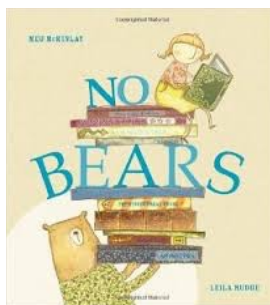
McKinley, M. and Rudge, L. (2013) *No Bears,* **London: Walker Books**

(Image 3: front cover, *No Bears*)

Ruby, the young narrator of *No Bears*, is tired of reading books about bears. She has decided to write her 'perfect' tale, creating a book-within-a-book that develops with every turn of the page. Ruby's written story is about a princess (Ruby), who is kidnapped by a monster but saved from a tragic end by her faithful fairy godmother. After throwing a party to celebrate her fairy godmother's courage and loyalty, Ruby's story ends 'happily ever after'. Yet the visual narrative carries an alternative plot line that contests with the certainty and dominance exuded by Ruby's text.

Unseen by Ruby, a benevolent-looking Bear is present on almost every page, despite Ruby's determination to create a bear-free book.

From its marginalised position on the shadowy edges of the storybook world, the Bear surreptitiously and wordlessly stage-manages Ruby's story, stepping in to avert disaster on several occasions. This includes the ending, when it is the Bear − and **not** the fairy godmother − who rescues the princess. Although the Bear remains unacknowledged by Ruby, the rest of the characters, including the fairy godmother, respond by leaving Ruby's party behind and clustering around the Bear to listen to its alternative version of events, which is expressed as a series of images.

The story ends ambiguously. While Ruby concludes her narrative with a confident sounding 'happily ever after', the Bear's unhappy, wordless outcome jars with the reader, creating a sense of injustice that is exacerbated by the fairy godmother's dejected expression as she is helped to recognise her role in the proceedings. As Ruby's views on bears have not been challenged or changed, it looks as if the Bear will continue to be forced to live on the margins of this particular storybook society. Yet, the upset visible on the faces of the other characters and their final placement on the Bear's page rather than Ruby's, could suggest that change is still possible.
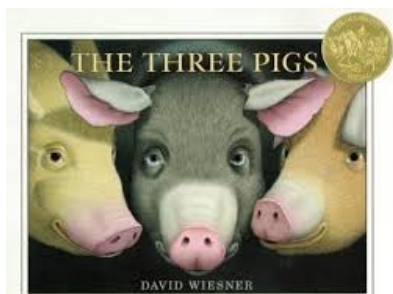
Wiesner, D. (2001) *The Three Pigs*, London: Andersen Press

(Image 4: front cover, *The Three Pigs*)

The metafictive aspects of Wiesner's text are apparent from its opening pages, when the 'traditional' beginning unexpectedly and delightfully descends into a chaotic, non-linear adventure caused by the wolf's huffing and puffing, which unintentionally blows the first pig out of the story. Excited by his new-found freedom, the first pig

encourages his porcine friends to join him in the white space, well away from the wolf and his predatory intentions.

Wiesner interrupts the well-known version of *The Three Pigs* in terms of its plot (the pigs turn the wolf and the page he appears on into a paper aeroplane, visit both a nursery rhyme and a fantasy story about knights and dragons before returning to their own transformed tale) and also in terms of the devices that are used to tell the story. Like *No Bears*, there are points when the words and images contradict one another; there are competing narrative threads and visual styles as the pigs try out different genres for size, and the majority of the action takes place in the usually innocuous white space that surrounds the story frames the pigs have now evacuated. As a result, the limits or boundaries of stories are made visible as we watch the pigs decide which story worlds to enter – or leave – and then witness as they reassemble and re-enter the panels of their original narrative once they feel it is safe to return home. This time, of course, they do so complete with a wolf-deterrent in the shape of a powerful dragon.

Like the authors of the other picturebooks used in the project, Wiesner plays with the idea of stories as selective, creative and subjective acts, while also exploring their vulnerability and malleability to change and retelling. For example, in the final spreads, when the dragon comes bursting out of the front door in order to surprise the wolf (who is about to resume his huffing and puffing after all the confusion and digressions), its head crashes into the sentences of text that are already there and sends the letters flying in all directions. Symbolically, the dragon's obliteration of the written text could also signal the end of the traditional version of the tale, where the wolf dominates over the pigs. Yet Wiesner's retelling, with its emphasis on friendship and sharing also seems to put an end to alternative versions of the story that see the wolf boiled alive in a soup pot or chased out of town. Instead, the final scene shows the new friends sharing some food and conversation while all squeezed inside the third pig's tiny brick house, with the semi-reconstructed text still dangling haphazardly above them. From out of the window, the wolf can be seen

sitting quite benignly on the grass, leaving the reader to speculate about the future of these characters and other possible ways of telling their stories.
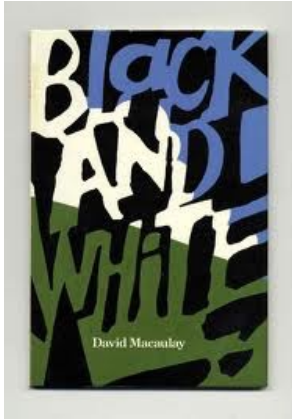
Macaulay, D. (1990) *Black and White***, Boston: Houghton Mifflin**
(Image 5: front cover, *Black and White*)

Macaulay begins this award-winning picturebook with a warning: readers are advised that it may or may not contain more than one story, while 'close inspection' of both words and pictures is recommended. The double-page spreads are divided into quadrants, each carrying a narrative thread that varies in subject matter, visual style or grammar, font and narrative perspective. As the warning to readers suggests, it is up to individuals to decide how to read the text (all four boxes at once, left to right, or one box at a time?), and to determine whether the stories are separate entities or all part of a singular story.

The top left hand narrative, *Seeing Things*, is a third person account of a young boy's first journey alone on a steam train, where he encounters a mysterious old lady, runs into delays possibly caused by rocks (or is it cows?) on the tracks and experiences a 'snow storm' of tiny newspaper flakes. In the bottom left hand corner is *Problem Parents*, the first person recount of a teenage girl, who describes the time when her usually work-focussed parents come home dressed in newspaper hats and garments. The images show her brother busy playing with a toy train set while the television set in the background carries a report of a missing robber. The top right hand box, *A Waiting Game*, consists of a repeated single image of a train station throughout the day. Starting off empty, the platform becomes densely populated with newspaper-reading commuters, who read while they wait for their delayed train to work. Possibly out of boredom, one female passenger turns her newspaper into a hat, with others quickly following suit. They begin to sing and shred their newspapers into tiny squares, which swirl around the train when it finally pulls into the

station to carry them away. The only text is the formally-worded passenger announcement apologising for the delay.

Finally, the fourth box, *Udder Chaos*, on the lower right hand side, contains words and images that appear to be unconnected. The written text is in the style of an agricultural manual and describes the habits of a specific breed of cow, the Holstein. The images show the progress of a robber, who can be seen lowering himself down a rope of knotted sheets on the title page and then disguises himself among a moving herd of Holstein cows in order to evade detection. The final single page consists of a single image that contains visual links to several of the other narratives: in it, a large hand picks up the train station, while a dog with newspaper in its mouth stands by, watching and waiting. It is possible, although not necessary, to make connections between all of the four stories, using both the words and pictures. What makes Macaulay's approach so metafictive is that it makes explicit some of the readerly decisions that underpin the processes of reading and meaning making, but which often remain invisible. By constructing the text as a challenge or a puzzle for readers to work through, Macaulay positions his audience as co-authors while also challenging perceptions about how books are read. There are multiple ways of reading this book, presenting readers with a level of ambiguity not found in the other picturebooks used in this project.

Reflective summary

Although I realised that some of the families may have already read the picturebooks, or others like them, I recognised that the four books I had selected were quite different in nature from those my son and daughter ordinarily brought home from school. Therefore, I decided to arrange the books into an order that reflected my assessment of their complexity, drawing on an idea suggested by Pantaleo and Sipe (2008). Having analysed the books in detail, I felt quite strongly that the style, structure and content of *The Bravest Ever Bear* and *No Bears* might feel more familiar to readers than those of *The Three Pigs* and *Black and White.* As the most complex of the texts, I decided that *Black and White* should go last and wondered whether reading the previous three picturebooks might help to

prepare the readers for tackling its puzzling structure and abstract subject matter. Therefore, the final order the books were sent home in was: 1) *The Bravest Ever Bear*; 2) *No Bears*; 3) *The Three Pigs* and 4) *Black and White*.

In this chapter and during the literature review on metafiction and picturebooks, I have explained the significant role of the texts in this study. Building on this, in the next chapter I describe the rest of the project's design and methodology.

Chapter Four:

Ways of talking with readers - a methodological overview

"Shall I just talk?"

(Helena, Clare's mum)

Having introduced the picturebooks in the previous section, I now provide an account of the study itself. Broadly speaking, the study falls into two methodologically distinct yet also intertwined parts: the first, the set of methods that gave shape to my discussions with the children inside the school building; the second, the different approach and understandings I used to frame my conversations with the children's parents that took place across a range of settings outwith the school walls. In the paragraphs that follow, I justify the decisions I took as a researcher and project designer and explain the rationale and challenges behind the methods selected for use in both segments.

Due to the project's dual location both inside and outside of school, I drew on − and adapted − aspects of research commonly enacted in both fields in order to work with participants in ways that not only satisfied the requirements of my institution's ethical scrutineers, but which also tried to account for my own ethical concerns about the imbalances of power that can characterise empirical research, particularly when located within an educational context.

Despite the different considerations that researching with adults and children can entail, practically and ethically (Punch 2002), both parts of the project were underpinned by a common aim: to explore the "ways of taking" (Heath 1983) that might emerge from readers' responses to the metafictive devices used across each of the four picturebooks. As described earlier, Heath's seminal work into the language practices of families was part of a larger push to illustrate how literacy is inherently a social phenomenon that both shapes and is shaped by an individual's interactions within their cultural, social, political and

historical contexts (Street 1984; Lankshear 1999). Grounded in such understandings, my aim has been to consider readers' responses as also indicative of broader assumptions about 'what counts' in terms of reading in the early years of primary school.

Overview: research design for the <u>school-based</u> part of the study.

The basic structure was as follows: I worked with two groups of children from a local primary school: four from Primary One (aged 4.5 to 5 years) and four from Primary Two (aged 5.5 to 6 years). Over the course of several months, the series of four picturebooks were sent home with the children without instructions or intervention other than "please read this book at home". As explained in Chapter Three, *The Bravest Ever Bear* (Ahlberg & Howard 1999) was the first of the four picturebooks to be sent home. It was followed in subsequent weeks by *No Bears* (McKinlay & Rudge 2013), then *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner 2001) and *Black and White* (Macaulay 1990) in an order that reflected their increasingly complexity. I put a typed slip inside the copies of the first books, which repeated some of the information I had already emailed to parents (Appendix D). In total, I carried out eight small group reading sessions or literature circles in school: four with the Primary One group and four with Primary Two.

The school

Based in a suburb of west Edinburgh, in Scotland, the research took place in a large, state-run primary school with more than 500 pupils drawn from a wide, mostly urban catchment area. According to recent data, 3.4 per cent of its pupils are eligible for free school meals, a figure that is considerably below the Scottish average of 22 per cent. My relationship with the school is multilayered in that both of my children are pupils there and I have a history of research activity in the school. The first project was the Masters level study described earlier, which involved a Primary One class and their responses to one picturebook (Farrar 2016). This study led to an on-going, positive relationship with the school and as a result, I have also carried out several voluntary literacy projects, including a whole-school 'creative week' based around a single picturebook (Farrar 2015), have provided training and in-class

support to members of staff, and have also helped the nursery school to update and resource its home library provision.

Recruitment of volunteers

An introductory letter containing an overview and information about the project (including a Plain Language Statement (PLS) with a tear-off reply slip) was sent home to every member of a Primary One and a Primary Two class, approximately 55 children. The classes were identified in advance by the headteacher and both class teachers were fully supportive of the project. Interested families were asked to reply by a specified date by handing the tear-off slip into the school office. In total, 14 slips were returned (plus an additional three submitted once the project was already underway). From the original 14, I separated the replies into Primary One and Two and picked four from each at random. The table below shows the make-up of the group by gender, including that of the parent nominated as main participant:

	Pupils	Parents
Primary 1	3 girls, 1 boy	3 mums, 1 dad
Primary 2	2 boys, 2 girls	2 mums, 2 dads

(Table 2: Participants, by gender)

Data collection in school

On dates specified to parents by email and arranged with the teachers, I collected the children from their classrooms (one group at a time) and spent between 50 minutes and one hour reading and discussing the books in a spare classroom or the school library, depending on the availability of space. With the participants' consent and assent, the sessions were recorded and later transcribed for the purposes of analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Glasgow (see Appendix E) and permission received from the children and parents to conduct the research and disseminate the findings. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms, which were chosen by myself.

Methodology: school-based work

Following in the footsteps of well-established classroom-based picturebook researchers (e.g. Arizpe & Styles 2003/2016; Pantaleo 2002; 2004; Sipe 2008), a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate for a project that involved the interpretation of children's thoughts and ideas on the books. Yet, given the close relationship between epistemology and methodology (Trochim 2006), the influence of my interest in critical literacy as a way of reading the word and the world (Freire 1996) can be traced through many of the methodological decisions I took in this project. Having observed group and whole class reading in the school, I knew that it was common practice for reading sessions to be teacher-led and tightly controlled in terms of their agenda and outcome, but also in terms of how the children were permitted to respond to the teacher-initiated questions on the text.

Literature circles

Building on my own classroom experiences as a secondary teacher and knowledge from other research projects, I decided to use literature circles as the main way to discuss the books with the children. Comprised of a maximum of four child readers − plus myself − I hoped that the small group gatherings would create a setting less intimidating than whole class discussions, while also promoting and permitting dialogue, interruptions and digressions above the teacher-led talk that can often dominate reading in school (Short 1992; Pantaleo 2004). As Souto-Manning has shown (2010), reading and discussing literature in small groups can enable children to generate themes and ideas in a spirit akin to Freire's culture circles.

After arriving at school and greeting all of the children in the class, my usual practice was to gather together my small group of readers and walk with them to whatever space was available for us in the school building, which varied from week to week. On several occasions, the children started to talk about the books in the corridors, before we reached our specified location where recording could begin. In retrospect, I have recognised the value of these initial, bubbling-up comments and wish I had also recorded them. After we arrived in our space (which included the school library, an empty classroom, the school

medical room and, on one occasion, a waiting room adjacent to the school office) and the children had picked where they wanted to sit, I reminded them about the voice recorder and usually let one of them switch it on and off. Sometimes we played about with the device, and made silly, short recordings which we listened back to with much interest and giggling. After the first week, the children knew they were 'allowed' to interject, interrupt and ask questions during the shared readings. While some hands flew up to offer answers, this seemed to dwindle as the weeks progressed and our conversational habits relaxed. I tended to start each session with a general invitation, such as, '*Tell me what you thought about this book*' and then allowed the discussions to develop from there.

Drawing on Smith's work on reading practices in primary schools, I deliberately positioned myself as a co-reader, trying to place "the power to respond, to speak and to think" (1999: 59) with the children, rather than with myself, although this was not always straightforward, as I describe in Chapter Five. With a parallel interest to my own in terms of exploring reading practices that might be "more conducive" to critical literacy, Smith's work in classrooms (2004: 416) has indicated that analytical and critical insights might be "more likely" if pupils can be positioned as initiators rather than responders and if they can be encouraged to articulate ideas based on their own understandings rather than those of their teacher (Smith 2005: 30).

My approach during the group reading sessions with the children was also influenced by an awareness of the peculiar nature of my status. To some of the pupils, I was already known as the mum of children who were also at their school. In addition, I was known to others as the "*lady who came in and read stories to our class*" (Ben, Primary Two), something I had volunteered for during the previous academic year in order to support the school during Book Week, a national reading promotion. Like Smith, I acknowledge the fact that as a researcher − a privileged classroom visitor with no 'official' curricular duties and no disciplinary pressures − I was able to assume a different, less formal relationship with the children (1999: 59), something that may have impacted upon their responses. Yet I remained aware of the strength of my own teacher persona and the real risk that my

relationship to the texts might determine and sculpt what students were 'allowed to know' and think (Baker & Freebody 1989: 171).

Initially concerned that I would not be able to entirely bracket out the dominance of my teacher self in the literature circles, my confidence was strengthened by Tizard and Hughes' (1986) account of several young children's literacy lives both inside and outside of school. Although the home reading sessions they observed were often "chaotic", disordered, full of disagreements about the choice of book and vulnerable to collapse (1986: 59-60), Tizard and Hughes found that conversations at home (on a range of topics − not just books) were characterised by a richness of content and depth of thought that could lead to "passages of intellectual search": enlightening and often elongated episodes when the young children grappled with their existing ideas to account for the impact of new understandings (1986: 126). In addition, reading sessions at home were found to be characterised by a high level of child-initiated questions and interactions, presumably because of the familiar, comfortable surroundings and the intimate relationships that existed between the readers young and old. When examples of talk from home were contrasted with those that occurred between the same children and their nursery teachers, the researchers noted that:

> The richness, depth and variety which characterised the home conversations was sadly missing. So too was the sense of intellectual struggle and of the real attempt to communicate being made on both sides. The questioning, puzzling child which we were so taken with at home was gone: in her place was a child who, when talking to staff, seemed subdued, and whose conversations with adults were mainly restricted to answering questions rather than asking them (Tizard & Hughes 1986: 9).

By illustrating how children's responses differed between home and school, Tizard and Hughes' study also highlighted what might be lost in translation between contexts, when rules of conduct shift and different relationships apply. Applying this insight to my own study, I wondered if the format of literature circles might help to evoke some of the curiosity-rich discussions that Tizard and Hughes had found in homes, by creating a space in school for reading that could be set apart from more traditional teacher-led approaches

to shared reading. While I was determined to share the responsibility of interpretation with the children as a co-reader, I also retained an awareness that the children's social conditioning and expectations might make it impossible for them to see me as anything other than an adult in a 'teacher-like' role.

No scaffolding: sending the books home

My decision to send the picturebooks home without any scaffolded instruction was motivated by a similar desire to generate a broad dialogue about the books, and to stimulate an opening-up of ideas and theories, such as what they were about, how they worked etc. In addition, I wished to explore my hunch about the *work* that could be done by metafiction. Usual practice in these classrooms was to read and discuss books in school first, before sending them home to be re-read with parents. I wondered, however, if this approach might encourage any schooled interpretations to 'stick', or to be privileged above alternative versions that might emerge while reading in a different context. By sending the books home unread, my intention was to try to somehow subvert – or at least adjust – the usual flow of meaning between home and school. As discussed in an earlier section, this flow is often unidirectional from school to home, causing scholars such as Marsh (2003) to call for an exchange of knowledge and ideas that can travel both ways. With these ideas in mind, I anticipated that a more diverse range of interpretations might be possible if the home readings could occur first, given that each family pairing would draw on different "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez et al 2005) to differing extents in order to make meaning from the texts. In addition, I theorised that the metafictive devices found in the texts could also support the development of plural interpretations, and could therefore promote more open-ended discussions (Pantaleo 2004). By adopting such an approach, I hoped to promote the idea of realities as multiple and socially constructed while aligning myself with the key critical understandings I have set out in Appendix B.

Overview: research design for working with the <u>parents</u>

Once the first book had been sent home in the children's schoolbags, I contacted their parents individually by email to arrange a time and location for a discussion of the book. In

that first email, I emphasised that they could choose how and when to respond to the books and suggested options that included discussing in person, over the telephone or via email. I also offered to meet with the parents at times and in locations that suited their daily routines, such as immediately after dropping the children at school, at the end of the school day or after the children had gone to bed.

As Table 3 shows, each parent selected different ways to talk about each of the books:

Parent	Mode of response
Laura	In person: in the playpark (with children); walking to school gates; at the school gate; in the school playground before pick-up.
Chloe	In person: at the school gate before pick up; in the school playground/bike sheds before pick-up.
Brendan	On phone: in evening.
Barbara	In person: walking to school before pick up; via email; on phone in evening.
Michelle	In person: in school playground after pickup, sometimes with children present.
Helena	In person: at home, with other children present; in waiting room of local church hall (playgroup) with niece present; walking to playgroup from school.
James	Via email; on phone; also spoke to his partner, Ben's mum, about the final book.
Niall	On phone: two conversations at home during the afternoon; once at his office during lunch hour. Additional conversation with Niall's wife, Diana, about the final book in the school playground at pick-up.

(Table 3: Where and how the parents chose to respond)

As with the children, my conversations with parents were semi-structured, principally by our shared understanding of a requirement to discuss the picturebooks in some depth, although digressions onto other topics were frequent, inevitable and enjoyable. After starting off the discussion with a broad invitation such as, *"tell me what you thought of the book,"* I tried to follow the direction set by each individual. Some conversations spanned

more than one book and our discussions varied widely in length, from eight to 45 minutes. After each conversation, which I recorded (with permission) using a hand-held device, we tentatively arranged how, when and where we would speak about the next book.

Methodology: talking with parents

As alluded to already, my overall approach was shaped by an ethical interest to develop a decolonising methodology (Phipps 2013a), using approaches that consciously aimed to decentre the researcher's status and power, although I acknowledge the limits of my success in this regard. Some of these limits were a result of my status as a researcher who is necessarily subject to institutional codes, "procedural ethics" (Guilleman & Gillan 2004) and the influence of methodological norms, all of which shaped and conditioned my own expectations about what might be possible and what would pass muster with those assessing my performance. In addition to these restrictions, I felt keenly aware of the dynamics of power at work in this study, particularly in relation to the adults I worked with. Perhaps this registered so acutely because enacting the project had also required me to change status. From being a 'normal' parent, full of school gripes and playground gossip, I was now asking members of my peer group to account for themselves (Butler 2001), not just as readers, but also as *parents*, within the context of an official, publishable university research project. Recognising such positionality within research has a vital role, according to Madison, "because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects" (2005: 7). With this in mind, the ways of talking − or "taking" (Heath 1983) − I developed with parents represented a conscious attempt to address and recalibrate the imbalances of power that can exist between the researcher and the researched.

Inspired by Jones' account of her work with her students and their families (2005) and others I have mentioned in Chapter Two, I hoped that offering parents a range of ways to communicate their thoughts on the picturebooks could help to transfer some of the decision-making powers that would otherwise have rested with myself. By thinking through some of the methodological questions that have been raised in the field of

intercultural research (Phipps 2013a, 2013b), I also found it difficult − almost unpalatable − to categorise my conversations with the parents as 'interviews', semi-structured or otherwise, because of the clinical, desk-bound, power-laden dynamics such a word evokes. Instead, I have used words such as 'conversation' and 'discussion' throughout this thesis in order to represent my heightened awareness of the power structures at work, although I do recognise that as the researcher in charge of the tape recorder and author of this thesis, that the power of representation ultimately rests with myself.

Where to locate the conversations with adults also became problematic for reasons that were not applicable to the children, due to the school-bound locations of our sessions. To meet with the adults within the school building might have seemed intimidating to parents and would also have anchored the project firmly and physically to the world of school, a powerful social field with its own arbitrarily specific logic and values. Similarly, to suggest that parents could invite me into their homes felt like an imposition that also diverted away from my wider ethical aim to 'fit in' with their lives. In addition, using the family home as a primary site for researching with parents could have raised separate issues related to power, while also risking a dichotomisation of the project along starkly defined contours, something I wished to avoid. As Table 3 indicates, one parent did invite me to her house on two separate occasions because it suited her childcare arrangements. While I was more than happy to accommodate this, it was not an option I actively promoted for the reasons given above.

Several parents − including all three fathers − circumvented the issue of *where* to meet by requesting that we discuss the books over the telephone in the evenings, once all of our children were in bed. In these instances, my aim was to ensure that the telephone manner I adopted was similar to my face-to-face approach, in that I did not follow a set list of questions and followed the direction of the ideas we generated together. The conversations were recorded and transcribed in the same way as the face-to-face discussions. Given the differences in medium (e.g. over the telephone as opposed to in person) I acknowledge that all of our conversations were subject to different ebbs, flows and contextual influences.

For those who preferred to meet with me in person, I wondered if walking and talking about the books might help to relieve some of the formal, hierarchical tensions that interviewing can create. As Moles has noted:

> the rhythm and practice of walking [enables] narratives [to] emerge
> that might not have been uncovered in a stationary interview…through
> walking, the researcher and the participant bimble into new narratives
> and discover and construct new spaces together (2008: online).

Given my concerns about the power dynamics implicit in more commonly-recognised methods of collecting data, 'bimbling' with parents offered a fluid and responsive means of decentring ways of talking, while making space for agendas, ideas and questions other than my own to emerge (Holliday cited Phipps 2013a: 11). In addition, the act of walking and talking through the public spaces and pavements that connected homes to school also resonated with my interest in liminality and third space theory (Turner 1985; Rutherford 1990), in that it encouraged parents to explore and express their ideas in the midst of familiar settings that existed on the margins of the more dominant, formal and polarising social fields of home and school.

As Table 3 indicates, walking while talking did not suit all of the participants, so I adapted the method to suit the parents' needs. While I walked and talked with one mother on the way to collect our children from school, I met with another in the local play park, where we discussed the books, our eyes trained on our clambering, dangling children. On different afternoons, I met with other mothers (separately) on the pavements outside of the school gates, where we would talk before gravitating towards the children's after-school dismissal spots once the bell rang. Sometimes it was necessary for us to hide, with pushchairs, bags and babies, from the wind and rain in the safety of the school bike sheds. One mother preferred to talk amid the turbulence of the playground, during the 15-minute gap between the end of her younger child's school day and his sibling's, who was several years older. Consequently, many of the recordings made at this time are punctuated by shrieks, screams and school bells; by interjections and requests from children − often our own − and I found it interesting to hear how fluently we flipped and slipped between

personas: from mums issuing stern instructions (*"Don't do that!"*) back to picturebook experts enthusiastically discussing the texts.

Of course, it could be argued that the location of many of these conversations offered parents little or no freedom from the 'shades of the schoolhouse', to paraphrase Wordsworth (1807), due to the fact that spaces such as playgrounds are council owned and form an official part of school property. Yet, as Bettis and Adams have suggested, school playgrounds can also be thought of as liminal and transitory in nature (2005: 11), as places where 'ownership' fluctuates according to time and levels of supervision. During the school day, when teachers assume sole control, the children's voices and bodies − and, to a lesser extent, those of their parents − are said to be regulated by sets of scholastic and socially constructed codes of conduct. Yet in the moments surrounding the beginning and ending of the school, the playground is said to be translated to a different space; a place where teachers, children and parents can exert and contest levels of power and responsibility. Applying Turner's ideas of liminality (1985) to the school playground helped me to conceptualise it as a shared physical space, a place where home and school could interweave and co-mingle at either end of the school day. It is within these patches of flux and ambiguity that I envisage my conversations with the parents to have taken place.

A liminal, critical reflection

As I have already explained, my discussions with the children took place within the school building, in rooms that were not their classrooms and away from their teachers. While it could be argued that these shared spaces were not liminal in a material sense, it is my understanding that they represented a symbolic third space by operating at a remove from normative school arrangements and routines. Indeed, I suggest that it is the sense of surprise, or feeling of upheaval, that comes from changes to 'normal' routines, spaces and places (or, indeed, books) that can make liminal moments possible, creating tiny chances for "equitable practices and possibilities for learning" to emerge (Gregory et al 2004:4).

The indeterminate nature of my own stance also played a role in the construction of the project as a liminal space. Without realising it at the time, the approach I adopted appeared to draw on liminal aspects of the Trickster figure, a character from legend and story who is said to inhabit "a borderland between different worlds or different conceptions of the world and its experiential content" (Conroy & Davis 2002: 256). When translated into an approach for learning and teaching, or, indeed, for researching, the Trickster is someone who occupies a position on the "threshold of inside/outside, hegemony and heteronomy" (ibid: 261); a space that lies "between not only childhood and adulthood but also between the centre and the periphery" (Conroy & De Ruyter 2009: 7). In many respects, the multi-faceted and fluid nature of my status as parent/teacher/researcher made it possible for me to assume such a stance. Given my interest in carving out a research (rather than teaching) stance that could transition across and between the notional borderlands of home and school, it makes sense that Trickster or liminal-like traits were visible in my efforts to "shift shape and offer a challenge to both worlds" (ibid: 267) through the methods and locations I selected. This sense of transitioning across and between borders was especially true of the conversations that took place with parents at (or around) the school gates, given their symbolic role as guardians of the threshold between the two realms. Indeed, as I describe in Chapter Six, many of the parents became border-crossers themselves, shifting fluently back and forth between their roles as individual readers and mediators of the text, and between the dual aspects of their relationship with myself, as someone who was both a member of their parental peer-group and a university researcher recording their words.

In this chapter, I have described how my lived experiences as a teacher, parent and border-crosser have influenced my selection of research methods and locations, particularly in relation to the parents. I have also accounted for *why* and *how* I sought to lay the children's and parents' knowledge *alongside* my own (Pushor & Murphy 2004). In addition, by explaining why I selected methods that aimed to disrupt existing power relations (which are to the advantage of the researcher and not the researched (Phipps 2013a)), I have emphasised my commitment to research that is "broader, looser [and] more generous" in its nature (Law 2004: 4).

Despite these well-intentioned efforts, I remain aware that these same claims could not be made for the methods I employed with the children in this study. As a method, the literature circles we engaged in were certainly *less extractive* in nature than other research tools, yet it remains that the sessions were all school-based, a factor that must have imposed conditions on the children's responses. In addition, the important requirement of child protection guidelines, university ethics and my own sense of responsibility as the adult in charge meant that the methods I used with the children were less fluid and organic than those used with the adults. As a result, I can see that my approach has raised several methodological contradictions and questions, such as, was it fair to treat the adults as adults (and also parents), yet the children as pupils? Did my school-based approach inhibit the children's ability to function as "active social agents" (Qvortrup cited Harden at al 2000)? In truth, many of these questions cannot be answered here, but the act of reflection and critique has forced me to confront my own assumptions and oversights. As Guillemin and Gillam have suggested, such reflexivity can prepare researchers for any "ethically important moments" that may arise (2004: 261), such as my own realisation that studying and representing others is always an act of domination (Madison 2013) that requires interrogation, deconstruction and significant reflection.

In the next chapter, I begin by reflecting on the process of analysis and propose a Bourdiuesian-influenced version of reader response theory, before moving on to analyse and discuss the **children's** responses to each of the four picturebooks in turn.

Chapter Five:
Talking about the books - how the children responded

> *Niamh: They're kind of making the words, it's not*
> *actually telling a story any more really.*
> *Ben: No.*
> *Niamh: No, because he is bouncing the words and you*
> *can't really read them. You have to go like this* [turns book]
> *to read them.*
> *Ben:* [whispers] *"Hey! Out here! Come out here!"*
> *(Primary Two, The Three Pigs)*

Constructing an analytical frame for the responses: The problem with grounded theory…

Initially, I approached the analysis of my transcripts with some trepidation. As the work of children's literature scholars has often demonstrated (Pantaleo 2004, Sipe 2008, Arizpe & Styles 2016), readers' responses to books tend to be analysed according to the principles of grounded theory, where researchers employ well-established qualitative methods to construct codes and themes from out of the data themselves. During a lecture on his research methods, Lawrence Sipe said this approach had enabled him to come to his analysis without any preconceived notions, in order to "let the children's talk during readalouds […] reveal what literary understanding was for them" (2011:1). Like Sipe, I believe it is important for researchers to respect the voices and opinions of participants and to find methods that enable them to 'speak for themselves'. To an extent, the principles of grounded theory seemed to offer creative and reflective ways of achieving this (Cutliffe 2000), suggesting a 'best fit' in analytical terms.

Yet, unlike Sipe, I had some misgivings about how grounded theory alone could be compatible with a PhD project that started out, as I have described, so deeply immersed in understandings drawn from a critical perspective. I did not see how I could cordon off or ignore these 'preconceived notions' because they felt too inherent, too central to the project's conception. In addition, having discovered that the research paradigm I had

constructed had so much in common with a Bourdieusian perspective, I wanted to engage with these ideas and allow them to frame any theories that emerged, instead of holding them in "abeyance" during the process of analysis (Costa 2014). Given that critical literacy has been described as an "attitude" or "commitment" (Luke 2000), it is clearly a perspective that can transform the way an individual looks at the world (Jones 2005). Likewise, it has been said that thinking through a Bourdieusian lens can also produce a "sociological gaze" with the potential to change "one's whole vision of the social world" (Maton 2011: 60). Given the strength of these understandings, I knew I would find their epistemological effects hard to ignore.

In my view, a more realistic version of grounded theory has been proposed by Cutliffe (2000), who has suggested that researchers should allow their prior knowledge to interplay with the data instead of bracketing it off artificially. As a result, the themes and theories that are generated will quite probably be guided by "the *subconscious* perceptual and intellectual processes of the researcher's mind" (Turner cited Cutliffe 2000: 148). Again, while broadly I agree with the concept of this approach, I wondered to what extent it could accommodate a researcher who *consciously* (rather than subconsciously) applied a theoretical filter to the themes and codes emerging from their data. I also found myself in agreement with Flewitt et al's assertion (2015) that contemporary research should be more than an "unthinking exercise in application and analysis" of tried and tested methods (2015: 1) − a comment that encouraged me to think theoretically and creatively around my sticking points with grounded theory. Would it be possible to theorise grounded theory, I wondered, in order to create a form of data analysis that could move iteratively between a bottom-up, grounded theory-like approach and an overarching, top-down theoretical canopy? Would moving back and forth between the two have methodological benefits by encouraging me to critically reflect on the opportunities and constraints of each approach? With a mind full of these caveats and questions, I approached the process of how to conduct my data analysis. In the paragraphs that follow, I describe and evaluate my approach while explaining how I reconciled my concerns.

Critical literacy, reader response and Bourdieu

If, as Comber and Kamler have suggested, a critically-literate focus is one that pays explicit attention to the *decisions that authors make* (1997), then, given the influence of critical literacy on my perspective, I decided to approach my transcripts by examining the *decisions that the child and adult readers made* when telling me about the picturebooks. In other words, I focused on what readers had decided to tell me about the books within the confines of this research project, with a further consideration of *why* these decisions might have been made.

A study that had explored primary school pupils' identities as readers also proved immensely helpful in arriving at this stance. In this paper, Ryan and Anstey described how they had analysed participants' responses according to the reading resources they drew upon "naturally" when making meaning from a picturebook (2003: 13). The authors claimed that the children's responses could be thought of as "natural" because they did not result from any direct teaching or explicit instruction from the research team, who had tried to remain neutral throughout (2003: 21). In their discussion, Ryan and Anstey qualified their use of this word by acknowledging that the students' responses would have been conditioned by their "general experiences as readers" as well as any prior reading lessons they had learned both in and out of school (2003: 13). Although I was intrigued by this approach to reader response, I felt that 'natural' was perhaps too slippery or opaque a term to appropriate without scrutiny into a study that also aimed to explore the social and ideological undercurrents that flow through and around the literacy practices used by a group of parents and children. Yet, if 'natural' could be understood as referring to the fact that readers had been largely unscaffolded by any teacher-like interventions, I reasoned that the children's responses could be interpreted as representative of the decisions they had made as socially constructed, individual readers when faced with a complex text. In order to acknowledge reading as a social practice, I felt it might be more appropriate to discuss and theorise the nature of readers' decisions and responses through a lens assembled from Bourdieu's theoretical tools.

A bit of a Bourdieusian digression…

According to Bourdieu, the habitus consists of systems of dispositions, a complex network of influences and understandings drawn from past and present, macro and micro (1997). It can be thought of as "history turned into nature" or a "product of history" (ibid: 78/82), both phrases that suggest the interplay between social practices, individual agency and time. Reay has visualised habitus as a "deep, interior epicentre containing many matrices", all of which have been produced by the "opportunities and constraints" that comprise an individual's previous life experiences and contribute towards the shaping of their present and future (2004: 433; 435), as well as memories of their past. In a Bourdieusian sense, how someone is *disposed* towards an issue or social practice represents not only their particular, individual feelings towards an issue or a set of practices, but also incorporates the impact of powerful societal, cultural and political structures, fields and values that can curtail or encourage decision making and disposition forming. As Maton has noted, Bourdieu's emphasis on understanding the principles and structures that help to generate dispositions means that using habitus as 'shorthand' for an individuals' habits, such as their likes or dislikes, is inadvisable (2011: 56), because it does not account for the full range of structures that can influence something as 'simple' as an individual preference. By intentionally viewing the participants' responses through this wider, deeper Bourdieusian frame, I hoped to make more explicit my understanding of the powerful internalised dispositions that are also at work during the apparently neutral act of reading a story book with a young child.

Of course, envisaging reader response as a highly social, subjective act is nothing new. It has long been recognised that readers' interactions with texts occur through a process of "selective attention" (James cited Rosenblatt 1986: 123), a phrase which, to my mind, conjures up an image of a reader deciding to focus on the parts of a text that seem most relevant or interesting, while glancing over others. According to Street's theory of literacy as a social practice, the ideas readers draw upon will always be ideological, contested and deeply "embedded in social and cultural contexts" (Street 1993: 82). Citing the words of Raymond Williams and echoing James' phrase (see above), Luke's description of literacy as a "selective tradition" is also helpful in that it suggests the power of literacy to sculpt or

socialise individuals into specific discourses or world views (1994: 16) while appearing normal, neutral and simply part of the taken-for-granted fabric of things. As Bourdieu might have added, the nature of these selections, such as what seems most cogent or compelling to an individual, are all operationalised by the workings of habitus in relation to its surroundings. In fact, Rosenblatt's explanation of the transactional nature of reading can be extended to accommodate a Bourdieusian interpretation. According to Rosenblatt, when it comes to selecting which aspects of a text to focus on at any "particular time and under particular circumstances" (Rosenblatt 1986: 123), individuals are always guided by their surroundings and context, which includes their motivation for reading. Through a Bourdieusian lens, the relationship between an individual and their context is emphasised as recursive and interdependent; a perspective that can reveal the ways that language-based interactions are shaped by objective structures, which, in turn, are continually re-shaped by the impact of "individual sense activity" (Grenfell 2007: 52). As a result, according to Carrington and Luke (1997), language use can always be understood as "incorporating and reflecting relationships of domination and subordination, [which are] dependent upon distributions of cultural resources and concomitant symbolic power" (1997: 104).

Building on these understandings, the Bourdieusian-infused theory of reader response I present here is one that acknowledges readers as actively structuring agents who operate within multiple sets of fluid, socially constructed structures that give context and shape to the responses that emerge. From this perspective, the process of making-meaning can be understood as a transaction between reader, text and context that is also "constitutive of the dynamic of a relationship between individuals and the social conditions – both material and ideational – which surround them" (Grenfell 2007: 59). By recognising how habitus and field operate at the very heart of these reading transactions, both shaping and being shaped by the experience, I believe Bourdieu's tools can enhance interpretations of readers' responses by offering researchers ways of "theorising a [*reading]* self which is socially produced" (Lawler 2004: 111), [my addition].

Indeed, as Reay has noted, using habitus can help researchers to ensure that their "focus is always broader than the specific focus under study" (2004: 437), a useful outcome that reflects Bourdieu's emphasis on the often glossed-over relational ties between agentive, creative individuals and the surrounding structures of the social world, as alluded to above. From this perspective, readers' responses cannot merely be considered as representative of an individual's cognitive processes; they must also be understood as the outcome or social product of the relationship between an individual's habitus, the fields in which they move and the forms of capital available to them at any given time.

At a conceptual level, thinking of readers' responses in terms of habitus, capital and field can also be helpful when considering what might happen when dispositions become disrupted or unsettled − in other words, when the status quo is challenged. In an often-quoted simile, Bourdieu described habitus as being like a "fish in water" when meeting with aspects of a "social world of which it is the product…it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Wacquant 1989: 43). The converse, as Reay has explained (2004), is when a habitus encounters an *unfamiliar* social world or field. Pricked into a heightened awareness of what might be causing this sense of difference or dissonance, change and reconfiguration becomes possible through the self-questioning and critical reflection that follows; a process that can cause the habitus to suddenly "operate at a level of consciousness and the person [to] develop new facets of the self" (ibid: 427).

When applied to the act of reading, Bourdieu's 'fish-in-water' image illustrates that an individual's habitus or disposition will remain invisible and therefore unchallenged when the ideological content and structure of a text are largely aligned with a reader's existing practices or normative expectations about 'what counts' as reading, or how books *should* work. These doxic understandings about the world − often unconsciously accepted and considered "beyond question" (Bourdieu cited Grenfell 2007: 56) − can suddenly be made visible by heterodoxic forces that deny or work against dominant principles and practices. As mirrors, many books simply confirm the dominance of the status quo by reflecting it

back to individuals without question or alteration. Therefore, to make aspects of the habitus (or disposition) become visible, readers need to be made to feel more 'out of water' than usual, a state of being that may be triggered by books that provoke, disrupt and challenge normative assumptions or usual patterns of reading. As I have already explained, by requiring readers to 'work harder' during the transactional process, metafictive picturebooks have the *potential* to disrupt normative assumptions about reading by drawing attention to the widely-accepted literacy conventions that feature in many texts for children, as well as highlighting how books work. With Bourdieu firmly in mind, in the next part of this chapter I explain how I set about analysing the **children's** responses to the books.

Locating an analytical starting point for the children's responses

Following Ryan and Anstey's example (2003), I decided to appropriate Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1999) as a way to categorise the children's responses to the picturebooks. Developed and adapted during the 1990s, Luke and Freebody's model describes the four "necessary but not sufficient roles" required of readers living (and reading) in a postmodern, text-based culture (Luke & Freebody 1999). Rather than offering teachers yet another specific, fail-safe teaching method, Luke and Freebody's intention has been to shift debates about reading away from the idea that a 'right' or 'best' way can exist, towards an increased focus on the breadth and availability of textual practices actually on offer in classrooms. Thus, on one level, the Four Resources Model has the potential to function as a 'checks-and-balances' tool, helping teachers to assess the spread and (im)balance of their literacy provision across the four main areas or 'roles'. In addition, by prompting educators − and researchers − to consider or audit the methods and text types that dominate their teaching (or research methods), the model can also be used as a methodological tool, stimulating self-reflective scrutiny about the kinds of readers that certain types of teaching (and reading) practices will ultimately produce (Luke 1992). Given the fact that this study was not an inquiry into pedagogic practices and therefore did not require me to take up the role of a teacher, I utilised the Four Resources Model as a way of categorising or auditing the readers' range of responses.

The Four Resources, as originally described by Luke and Freebody (1990) are:

code breaker: readers break the code of written texts by recognising 'fundamental features' such as the alphabet, sounds in words and spelling.

text participant: readers make meaning by drawing on literal and inferential references, as well as any prior knowledge and/or previous experiences with similar texts.

text user: readers use texts functionally by recognising and acting on their differing structures and features, including the impact of their cultural and social purposes

text analyst: acting on the knowledge that texts are not natural or neutral, readers analyse and transform texts to represent alternative and possibly silenced viewpoints.
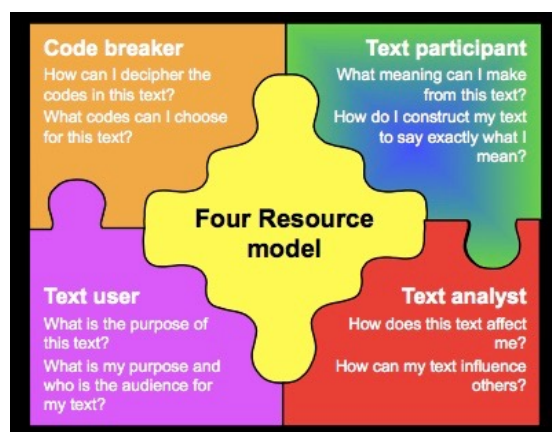
(Image 6: Representation of the Four Resources Model)

According to Ryan and Anstey's conclusions, the children they read with were "naturally predisposed" (2003) to respond to the texts as text participants, a largely interpretive approach that sees individuals making connections to texts based on their own experiences. In fact, Ryan and Anstey found "there was little or no 'natural' disposition by these students to engage in the other three reading practices" (2003: 13) outlined in the Four Resources Model (Freebody & Luke 1990). The *only* critical or analytical responses to emerge during their study resulted from teacher-led questions or deliberately constructed tasks that explicitly engaged students in critical practice, leading the authors to conclude

with some concern that this lack of balance – in fact, absence – of analytical resources signalled a need for literacy pedagogies to be altered to ensure that readers could have access to the multiple literacies demanded by 21st century texts and contexts (New London Group 1996; Ryan & Anstey 2003). Given my decision to adopt the position of a co-reader rather than the textually authoritative role of a teacher-reader, such explicit critical questions or tasks could not come from me, although I have acknowledged my struggle to keep my teaching persona at bay. My awareness of this stance led to me to understand that if I could find evidence of critical engagement in the transcripts, it would probably have resulted from the work of the texts in transaction with the readers within our small groups, both in school and at home, framed by a heightened, collective awareness of the fact that we were all taking part in a research project.

Wider reading also led me to additional examples of other researchers who had, like Ryan and Anstey, drawn on aspects of Luke and Freebody's Four Resources Model (1990) in order to highlight the absence of critical literacies from classroom contexts. For example, Leland et at (2005: 267) described North American approaches to literacy acquisition as "bogged down" by decoding and meaning-making, a phrase that suggests the difficulties of introducing or extending existing literacy practices to include critical or pragmatic competencies. Similarly, Jones has claimed that pupils in "most" American classrooms are not taught to be text analysts, despite the growth of "progressive ideas" in the area of critical literacy (2006: 114-15). McDaniel has reinforced this perspective by stating that children in the United States tend to be "indoctrinated into passivity" via narrow approaches to literacy, and are taught not to challenge voices of authority or the status quo (2004: 473). Remaining wary of the generalisations that may be implicit in some of these conclusions, I could see that using the Four Resources Model had enabled these authors to highlight their concerns about the (im)balance of literacy practices across schooling.

Clearly, the studies summarised above began from the reverse position to Ryan and Anstey, in that they addressed the absence of critical perspectives from teaching approaches and activities rather than from pupils' responses. Nevertheless, their conclusions still helped to

suggest why critical responses might not come 'naturally' to some children. As the work of Maybin (2013) and Scull et al (2013) has indicated, the absence of a critical perspective from classrooms can be attributed to political acts such as curricular silences, gaps in teacher knowledge, understandings and dispositions, as well as the influence that these assumptions can have on the social spaces that border onto the schooled field. Consequently, the habituses generated by schools − and internalised by families who may align their practices to match those deemed most valuable by educators and employers − will reproduce these gaps and silences, meaning that the adoption of a critical stance cannot become a *natural* or normal response if it is not already a recognisable part of the dominant culture's 'master plan'. The power of both home and school to shape and sculpt individual dispositions has been emphasised by Bourdieu, who noted that a child's initial school experiences were influenced according to the ways of being and doing they had seen modelled at home (1997:87). Once at school and beyond, an individual's habitus is repeatedly transformed through its relationship with the different objective social conditions it encounters, including other life-shaping experiences such as employment (Reay 2004: 434) and possibly even parenthood. Yet the act of transformation does not remove possibilities of agency or wipe out traces of previous influences on the habitus; it can be remade or reinscribed in a similar fashion to a 'palimpsest', an ancient word for a reused vellum manuscript upon which the traces of earlier scribes always remained visible, a term I have borrowed from Sipe (Sipe & McGuire 2006).

Reflecting on the key points raised by the existing literature − and Ryan and Anstey's conclusion in particular − I wondered how the readers in my own study would respond, especially given this project's location "betwixt and between" the worlds of home and school (Turner 1985) and the possible impact this might have on the resources that the readers decided to draw on as most appropriate or relevant to the task at hand. Would they also be 'naturally' indisposed to respond analytically; responding critically only if prompted? If, as Ryan and Anstey had suggested, critical engagement was unlikely to occur (or develop) without explicit support from a more experienced co-reader (2003), then I wondered if I should expect to find little or no critically literate-type talk, given that I was not providing the readers with any instruction or guidance about the books.

Based on my interest in the relationship between the effects of metafiction and the broad 'aims' of critical literacy, I felt especially keen to explore if and how the readers had been disposed towards these devices. Indeed, I hoped that my focus on participants' responses to metafiction would help to illuminate the influence of wider structural forces. As Gee has suggested (1992), a broader, sociological view is possible from an examination of **how** the "literacy bits" − in this case, responses to metafiction − work in relation to "everything else" because:

> the literacy bits are used almost like a radioactive isotope that allow bits and pieces of the whole configuration to be lit up… We can then study the human work it takes to get and keep these links forged, to destroy them or transform them. (1992: 24).

Extending existing frames

As Serafini has recently pointed out, the four resources initially posited by Luke and Freebody were primarily focused on how readers might interact with printed text and written language and did not explicitly account for the demands of multimodal texts, such as picturebooks (2012: 151). Accordingly, Serafini has expanded Luke and Freebody's model into an account of the four resources or "social practices for *reading-viewing* multimodal texts" (2012: 152). His re-conceptualisation of readers as "reader-viewers" is intended to account for the ways individuals make meaning from and interact with visual images, structures and designs, as well as the printed word (2012: 152). While I agree with his shift in emphasis, I continue to use the term 'reader' in this dissertation for reasons of fluency and ease of understanding. According to Serafini's version (2012: 159), the four expanded resources are:

> **navigator:** readers crack the codes of written texts as well as those associated with design and visual elements; they have an understanding of concepts of print, directionality and sequencing − including non-linear structures, hypertexts and multimodal strategies, and grammars of visual design.

interpreter: readers actively construct meanings from written words, images and design, often considering multiple perspectives, drawing from their "experiential reservoirs" and intertextual knowledge to add to existing interpretations (ibid).

designer: readers not only construct meaning from what is depicted but also design the way the text is read: its "reading path". Readers transform the text's "semiotic potential" by selecting from, organising and shaping the existing material according to their needs, interests and experiences: "the reader makes decisions about which aspects of the text are being navigated to consider and interpret, and, in doing so, designs the text to be read rather than passively uncovering a text that comes ready-made" (ibid).

interrogator: like Luke and Freebody's text analyst, readers as interrogators "move beyond the literal" to consider how meanings are socially constructed as well as "socially embedded, temporary, partial and plural" (ibid). Unlike cognitive theories of reading, which focus on reader response at the point of reception, interrogators also focus on the production of words, images and their intended audiences.

Faced with what initially felt like a choice between Serafini's recently-adapted version of the Four Resources Model and Luke and Freebody's seminal work, I decided to use both frameworks as reference points while I read through my transcripts, although aware of their overt pedagogic purposes. In addition, I used both Anstey (2002) and Pantaleo's comprehensive list of metafictive devices (2011; also see Appendix A) and the notes from my own content analysis (Appendix C) to help identify whether the participants had responded to any of the texts' metafictive devices. As the example provided in Appendix F illustrates, I placed the entire text of my transcripts into a table format, leaving a column free for me to make notes by hand. As I read through, I made notes (on the right hand side) about the 'types' of responses that had occurred (e.g. analyst, navigator), using Serafini and Luke and Freebody's categories as a broad guide. On the left hand side, I indicated points where participants had referred or responded to the effects of a metafictive device. When this occurred, I made separate, handwritten notes on the nature of the conversation and the reader resources drawn upon. These notes were added to and were also written up into

continuous prose to help me think through the emerging ideas. Using these categories provided me with a initial structure around which to organise and grow my ideas.

I worked through the transcripts according to the order of the books in the project. In other words, I read the Primary One group discussion of *The Bravest Ever Bear,* followed by the Primary Two group's version, followed by any comments the eight parents had made on the same text. Once all of the transcripts had been read through several times and repeatedly annotated in this way, I considered the themes or 'main stories' that were emerging and the types of resources the readers tended towards. In particular, I paid close attention to how readers had chosen to respond to the metafictive devices and what they had *decided* to tell me about them.

"You're all interrupting my sentence!" (Lewis, Primary One)

As the images of my annotated transcripts illustrate (Appendix F), I started by asking myself the following general questions while reading through the transcripts for the first time:

- What did the participants select or decide to tell me about the books?
- What resources did they draw on 'naturally' to tell me about the books?

And then, more specifically:

- How did the readers respond to the metafictive devices?
- What resources did they draw on to describe them?

Applying a similar structure here, my accounts of the readers' responses to the books begin in general terms, with a brief overview of the resources that dominated the children's responses, before focusing in on their responses to the metafictive devices in particular. In Chapter Six (after explaining the methodological issues I encountered while applying the Serafini/ Luke and Freebody resource-based criteria to the adults' responses), I describe

how the parents responded to the books and also how *they* interpreted their children's responses. While the terminology I refer to is largely based on Serafini's expanded Four Resources Model (2012), I do so in the understanding that Serafini's version is firmly grounded in Luke and Freebody's work and builds on (rather than demolishes) the seminal concepts they established (1990). As with all qualitative research of this type, I acknowledge the selective and subjective nature of my analysis and appreciate that another researcher might re-interpret my suggestions differently.

In the following sub-chapter, I describe what the Primary One and Two pupils told me about *The Bravest Ever Bear (1999),* the first picturebook to be sent home, with a particular focus on their responses to its metafictive aspects. In addition, I show how the ideas generated by this discussion helped to direct the analysis of the remaining picturebooks.

How the children responded…
Book One: making meaning from *The Bravest Ever Bear*

"There are so many things to look at!"
(Beth, Primary One)

Navigating and interpreting the text

As a result of the project's design, the children were already familiar with the texts by the time we got to read them together in school. According to some readers, the books had been read three or four times at home, sometimes involving family members who were not directly involved in the project but had become interested or co-opted along the way. As a consequence of this prior knowledge, the children moved confidently back and forth between the pages of the picturebook, keenly tracking down visual details, making links and frequently exuding what I then described in my journal as a palpable sense of 'ownership'.

For the most part, both the Primary One children (aged four and five at the time of recording) and the Primary Twos (aged five and six) appeared to predominantly respond to the metafictive devices employed in this book as navigators and interpreters. Great chunks of the sessions were devoted to *"oh look! and look*!*"* navigational-type responses, where the children enthusiastically spotted, labelled and made text-to-text, or text-to-life commotions, while also sharing the prior interpretations and understandings that had been shaped and developed at home. The following extract is illustrative of such an exchange:

Beth: Oh look! A chicken and a frog and an apple and a bucket…
Lewis: …and an elf and a snail.
Jennifer: Do you know where they come from? What stories are they from?
Lewis: Christmas.
Jennifer: Maybe, yes. What about the chicken? Does she come from another story?
Lewis: The King and the Frog!

Jennifer: Oh yes…

Beth: Oh yes, there's actually a fairy…

Eve: I can actually see it.

Lewis: It's Tinkerbell!

Jennifer: Can you see all these people here on the bridge?

Beth: Little Red Riding Hood…and a wolf.

Lewis: A cat. A cat. Oh look, a chicken!

Jennifer: The chicken is on the bridge again…

Beth: A little elf is there and a fairy is there. And the frog. And the frog…

Sarah: And the fairy! (Primary One, *The Bravest Ever Bear*)

One reason the children may have spent the bulk of the reading sessions engaged mainly as navigators and interpreters is that doing so may have helped them to identify shared understandings and consequently arrive at a group interpretation of the text. As the work of Farrell et al has suggested (2010), individual readers first gain access to a text by labelling, naming and making links. By extension, I wondered if groups of readers followed a similar pattern, using related strategies to identify common ground and to arrive at cohesive understandings. In addition, the children's inclination towards the roles of navigator and interpreter reflected the status of these resources as 'ideal' reading practices, in other words, those privileged by the education system and therefore quite likely to have been modelled by teachers and parents as equating with school success.

As interpreters, according to Serafini, readers draw on their existing knowledge to make meaning (2012). Glimpses of this were visible during the children's transactions with the metafictive aspects of this first book. During the Primary One group, Lewis drew on his knowledge of how books *should* work in order to suggest that the disjointed sequence of mini-stories at the start of *The Bravest Ever Bear* were just simply *"too short"* to ever be considered a success. In the Primary Two group, Niamh was also able to pinpoint what was non-traditional about the form and format of the stories in *The Bravest Ever Bear* by comparing it to the type of books she already knew. According to Niamh, the books she

usually read *"just had a lot of words and then they wrote 'The End.' And this one is just like a tiny one and then it says 'The End'."*

By identifying or labelling the unusual elements present in the picturebook, such as its non-conventional plot, character and setting, I could see that the pupils had started to actively engage with the authors' use of metafiction. As these examples have indicated, the children were able to compare the text's version to their own knowledge but without necessarily offering a judgement on whether the disruptive version I had provided them with was 'right' or 'wrong'.

Provoking some stronger opinions

Yet sometimes the children took up non-neutral positions in relation to the text, most often in response to a metafictive device. Sarah drew on her interpretive and intertextual knowledge to point out what was wrong with the fact that four and twenty black bears could be seen climbing out an enormous pie on the fourth opening of the text:

Jennifer: Look at this down here, [the bear's] saying, 'This is ridiculous!' Why is it ridiculous?
Eve: Because it's not fair when it's not, when it's not that good a story.
Jennifer: So the bear doesn't like the story?
Sarah: No, because they're bears but it's actually birds! [Primary One]

As her use of the phrase *"it's actually"* suggests, Sarah used her existing knowledge and privileged it over the slightly subversive alternative offered by the picturebook as a form of resistance. In doing so, she effectively positioned herself against the Ahlberg and Howard version. Although Sarah's response to the disruption was to maintain the status quo, I found her comment interesting, however minor or throwaway it might have seemed, because it represented a willingness to challenge dominant views; a seedling awareness that might grow into further critical understandings. Looking back through the transcript, I

found that Sarah had also commented on the same image a moment or so previously, when she had told us: *"It's not meant to be bears, it's meant to be birds!"* Again, her repeated use of *"meant"* implied she understood that the new version was somehow wrong in its transgressions. For me, such glimpses breathed life into Comber's claim that young children come to school replete with rich, critical resources, honed from their own life experiences of "what's fair and what isn't" (2001: 170).

What I also found interesting was fact that these comments with a more resistant edge were made predominantly in response to the dissonance caused by a metafictive device, when their normative assumptions became unsettled, even if only marginally. For example, during the seventh opening, when the Bear narrates his own super-charged, superlative adventure, the words and images briefly contradict each other. While the Bear's words declare an intention to slay the menacing dragon, the images clearly show the dragon has been tied up with a hose pipe instead.

Jennifer: [reads] 'Then one day the Bear did his best and bravest deed of all. He…'
ALL: Slew the dragon!
Eve: He actually didn't. [Primary One]

Eve's comment (which she delivered in an unimpressed-sounding, matter-of-fact sort of voice) effectively punctured the Bear's egotistical list of biographical achievements and provided another brief example of a young reader taking up an oppositional stance to the dominant narrative voice. Perhaps Eve's sense of confidence stemmed from the fact that she already knew what happened in the rest of the story; an authoritative knowledge that positioned her as expert and encouraged her to engage and interject with such snippets of challenging commentary.

Signs of resistance: talking back to the text
A similar example emerged in response to the eighth opening, when the Bear concludes his tale by announcing his marriage to the princess. By this stage in his story, the Princess's

narrative voice has become noisier, with her interjections now flatly contradicting those of the Bear's. Faced with these contesting narrative voices, the young readers had to consider the truth offered to them by these different perspectives:

Jennifer: [reads] "The Bear rescued the Princess, collected his prizes, got married and… er… lived happily ever after."
Eve & Sarah: No he didn't! [Primary One]

While a closer inspection of the text revealed that what the girls chorused back were actually the next words to be spoken by the princess, I was still interested in the way they had delivered the line, with what sounded like a mixture of delight and defiance. Of course, they could have simply been dramatising or acting out the text and were projecting their voices to convey the princess's clear disgust at the thought of marriage to the Bear (Sipe 2002: 477). After all, remarked Eve, *"Bears don't marry princesses."* Alternatively, the children's interjections could have been examples of what Sipe categorised as "talking back", a type of response that emerges when readers become so deeply engaged in a story that it blends or blurs with their own lives, causing them to comment on details of the plot or its characters, sometimes in character, from deep within the fictional realms of this secondary world (2002: 477). According to Sipe, instances of talking back can stem from an alignment between the worlds of the child and the book, when "the two worlds become superimposed – one transparent over the other" (2002: 477). Drawing on Bourdieu's ideas, I conjectured that what Sipe referred to was when a state of doxic agreement existed between reader and the text, meaning that there would be no palpable sense of dissonance or gap between the two worlds, real and imaginary.

Yet conceptualising 'talking back' as a process of blurring or alignment did not quite square with my own notion about what might happen when readers talked back to a metafictive device, although it has to be noted that Sipe's original theory was not created with metafiction in mind. By adapting his typology of expressive responses to suit a more critically literate perspective, I interpreted the act of talking back to a metafictive device as

evidence of a reader-identified gap; a critical distance created when readers encounter aspects of a text that fail to match up with their epistemological or ideological understandings or expectations. This could be seen when Sarah pounced upon discrepancies between versions of the texts, or when Eve pointed to the contradictions between words and pictures. To return again to Bourdieu's logic, it seemed to me that such moments of disalignment could have the potential to make aspects of the habitus seem *strange*, creating opportunities for reconfiguration, change and possible growth (Reay 2004: 437). Reframing Sipe's concept in this way helped me to visualise instances of 'talking back' as indications of critical, analytic potential rather than as signs of off-task or unruly behaviour, as Sipe suggested is all too often the case with such comments (2002).

Signs of resistance: rejecting unruliness

From re-reading the transcripts, the children's resistance to metafictive aspects of *The Bravest Ever Bear* became visible in ways other than occasional moments of textual back-chat. In the Primary One group, the children reacted against the Princess's unconventional characteristics, such as her bid to be free of the status quo; her rejection of a traditional princess dress (for jeans and trainers); her refusal to marry (anyone, not just the Bear) and her habit of usurping the Bear's protagonist role. Although the children seemed to agree that the Princess shouldn't have to marry a bear, they did not seem to approve of her behaviour in general:

Eve: She's not nice.

Jennifer: You don't think she's nice?

Beth: She's very smart.

Sarah: No, because in the next story she says 'push off prince!'

Jennifer: Is that funny or not nice?

Sarah: Not nice!

Lewis: Look! She's writing the story now.

Jennifer: She is…look, she says 'Now let's see' and she writes her story, The Perfectest Ever Princess.

Eve: No, it isn't hers. Because it's the Bear's story.

Jennifer: What do you mean?

Eve: It's supposed to be the Bear but in this story it's the Princess. (Primary One)

Having assumed that the children might endorse the Princess and her feisty way of dealing with unwanted suitors, not to mention her determination for independence, it was surprising to find they disliked the unruliness she brought to the story. Sipe and McGuire defined this form of resistance as intertextual (2006), when readers object to a variation of a familiar story, often because of discrepancies in plot or specific detail. As the extract above shows, the children objected to aspects of the Princess' personality and behaviour, yet they were also irritated by her impact on the story's anticipated narrative structure. Eve's comment, *"It isn't hers. It's the Bear's!"* indicated how she positioned herself against the Princess' narrative intervention, not simply because of her rude conduct, but also because she had wrested control of the story away from the character who *should* have been in charge of the book.

Meanwhile, in Primary Two, Ben, aged six, also articulated some complex understandings about the *Bravest Ever Bear's* unconventional narrative structure and the Princess' bid to rewrite the Bear's story from her own perspective: *"Because if she does change the story we won't know what happens next. What **really** happens next."* While Ben's resistance here was also intertextual in that he objected to the way the story had been retold, his concerns struck me as being more than a mere quibble about changes to the plot. As his phrase *"what really happens next"* suggested, Ben's concern was also epistemological in that he regarded the presentation of the Princess' alternative perspective as a foil, or barrier, that might somehow prevent him from accessing the text's dominant, 'correct' meaning. Within the depths of my educator's head, this registered as a marvellous 'aha!' teachable moment. In addition, I was interested by Ben's awareness that a narrative intervention from the Princess could fundamentally transform the 'original' story, because it seemed to indicate the beginnings of an appreciation of texts as partial, multiple and always framed by the nature of their construction, elements of the criteria required when reading as an interrogator (Serafini 2012: 160).

Like Sarah, Ben's comments both confirmed and privileged the status quo – in this case, the dominant narrative voice – by resisting the Princess' unruly behaviour and her impact on the picturebook's structure. In addition, Ben also seemed to resist the authors' use of multiple, contesting narratives, a metafictive device that can challenge readers' expectations by requiring different ways of reading or viewing (Anstey 2002).

While the children's resistance to the effects of these metafictive devices (the unruly actions of a non-traditional character and the trustworthiness of multiple narrations) and their loyalty to the status quo might seem like the very antithesis of critical literacy, following Sipe and McGuire (2006), I suggest that their resistance was of crucial importance because it indicated that some form of ideological dissonance was occurring somewhere, on some level. The converse of this would be a lack of resistance – a blind or unquestioning acceptance and an absence of critique – a position that renders readers powerless because they "simply submit to…the text and are taken over by it" (Poulet cited Sipe & McGuire 2006:12). Therefore, I felt immensely encouraged by the fact that the children had put up some resistance to the effects of the metafictive devices, even if it was in order to defend their normative assumptions about the ways that books *should* work. To return to Bourdieu's "fish in water" analogy (Wacquant 1989), the experience of resistance as a reading response seemed to have a disruptive effect on a reader's habitus by drawing attention to existing, perhaps invisible, assumptions about how books work. Before developing this idea in relation to the next picturebook, I outline another significant area of interest to have emerged from our conversations.

Metafictive springboards to meta-level insights?

In addition to provoking instances of reader resistance, some of the metafictive devices found in *The Bravest Ever Bear* stimulated conversations that seemed more *meta* in nature, in that they conveyed a heightened awareness *about* the workings of language and how meaning was made. Citing Gee, Lankshear has said that a more critical stance is possible by evoking "meta-level understandings of language in use" (1999: 24), presumably because it involves a consideration of texts as constructs and how and why they have been

assembled in particular ways. Just as I had become interested in the effects of 'talking back', as discussed above, I also became drawn to the flashes of *meta-level* insight that peppered our conversation about this picturebook. In a similar way, I wondered whether these meta-level moments might also offer readers routes towards a more critically literate stance, by helping to emphasise the constructed, deliberate and partial nature of any text (Comber 2001a; Serafini 2012).
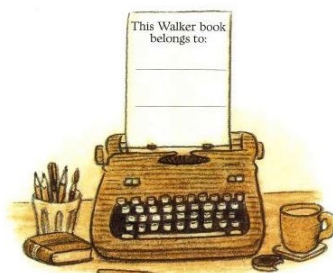
(Image 7: The typewriter – an invitation to write, *The Bravest Ever Bear*)

One example emerged when the Primary One children expressed intrigue at the image of an old-fashioned typewriter, as seen above, which first appears in *The Bravest Ever Bear's* front matter and recurs throughout. This exchange occurred within the opening moments of our discussion:

Beth: What's this for? [she points to the picture of the typewriter]

Jennifer: Where have you see this picture before? Is it anywhere else?

Lewis: My mummy has got a typewriter.

Eve: And I'll show you where the other typewriter…[turns pages] There…and there.

Beth: And I know where the other typewriter is…and another typewriter.

Jennifer: Why are there so many typewriters in this book?

Sarah: Because they write lots of stories.

Eve: It's because everyone is writing a story.

Jennifer: Why do they keep writing lots of stories?

Sarah: They keep saying it's the end and it's not the end. (Primary One)

As shown above, the first time we see it, the typewriter has an almost blank piece of paper inserted, which reads: *"This Walker book belongs to…"* with a space for the reader to write their name, subtly inviting them to assume the active role of co-author. Of course, many of the children would never have seen a typewriter before, yet the fact that they accepted its presence automatically suggested its purpose had already been explained to them at home or via another source. Here, the image of the typewriter plays a metafictive function in that it draws attention to the act of authoring, an idea reinforced by the fact that almost every character takes a turn on the machine in order to construct a story that foregrounds their own perspective and preferences above all others. The backstage presence of the author − any author − is also emphasised by the fact that the typewriter is often located behind a peeled-back portion of the page, placed atop a paper-strewn desk in a dimly-lit, sepia-coloured office.

Spiralling away from the Primary One group's discussion of the typewriter image were observations that seemed to straddle the interpreter and interrogator categories as described by Serafini (2012), refusing to settle comfortably beneath either heading. For example, this exchange occurred during a longer discussion about the stop-start nature of the story's structure:

Jennifer: Why do they keep going to the typewriter?
Eve: It's because they don't want it to say 'The End.'
Jennifer: Oh, they don't want it to say 'The End?…
Sarah: Because they don't like that person's story.
Jennifer: Is that okay? So if you don't like a story…?
Eve: Don't read it!
Beth/Sarah: Don't read it again! (Primary One)

As this shows, from interacting with the typewriter image emerged the idea of reading and writing as subjective, with multiple retellings always a possibility. Eve's comment suggested that it would be acceptable for a reader to challenge and change the outcome of

a story if it were not to their taste or liking, a key critical understanding that has been emphasised by Simpson (1996) and Comber (2003). In addition, Sarah's contribution [*"Because they don't like that person's story"*], which built on Eve's comment, also suggested her awareness of texts as partial in nature (Serafini 2012), in the sense that they are always representative of a specific (and sometimes dislikable) epistemological outlook.

On many occasions, the children were prompted to draw on their intertextual knowledge in order to make meaning from the text; metafictive-inspired moves that enabled them to identify what made Ahlberg and Howard's text seem different to the more traditional versions they already knew. In response to my question about the retelling of Goldilocks: "*Is this the story you know?*" all four children in the Primary One group chorused "*No!*" and offered me reasons such as: *"Because there's a police chase"* (Eve), *"And a trial!"* (Sarah). In a similar vein, Niamh from the Primary Two group observed *"there wasn't a police chase and she didn't have to see a trial."*

Building on this, I asked the Primary Two group *why* the author might have inserted a trial into the *Goldilocks* story:

*Ben: Because he just added another bit on because I think he thinks that **should** happen.*
*Jennifer: Ah, interesting. Do you think that **should** happen? Do you think Goldilocks should go before a judge?*
Niamh & Ben: No.
Ben: Well, it would happen in real life but it wouldn't happen in a story book.

Here, Ben drew on his intertextual knowledge but redeployed it in a way that also revealed an understanding of authorial intentions at work. His spoken emphasis of *"should"* also underlined his awareness that texts can reflect particular points of view, and provided a glimpse of another key critical insight (Simpson 1996; Comber 2003; Appendix B). In addition, Ben was able to separate himself from the world of the story, drawing a clear

boundary line between 'real life' and a 'story book'. While it could be argued that this comment could simply reflect his lack of engagement with the text (in other words, he had not totally immersed himself in the secondary world of the story (Sipe 2002)), it could equally have been due to the gaps created by the metafictive devices in the text, which made total immersion less likely and which enabled Ben to enjoy the text while observing it from more of a critical distance.

Summary, *The Bravest Ever Bear*

In this section, I have described how the young readers responded to the metafictive devices found in our first book, *The Bravest Ever Bear*. In particular, I have divided the responses, very roughly, into two broad categories: forms of resistance and comments that showed an increased or heightened sense of 'meta-level' awareness. It seemed significant at this early stage, that the only comments to come close to Serafini's interrogator category (2012) or, indeed, Luke and Freebody's analyst (Luke & Freebody 1999), were those made in response to metafictive aspects of the text.

Considering the setting of our discussion and my role as the adult-in-charge, it was not surprising to find that the children seemed most inclined to decode, comprehend and maintain the status quo, given that these are the resources usually privileged by schools and reinforced in other settings. I also wondered to what extent the children's responses reflected *what counted* as reading to their parents; in other words, the reading resources that had been valued and promoted while reading at home and possibly in preparation for our reading group. Yet given the potential impact of these influential forces, the children's engagement with *The Bravest Ever Bear* showed they were actively structuring agents who could draw upon a wide range of resources in order to respond to the texts' metafictive disruptions with ease and pleasure.

In the next section, I describe how the children responded to the use of metafiction in *No Bears*, with a particular interest in the notion of resistance as a reading response and the

idea that a heightened level of "meta-level awareness" (Gee cited Lankshear 1999: 24) might result from engaging with and discussing the effects of metafiction.

How the children responded…
Book Two: The children find fault with *No Bears*

"*That poor Bear!*"
(Ben, Primary Two)

Primary One, *No Bears* and no images?

For the most part, the small group of readers from Primary One responded to this text as navigators, interpreters and designers. They made meaning by labelling and decoding aspects of the verbal and visual texts and applied their own experiential knowledge in order to connect with aspects of character, plot and theme. Their prior knowledge of the text meant they designed pathways through the book, according to taste and preference. In addition, the children responded positively to the 'hide and seek' style humour created by the recurring visual trope of the bear, who remains present in the story despite Ruby the narrator's ban.

Eve: Look, it says 'No Bears' but there are bears in it! [laughs]
Sarah: And the bear's even on the front cover!
Lewis: And the bear's there, the bear's on the middle cover! (Primary One)

Functioning as a metafictive device, the contradiction between written and visual narratives not only amused the children, but it helped to draw their attention to the presence of more than one perspective or way of reading the story. As described below, the children's recognition of the contesting discourses also led to some conflicting opinions, causing them to disagree over whose interpretation of the story was 'correct'.

The idea that different perspectives were actually possible within one book emerged via a discussion about the Bear's decision to pick up (and use) the magic wand left behind by the distracted and harassed-looking fairy godmother, seen on the fifth opening. Although the

wand is used by the Bear to good effect (in that it saves the princess), the children began by wondering whether the character's action could be classified as borrowing or stealing.

Eve: He's stealing.

Jennifer: Why is he talking the wand?

Eve: Because he needs to do magic.

Beth: To save the princess.

Sarah: Actually, it was the fairy godmother who did it.

Lewis: Actually…

Jennifer: Was it the fairy godmother who did it?

Eve/Beth/Lewis: No.

Sarah: Yes.

Jennifer: Let's read through then and see, shall we?

Beth: Sarah thinks it's the fairy godmother but it isn't.

Sarah: [loudly] But it says in the words though.

Jennifer: What happens in the pictures?

*Sarah: It **isn't**.*

Eve: Because it has the fairy…

Sarah: It does say in the words, Eve!

Jennifer: Well…shall we go and see if the words and the pictures say the same thing?

(Primary One)

(Image 8: The Bear 'borrows' the Fairy Godmother's wand to save the Princess, *No Bears*)

As this extract shows, prompted by the metafictive device, the children began to engage with the text at a level that was not only confined to interpretive issues of plot, theme and setting (Sipe 2002), but which verged on a movement "beyond the literal" (Serafini 2012: 160) towards a consideration of how meaning-making occurs, and which modes to trust − the words or pictures. Indeed, Sarah's refusal to accept that the written word could be subordinated to images was interesting for several reasons, the first being how firmly entrenched her ideas about writing as the dominant mode seemed to be, aged just five years. As discussed in Chapter Two, adults are said to have been schooled into privileging images over words by an education system that traditionally considers images as less intellectual or challenging than words (Meek 1988, Nikolajeva 2012). Yet younger children, who may still be learning to decode written text, are said to place greater trust in images because, as Kress has also suggested, at this stage their inclination is to use "whatever is to hand that is apt for the purpose" (2003: 155). According to Kress, younger readers make use of a greater, multimodal flexibility until "common sense" assumptions about the socially-defined suitability of specific literacy practices take hold (ibid). To her mum, Barbara, Sarah's resistance to the Bear's role was both interesting and amusing:

Barbara: We had a big discussion about did the Bear save her. Sarah was adamant that it wasn't the Bear, that it was the fairy godmother. She was absolutely adamant about it! I was saying, 'look, look at what the Bear is wearing' but it was no, no, no! She wasn't having it at all!
Jennifer: So why do you think she was so adamant?
Barbara: The story said it was this and so for her to interpret it in any other way…I think she just took it really literally. She wasn't having it any other way.
Jennifer: You said you just gave up in the end − did you try to talk about…?
Barbara: I did give up − she was so adamant. So I said, 'you're allowed to think that, Sarah!'

As Barbara's use of *"literally"* indicates, Sarah placed her trust in the words and not the images, despite the fact that she was not yet able to decode them fluently by herself. Sarah's prolonged and quite vocal resistance to the idea that images could prevail over

words was also interesting because it seemed to prompt some of the other children in the group to reconsider their own understandings, as I describe next.

Unlike Sarah, who refused to be swayed, Lewis appeared to adjust his stance as a result of the wide-ranging conversation about the different stories that could be offered by words and pictures. Having initially agreed with the others that the words were *"wrong"*, Lewis shifted to a less-definite stance during the final two openings of the book, when the celebratory party takes place and the Bear's contributions remain ignored by Ruby, although they have now been acknowledged by the other characters. Sarah, who still insisted that the words were 'right', explained her reasoning: *"Because the pictures **need** to be telling the right story but they are telling the **wrong** story"* [my emphasis]. Although slightly confusing when decontextualised like this, Sarah's comment suggested a belief that the images had some sort of responsibility to support and reinforce the story contained in the words, and that by failing to do so, the images were at fault, not the words. A few seconds after this utterance by Sarah, Lewis spoke out for the first time in a while:

Lewis: I think the pictures are telling the wrong story too.
Jennifer: Why do you think that?
Lewis: Because on the next page it's different than the words.
Jennifer: So if you read something and the words said one thing and the pictures said another, which would you believe?
Lewis: I believe the pictures. But not this one.

Lewis' comments proved challenging to interpret because of their equivocal nature. His use of the word *"too"* at the end of the first sentence was ambiguous: did he mean he agreed with Sarah, or did he think that both words and images were 'wrong'? In addition, his final sentence: *"I believe the pictures. But not this one,"* conveyed his sense of distrust for this particular image, although it was not clear why: perhaps Sarah's comments had been enough to persuade him on this occasion. This uncertainty aside, Lewis' comments provided an illustration of how reading and talking about metafiction had started to unsettle his existing understandings, prompting a kind of reading that began to account for

meaning-making not simply as a product, but also as a process of thought, deliberation and decision-making (Grieve 1998; Smith 2005: 22).

Finally, while it could be argued that Sarah's consistent refusal to accept the dominance of images over words showed that metafiction failed to unsettle any of her assumptions about how reading 'works', the fact that the children could not find common ground on this issue suggests that some disruption did take place. Through their minor squabble about the words and the pictures, the group of children challenged the idea that a singular interpretation was a necessary, even desirable outcome of shared reading, possibly planting seeds for future ideas and understandings.

Primary Two, *No Bears* and 'what's fair'.

The Primary Two discussion about *No Bears* followed a very different trajectory from the Primary One group, although initially the children drew on similar resources of text interpreter and navigator to access aspects like character and setting (Farrell et al 2010). Unlike the Primary One children, who regarded the Bear's 'illegal' presence as a game or a recurring joke to spot, some of the Primary Two group sidestepped the humour and responded quite seriously to the fact that the Bear's story had been marginalised or silenced by Ruby.

Clare was first of the group to tentatively voice a negative opinion on the book. Although her initial comment sounded as if she intended to connect with the text, she appeared to change her mind mid-sentence:

> *I thought it was really good. Because at the start… well, I thought*
> *it was really good, but you know, at this bit the Bear wanted to put*
> *the picture in the book but the fairy godmother didn't allow it.* (Clare)

Speaking immediately after Clare, Ben also used his first comment about the book to offer a critique, and made a similar shift from positive to negative:

> *Well, I thought it was funny at points but…[sighs] I didn't like it as much as the last one. It was just because I felt sorry for the Bear.* (Ben)

The strength of feeling evident in these initial responses seemed to have some influence over the two remaining group members who quickly adjusted their stances on the text, backtracking on their original, more lighthearted comments about what they had found funny. Over the course of the 45-minute session, the children discussed issues raised by the text's metafictive, multiple, contesting narrative structures and drew on their experiential knowledge to build up a hardy resistance to Ruby the narrator and her unfair treatment of the bear. Niamh, for example, who had started out by expressing her pleasure at the book's lack of bears [*"I think I like it without bears sometimes"*], shifted her stance towards from convergence to resistance, presumably in order to accommodate the group's dominant moral viewpoint. When discussing Ruby (the narrator), she noted:

> *She's not letting him in and it's not nice to do that…she's not thinking of other people's feelings. And if the Bear didn't let **her** in, she'd feel sad.*
> (Niamh)

Implicit in Niamh's interpretive response were echoes of the discussions that take place between parents and children, or teachers and pupils, whenever empathy and compassion are used to encourage reflection on a selfish or unkind act. Bolstered by this show of support for his stance − and possibly by my own interest in their interpretation − Ben then drew our attention to a list found on the fourth opening, where Ruby uses both words and pictures to dictate what is − and is not − allowed in her story. While monsters, giants and other scary things are allowed in her stories, Ruby refuses entry to bears because they are unnecessary, common and she dislikes them. From the margins, the Bear directs a concerned glance at the reader, encouraging us to engage with the issue of its unfair exclusion.

> *I think I am feeling sorry for him because it [the list] has not got him inside it. I think he is feeling really sad because it would hurt your feelings if you weren't in a story book. Also, how would you manage to write 'Little Red Riding Hood' with no wolves or bears?* (Ben)

Here, Ruby's list of preferential story ingredients performed both a metafictive and critical role that it drew the children's attention to Ruby's list (a text) as a deliberately assembled construct, while also highlighting the arbitrary, decision-making powers of text producers, who can decide to include and exclude whatever or whomever they like. While Ben's comments against Ruby's no bears rule seemed to have been motivated by his feelings of empathy and were interpretive in that respect, his final question: *"How would you manage to write 'Little Red Riding Hood' with no wolves or bears?"* was interesting in that it issued a challenge to the dominant narrative voice for its apparent lack of structural logic, based on his intertextual knowledge of other narratives. Ben's thoughts seemed to have turned away from his emotional response towards more practical matters of story construction, a subtle shift that, with some more support, could perhaps have enabled him to take a step away from the story's "secondary world" of plots, themes and characters, towards a more critically framed understanding of a text as something that can be interrogated and critiqued (Sipe & McGuire 2009; Serafini 2012).

(Image 9: Ruby the Narrator's preferential list that definitely
does not include bears, from *No Bears*.)

It struck me that perhaps the children's resistance to Ruby might have been prompted by her non-traditional, quite disruptive approach to the task of narrating. Unlike conventional picturebooks, where the reader is often kept on the side of the narrative voice, Ruby's unfair actions place the reader at a distance, making it less likely for us to admire or connect with her perspective and forcing us to place our allegiances elsewhere. In addition, the presence of contesting narrative threads (another metafictive device) also offers readers a choice of perspective, leading to an increased awareness that alternative, sometimes

oppressed viewpoints, such as the Bear's, actually do exist. In many respects, the Bear's wordlessness provides an effective contrast to Ruby's verbal and visual dominance because it helps to accentuate his/her metaphorical lack of voice, or status, which, in turn, emphasises the unjust nature of power relations in Ruby's story-book world.

Of course, it could also be argued that by resisting Ruby's bad behaviour, the children simply conformed to the positions already carved out for them by the text's producers, given that it is highly unlikely we are intended to admire her selfish conduct. With this in mind, perhaps the children's resistant responses should actually be understood as lacking in agency and anything but critical or interrogative. Yet, while I recognise the limited extent of the children's resistance, *No Bears* did teach some lessons about power and even social activism by enabling its child readers to experience a *feeling* of increased agency, that thrilling sense of confident pride that can come from taking action or standing up for your beliefs.

Metafictive spaces for reader agency?

This heightened sense of agency could have been derived from metafiction's indeterminate or open-ended nature and the fact that it can force readers to actively engage in the process of meaning making (Anstey 2002). The performative nature of some of the children's responses to *No Bears* also lent support to this idea. At several points, both sets of children talked back to the text, indicating their immersive, expressive engagement (Sipe 2002: 47) and possibly a form of embodied critical engagement (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012). With the Primary Two group, for example, when I read aloud Ruby's list of bear-free story ingredients, Ben talked back to the text, effectively distancing himself from it:

Jennifer: [reads] 'You need pretty things, you need fairies and princesses…' Is that right?
Ben: No! You can have anything − scary things, exciting things!

By inserting an emphatic-sounding *"no!"* at the start of his sentence, Ben positioned himself against the bear-free perspective offered by Ruby. Although the sentence beginning *"You can have anything…"* actually belongs to Ruby, the narrator, Ben's minor addition enabled him to deliberately adjust the flow of the existing text to suit his own interpretation.

In addition, some of the children began to engage in the act of revoicing, a performative practice in which readers re-enact aspects of a text while "feeling their way inside a story" with a "critical sensitivity to language and form" (Maybin 2013: 65). During the final spread, we are presented with Ruby's 'happily ever after' written conclusion on the left-hand page, while the right-hand side is filled with the Bear's contradictory visual narrative, in which a cross-looking mouse castigates the dejected fairy godmother for her complicity in the Bear's mistreatment (see Image 10). After examining these pages closely, several of the Primary Two children decided to bring this wordless encounter to life:

Matthew: [adopts an angry voice] 'Why did you not let him in the story?'
Ben: I think he's saying, 'I saw the whole thing and the Bear did it, not you. Why did you lie because the Bear did it? That poor Bear! You should award him with something.'
Niamh: [also puts on cross voice] 'It wasn't you! It was the Bear! Don't throw a party for you − throw it for the Bear!'

(Image 10: when words and pictures tell different stories: the final spread *No Bears*)

Implicit in the children's revoiced comments was the idea that aspects of the text needed to be changed in order to privilege the opinions it silenced. By spontaneously suggesting and performing snippets from an imagined, alternative dialogue, the children also resisted the status quo of the story world, creating a temporary, fleeting upending of power relations through performative responses and resistances that have elsewhere been described as critical (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012: 34).

Summary, *No Bears*

Because the books had been initially read at home, I wondered whether the Primary Two children's perceptions of injustice had been implanted by their interested parent co-readers. Yet according to Ben's father, the topic definitely did not come up [*"Ben's moral code is in spite of our best efforts,"* he joked], while Niamh's father admitted they had not noticed the contradictory words and pictures, making any prior discussion about the Bear's exclusion unlikely. Helena, Clare's mother, who reported that the issue did arise at home (instigated by Clare), felt that it had played to her young reader's strengths:

> *I think having a discussion point on morals, right and wrong, or why*
> *would she not want to have a book about bears…relates to children because*
> *they feel a very definite sense of what is right and what is wrong or unfair.* (Helena)

This interest in the issue of fairness led the Primary Two group to suggest ways of reworking *No Bears'* existing, highly-ambiguous conclusion into one that seemed more equitable, another critically literate practice (Simpson 1996). Some of the children's alternative endings are given below:

Niamh: Leave out the people who weren't being kind to the Bear and have the party with the mouse and the other people who have been good.

Clare: I think they should do the party again and…put the Bear in it so the Bear can have fun.

Matthew: I would change the ending [so] everyone could be in the story and then they could all say sorry to each other and that could be the happy ending.'

Again, by simply replacing the original ending's open-ended ambiguity with a tidily-resolved happily ever after, perhaps the children's responses to this final metafictive device could be described as more conservative than critical in spirit. Yet, as these examples are intended to illustrate, such tidy conclusions are the eventual product of a much wider reading process that can involve forms of resistance, moral choices, shifting perspectives and the gradual unfolding and unsettling of some normative assumptions about reading. To return to the idea mooted earlier, to focus on reading as *process* rather than as a *product* is to move closer to a form of critical literacy (Smith 2005), one that tries to account for how and why meaning is made, by particular readers, under particular circumstance, in response to a particular sort of text. Therefore, by interrupting normative approaches to story-telling, the metafictive devices used in *No Bear*s appeared to make it possible for the children in this study to experience reading as more of a process of meaning-making, rather than simply as a product, or a singular interpretive outcome. This could be seen in the debate surrounding Sarah's defiant resistance and Lewis' shifting stance. For the young readers of *No Bears*, this process felt lively and fun, involving moments of provocation and resistance that stemmed from the text's metafictive details.

While of course it cannot be claimed that interacting with metafiction in *No Bears* suddenly 'made' the children more critically literate, the process of experiencing disruption and resistance while reading this picturebook seemed to have helped create crucial spaces for greater reader agency, by which I mean room for disagreement, contestation and change while reading, an idea I return to in the final chapter. In the next section, I describe how these ideas developed when the children responded to David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs,* a text I felt quite sure would provoke some interesting ideas.

How the children responded…

Book Three: Happily breaking boundaries with *The Three Pigs*

> *Jennifer: Okay, shall we turn the page and see*
> *what happens?*
> *Lewis: Aaaahhhhh!* [lots of giggling]

As alluded to at the end of the previous chapter, this was a picturebook I had looked forward to tackling with the children in school. I felt quite sure they would enjoy it, even though it could be considered as being 'more metafictive' than the texts we had already explored, if metafiction in picturebooks is visualised along a spectrum of increasing complexity, following Pantaleo and Sipe's suggestion (2008). My certainty was coloured by my recollections of how positively other children (including my own) had previously responded to this book, and my memories of their glee at its boundary-breaking disruptiveness. Indeed, the children from both groups did not disappoint when I asked what they thought about the book at the beginning of the session:

Sarah: It was funny! Because they came out of the story and then they went back in! (Primary One)

Niamh: It was funny because they jumped out of the pictures…I liked it because they went in other stories. (Primary Two)

Ben: I loved it! It's my favourite book so far! The funny bits were where they jumped out of the picture and the wolf was like [puts on a voice] *'Wha? I didn't eat them up? Where have they gone?' And when they all jumped out of the book, that surprised me a lot. I was like, 'wha? I thought the wolf would eat them!'* (Primary Two)

As these opening comments begin to illustrate, many of the children responded to *The Three Pigs* with humour and delight. Having read Sipe's typology of expressive and performative engagement (2002), I looked forward to the analysis of this transcript in particular because I recalled that our discussions had been peppered with more spontaneous moments of song, silly voices and performative responses than the other sessions, although this assertion was based on a general feeling or hunch rather than any specific measurement. Indeed, the transcript made for interesting reading but not for the reasons I anticipated.

As shown above, when asked what they thought of *The Three Pigs,* the majority of the children decided to tell me about a metafictive aspect. For example, Sarah, Eve, Niamh and Ben all admired the pigs' ability to break the narrative boundaries that constrained them, a device with a metafictive function in that it highlights the nature of stories as constructed by intentionally revealing how these structures can be broken. In addition, Matthew's enthusiastic opening comment: *"It actually says 'and ate the pig up' and it didn't!"* was a direct reference to the humour, confusion and delight caused by the contradictory words and pictures, another metafictive device. Likewise, Clare's first comment on the book also referred to the interpretive hurdles caused by the contesting discourses: *"I think it was really good but I thought it was really confusing. Because people don't know if the words are right or the pictures are right."* As Clare's comment seemed to indicate, her confusion stemmed from the fact that she had to make up her own mind about what was 'right' and what was 'wrong', a decision that would have been made more obvious to her by other, more conventional texts.

On the whole, the children treated this text as a semiotic, "linguistic and visual playground" (Sipe & McGuire 2009: 283): they happily toyed with its ideas, gave voice to its characters and explored its unusual landscapes with great enthusiasm and, in some cases, surprise. Like the other picturebooks, the children's responses tended to be dominated by decoding and interpretive-type comments, which did not come as so much of a surprise, given the previous sessions and my assumptions about this text's increased

complexity. Yet after reading the transcripts, I also experienced some surprise when I realised that, unlike the other picturebooks, the children had put up no resistance to this text. They seemed to have happily accepted the fact that the characters could hop in and out of stories; they were not especially troubled by the expanses of white space, and, although we had some interesting discussions about the confusion caused by the contradictory words and pictures, their presence in the story was not seen as especially troublesome or negative. Given that this was the third book to be read during the project, I considered whether the children's lack of resistance or surprise could also have been linked to their growing understanding of how these texts worked.

There's nothing to resist here…

Unlike the previous picturebooks, which had caused some of children to respond with resistance to the main characters (Ruby the narrator of *No Bears* and the Princess in *The Bravest Ever Bear),* in *The Three Pigs*, the children seemed happy to align themselves alongside the pigs' perspectives while appearing to accept the metafictive disruptions as entirely valid and relevant to the development of the plot. As an example, in the first brief extract below, the children responded to the moment when the pigs break free of the traditional narrative, leaving its story panels scattered across an expanse of white space while they venture into new story forms and formats:

Jennifer: Let's have a look at the next page…[reads] 'The third pig built his house out of bricks'. Hang on, what's happening here? Where has the story gone?
Eve: He knocked it over.
Jennifer: How could he do that?
Eve: He was running and he did this: [mimes heading like a footballer, then laughs].
Beth: Ooooh – and look! And LOOK! (Primary One)

In this next example, the Primary Two children also responded to the pigs' practical approach to textual deconstruction: here, our porcine protagonists have folded the 'page'

containing the wolf into a paper aeroplane in order to fly it across an otherwise blank double-page spread:

Ben: [laughs] He's got a… paper aeroplane.

[We all turn pages – moving through the text at different speeds]

Jennifer: What's happening on this page?

Niamh: I think they are trying to make a paper aeroplane and they are going to fly away and find some different stories that they could jump into.

Jennifer: Why is there so much white space?

Ben: Because they have flown out of the story and there aren't any pictures out of the story.

Niamh: Because they are all down and flat. (Primary Two)
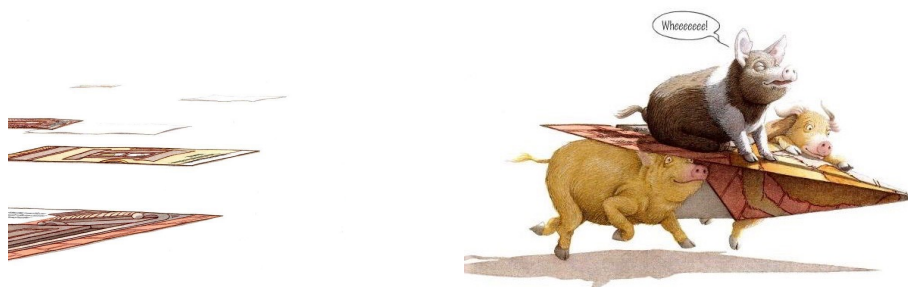
(Image 11: the pigs escape from their *"down and flat"* narrative, *The Three Pigs*)

In both examples, the children seemed to accept the 'work' the metafictive devices had done, meaning that they responded to the text as a subject (or secondary world) rather than as an object (a text), a distinction I developed in my earlier Master's project to help describe the extent of immersion or distance that might exist between a reader and the world of the story (Farrar 2016). In brief, I decided that a *text-as-subject* response could occur when a reader interacted with a text experientially and interpersonally, drawing on existing knowledge and from personal understandings in order to crack its codes and label and identify its contents, themes and characters. Differentiated from this was a *text-as-object* response, which I suggested would acknowledge texts as constructed artefacts or "motivated signs" (Kress cited Pahl & Rowsell 2005: 30), and would contain a heightened, more critical awareness that all texts have been designed in particular ways with a particular purpose and audience in mind.

With reference to these categories, as well as Serafini's version (2012), Eve's reply to my question: *"Where has the story gone?"* was a text-as-subject, or interpretive response, because her primary consideration seemed to be that the pigs' actions were not disruptive, but a plausible part of the storyline. Similarly, Ben and Niamh's responses also occurred at subject level, in that they interpreted the unusual use of white space and disruptive format in relation to the pigs' feelings or motivation for leaving the bullying wolf far behind. I highlight these comments here, not to draw attention to them as deficient in any way, but to illustrate the children's confidence as interpreters and the ease with which they negotiated the complexities of a text that has elsewhere been described as "quintessentially postmodern" (Goldstone 2004: 198).

In some respects, the children's comments (above) supported the idea of meaning-making as a multi-layered process in which readers must initially anchor or situate their own understandings via labelling or decoding before moving onto more detailed and possibly more analytic interpretations (Farrell et al 2010) that could be expressed via resistance. Therefore, perhaps repeated read-throughs with the group might have enabled more confident, analytical responses to emerge. In another sense, perhaps the children's lack of resistance to this text could be linked to their prior experiences and expertise with similarly multimodal, boundary-breaking texts, both on and off the page. As McClay has noted, while many adults may regard the postmodern as representing a complex break with tradition, for many children, the postmodern *is* the tradition within which they have grown up (2000:91). Thus, perhaps the children's expert handling of *The Three Pigs* was strengthened by the synergies that exist between the style and structures found in postmodern picturebooks and those of the multimedia, digital genres that play such a dominant role in many children's out-of-school literacy experiences and understandings, such as visual and digital texts (Labbo 2004).

While the children did not seem to express any explicit resistance to Wiesner's version in terms of its message, content, language and illustrations, some of the pupils voiced (polite) disapproval at my/our way of reading the text. Given its disrupted, non-linear narrative

sequence and fragmentary nature, the book is a challenge to read aloud (as several parents also noted)[3]. Following the narrative directions established by the children, I read out what I could, but the trajectory of our discussion meant that some 'bits' got left out. Although this had also happened during our shared readings of the other picturebooks, the children seemed to notice it more during T*he Three Pig*s. While Sarah in Primary One simply pointed out the portions of the text we had missed by saying, *"How about we read all of those bits?"* Eve's approach was to firmly reign the group back in if we tried to skip too far ahead:

Jennifer: I think this is my favourite page.
Eve: No, we've not got to that page yet.
Jennifer: Okay, we'll get to that page. Look, they've all gone 'wheeeee!'…
Eve: Look! We need this page! [points to page she wants to read] (Primary One)

In the Primary Two group, Matthew took a different approach. Once we reached the end of our read-through and discussion, he asked politely: *"After this, could you **read** the book?"* a request he repeated several times, suggesting he didn't feel our non-linear, co-constructed passage through the text had constituted a 'proper' reading; an observation that also offered an insight into his habitus as a reader[4]. By taking issue with *how* we approached the text as a group, rather than with the text itself, Matthew, Eve and Sarah all responded with a form of resistance, albeit one that is not explicitly accounted for in the typology of children's resistance conceptualised by Sipe & McGuire (2006)[5]. With reference to this typology, the children's resistance seemed to be *more than* intertextual in that their critique was not directed at Wiesner's reinvention of the traditional story, but towards the aesthetics of this fragmentary story in performance.

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[3] *"It was very difficult to read for me. I didn't quite understand how to read it,"* (Niall)

[4] *"I only read when I am on holiday and he'll say, 'mummy, read me something from your book!' So I have to check what's on the page first…I think he just likes being read to."* (Michelle, Matthew's mum)

[5] The six types of resistance outlined by Sipe and McGuire (2006) are: intertextual; preferential or categorical; reality testing; engaged or kinetic; literary critical and exclusionary.

Likewise, Sipe and McGuire's label of literary critical resistance (2006) did not quite fit with the children's responses, given that they did not explicitly challenge any of Wiesner's authorial decisions or position themselves against the text itself. In light of the children's readiness to enter into the pigs' fictional world and their willing acceptance of metafictive devices as plausible plot drivers, their reaction against the version we co-produced as a group was all the more interesting. In part, this was because it suggested the ability of the metafictive devices to unsettle the expectations the readers brought with them to a text by disrupting (or even spoiling) the 'sort' of ending that *should* emerge by altering the consistency of the narrative flow produced during a shared literacy event. While I acknowledge that there may have been no issue other than my poor story-reading technique, it is possible that the polysemous, indeterminate nature of texts such as Wiesner's provoked resistance in different ways; in this case, by denying readers the satisfaction of feeling they had heard the whole story, even though every page had been turned.

Exploring the text at a meta-level…

As discussed, while the children did not respond with resistance to metafiction in *The Three Pigs*, they were still drawn to the effects of the devices and were keen to discuss and explore their effects, possibly building on their knowledge from the previous sessions as well as from their own experiences as readers, writers, viewers and thinkers.

One of the most interesting responses to metafiction in *The Three Pigs* came from Sarah, in Primary One, who had firmly refused to accept that words could be 'wrong' (and images 'right') during our discussion of *No Bears*. Like the contradictory words and images found in *No Bears*, Wiesner also uses contesting discourses on the first double-page-spread of *The Three Pigs*, when the wolf's huffing and puffing succeeds in blowing one of the pigs right out of the story frame and into the white space that surrounds it. While the words tell us the wolf 'ate the pig up', the visual narrative contradicts this assertion and we are shown the little pig escaping, utterly unscathed into a new world while the scrawny-looking wolf scratches his head in disbelief, wondering where his dinner has gone. Sarah was the first in her group to point to the contradiction between words and pictures, which she announced

with great shouts of laughter: *"It says that he ate the pig up but he didn't!"* Her exclamation sparked off a discussion about the discrepancies between words and pictures and the impact of this activity on the wolf, some of which is shown here:

Jennifer: Do you remember the last story we did? Do you remember that sometimes the words told a different story?

Lewis: [Alternates between growling and high pitched squeaking] Little pig, let me in! Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin!

Sarah: Because the pig doesn't actually get eaten up but it says.

Jennifer: So are the words right or are the pictures right?

All: The pictures!

Jennifer: Are the words wrong?

All: Wrong!

Beth: Well….but these words are right. [she points to the speech bubble next to the pig]

Jennifer: Oh, so those words are right. How are they different from the other words?

Beth: Because he says 'hey, he blew me out of the story' and he HAS blew him out of the story. [Primary One]

In this instance, Sarah was happy to accept that the words could be overruled, despite her previous resistance to this idea. While it is not possible to determine what caused her to change her mind – was it the plot? Wiesner's use of humour? – it was still interesting to note her reaction and to speculate on its evolution, given literacy's ecological nature (Pantaleo 2009b) and the possible effects of her peer group's more flexible stance towards the role of words and images. Equally interesting was Beth's carefully-drawn distinction between the veracity of the words linked to the dominant 'old' Three Pigs' narrative voice (seen as incorrect), and the liberated pigs' own speech bubbles (correct), both of which use different fonts, as shown in the image inserted below. The logic of her interpretation rested on the visible correlation between the pig's words and the action depicted in the images, but in order to make this connection, Beth must also have drawn on her wider knowledge of different visual and verbal grammars and their 'rules' of operation.

(Image 12: differences in meaning - words, pictures and fonts too, *The Three Pigs*)

Like the Primary One group, the Primary Two literature circle was also sparked off by a discussion about same double-page spread. After considering which mode was 'right', [*Ben: I believe the picture because the picture can tell you what's happening*], the children went on to describe how they had arrived at these readerly decisions:

Ben: It's confusing…

Jennifer: How did you make up your mind?

Niamh: I thought of the other book and looked at the page and said 'that's right and not the words.'

Jennifer: So what other book did you think of?

Niamh: Normal Three Pigs.

Clare: …I thought it was quite confusing. Because people don't know if the words are right or the pictures are right .

Jennifer: Yes, it's tricky. You can look at the pictures and you can see the pigs are coming out but what happens if the pictures are tricking us, and the words are right? We don't know!

Niamh: That's really confusing.

Jennifer: What do we do then?

Ben: I don't know.

Niamh: I think they would look at a bit that's right and then they would look at our book and they would think which one, which page it was at, and if it's right. (Primary Two)

By voicing her thought process, Niamh offered us an insight into the "inner conversation" (Walsh cited Farrell et al 2010) that took place when she encountered – and made meaning from – the contesting discourses on the page. In addition, by describing how readers compare and evaluate the texts they encounter, the reading process that she described was both active and reflective. We can also see how she negotiated ways around the uncertainties found in Wiesner's text by comparing it with a 'normal' version of the story, a word Niamh used as shorthand for the version that seemed familiar or legitimate, or, in her own words, the one that felt *"right"*. While the words 'normal' and 'right' suggest a reading habitus that was already quite attuned to a specific set of dispositions, it was interesting that Niamh put up no intertextual resistance. Instead, her comments seemed to reflect an easy acceptance that another retelling was possible, a key critical understanding (Anstey 2002) and another 'aha' moment for me.

As the children's responses to *The Three Pigs* have illustrated, the indeterminacy caused by the metafictive devices once again helped to provoke or "prod" some of these young readers into paying closer attention to the act of reading or meaning-making as a process (Goldstone 2004: 201; Smith 2005), perhaps more especially because they had taken place within the confines of a small group setting, where ideas could be tested and explored. This was also highlighted by the process of inquiry or "intellectual search" (Tizard & Hughes 1986) undertaken by Ben, a member of the Primary Two group, who returned to the issue of *how* to make meaning from the contradictory words and pictures on a number of occasions during the session, a train of thought (about thought) that suggested his determination to use the group discussion as a way of 'working something out.'

For example, Ben, who had initially voiced confusion and outright uncertainty about the process of how to read contesting words and images [*"I don't know"*] also referred to how the book had been read at home, possibly in order to locate the nature or origins of his own

response. When responding to a question about Wiesner's use of white space in the middle section of the picturebook, he said:

> *Well, my Dad thought it was quite weird and funny at the same time because all of the pages were folded up and he thought it was weird because if you don't have any – just blank…and no words, then you will just go 'wha?' It's more a puzzle so [Dad] wasn't really thinking, he wasn't really knowing what to do.* (Ben)

Undeterred by the 'weirdness' of the layout and design, Ben's use of *"puzzle"* suggested he – and his dad – had been involved in the text as active readers. A few pages later, when the pigs begin to move from the white space into other storybook worlds, such as a nursery rhyme and quest tale, Ben volunteered to the group: *"I think we have to look at the pictures and work it out,"* highlighting his awareness of the need to read across and between the different modes – verbal and visual – simultaneously at work on the page.

As we drew to a close almost 40 minutes later, Ben brought up the idea of readerly confusion once again, a move that also enabled Niamh to re-articulate and clarify her own stance:

Jennifer: Imagine if other characters could jump into the story.

Ben: That would be really good!

Matthew: I would jump into the…

Ben: But if the cat came out with the fiddle, then there wouldn't be a cat, and then the wolf would go 'uh?' and there would be no knowing which was right, the words or the story.

Jennifer: So it can be a bit confusing …

Niamh: Very confusing! You won't know which [one] actually is!

Jennifer: So how do you make up your mind?

Niamh: You could actually find another book and actually read that part and then go onto the next bit of the actual book… (Primary Two)

While the issue of *how* meaning was made in this context was not resolved, Ben's *"what if?"* final comment seemed to gesture towards a recognition of the nature of stories as multiple and infinite, as represented by the enormous number of questions or perspectives also left unanswered or unexplored by Wiesner's text. In contrast (yet by no means subordinate), Niamh's comment offered a way for puzzled readers − like Ben − to anchor their understandings through a logical process of comparison, using her concept of what a 'normal' book looked like. Given the ecological, social nature of literacy, it is feasible that Ben may have taken note of Niamh's explanation, just as Niamh may also have taken Ben's point on board for activation during future readings.

Summary, *The Three Pigs*

Like Ben, I have questions that remain unanswered as a result of the children's responses to *The Three Pigs*. Why did the children assimilate with this text so wholeheartedly? What − if anything − was significant about their lack of resistance to its complex structures and fractured storylines? While resistance is not something to be expected or produced on demand, its absence here seemed interesting, given that this text was far less traditional than the picturebooks we had already explored. Of course, perhaps it is *because* the text had offered such a diverse take on *The Three Pigs* tale that the children were happy to accept it as different rather than a story that was trying to 'pass itself off' as normal.

As discussed above, while the children noticed and responded to the metafictive devices by offering some interesting insights into their understanding of meaning-making as a process, the disruptive effects of these devices seemed to be accepted as part of the plot, rather than as something that could bring about a disconnection or distancing, however small. I acknowledge that it might seem fruitless to ruminate over the absence of something that could not be controlled or guaranteed, but my interest in this matter is built on the pupils' comments about the previous books, and the fact that experiencing resistance as a reading response to metafiction seemed to support or enable some of the children to take up a stance with more of a critical *edge*. As I have already described, by giving voice to what seemed unfair about the Bear's predicament in *No Bears* and by considering the message

of the images in relation to that of the printed text, it became possible for young readers like Ben to occupy a different space as a reader, one created and supported by the fact that his interpretation of the text seemed to be divergent or different from what was offered up by the dominant written narrative.

In addition, it has also been noted that teachers who give their students opportunities to describe their disconnections with a text, rather than simply their connections, can "open up spaces for critical conversations" (Jones 2005: 128). As such explicit teacherly interventions were not part of my role in this study, it seemed to be the metafictive books themselves, in conjunction with the readers, their knowledge and our shared reading context, that enabled such 'lessons' to emerge. In this instance, the children quite possibly didn't feel like disconnecting, choosing to instead fully submerge themselves into the pleasures of this fast-moving, metafictive adventure. In my notes, I observed that the children seemed to have 'approved' of Wiesner's changes to the traditional tale, perhaps because they brought its features into line with many of the multimodal digital texts that make up children's literary lives. By remaining firmly − and happily − within the world of the story, the students were not disposed towards interrogating the text or asking questions of the assumptions it made about the world, as my analysis has shown. Yet this did not prevent them from engaging with the text as readers with an increasing meta-level awareness and a growing sense of their picturebook expertise.

In the next sub-chapter, I explain how the children responded to the final picturebook in the series.

How the children responded…

Book Four: Encountering new forms of resistance in
Black and White

"Please, can we just read the words?"
(Eve, Primary One)

As my accounts of the previous literature circles have shown, the children had largely responded to the picturebooks as active readers who seemed sufficiently secure in their own understandings to offer directions and ideas that helped to shape our co-constructed pathways through the texts. In turn, this had enabled me to decentre myself as the authoritative teacher-type figure and supposed text expert, one of my methodological aims (Aukerman 2012). While some grown-up interventions were necessary from time-to-time (resolving a minor spat over who got to sit on a tiger-shaped cushion, for example), for the most part, the children seemed happy with my position as their co-reader. This did not mean that my teacher authority had vanished altogether but instead suggested the children's willingness to accept that I did not have to be the sole arbiter of the text's meaning.

When reading and discussing David Macaulay's *Black and White* (1990), however, the group dynamics altered quite significantly, with some of the children seeming to shift from active meaning makers to a sort of self-imposed passivity or submissiveness. This impacted on my own role by pushing me towards a more dogmatic, teacherly stance, something I tried to resist with varying degrees of success. As I have shown, in the previous texts the children had started to respond to the provocations of metafiction by articulating their resistance to aspects of character and plot. Yet *Black and White's* style and structures seemed to inspire a form of resistance that was more widespread and barrier-like in nature, an idea I unpack and reflect upon in the paragraphs that follow.

As a picturebook, *Black and White* differs from the others used in the study in that its 'metafictiveness' feels all-pervasive or dominant. While *The Bravest Ever Bear* plays with readers' knowledge of story structure through its frequent stop-start endings (and beginnings), its largely 'child-friendly', fairy tale-themed content, vast intertextuality and cumulative narrative trajectory made it possible for the young readers to connect with recognisable aspects of its subject matter, while also disconnecting with aspects of the text, such as its dual structure or disruptive narrative figures. Likewise, *No Bears'* sustained use of contesting discourses is housed within a broader narrative about princesses, bears and books; subjects that also seemed familiar and perhaps comfortable to many of the readers in this study.
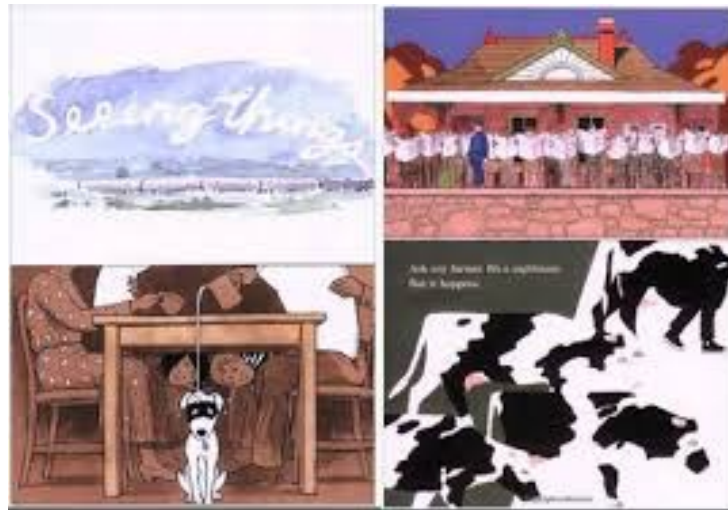
(Image 13: A spread from *Black and White*, showing the text's use of narrative quadrants and different visual styles)

With four separate (but connected) stories told simultaneously within a quadrant format, *Black and White* not only looks different from the other texts, but also deals with topics that are less well known in stories for children: the roaming and homing instincts of Holstein cows, for example, or the tedium endured by parents during their daily commute. In addition, as discussed below, the children's struggle to read this book in a conventional, linear, left-to-right sequence also seemed to heighten their awareness of its disruptive difference. In the following paragraphs, I describe how the metafictive nature of this text provoked these higher levels of resistance.

"*Have you got any more books*?" Beth, Primary One

In keeping with previous literature circles, the *Black and White* session with Primary One also started with a general question, in this case, whether everyone had been able to read the book. Before I could ask what the children had made of this challenging text, several of them beat me to it:

Beth: My mummy read it to me. I didn't know all of the words.

Eve: I like it but I don't really understand the book.

Jennifer: Tell me why you don't understand.

Eve: Because it is tricky to understand.

Jennifer: What was tricky?

Sarah: [reads] 'Udder Chaos!'

Eve: Those words. The words that go on…I can't really understand them.

As the tone of these opening comments suggests, our discussion of *Black and White* was immediately charged by a sense of the children's uncertainty and their desire to unlock or solve the secrets of the text. Interestingly, the children made more frequent references to their parents' interpretations during this session than any other; possibly invoking the home reading as a source of authority in the midst of the (sense of) confusion caused by the multi-stranded complexities of the plot, not to mention its challenging form and format. While there were occasional interpretive bursts, such as when the pupils made sudden connections between the multiple plot-lines or offered alternative hypotheses, much of the session consisted of identification and labelling, as illustrated by this exchange:

Beth: Oh look!

Jennifer: A row of boulders?

Eve: Those are just those cows.

Beth: Oh I think I can see the burglar!

Sarah: They didn't give them any tea!

Jennifer: They didn't speak to them either, they are just so busy working.

Beth: Can we go to the room we used last time?

Lewis: Let's see if we can count the bags. (Primary One)

As this brief extract illustrates, the children were most disposed towards Serafini's navigator resource (2012): together we spotted, counted, checked and labelled. Also, as shown above, the young readers were interpreters, a role forced upon them by the complex nature of the text, which required them to forge interpretive connections between each of the four stories in order to decode or unlock the book's "special structures" (Goldstone 2004). At times, each child's contribution to the discussion was made in reference to a separate story strand, as seen in the extract above; a factor that increased the complexity and disjointedness of our discussions, while heaping extra demands upon the attention spans of each reader as individuals.

This sense of disjointedness was also intensified by the children's resistance to the peculiarities of this text, which they expressed in ways that were both verbal and physical in nature. Words such as *"strange"*, *"weird"* and *"odd"* peppered their observations. Additionally, as shown in the extract above and within this section's sub-heading, both of Beth's comments: *"Can we go to the room we used last time?"* and *"Have you got any more books?"* suggested a strong feeling of preferential resistance that prompted her to try to find a way out of our discussion about *Black and White*. In fact, after only a few minutes of conversation, both Eve and Beth collaborated on the following exchange that conveyed a combined sense of their resistance to *Black and White*, although it must also be noted that both girls were keen to align themselves with my perspective by telling me how much they liked the book, despite the confusion it caused:

Eve: Can we get "No Bears" again?
Beth: Because we liked that one.
Eve: Can we just read it [Black and White] and tell me what it means because I don't know what it means. (Primary One)

While Beth's use of 'we' was both interesting and intelligent in that it conveyed to me the idea of collective dissatisfaction, Eve's comment felt more unusual because it marked the first time in the project that one of the children had directly asked me to provide an 'answer' to one of the books. Up until this point, any problems had either been solved

between us or simply left unresolved (such as Sarah's strong feelings about the Fairy Godmother's role in *No Bears*). Yet over the course of the 50-minute group discussion, Eve made 19 separate, politely-worded requests for me to *"please tell [me] what it means"*, or words to that effect. Acknowledging her concerns, I encouraged the children to rely on their own understandings, although this did not meet with an entirely happy response:

Eve: Can you just read the story and tell me what it means now please?

Jennifer: What happens if I don't know what it means?

Eve: You do!

Jennifer: What happens if I don't?

Eve: Then you won't tell me!

Jennifer: But you can tell me what you think too.

Eve: Nooooooo!

*Beth: Can we have the rest of the story now… (*Primary One)

All too aware of these feelings of frustration and resistance, the session picked up in pace as I attempted to cover the text according to the children's instructions, while deliberately resisting the level of scaffolding some of them seemed to be willing me to provide. Sometimes they asked me to go back and read a section again, this time performing it using a different, quite specific voice [*Eve:"Can you do it like he's saying it cross"*[6]]. Also at Eve's request, I read out as many words as I could, sometimes with only a passing reference to the images. Yet given the nature of the text and the interplay between words and pictures, it was extremely difficult to honour her request. The following extract is representative of the competing demands in operation during the session:

Jennifer: Shall we follow the burglar and see what happens?

Beth: [reads] Udder chaos. And look! It's got a picture!

Eve: Can you read the book?

Beth: It's udder chaos because look!

Eve: Can you read all of the words in the book?

"That's my fault. I'm sorry. I have never heard those sorts of words being used without a nasal sort of twang." (Brendan, Eve's dad)

Jennifer: What about the pictures?

Eve: No. [shakes head]

Beth: This one looks interesting.

Jennifer: Can you see how it says here that the words and the pictures are meant to be read…

Eve: Please can we just read the words? (Primary One)

Eve's privileging of words over images was interesting in terms of what it could reveal about *what counted* for her when making meaning that seemed trustworthy and comprehensible. While she was happy to allow images to carry the 'correct' narrative in *No Bears* and *The Three Pigs*, this multimodal flexibility did not apply to *Black and White*, where the interplay between words and images is more complex and the subject matter more obscure. Rattled by what she perceived as her inability to crack the book's code [*"I like to find out what books mean"],* Eve's default setting of trust appeared to be with words, reflecting the influence of wider social and scholastic hierarchies that have resulted in the construction of writing's "unquestionably veridical" status (Baker & Freebody 1989: 22). Beth and Eve's resistance to the text could also have been linked to their struggle to enact a satisfactory *proairetic* reading from its indeterminate temporal structures and non-sequential nature, a term that refers to how a reader interacts with a text in order to anticipate what lies ahead (Nikolajeva 2010: 29). Without a coherent sense of sequence, in other words − a tangible beginning, middle and end − it is said that readers may be less likely to regard a text as complete and comprehensible (Nikolajeva 2010: 29). As a result, it is also feasible that readers might respond to such texts with increased resistance.

Resistance to the book was also performed and embodied. Our *Black and White* reading session took place first thing in the morning − the same time slot (and length) we had used before − and occurred in the school library − a location we had also used several times during the project. As well as several requests from Beth for a different book or to shift location, three out of the four children asked to go to the toilet (something that had also not happened in any of the previous sessions). After her toilet break, Beth drifted off around

the small library while Eve told me she *"didn't really want a chair anymore"*. A few moments later, Sarah said, *"I don't want to see the pictures"* and also proceeded to prowl around the library space, offering comments on our on-going discussion from afar. Of course, the children's need for toilet breaks and restlessness during this session could have been mere coincidence, linked to tiredness or some other distraction, such as the firework celebrations of November 5th the night before. However, the higher incidence of these physically-resistant responses during a reading session that was also riddled with examples of verbal resistance have made it tempting to connect the two.

Using Sipe and McGuire's typology (2006), the main forms of resistance offered by the Primary One group were preferential and literary critical, as illustrated by Eve's comments relating to the text's utter incomprehensibility. Reminiscent of the "chaotic" reading scenes of home, as described by Tizard and Hughes (1986), the children's resistance to *Black and White* presented both an obstacle and opportunity for critical conversations to develop. Unlike the other sessions, where the children's 'talking back' had been in relation to narrower aspects of the text, such as character or theme, here their resistance felt broader and aimed at the very concept of this multi-stranded, multi-voiced book. In other words, here the issue was with the text itself, rather than with a character's flaw or misdemeanour. To return again to Bourdieu's "fish out of water" simile (Wacquant 1989), it appeared that readers like Eve and Beth had encountered a text that was so far removed from their normative concepts of how books worked that it threatened to derail their reading experience. Due to the disruptive nature of the text's metafictive excesses, the girls seemed unable to connect with it experientially or empathically; absences that created a sense of distance from the book that, with support, *could* perhaps have helped them edge towards a more critical perspective. Given the project's constraints (both methodological and temporal), it was not possible for me to develop or explore the critical potential implicit in the children's resistance within the sessions, other than to observe the nature of their responses and speculate on their wider implications for teaching, learning and reading. The issues raised here − including the need for support (and what this might entail) − will be developed in more depth in Chapters Seven and Eight.

In the journal I kept during the project, I noted that this particular session had felt like a *"struggle."* As this word suggests, I felt that I had done a bad job; that the children had not 'got' the book; we had not cracked its codes. Reflecting on this from afar, I appreciate that what we struggled against was exactly the sort of road-block style resistance that Sipe and McGuire have encouraged teachers to reframe and embrace for its catalytic potential to develop more reflective and critically-minded readers (2006). But based on my lived experience of this resistance (and other examples from my secondary teaching practice), I can see why such responses might initially be rejected as negative or passive, or seen as somehow representative of a failure to understand or connect. Learning to deal with resistance in a constructive sense was a lesson for both the children and myself. Given the level of dissent, resistance and distraction during our discussion, this felt like a noisy literature circle. Yet, the transcripts show that some voices were quieter in this literature circle than others. Lewis, it turned out, had not read the book, which explained why he was less vocal. At the other extreme was Sarah, who had brought with her an interpretation that she adhered to without change, despite the resistance and confusion that surrounded her: *"I know what it's about! Everything what's problems!"* Having observed the frustration of her peers, while already secure in her conviction that she had cracked the book's code, Sarah took more of a back seat during our read-through. By firmly adhering to her initial hypothesis about *"problems",* perhaps Sarah also enacted another form of resistance: by refusing to submit to the ambiguity and indeterminacy caused by the metafictive devices at work in *Black and White.*

"Don't listen to the words! Be warned! Don't listen to the words!" Ben, Primary Two

Like their younger counterparts in Primary One, the Primary Two group spent a lot of time decoding or cracking the codes at work in Macaulay's *Black and White.* They also expressed confusion at the book's non-traditional structure, the presence of contesting discourses, the indeterminacy of the plot and its unusual layout. While several admitted to not having enjoyed this book as much as the others – including Ben who said he felt *"disappointed because none of it made any sense"* – the sense of preferential resistance was less acute or tangible than in the Primary One session, with the older group embarking

on a lively discussion that saw them interacting with the text as interpreters, navigators and designers.

Despite their confusion, the language the children used to talk about the text reflected their willingness to take it on and to engage with it using an interpretive problem-solving stance. Phrases such as: *"I want to show you a picture…"* (Niamh); *"There is something else that I thought"* (Clare); and *"I think I know what he has done!"* (Matthew); along with their use of *maybe* and *could* all reflected the conjecture-rich spirit of the discussion and the explorative, speculative nature of their findings.

Even Ben's initial admission of disappointment, which could be interpreted as an expression of literary critical resistance according to Sipe and McGuire's typology (2006), became a sort of springboard into new understandings about the interplay between words and pictures within the text. Once the discussion was underway, we turned to the subject of *how* the book had been read at home. Had they read each of the four panels from left to right before turning the page? Or had they followed one story through at a time? Ben shared his experience with the group:

Ben: Well, we sort of did that but instead of reading the words we looked at the pictures and then we figured out what was happening because the words aren't always right and I think especially in that book that the pictures are right but not the words. The pictures tell more than the words.

Jennifer: Can you find me an example of that?

Ben: Yup. Because… that looks like the dog and it's like it's telling you that it's the same but just… they're joined.

Jennifer: So you mean the pictures are telling you they are joined, is that what you mean? Because the dog has a band over his eyes?

Ben: Yeah, yeah.

Jennifer: So, how do you mean the words don't tell you that?

Ben: Because the words are just telling you that it's one picture…but the words are telling you that it's joined…no − the pictures are telling you that it's joined.

Jennifer: And does that make it easy to read or tricky?

Ben: It makes it tricky to read. Like the other book, it makes it really tricky to read because you go, 'Uh? What?' (Primary Two)

As in some of the previous sessions, the content of Ben's comments have proved harder to categorise because of their movement "beyond the literal", to recycle Serafini's helpful phrase (2012: 160). As seen above, discussing the interplay between the words and images, helped Ben to describe how he had read, while beginning to evaluate the effect the text had on him as a maker of meaning, giving his reading a more critical, metacognitive edge (Smith 1999).

Glimpses of the children's awareness of the role of words and pictures were again visible towards the end of the session, when we discussed what you would tell someone else about *Black and White*, such as **how** to go about reading it. While Niamh stuck to describing the book in terms of its plot: *"I think I would say it is about a boy who is going on a train for the first time and he meets his mum… and the burglar is trying to do something…"*; Clare decided to focus on the possibility of confusion: *"I would [say], it's quite confusing and at the end everything is very confusing. It's all about trains and the robber is in every story."* Ben's advice was slightly different in that he focused more on Macaulay's use of modes, quite possibly inspired by the presence of the 'warning' label on the title page:
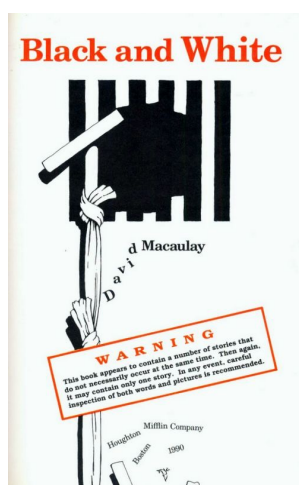
(Image 14: The warning on the title page of *Black and White*)

Ben: Well, I would [say]: Don't listen to the words! Be warned! Don't listen to the words! Look at the pictures.

Niamh: There's a warning…

Jennifer: There is a warning.

Matthew: Maybe he could read the warning! (Primary Two)

Once again, Ben's comments offered an insight into the decisions he had made as a reader while working through the text, both at home and within our little group at school. By emphasising the power of images over words, Ben also showed he understood what would *normally count* when reading or making meaning from a text. In other words, he seemed aware that another reader might automatically privilege words over images, without considering the question of their reliability. In this respect, Ben's comment revealed traces of the social practices and influences that had already sculpted his assumptions as a reader and had conditioned his literacy practices. Yet, by deciding to warn others against this heavy dependency on words, Ben's comment was also resistant, indicating his willingness to challenge or undermine aspects of the status quo. This awareness of how others might read emerged once again towards the end of the session, when we reflected on all of the books we had read as a group. Interestingly, Ben expressed his preference by conjuring up an intertextual link that compared the books according to their metafictive characteristics:

Ben: I loved 'The Three Pigs'… It was a bit like [Black and White] because it has stories joined onto stories and it's really funny. As well you have to look at the pictures and not the words.

Jennifer: Do you think, when you are reading with other people, do they read the pictures?

Niamh: No, they just read the words.

Ben: No, they just look at the words, being boring.

Niamh: Because they know they are right.

Jennifer: But are the words always right?

Ben: Nope! (Primary Two)

Like Ben's, Niamh's comment also revealed some of the assumptions underpinning her disposition as a reader. To her, adult readers were equated with words and, despite some of her earlier comments on the role of images in the picturebooks, it seemed that her trust remained with words as the more reliable or 'right' mode. After a quick interjection of some humour at the expense of adults, Ben took up an opposing stance to Niamh by suggesting once again that the veracity of words could be challenged by images. Although it would have been satisfying to think that reading the picturebooks within the project had been responsible for propelling Ben towards this awareness, it was beyond the scope (and the intention) of this study to determine how much he already knew. However, it is highly likely that the project built on his existing ideas and knowledge and provided him with a different space to explore them in greater depth. In addition, Ben's repeated comments about words and images may also have been an attempt to align his understandings with what he assumed to be my own, in order to provide me with a 'correct' and pleasing answer. Regardless of this, the complexity of Ben's insight and engagement with metafiction was impressive in that it enabled him to make increasingly "meta-level understandings of language in use", which as Gee has reminded us, can make the adoption of a critical stance more likely (Gee cited Lankshear 1999: 24).

Summary, *Black and White*

As with the other picturebooks, examining the children's responses and resistance to *Black and White* has shown what is possible without explicit instruction or scaffolding. There are, of course, several caveats to consider: the children were aware they were participating in a research project and this would have impacted on their responses, including the time they spent reading. In addition, they may have consciously aligned themselves with what they perceived to be my stance, in order to please me, or to provide me with a 'correct' answer. Yet by focusing on what emerged from the children's transactions with the metafictive aspects of the texts, I have highlighted the 'work' that metafiction can do, while also gesturing towards what else might be possible with some additional and sensitively-constructed scaffolding and support.

In Chapters Seven and Eight, the discussion and final summary, I pull together some of the main ideas to have emerged from my discussions with the children and reflect upon the pedagogic possibilities that metafictive picturebooks may offer other readers. Before that, I turn to the group of parent readers and consider what their responses to metafiction revealed about *what mattered* to them when reading at home with their children. As with the children's responses, I provide a commentary for each of the picturebooks, prefaced by an overview of how I approached the process of analysing our conversations.

Chapter Six:
Talking about the books - how the parents responded

> *"Having now read these books, it will be interesting to*
> *see what you were trying to get out of this."*
>
> **(Niall, Niamh's dad)**

Shifting the starting point: constructing an analytical frame for the parents' responses

After working through the children's transcripts, I moved on to my conversations with their parents. As with the younger readers, I wanted to be able to explore how the adults had responded to the texts – especially to the metafictive devices – and wondered what kinds of conversations they might have inspired at home. However, it quickly became evident that I could not apply the same analytical approach wholesale to both the adults and children because both sets of readers had responded to me – and the task of talking about the books – in quite different ways. To a large extent, this was because I had actually read and talked through the books with the children during our sessions together, yet I did not read through the books with the parents. Instead of reading or talking through the picturebooks page by page, we tended to discuss them in far broader terms, with one exception, which I describe below. Therefore, applying the same Serafini/ Luke and Freebody inspired framework to the parents' and children's responses just did not seem to 'fit' with the contents and context of the two data sets.

The differing nature of our conversations about the books meant that the parents embarked on the project from a different starting point to the children. The variances in their interpretive stance can be more clearly explained using Gee's terms for describing the nature of "human work" involving language as being either *enactive* or involving an act of *recognition* (1998: 15). According to Gee's ideas, the very nature of research can be thought of as enactive because it involves an individual assembling a particular set of ideas and materials into a particular configuration in a way that "pro-jects" [hyphenated in

original] something about their meaning and value to others, in this case to the group of children and parents who had volunteered to read and discuss a specific, pre-selected range of books (ibid). The act of recognition comes from the ways in which others respond to what has been enacted; in other words, their efforts to "accept or reject our attempts – to see or fail to see things 'our way'" (ibid). As Gee has also noted, the social nature of recognition means that changes or alterations to what was originally enacted (through the process of interpretation) are an inevitable outcome (ibid).

Recognition and Response

Using these terms helped me to conceptualise the ways in which both parents and children had recognised and responded to what was offered to them by the project. The children, who were presented with opportunities to talk about the books with a teacher-like adult within the familiar setting of their school building, seemed to *recognise* the project as similar to other school-like reading practices; a connection that may have prompted some of them to draw on many of the resources, behaviours and reading habits they already knew to be privileged or permitted in that setting. Like the children, the parents' recognition of the project was informed by where and how we spoke about the books, using the methods I have described in the methodology chapter. Yet several additional factors may also have helped to shape the parents' approach to the project.

To start with, how the parents responded was influenced by their greater understanding of what participating in a research project actually signified. This was alluded to by several parents who implicitly acknowledged the deliberate or intentional nature of my actions (or *enactions*) as a researcher, by trying to second-guess my thesis or rationale from quite early on, as shown by comments such as Niall's: *"I think I know what you are up to."* Others were more candid about how 'real' or representative their shared reading experiences had been compared to what would normally happen at home. Not only did these admissions heighten the sense of the project's constructedness (possibly even its metafictiveness?), but they also added a performative aspect – akin to acting-up for the camera – in which we all played along with creating the research together before flipping back into 'normal' parent

mode once the recorder was switched off. Laura's comment, which was made at the start of the project, illustrates this heightened sense of motivation:

> *To be absolutely honest, we probably spent more time on the books because we knew we were doing this, but maybe that's a given…We read a lot of books at home and…they love their stories at bedtime but sometimes, you know, you just want to get it done, get a cup of tea and get to bed. So it was quite nice, setting aside a bit of time to sit and talk about it properly and to see how much he takes in.*

As *"talking about it properly"* suggested, Laura also seemed to have used the project as a positive way of focusing in on an aspect of family life and learning that busy schedules can often make difficult.

Called to account: the impact of 'taking part'

Another factor to have conditioned the parents' recognition of the study may have been the pervasive influence of dominant understandings about research as an extractive and reductive process of inquiry (Phipps 2013a). Concerns were frequently expressed – often via self-deprecatingly humorous asides – as to whether they had given the 'right' answers or interpreted the books 'correctly'. Latterly, several parents revealed that the process of discussing the texts had initially felt like a test. This suggested that some may have *recognised* the project as posing questions about their parental competence, by requiring them to make their practices recognisable to me (Butler 2001), a researcher with a largely-invisible agenda, within a field that is so often defined in terms of success and failure – especially when pertaining to the contested issue of how to raise children 'properly'. Attending to these flashes of anxiety helped me to understand that, for some, university research was unfamiliar ground that caused an increased sense of self-consciousness. In turn, this caused me to pay closer attention to my own actions, while sharpening my sense of the distinction between the responses of the children and their parents.

The unavoidable legal and ethical requirements of the university research process may also have shaped the parents' recognition of the study and informed the dynamics of their 'starting point', thus differentiating it further from the children's. By consenting for their

words and ideas to be subject to scrutiny and analysis against criteria over which they had limited control and no prior knowledge, the parents also agreed to make themselves and their children vulnerable. Yet this conscious act of voluntary consent could also be interpreted as a sign of approval of and/or interest in aligning themselves with a university and research council-backed project that might bring intellectual and educational benefits or insights alongside any temporary discomfort caused by the experience of vulnerability or sense of risk.

To help explain this further, I turn to Bourdieu's concept of capital, which Compton-Lilly has applied specifically to reading in order to explore how certain groups and individuals can be positioned as "accomplished or struggling readers" by the privileging of officially-recognised success criteria (2007: 115). Using these terms, the project itself could be conceptualised as offering access to a form of *social reading capital* through its creation of a support network of educationally-based relationships aimed at promoting readers − and the act of reading − according to officially-recognised ideas and approaches. Indeed, the project could also be considered as offering a form of *embodied reading capital,* a subset of cultural capital, through its potential to cultivate desirable "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" that are often associated with proficient and successful readers (Bourdieu cited Compton-Lilly 2007: 116). Such behaviours include being seen to read the 'right books' in the 'right' way, or knowing how to say the 'right' things about books and reading (the example Compton-Lilly gives is, 'I love books' (ibid: 116)).

Therefore, as a form of social capital, the project embodied a set of values, ideas and aspirations that presumably aligned well with the habitus of those parents who volunteered. As I describe below, many of the parents identified reading as being socially desirable and linked to personal development, [Laura, mother of Lewis: *"You learn to read because it opens up this whole world to you, that you can do things by yourself"*] or self-reported as visibly voracious readers: *"If it's a book and it's lying around then it will get read"* (James, father of Ben). It could also be argued that in this era of increasing standardisation and competence-based skills testing, some parents may have been attracted to the project by

the idea that it might contribute to their child's (and possibly their own) accomplishments (or capital) as readers, by topping up the value of their existing educational provision and personal knowledge in a highly competitive field, although this is definitely not to suggest that the parent volunteers were motivated only by self-interest.

Having considered the possible influence of reading capital, the complexity of the parents' stance and my impression that the adults' responses felt different from the children's, I understood that I had to adjust the frame of my analysis. Like the children, *what* the parents selected as relevant for our discussion would have been influenced by what they assumed I was interested in 'discovering' about their reading habits. Therefore, I felt that my earlier focus on *what the readers decided to tell me about the text* could remain. As with the children, I hoped that the parents' selections might function as "radioactive isotopes", illuminating the currents of "human work" that flowed beneath the surface of their responses (Gee 1998: 24).

As mentioned above, while my conversations with parents revolved around the books, they did not involve us reading them through together. This was not something that had been ruled out. In fact, I was invited to read through several of the books with Clare, her mum and Clare's younger brother in their family home. Yet on the whole, most parents decided to describe to me how they had read the books instead of providing a page-by-page breakdown. Consequently, I decided that classifying the responses according to the Serafini/ Luke and Freebody categories was less relevant, given that we were not decoding and navigating our way through the texts in the same ways we had done with the children. Linked to this was the fact that it was not possible for me to observe how the parents had responded to the metafictive devices as they cropped up in the texts. Instead, I noted down when parents made specific mention of a feature I knew to be metafictive in character, then later examined the types of comment to have been provoked.

Another factor for consideration was that that the majority of parent readers seemed to automatically assume responsibility for a dual level of interpretation, although this had not

been explicitly requested from them. When asked, *"what did you think of the book?"* their answers tended to reference their own thoughts on the texts while simultaneously offering a second layer of commentary that assessed their child's performance or engagement against a set of standards that we had not discussed, but which drew upon their socially and experientially-shaped assumptions about what *should* count when reading, often linked to schooled developmental goals. For example, Niall, father of Niamh said: *"I think she needs to expand some of her vocabulary",* while Michelle, mother of Matthew noted: *"I know he's too old for Julia Donaldson now, but that's what he loves, that sort of rhyming in books."* Such comments reflected how the adults seemed to have internalised aspects of the benchmarking systems used in schools (and reinforced in other contexts) in order to assess their child's progress at home, which they now put into use within this project. Again, this was not something I had expected but it was a feature that afforded me a glimpse at some of the socially constructed understandings that underpinned the decisions the parents made as readers, co-readers and respondents during this project.

The messiness of interpretation

Having recognised that so many diverse influences underpinned the parents' responses, how to weave them together threw up several representational challenges. Unlike the children, who had met and discussed the books in small groups, where peer-to-peer influence was likely, the parents talked with me alone. Therefore, with the adults, it was harder to establish a clear sense of a collective feeling or overall response, given that the notes and transcripts were from multiple sets of individual meetings, all conducted at different times, in differing spaces and contexts. In addition, it was crucial to recognise the impact of my own position on the tenor of the discussions, given that some of the participants were known to me through the playground network before the study, while others were relative strangers. Therefore, it could be argued that what the parents felt *could* be said, in other words, what seemed permissible in the circumstances, was conditioned by their knowledge of me and my roles as researcher and/or their parental peer. While aware of this issue as a limitation, how to translate its influence into writing was challenging, causing me to reflect more deeply on the nature of "fieldwork [as] a personal experience [in which] our intuition, senses and emotions…are powerfully woven into and inseparable

from the process" (Madison 2012: 8). Following Law (2004: 61), I have also acknowledged and embraced the idea that research of this type cannot be neatly compartmentalised or fully explained because "different realities overlap and interfere with one another. Their relations, partially co-ordinated, are complex and messy."

With all of this in mind, I approached the analysis of the transcripts by drawing once again on the generative principles of grounded theory to establish the types of comment that recurred through reading and re-reading the parents' transcripts (Strauss & Corbin 1988), although I have already explained my appropriation of this method at the start of Chapter Five. As with the children's responses, their words were filtered through a framework of understandings from theories of critical pedagogy and reader response, as well as Bourdieu, in a hope that such a focused perspective might enable issues of power and equity to surface. Given the wide ranging and exploratory nature of our individual discussions, it became necessary to make links between the responses and to gather segments together under broad thematic headings in order to create a narrative pathway through the transcripts. At a broad level, some key ideas or themes to emerge from the parents' comments included:

- the books (and the children's responses to them) as surprising
- the dominance of words over images
- parents' resistance to the picturebooks' unruliness
- parents' own experiences and habits as readers
- the role of reading (what it is for)
- the responsibility of co-reading
- 'what counts' for young readers (what they *should* be learning)
- parents' uncertainty of their own abilities as readers or the need for guidance

In addition, many of the parents' comments on the books helped to animate aspects of picturebook theory, showing how 'real' readers can both enact but also disrupt theoretical, scholarly claims.

Given the lengthy number of categories listed above and the fact that each book elicited a differing range of ideas, I decided to re-read and re-group the parents' responses to the books under the far broader headings listed below. While this is again a reductive measure, this process of searching for parallels or commonalities across the parents' responses also enabled further patterns and stories to emerge, which, in turn, helped me to formulate my thoughts and ideas into the paragraphs that follow below. Given the selective nature of this qualitative, narrative-driven account, it was, of course, necessary to exclude many potential categories, ideas and observations from this final write-up and once again I acknowledge the fact that other stories would be possible. Pursuing the line of inquiry already made clear in the following sections, I decided to arrange the parents' ideas about the books into these broad areas:

- how the parents 'recognised' the book
- how the books were read, including any responses to metafiction
- reflections arising from the book.

Repeating the narrative trajectory I followed with the children's responses, in the next section I describe how the parents responded to *The Bravest Ever Bear,* the first book to be sent home.

How the parents responded…

Book One: Getting the hang of a metafictive approach in *The Bravest Ever Bear*

> *"I found it strange to start with, the very first time reading it with her, but Beth found it hilarious."*
>
> **(Chloe, Beth's mum)**

Recognition

Nearly all of the parents told me that they liked this picturebook. The exception was Michelle, Matthew's mum, who said she didn't really welcome the interruptions caused by the text's metafictive structure:

> *It wasn't what I was used to. It took a couple of times to get into it. The first time I was reading it, I was like, 'oh right, okay, okay.' And then it would stop and the Bear would start writing his own story and I was like, 'we are going to have to read this again!'* (Michelle)

As *"It wasn't what I was used to"* suggests, what Michelle initially recognised about the book was related to its difference from her normative expectations of narrative structure and the impact this had on her experience of reading *The Bravest Ever Bear* aloud. As she explained, *"I'm used to books that just sort of flow,"* a comment that politely implied a preference for books with structures less disjointed and approaches a bit less "*weird*". In addition to Julia Donaldson's books, Michelle said they were currently reading books from several widely available reading schemes: *"We just go through Biff and Chip − I've got my own Biff and Chip, outwith the school's − so we go through them."* As staged, school-approved approaches to reading, the stories included within such schemes tend to adhere to traditional narrative conventions, usually privileging the status of words over images (Arnold 1996). By replicating a similar pattern of ordered, developmental progression through the books at home, Michelle indicated to me how she primarily aligned herself with the dominant literacy practices advocated by schools and reinforced by so many other outlets.

A similar sense of 'strangeness' was also expressed by Beth's mum, Chloe, who began by contrasting her own response to the text to her daughter's:

> *I found it very strange the first time reading it with her, but Beth found it hilarious, especially with the little bear saying things like, 'this is ridiculous' and 'even more ridiculous'; she found it really funny.*

Like Michelle, Chloe recognised *The Bravest Ever Bear* in terms of what made it different from the texts usually sent home from school, but this time the contrast worked more in favour of the metafictive text. According to Chloe, the books Beth usually brought home had:

> *…very simple words and the pictures kind of tell the story, what's going on… whereas this was much more of a story, much more like the sort of books we would read her.*

It seemed that while Chloe was happy to receive reading books home from school [*"The books they are reading are a really good starting point. I'm amazed at how much she can read now and it has only been a few weeks"*], she was keen to emphasise their place alongside *"more **story** books".* Her spoken emphasis of the word in bold suggested her knowledge of (and perhaps personal preference for) texts other than the staged reading books sent home from school, although, as she observed wryly, her choice did not usually extend to books with *"all that starting and stopping"* as per the Ahlberg and Howard text.

Despite the confusion caused by its narrative structure [*"I said to Beth, 'what's going on here? This is a funny book"*], bound up in Chloe's response to *The Bravest Ever Bear* was a recognition of what it might offer in terms of a more holistic reading experience, or perhaps in terms of its potential to cultivate the "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" associated with a successful reader (Compton-Lilly 2007: 116). By deliberately encouraging Beth to read books she felt were *more story-like* in tandem with the staged reading texts sent home from school, Chloe showed her support for the school's approach while consciously supplementing it with another 'sort' of reading; one linked to the idea of stories as a source of pleasure and imaginative freedom.

The presence of these two apparently separate strands within Chloe's initial comments struck me as interesting, given the school's use of a reading scheme that is largely structured around the acquisition of set word lists in the first two years of schooling, and the assumption that most parents would align themselves with this approach without question. Indeed, by ensuring that the reading practices she encouraged at home both complemented but also expanded upon the "ways with words" (Heath 1983) made *most visible to parents* by the school at this stage, Chloe's approach showed me how the literacies of home and school could already co-exist and supplement one another, despite the conventional notion of a divide between the two. Of course, this is not to suggest that the school's repertoire of reading practices (or that of any other participant) was limited to a close focus on decoding written text. Given my knowledge of the school as a parent and researcher, I know this is far from representative and it has not been the intention of this study to amplify the idea of a home-school binary. However, as parents who were immersed in this particular approach to reading when our discussions took place, it makes sense that many of them drew comparisons between their knowledge of other 'sorts' of books for reading, in order to articulate and contextualise their recognition of the picturebooks' characteristics.

Like Michelle and Chloe, Niall, father of Niamh, also recognised the text in terms of its differences to the types of books already known to them as a family, but this time focused on whether the more sophisticated demands he felt it made of its younger readers were entirely age-appropriate: *"I found the humour quite funny but I wasn't exactly sure that Niamh would. I thought it would appeal more to an adult."* As Niall's subsequent comments implied, other "writerly" demands made by the text (Barthes 1970) included the need for a heightened intertextual awareness of the multiple parodies and retellings played out by the picturebook's words and pictures: *"I have read a number of fairy tales to her before…and I think because some of that was in there as well, she understood some of them and appreciated it a lot more because of that."* Like the children, Niall seemed to have been drawn towards the metafictive "literacy bits" (Gee 1998), perhaps because they also jarred with his expectations of what such a book *should* contain, at what level it should be pitched and how it should be read.

Similarly misaligned expectations of children's abilities were expressed by the adult participants in McClay's study, which explored teachers' and students' responses to the metafictive complexities of Macaulay's *Black and White* (2000). As mentioned in a previous section, some of the teachers assumed pupils would not be able to access the text without adult support because of the difficulties *they* had encountered while interpreting its structures and content (2000: 101), suggesting the effects of socially-generated assumptions about what adults expect and what children can deliver as readers. In a sense, this project built on some of McClay's foundations by offering *parents* (instead of teachers) a space in which to (re)consider their prior assumptions about reading, after exploring the book together at home. Having initially assessed the text as too complex for his daughter, Niall said he was both pleased and interested to notice that she *"actually enjoyed it as well,"* an admission that indicated how he had already adopted a reflective, quite co-researcherly stance towards the work we were collectively enacting; a shift that enabled him to step back and to revisit some of his assumptions. Close to the start of our discussion he observed:

> *I suppose at first, I thought 'okay, where is this going? Am I really going to enjoy this? What am I meant to be reading? Probably Niamh thought that too…But I think that as she went through the book…and as some of the stories started to get a bit more complex, she started to enjoy it.*
>
> (Niall, Niamh's dad)

Niall's interpretation and explanation of his daughter's reading enjoyment interested me for several reasons. First of all, by assuming that *"probably Niamh thought that too,"* Niall showed he expected them to experience the text in similar ways, presumably due to their shared funds of knowledge from home (Gonzalez et al 2005). Yet Niamh's perspective of the book - although possibly exaggerated for my benefit - told a different story from her dad's:

Jennifer: What did your mum and dad think [of 'The Bravest Ever Bear']?

Niamh: I think they thought it was quite weird.

Jennifer: Why did they think it was weird?

Niamh: Because it was different stories the other way round.

Jennifer: And did you think it was weird?

Niamh: No, I thought it was quite funny. (Primary Two)

Secondly, Niall's suggestion that Niamh would probably have preferred the *"more complex"* stories found in the latter part of the picturebook, to the scant, four-line, apparently dysfunctional versions found in the earlier pages was also intriguing because it effectively aligned both of their reading preferences with the most conventional aspects of quite an unconventional text. By commenting on the book in this way, Niall offered up another sort of recognition, this time in relation to his daughter's status as a reader and thinker in her own right, as well as considering what might make a book for children seem more grown-up:

Niall: There were certain words like 'community service', I don't think she really understood that. You had to explain certain bits to her.

Jennifer: When I spoke to her this morning about Goldilocks being sent for a trial, they were all quite approving, they thought this was a good idea…It was quite interesting to see a flip-side of the story.

Niall: Yes, I think she picks things up at school, with her friends, that I probably don't appreciate. She understands things a lot more than I think she understands them…It's quite good, as this is quite a grown-up book really, rather than the books we have, which are more aimed at just the children.

As Niall's final sentence or two suggest, the process of discussing the book helped him to recognise it as offering something more, or something different, to the books they usually read at home. In this regard, this picturebook helped to unsettle his initial assumptions about what was possible or most suitable for readers at Niamh's age and stage of development.

Response

Like Niall, after identifying what made the book seem different, other parents described how they had read it and how they had dealt with the challenges posed by its complex

structures and sophisticated humour. When asked how he had read the book, Brendan, Eve's dad, couched his response in quite practical terms:

> *Once you got the concept, you were fine. You ended up using the ends*
> *[of the separate stories]…Like, normally you would read through a book*
> *and say 'what do you think?' That sort of thing. [Here] you were reading a*
> *passage and then discussing the passage, as opposed to what you would*
> *normally do in a book, when you could go through five pages of Kipper*
> *and all the rest, and you wouldn't have an opportune moment to stop.*
> *It broke it up in such a way that there…was more interaction between us.*
>
> (Brendan)

As Brendan suggested, the complexities and *"concepts"* used in *The Bravest Ever Bear* provoked him to adopt a different approach while reading. Through his explanation of how the book was read, it is possible to see how his existing practices were adapted in order to make meaning, such as pausing more frequently to discuss the narratives as they occurred [*"using the ends"*], rather than ploughing on towards a summative discussion at the end. While there is perhaps nothing so very remarkable in pausing to discuss a book more frequently, it is nevertheless interesting and, I think, significant, that Brendan perceived a need to articulate this fact, perhaps because it seemed odd and therefore different to his usual practice, as confirmed by his repeated use of phrases such as *"normally you would read through"* and *"what you would normally do"*. In this way, Brendan's insights provided a glimpse of theory in action by demonstrating some of the heightened reader engagement that metafiction is said to demand (Pantaleo 2004; Goldstone 2004), by challenging readers to assemble meaning in new ways from unconventional narrative patterns and unruly narrative voices (Anstey 2002).

The Other Bear

Once upon a time there was *another* bear.

The End

No, no, it's still me!

This is no fun.

(Image 15: Leaning how to use 'the ends', a spread from *The Bravest Ever Bear*)

Like some of the other parent readers, Brendan evaluated *The Bravest Ever Bear* against his experiences of reading other books, including those used at school, as indicated by his reference to the characters *"Kipper and all the rest"* in the quotation above. As a result of this contrast, he was able to emphasise his feeling of greater involvement with the text:

> *There was an awful lot of fun discussion to be had… It wasn't the dog had a wash'*
> *– there was more to talk about…I think it was a bit easier to get involved because it*
> *wasn't your standard [story]. You're reading everything and…you could feel*
> *yourself getting more involved with it just because there were other characters*
> *getting involved in the story.* (Brendan, Eve's dad)

To Brendan, the scope of a *"standard story"* could be represented by one-dimensional storylines as dull and flimsy as *"the dog had a wash"* – an observation that indicated his welcome for the greater levels of interaction expected by this metafictive text, including the need to *"read everything"*. A similar sense of increased demand was also noted by Helena, Clare's mum, who found *The Bravest Ever Bear* required several read-throughs and frequent recapping, due, in part, to the plethora of visual intertextual references that led to a great deal of 'close looking' (Doonan 1992) from her younger co-readers:

> *Sometimes books are more straightforward so the child follows the words*
> *and you can have a wee laugh or talk about it. But this needed a bit more work…*
> *There was lots in it but it was a bit harder in terms of having to unpick it. But we*
> *still enjoyed it.* (Helena, Clare's mum)

Like Helena, other families found that multiple read-throughs were necessary in order to absorb the whole text. Niall, for example, described how he used the first reading to comprehend the words, leaving the images till the second time around:

> *Like with all books, when you first read it you are focused on [the words]*
> *rather than the pictures because you are actually focusing on reading to the*
> *child. But the second time it was a lot easier because you could actually start*
> *looking at the pictures as well and actually interacting.* (Niall, father of Niamh)

By describing how he had prioritised the words, Niall also revealed something of his disposition as a reader. Having equated the reading of *"all books"* with the need to first

decode and interpret the written text, Niall intimated his reliance on the verbal over the visual, a move that also gestured towards the effects of social, cultural and educational "manipulation" that has long privileged written language over images (Nikolajeva 2012: 278). Yet, as his comment about the effects of the second read-through indicated, Niall found it *"a lot easier"* to read through the text when interacting with **both** words and images. While this feeling of increased ease could have derived from the fact that the words now seemed more familiar, it could also be argued that a greater range of meaning became available once the picturebook was able to function as a picturebook; in other words, when an overall meaning could emerge out of the "co-operation" (Nikolajeva 2003) or "synergistic relationship" (Sipe 1998) that exists between the verbal and visual modes.

According to Kress, adults' literacy practices are limited by their knowledge of social and cultural rules and regulations that compel them to equate language with writing, as Niall did above, perhaps because it seems the most culturally-conventional or common sense approach (2003: 155). As mentioned previously, Meek has noted the tendency of adults to skip and scan over images (1988: 19), creating a binary opposition between the status of words and pictures as a result. Given that scholarly interest in visual literacy has only come to the fore in recent decades, it was unsurprising to find that Niall was not the only adult in the project to have put the words first when making meaning from this particular picturebook:

"We talked a little bit about the pictures." (Barbara)

 "He was fine with the bigger words but then we got to the dragon bit where the wording got much smaller and then he started struggling…because he's not a great reader." (Michelle)

"I do the reading – out of habit from when Ben was much younger and I focus on the words." (James)

In this regard, the adults' decisions to focus first on the words reflected not only the shaping forces of their own schooling, upbringing and practices as literate individuals, but

also resonated with current educational debates about 'the basics' of literacy (Walsh 2008) and the status of visual literacy in classrooms (Arizpe & Styles 2016).

Despite the assumptions they may have brought with them about the role of images, most of the parents reported that sharing this book at home had led to a more interactive, although possibly less comfortable or straightforward reading experience with their child. To borrow Helena's words, the book seemed to require *"more work"* from readers on either side of the generational gap, although such increased effort wasn't necessarily perceived as a challenge or an obstacle: *"It was just different. It was interesting. I liked it!"* (Barbara, Sarah's mother). Even Michelle, who found reading the book *"difficult…because it jumped from story to story",* showed how highly she prized reading as a form of cultural capital when she said she wouldn't give The Bravest Ever Bear a bad review, despite her own negative response to the text: *"If someone asked me, I would say, 'yeah, read it'…I would never tell someone to read a book. But I don't know…I wouldn't go to the library and take it out."*

Reflection

From many of the parents' comments it has been possible to see how this sense of additional *"work"* stemmed from their interactions with − or against − the book's metafictive nature and the discussions provoked by its interruptions to the status quo. In addition, as described above, the nature of the project's design caused some participants to reflect on the nature and origins of their own habits or tendencies as readers. For example, reading and talking about how she had negotiated some of the metafictive structures and complications found in The Bravest Ever Bear prompted Helena to muse upon how she had been read to as a child:

> *We always had a bedtime story read to us as part of our routine but I don't know **how** it was read to us. Now, when we go to stay at Gran's, she'd got this old-fashioned fairy tale book and they all love it but she just reads it, and I wonder if, as parents, we need some more guidance.* (Helena, mother of Clare)

Visible within Helena's comment were concerns about reading to or with children as an activity that can be judged as right or wrong, as indicated by her suggestion that perhaps parents could some benefit from some sort of *"guidance"* on how best to read. In a sense, her point connected to one of the key methodological and epistemological issues located at the heart of this project, aptly summarised by Luke as the need to:

> cut across what has been called the 'great debate' over how **best** to teach reading and to suggest that different programmes and approaches to literacy provide **different** constructions of what counts as reading (1992: 3).[my emphasis]

While Luke's argument was written with schools in mind, its logic could equally be applied to the issues faced by parents, especially given their position on the receiving end of decisions by school and relative powerlessness in terms of their ability to intervene. On a macro, theoretical level, perhaps Luke's perspective could have offered Helena an answer, by showing that there are no bad/good or best/worst ways of reading with children, simply varied practices that are different for a variety of social and culturally-specific reasons. Yet, on a micro level, when surrounded by the stresses and tensions of daily life and held accountable by the arbitrary yet powerful nature of assessment structures *["Further up the school they are given a textbook or novel to read whether the child likes it or not," Helena*], such reassurances could seem unsatisfactory, even unhelpful.

Similar tensions could also be traced in Niall's comments, this time related to the purpose of reading:

> *I think she needs to expand her vocabulary. It'll come. It's just really enjoying books, that's what I want her to do. I am not too bothered at the moment about what she reads so long as she gets an experience of different kinds of books or stories.*
> (Niall, Niamh's dad)

By noting that Niamh needed to *"expand some of her vocabulary"*, Niall drew on discourses of teaching to help him identify quite a specific target that could easily have been found in a pupil's end-of-term report. Of course, this observation could also have

been made in response to what Niall supposed my educational interests were at this early stage in the project. Yet the next part of his comment − *"it's really just enjoying books − that's what I want her to do"* − offered a noticeable contrast by emphasising the importance of a more holistic view, one that linked reading to pleasure rather than simply to skills and success at school. Here, concerns related to academic competence as performed, measured and judged rubbed alongside the more heartfelt, human concerns of a father intent on safeguarding his daughter's future self. Writing about the competency debate in relation to multilingual research, Phipps (2013) has noted that anxieties such as Niall's are the hallmarks of austere and uncertain times, requiring:

> human qualities in a transformative education that can be sufficient to the task of protecting and advancing the space for the human being *qua* human being, rather than for the human being *qua* worker/employable wealth creator (2013b: 337).

Or indeed, as in this case, *qua* parent. Echoing Phipps' idea above (ibid), in the chapters that follow, I describe how reading and discussing the books within the confines of the study helped to create new spaces in which some of the parents developed deeper awarenesses as co-readers, but also as readers in their own right.

Summary: the surprise

As the first book in the project, *The Bravest Ever Bear* seemed to come as something of a surprise to the adult readers. Even Michelle, who had been irritated by its approach, was struck by its unusual form and format, while others chose to tell me (in surprised tones) that they had enjoyed the text, especially when contrasted with the books they were used to reading. Other parents were both surprised and pleased to find that their child had also enjoyed the text, despite its complexities, suggesting that some early assumptions had been unsettled, an idea I continue to develop in relation to the other books.

According to Nikola-Lisa, the power of inherently-playful texts, such as these metafictive picturebooks, lies in their ability to provoke surprise (2004: 38), a response with a forward-moving, outward-looking momentum:

> In fact, surprise is the very reason for play to continue –
> with each surprise the past reveals a new beginning in itself.

Indeed, as the next lines from Nikola-Lisa's free verse essay on postmodern picturebooks suggest, the disruption caused by surprise can have catalytic effects on a reader's understandings, akin, perhaps to the experience of doxic dissonance. But as Nikola-Lisa also makes clear, simply experiencing the surprise is not sufficient: it is what happens next that is critical:

> It is not enough to be merely amused by surprise;
> we must be transformed by it" (ibid).

In the next section, I explore whether any such surprising transformations took place when the parents brought their experiences and understandings of *The Bravest Ever Bear* to bear on *No Bears*, the second book in the series.

How the parents responded…
Book Two: Reading the words <u>and </u>the pictures in
No Bears

> ***"But to me, reading is reading."***
> ***(Michelle, Matthew's mum)***

Recognition

No Bears divided opinion among some of the adult readers. *"It was a bit 'meh',"* observed James, father of Ben: *"It wasn't bad, some of it was quite nice. But it just seemed to me that you were supposed to notice there is always a bear there. And that was kind of it. That was the gag."*

Brendan, Eve's dad, wasn't especially keen either, but for a slightly different reason:

> *I found it…a bit too clever for its own good. I may well end up patronising my daughter here, but I feel the need to spot or highlight things. And I'll be honest, the first time I read 'No Bears', I didn't even notice the bear was in the story.* (Brendan)

Yet for Michelle, who had resisted the surprising structure and format used in *The Bravest Ever Bear*, the second book represented a welcome change: *"It was more my sort of thing. I like surprises and tricks and treats,"* she explained, referring to the running joke that James had so disliked. Several others compared this book to *The Bravest Ever Bear* and decided that the central concerns and structure of *No Bears* had been easier to talk about with their children. According to Helena, the inclusion of injustice was helpful because *"Clare sort of identified that, and we talked about what wasn't fair."* Laura, on the other hand, was drawn to its dual narrative: *"We talked about…the fact that there were two stories going on. I found it interesting for me reading it."*

Whether they liked or disliked the book, it seemed that the parents' previous experiences with *The Bravest Ever Bear* and their heightened, increasing interest in project's rationale[7] had an impact on how they recognised, or acknowledged *No Bears*. Perhaps they suspected that *No Bears,* like *The Bravest Ever Bear,* was a book that was quite likely to be 'up to something'. This idea was addressed by Helena, who admitted that she had been *"looking for things a bit more",* a comment that suggested her level of attention to analytic detail had been artificially raised for the project, even though she explained that exploring picturebooks was already an established part of the family's literacy habitus (Carrington and Luke 1997): *"We like picturebooks; we request them from the library…the children [get] excited about spotting things."*

According to Helena, this sense of deliberate looking was also manifest in her daughter Clare's way of reading within the project, suggesting that some of the younger participants had also tried to second-guess the reasons behind my interest in the books:

> *I mentioned [the next book] to Clare and said we should have a look and*
> *she said 'yeah, there's not much in it to be honest. There's not much in it to spot.'*
> *So I wondered if she is…not reading naturally, sort of looking for things.*
> (Helena, Clare's mum)

As *"not reading naturally"* suggests, Helena seemed to distinguish between the type of heightened reading she (and Clare) associated with the project – the sort of "close looking" that Doonan has described (1992) – and another that seemed more *"natural"* or conventional and possibly less disjointed in its approach. As the literature on metafiction suggests (McCallum 1996; Pantaleo 2014), it is possible that the readers' engagement with the effects of the metafictive devices brought about a type of reading that felt more acutely disrupted, non-linear and self-conscious in nature because it involved reading aloud to another person. When combined with the pressures of performing within the project, the

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[7] *"I am still quite intrigued,"* Niall, Niamh's dad.

"*I guess you want to find out about [children's] reading knowledge because the books you are giving us relate to other stories. And so we have to make all of these connections. I wondered if that was a sub-plot in there, you are just finding out how much children read,"* Barbara, Sarah's mum.

act of reading may have suddenly felt unnatural to already confident readers like Helena and Clare.

This sense of heightened awareness could also have been provoked by resistance to the text. As mentioned at the start of this section, Brendan resisted *No Bears* for seeming too *"out-there",* as did James, who explained that his own literary dissatisfaction with the 'spot-the-bear' trope had impacted on how the book had been read and recognised at home:

> *For 'No Bears', there wasn't much of a discussion. In other places,*
> *we will chat about things but…I don't think we gave it much of a chance.*[8]
>
> (James, Ben's dad)

Similarly, Brendan's comment about the book *"being too clever for its own good"* suggested another sort of literary critical resistance (Sipe & McGuire 2006), this time linked to the idea that the book had *"tried too hard"* and had consequently failed to meet up to his individually and socially constructed expectations of what a children's book *should* contain. Bound up with his resistance was a sense that the book had somehow denied him his role or function as an adult co-reader: *"I feel the need to spot or highlight things."* Through this comment, Brendan also gestured towards the power dynamics that are commonly assumed to be characteristic of shared reading with children, such as the dominance of the adult perspective over the child's, and the positioning of the adult as expert. Perhaps it could be said that he had felt slightly upstaged by the operations of the metafictive devices in the book.

Additionally, through his observation, *"the first time I read 'No Bears', I didn't even notice the bear was in the story,"* Brendan showed how his normative assumptions had been discombobulated (even if only slightly) by the text's use of contesting discourses, in which the images and words carry forward different representations of the same reality. As his commentary revealed, several read-throughs had been necessary to make sense of the text,

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[8] Ben's initial comment on *No Bears* seemed to resonate with his dad's: *"Well, I thought it was funny at points but it wasn't…I didn't like it as much as the last one."*

an acknowledgment of the challenge this book's unconventional format had posed to his credentials as the adult reader in charge, by forcing him to re-read, re-register − and possibly reconsider − the possibility of a more complex relationship between the words and the pictures in this story. In this respect, perhaps the book's metafictive effects caused a disruption to normal practices by forcing Brendan into readdressing the text while accounting for the impact of the images and the Bear's persistent presence. Following Bourdieu's logic, referred to already, such a disruption may also have brought about an adjustment to his habitus, an idea that is developed in more depth below.

(Image 16: the Bear hides from Ruby the Narrator, and adult readers too? From *No Bears*)

As with *The Bravest Ever Bear*, some parents seemed to recognise the book as a challenge, part of an evolving sequence that presented them with a code to be broken or unlocked: *"I kept looking for things a bit more and then I thought, that's not the point, this is not a test for me, we are just meant to be reading it,"* said Helena. Framed by this heightened sense of intentionality − in other words, by mounting speculation about the project's overall meaning or purpose − the parents continued to offer up responses that provided me with introspective insights into some of their taken-for-granted assumptions about reading and co-reading, as I describe next.

Response

As discussed previously, metafictive devices can foreground a text's status as a deliberately constructed work of fiction by fracturing the immersive quality of conventional reading experiences and by placing readers at a greater distance from the text (Pantaleo 2014). One way this is achieved in *No Bears* is through the sustained use of contesting discourses, in

which words and pictures present readers with different perspectives on the same story. According to Lewis, it is this "double aspect" that gives picturebooks their power:

> The picture book always has a double aspect, an ability to look in two directions at once and to play off two perspectives against each other. Here then lies at least one of the roots of the picturebook's flexibility and adaptability, its insatiable appetite for words and images… [It] is thus not just a form of text, it is also a *process,* a way of making things happen to words and to pictures (Lewis 1996: 109-10). [my emphasis]

Therefore, for a full meaning to emerge, *No Bears* requires its readers to engage with the *process* that Lewis has described: by interpreting the gaps and silences between the contradictory narratives and weaving them together into a meaningful whole. In this text, only a partial, less coherent understanding can result from a focus on either the words or pictures alone; it is through an appreciation of the interplay of the modes, or the counterpoint between the verbal and visual perspectives (Nikolajeva & Scott 2000) that readers can begin to appreciate the extent of Ruby's complicity in the bear's unhappy, isolated predicament.

Writing elsewhere, Nikolajeva (2003:238) has expressed the tension between words and images in picturebooks as a "dilemma", a term that suggests the tricksy, context-contingent nature of the decisions required by individual readers when responding to a text. By extending and applying this notion of a dilemma to the shared reading that occurred between adult and child readers in this study, and especially when interpreting the use of contesting discourses in *No Bears*, I considered whose preference seemed to dominate when it came to the reading of words and pictures, and wondered what factors might have influenced their decision-making. Returning to Gee's idea of using the metafictive "literacy bits" as "radioactive isotopes" in order to foreground aspects of human work (Gee 1998: 24), I considered how habitus had been operationalised during the readers' transactions with these specific 'bits' of the text.

Through its use of contesting discourses, *No Bears* challenges its readers to make meaning from the words and pictures at once. Yet, as previously mentioned, Brendan didn't seem to notice the Bear's wordless input during the first read through: *"It's a bit of a strange story at face value and then you go through it and go oh, look – the wand is in the paint pot – there's a bit more to it."* As this comment indicates, a read-through at *"face value",* which I interpreted as meaning a surface-level, written text-focused reading, led to a feeling of strangeness, a word that conveyed a feeling of dissonance. Given the "inescapably plural" nature of picturebooks (Lewis 1990: 141), perhaps such *"strangeness"* could have been derived from the fact that the main thrust of Ruby's written narrative is not wholly supported by the visual text, meaning, therefore, that enacting a text-focused reading just wouldn't make sense. By re-reading the text, this time with an increased level of image-focused scrutiny, Brendan noticed that *"there's a bit more to it",* in other words, that a greater depth of meaning could be possible through a consideration of both modes:

> *It wouldn't have been that good a story until you start going in and notice the wand's being put in the paint pot and the bear is not actually in the story and you can see the bear has done something with the shoelaces…Two or three reads and you are finding new things yourself.* (Brendan)

By suggesting that *"it wouldn't have been that good a story until…",* Brendan drew attention to what this text had taught him about the relationship of words to pictures, to paraphrase Meek's well-known phrase (1988). Through Brendan's description – and through his resistance to its *"cleverness"* – the act of reading emerged as an active, iterative process of interpretive engagement and challenge, made all the more demanding by the presence of a metafictive narrative strategy that deliberately frustrated his readerly expectations of how such a text *should* work. To return again to Bourdieu's theory of doxa, it is said that the established understandings (or dispositions) that comprise a habitus can only be questioned or unseated as a result of a "crisis" (Grenfell 2007:56); in other words, by an experience that can deny or undermine the credence of existing assumptions about the world, or in this case, picturebooks. Given that 'crisis' seemed like quite a dramatic way to describe Brendan's response to the role of images in *No Bears*, I decided to substitute it with Nikola-Lisa's notion of *surprise* (1994) in order to convey the gentler nature of the disruption that had taken place. As Brendan's comments made clear, he had

been slightly taken aback by the text's strange capacity to dupe unsuspecting adult readers: *"I didn't even notice the bear was in the story!"* After this acknowledgement, Brendan described how he had been forced to change tactic [*"until you start going in"*], by re-engaging with the text in a way that felt unusual for him, indicating that some sort of shift or change had occurred.

For other parents, interpreting the images in conjunction with the words presented them with opportunities to read with their child in a more equable way. For example, Chloe acknowledged that while she focused on reading the words, she left the 'spotting' to her daughter[9]: *"I'm reading it and she is taking it all in more, more than me actually picking up on it…I will be reading and she will stop and say 'look at this, mummy!'"*

An even greater sense of partnership was evoked by Niall's description of how they had tackled the images together: *"I think it's between the two of us. Looking at the pictures and trying to get a sense of what they are, and the subtleties of what's in the pictures."* From this comment, it seemed that both Niall and Niamh had paid close attention to the words and images and had detected the level of interplay between them. Yet this assumption became quickly unstuck in the light of Niall's response only a few conversational turns later:

Jennifer: Did you talk about the fact that at the very end [of "No Bears"] − and the children brought this up − there was a part where the words said one thing and the pictures said another?
Niall: No, I can't remember that at the end. That didn't come up….No.

Therefore, like Brendan, Niall seemed aware of the role of images, yet unclear about the extent of their significance within texts of this type, and possibly, within this stage of the

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[9] Beth: *"And look…! And…look!"*

'learning to read' years at school, where the focus arguably remains on developing skills related to the fluent decoding of words over pictures (Maybin 2013).

Michelle offered quite a different perspective that, like Niall, drew on her own experiences and understandings about reading. Although she had enjoyed reading *No Bears*, Michelle expressed well-defined ideas about the status of images within the *what counts* hierarchy. When asked to describe how they had read the book at home, Michelle sketched out a typical reading scene, complete with mime:

Michelle: What we always do is that I will read the book first and then when he is reading the book he always starts talking. He'll start [she mimes pointing as if at illustrations on the page] *and I'll say no, no wait until after and we'll discuss it…*
Jennifer: Do you stop him?
Michelle: Yes, so I stop him! But he carries on anyway!

By beginning her commentary with *"what we always do"*, Michelle conveyed the sense of a habitual routine; a tried-and-tested approach to reading books of this type. As she depicted with some humour, Michelle's way of reading seemed aimed at preventing often lengthy digressions into the visual realm, illustrating her intention to put words first:

> *Once I've finished the book, I'll go back in. In general, I try not to discuss it till afterwards because it will take us an hour to read a Biff and Chip book just because he wants to talk about it: 'There's a book! And there's the sunglasses!' And I am like, 'Can we just read the book? Can we just* **read** *the book?'*
>
> (Michelle, Matthew's mum)

In a sense, the (comic) exasperation of Michelle's repeated exclamation *"can we just read the book?"* animated theoretical claims that adults are socialised or schooled into automatically privileging words over images (Meek 1998, Kress 2003, Nikolajeva 2003), although clearly the converse is also possible. By drawing a partition between Matthew's interest in the images and her *own* emphatic intention to *"just read"*, a phrase that I interpreted as indicating a primary focus on the written text, Michelle's response revealed

the proximity of her habitus to the print-bound nature of dominant schooled literacies (Pahl & Rowsell 2005). Yet as a parent, I also recognised – and empathised with – her desire to get the reading homework over and done with. Given the proliferation of official reports and media texts that document the apparent decline of basic literacy standards (see *Daily Mail* 2013), it is possible to understand why, for some, dwelling on images could seem like an off-task pursuit; a distraction from the more urgent task of achieving fluency with the written word, especially in these new times of uncertain employment and technological flux. These ideas were fleshed out further with Michelle as our conversation about *No Bears* continued:

Jennifer: So reading for you is very much about the words, with the pictures secondary?

Michelle: Yes.

Jennifer: And is that reflected in the books you read with Matthew?

Michelle: …It's not always going to be picturebooks so [I say] let's concentrate on the story first and then we can go back and look at them. Because when they get older, there's not going to be pictures anymore.

Jennifer: What about movies and the telly and adverts? They are pictures and we need to read them…

Michelle: Yeah, but when you are reading a book… What I try to say is that the pictures are sort of secondary, so read the words and understand what they mean. And then go back to the pictures if you don't understand, you can maybe get a little bit more. But to me, reading is reading.

As indicated by *"it's not always going to be picturebooks",* Michelle's response to *No Bears* was informed by her concerns for her son's future and suggested an overarching intention to align the family's reading practices with the professional competences traditionally associated with success. Consequently, the literacy practices she privileged expressed aspects of her habitus, as illustrated by her focus on the written text [*"let's concentrate on the story first and then we can go back and look"]*; and her distinction between the role of images found on a printed page and those found on screens: *"Yeah, but when you are reading a book…"* As a fellow parent, I found it easy to connect with her determined, almost exclusive focus on reading as being about decoding and

comprehending words and could also understand her drive to equip her children with the right tools for life from the outset. Yet as a literacy researcher, I felt that Michelle's comments resonated with some of the broader issues that encompass this study, to which I turn, below.

Reflection

Discussing *No Bears* with the parents opened up several new avenues for exploration and thought, some which appeared to digress far away from my starting focus on responses to metafiction. As the second book in the project, it seemed feasible that the adult readers would have readjusted their responses to account for what they *now* suspected I was interested in studying. To recycle Helena's phrase, they weren't *"reading naturally"*, but then, as a social practice, it is argued that reading practices are never natural or neutral (Comber 2003).

On the whole, the adult readers seemed to feel both comfortable and confident when describing what they liked and disliked about *No Bears,* which suggested that overall, the text did not pose too much of an ideological challenge. Unlike the first picturebook, *The Bravest Ever Bear,* the metafictive aspects of *No Bears* did not jar with their expectations to quite the same extent, given that the most extreme critique came from James' use of *"meh"* to indicate his polite lack of interest or sense of apathy. Indeed, as Barbara discovered through Sarah's passionate response to the effects of contradictory words and images, the book had unsettled her child's expectations far more than her own:

Barbara: She just took it really literally. The story said it was this and so for her to interpret the pictures in a different way…she wasn't having it any other way.
Jennifer: You said you gave up in the end. Did you try to talk about it?
Barbara: I did give up − she was so adamant. So I just said, 'you're allowed to think that' [laughs]. You know, reading is not about having a fight with your kid. So they can think one thing and you can think the other.

As these comments begin to show, our discussions about *No Bears* broadened out from details of the text to more general issues connected with reading, enabling me to explore the connections between the parents' visible literacy practices and the structures that made them work, or gave them meaning (Street cited Pahl 2002: 51). In Barbara's case, this involved her recognition of multiple perspectives [*"they can think one thing and you can think the other"*] and the value she placed on books that can *"throw out questions"* about words and the world. Given Barbara's background in teaching, the close alignment of her habitus with aspects of current literacy pedagogy − including reading for pleasure − was not surprising.

With Niall, our conversation about *No Bears* turned inwards to the books he had read as a child, enabling him to reconnect experientially to the visual texts that had mattered to him then. Describing how he had enjoyed comics and graphic texts such as Hergé's *Tintin*, Niall recalled:

> *It's not just the words, it's the pictures too. You can read and re-read these things as many times as you want and pick up things as you read.*

Through this recollection, Niall seemed to remind himself of how central images had once been to his reading "identity in practice" (Pahl 2002: 48), before words seemed to have assumed greater dominance. In a similar way, discussing how the images and words worked together in *No Bears* also prompted Chloe − and me − to recall how we had learned to read as children:

Chloe: My focus is obviously the words at first whereas [Beth's] focus is probably on the pictures first.

Jennifer: I think that's probably how I learned [but] when you think about the world that our children are growing up into…

Chloe: Well, I know they are learning to read through the pictures first, aren't they, and then understand what the words are saying by looking at the pictures first, so she is definitely doing that. Whereas I am just straight to the words. I suppose that somewhere along the lines you just forget about the pictures as much.

For Kress, an explanation of *"somewhere along the lines"* might include the moment when an individual realises that society has preferred, mode and context-specific ways for meaning-making to occur, despite personal preferences to the contrary (2003: 164). For children learning to be literate within a schooled environment, this could involve the shift from images to words because, as Kress has noted, "the aesthetic dimension is not important, is irrelevant…or is only possible for selected individuals" (ibid). For the parents in this study, perhaps a parallel 'somewhere along the lines' type realisation was implicit in their acceptance of the literacy practices endorsed by schools. As Reay has suggested (2004: 439), such decisions are always the product of conscious and unconscious forces, that, in this case, seemed to be predicated around binaries of success or failure.

Summary: words vs images

As radioactive isotopes, the metafictive devices used in *No Bears* emitted strong signals about the habitual literacy practices and assumptions at work in the parents' responses (Gee 1988). Given that concepts such as multiliteracies (New London Group 1996) and multimodality are relatively recent additions to the still-developing field of New Literacy Studies (Street 1984), and given that visual literacy and critical literacy still remain in their infancy in classroom contexts (Comber 2001a), it is highly likely that many of the theoretical ideas under discussion here will have emerged during the learning lifetimes of the adult participants. As a consequence, the ideas provoked by this text's use of contesting discourses not only helped to illustrate the sustained dominance of words over images, but also raised far broader questions about how to disseminate some of these new understandings about multiliteracies – including visual and critical literacy – to 'real' 21st century readers, an issue I return to in the closing sections. In the next section, however, I describe how the parents responded to the complexities of Wiesner's *The Three Pigs*.

How the parents responded…

Book Three: Resisting change in *The Three Pigs.*

> *"You had a story at the beginning, and then the story*
> *suddenly disappeared and it came back and went into*
> *another story and that story went into another story and*
> *it was just very difficult to know <u>how</u>."*
>
> <div align="right">*(Niall, Niamh's dad)*</div>

Based on the children's reactions to this text, I was not sure how their parents would respond. As discussed in Chapter Five, I had been surprised by the children's happy acceptance of Wiesner's quirky retelling of *The Three Pigs*, and their lack of resistance to a text so stuffed with metafictive tricks and textual oddities. As noted in the previous chapter, this lack of resistance could have been because the children had been born into a world already suffused with such texts, meaning that for them, the postmodern influence was nothing new (McClay 2000: 91). Yet how would these same devices be understood and received across the generational divide? As Meek has neatly observed, over time "habitual readers can become less adventurous when their skills allow. It's like driving in second gear in a high-powered car" (1988:35). In other words, more experienced readers can forget that other ways with words are possible. Therefore, I was interested to see whether the devices used in this book were already part of the parents' 'habitual' reading repertoire, given the children's confident handling of the book. Or, like me, might the adults have discovered that the book jostled some of their taken-for-granted assumptions about how reading tended to happen and how books worked? Drawing on my own experiences, I thought back to the start of my Master's studies in Children's Literature and the first time I had read Wiesner's book with my children, who were aged three and four at the time:

The children settled beside me on the sofa. We started to read. And then we stopped. The pigs appeared to have been blown out of the frames that usually boxed in the story. After a brief pause (for me) to think, we started reading again. But I was uncertain. Where

had the story gone? What was going on? Was I reading it right? Several page turns later
we stopped once more. Now the pages were blank, save for a small image of the three pigs
perched atop a paper aeroplane, zooming off into the distance. I faltered. This wasn't what
I was used to. I flicked ahead a few pages to see what else lay in store. More blank pages.
On another spread, the pigs seemed to be talking to us directly. "I don't really know how to
read this," I admitted to my children but they weren't listening; they were too busy looking.
How, I wondered, would other parents read this?

Recognition: an overview

In contrast to my own experience of reading this particular picturebook, the parents
responded with interest and good humour, as they had done with all of the texts so far: *"It*
did feel like you had had a glass of wine or something," joked Helena. "*At first, I thought,*
'Oh! I can't even read these words!" remarked Michelle, who also admitted that she had to
forego her usual strict practice of leaving any discussion until after the first read-through:

> *I got about two pages in and I thought, okay! I see what's happening now.*
> *So I had to discuss that with him, whereas normally I wouldn't but I **had***
> *to discuss it.* (Michelle)

As her emphatic and quite indignant use of *"had"* seemed to signify, Michelle noticed that
she felt compelled to read the book to Matthew in a different way, in order to ensure that a
clear meaning emerged. Again, while reading a book in a different way might not seem to
constitute the "crisis" of understanding also referred to in the previous section (Grenfell
2007: 56), the fact that Michelle drew my attention to it struck me as significant, because it
suggested it had also struck her as unusual or surprising.

For James, the visual style of *The Three Pigs* connected to his prior experience with
comics and graphic novels:

> *I read a lot of comics when I was younger, so the idea of there being stuff*
> *where there is nothing to read is something I am already used to.*

As the *"idea of stuff where there is nothing to read"* suggests, James signified his recognition of the complex interplay between words and images in this text and showed that he understood how to make meaning when no words were present. Consequently, this text did not appear to challenge or disrupt his literary status quo meaning that, to return to Bourdieu's fish out of water simile, his habitus did not even seem to ripple (Wacquant 1989). Instead, James seemed to derive increased freedom from the text's feeling of familiarity, which, in turn, impacted positively on the style of his reading with Ben:

> *The idea that you are going in and out of the comic panels is a trope I have seen before. So that wasn't a difficult one and [Ben] had seen it [which meant] I could let the story go; I didn't need to push the story onto him…he got the idea that they were going into the picture.* (James)

While little *"story pushing"* had been required by James − an expression I understood as referring to the level of social, cultural and linguistic scaffolding that adults erect while reading aloud with children − for some of the others, this book posed a new sort of reading challenge, causing them to recognise it with a mixture of curiosity, resistance and reflection. To explore these responses in greater depth, in the next part of this chapter, I deviate slightly from the pattern of previous chapters in order to focus more closely on the comments made by three of the parent readers and discuss how they *recognised* (Gee 1998) and *responded* to *The Three Pigs* within the context of this study. While all of the parents' comments were interesting, those I have selected for further exploration here reflect my wider interest in exploring the critical potential of resistance (and reflection) as a response while reading.

Brendan: response, recognition and reflection

For Brendan, David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs* represented even more of a break from the norm than the previous picturebooks: *"We haven't seen anything like this ever,"* he remarked, *"it's a completely new concept, not just in reading but in all things."* By *"all things"*, Brendan seemed to recognise how the book had made different demands of him as a reader and co-reader, a comment that gestured towards the disruptive effects of metafiction: *"You want to try to explain,"* he continued, referring to his role in the shared

reading process, *"but I'm opening up page two, the pigs have already been blown out of the page and the story doesn't match what's going on. It's not quite knowing what I need to say, as far as I am concerned."*

When writing about young children's responses to the same picturebook, Pantaleo (2002) observed that the presence of metafiction caused dissonance for some readers by "challenging widely accepted cultural reading practices. The trajectory of these stories [can] require readers to engage in different ways of reading" (2002: 81). While Pantaleo's comments were directed at the young readers in her study, I suggest that they could just as easily be made in relation to adults. As Brendan's commentary has highlighted, the "different ways of reading" he encountered included interpreting the textual gaps left by contesting discourses [*"the story doesn't match up with what's going on"*], or untangling meaning from the text's disruption of space, time and conventional boundaries, as illustrated by: *"there's a page where the pigs are moving around, trying to get themselves a bit more space…and as an adult, I just cannot work out how I can explain it"*.
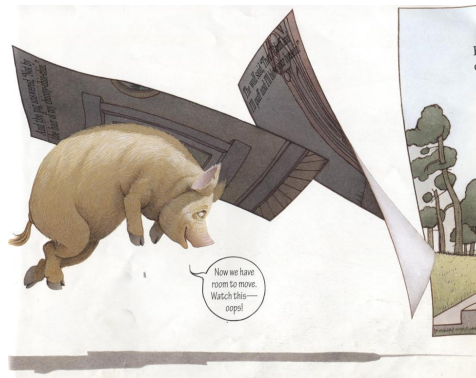
(Image 17: the pigs create some space by deconstructing the text, *The Three Pigs*)

Additionally for Brendan, encountering and engaging with metafiction forced him to change how he read the text aloud. A sense of his frustration at these disruptions was conveyed by his repeated use of the word 'explain' [*"I feel the need to explain"*; *"I want to try to explain"; "how do I explain?"*], thus emphasising the destabilising effect that engaging with this text had on his assumptions − both inwardly as a reader and also

outwardly, as someone who had to process the words and images and then project these understandings of the text onto another.

Interpreting Brendan's comments on the book helped me to become more aware of the multiple facets and forces at work within his response − each influenced and tugged at by separate, yet also interlinked, aspects of his "identity in practice" or habitus (Pahl 2002: 48). As Pahl has suggested, I found it helpful to imagine the habitus as "semiotic sediment" (Pahl 2002: 48), a phrase that encapsulates how habitual meaning-making practices can be 'stirred up' as a consequence of change, before settling down again into taken-for-granted, more solidified ways of being and taking − with the prospect of more sedimentary swirling and reconfiguration always a possibility. Using Pahl's image, I visualised the sedimentation of literacy practices as multi-layered, rather like an archaeological cross-section, to represent the plural, social fields and differing "networks of value" through which an individual travels and intersects (Grenfell 2007: 56). With this in mind, I unpicked some of the different roles and influences, both past and present, visible from Brendan's responses to *The Three Pigs*. As an individual reader, for example, he disliked the fact that parts of the text just didn't make sense: *"My logical head is going, well, if the pig can get out then why can't the wolf?"* This lack of clear logic seemed to have presented an obstacle to him as both an individual **and** a co-reader:

> *If I just read it, as is, it would be a story that wouldn't quite work. I feel the need to try and go 'oh, what's a bit strange there?' you know, what's happened? Or, 'oh look, he's eaten the pig. No, he hasn't eaten the pig.'... Once you get into that, you are in the 4th dimension because where actually **is** the pig?* (Brendan)

Having linked his preference for texts that "*add up*" to his commerce and engineering background [*"I am an analytical person, you know, logical"*], Brendan also described how his disposition as a reader had been shaped by negative experiences of studying English at secondary school:

> *I used to love reading as a kid. I read 'Animal Farm' off my own back and then I had to read it at school, and you had to double analyse and treble analyse. It just switched me off reading completely, probably for most of my time at uni.*

I just read because I had to. (Brendan)

While wary of potting his story as a reader, several 'stirrings up' and resettling of habitus became visible through Brendan's comments, to borrow again from Pahl's image (2002). For example, Brendan's childhood love of reading seemed to have been disrupted by the introduction of intense textual analysis at high school, something that caused him to reconfigure his habitus by switching off reading as an interest. Reading became something functional, done only on a 'needs must' basis, especially in higher education. Based on this, I wondered if Brendan's resistance to the *"cleverness"* of Wiesner's fictional text had also been a throwback response to the extra demands made by metafiction, which, by positioning readers in more active interpretive roles (McCallum 1996) could, perhaps, have felt too much like double − or even treble − analysis.

Later in life, Brendan's disposition as a reader appeared to reconfigure and settle again via the arrival of an e-reader [*"I read a lot, every day…it's how I tend to wind-down"*], and from reading at home with Eve, his only child. Given the increasingly reflective and evaluative nature of his responses to metafiction in *The Three Pigs*, I wondered if reading and talking about the book within the context of the project had caused yet more sediment swirling to occur. Indeed, several comments suggested that Brendan had "grasped the force of the habitus" (Fowler 2000: 1) while reading and talking about *The Three Pigs*. In other words, the act of discussing how he had struggled to make meaning from a text that had deliberately defied his notion of logic seemed to enable Brendan to become more aware of the "possibilities and constraints" (Reay 2004: 433) imposed by his normative assumptions about participating in shared reading at home. This awareness was especially visible in off-the-cuff remarks such as: *"You know, maybe **it's an issue with me being an adult"; and "It could just be me** and I should just let her get on with it,"* where the words in bold indicate Brendan's recognition that his status as an adult and his personal taste in books both had a shaping effect on how he read with Eve.

In summary, *The Three Pigs* represented a 'break from the norm' for Brendan in more ways than one. By offering him a new kind of reading experience, the text challenged and extended his existing knowledge of the sorts of books available for younger readers. In addition, the invitation to explore the book within the context of the project created a space for him in which to identify the complex negotiations between his multiple roles and responsibilities as a reader, co-reader and co-curator of Eve's developing ideological and epistemological self.

The potential of metafiction to create such spaces by placing readers at a greater distance from a text has been well documented (e.g. McCallum 1996; Pantaleo 2004). Yet far less has been written about metafiction's potential to create a sense of space or distance through *resistance* and the critical potential that could be inherent in such responses. By discussing and exploring aspects of his resistance, Brendan was able to step back slightly from his own role, achieving a greater objectivisation of himself as a reader but also as a co-reader. As Arizpe and Styles have noted (2016), such an achievement is no easy task for readers ‒ of any age. Yet, by the end of our conversation about *The Three Pigs,* Brendan appeared to be in the process of reconfiguring what he knew about his role in the reading process, aided by some final reflections drawn from his own experiences as both reader and parent:

> *You need to have some discipline [when reading] to let them roam free and if they don't get anything out of the story other than just the standard, then why is that so different to me loving 'Animal Farm' because I thought it was about a few pigs and a horse! So maybe there is something there that I need to watch myself.*
> (Brendan)

Niall: response, recognition and reflection

Like Brendan, resistance shaped Niall's response to *The Three Pigs.* Although he predicted *"I would have quite enjoyed it myself as a child",* as an adult, the book presented an interesting but not-so-enjoyable reading challenge. According to Niall:

> *It was very difficult to read for me. I didn't quite understand how to read it. You had a story at the beginning, and then the story suddenly disappeared and it came back and went into another story and that story went into another story*

*and it was just very difficult to know **how.***

As *"I didn't know how to read it"* indicated, Niall's encounter with *The Three Pigs'* non-linear structures and other metafictive aspects seemed akin to learning a "new sign system, a new set of verbal relations" (Hutcheon cited McCallum 1996: 398), one that contrasted strongly with his expectations of how such books *usually* functioned. Interestingly, Niall attributed the text's inaccessibility to particulars of the written text rather than to the images, gesturing towards where his primary focus lay as a reader:

> *With most books you feel there is a rhythm to the words and to the story,*
> *there is some repetition which helps. I loved the pictures and the graphics.*
> *It was just the story. It was very difficult to read.* (Niall)

As with *No Bears*, Niall appreciated the images for their artistic value, yet his awareness of their dialogic role within the text was not clear and remained unexplored in our conversation. By approaching the text in this way, Niall illustrated Meek's idea that for many experienced readers, "one kind of reading [can] do for all" (1988: 35), a phrase that harks back to the idea of reading as habitual – but also habit-forming – practice. Additionally for Niall, the experience of resistance as a response to *The Three Pigs* prompted him to foreground his existing understandings about the book before then contrasting (and questioning) them alongside the approaches employed by Wiesner:

> *It's interesting seeing all of these different books and the different ways [they*
> *are written]. A lot of books are kind of similar…and so you think, 'okay,*
> *I understand how these books are written, I get it.' Whereas with these books, I*
> *don't. We read through it and I think: am I meant to…? How am I meant to get*
> *into this narrative?* (Niall)

Guided by Sipe and McGuire's categories of children's resistance to texts within a classroom context (2006), I refrained from interpreting Niall's emphatic use of *"I don't"* as an outright rejection or flat refusal to co-operate with the text's unusual retelling of the traditional tale. As with the children, I perceived his resistant comment as evidence of a deeper engagement that offered a springboard for further inquiry into what made this text

feel so different: why did *The Three Pigs* seem to cause such intellectual dissonance? Borrowing yet again from Meek (1988), I wondered what lessons about reading might be learned from the parents' resistance to this text, an idea I return to in Chapter Seven.

Barbara: response, recognition and reflection

"I wasn't so fond of this one actually," admitted Barbara at the start of our conversation: *"The story becomes very disjointed and doesn't flow.[10] I can appreciate the technique of coming out of the story and going into other stories, but I think it kind of lost the story along the way."*

As seen above, Barbara responded to *The Three Pigs* with both preferential and literary critical resistance (Sipe & McGuire 2006), yet drew on insights from her professional knowledge as a primary teacher to recognise, or, to use her own word, to *"appreciate"* how such a text might benefit readers in a home or classroom context:

> *It was still nice to chat about, because all of the books you have given us have references to other stories, so we have always had to chat about other stories as well as the story that is being read.* (Barbara)

Having immediately recognised the text's intertextuality, Barbara also pinpointed how it had demanded an increased level of engagement from Sarah and herself as readers:

> *As well it had the blank pages, you were able to talk about 'oh, what's happened here? Is this the end of the story?' That kind of thing. I think it handed so much back to you as a reader.* (Barbara)

As discussed in Chapter Two, much of metafiction's power and potential lies in its ability to − as Barbara said − *"hand so much back to the reader"* by provoking a heightened awareness of how books work (Pantaleo 2014), and by forcing the uptake of a stance that

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[10] *"I found it quite easy to read,"* Helena, Clare's mum.

"This one flowed really easily and we could chat really easily about it," Chloe, Beth's mum.

is more active than passive; more writerly than readerly (Barthes 1970). Yet despite recognising the discursive, pedagogic potential of these features, Barbara remained unconvinced that *The Three Pigs* made for ideal reading material at home, where she felt different priorities should be privileged:

> *I think for me, reading with your child isn't always about discussing every detail of the story and making it educational. You know, it can often be about that comfort time…it is more about that bond and communication between you and your child rather than your actual reading…It takes away the pleasure for you as an adult.* (Barbara)

Echoing Brendan's comment about the negative impact of reading at school [*"you had to double analyse and treble analyse"*]*,* Barbara's response also touched upon the idea that the additional 'work' demanded by *The Three Pigs* had felt off-putting at home and was not in keeping with her primary aim of reading for pleasure and comfort. The book had not been difficult to read, she noted, it was just *"unusual"* and lacking in the *"amusing quirks"* of the previous picturebooks. By equating, as Brendan had also done, the need for additional scrutiny and analysis *"of every detail"* with schooled approaches, Barbara's resistance to this book placed reading for pleasure into a temporary opposition to reading for educative purposes. In this respect, her actual lived experience of this book, as reader, parent and educator, offered an interesting contrast to the theoretical claims, which broadly suggest that the playful and puzzling nature of metafiction make it a potential ally (Mackey 1990) for the push to reclaim reading for pleasure in schools (Cremin et al 2014; Pantaleo 2014) . Yet, as Barbara's response highlighted, what constitutes notions of work and pleasure will always be contested, subjective and subject to resistance.

Of course, Barbara's resistance is but one example, and, like Pantaleo, I too have "observed the enjoyment that students derive from puzzling through the multiple layers of meaning and ambiguity in picturebooks with metafictive devices" (2014: 331). Yet Barbara's comment also highlighted the potential insights that could be gained from extending, exploring and sharing assumptions of *what counts* about reading across

generational gaps, social field boundaries and the dichotomies of home and school, while also highlighting just how subjectivities at play in this field of research.

Reflective summary

After our discussions about *The Three Pigs* were complete, I wondered what each of the adults would have taken away from talking about the book, given that I had gained a great deal. Had the content of our conversations 'felt' reflective to them in any way? Did they have a sense that they had somehow "objectivised" themselves as readers and co-readers, as I had suspected and theorised (Arizpe & Styles 2016: 90)? While these questions remain unanswered and largely unanswerable in the context of this study, Barbara later provided me with an additional insight into how she had *recognised* both the books and the study, suggesting that she had continued to reflect on what I was 'up to' in the hours that followed our conversation about Wiesner's text.

Our discussion, which had started with a walk and had ended in the heart of the school playground, rounded off with an impromptu chat about what she thought the project might be about. In the playground, Barbara took a guess that reinforced a point she had touched on earlier:

> *All of the books you have given us relate to other stories. And so we have to make all these reading connections and I wondered if there was a subplot in there, [that] you are finding out how much children read.*

Yet, later, after some further thought at home, Barbara emailed me with a clarification of her earlier thoughts:

> *Thought you might also be trying to broaden our reading experiences by giving us books that play with characters and story lines – provoking interaction and discussion. Not always following a traditional storyline.*
> <div align="right">(Barbara, email)</div>

Reading this interesting and supportive comment caused me to reflect critically on my methodology and the ethical impact of the project's "enactive" work (Gee 1988). What seemed to be implicit in Barbara's final comment was an assumption that the purpose of my research was to *enhance* or *improve* the families' knowledge of books, suggesting that what already existed was perceived as somehow deficient or lacking in breadth. As I have described at length in Chapter Four, one of my core aims had been to try to find ways to decentre and "decolonise" the research experience (Phipps 2013a: 17), yet feedback such as this served to remind me of how great an ambition this was, given the strength of normative assumptions about power relations between the researcher and researched, the positioning of parents in relation to educational structures and the inevitable changes that occurred between my projection of the research concept and its recognition by the participants, just as Gee had suggested (1988).

Despite these reservations, I remained interested in the parents' increased resistance to this text. As described by Sipe and McGuire, the presence of resistance during reading is often perceived as a roadblock (2006) or insurmountable hurdle to further comprehension or connection. Therefore it might not have been inaccurate to have concluded here that '**in spite** of their resistance to the metafictive aspects of *The Three Pigs*', Niall, Barbara and Brendan all began − to a varying extent − to engage with the text in ways that suggested a deepening awareness of issues related to their own habitual practices as readers. Yet, instead I suggest that it is actually **because** of their resistance to the book that greater insights and reflection became possible in this project, especially for Brendan, who appeared to have started to reconsider some of his own assumptions as a result of exploring why *The Three Pigs* just didn't work for him, as illustrated by his thoughtful final comment, *"maybe there is something there that I need to watch myself."*

According to Meek, adults don't tend to "inspect what they do" when they read, meaning that *"how* we read isn't part of the consciousness we bring to texts" (1988: 36, my emphasis). In other words, adult readers are less likely to engage in meta-level insights about language in use while reading, unless such practices already have a specific role in

their daily lives. Yet through their engagement with − and resistance to − the metafictive aspects of *The Three Pigs*, it seemed that some of the adult readers started to inspect − more consciously and deliberately − *how* they read, and what took place when they shared a book at home. Pricked into positions of increased uncertainty by the unruly behaviour of this metafictive text [*"I didn't know how to read it"*(Niall); *"I can't even read these words!"* (Michelle)], the experience (and, for some, exploration) of resistance helped to create spaces for greater agency and a heightened awareness of what happened when they read, just as it had done for some of the children.

The next chapter presents an account of the parent readers' responses to *Black and White*, the final book to have been read in the study.

How the parents responded…

Book Four: The parents crack the code in *Black and White*.

> **"*It was challenging − it just didn't conform.*"**
>
> **(Diana, Niamh's mum)**

Channelling the unsettling, subversive spirit of metafiction, the structure of this section deliberately breaks with the organisational boundaries established by previous chapters. Instead of beginning with the parents' recognition of the text, followed by an analytical commentary on their responses and a short reflective conclusion, this chapter's messier, more topsy-turvy approach is a reflection of the evolution and growth of some increasingly complex and tangled insights and understandings as we − by which I mean the parents, children and myself − drew towards the end of the project.

Indeed, the focus of this final chapter acknowledges the increasingly reflective nature of the discussions we had about *Black and White*. Given its status as the final book in the project, I wondered if some of the adults might have recognised it as the culmination of their brief journey through some 'weird' and challenging texts, thus prompting them to adopt a more evaluative, holistic stance that gathered their thoughts and ideas on all four books together here more so than in any other discussion. Beginning with an account of the parents' responses to *Black and White*, I then explore some of their reflective comments and use them to help frame the broader interpretive, discursive summary that follows on from this section.

Response…the sound of silence

For some of the adult readers, what they noticed about *Black and White* was the unusual silences it seemed to provoke in their children. As Chloe, Beth's mum, observed of their shared reading: *"Beth was saying 'yes' but she wasn't speaking that much, which was*

unusual, so I think she was tired when I was reading it to her. I think she was maybe trying to figure out what was going on as well."

In addition, both Laura and Michelle noticed that their sons were quieter than normal too. According to Michelle:

> *Normally with the books that we read, I have to keep on saying, 'shhh! Shhhh! Let me read but we'll talk about that afterwards! We'll read the page first!' But he was more quiet this time; he was listening to it all, whereas normally he is interrupting me and talking and saying 'look at this and this!'*

Ben's mum, Fiona, who had read this final book with him, also noticed an alteration in his usual readerly behaviour, something she attributed to the text's inaccessibility, or to his lack of interest in its subject matter:

Fiona: It took him a long time to get interested in it. It wasn't very engaging for him and he wasn't intrigued by it in the same way an adult or an older child might have been…he was just a bit nonplussed, I think!
Jennifer: And how did you find it? Did you have to work harder at making sense of it for him?
Fiona: Yes I did, which is unusual because he normally tends to get things quite fast. Well, he says he gets things quite fast.

While the children may have been quieter than normal for a range of different reasons, including tiredness or boredom, it interested me that half of them had responded to *Black and White* with unusual levels of silence. This was not something that any of the parents had reported before; on the contrary, most had said that the picturebooks had provided them with plenty of conversational scope, as Brendan had mentioned during our discussion of *The Three Pigs*:

Certainly the discussions you have off the back of these books are a lot more fun that you have off reading a Thomas book for the umpteenth time…they certainly give you a bit more outside of the story to talk about and as springboard for other things. (Brendan)

Drawing a mental parallel with the silent or non-verbal phase of early bilingual learning, a period when speakers can elect to interact without spoken language while acclimatising themselves with the sights and sounds of their new surroundings (Drury & Roberston 2008), I wondered if some of the children in my study might have experienced a similar sense of unfamiliarity, one that had caused them to take refuge in silence when encountering this highly challenging book for the first time. In a sense, the metafictive complexities presented by *Black and White* – its split pages; the separate, distinct visual grammars; the unusual story lines – might have made the children feel that their existing metalanguage or knowledge about books, simply did not work. Perhaps the experience of reading this *"very strange"* text, as Chloe summarised it, had made the children feel displaced – like 'fish out of water' – by denying their taken-for-granted assumptions about how books worked and challenging them to apply their existing knowledge in new and unsettling ways. In another sense, perhaps the children's silence represented a form of embodied resistance or uncertainty caused by the "dissonance between features of the text and the [children's] experience or developing ideologies" (Sipe & McGuire 2006: 6), which in this case, was in relation to how books were normally read aloud.

By extension, the fact that not all of the children responded to *Black and White* with silence suggested that what it offered them did not feel too disruptive or dissimilar from their own literacy practices or prior experiences as readers, viewers or listeners. Barbara, for example, said that while aspects of the text were a *"wee bit beyond Sarah's kind of age, she got a lot out of it. She was still able to talk about a lot of it,"* a comment that suggested their own habitual textual practices were sufficiently aligned with the book to enable a satisfactory meaning to emerge.

According to Drury and Robertson's description of early bilingual learning, after a period of silence or non-verbal interaction, many language learners then go on to rehearse or practice in private until they feel confident enough to use their new linguistic skills in public (2008 online). Indeed, the idea that a silent exploration of the text at home could be followed by a more active discussion at school, once the children had had time to mull over or rehearse the concept of the book in their minds, was suggested to me by Brendan's comments about Eve's response at home. As described in the closing pages of Chapter Five, Eve made 19 separate requests for me to explain what the text meant during our 45-minute discussion about *Black and White* in school, so perplexed was she by the book's unusual style and its high level of indeterminacy. Yet at home, her approach was very different, as Brendan described:

Brendan: [Eve and I] were talking, almost just to remind myself about the book over the last couple of days and she said that of all the books, that was the one she preferred. She was quite happy to say that she didn't understand it.
Jennifer: Oh really?
Brendan: It's funny because we were talking about it and saying well actually, that's quite reasonable, there's nothing wrong with enjoying something without understanding it. We were laughing about TV programmes and not fully understanding everything in them but actually enjoying the feeling from them or whatever.

Given my own experience with Eve in a schooled context, I found it interesting to learn that she had been happy to settle for a partial explanation at home, perhaps because this was the practice or approach offered to her by her father on this occasion. While Brendan had not found that Eve had been any quieter than usual [*"she was adamant that she wanted to cover every word and discuss everything on the page before she moved on"*], by obediently acquiescing to the interpretive breadth of his suggestion that there was *"nothing wrong with enjoying something without understanding it,"* perhaps she had also agreed to silence the many questions that may have been fermenting in her mind and which bubbled up and over into consciousness during our group conversation, as seen in Chapter Five. Interested in the apparent contrast between Eve's 'home' and her 'school' responses, I told

Brendan how frequently she had implored me to explain the text, and how certain she had been that I would possess a definitive answer:

Brendan: Well, she never asked me, so she sees you in more of a teacher role than me, so that's good.
Jennifer: Well, the thing is I tried to say to her, 'I don't know' and 'your answer is as good as mine' so maybe she [was] looking to a grown up to say 'this is how it works'?
Brendan: It's strange when this is actually the one that I tried to give her the least guidance on and didn't feel that she was demanding of it. But then, put her back in that environment, and she was looking to someone for the answers.

Taking Brendan's final sentence first, his comment about the impact of the schooled environment raised an important point about the persistence of taken-for-granted assumptions that still give shape to teachers' authoritative roles in classrooms and communities. Writing in 1970, more than 45 years ago, Freire cautioned against the dominance of banking models of education, in which "the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing" (1996: 54), a situation he warned would "minimise or annul students' creative power" (ibid). Therefore, by looking to me (and not her dad) for answers or solutions to *Black and White*, Eve's approach indicated that even at this very early stage of her schooling, she had been socialised into thinking that teachers (or teacher-like figures) *should* have the answers at their disposal. In a sense, Brendan's happy acceptance of the fact that Eve should look to me, as a teacher-type figure, for clarification and explanation reinforced this idea, while simultaneously strengthening the teacher/parent power divide.

…and reflection

What I found equally interesting was Brendan's description of Macaulay's text as the one *"that I actually tried to give her the least guidance on"*. As this makes plain, Brendan had made changes to his own role during the shared reading process, something he attributed to the influence of the project:

Brendan: After the chat we had last time, I took a step back, just to sort of see how Eve reacted to it really.

Jennifer: Oh that's interesting. Why did you do that?

Brendan: It was just from talking to you. I was thinking, 'how much am I steering?' I thought I would try to…leave pauses and see what happens. Just be a little less guiding… rather than putting my ideas on her, just trying to give her the opportunity.

In previous sub-sections of this chapter, I described the parents' growing curiosity to discover the project's rationale, a level of interest that I interpreted as a sign of positive engagement. While some, such as Barbara, had offered me their considered suggestions outright, Brendan appeared to have reflected internally, choosing to quietly adjust his actions and understandings in the light of our discussions about the books. With my ideas bolstered by Gee's concepts of enaction and recognition (1988), it was interesting to consider what values Brendan had extracted from the study − in other words, what he had *recognised most* from the configuration of ideas and texts I had projected. In particular, I was interested by these sentences:

> *I was consciously not putting ideas in her head. It was more of a pull than a push, if you see what I mean? I was trying to extract information from her, rather than impact my views.* (Brendan)

By acknowledging the directional differences between 'pulling' or 'extracting' and 'pushing' or 'impacting' (which I understood as an application with some force), Brendan also seemed to recognise the ideological impact of shared reading, thereby showing his critical awareness of reading as a social process of epistemological sculpting and development. To return again to Fowler's useful image, it seemed that Brendan had once again been able to "grasp" at the habitus, this time maintaining his grip long enough to make some adjustments to his practice (2000: 1). As Reay has noted, while Bourdieu's original conception of habitus did not account for the impact of "conscious deliberation" and how it might be woven together with an individual's "unconscious disposition" (2004: 437), researchers should consider conscious ethical and moral judgements (such as a father's wish to further his daughter's educational well-being) as an integral part of the

habitus. Therefore, Brendan could be seen to have consciously improvised at the level of habitus, experimenting with and reconfiguring his ideas about reading with Eve in the light of the new insights and understandings the project had brought about (Pahl 2002).

Thinking about reading…

Like Brendan, other parents seemed to experience and express an increased sense of reflexivity in response to *Black and White's* explicitly metafictive structure and quadrant narrative format, which forces readers to forge their own pathways through the text while simultaneously foregrounding the selective nature of these interpretive processes (Anstey 2002). *"It was weird,"* remarked Michelle. *"But I really enjoyed it. It really made me really think. You really had to think, 'hold on, there's four different stories and do you read across the way or down the way – what do you do? Does it matter?'"*

As conveyed by her repeated emphasis of *"really think",* Michelle was aware of the cognitive, decision-making processes she had engaged in while puzzling her way through *Black and White.* This could suggest that her transactions with the devices used in this text had provoked some heightened meta-level understandings. Indeed, some of Michelle's comments about the text showed evidence of an awareness of reading as not only a product or outcome, but also as a process (Smith 2005: 22):

Michelle: It engages your brain, that's the first thing I would say about it. It's very, very different.
Jennifer: Yeah, do you think it's about anything? Does it have a point?
Michelle: No, it's not got a point. It's just very cleverly made…See at first, I was thinking they were four different stories, but half way through I was thinking this isn't four different stories, this is one story but it is all interlinked in different wee ways.

What interested me about this brief exchange was the exclusivity of Michelle's focus on *how* she had read, rather than *what* she had read, as shown by her emphatic statement: *"No, it's not got a point,"* which suggested she had not really had time to consider (or had

ruled out) the idea of any moral or authorial intention. To Michelle, this was a book that *"engaged her brain"*, in part because of what made it so different to the books she usually read at home with her sons. In this instance, the process of reading seemed to have become slightly more significant than the product or narrative outcome. In fact, it seemed that reading *Black and White* with Matthew had once again caused Michelle to adjust her own practice of reading first and discussing later, which, as described in previous chapters, she had been reluctant to deviate from. However, in this book she found that talking about the text was unavoidable on the way through: *"I had to explain a lot of things to him…If I had just read it through and not talked about the pictures at all there is no way he would have got anything."*

As this last comment shows, reading *Black and White* had caused Michelle to extend the focus of her reading to account for both images and words, when previously, her firmly stated preference had been to focus on the words exclusively. This change in emphasis was clearly visible in her recount of one of the most confusing spreads in the text − when fragments of torn-up mail mix with drifting pages from the passengers' newspapers and fall together as the snowflakes that envelop the boys' trains:

> *Like for instance the snow. We were like, 'oh, it's snowing' and turned the page and then I was thinking, 'is that snow?' and then we turned another page and then I said, 'no, I think that's newspaper.' So it was like you were getting it just before [it happened]. It was like a page turner.* (Michelle)

Spurred onwards by the "drama of the turning page" (Bader cited Lewis 2001: 1), Michelle's comment showed how the interplay between images and words had an impact upon what she chose to look at and discuss, while also highlighting the iterative, highly active nature of her thought processes.

Referring to the same page as Michelle, Fiona also expressed how difficult it had been at times to translate parts of the book for Ben's benefit. As her comment below illustrates,

one of the challenges she faced when reading *Black and White* out loud was how to articulate or explain complex aspects of its layout and structure to somebody else:

> *Like in certain bits, the paper starts getting ripped up and the words spread out and when you look at that and read it, it makes sense in your head…because you are reading it yourself. […] Whereas when you are actually reading it aloud, you're not sure what you should do with that. Do you spread out your words as you read them or do you just read it and then point out what's happened?*
>
> (Fiona, Ben's mother)

(Image 18: The stories blur in *Black and White*)

In order to describe and evaluate the differences between her internal [*"it makes sense in your head"*] and external or projected reading processes [*"do you spread out your words as you read them?"*], Fiona stepped back from the text and engaged with her "meta-level understandings of language in use" (Lankshear 1999: 24), a critical practice prompted by the text's metafictive approach. Similar sorts of meta-level reading patterns were visible in the commentary offered by Niamh's mum, Diana, a primary school teacher, who had also read the books alongside Niall and their daughter and was keen to share her thoughts:

> *I mean, she was thinking, she was really thinking. She was looking back, going back, [asking] 'Is that the boy's? Is he having a dream?' And then you are picking up clues from the pictures, picking up clues from the text…She was really thinking about her reading and thinking about the text.* (Diana, Niamh's mum)

Like Michelle, Diana's comments highlighted the active reading and cognitive strategies that had been activated by the text's multiple narrative strands and contesting discourses.

Through her repeated use of *"thinking"*, Diana seemed to want to draw my attention to the metacognitive processes Niamh had used in order to make sense from the text. The visibility of such processes seemed to come as something of a pleasant surprise to Diana, prompting some further contemplation:

Jennifer: One of the first things Niall said was that he didn't know if Niamh would be able to…he thought the first book was too sophisticated.
Diana: Yes, I would certainly back him up on that, I mean, in terms of was she quite ready for that sort of thing, and yet she was. She would see things in them [the books] that we didn't necessarily…As a teacher, children always surprise you…This was really surprising − that she was getting so much from it.

As this reflective snapshot has suggested, Diana's habitus as parent and a teacher seemed to have been momentarily disrupted by the acknowledgement that change had occurred − *"and yet she was"*. Such a realisation caused the sediment of her taken-for-granted understandings to swirl before beginning to re-settle into a revised configuration that would eventually become embedded in her habitual ways of being and doing as a reader and parent (Pahl 2002), as the following comment reinforced:

> *I think Niamh did find [the books] very appealing, which I guess gave us feedback about her as well - like, she probably doesn't just want 'the cat sat on the mat' anymore!* (Diana, Niamh's mum)

Speaking separately from his wife, Niall described how his own understandings had been altered as a result of such *"feedback"* from the project. Like Diana, he had been surprised by the evidence of Niamh's capabilities as a reader when faced with these sophisticated texts. And, like Brendan, he described to me how he had adjusted his practices as a result:

> *I think I was quite surprised at the first [book] because I thought that maybe it was too sophisticated, because all we had read were fairly simple books. But I think now, having read all four books, she is now appreciating the books in different ways than I would have thought. I think she enjoys these books − she just enjoys the stories − and now when I am reading, I am reading different stories to*

*her. More chapter books and also more books with slightly different types of
approaches to the writing and to the pictures.* (Niall)

Summary: the potential of surprise

Over the years since its publication in 1990, Macaulay's *Black and White* has been
described variously as "boundary-breaking" (McClay 2000: 91); "infinitely
varied" (Nikola-Lisa 1994: 37); and a "prototype of literature for a young person of the
electronic age" (Dresang & McClelland 1995: 704), given the nature of its multilayered
structure and interactive approach. Now, more recently, it has been reviewed as *"weird –
but enjoyable"* (Michelle); *"challenging in the sense that it didn't conform"* (Diana,
Niamh's mum); and *"more rewarding"* (Helena); a series of responses that appear to
support McClay's suggestion that part of this text's appeal to adults in particular, is the
sense of *intrigue* that can be sparked by its highly-transgressive nature (2000: 94).

According to the suggestions provided by my computer's on-line thesaurus, the
connotations of intrigue are largely positive, suggesting an arousal of interest or a piquing
of curiosity in a way that is usually pleasurable. Drawing on Barthes' concept of textual
jouissance – or bliss – Sipe and McGuire (2008) have compared the act of reading a
sophisticated, contemporary picturebook (such as *Black and White*) to the feeling of
pleasurable satisfaction that can be derived from puzzling through the challenges of an
intellectual game or activities that can "unsettle our comfortable assumptions and jar us,
opening up new vistas of experience" (2008: 283). While it is likely that some of the
parents would dispute the idea that reading *Black and White* had been a pleasurable
experience [*"It was quite hard to chat through what was happening with Beth…I don't
know if I enjoyed it,"* Chloe], for others, it did seem to be a text that provoked both intrigue
and surprise, and made visible key assumptions about reading that had become taken-for-
granted over time.

To return, once again, to Nikola-Lisa's link between playfulness and surprise, and the
related notion that "with each surprise the past reveals a new beginning in itself" (1994:

38), it could be argued that in this case, several 'new beginnings' were initiated by the parents' openness and willingness to act upon their feelings of surprise by making changes, however minor, to their practices as readers. Without wishing to assume that the adaptations Brendan and Niall told me about, or the differences noted by Michelle, Chloe and Diana, would survive in the longer-term, it seemed significant and highly positive that such changes had occurred within the shared confines of the project. In that respect, for some, the project functioned as a liminal, transformative space, an idea I return to in the closing chapters that follow.

Chapter Seven:

A text that can teach - lessons learned from the project

> *Jennifer: OK, here's the story.*
> *Beth: Can we go back?*
> *Sarah: We could read one story at a time.*
> *Eve: Can't we just read it?*
> **(From *Black and White*, Primary One)**

Pulling the patchwork of stories together: a discussion of the main findings.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, the parents and young children responded to the picturebooks' metafictive devices in a range of fascinating, complex and surprising ways. Here, I pull together some of the ideas and themes that emerged from our discussions and consider what light they might shed on this study's original research motivations and intentions, which I summarise again below. In order to assemble the patchwork of stories presented here, I have revisited some of the comments referred to in earlier sections, meaning that some repetition has been necessary. However, by doing so, my intention is to provide a deeper, richer level of understanding by viewing the comments from a more detached yet holistic perspective.

To help me accomplish this task, I have drawn yet again on Margaret Meek's idea that texts can teach what readers learn (1988). This time, the text in question is not a picturebook but this study itself, which I visualise as multi-stranded, multimodal and comprised of many sub-texts, including the picturebooks and our conversations about them; my analysis of the transcripts; and the subsequent pages of connected prose, of which this paragraph is a small part. To understand *what counts* (to me) about this study, I have combed back through the transcripts, my own sentences and memories in a reflective and highly subjective search for the places that have caused me to pause again upon re-reading while also (re)forging mental links. Therefore, this chapter outlines some of the key 'lessons' I have learned from researching readers' responses to metafiction. With so many teachable or noteworthy moments to choose from, those included here reflect my original and deeply personal research interest in exploring whether any critically literate

"ways with words" (Heath 1983) might occur as a result of reading, thinking and talking about metafictive picturebooks.

"But what does a critical response even look like in this context?"[11]

As described in Chapter Two, it is my understanding that the metafictive devices found in these picturebooks have the potential to act as vehicles for critical literacy practices by foregrounding the constructedness of texts and by promoting conversations about the work done by words and pictures on the page and, by extension, in the wider world (Freire 1996). Therefore, I started this project with the assumption that *if* the participants were to respond in ways that could be theorised as more critical in nature, I would somehow *know* what they looked like and, moreover, *how* to describe them. Consequently, one of my first − and most awkward − lessons post-data collection was to confront the limitations of my own understandings about what critical literacy practices might 'look like' in the context of this project, as reflected by the frustration evident in my comment from my personal journal, in the subheading included above. As I have explained, I decided not to provide the readers with any explicit teaching or scaffolded instruction about the picturebooks, metafiction or critical literacy in order to explore how they were disposed to respond to the texts' metafictive provocations. Yet as my review of critical literacy within Chapter Two illustrates, the majority of literature in this field is distinctly pedagogic in nature, in that it aims to inform, persuade and support teachers who wish to pursue a more explicitly critically literate stance in their classrooms. As a result, this project offers an extension of some of these ideas and approaches by considering them both inside and outside of classroom spaces.

Guided by the existing frameworks and scholarship I have described, I found it difficult to confidently apply the label of 'critical' to many of the children's responses according to the interrogator and text analyst categories offered by Serafini (2012) and Luke and Freebody (1999), possibly because these definitions had originally been created with schooled contexts in mind. Just as Ryan and Anstey (2003) had also found, it seemed that the young

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[11] Title of a personal journal entry, written during the period of analysis.

readers were unlikely to offer responses that 'looked' like the critical literacy I had read about (and was also looking for) without scaffolding or explicit instruction from a teacher-like adult. Yet, after stepping back and reconsidering the context-specific nature of literacy as a social practice, I realised that the responses I was searching for might have more in common with the critical practices described as "embodied" and "performative" by Johnson and Vasudevan (2012: 35), given that they had emerged in response to the texts (and the research contexts) rather than to any deliberate teaching method or stance. Nevertheless, it could be said that my attempts to encourage dialogic engagement (Aukerman 2012) represented an intentional pedagogic move on my part. As Johnson and Vasudevan have suggested, understandings of what critical literacy might look like can be stifled or rendered invisible by the influence of:

> context specific definitions [which] often foreground classroom teachers' experiences, charging them with scaffolding and recognising particular critical literacy practices that largely depend on deconstructing texts (2012: 35).

As illustrated, I hope, by the thought processes I have tried to make visible throughout this thesis, arriving at an idea of what critical literacy looked like *in this study* has been a long and complex task that is, of course, still open to challenge and critique. Given my status as a PhD candidate, I have had the time and inclination to chew over the issue for many weeks and months. But I am aware that for others, especially teachers, finding the time and intellectual space to think about what a critically literate response *might* look like in their classrooms and beyond might present yet another obstacle for educators who are already hard-pressed by the demands of school life, and who are accustomed to gathering evidence of learner development according to sets of prescribed experiences and outcomes that are often "logo and verbo-centric" in nature (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012: 35). As Stone has discussed in relation to a Scottish context (2012), a lack of information for teachers and other educators about what critical literacy means; examples of what it *could* look like, and explanations of its complex and inspirational theoretical roots has meant that critical literacy has remained on the outside, as an adjunct, or as something that gets *done* as an extension task (Comber 2001a). Yet, as I have tried to show, the literacy practices with critical potential in this study were not necessarily *done*, but enacted, embodied and performed in response to the provocations of the metafictive texts (and my own presence)

in ways that might ordinarily have seemed "backstage" or off-task (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012: 35).

Guided by these understandings, the 'lessons' I relate here are linked to what critical literacy *did* look like in this study, first of all from the perspective offered by the children's responses. Returning again to Sanders' description of metafiction as a stance that offers readers "a solid position from which to prod ideology" (2009: 353), I also draw on Nikolajeva's (2014) metaphor of picturebooks as training fields for younger readers in order to summarise **how** metafiction provided the young readers in this study with access to critical 'training'. This occurred in two main ways: first of all, through the experience of resistance and secondly, through a related development of metaliterate understandings, a term I explain below. After that, I describe the lessons learned from the adults' responses to metafiction.

Lessons from the children: Not a roadblock – the surprising effects of resistance as a reader response to metafiction.

As my account of their responses makes plain, I quickly became interested in the different ways the children had resisted aspects of the picturebooks and wondered what this might suggest. In the paragraphs that follow, I pull together the threads from our discussions to explain why I feel the children's resistant responses to metafiction should be interpreted as examples of critical literacy.

Throughout Chapter Five, I explained how Sipe and McGuire's (2006) typology of young readers' resistance to stories had initially helped me to identify where such responses had occurred, as well as indicating the places where the categories did not quite fit. According to these authors, the experience of resistance while reading is a critical practice to be encouraged because it can help young children progress towards "becoming truly critical" by positioning them as active rather than passive readers (2006: 10,12), although I query the use of 'truly' in this context. Nevertheless, by drawing parallels between their own

understandings of resistance and those of prominent critical theorists (including Giroux and Apple), Sipe and McGuire (ibid) observed that the potential of young children's resistance lies in its ability to highlight where instances of contrast, difference and dissonance have occurred. Consequently, resistance can function as a "catalyst for raising…consciousness about important social issues and their development as more reflective readers and citizens" (ibid). Building on this and based on the children's reactions to the devices found in the picturebooks, I suggest that the resistance experienced as a result of engaging with metafiction was indeed catalytic. Encountering such feelings helped some readers to extend *beyond* an awareness of what the social issues were (the Bear's exclusion in *No Bears,* for instance), towards a perception of how the issues had arisen and how they had been presented in the text.

Lessons from the children: learning to resist

The inherently playful nature of the metafictive devices seemed to increase the children's delight in resisting, contradicting or talking back (Sipe 2002) to the picturebooks. In particular, thanks to their evident familiarity with the traditional stories that underlaid some of the metafictive versions, pointing out where, when and how the book had got it 'wrong' was not only easy, but also fun: *"It kept saying the end but it wasn't the end*!*"* [Eve, Primary One].

In this respect, the metafictive texts taught the children that resistance, challenge and questioning could be part and parcel of the reading process. As some of the parents also observed, the children became increasingly adept at the 'close looking' Doonan has described (1992), scouring both the words and pictures for intertextual connections, signs of dissonance or disruptions to the norm, tricks or traps. Helena, who had read the books at home with Clare and her siblings, came close to expressing Doonan's idea perfectly when she noted: *"I think…[the children] twigged that we were looking closely at what we were reading – they were probably looking for things!"*

After considering examples of the children's resistance from across all four books, I could see that it separated into two strands, or distinct targets. In the first, the children directed their resistance at disruptive aspects of **character** and **theme**, as seen when they objected to the Princess's unruly behaviour in *The Bravest Ever Bear*, or when the Primary Two group took up a moral stance towards Ruby the Narrator's unfair treatment of the mute bear in *No Bears*. This could also include the moments of (quite jolly) resistance to Ahlberg and Howard's use of playful, intertextual games, in which commonly recognised nursery rhyme ingredients were inverted or replaced with silly-sounding substitutes, such as a marching band of black bears instead of the more traditional four-and-twenty blackbirds in a pie.
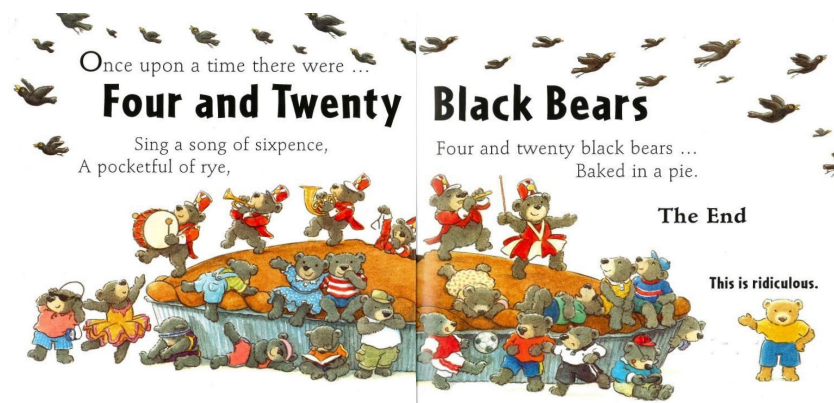
(Image 19: 'ridiculous' word-play in *The Bravest Ever Bear*)

Given the children's willingness to express their resistance to the picturebooks' disrupted characters and themes, it is possible to see how teachers (or other adults) could direct their feelings into broader, potentially transformative discussions about *why* they were experiencing resistance, or what aspect of the status quo had been disrupted, which could, in turn, lead onto further conversations about equity and fairness. A link between the experience of resistance as a reading response and the spirit or "ethos" (Comber 2013) of critical pedagogy has already been suggested by Sipe and McGuire, who have written that:

> understanding expressions of resistance provides a window onto how children are experiencing reading and how they are experiencing life – how, in Freire's terminology, children are learning to 'read the world' as well as the word. Through resistance, children give voice to their insecurities, anxieties, questions and struggles (2006:6).

Indeed, as discussed in the review of critical literacy (Chapter Two), the idea of using texts with challenging or disruptive themes in order to provoke feelings of resistance and critical discussions about power and equity is really nothing new (Leland et al 2005). In fact, it could be argued that metafiction's ability to excite reader resistance through the (often) playful disruption or juxtaposition of normative expectations simply presents teachers with another way to engineer discussions about what's fair and unfair within their classrooms and wider communities. The Primary Two children's focus on what was so unfair about Ruby's treatment of the Bear, in *No Bears*, provides an example of what this might look like in practice.

Yet, while I agree that it is fundamentally important to raise issues of inequity and injustice with children, I am also aware of the scholarly arguments that have warned against the reductive conflation of 'being critical' to the consideration of multiple perspectives (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012), the spotting of stereotypes (Comber 2001a) or to pre-determined, socially-acceptable interpretive "outcomes" (Aukerman 2012) made in response to books that depict unjust situations, such as racism and homelessness, for example. According to Jones, the adoption of such approaches to critical literacy − although valuable in some respects − can risk readers falling into a "multicultural trap" (2006: 115). Reflecting on her own practices as a primary classroom teacher, Jones has recalled how she used texts written from marginalised or non-mainstream perspectives to stimulate discussions about social issues and relationships of power. Yet when her pupils returned to the mainstream reading scheme texts that presented them with characters from predominantly white, stereotypically 'normal' lives, Jones found that they stepped away from their new roles as text critics or analysts and unthinkingly aligned themselves with the text's version of reality, its characters and their experiences (2006: 116). In other words, the critical practices they had developed in relation to the multicultural texts were not durable enough to be sustained in other reading contexts, remaining isolated from the textual practices they drew upon to negotiate everyday texts.

Drawing a parallel from this to my own study, I agree that it would be equally risky and reductive to equate students' expressions of resistance to a particular theme or character as substantive evidence of a critically literate response. This is not to say that such comments are not interesting or important within the larger aim of developing critically literate readers. As I have described in Chapter Five, the act of 'talking back' to the deliberately disruptive behaviour of characters in *The Bravest Ever Bear* seemed to enable some of the young readers to put themselves at a distance from the text; highlighting rather than blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. Perhaps it could be argued that, on their own, expressions of resistance to aspects of character and theme might not be 'enough' to count as a critical literacy practice because they do not necessarily require the children to read with any "sense of textual authority" (Aukerman 2012: 43), although, as my use of single inverted commas around 'enough' suggests, quantifying what counts as critical literacy in such terms is also problematic.

Yet, as intimated above, the children's resistance was not just directed at aspects of character and theme: there was a second main target, which I have summarised as resistance to the text's metafictive **structures** and **techniques**. This was especially visible through Sarah's staunch resistance to the idea that images could be privileged above words in *No Bears*, although this seemed to be a stance that she was willing to adapt when faced with contesting discourses once again in *The Three Pigs*. In other instances, the children's resistance seemed to be directed at the consequences of metafiction, by which I mean the impact the devices had on the shape, feel and flow of the narrative that emerged when read aloud in our small group. As described in Chapter Five, this became visible when Matthew politely asked if we could read through *The Three Pigs* at the end of our discussion even although we had already travelled through the text once; a request that suggested he had not recognised our collaborative and disjointed exploration of Wiesner's metafictive story worlds as constituting a *proper* act of 'reading'.

Perhaps most notable of all was the varied resistance shown by the Primary One readers to the structures of *Black and White* (Chapter Five). To me, this session felt like a disaster

but, once viewed from afar, seemed to have offered me a range of wonderful, teachable moments that stemmed from the children's confusion and consternation about how such a book was structured, how it functioned, and what felt *wrong* with it. What these snippets of conversation had in common was a heightened awareness that something was out of sorts; that something was not quite right with the story because of how it stopped and started, or how the story flowed. To recycle Bourdieu's simile once again (Wacquant 1989), the children's resistance to the texts' unconventional structures suggested that, at times, they had been made to feel like "fish out of water", an experience that felt uncomfortable for some, especially Eve in relation to *Black and White*. This type of resistance is not explicitly accounted for by Sipe and McGuire's typology (2006), lying as it does *somewhere* between their explanations of literary critical and preferential resistance while also, in my view, doing something **more** than these categories suggest. What this 'something more' might be stems from the role or impact of metafiction, its humour and its potential to evoke emotional responses such as resistance from young readers whose assumptions about books and the world have not yet been secured (McClay 2000). If "emotions are the strongholds of ideologies" as Rogers and O'Daniels have suggested (2015: 73), then perhaps the powerful feelings of resistance provoked by metafiction and the heightened emotions that can result might be sufficient to trigger a surprising sense of doxic or ideological dissonance; the state of mind that can unsettle existing ideas and effect changes to habitual understandings, however marginal.

Therefore, what I learned about metafiction from the children's responses was its capacity to stimulate readers' feelings of resistance towards character and themes, while **also** provoking curiosity and inquiry into the more unusual aspects of the texts' structures and approach. By appearing to 'train' the children into expecting – and to some degree, welcoming – moments of disruption or incongruity while reading, the metafictive devices found in the picturebooks also helped the younger learners to develop a more heightened awareness of reading as a process of negotiation and decision-making rather than as simply an outcome. In this regard, the readers in this study compare favourably to the ideal, "mature" readers described by Mackey (1990), who are said to:

> …read with a more reflective and detached awareness of how the

> processes of fiction are operating as they read. They are simultaneously
> caught up in the story and standing back from it, watching it work (1990: 179).

As Mackey's comment suggests, the advantage of such an in-between, *liminal* reading stance − one involving engagement but also detachment − is that the act of reading can become visible as both a product and a process. In this way, reading and engaging with the provocations of metafiction can help to support children's developing sense of "textual authority" (Aukerman 2012: 43).

Moving on from resistance, in the next section of this chapter, I summarise why the some of the children's responses could be described as revealing "meta-level understandings of language in use" (Gee cited Lankshear 1999: 24) and explain how these also helped to create spaces for critical literacy by enabling the young readers to be 'caught up while standing back' from the texts in slightly different ways.

Lessons from the children: making links between metafiction, metacognition and critical literacy.

This study has been conducted against a backdrop of increasing scholarly interest in the relationship between metacognitive skills and the act of reading. Scholars including Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer (2013) and Nikolajeva (2014) have drawn on theories from cognitive science and psychology to help them develop new perspectives for analysing authors' strategies in text construction as well as for understanding readers' responses − both implied and real − to texts (Nikolajeva 2014: 5). While aware of and interested by these developments, the suggestions I make in this section have not been explicitly influenced by such approaches, although I acknowledge the overlaps that exist and the possible insights they may have brought to this study had I embedded them into my analytical approach.

As I have explained, my theoretical interest in metafiction has stemmed from its potential to stimulate conversations about how fiction works, and, by extension, how meaning is made. By helping to draw readers' attention towards the constructedness of fiction, I wondered if reading and talking indirectly about the effects of metafiction might make it possible to emphasise the fact that all texts are "constructed with particular motivations by particular people with particular goals and that these are never neutral" (Comber 2001a: 172). Consequently, the sorts of comments I homed in on during analysis were those that seemed to be more 'meta' in nature, in that they expressed a heightened awareness about the act of reading, or how language worked. Similarly to Arizpe and Styles (2003/16), I looked for moments in our conversations where the readers seemed to go inside their own heads in order to describe what they were thinking and feeling as they read. In the vast majority of cases, I found that these moments were provoked by a metafictive aspect of the text, such as the interplay between the images and words (which differed in each of the four picturebooks), or disruptions caused by non-conventional characterisation and narrative structures, quite simply because they disrupted the status quo.

How to appropriately label such comments has required me to tread carefully, given the recent upsurge of academic activity between the fields of children's literature and cognitive science, as described above, and the overlapping use of terminology that has resulted. While it could be argued that the type of comments I had identified were metacognitive, in that they showed an active awareness of thinking as a process, or a "knowledge about one's own mental processes and the control of those processes to achieve one's intended goal" (Chang-Wells & Wells cited Ruttle 2004), I wished to use a term that would enable me to remain at more of a distance from the cognitive debate. To facilitate this, I have decided to borrow the word 'metaliterate' from Arizpe and Styles (2003/16), a term used by these authors to denote readers' awareness of the sense-making thought processes that can occur during the act of reading words and pictures (2016: 89). Although Arizpe and Styles' usage of the word has been contained to a chapter heading only, by inference, I have understood a metaliterate response to be one that shows a heightened awareness of the "thinking, looking and planning" that occurs when readers make sense from words and

pictures or other textual forms (ibid: 98). In other words, the sort of comments that begin to acknowledge and articulate *what* readers do while they read.

Lessons from the children: resistance and its relationship to metaliteracy

In some cases, discussions of a *metaliterate nature* grew out of the children's resistance to the metafictive devices. One of the clearest examples of this occurred during the Primary One group's reading of *No Bears*, when Sarah became irate over her classmates' privileging of the Bear's image-led narrative over Ruby the narrator's print-bound perspective. As I described in Chapter Five, Sarah appeared annoyed by her peer group's interpretive stance and seemed to go quiet, offering answers that were either monosyllabic [*"Words."*] or conveyed by the sharp stab of a pointed finger to the relevant place on the page. A crucial effect of her visually-resistant response was that it foregrounded the act of interpreting words and pictures as a process that involved individual decision-making and, occasionally, conflicting points of view. In that sense, Sarah's strong reaction to the contesting discourses offered us a metaliterate gambit, in that it gave the rest of the group an opportunity to articulate what they thought had happened in their heads when reading *No Bears,* just as she had done. Indeed, as I have already explored, Sarah's resistance to the image-led narrative of *No Bears* seemed to provoke Lewis into reconsidering which mode he trusted to tell the *"right story"*. After quietly listening to the rest of the group bickering about who was responsible for the princess's rescue − the Bear (the images) or fairy godmother (the words) − Lewis shifted his allegiance from the pictures to words, suggesting that he had been mulling this over during our discussion: *"I think the pictures are telling the wrong story too"*. Of additional interest was the fact that he seemed to have registered meaning-making as context-specific, as suggested by his subsequent explanatory comment: *"I believe the pictures. But not this one."*

Responding to the same stimulus, similar patterns and processes of thinking could be traced through some of Eve's comments about *No Bears.* In order to make sense of the words and pictures, Eve told me, *"you have to think first and then tell,"* although by the end of our discussion, this had changed to, *"you have to guess. You have to read first."*

While the decrease in certainty suggested by her substitution of *"think"* with *"guess"* could have been linked to our collective unpicking of the text's ambiguous and 'not quite so happily ever after' ending, Eve's repeated use of *"first"* was also interesting because it emphasised her awareness of reading as a process that involved thinking in stages; an idea also reflected by her sequential sentence structures. On this occasion, the children's comments about *No Bears* provided me with a brief glimpse into their inner workings, while also demonstrating how moments of resistance could function as an enabling tool for the development of cognitive skills (Nikolajeva 2014). Therefore, from a pedagogic perspective, I could see the benefits that such a picturebook could bring to readers in the classroom, especially if read, as we had done, with less deliberate scaffolding and conscious teacherly guidance in a bid to create more room for increased dialogue and greater reader agency. As Nikolajeva has described (2014), the resistance, confusion and frustration caused by metafictional elements helped to arouse readers' curiosity about narrative conventions, while sharpening their ability to detect when other deviations might occur, thus providing them with important cognitive and, it could be argued, critical training (2014: 46).

Yet, as the Primary One children's responses to the more complex structures of *Black and White* demonstrated, such 'training' is not always straightforward. In addition, it cannot be assumed that the experience of resistance while reading will automatically lead readers towards metaliterate insights. This is not to say that such insights were beyond the Primary One children in this group. Like Sipe and McGuire (2006), I agree that moments of resistance can lead to powerful learning and deep comprehension (2006: 6) but I suggest that for Eve and her four and five-year old colleagues, additional, supported read-throughs of this text and more explicit support would have helped us to negotiate ways around their understandable confusion at such an unusual approach and could quite possibly have led us towards deeper insights. Of course, such support would have to be offered in ways that still created space for the children to think and engage with the texts on their own terms, rather than those decided solely by the adults in charge.

While the Primary Two group of picturebook readers also resisted aspects of *Black and White,* to me, their resistance felt like less of a stumbling block for us to overcome in the short time we had together. Like the readers in McClay's study (2000), who were actually several years older than this group of five and six-year olds, they treated the problems they had with the text as puzzles or codes to be cracked, explored and explained. This seemed easier for some of the group than others, reflecting the differing reading experiences and social practices each individual brought with them to the session. Ben, for example, embarked on several quite long exchanges where he explained how he had *"figured out"* what was going on; a comment that immediately suggested how deeply he had been thinking about the text. Through his description, it became clear that the act of reading this book had involved multiple interpretive strategies, including decision making [*"instead of reading, we looked at the pictures"*]; conjecture and deduction [*"and then we figured out what was happening"*] and a comparison to his existing textual knowledge [*"the words aren't always right and I think especially in that book that the pictures are right but not the words"*]. Different sets of code-cracking strategies were used by Clare, who described how she had followed a self-identified trail of visual clues: *"Something I have recognised on every page, that one is all circle, circle, circle…and this one is rectangle, rectangle, square…"*, while all of the children offered me an explanation of how they and their parents had negotiated ways around the quadrant of narratives. In this way, the text's structure ensured that discussions of a more metaliterate nature were, to a certain extent, an inevitable consequence. As I have explained, such conversations can offer access to critical literacies by drawing attention to texts as constructs and highlighting the plurality of perspectives.

Lessons from the children: metaliteracy – no resistance necessary

In other cases, metaliterate moments arose without the provocation of resistance. One of the strongest examples of this emerged from the children's responses to *The Three Pigs,* which as I have explained in Chapter Five, had seemed to be unfettered by feelings of resistance. Driven by a desire to explain to me what had made the book so funny and enjoyable, many of the children started to deconstruct the parts they had enjoyed, affording me a glimpse of their understandings of the text's mechanics. For example, when Matthew

told me, *"It actually says 'and ate the pig up' and it didn't!"* his comment revealed an appreciation of the ironic humour made possible by his (possible unconscious) understanding of the texts' contradictory visual and verbal messages. Related to this was Niamh's quite detailed explanation of the mental, intertextual links she had made in order to validate the approaches taken by alternative tellings of traditional tales such as Wiesner's text. By describing how she would draw on her existing knowledge [*"I thought of the other book"*] before comparing it to the version of events offered by the new book [*"…and looked at a bit that's right and then looked at our book"*], the process of reading Niamh depicted involved complex, recursive patterns of movements back and forth between information old and new, while she recalibrated their relationship to one another: *"…and looked at the page and said 'that's right and not the words'."*

Yet, a consequence of my own detached stance was that I had to let many 'teachable' metaliterate moments go by, largely because to have pursued them might have caused me to alter the balance of my role within the project. For example, it would have been interesting to probe more deeply into why Sarah felt it was okay for the images to carry the 'right' story in *The Three Pigs,* when such an idea had seemed so impossible to her in relation to *No Bears*. In a similar way, it might have been fruitful to ask the children to tell me more about the constant rewriting of the dominant narrative that took place in *The Bravest Ever Bear,* or to help them to overcome their difficulties with *Black and White*. As an English teacher, I could see how developing these metaliterate lines of inquiry would have helped me to position the children as text analysts or interrogators who read with an increased sense of "textual authority" that Aukerman has described (2012: 43).

Lessons from the children: establishing metafiction's twin affordances

However, a benefit of my largely 'non-interventionist' position was that it enabled me to examine what could emerge from the children's transactions with the picturebooks without any explicit teaching or instruction from me, as the teacher-like authority figure in charge of the project. In other words, it enabled me to watch the metafictive devices at work. To summarise what I have explained above, the 'work' of metafiction was observable in two

major ways: firstly, through the experience of resistance, which arose when the children's assumptions and existing understandings were unsettled or interrupted. And secondly, through enlightening moments of heightened metaliterate awareness, which were made possible by metafiction's exposure of the "processes of fiction" (Mackey 1990: 179). Forming a powerful, provocative combination, these dual affordances of metafiction presented the young readers in this study with a strong, multi-layered platform from which to begin prodding at the dominant ideology (Sanders 2009: 353).

Lessons from the parents: challenging what counts when it comes to reading

It could be argued that for the children the "dominant ideology" (Sanders 2009) with which they started to engage was that of the picturebooks themselves. In other words, they were prompted into considering how the books worked and what was normal or different about them, compared to what they already knew. As I have described above, engaging with metafiction appeared to enable some of the children to comment on – and challenge – aspects of the sometimes unspoken 'rules' that govern how such texts work, such as the relationship between words and pictures; the inclusion or exclusion of key generic ingredients and the placement and permeability of narrative boundaries.

Like the children, it seemed that some of the parents were also willing to use metafiction as a position from which to engage in similar sorts of ideological prodding, just as Sanders suggested might be possible (ibid). Given their increased life experiences and greater knowledge about words and the world, it was unsurprising that the adults assumed a platform that extended beyond a focus on the rules of how such stories worked. As I describe next, doing so enabled some of the adults to consider reading with children as an ideological and epistemological act; a process that shaped and constructed young readers – but also themselves – in particular ways and with particular outcomes.

In Chapter Six, I described how the texts' metafictive interruptions had caused some of the adult readers to contrast the picturebooks with text types they were already familiar with, such as the books typically sent home from school for shared reading. While it had definitely not been my intention to orchestrate a 'better or worse' scenario between any of the different types of books, the parents' decisions to read the texts against one another was both unexpected and helpful in that it enabled some of them to articulate what felt so very different about the picturebooks' styles and structures. Brendan, for example, initiated quite frequent and explicit comparisons between the picturebooks and *"Kipper and all the rest of it"* (a reference to characters from the popular Oxford Reading Tree reading scheme used in the children's school). As I have already noted at various points throughout Chapter Six, Brendan highlighted the impact of the picturebooks' non-linear structures on his reading style: *"you almost ended up having discussions through the book so you weren't reading…as you would normally do"* and spoke approvingly of their more complex plots and themes because unlike the books usually sent home (which *"just kind of go out of your head as soon as you have read it"*), the picturebooks helped to produce *"a little spark of imagination"* and a range of new ideas. Other parents noted the contrast in more general terms, such as Michelle, who made a broad distinction between what happened in *"normal"* books and those used in the project, and Chloe, who observed that the metafictive texts offered *"much more of a story"* while demanding extra input from both readers, just as picturebook theorists have suggested (eg Goldstone 2004; Pantaleo 2014):

> *I quite liked that it was that little bit more challenging, rather than*
> *just listening to the story. It [did] make her think and she is very inquisitive!*
> (Chloe, Beth's mum)

By highlighting a sense of the increased *"work"* demanded by the picturebooks (see Helena's comments on *The Three Pigs*; also Goldstone 2004), some of the parents started to consider what was expected of their children **as readers** by the mainstream approaches employed by the school and embedded elsewhere. In this sense, they began to demonstrate an awareness of reading as the process of "selective socialisation" with specific demands that Luke described (1992: 6). During our last conversation, Chloe noted that the reading the picturebooks had encouraged them to discuss:

> *…what was going on in the actual story. Like where the wolf and pigs had gone and why they were going in and out of the story and actually about the pictures. Sometimes with the other books…we don't actually talk about the pictures that much but I would definitely say that with these ones…you [were] looking at the pictures more and kind of talking about it more, just to try and understand it.* (Chloe, Beth's mum)

As this comment suggests, Chloe seemed to leave the project with a heightened awareness of what was different − or might have been absent − from her usual practice as a co-reader, which, in this case, related to her tendency to spend less time on the images. To return to Pahl's Bourdieusian image of habitus as layers of shifting sediment (2002), perhaps Chloe's pre-existing ideas had been unsettled, even if just slightly, by noticing that in some books it was possible for the images to play a more crucial role in sense-making.

A similar notion was expressed by Brendan, Eve's father, who compared the level of effort demanded by the metafictive picturebooks to what was expected of them by the books they usually read together at home. Having observed frequently that the picturebooks had given them a lot to look at and talk about [*"you can get more fun out of seeing things in different ways"*], he also appeared to notice a difference in the content and aims of the reading books sent home from school: *"there is nothing much to them − you don't really get to discuss the story."* Developing this idea, he noted:

> *You know, all you are worried about is can she read all of the words and you try and ask, you know, what do you think Floppy is doing here and you just don't get… There's not much to the books and you are not getting much out of the books either, if you see what I mean. It's clearly a task as opposed to…an enjoyment of reading books.* (Brendan, Eve's dad)

Given his use of the phrase *"all you are worried about"*, Brendan seemed aware of the limits that could be imposed by one particular way of reading, or thinking about reading. In addition, by sending home texts (*"with not much to them"*) that appeared to privilege the decoding of words over other reading resources, perhaps it could have seemed (to him) that the school's aim was to construct readers (and parents) who should also be mostly *"worried about"* the words. While not disputing the importance of learning to decode, especially in the first years of schooling, the clarity of Brendan's distinction between

reading as a *"task"* – a word with such strong connotations of work and duty – and reading for enjoyment and pleasure, struck me as interesting, especially given current concerns about the low profile of reading for pleasure in classrooms and its valuable role in later life (Cremin et al 2014). By trying to broaden the scope of the literacy practices involved through the use of questions such as, *"what do you think Floppy is doing here?"* Brendan also showed an intention to help co-construct his daughter as a reader who knew to do more than simply *"read all of the words"*.

Inculcating a future love of reading was an aspiration expressed by the majority of the parents; a shared intention that also indicated how closely their reading values were aligned to those projected by this study – something that could be regarded as a weakness or limitation. Like Brendan, several other parents seemed to have separated learning to read in school from reading with pleasure, including Chloe, who saw her role as to facilitate a link between the two: *"Generally I let her read the school books and then we have a more 'story' book that we read to her. I like a mixture of both."* Aside from an occasional grumble about the plot lines found in the reading scheme texts [*"the cat has gone up the tree, the girl's got caught up the tree, the fireman's come, oh look, the cat's up another tree and it's the end"*: Brendan], none of the parents voiced any particular complaints about the school's approach to reading. In fact, there was a strong sense of parental support and respect for the learning and teaching that took place in school, although, of course, the 'official' nature of my role made it less likely that anyone would turn to me as a confidante about any curricular worries they might have had, and, as I have already stated, it was never my intention to undermine the valuable work of the school. As described above, engaging with the differences made visible by the effects of metafiction helped some of the parents to begin to consider how their child had been constructed as a reader by the "ways with words" privileged by schools (Heath 1983), a powerful although not widespread experience. Instead of using metafiction as a position from which to examine how external forces had and could shape readers, many of the adults responded by looking inwardly and by beginning to unpack some of the ideological views and values they had brought to the project about reading in general, but also about their children as readers.

Lessons from the parents: Unravelling metaliterate moments.
"The whole way through I was thinking, 'Oh! where is this going?'"
(Chloe, Beth's mum)

As indicated above, taking part in the project also led some of the parents to foreground and reflect upon the assumptions and ideological values that dominated their own approaches as readers **and** co-readers, although this was visible in certain cases more than others. In this section I provide an overview of how the parents' transactions with the metafictive picturebooks *in conjunction with* their children seemed to help make them more aware of their habitus and pre-existing assumptions by drawing attention to some of the literacy practices they employed while sharing the books.

Like the children, the task of reading and responding to the metafictive devices seemed to have had a catalytic effect on the parents, prompting them to offer observations that were more inwardly reflective in nature and metaliterate in their focus. While the children had mostly focused on describing the transaction between words and pictures that had taken place inside their own heads [*"You have to guess… you have to read first"*, Eve, Primary One], the parents' comments on this theme went a stage further, by articulating not only their own understandings, but an awareness of how they had mediated and conveyed them to their child co-readers. By making a smooth read-through far less likely, the texts' non-linear formats and non-conventional approaches to storytelling helped to disrupt the parents' expectations that they would know what to 'do' with the picturebooks, a format that all of them had told me they were accustomed to. In several cases, parents expressed feelings of discombobulation at the texts' unpredictability. Chloe's comment, quoted above in this section's sub-heading, conveyed a clear sense of her unease at not knowing where the text was '*going*' to next when reading it aloud. A similar point arose during Helena's commentary on *The Three Pigs,* a book she said had kept her *"a bit busy"* while reading it aloud because of the extra work its interactive, metafictive features had entailed:

> *You are trying to keep ahead of it so you can ask them questions to help*
> *them follow it and then you see the pigs are pulling everything out and so*
> *you ask 'what are they doing? Oh, are they playing hide and seek or are they just*
> *playing with the pages?' And then [the blank pages] give you a wee*
> *bit of respite, when you are flying through the air, and it gets a wee bit*

more complicated again (Helena)*.*

Painting a vivid picture of her twin roles as solo reader and reader-aloud, Helena's words illustrate how hard her mind had to work when engaging with aspects of metafiction in *The Three Pigs.* Like Chloe, Helena's comment *"you are trying to keep ahead"* suggested that her usual practice while reading was to remain several steps in front of the children in order to provide them with whatever scaffolding and support they might need during their own meaning-making processes. Yet, having discovered that staying abreast of such a text was just not possible (at least, not during the first reading with her children present), given that every turn of the page brought with it a new surprise [*"and then you see the pigs are pulling everything out"*], Helena's use of questions showed how she transformed her own uncertainties about the text into ways of enabling them all to actively engage with the picturebook's complex use of words and pictures. In some ways reminiscent of Brendan's appropriation of *"the ends"* of the short stories in *The Bravest Ever Bear* as brief moments for discussion and thought-collection, Helena's interpretation of the blank pages as representing *"a wee bit of respite"* helped to convey an idea of how quickly her mind was racing backwards and forwards between different sets of meaning-making and meaning-dissemination strategies.

Related to this was the fact that some parents gave vent to what seemed to be feelings of frustration at the picturebooks' unruly, unusual and unmanageable tendencies. On several occasions, Michelle expressed a sense of (good-humoured) exasperation at the disruptions the books had caused to her usual reading habits and patterns. Having read *The Bravest Ever Bear* for the first time, *"I was like, 'We're going to have to read this again,"* while *The Three Pigs* met with a similar initial response: *"I don't know how to read these words! I don't know what's going on here!"*

Frustration of a different kind had been experienced by Niall, who said *The Three Pigs* had been *"just very difficult to read"* not simply because of its scrambled words and *"pages of*

nothing", but because, physically, it was a book that did not lend itself to being shared at bedtime in their house:

> *We've got one of those elevated beds so Niamh is up at the top. So it was quite difficult for me to look at the pictures and for her to try to read it and to make sense of it. It was one of those books she was quite pleased to actually hold and… she was quite pleased to look at the pictures and read it herself.* (Niall, Niamh's dad)

As Niall's words seem to suggest, the challenges posed by the book's textual complexities – such as the need to engage with both words and pictures simultaneously – had been accentuated by their awkward physical location, meaning that the shared reading experience had felt far from satisfactory on this occasion.

Brendan, Eve's dad, also found fault with some of the picturebooks for going *"too far"* – possibly by making the act of co-reading feel more complicated than seemed necessary to him, and especially when contained within books aimed at young children. This topic came up twice in our conversation about David Wiesner's text. First of all, he said: *"As an adult, I just cannot work out how I can explain it …in words that your little girl will understand."* Shortly after this, he added: *"It's not quite knowing what I need to say…as far as I am concerned."* Based on these comments, it seemed to me that Brendan's resistance was rooted in the sense of responsibility he felt as a father; that, as the adult in charge, he should somehow have known what was going on and how to read the book 'properly'. As also discussed in relation to *The Three Pigs*, the parents' sense of *'not knowing'* how to read some of the words and images supported the idea of an information gap between the adults' print-bound, habitual understandings about literacy and more recent shifts of understanding about multiliteracies (New London Group 1996) and the New Literacy Studies (Street 1984).

Yet, as I found with the children, the experience of frustration and resistance while reading could be beneficial. Indeed, as I have already explained, participating in the project seemed

to have a positive effect on Brendan, enabling him to recognise and also start to problematise how he felt as a result of engaging with the uncertainties caused by the metafictive texts and foregrounded by our discussions. After acknowledging how much his own ideas and ideologies might have *"steered"* Eve while reading, he explained to me that he had decided to carry out the shared reading of the fourth and final book, *Black and White,* at a more detached, critical and evaluative distance, *"by leaving pauses, to see what happens"*. Apparently empowered by the strength of his new understandings, Brendan even suggested a way that we could rethink the project, by reversing the order of the books:

> *If we had the books in a different order it could have been interesting because the way the last book [Black and White] was, you could have taken it in umpteen different ways and none of them would have been necessarily right or wrong, no matter which way you did it. So actually…it would have been the hardest one to say 'this is how it works'…it was an awful lot easier to just ask her about it.*
> (Brendan, Eve's dad)

Lessons from the parents: reflection and change

Like Brendan, other parents seemed to have identified how the heightened, interactive demands of the picturebooks required changed, adapted or different ways of reading. In some cases, the observations were subtle and were reflected by the words the adults had used to tell me about the texts. For example, when commenting on *The Bravest Ever Bear*, Barbara recalled:

> *There was the story and then there was the little bear at the side, helping along. We read the story and then we **had** to go back and look at what the bear was doing at the side each time.* (Barbara, her emphasis)

By placing a definite stress on the word *"had"*, Barbara could have been gesturing towards what Sarah, as her co-reader, insisted they do next. Additionally, she could have been commenting on what she felt she had been compelled to do next by the text's multiple and contesting narrative voices. On another occasion, this time in relation to *No Bears*, Barbara made a similar observation:

*All the books you have given us have references to other stories so we have always **had** to chat about other stories, as well as the story that was being read.* (Barbara, my emphasis)

While this comment made it clear to me that Barbara understood how this aspect of the picturebook functioned, her use of 'had' also seemed to emphasise the impact that the text's many intertextual references had on the direction of their journey through its pages. In a similar way, Michelle's accounts of her readings with Matthew revealed how the picturebooks had prompted her to change the practices she employed while sharing a book, although I am not certain that she fully recognised the sorts of adjustments that had occurred. As I have described in Chapter Six, Michelle's approach when sharing a book was *usually* to focus on the words first *"and then we go back and we do the pictures and then we talk about the book."* This approach to shared reading (read words; look at pictures; discuss book) was one that she tried to adhere to while reading through the first two books in the project, although it seemed that the plot twist caused by the contesting visual and verbal narratives at the end of *No Bears* did tempt her into deviating just *slightly* from her standard approach:

I had sort of clicked what was going on about half-way through and so for the last two or three pages I was like 'who do you think it is going to be?' But generally, I try not to discuss it till afterwards. (Michelle)

Like Barbara, I wondered if Michelle's emphatic use of 'had' could be taken as indicative of the effects or demands of the metafictive devices. Related to this was Chloe's acknowledgement of the interplay between the words and pictures and its impact on their approach to reading the picturebooks, a subject that cropped up with several other parents, although in less specific terms. After commenting on the fact that they ordinarily spent quite a lot of time on images due to Beth's excellent ability to spot the tiniest visual detail, Chloe told me that, *"these ones force you to look at the pictures more"*. Like the previous comments, what interested me about this observation was Chloe's word choice and her use of *"force"* to describe and acknowledge the impact the images had on her understanding of the storyline. Just as Goldstone suggested could happen, the metafictive devices at work in

these texts seemed to have "prodded" (2004) some of the adults into noticing how the texts worked, and how they, as readers, made sense of them.

A final sort of change or shift was visible through Niall's acknowledgement that he had underestimated his daughter's skills and abilities as an increasingly sophisticated reader. As observed in Chapter Six, when reflecting on all of the books at the end of the project, Niall described how his initial feeling of surprise at the first book's complexity [*"I was surprised to see she enjoyed it…I didn't think that would happen"*] had developed into new understandings about what Niamh liked to read, as well as what she was *capable* of reading:

> *With a child, you never really know what level they are at because apart from maybe the books they bring back from school [and] those are the books they are reading because they are part of the curriculum. You don't really know what they enjoy. And you don't really know what there is [to read] because you take them to the library and that always runs the same.* (Niall, Niamh's dad)

By *"always runs the same"*, I understood Niall to be referring to the reading habits or patterns they may have developed as a family that shaped or dictated the sorts of books they read, or the authors they borrowed. For Niall, having seen another side to Niamh as a reader as well as a different facet of children's literature, the project seemed to have offered him new insights into the sorts of reading habits that it might be also possible to cultivate:

> *Having read all four books, she is appreciating [them] in different ways than I would have thought…We just need to make her enjoy the reading so that it is something she will develop and enjoy as a growing girl into an adult.* (Niall, Niamh's dad)

To conclude this section, I return to Nikolajeva's image of picturebooks as training grounds (2014) to consider what sorts of training the metafictive devices offered to the adult readers, and, more specifically, what critical insights they may have revealed. Certainly, reading and engaging with metafiction introduced some of them to new and interesting

ways of telling stories, as illustrated by Diana's excited exclamation: *"I didn't know they did books like this!"* In addition, through their differing experiences of resistance, frustration and outright confusion, some of the adults took the project as an opportunity to explore what may have provoked such responses. Displaced from their usual textual surroundings, to appropriate Bourdieu's image for a final time, some of the parents seemed to have been led towards new sorts of understanding about themselves, and their children, as readers.

Just as I had found with the children, deciding what a critically literate response looked like with the parents initially proved challenging. Yet, if critical literacy is understood as questioning and challenging the way things are in texts and in everyday life (O'Brien & Comber 2001: 153) then it seemed clear that engaging with the metafictive devices enabled some of the parents to make comments with a more critical 'edge' by challenging and changing some of the assumptions they brought with them to the study. While it is impossible to discount the heightened awareness that was caused by volunteering to take part in a study about reading, it is also clear that the disruption and dissonance caused by the texts' metafictive devices played a major role in the parents' responses and, in some cases, their subsequent reconfiguration of ideas about reading.

Reflective conclusion

As mentioned in a previous chapter, Grieve (1998) has suggested that metafiction's theoretical potential is bound up with its ability to pose:

> ontological questions about the nature and existence of reality, the creation
> of the literary universes and the nature of human artefacts. It reminds the reader
> of the book's identity as an artefact and of the reader's own role in realising the
> text… Metafiction is both a process and a product which denies the reader a
> passive role (1998: 13).

As a *product*, in the shape of the picturebooks we read and discussed during this project, metafiction offered readers both young and old opportunities to occupy a different, more

detached stance or position in relation to the text. As I have explained, aspects of this stance became increasingly visible to both sets of readers through their differing experiences of resistance and also through the metaliterate 'moments' that were made possible by the texts' deliberate foregrounding of the "thinking, looking and planning" (Arizpe & Styles 2016: 98) that goes into reading as a *process*. In this sense, the conversations that took place within this study highlighted the ability of metafiction to promote conversations with a more critically literate edge; a surface that could possibly be sharpened through increased exposure and over time. In response to Ryan and Anstey's finding that the readers they worked with were not *naturally disposed to respond critically* to texts (2003), I suggest that metafiction has the potential to interrupt the inevitability of such statements, by offering readers access to the more critically-aware "platform" (Sanders 2009) or stance I have outlined above. By causing the readers in this study to stop, to query and, in some cases, to reconsider what they *naturally* did while reading, the disruptive metafictive devices at work in these picturebooks helped to foreground some of the invisible dispositions that shape how we read words, and, by extension, the world (Freire 1985). As I have explained and demonstrated throughout this thesis, it is by making what is normally invisible *visible* − if only fleetingly − that authentic reflection can become possible and changes to an individual's dispositions more likely.

In the next − and final chapter − I offer some concluding thoughts on the project and the understandings that emerged. Using the research questions that provoked this study in the first place as a structure, I reflect on its limitations and suggest how aspects of this project could help to inform future practice and research in homes and schools, as well as the places and spaces in-between.

Chapter Eight:
Concluding thoughts and critical reflections

> *"With some of the books, you just thought 'oh my good God – what am I going to do with this one?' – but it's definitely worth a go."*
>
> **(Brendan, Eve's dad)**

In the previous chapter, I drew once again on a patchwork metaphor to gather together some of the main findings to have emerged from the readers' responses to metafictive picturebooks. Continuing that image here, this final section is concerned with the tying-up of the loose threads that remain by summarising the main findings and resulting ideas and by looking towards the future. First of all, I offer some additional, critical reflections upon the research questions that have framed this thesis.

Research question one: How do parents and their young children respond to the non-linear, often disruptive and multimodal metafictive devices employed in the following picturebooks: *The Bravest Ever Bear* (Ahlberg & Howard 1999), *No Bears* (McKinlay & Rudge 2013), *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner 2001), and *Black and White* (Macaulay 1990)?

In many respects, the expansive yet chronological nature of this first research sub-question provided me with a coherent way to structure the bulk of this thesis, as can be seen in Chapters Five and Six, where I provided an in-depth account of **how** readers had responded to the metafictive aspects of each picturebook. In hindsight, I recognise that the breadth offered by this research question created obstacles as well as opportunities, by presenting me with an apparently broad canvas, while simultaneously forcing me to account for the inherently subjective nature of my own approach, and what I had decided constituted a valid (and valued) readerly response to the metafictive devices at work in each text. In this case, it required me to make explicit my focus on the relationship between the aims of critical literacy and the effects of metafiction (see Chapter Two), a

theoretical interest that helped to carve out the shape of the study in the first place, but one which could perhaps be critiqued for its single-mindedness. Yet, I contend that by exploring whether readers' responses to metafiction could be mapped onto critical literacy practices, this study has added to the literature that already exists.

The fact that readers were not offered any formal pedagogic or theoretical scaffolding when approaching the metafictive picturebooks is another distinctive feature, given that so many classroom-based studies provide younger readers with access to a metalanguage or explicit instruction during or before the act of reading. In addition, as indicated in Chapter Six, by including parents' views alongside the children's, my intention has been to make more room for their voices, while also reflecting and recognising something of the ideological and intellectual interplay that can occur between a parent's multiple roles as co-teacher (given that adults at home are often tasked with supporting their children's education in highly-specific ways) and also as readers, whose understandings have been sculpted and "sedimented" (Pahl 2002) by the impact of their own diverse life experiences, including their schooling.

Therefore, by offering a snapshot of the sort of insights and interest that *could* emerge if the texts were discussed without any explicit, scholastic instruction, the readers' responses suggest the level of critical engagement, analysis and − crucially − fun that might be had elsewhere if such disruptive and playful books were sent home from school, to be enjoyed more widely. Indeed, with some further scaffolding, albeit considerably applied, it is intriguing to imagine the sorts of conversations that might take place in other living rooms and classrooms, where adult and child readers are provoked into puzzling out narrative pathways through the words and pictures, *in addition* to decoding the printed lines of linear text. As the parents' responses indicate, such discussions *can* and *do* already take place, suggesting the scope for schools to embrace and capitalise on these pre-existing practices. In addition, given the parents' curiosity about the picturebooks and their lack of conceptual awareness about visual literacy (which, as I have explained, can be attributed to generational shifts in literacy theory and the relative infancy of visual and critical literacies

within curricular frameworks), it is clear that there is also room for schools and other organisations to work alongside parents and carers to help 'fill in the blanks' while also extending the conversations in new directions.

Research question two: Can reading and discussing metafictive picturebooks make adult readers more aware of the "force of the habitus" (Fowler 2000: 1) by drawing attention to the literacy practices they employ while reading with young children?

As I have discussed extensively in Chapter Six, several of the adults responded to the picturebooks in ways that seemed to confirm metafiction's ability to make readers more highly aware of their own thinking, or the "behind the scenes reasoning processes" (Sipe & McGuire 2009: 286) that are socially constructed and help to fashion our individual understandings and interpretations. By conceptualising reader response as an expression or mobilisation of an individual's habitus, it became possible for me to 'see' the effects that metafiction had on some readers, by searching through the transcripts for moments where pockets of disruption were most visible. As I have shown, participating in the study enabled several of the parent readers, especially Brendan, Niall and Chloe, to experience forms of doxic dissonance that Bourdieusian scholars have agreed can lead to the reformulation of existing understandings; a process of knowledge formation that could also be conceptualised using a metalanguage drawn from the theory of threshold concepts. I acknowledge that, of course, it would have been possible to describe any such change to readers' taken-for-granted assumptions about reading without recourse to Bourdieu's terminology, yet I contend that thinking through this particular theoretical lens was helpful, not least because of its commonalities with emerging trends in socio-literacy research (eg. Rowsell & Pahl 2015). Visualising readers' responses to the picturebooks as expressions of their *literate habitus* (Carrington & Luke 1997: 100) forced me to consider their comments as representative of far more than individual preferences or experiences, in the sense that they were also indicative of the shaping effects of the multiple, overlapping social fields that surround us all. As Maton has suggested might be the case, thinking through a Bourdieusian lens enabled me to explore how social structure and individual agency can be

reconciled (2011: 50) and made visible during an activity as apparently *'natural'* as sharing a storybook at home.

I also feel it is important to note that the majority of my Bourdieusian knowledge has been gleaned from the application of his concepts by experienced scholars such as Diane Reay, Michael Grenfell and Kate Pahl, rather than directly from Bourdieu's original writings. While I did read Bourdieu's texts in translation from French, ultimately, I found it far more helpful to read how others had translated his *concepts* into educational contexts connected to literacy rather than simply his words alone. Such an approach resonates with Bourdieu's own claim that his work should be received as a "practical project first and a theoretical one second" (Grenfell 2007: 48), a comment that underscores the need for researchers to use Bourdieu's tools for thinking through, rather than as an explanatory afterthought (Reay 2004).

Finally, despite the original sub-question's primary focus on how the adult readers responded to metafiction, it is clear from the children's responses to the books that engaging with the metafictive devices in picturebooks also enabled them to arrive at new understandings. In particular, the children seemed especially intrigued by the contradictory interplay between words and pictures and the tricky questions this could raise about a story's reliability. With reference again to Bourdieu's terminology, I suggest the metafictive picturebooks we read in this study could be described as *heterodoxic* in nature due to their potential to deny − or at least unsettle − readers' taken-for-granted understandings about how books *should* work, while also highlighting the impact that such assumptions or dispositions might have on others, who might well have interpreted a text differently. For this reason, I suggest that metafictive picturebooks can provide teachers or parents who are interested in developing younger readers' critical potential (and indeed, their own) with playful and productive routes into discussions about power, the status quo and how words work both in books and the world (Comber 2001).

Research question three: Can the metafictive picturebooks' non-canonical status help to disrupt the dominance of schooled literacy practices at home, by offering parents and children the chance of a 'third space' to construct meanings independently (McGonigal & Arizpe 2007)?

When going through the preparatory notes I had scribbled down to help me construct this final chapter, it struck me how frequently I had used (or underlined) references or phrases containing the word 'space'. The fact that this word appears more than 100 times throughout this thesis also gestures towards its conceptual significance. In chapters Two and a Half and Four, where I described the project's design and methodology (with reference to the theories of liminality expounded by Turner (1985) and Conroy and de Ruyter (2009)), I also alluded to the helpful parallels that exist between Pahl's explanation of how the habitus can be reconfigured (2002) and theoretical accounts of liminal experiences. Returning to those ideas once again, I suggest that the heterodoxic nature of the metafictive picturebooks (as outlined in the paragraph above) helped to create spaces for new understandings to emerge by interrupting readers' assumptions of what they thought *usually happened* in picturebooks, a text format with which the families in this study were all well-accustomed. In this respect, the metafictive devices functioned as catalysts for bringing about these new understandings within the project space we had carved out collectively. Of course, while it is impossible to separate the effects of the metafictive devices from the experience of participating in the project as a whole, I suggest that the *transformed* understandings and practices expressed by some of the parents emerged **because** of the disruptive, dissonant effects of metafiction within a picturebook format. Indeed, it seems unlikely that such ideas would have emerged in response to texts that merely confirmed or reflected the status quo in story-telling terms.

In addition, the surprising experience of 'discovering' these picturebooks within the confines of an officially organised, research council-funded picturebook study (rather than through a random encounter in a book shop, library or official schooled context) also helped to advance deeper contemplation and to accentuate comparisons of what made these books seem so *different* or *weird*. As I have already noted, many of the readers were

curious to know why had I picked these books out in particular: what was I looking for? What was I up to? Spurred on by such "nettlesome" questions (Cousins 2010), for some, the project was able to function as a liminal − or third − space, one in which readers were presented with opportunities for greater agency, and with room for ontological and irreversible conceptual change to occur (Meyer & Land 2006). From within these liminal spaces or moments, it became possible for some readers to engage in a level of reflection and self-scrutiny that brought about adjustments to their normative assumptions or practices, however slight. As discussed in Chapter Seven, for the children, these new insights remained clustered around issues raised by the text and its practices, although it did seem highly likely that, with some carefully applied support, deeper understandings would also have been forthcoming. For some of the parents, engaging with metafiction within the project enabled them to reflect not only on the texts, but also upon the effects of the wider, structural forces that help to shape all of us into the readers we become. In most cases, this sense of discovery − whether it was prompted by surprise or feelings of resistance − generated knowledge that was "troublesome" in some way (Meyer & Land 2006), in that it challenged what was already taken-for-granted, provoking temporary feelings of cognitive instability and uncertainty. Consequently, I suggest that some of the *insights* produced by the effects of the metafictive devices were threshold-like in quality, in that they led to new configurations of knowledge that, it is said, are unlikely to be forgotten or unlearned (Land et al 2014). Indeed, as these authors have also noted (ibid), learning in a liminal space can often occur when individuals experience conceptual difficulties, causing them to:

> let go of customary ways of seeing things, of prior familiar views. [The difficulties] provoke a state of liminality − a space of transformation in which the transition from an earlier understanding (or practice) to that which is required is effected. This transformation state entails a reformulation of the learner's meaning frame and an accompanying shift in the learner's ontology or subjectivity. The latter tends to be uncomfortable or troublesome (Land et al 2014: 200).

Therefore, to conclude the argument I have sustained throughout this thesis, perhaps the relationship between the *effects* of metafiction and the broadly-agreed *aims* of critical literacy can be better expressed using the terminology of threshold concepts. Thus, the

unruly and disruptive training regime offered by metafiction can be visualised as instrumental to the creation of a "conceptual gateway" or portal; a point of access that can offer readers ways into a "new conceptual terrain in which things formerly not perceived come into view" (ibid). In the context of this study, I suggest that the *'things not perceived'* by readers were the often-invisible ideological implications of reading that a more critical perspective can suddenly make visible. This was illustrated by Brendan's heightened awareness of his own epistemological impact on the reading process; Niall's new understandings about Niamh's capabilities as a reader and the children's realisation that both pictures and the words can be allowed to tell stories that don't necessarily agree. Indeed, it is also visible in the new understandings I have arrived at as a result of constructing this thesis. Applying the logic of threshold concepts, it follows that such new knowledge, however slight, will be irreversible, transformative and capable of transfer to other types of texts, in differing contexts and circumstances.

Research question four: Can adults and young children be encouraged to develop critically literate practices as a result of reading and discussing metafictive picturebooks at home?

The short answer to this final question is − yes. As I have shown throughout this thesis, the act of reading and discussing metafictive picturebooks within the spaces created by this project encouraged many readers to respond in ways that revealed a critical 'edge', a tentative-sounding term that I have used in order to acknowledge the complexity of ever labelling something as 'critical' with confidence. It is both interesting and significant that these moments became increasingly visible as a consequence of (the readers and myself) taking a sideways step away from our usual domains of practice. For the children, this involved being part of a small group who had permission to leave their classrooms behind in order to talk about a set of picturebooks that were somehow special − possibly because they had been sent home from school in a canvas bag and had absolutely nothing to do with their teachers or the rest of their classmates. For the parents, this involved being consulted in a different way − and within different spaces − about issues that related not only to their child's reading but to themselves as readers and active constructors of

knowledge. For myself, the demands of this sideways move required me to work at the periphery of several worlds and across several field boundaries, causing me to question my own identity within the study and to challenge many of the assumptions I had brought to it. From this detached but also attached, liminal vantage point, it became possible for some of us – including myself – to "stand back from [*ourselves as*] texts and view [*ourselves*] critically" (O'Brien 1994: 40), a quotation I have appropriated with italics to re-emphasise my understanding of critically literate practices as embodied and performed (Johnson & Vasudevan 2012) and the nature of critical literacy as stance or attitude rather than a method or procedure (Luke 2012). In addition, I have shown how the experience of resistance made room for responses with critically literate potential to emerge. While our encounters with critical literacy were fleeting and fragmentary, like Smith (2004), I believe that engaging with the disruptive effects of metafiction within this project was sufficient to set some of us, including myself, on the road towards newly enhanced, critical understandings.

Summary of key findings and recommendations

While the multi-layered nature of this research project has made it a challenge to condense into a final summary, some key findings include:

- Responses with a 'critical edge' were a direct result of readers' interactions with a metafictive aspect of the texts.
- Engaging with metafiction caused the readers in this study to respond with resistance and/or with a heightened sense of metaliterate awareness. As I have shown, both types of response can help to support the development of a critically literate perspective.
- The familiar and comfortable format of the picturebook made it an ideal site for disrupting readers' assumptions about *what counts* when reading. Because of this, I have labelled metafictive picturebooks as *heterodoxic* in nature, given that they seek to deny existing, invisible understandings about how texts work and how meaning is made.
- For many adults in this study, *what mattered* about reading remained tethered to the print-centric 'basics' of years gone by, suggesting a need to share research-led insights about what literacy looks like for readers in a multiliterate age.

- For many of the children, what mattered about reading remained fairly fluid, yet heavily influenced by the understandings of their adult, more experienced co-readers.

In addition, the following recommendations are offered as extensions of the key findings:

- Metafictive texts − especially picturebooks − have an important role to play in the development of a more critically literate citizenship (Beach et al 2009), by offering readers access to conversations about the constructedness and non-neutrality of texts that can enable readers to both engage **and** remain detached from a text.
- Metafiction's provocation of independent thought and reflection through resistance and increased metaliterate awareness can offer a 'way in' to critical literacy that may avoid the pitfalls of *critical literacy as procedure,* as identified by Aukerman (2012).
- The policy gaps and training silences that exist around the relatively recent concepts of critical and visual literacy should be addressed in ways that can cater for the different needs and perspectives of both parents and teachers.
- Likewise, the critical potential of resistance as a reader response should be shared far more widely with teachers and other adult readers so that it can be perceived as a support for, rather than an obstacle to, meaning-making.
- Applying a threshold concepts approach to the 'troublesome' concept of critical literacy (Land et al 2014) may offer a productive, positive approach for both adults and children to develop individual understandings in ways that emphasise critical discovery and authentic reflection (Freire 1996) over direct instruction or transmission.
- Consulting parents as readers rather than simply as co-readers may help to open up new channels of communication between home and school and may also offer another way to "use and value what families already know in order to teach them what they do not know" (Brooks & Hannon 2013: 196).

Final thoughts and future hopes

In conclusion, this research study has shown that metafiction does indeed have the potential to act as an engaging ally (Mackey 1990), by encouraging readers across the generational divide to engage with words and pictures in a range of creative, thought-

provoking and critical ways. I feel it is also important to emphasise the pleasure and positivity about reading that emerged from our engagements with these playful texts; responses that happily co-existed alongside the deeper, more serious reflections I have also described. For this reason, I believe it would be interesting to carry out this study in another school, in a different catchment area, with a set of families who know nothing of me or my interest in picturebooks, in order to see what sort of responses might emerge. Doing so would also help me to address my genuine concern that the middle-class-centric nature of this project might also be its biggest weakness.

In its current form, this project may not present classroom teachers with a model to sustain or develop, given that so very few people have the time and flexibility to hang around school playgrounds interviewing parents about picturebooks! Yet, I believe that aspects of this project's methodology, including the use of literature circles, the reversal of the usual trajectory of reading between home and school, and the consultation of parents as readers and thinkers in their own right within less formal places and spaces, all hold promise for classroom practitioners. Above all, I am wholly convinced that discussing the effects of metafiction in picturebooks can spark off powerful conversations that can help to push readers "beyond the literal" (Serafini 2012: 160), into realms of resistance and metaliterate understandings that may also contain that elusive, critical 'edge'. Such conversations are necessary at home and in schools if critical literacy is ever to shake off its niche status and become a more 'natural' part of our ways with words. At a time when so many are struggling to deal with the effects of heightening social and political propaganda, with discourses of hate and with the impact of widespread apathy; at a time when education is narrowing, while stakes rise and forms of communication expand; finding ways − however small − to cultivate critical readers both inside and outside of school seems to be a valid and valuable endeavour. To return, finally, to Brendan, whose words appear at the start of this chapter, I agree that *"it's definitely worth a go"*.

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Appendix A: Examples of recognised metafictive devices

From Anstey (2002: 447)

- Nontraditional ways of using plot, character and setting, which challenge reader expectations and require different ways of reading and viewing.

- Unusual uses of the narrator's voice to position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes.

- Contesting discourses (between words and pictures) which can cause the reader to consider different perspectives and meanings.

- Indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character etc., requiring the reader to construct some of the text and meaning.

- Pastiche of illustrative styles, which require the reader to use wider knowledge/ grammars in order to read.

- Intertextuality – requiring the reader to employ background knowledge in order to arrive at the available meanings.

- New and unusual design and layout, which can challenge the reader's perception about how to read a book.

From Pantaleo (2004: 230)

- Nonlinear/non-sequential plot.

- Multiple narratives.

- Narrators who directly address readers and comment on their own narration.

- Characters and narrators swap places.

- Disruptions of traditional time and space relationships.

- Use of parody.

- Use of narrative framing devices, including illustrative framing devices.

- Description/foregrounding of the creative process.

- Mixing of genres/modes/ styles

Appendix B: Table of key understandings

Anstey (2002: 446/7) Key understandings about new literacies in the 21st century	Anstey (2002: 447) Metafictive devices common to postmodern picturebooks	Goldstone (2004: 198/199) Key features of postmodern picturebooks	Pantaleo (2004: 230) Common metafictive devices (those included here are additional to Anstey's list.)	Simpson (1996: 119) Key critical understandings	Comber (2003) Key critical literacy practices/ questions
All texts are consciously constructed and have particular social, cultural, political and economic purposes	Nontraditional ways of using plot, character and setting, which challenge reader expectations and require different ways of reading and viewing	Nonlinearity of narrative	Nonlinear/ non-sequential plots	Characters are not real but are constructed by authors. Stories are selective versions of reality, told from a particular view. Authors write for particular audiences and make assumptions about the nature of their cultural knowledge and values.	Asking in whose interests particular texts work (and whose they ignore). Examining the historical and cultural contexts of discourses in texts.
Texts come in a variety of representational forms, requiring readers to use a range of grammars and meaning-making systems.	Unusual uses of the narrator's voice to position the reader to read the book in particular ways and through a particular character's eyes. Contesting discourses (between words and pictures) which can cause the reader to consider different perspectives and meanings	Multiple perspectives	Multiple narratives Narrators who directly address readers and comment on their own narration. Characters and narrators swap places	Authors leave gaps in the text for readers to fill: readers will fill these gaps differently.	Examining multiple and conflicting texts. Reading texts against one another. Comparing the vocabularies and grammars of related texts.
Social and technological change will continue to change and challenge the representation of texts.	Indeterminacy in written or illustrative text, plot, character etc, requiring the reader to construct some of the text and meaning.	Irony and contradiction	Disruptions of traditional time and space relationships Use of parody	Some values are privileged by the cultural context through which they are mediated.	Texts can be transformed and redesigned.

| Multiple ways of reading and viewing a text are possible, depending on social, cultural, political factors. | Pastiche of illustrative styles, which require the reader to use wider knowledge/ grammars in order to read. | Exposure to the artistic act of the book's creation. | Use of narrative framing devices – eg stories within stories. This can also include illustrative framing devices. | Readers fill textual gaps differently.

It is possible to resist/ challenge dominant or preferred readings of texts. | Textual practices are non-neutral. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Intertextuality – requiring the reader to employ background knowledge in order to arrive at the available meanings | | Description of the creative process

Mixing of genres/ modes/ styles | | |
| A range of possible meanings should be considered, including how the text constructs the reader and a view of the reader's world. | New and unusual design and layout, which can challenge the reader's perception about how to read a book.

Multiple readings and meanings are available for different audiences. | Reader as co-author | | Authors use language, point of view etc to position readers to respond in particular ways | Investigating how readers are positioned by the ideologies in texts |

Appendix C: Content analysis grids

Ahlberg, A. & Howard, P. (2010) *The Bravest Ever Bear,* London: Walker Books			
Page ref	**Brief content description**	**Metafictive device(s)?**	**Critical literacy practice and/or understanding?**
First page	Page contains a sepia-coloured image of a typewriter with an almost blank piece of paper inserted. The 'paper' reads: 'This Walker book belongs to' with a space for the reader to write their name.	The image hints at the reader's role as a co-author and draws attention to the text as an artefact that has been deliberately constructed.	The use of the word 'belongs' draws attention to the fact that readers will approach texts differently and will draw on different resources to fill in the 'gaps' left by authors. Reader engagement is demanded from the outset.
1st DPS: containing publisher's details, title page and contents.	Moving from L-R, we can follow Bear as he gets ready to start the story: he wakes up in bed, dries his hair after a bath and finally hops about in anticipation close to the point where the reader will turn the RH page and the story will begin.	Bear's preparations draw attention to his role as a character or a performer and therefore the fictionality or performativity of the text. The list of chapter headings reads like a list of characters, also suggesting the nonlinearity of the narrative?	Bear's 'awareness' of his acting role highlights and celebrates the text as a constructed object. By showing us where the *real* story experience begins (when we turn the page) Bear's actions already begin to subvert more traditional approaches to narrative.
2ns DPS: The Bear	The story begins and ends with one line: 'Once upon a time there was a bear.' Bear is initially pleased with this and conveys his pride directly to the reader: 'That's me!' However, once he realises the length/ content of the story, he objects and appeals to the reader/ narrator directly, with arms outstretched and a puzzled expression: 'What's going on?'	Presence of multiple narrators who contradict each other. Bear critically comments on his own narrative and addresses the reader directly. Non-traditional plot.	Both strands of narrative immediately interrupt assumptions about 'what counts' as a story. This suggests that the authors assume that readers will have specific knowledge about how texts work and what constitutes a transgression.
4th DPS: The Three Bears	Bear oversees a version of The Three Bears that begins traditionally but ends with Goldilocks competing a community service order. Bear appears to think this is a just punishment.	Bear comments/ interacts with the main narrative: he is getting increasingly frustrated with the narrative's direction. The retelling of *The Three Bears,* relies on readers' intertextual knowledge, is non-traditional and parodies the conventional outcome that sees Goldilocks escape punishment.	Stories can be transformed and retold to suit a particular viewpoint. Dominant or preferred readings of texts can be resisted and/ or challenged.

6th opening: The Penguin; The Sausage.	Bear's frustration with the dominant narrator increases with the introduction of a seemingly pointless story about a penguin. Bear's complaint causes the affronted penguin character to speak out: 'Yes- what's wrong with penguins?' On the facing page, a similar story called 'The Sausage' begins but is quickly interrupted by Bear who stomps to the edge of the page and peels it back to reveal a sepia-coloured office, complete with desk, the typewriter from the first page and an angle-poise lamp. Bear sits down and begins to write.	Multiple, contesting perspectives jostle for dominance and inclusion. Traditional perceptions about how to read a book are challenged. Requires reader to consider which one they think to be dominant and why. Increasing plurality of narratives means that the reader needs to become actively involved in the construction of meaning.	Draws attention to the fact that characters are not real but are deliberately constructed by authors to serve a particular purpose. By exposing the 'inner workings' of the book, Bear highlights the act of authoring and puts the reader at more of a critical distance from the main story. By taking control of the typewriter, Bear shows how dominant readings of texts can be resisted and challenged. He begins the process of deconstruction.
7th & 8th openings: The Bravest Ever Bear.	Bear **tries** to spend the next 4 pages telling 'his version' of his own story. He portrays himself as a grand hero and his story progresses in a traditional, linear format, adheres to many fairytale conventions and ends with him rescuing and marrying a princess and living happily ever after. While the words reflect the Bear's version of reality, the images begin to show a contradictory world view that includes the Princess' emerging narrative. The ending of the Bear's story is disrupted by the Princess who disputes their marriage, changes out of her wedding dress into jeans and a t-shirt while declaring 'It's the *wrong* story.' She then slithers off the rolled up page and takes over the behind the scenes typewriter.	The number of different perspectives increases. Bear tries to reassert traditional forms of narrative but is interrupted by the Princess who is unimpressed by the stereotypical assumptions Bear has made about her in his story. The characters swap place as narrators, the creative process is highlighted again and the synergy between words and images also increases. Readers are expected to employ some intertextual and/or background knowledge in order to understand the assumptions/ conventions that the Bear draws upon and the Princess rejects.	Both Bear's and the Princess' determination to write their own stories highlights the fact that all texts are written by particular authors in particular ways for a particular purpose. Contrasting the ideologies inherent in the Bear's discourse with the Princess' is a useful way to explore the differences in their worldviews, The Princess' rejection of the Bear's narrative is also a useful way to discuss that although some cultural values are privileged, it is still possible to challenge and change them. Following on from the Bear's reconstruction (in his own interests) the Princess begins the process of deconstruction all over again.

9th opening: The Perfectest Ever Princess	The Princess begins her own preferred story and is frequently challenged and interrupted by other characters who dispute her version of events. After describing moving into a flat with friends and a career in television, the Princess declares her story is at an end, but the narrative thread is taken up immediately by a Dragon, who explodes it into life over on the next opening.	The plot continues in a non-sequential fashion with many intertextual clues and references to fairy tales and nursery rhymes. The dominant narrator from the start of book is now absent and the written text reflects the Princess' 'voice', with the other characters voicing opinion on the quality and content of her narrative.	The Princess' transformation of her own story highlights the stereotypes that she is so keen to reject and draws attention to texts as culturally specific artefacts than can be interrupted in the interests of equality and justice. Her interventions could lead to discussions about whose interests are best served by texts and whose are ignored.
10th opening: 'Started!'	The page is flooded with the orange flame from the Dragon's roar, creating a sinister backdrop for the Princess and Bear to run against. They are surrounded by a symbolic representations of scary characters - the green hand of a witch, the enormous paw of a bear, a dangling black spider. The Princess says to Bear: 'I don't like this book.' Meanwhile, one of the 'evil' characters, the Troll, has taken over the typewriter while it is free.	Intertextual references and background knowledge are required to decode the scary backdrop the characters run through. The Princess' comment is metafictive in that it draws attention to the fact that (the characters) are in a book, which could also challenge readers' perception about that nature of what they read.	Authors can use language, cultural symbols etc to position readers to respond in particular ways.

11th and 12th opening: The Wolf, The Troll and the Dragon	The narrative is now taken over by three characters who are often depicted as evil/bad in traditional tales. They use the next 4 pages to re-tell their narrative so that it paints them in a positive light, using phrases like 'happy wolf', 'cosy bridge' and 'best pal' to do so. While the words paint a positive picture of the three characters, the images still confirm their nefarious tendencies. In one image, the Wolf is sitting down to eat a plate full of the Three Little Pigs; in another the Troll is about to tuck into a sandwich containing something small and cute. The characters' story centres around their desire to 'get their own back' on Bear, which they accomplish by eating all of the banquet at the Bear and Princess' wedding reception.	By continuing the plot in a way that glorifies themselves, the Troll, Dragon and Wolf contradict conventional expectations and challenge the reader's perceptions about which version/ perspective they trust. The issue of trust is raised again by the contesting discourses (words and images) as well as the narrative critiques from the Bear on the sidelines.	Stories are selective versions of reality and the Wolf et al's version subverts/interrupts conventional notions about the 'way things are' in stories. Their reconstruction shows the power of the author/language to influence and manipulate readers.
13th opening: The Wedding Cake	Good prevails in the final pages when the wedding cake turns out to be full of black belt bears who wrestle the Troll etc into submission and free the other characters from their negative influence. New narratives emerge from amongst the characters who sit and watch as the black belt bears do their work - there are many intertextual references - and Bear is kissed by Little Red Riding Hood. Is this because he helped to capture the wolf? Is it a blossoming romance? Who is narrating this story?	Intertextual refs Muiltiple perspectives Indeterminancies between written and drawn texts	Authors leave textual gaps, which readers all fill differently. Textual practices are non-neutral.

15th opening: The Bed	Bear's adventures are at an end and he stretches, gets into his pyjamas and goes to sleep. After all of the narrative disagreements and digressions, Bear finally agrees with the narrators's decision to bring the book to a close. Cultural link to the importance of a bed time story?		
16th opening: final page	The penguin, who has been rejected by several of the other characters (including the Bear and the Princess), finally gets a chance to work at the typewriter. The sense is that while one set of narratives have been concluded, others are just beginning and they will be influenced by all those that have gone before.	Endings can be ambiguous. Readers have to make meaning from a range of perspectives. Final return of the dominant narrator voice suggests…?	Texts are not static but are subject to constant retellings and reworkings, according to context .

McKinley, M. & Rudge, L. (2013) *No Bears,* London: Walker Books			
Page ref	**Brief content description**	**Metafictive device(s)?**	**Critical literacy practice and/or understanding**
Front cover	The book's title 'No Bears' is contained in a teetering pile of books. At the top of the pile sits a girl, holding an open book. At the bottom, holding the entire pile (and the girl) is a large bear. Both are looking directly at the reader.	The written and illustrative content contradict each other from the outset. Despite the fact that the title says 'No Bears', a bear is clearly present and seems to be doing something quite helpful, which calls into question why a ban on bears exists. It's also quite playful - a bit like hide and seek - a joke that is extended to the back cover where the bear is hiding behind the ISBN number. The front cover also contains intertextual references to other typical fairy stories - none of which contain bears.	The immediate contradiction between words and pictures sets up the idea that this book is about challenging rules? In that sense, the Bear's presence is quite subversive? The text could also be taken as an indication that texts are representations of a particular sort of reality that is never neutral (in this case, with a bias towards bears), which seek to influence us.
2nd opening: publisher's details and title page	Ruby (main character) is pictured with a broom sweeping away a small picture of a bear's face and some paw prints. She is pushing the pages away from the direction of the main story, into the publisher's details (and therefore away from the 'important' content that will follow?)		
3rd opening: 'Hi, I'm Ruby and this is my book…'	Ruby introduces herself and also what she understands a book to be: there are words everywhere, it begins with 'upon a time' and ends with 'happily ever after' and 'the end'.	Different fonts are used to indicate the difference between Ruby's voice and the genres of books she refers to. Eg 'Happily ever after' is written in an italicised, looping font and 'Once Upon a Time' in a more traditional Times New Roman style. Using different fonts like this can require the reader to draw on their existing knowledge of the conventions of books/stories.	Ruby's comment about books containing words ignores the visual aspect of texts. This is in opposition to the book that lies open in front of her (which she seems to have drawn herself) that contains images rather than words. The assumption that Ruby seems to be making is that words are 'better' than pictures, a stance that is often reinforced by schooled literacies.

4th opening: 'I'm in charge of this book so I know everything about it…'	Ruby asserts her decision making powers and dominance as author. She is fed up with reading about bears in books and does not want her story to contain any: instead she lists all of the characters and settings she would rather have. She is pictured placing a whole stack of books into a 'Bear Book Recyling Bin' (suggesting this is a common issue?) but seated in front of the bin, in full view to the reader, is the large bear from the front cover who is reading a book about bees. The joke about the bear-who-shouldn't-be-there-being-there continues onto the RH page, where the bear appears to be listening and thinking about Ruby's list of story ingredients.	Contesting words and pictures - forces the reader to actively engage with the text and to consider why the images seem to be undermining or contradicting the words. The Bear looks benign - not scary - and the reader may wonder whether Ruby is fair and/or right to have imposed such an arbitrary ban on bears. Readers can also read the expression of the Bear - seems to be addressing us with his/her eyes - we need to draw on knowledge of visual grammar in addition to written.	Ruby's arbitrary adoption of a very particular viewpoint emphasises the decision-making powers of text producers. It also draws attention to the way that authors attempt to influence and position readers. By focusing on the dual/ conflicting messages that emerge from the words/ pictures, it may be possible to consider how we make meaning/ who we trust/ who interests texts work in favour of and whose interests and views (eg bears) are silenced.
6th opening: 'Yes, perfect! This is my kind of story. So…'	Ruby reads us her story - book within a book. The map of the world she has drawn has a 'no bears' symbol being drawn on it by the fairy godmother. The last sentence of the written text ends with '…' - simulating the intonation of a storyteller as they prepare to turn the page - and the Bear is there, hiding behind the page, ready to help turn it over. It seems like the Bear has bent back the corner of the page to give the reader a hint as to what will happen next. Ruby, on the opposite page, has not spotted the Bear.	The contesting words/ images continues. The use of the book within a book device also draws attention to the fictionality of the text/the art of creation. Bear's repeated appearances become a playful joke - something to look forward to. Why is Bear holding a framed picture of her/himself?	Texts are deliberately created/constructed to serve a particular purpose. Continues to emphasise the potentially negative impact of an author's decisions: some people/ voices/perspectives can be excluded unfairly.

| 7th - 11th openings: from 'A MONSTER!' to 'SPLASH! went the monster into the sea.' | Ruby's story continues in the same way: she narrates the picturebook she has drawn. Her 'book' is surrounded by white space, into which she moves, as does the Bear and the fairy god-mother. The white space becomes like a behind the scenes or a backstage area and also provides a location for the Bear's narrative to emerge. The Bear wants to help Ruby's story (does this suggest that the Bear has prior knowledge about Ruby's story telling skills?) and pinches the fairy godmother's magic wand from a pencil jar. The Bear then provides stage effects to accom-pany (and improve?) the narrative - such as filling the fictional sea with water from a watering can. Bear also seems to help stage manages the defeat of the monster Ruby has created by appearing to untie its shoelace? Ruby is the princess in her own story but she is captured and almost eaten by the monster until Bear (se-cretly) intervenes with a magic wand to send the monster tumbling into the sea. | Intertextual references to fairy tales - we see Ra-punzel, Three Pigs, the Gingerbread Man etc.

As the alternative narra-tor, Bear communicates with us directly through gesture and facial ex-pression. Bear's story develops in order to save Ruby's from disaster. Because the words of Ruby's story don't re-flect what 'actually' happens, the reader is forced to employ a range of strategies. | The visual and verbal discourses/ narratives can be read against each other with an emphasis on how they combine to make meaning? This could be extended to a consideration of how readers can be posi-tioned by texts, which mode we trust and why.

Bear's interruptions change and modify Ruby's story for the bet-ter, showing how any text can be challenged and changed in some way. (Although Bear does not ultimately manage to change or challenge Ruby's preju-dice against bears!) |
| 12th opening: 'Phew! That was close! | The fairy godmother is credited with saving the princess and Ruby's story ends with a party to celebrate. In the white space behind the book stands Bear, hands on hips, seeming to smile knowingly at the reader, while the fairy god-mother finally finds her missing wand and ges-tures her relief to the reader by wiping her brow. | Multiple narratives - reader as co-author mak-ing sense of them all.

Visual and verbal modes contradict but also in-terweave.

Lots of visual intertextu-al refs. | |

13th opening: 'Wow! This has turned out…'	Ruby declares her story to be a success and links this to its lack of bears. At the RH side, looking sad, arms folded, is the Bear. Voting with their feet, all of the characters from the party (excluding Ruby, who is now out of her princess character) leave the story frame to offer comfort to the Bear.	Images carry more weight than words on this spread. Ruby's declaration sounds mean spirited in the light of what have 'seen' during her story and the fairytale characters' compassion for the Bear also casts her negatively. By breaking out of the story book frame, the characters once again draw attention to the text's fictional nature and their role as actors within in.	The characters' decision to comfort the Bear raises some interesting points about the need to challenge dominant narratives, especially if they are unfair or cause harm. By objecting to Ruby's treatment of the Bear, the other characters rebel against her narrative authority in the interests of fairness and justice.
14th opening: 'So now there's only one thing left to do.'	Ruby concludes her story 'happily ever after' despite the fact that we have just witnessed an unhappy ending. On the very last page, the Bear is recounting her/his version of events to a rapt audience, which includes a rather sheepish-looking fairy godmother (being reprimanded by a mouse).	Bear's visual conclusion comes after Ruby's written, suggesting that his/her version has more importance or worth? Indeterminate, ambiguous ending from the visual narrative - while Ruby finishes her story with a traditional flourish, her conclusion is unfair and ignores events that do not suit her perspective. The Bear's conclusion (which emphasises his/her involvement at all stages of the narrative) does not end happily because the fairy godmother looks unhappy at her role and Ruby's views on bears have not been challenged or changed so life for the Bear will continue on the margins.	Ruby's final written sentences assume that the reader knows how all stories 'should' end, which reinforces the dominance of her text-centric traditional model of narrative. Despite Bear's attempts to make his/her voice heard, Ruby's views on bears remain unchanged. While this is a somewhat depressing outcome, it could be seen as more realistic because it illustrates that not everything ends happily, that dominant views are hard to challenge and change and leaves the reader asking questions about what has happened and whether it was fair. In turn, this emphasises the non-neutrality of textual practices and the need to make room for voices that are often marginalised.

Wiesner, D. (2001) *The Three Pigs*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin			
Page ref	**Brief content description**	**Metafictive device(s)**	**Critical literacy practice and/or understanding**
Page 1: 'Once upon a time…'	Illustration framed traditionally, font is also a traditional Times New Romanesque style. Image reflects the content of the written text.		Authors make assumptions about readers' cultural knowledge and values. May be possible to explore what we expect (as readers) from a text that begins in this way.
1st DPS opening: 'Along came a wolf…'	The story continues on the LHS in a traditional/ conventional manner but on the RHS, when the wolf starts to huff and puff, he blows the pig out of the story frame into the white space that surrounds it. The text that follows "… and ate the pig up" marks the start of the diverging discourses: the words and pictures contradict one another. As the wolf's open-paw shrug suggests, he has not been able to eat the pig up.	Multiple perspectives. Contesting words and pictures. Which mode do we trust? Which one carries the 'real' story? Such contradiction means that the reader has to become actively involved in the construction of meaning. Use of different illustrative styles to represent the different domains the pig inhabits. When in the white, external world, the pig is drawn in a more realistic way. The pigs thoughts/ utterances are now delivered by them, via speech bubbles, rather than by an omniscient narrator.	The contrast between words and images on this spread draws attention to the differences between them (in terms of written and visual grammar etc) and also to the assumptions we make when reading. By interrupting the traditional narrative at this early stage, Wiesner is showing how it is possible to resist or challenge dominant readings.
2nd, 3rd and 4th DPS: 'Now, the second pig…' to 'OK. Just let me fold this up.'	The pigs continue to deconstruct the traditional story in order to escape the wolf's unwanted attentions. Once all 3 have emerged into the white world that 'exists' behind the traditional story panels, they create a new space for themselves by shoving the panels out of the way, causing them to collapse all around them. The black and white pig begins to fold up the panel containing the last image of the wolf.	Wiesner's narrative is non-linear and non-conventional in that it immediately interrupts assumptions about how the story of the Three Pigs is usually told. The changes to the pigs are not mentioned in the written text - readers have to work this out for themselves by reading the images.	The pigs' deconstruction of their story is symbolised by their actual deconstruction of the way the story appears to the reader. By actively dismantling the story, Wiesner draws our attention to the constructedness of texts.

5th -9th DPS: 'Weeeee!' to 'Wait -what's that?'	The series of spreads in this section show the pigs flying through the white space on a paper aeroplane made from the folded up wolf. Words become minimal - visuals dominate. The episode ends with the pigs crash landing.	Wiesner's use of white space challenges readers' expectations and forces them to make meaning using other resources in non-linear ways. The pigs' narratives can be followed individually or collectively, meaning that multiple readings are possible (and desirable).	Again, Wiesner explores the idea of textual gaps by leaving the reader with acres of white space to fill. The switch between modes (now the visual dominates) is also a way into discussions about how readers assume a text should be read and the differing values we/society attaches to different modes.
10th DPS: 'I think someone's…'	The LHS is dominated by a closeup of a pig's face - it is almost as if he is staring through the book in order to catch a glimpse of who/ what is on the other side. On the RHS, the other pigs have found a 'new world' and ask the 3rd pig to come and help them pull it down.	The pig's awareness of 'somebody' being out there can be linked to changes/ advances in technology? Pigs have taken over as narrators - now address reader directly?	By breaking the illusion of the story as a self-contained object, the pig draws attention to itself as a character in a fictional work, and therefore also makes the reader more aware of the active role they have in the act of reading.
11th DPS: 'Hey diddle diddle…'	On the LHS, the pigs enter the new story, are transformed into a more stylised 'cartoon' style of pig (they have entered the 'world' of the Hey Diddle Diddle nursery rhyme) but their facial expressions and gestures to each other reveal their unhappiness at this new location. They exit on the RHS, jumping back into the white space, followed by the Hey Diddle Diddle cat.	Readers are required to draw on intertextual funds of knowledge (both written and visual) to help them understand where the pigs are and why they might not wish to remain there.	The different 'texts' (represented as worlds) can be read against each other. This could also lead to discussions about how authors can use language, colour, images etc to encourage different kinds of responses from readers, or to suggest that readers don't have to respond in these ways.
13th DPS: 'High on a hill…'	The pigs select a new world to jump into and find a sepia coloured story about a knight and a dragon. The pigs quickly befriend the dragon and are pictured on its back, admiring the view across the valley. They become aware (via the written text and corresponding images) that a knight is on his way to slay the dragon, causing the pigs to usher the enormous creature out of the story into the white space that also brought them safety.	On the LHS, the pigs clamber down the outside of the dragon story, looking for a way to jump in. Treating the story as a climbing frame reminds us of the text's constructed nature. The language used and visual style of the dragon story also requires the reader to draw on intertextual resources or previous knowledge about the genre (or their generic expectations).	Once again the pigs show how texts can be deconstructed, changed and challenged if the dominant or preferred reading is unfair or unkind. The animals make friends (is it an animal versus human thing?) and decide on a plan of action that will save the dragon from a cruel fate. This could prompt some discussion about why dragons are often depicted as cruel or evil, whether this is fair and how, as readers, we can learn to read against the assumptions that texts contain.

14th DPS: 'Many thanks for rescuing me…'	The pigs, the cat and the dragon (with the golden rose) have emerged out of the black and white text into the more colourful out-of-story world. The dragon thanks the pigs for helping it to escape from the story which we see stretching into the distance behind. Like the pigs, the dragon now looks more 'realistic'.	The words on the dragon's story now contradict with the 'reality': the knight scratches his head in disbelief at the missing dragon, while his horse appears to look straight out at the reader.	Contradictory/conflicting discourses can be explored. The image of the multiple story boards stretching off into distance is a reminder of the multiplicity of possible stories and highlights the creative process.
16th DPS: 'It's my place…'	After looking around for a story that interests them all, the pigs, dragon and cat come across an image from the original Three Pigs story. It is of the 3rd pig's brick house. Seeing it prompts one of the pigs to suggest, 'let's go home' to which they others agree. Starting with the crumpled up wolf, they begin to reassemble the narrative.	Once again this spread exposes readers to the act of the book's creation and draws attention to the selective, deliberate nature of the process. This time, the pigs decide to return home, despite the fact that the wolf is there waiting for them, although, as the crumpled page containing the wolf reveals, the wolf is no longer bold and cunning but tremulous and cowed by his experiences. (Does this increase reader sympathy for the wolf?)	Texts are deliberately constructed by authors and reflect a particular viewpoint/version of reality. Texts can be transformed and redesigned. It is possible to resist or challenge dominant or preferred readings.
17th & 18th DPS: 'Along came a wolf…' to 'I think we're going to like it here.'	These two spreads show the reconstruction process. Working together in the white space surrounding the story boards, the animal friends help each other to move the somewhat crumpled panels back into order. Realising that the story is back 'on', the wolf manages to gather his composure and prepares to 'huff and puff' just as the written text suggests that he should. However, in the time it takes to turn a page, the dragon, pigs and cat enter the story world and greet the horrified wolf at the front door. The characters use their new found skill of jumping in and out of stories to their advantage as they move and adjust the words and the images until they meet with their mutual approval.	Wiesner begins to play with the form/representation of the printed text, to show how vulnerable it actually is. For example, when the dragon comes bursting out of the front door in order to surprise the wolf, the dragon's head crashes into the sentences of text there and sends the letters flying in all directions. Symbolically, this signals the end of that version of the story: the dragon's disruption of the written text puts an end to the wolf's (and the text's) dominance but also puts an end to the versions of the story that see the wolf boiled alive in a soup pot.	The pigs reconstruction of words and images is in their own interests but also those of the dragon, the cat and the wolf, whose fates are also transformed as a result of the changes to the story's structure. As the RHS image on the 18th spread shows, the creatures have learned to exist half in and half out of the story world - at enough of a distance from the 'fictional' text to be able to critique it and adjust it in the interests of fairness and justice. Could their half-in/ half-out position be likened to the critical ability to take a 'step back' from texts, a tactic that enables readers to regard texts as deliberate constructions rather than benign or neutral?

19th turn (final page) 'And the all lived…'	The final page is devoted to an image of the friends squeezed into the tiny brick house, sharing a pot of soup. Instead of the traditional ending (which sees the wolf plunged into a boiling vat), through the window we can see the wolf sitting obediently on the grass.	While the final image is overwhelmingly positive and about friendship, the ending is also ambiguous. What will happen to the wolf next? Have they given him a second chance? Can the wolf be trusted not to reoffend? Will the dragon stay or be forced to return? The dominance of images over words continues- one of the pigs sits on the dragon's back to reassemble the broken lettering into a coherent sentence ('happily ever aft…' while the pig holds the final two letters in its trotters)	The presence of ambiguity makes it possible to discuss the fact that other versions are possible; that Wiesner's version of the story is only one way of telling the story of the Three Pigs. Despite the ambiguity, the new narrative's happy ending celebrates friendship, teamwork and democracy in ways that are not often seen in the more traditional tales, which often conclude abruptly and/or unfairly. The ending of this text may leave unanswered questions but it is unquestionably fairer. Wiesner's text shows how the process of deconstruction and reconstruction can issue challenges to taken-for-granted assumptions (about the evil nature of dragons and wolves for example) while simultaneously posing broader questions about the way things are in the world.

Macaulay, D. (1990) *Black and White*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.			
Page ref	**Brief content description**	**Metafictive device(s)**	**Critical literacy practice and/or understanding**
Front/back cover	The title 'Black and White' is presented in black, white, green and blue. The lettering appears to have been cut out of the same black sheet of paper - some of the letters are joined/ connected yet still clear enough to be read separately. The back cover has an image of a black & white cow's back legs which explains that the black and white section on the front cover is also part of the same cow. The pattern on the cow's flank is shaped into a laughing face (it is the thief).	Unusual layout and design challenges perceptions about how to 'read' the front cover. The connectedness yet separateness of the letters could also be interpreted as a hint as to the book's narrative approach? In a similar way, the fact that the back cover contains the information required to 'crack the code' of the pattern on the front challenges reader expectations because we would expect the front to contain the most important information, rather than the back? Message is one of subversion and challenge to traditional ways of approaching a book.	Macaulay interrupts our expectations of how to read a picturebook from the outset. By doing this, he draws attention to the assumptions or taken-for-granted reading practices or habits we may employ.
Title page	Black and White', written in red ink, sits above an image of a black window, and what seems to be broken bars. A knotted sheet stretches down from one of the bars, knocking the lettering of the author's name out of the way and crashing through the publisher's name and logo. The title page has also a 'Warning' stamp - framed in red. It warns the reader that one - or more than one - story may be present. 'In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended.'	By 'warning' the reader to inspect both words and pictures, Macaulay highlights the contesting discourses and also signals to the reader that this text will require 'new ways' of reading. The title page has an unusual layout- the text has been knocked about - by who? why? - and this also draws our attention to a new, perhaps less reverential, relationship between images and words?	Macaulay's warning places the responsibility for deciding how many stories the book contains (one? four?) onto the reader. It also reinforces the idea that readers fill textual gaps differently. The changed form and format of this page can lead to questions such as: what is the author doing? How is this text positioning us? Who put the 'warning' there and for what reason?

1st DPS: 'Seeing things…'	The two pages are split into half, making four boxes of equal size. Each has an image of a different visual style or grammar. Each image is accompanied by some written text - two or three words - which could be interpreted as a title?	This book very clearly positions the reader as a co-author who needs to make decisions about HOW to read this text. Is it four separate stories or one story? Should readers move through the text following one story/ illustrative style at once (therefore reading it four times?) or read them all at once? Due to the distinct illustrative styles, readers also draw on different funds of knowledge to help them access the visual grammar of each. Each 'story' uses different colour scheme, drawing style and font.	This text invites readers to read the different stories against each other in a bid to make meaning. By considering what visual grammar/semiotic systems are at work in each narrative thread, readers may be able to see how Macaulay has used language, colour, illustrative style to position readers. Macaulay's approach also emphasises that any story presents *a* version of reality, one that may differ or connect to other versions, none of which are definitive.
3rd DPS: 'Sometime in early morning hours…'	Both the written and visual aspects of the text reveal links between the stories. An old woman who looks suspiciously like the robber from the 'Udder Chaos' narrative sits down in the train carriage opposite the boy. The parents leave for work: in a briefcase is a newspaper. In the "Waiting Game", commuters on a busy platform stand reading broadsheets while they wait for their train to work.	The reader is required to make meaning from the intratextual and intertextual clues. The text has multiple perspectives but also multiple narrators? In addition, how should readers cope with the disruptions to traditional space and time relationships?	The ambiguity of the text (how to read it, in what order, what direction etc) draws attention to the nature of reader response and how different readers make meanings. Whose meaning is right? Is there a right interpretation? Links to multi-literacies - sense of channel hopping?

11th DPS: 'He opens the window…'	The gaps between the texts seem to be decreasing. The boy narrator of the first text sticks his hand out of the window to catch what he thinks are snowflakes. Some of the white scraps of text float down to the girl's narrative - where she is describing how her father grabs a pile of mail and tears them into 'a million pieces'. On the floor of the girl's living room, a toy locomotive approaches. Meanwhile the commuters on the platform are happily turning their newspapers into costumes while they wait for their train. In the final story, a steam train is stopped by a herd of cows and the robber.	The non-linear but converging narratives present readers with an interesting set of challenges. Reading becomes iterative and multimodal.	Continually disrupts notions of how to read and raises questions about authorial intention?
15th opening: 'When the boy awakens…'	Each story seems to reach a conclusion: the boy on the train reaches a station and is met by his parents; the girl narrator heads for bed after happily bonding with her often absent parents; a railway station employee sweeps up the sheets of discarded newspaper following the commuters' late departure and the cows change direction, moving right to left (and therefore back towards the start of the book?). Only the robber has changed story: he has escaped his own narrative and waves good-bye to the train that helped to free him.	The robber's movement from one text to another suggests the interconnectedness of the texts. It also suggests how the robber has *used* the cow story to his own advantage - he makes the text work to his own advantage? The indeterminacy of the multiple plots makes it hard to work out if/ what the conclusion is and this ambiguity is unsettling? Perhaps it is better to consider the fact that so many meanings are possible?	Ambiguity highlights the sense of a 'need' for a conclusion - for a way of arriving at a happy eve after? Readers can consider how each branch of the story/text has positioned them and what devices Macaulay has used to achieve this.
Final page: hand picking up the train station.	A hand picks up the train station - the fact that a dog's nose is also shown (with a bit of paper in its mouth) suggests it is hand of the boy from the second story?	Final image forces us to consider multiple possibilities and ways of constructing the world. Was the whole story an elaborate tale dreamed up by a boy with a train set?	Final image also forces us to consider how we are controlled by what an author does - what they show us, what they conceal from us and how they manipulate the way that we 'see' the world.

Appendix D: Copy of first note sent home to the children and parents

Hello!

Welcome to the project. Here is the first picturebook! It's called *The Bravest Ever Bear a*nd is written by Allan Ahlberg and illustrated by Paul Howard. There are no instructions about how, when or where you should read the book. Please read it and then tell me what you thought of it; I am looking forward to hearing your ideas!

I will be in touch via email or text to let you know when the small group reading session will be (and when the book needs to come back to school) and also to arrange a time to speak with a parent about the book.

Happy reading and thanks again for being involved.

Jennifer

Appendix E: Copy of Approval form from Glasgow University College of Social Science Ethics Committee

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

Staff Research Ethics Application   *Postgraduate Student Research Ethics Application*

<u>**Application Details**</u>

Application Number: 400130257

Applicant's Name   Jennifer Farrar

Project Title   Negotiating critical literacies beyond the classroom walls

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<u>**Application Status**</u>

<u>Start Date of Approval</u>   *(d.m.yr)*   22/08/2014

(blank if Changes Required/ Rejected)

<u>End Date of Approval of Research Project</u>   *(d.m.yr)*   30/09/2017

Only if the applicant has been given **approval** can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.

<u>**Recommendations**</u>   **(where Changes are Required)**

- *Where changes are required all applicants must respond* in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee and upload this as the **Resubmission Document** online to explain the changes you have made to the application. All resubmitted application documents should then be uploaded.

- *If application is Rejected a full new application must be submitted via the online system. Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document uploaded as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.*

(Shaded areas will expand as text is added)

MAJOR RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS	APPLICANT RESPONSE TO MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

MINOR RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS   APPLICANT RESPONSE TO MINOR RECOMMENDATIONS

REVIEWER COMMENTS
COMMENTS

APPLICANT RESPONSE TO REVIEWER

(OTHER THAN SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS)

Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact the College Ethics Administration, email address: socsci-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk

End of Notification.

Appendix F: Annotated example from transcripts

(handwritten, top margin) 3 Pigs P2

(handwritten, top) – V. little sense of resistance. Children enjoyed text and accept the contextity absurdities. Some "like w/ ambiguity of wolf's pov ⇒ feel story or not?

JF: So! The Three Pigs! Who wants to tell me what they thought of the Three Pigs? Who wants to start? Mary and then Adam.

M: I think it was quite funny because they jumped out of the pictures and we didn't get to hear of the third pig but we did get to hear of the second and first. But I liked it because they went in other stories - I liked it.

(annotation) Drawn to the MF device – jumping onto a diff/ unusual/ noticeable

JF: Why did you like it?

M: Because it's nice having different stories in different bits and they jumped out of the pictures. They were flying on the plane.

JF: Yeah, it's quite exciting, isn't it? Adam, what did you think?

(annotation) identifies surprise in a pleasing/ important part of his appreciation. (MF as a device-live) *(underlined)* participant

AT: I loved it. It's my favourite book so far. Because it's really funny and it's really good because it's really exciting because the funny bits were when they jumped out of the picture and the wolf was like 'wha'? I didn't eat them up? Where have they gone?' [puts on voice] And the wolf was looking a bit puzzled - that was quite funny. And when they all jumped out of the book – that was surprising me a lot. I was like 'wah?' I thought the wolf would eat them?

(annotation) + drawn to the contextity discourse + the perplexity/ confusion or just interest this causes.

JF: Ah, so it was a big surprise? Excellent! Thank you Adam. Liam, what did you think of the book?

LM: It actually says [reads] "and ate the pig up" and it didn't...

M: It didn't!

LM: Yeah, the wolf looks confused!

(annotation) discuss. context. discr. Readers as interp? knowing how to read? (eg reading words + pics)

JF: So the words say one thing

LM: ...and the page says another thing...

JF: The picture says another thing. So when you say page do you mean the picture?

LM: Yeah.

(annotation) → Interp (Nesbitt grammar man)

JF: SO which one is right then?

M: I think it's the page...the picture.

AT/AF: Yeah/ I think it's the pictures.

(annotation) All in agreement re pictures.

LM: It's the pictures.

(left margin handwritten annotations, partly illegible) MF / finding funny 2 / MF2 surprise / finding funny 2?

(bottom handwritten, partly illegible) Idea that children's "real" is do so for MF, not diffic. it to accept by children at to ...