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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Elizabeth Anderson Swaggerty entitled ""Is Someone Reading *Us*?" Fourth Grade Students Respond to Postmodern Picture Books." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Thomas N. Turner, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Colleen P. Gilrane, Deborah A. Wooten, Edward L. Counts

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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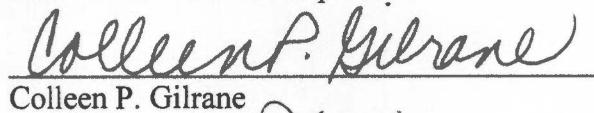

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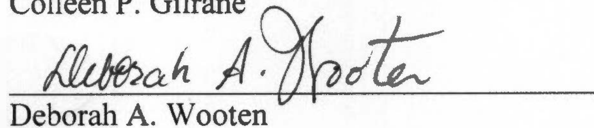

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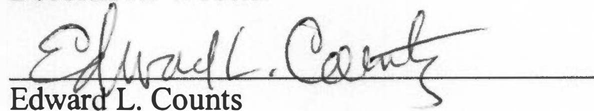

Edward L. Counts

Accepted for the Council:

Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

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“Is Someone Reading *Us*?”
Fourth Grade Students Respond to Postmodern Picture Books

A Dissertation
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this naturalistic case study was to gain understanding about the comprehension strategies successful readers employ as they construct meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books. Participants were eight fourth grade students from a large suburban elementary school in Tennessee. Data included transcripts and field notes from ten individual think aloud sessions and five group book club discussions.

Themes identified from the think aloud sessions related to the ways in which students navigated through postmodern picture books include: emotional responses, general story problem solving and postmodern story problem solving. Themes identified from the group book club discussions related to the ways in which students navigated through postmodern picture books include: aesthetic responses, reflecting on reading behaviors, general story problem solving, and postmodern story problem solving.

A general linear navigation pattern was identified from the think aloud session transcripts which involved encountering metafictive elements, emotional responses and problem solving. Book club discussions, on the other hand, produced a more interactive, dynamic navigation pattern in which participants shared aesthetic responses, reflected on their own reading behaviors, and spent time problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world. Data revealed that the fourth grade students in this study came to further their understanding of each postmodern picture book through the group book club discussions that followed their individual readings. The choice to explore the phenomenon in two ways, individual think aloud sessions and group book club

discussions, proved to be integral in providing a rich description of participants' experience with postmodern picture books.

Literacy in the 21st century means thinking critically, making sense of a bombardment of media sources, negotiating multiple digital literacies, and making choices about what to read and how to go about reading it. The findings from this study indicate that postmodern picture books have great potential to nurture growth in these areas if thoughtfully integrated into the curriculum.

With the insight gained from this study, teachers should be mindful to support and encourage students who might become frustrated as a result of more negative emotional and/or aesthetic responses to postmodern picture books. They can work to facilitate a classroom environment where students feel safe in their comments, questions, and responses during discussions about literature. The classroom environment should be conceptualized as a place where this sort of active engagement is valued and encouraged.

Data from this study revealed the complexity of the ways in which children independently constructed meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books. It is recommended that further studies are conducted in order to provide insight about how students might be supported toward more positive engagements with this emerging genre.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

John Berger (1991) wrote, "When we read a story, we inhabit it. The covers of the book are like a roof and four walls. What is to happen next will take place within the four walls of the story. And this is possible because the story's voice makes everything its own." Many readers can relate to the feeling of inhabiting a book, or "losing themselves" in a novel. As an avid reader, I can recall many occasions in which I was so engrossed in a story that I snapped back into reality when the phone rang or my husband called out my name. There was a moment of confusion as I switched from the world of the novel to attend to the real world demands of the telephone or my husband's inquiry. I felt as if the physical book disappeared and I had entered the world of the story. When readers are really "into" a story, like me, they sometimes forget that they are even reading a book.

On the other hand, there is a group of books that tends to have the opposite effect on readers, with authors working to bring attention to the fictional state of the book, or the book as a physical object. As a result, readers of this genre tend to function as co-constructors of the story. In the 1990's, a number of researchers documented this trend in children's literature involving a shift from traditional linear texts to books that mocked the traditional picture book by experimenting with innovative ways of organization (Goldstone, 1999a; Goldstone 1999b; Paley, 1992; Seelinger-Trites, 1994). Readers familiar with picture books featuring a traditionally organized plot with an easily identifiable beginning, middle and end, began to encounter books that employed metafictive characteristics, which purposefully brought attention to the text as fictive and a physical object (McCallum, 1996). These nontraditional picture books featured literary characteristics such as nonlinearity, multiple narratives, intertextuality, typographic

experimentation, and gaps and ambiguities in meaning. In recent years, this group of books has developed into a genre recognized as postmodern picture books (Chatton, 2004; Goldstone, 2002; Hellman, 2003; Serafini, 2005).

Of particular interest is the noted relationship between postmodern picture books and digital genres (Labbo, 2004). Many children are transformed by the pulses of the digital environment in which they are growing up. While not all youth have access to technology, many do have access to televisions, computers, and cellular phones. Youth are spending their time multi-tasking the different types of media they encounter. They are talking on their cell phones while instant messaging friends or even negotiating two on-line chat sessions simultaneously. The Internet, in particular, provides a highly interactive experience, requiring users to navigate multiple, dynamic, nonlinear pathways (Labbo, 2004). Surfing the Internet requires users to make choices about which link they click on and which part of the screen they will read first. This digital world is characterized by nonlinearity and interactivity, two of the characteristics consistently present in the postmodern picture book genre.

As a literacy educator, this information piqued my interest in postmodern picture books as an important emerging genre in classrooms today. Presumably a result of my elementary school teacher roots, I am always looking for books that might intrigue, entice or challenge readers. I imagined that postmodern picture books fit into this category. I wondered if I could learn directly from children how they navigate and make sense of these books. I chose to design a qualitative study which employed an interpretive, naturalistic, case study approach to describe the experience of eight fourth grade students as they attempted to navigate and make sense of five postmodern picture books.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In order for children to improve their reading ability, they need to read a lot of books (Allington, 2000; Krashen, 2004). Given this information, good teachers are constantly looking for books that may interest their students. Postmodern picture books are gaining in number and popularity, therefore warranting the attention of teachers who wish to positively impact student reading abilities.

Much is known regarding the common strategies that children utilize when approaching traditional literature (Pearson et al., 1992; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). They might look for the traditional story structure, expecting a clear beginning, middle, and ending or they might stop at the conclusion of a book and ponder the meaning of the book or the author's purpose in writing the book, with expectations of discovering the correct answer. Children encountering postmodern picture books, on the other hand, may find that these strategies are ineffective in assisting comprehension. The authors of postmodern picture books employ alternative devices which require alternative reading strategies. The presence of these literary characteristics challenges readers' expectations and requires access to alternative comprehension strategies. So, what are the comprehension strategies that may assist children in comprehending postmodern picture books? In order to answer this question, I chose to examine how successful readers go about reading and making sense of postmodern picture books.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding about the comprehension strategies successful readers employ as they construct meaning while navigating postmodern picture books. Specifically, this project attempted to uncover factors

contributing to the success of eight fourth grade students as they independently read five postmodern picture books and discussed them in an informal after-school setting.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the previously stated purpose, the following research question was investigated:

> How did fourth grade students construct meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books both independently and in a small group setting?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has significance in the field of literacy education for four reasons. First, the number and popularity of picture books that employ postmodern characteristics has increased in recent years (Serafini, 2005). An indication of this is that many postmodern picture books that have been recognized by various national book awards, including awards chosen by and for children themselves. For example, John Sciezka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992), a popular postmodern picture book for readers of all ages, was awarded the Caldecott Honor, Children's Book Award, and a Parent's Choice Award; David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs* (2001) was awarded the Caldecott Medal, School Library Journal Best Books of the Year, and ALA Notable Books for Children.; *The Red Book* (2004), a wordless postmodern picture book, was awarded a Caldecott Honor, a Children's Choice Award, and is an ALA Notable Book for Children; and, Lauren Child's *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book* (2003) was featured as a popular children's play in London.

Growing interest in these books may be related to larger societal trends. Perhaps children who are drawn to the interactive nature of the digital world are attracted to the same quality often present in postmodern picture books. For example, many of these

books feature characters who speak directly to the reader. Some require the reader to make choices about how s/he will navigate the text by presenting multiple texts. Perhaps children are drawn to the absurdity and humor often found in postmodern picture books. They may enjoy stories that poke fun at fairy tales with which children are familiar. Whatever the reason, postmodern picture books are showing up in bookstores and libraries and in the hands of children, justifying the attention of educators.

Secondly, a study of how children navigate postmodern picture books is important because the nature of postmodern picture books encourages critical thinking. Metafictive characteristics such as intertextuality, ambiguity, and non-linearity present in postmodern picture books require readers to think critically in order to achieve comprehension. Most educators agree that critical thinking is a purposeful activity; however, the complex characteristics found in postmodern picture books can have the negative consequence of turning away readers in frustration. The presence of these literary devices often requires alternative ways of navigating text and there is presently a lack of understanding about how readers approach and understand this particular genre.

Thirdly, there is a relationship between postmodern picture books and digital genres (Labbo, 2004), as I explained in the introduction to this chapter. Today's digital environment is characterized by nonlinearity and interactivity, two devices commonly used in the postmodern picture book genre. The Internet provides a highly interactive experience, which requires users to make choices about how they want to navigate the websites. Postmodern picture books are often designed in similar ways, requiring readers to make choices about how they read them.

Lastly, this study is important because there is a paucity of research available that explores how children engage with picture books with metafictive characteristics. In a review of research available that looks at how children engage with postmodern picture books, only three major studies were found. Pantaleo (2002) conducted a study in which nine postmodern books were read aloud to first grade students in a classroom setting. The findings from this study described how students interacted with the postmodern characteristics in the selected picture books (Pantaleo, 2002; Pantaleo, 2004). Serafini (2005) conducted a similar study in which eight to twelve year-olds in a multiage classroom listened to postmodern picture book read-alouds. They then discussed and responded to the metafictive characteristics found in them as guided by their classroom teacher. His findings described how students dealt with the metafictive characteristics. The third study, conducted by Chatton (2004), described how fourth and fifth grade students wrote reviews for postmodern picture books. A close look at how successful readers navigate postmodern picture books when reading independently is lacking in these three studies.

Literacy in the 21st century means thinking critically, making sense of a bombardment of media sources, and making choices about what to read and how to go about reading it. Postmodern picture books have great educational potential to nurture growth in these areas. As this genre grows in number and popularity, it is critical that educators turn their attention to the ways in which children comprehend picture books that have metafictive characteristics.

The results of this study may help teachers work toward understanding the way in which students approach and make sense of postmodern picture books so that they may,

in turn, support readers who struggle with picture books that utilize metafictive characteristics.

LIMITATIONS

Conditions that were not in my control may have influenced the outcome of this study. Despite the commitment and enthusiasm of the eight participants to the book club, absenteeism occurred due to illness. Out of six group sessions, there were five student absences. One participant was absent two times and three other participants were absent one time. Participants were chosen who had the ability to stay after school and provide their own transportation home.

DELIMITATIONS

Conditions that were in my control may have influenced the outcome of this study. I chose to select participants at a school site where I have served as an intern supervisor for over two years. Although I had a working relationship with the administrators and teachers, the students at the school may have recognized my face, but I did not have relationships with them. In choosing participants, I asked a fourth grade teacher to subjectively choose students whom she thought might have a preference for complex ambiguous books and critical thinking. The outcome of this study may be influenced by the decision to choose eight students from one classroom in one elementary school site. Another limiting factor is the choice to include five postmodern picture books. Lastly, I chose to act as a participant-observer during all sessions, creating a bias that some may consider limiting to the study.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Aesthetic Response: A response to literature with attention to feelings and attitudes (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Intertextuality: A literary term referring to familiar stories which are intertwined or the reversion of a story.

Metafiction: A literary term used in fictional writing which "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 1984, p. 2).

Metafictive Devices: The following are considered metafictive devices: non-linear plots, self-referential and/or self-conscious writing and illustrations, intertextual references, parodic characteristics, typographic experimentation, and indeterminate plot, characters and settings (ambiguity). These terms are further explained in Chapter 2.

Naturalistic, Instrumental Case Study: A bounded system that is studied in its familiar, native setting in order to provide insight into an issue.

Non-linear Text: Text which does not follow the traditional structure of beginning, middle and end.

Postmodern Picture Book: A picture book that employs any number of metafictive devices in order to achieve self-consciousness of the text.

Self-Conscious Text: text which draws attention to its status as a work of fiction; also called *metafiction.*

Story Schema: An underlying structure that all stories appear to have in common.

Think Aloud: an exploratory method in which participants share their thinking. In the current study *think aloud* is used as a tool for cognitive inquiry (also called *protocol analysis*) (Kukan & Beck, 1997).

Traditional Picture Book: A picture book with a linear structure including a beginning, middle, and end.

Typographic Experimentation: Literary characteristic involving play on writing styles, print convention variation, and mixing of literary genres.

Verbalization: A coded unit of transcript. This unit could range in length anywhere from a word or two to several pages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are a number of theoretical assumptions implicit in the conceptualization of this study. The components of the theoretical framework include the following assumptions: (1) observation of proficient readers provides insight about how struggling readers might be supported, (2) meaning from text resides in the transactional relationship between the reader and the text and (3) language and literacy are socially situated. The following paragraphs will briefly elaborate on each of these theoretical assumptions in the order introduced in this paragraph.

The first theoretical base assumes that much can be learned by watching and observing expert readers interact with text. The notion that there is merit in studying the methods of experts has influenced many studies in the field of reading education. For example, in 1992, Pearson and his colleagues synthesized research on characteristics of proficient readers, which led to the development of specific reading strategies that successful readers use. Afflerbach (1987) provided yet another example of learning from experts. His study examined the way in which university professors and doctoral students construct main idea statements as they read. Afflerbach provided suggestions for teaching children how to construct main idea statements. Careful observation of experts can produce insight about specific strategies that proficient readers draw upon as they read, which can inform teachers about how to support other students. This theory influenced my study in that I planned to learn how proficient readers comprehend postmodern picture books, in hopes that insight gained might be used to model for readers in a classroom setting some possible comprehension strategies specific to understanding picture books that employ metafictive characteristics.

The second theoretical base that frames this study is reader response theory. Opposing the idea that texts themselves are authoritarian and central, reader response theories recognize that readers bring what they know to text, personally connecting to text when making meaning. Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, in particular, focuses on the back and forth transaction between the reader and the text in a situated context (1978). Rosenblatt further describes how readers can approach text from an aesthetic stance, focusing on the experience of reading the text. Text can also be approached from an efferent stance, a more scientific focus with attention to facts. Transactional theory influenced this study in that I especially depended on reader response to postmodern picture books as they are noted for ambiguity and indeterminacy.

Lastly, this study is grounded in the social constructivist learning theory, believing that language and literacy are rooted in social relations and, specifically, that learning occurs when interaction with others takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, subjective understandings are co-constructed through interactions with others and the world (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The present study provided an informal after-school environment in which students were encouraged to interact with each other and the text to make meaning.

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

The remainder of this study is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and data analysis procedures used in this study, Chapter 4 presents the results and Chapter 5 concludes the study with implications for teachers and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study describes the ways in which a small group of students constructed meaning while navigating five postmodern picture books. Specifically, this study explored the ways in which eight fourth grade students navigated five postmodern picture books in two settings: independently in individual think-aloud sessions and in weekly group book club sessions. In order to situate the present study's findings, it is necessary to have an understanding of postmodern picture books and the studies that have incorporated postmodern picture books. It is also important to have a general understanding of story comprehension and think aloud as a methodology.

This literature review consists of four sections. The first section presents information about postmodern picture books and outlines the common literary and illustrative characteristics utilized in them. The second section provides information about research on postmodern picture books and children. The third section provides some background about story comprehension. The final section provides information about think-aloud as a methodology.

POSTMODERN PICTURE BOOKS

Postmodernism

Klages (2003) pointed out the ambiguity in defining postmodernism due to its uncertain historical origin and presence in a wide variety of disciplines including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. Postmodernism is characterized by indeterminancy, decanonization, irony, hybridization, interactiveness, reflexivity, self-consciousness, consciousness, ambiguity, and simultaneity (Klages, 2003; Lewis, 2001). Goldstone (2002) explained that

postmodernism emerged in the mid-20th century and is marked by a cynicism and mocking of traditional art forms that have taken place in Western culture since World War II. Over the past 25 years or so, these characteristics have increasingly appeared in children's picture books producing a genre called postmodern picture books. Today, many creators of picture books are experimenting with ways of mocking the traditional picture book by designing books that employ a variety of characteristics and, as a result, are pushing the boundaries of what readers expect to encounter when they pick up a picture book.

What are the characteristics of postmodern picture books and how do they differ from traditional linear texts? As Goldstone (2002) explained, the authors of postmodern picture books employ various metafictive devices, conspicuously causing the reader to ponder, "What is real? The story? The page? The book itself?" (p. 364). Patricia Waugh (1984) described metafiction as a literary term used in fictional writing which "self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality." (p. 2). McCallum (1996) described how the literary devices of realist fiction aim to construct an illusion so that the reader reads the text as if were real. In a metafictive work of fiction, on the other hand, the literary conventions work to make the gap between fiction and reality explicit, working to remind the reader that s/he is reading words on a page (Cashore, 2003). David Macauley (Caldecott Acceptance Speech, 2005) stated that in his picture book *Black and White* (1990) ". . . the subject of the book is the book," clearly pointing out the metafictional roots of his postmodern picture book.

Postmodern picture books employ any number of metafictive devices, including non-linear plots, self-referential and/or self-conscious writing and illustrations, intertextual references, parodic characteristics, typographic experimentation, and indeterminate plot, characters and settings (McCallum, 1996, Pantaleo, 2002). Some characteristics are not necessarily 'metafictive', but they have the potential to be when in combination with other devices (McCallum, 1996). For example, consider a picture book that is a parody of a traditional fairy tale, which is considered a metafictive device. If the author of this picture book chose not to employ other metafictive devices in order to bring attention to the fictional state of the book or the book as a physical object, then the picture book cannot be considered a postmodern picture book.

A common metafictive device is the portrayal of the characters or narrator of the book actually referring to the physical presence of the book or the process of making/writing the book (Goldstone, 2002, McCallum, 1996). Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith draw attention to the physical book and process of creating *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) many times throughout. For example, at the beginning of the book the narrator says to Hen, "I'm Jack. I'm the narrator. And no, I can't help you plant the wheat. I'm a very busy guy trying to put a book together. Now why don't you just disappear for a few pages. I'll call when I need you." A second example of drawing attention to the physical process of creating a book can be found in *The Undone Fairytale* (Lendler, 2005). The narrator introduces the reader to Ned, the fellow who is "making all the pictures for the story," and asks the reader to quit reading so fast because Ned cannot keep up.

Pantaleo (2004) noted that picture books employ metafictive devices with both verbal and visual text. Illustrations (independently of and sometimes in conjunction with the text) can reveal the fictional reality of the story. For example, *The Red Book* (2004), by Barbara Lehman is a wordless postmodern picture book that relies solely on illustrations to portray the plot in which a little girl enters the book she is reading and is magically transported to another place. The illustrations in this picture book cause the reader to ponder the idea of the red book, wondering if the red book in their hands has the magical power to emulate the story in the fictional red book. Postmodern picture books often capitalize on the synergistic relationship between text and illustrations. In David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs* (2001), the illustrations of the pigs change as they exit the story world and enter the "real" world. As the pigs exit the story frames, they transform from flat, cartoon-like drawings to more realistic-looking with their skin texture becoming furry and life-like. The words in the text do not describe the transformation; in fact, they contradict the transformation. The text explains how the wolf ate the pig, but the illustration depicts the pigs exiting the story frame. It is up to the reader to notice the changes in the illustrations (Pantaleo, 2002).

The following section will describe more specifically some common metafictive devices employed by the authors of postmodern picture books.

Metafictive Devices

The following paragraphs describe some metafictive devices commonly found in postmodern picture books and provide specific examples. It is important to be mindful that postmodern picture books typically employ a combination of several metafictive devices, and every postmodern picture book will not have all of these characteristics.

Nonlinearity

Goldstone (2002) explained that nonlinearity results when the story does not necessarily follow the traditional story grammar of a beginning, middle and end. The story parts may be mixed up or absent, the reader may move forward or backward within the text, or multiple narratives are present. For example, *Snowflake Bentley* (1998) by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and Mary Azarian is a nonlinear text in that the main story is told along with sidebars featuring tidbits about characters, photography, scientific information about snowflakes, blizzards, and other straightforward facts. Readers are in charge of how they will engage with the text, choosing when or if to read the sidebars. This example of nonlinear text reading can be linked to navigating the Internet. Since the sidebar information is independent from the main story, it is up to the reader to make connections and to decide which part to read when. Similarly, the Internet requires readers to make choices about which part to read when and to make their own connections.

Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* (1998) is another example of divergence from the traditional plot grammar of beginning, middle, and end. This picture book tells the same story of a visit to the park from four very different perspectives, resulting in four consecutive sets of a beginning, middle and ending.

A third example of nonlinearity is found in Audrey and Don Wood's *Bright and Early Thursday Evening* (1996). This strange book is full of paradoxes and tells about a woman's dream of her funeral. The story is told as many dreams occur, in bits and pieces that don't seem to make sense. The final pages of the book portray the same illustration from the book's beginning and tell readers, "Although I'm a liar my story is true –

There's an end in every beginning. So if you believe a word that I've said, Begin again, please, at the ending." Readers ponder the organization and timeline of this strange picture book.

Narrator or Author Intrusion

McCallum (1996) describes narrator and author intrusion as, "overly obtrusive narrators who directly address readers and comment on their own narrations" (p. 397). When the narrator directly addresses readers or comments on the book, readers are reminded of the fictional reality of the story. For example, *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992) by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith features Jack, the narrator, addressing readers on the dedication page (which is upside down), "I know. I know. The page is upside down. I meant to do that. Who ever looks at that dedication stuff anyhow? If you really want to read it – you can always stand on your head." On the next page, he again directly addresses readers in the introduction, "In fact, you should definitely go read the stories now, because the rest of this introduction just kind of goes on and on and doesn't really say anything." Readers are alerted in a humorous way, that the book is a physical object when Jack talks about process of putting the book together.

Chris Van Allsburg acts as an authorial intruder in *Bad Day at Riverbend* (1995). The story portrays black and white cowboy characters who are confused when shiny, greasy slime begin covering their horses. At the end of the story, there is a sudden point of view shift in which the reader sees a child coloring the cowboy pictures with crayons in a coloring book.

In Kevin O'Malley's *Velcome* (1999), the narrator tells several "scary" stories. Meanwhile, a dog appears throughout the story holding signs poking fun at the narrator

("This guy's about three feet short of a yard!") and warning the reader to stop reading the book ("Listen to me. You should stop reading. . . now!) because it is, in fact, not very scary.

Multiple Narratives and Multiple Narrators

Multiple narratives are characterized by two or more interconnected narrative strands and/or there are shifts in the narrative point of view (Mccallum, 1996). For example, David Macaulay places warning signs on the book jacket and title page of *Black and White* (1990) forewarning the reader, "This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended." The book features four simultaneous narratives each occupying a quadrant of every double page spread. The reader is forced to ponder the four separate narratives and the possible creation of cohesiveness with the help of textual and illustrative clues. David Macaulay (2005) explains his intentions when designing *Black and White*, "It is designed to be viewed in its entirety, having its surface 'read all over.' It is a book of and about connections — between pictures and between words and pictures."

Voices in the Park (Browne, 1998) utilizes multiple narrators as each protagonist, two parents and two children tell their version of the events in the park. Four unique perspectives are portrayed: an uppity mother, her glum son, an unemployed father and his cheerful daughter, Smudge. Each narrator's version of the events in the park is portrayed in varying text, fonts, light, and illustrations.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a metafictive device in which two or more familiar texts are intertwined or juxtaposed to create a new narrative (Hellman, 2003). Intertextuality could also be a reversion of a specific text (McCallum, 1996). When texts employ intertextuality, the reader is required to access and use her/his background knowledge in order to understand the text (Antsey, 2002). *The Three Pigs* by David Wiesner is an example of the employment of both descriptions of intertextuality. The story is a parody of the original tale of the three pigs. It begins the same as the original story with the three pigs building their straw, stick, and brick houses, but when the wolf came by, huffing and puffing and "ate" the pig, the reader sees the wolf with a perplexed look on his face. It seems that the pig escaped danger when the wolf blew him out of the story frame. After all three pigs exit the story; they embark on adventures where they encounter other familiar stories. *The Three Pigs* could be thought of as stories within a story.

A second example of intertextuality can be found in *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book* (Child, 2003). In this story, Herb falls asleep on one of his favorite old books. He awakens to find that he has entered the fairytales of the book and has some interesting encounters with various familiar characters including Little Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Cinderella, and The Three Bears. Herb comes to realize that some of the book characters are irritated with him because of his past mistreatment of the book, for example, the time he drew a mustache on the Queen.

Genre Blending/Blurring

Arlene Sardine (1998) by Chris Raschka represents an example of genre blending and blurring. The story about a fish named Arlene who yearns to be a sardine also tells

readers the facts about the making of sardines. The story can be classified as fantasy because it features a fish whose goal in life is to be a sardine. It can also be classified as nonfiction/informational as it provides the factual story of what happens to a fish as it becomes a sardine.

Many postmodern picture books feature genre blending of fantasy and realistic fiction. For example, *Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude* (O'Malley, Heyer, & Goto 2005) tells the story of a boy and girl who must tell a story to their class, but they can't agree on the story. The book can be classified as realistic fiction, but when the fantastic stories kids tell take over the book, it can be simultaneously classified as fitting in to the fantasy genre.

Indeterminate Plot, Characters, Setting

Texts that have a high degree of indeterminacy in plot, characters, and/or setting provide the reader with too little information and often gaps and ambiguities are present throughout the story. The reader is forced to construct his/her own meaning (Pantaleo, 2004). *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (1984) by Chris Van Allsburg exemplifies this degree of indeterminacy as readers are left to ponder and create their own meaning and story behind each of fourteen mysterious illustrations.

David Macauley's *Black and White* (1990) is another example of an indeterminate plot, as the story does not have a satisfying closure and resolution. Four separate, simultaneous stories stop on the last page of the book, where the illustration suddenly shifts and shows a hand lifting the train station out of the story. The reader is left wondering how the story (or stories) actually ends. Are the four stories separate or

connected somehow? What does the story mean? Readers are forced to create their own meaning of this picture book.

Visual Manifold Narratives

Seelinger-Trites (1994) described visual manifold narratives as being comprised of more than one set of pictures that are used to unfold the story or stories. For example, two distinct sets of pictures on two separate visual planes are used in *Come Away from the Water, Shirley* (1977) by John Burningham. Shirley goes to the beach with her family and her daydream adventures are played out in the illustrations on one side of each page spread. The corresponding page shows her parents existing and talking in reality.

The Funny Little Woman (1972) by Arlene Mosel and Blair Lent also features visual manifold narratives. The main textual narrative unfolds in color on the bottom of each page while a separate black and white illustration at the top of each page tells a complementary story about the old woman's house while she is absent.

Once Upon a Cool Motorcycle Dude (O'Malley, 2005), a third example of visual manifold narratives, is unique in its illustrative approach. There are actually three illustrators of this picture book. Readers encounter one set of illustrations that depict the girl and boy narrators of the story, another set of illustrations of a princess story, and a third set of illustrations that depict a story of a "cool muscle dude." Readers are required to negotiate more than one set of pictures that are intertwined to unfold the story.

Parody

The American Heritage Dictionary (2000) defines parody as a literary work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule. Postmodern picture books often employ parodic appropriations. *The Stinky Cheese Man*

and other Fairly Stupid Tales (Scieszka & Smith, 1992) is a parody of traditional fairytales, book construction, design and content. The title page is misplaced and actually comes after the Little Red Hen has started telling her story of a kernel of wheat. Jack the narrator, appearing in various illustrations, tries to call Chicken Licken into line for starting before the table of contents page, the print of which is crumpled because the table of contents fell and squashed everybody. Cinderella's tale becomes *Cinderumpelstiltskin or the girl who really blew it.* This book uses irony, parody, humor and surrealism to subvert the reader's expectations of fairytales.

Another example of parody is *Velcome* (O'Malley, 1999). This picture book is a collection of silly stories that poke fun at the classic horror story genre. In the first story the narrator tells a story about a boy is being chased by a coffin. The boy throws a cough drop at the coffin and "the coffin stopped."

Other examples of postmodern picture books that are considered parodies include *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (Child, 2003) and *Wait! No Paint!* (Whatley, 2001).

Typographic Experimentation

Typographic experimentation can involve parodic play on specific writing styles; wordplay such as puns, anagrams, clichés; print convention variation and use of margins, footnotes and epigraphs; and deliberate mixing of literary and extra-literary genres such as journal, letter, newspaper items, historical documents, etc. (McCallum, 1996).

Jan Brett is a children's book author who often utilizes margin space for illustrations. In *Berlioz the Bear* (Brett, 1996), the page frames tell the story of the

effects of the main story narrative. Side frames clue readers in to who will appear in the narrative next.

The text formatting is particularly postmodern in *Jack's Bean Problem* (story from *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*, Sciezska, 1992), with the first sentence squashed by the giant's boot and the narrator's irritation with the giant speaking in upper case.

Voices in the Park (Browne, 1998) utilizes typographic experimentation to match character personalities with corresponding font changes for each of the four narrators. The unemployed father's perspective is told using thick, bold, blockish font while the shy boy's perspective is portrayed with light, quiet, subtle font.

Disruption in Relationships

Attention is brought to narrative structure by disrupting the relationships between narrative events, characters and narrators, and multiple narrators (McCallum, 1996). In *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001) the narrative is repeatedly interrupted by the pigs as they take charge of the familiar fairy tale story and actually step out of the story frames. Illustrations depict the pigs hiding from the wolf between skewed story frames. Not only do the pigs disrupt the narrative, they take over and pursue their own adventures.

Disruptions between characters and narrators take place in *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (Scieszka & Smith, 1992) when Jack, the narrator interrupts Chicken Licken's story: "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" cried Jack the Narrator. "I forgot the Table of Contents! I forgot the Table of Contents!" "Hey, you're not in this story," said Chicken Licken (p.4). The characters bring attention to the narrative construction of the story by interrupting each other.

A final example of disruptions can be observed in *Black and White* (Macaulay, 1990). On the final page of the book, the reader encounters a hand lifting part of the setting (the train station) out of the book. The reader is left to wonder who the hand belongs to, why the hand is lifting the train station out of the book, and what is real in the story anyway?

New and Unusual Design Layout

Another common metafictive element found in postmodern picture books is unusual or new design layouts. When the design layout differs from traditional text, the reader's perception of how to read a book is challenged (Antsey, 2002). David Macaulay's *Black and White* (1990) is an example of an unusual text layout that challenges reader's ideas of how to go about reading a book. On the first page spread, the reader encounters four panels displaying words and illustrations that are seemingly separate and unconnected. Throughout the story, the reader may find that s/he returns to previous pages in an effort to make sense of the stories.

Another example of an unusual design layout is employed by Lauren Child in *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book* (2001). Readers encounter a few pages in which the text shifts from right-side-up to upside-down. There is a pull-out spread of Cinderella's ball and an actual hole appears on another page.

Absurdity/Impossibility

Many postmodern picture books involve plot, themes, and/or characters that are particularly impossible or absurd. *Bright and Early Thursday Evening* (1996) by Audrey and Don Wood is a unique book based on a dream. When the lady in striped pink tights

marries a potato in gabardine pants at a sad wedding and they have a bald-headed baby with hair hanging over his eyes, the reader surely senses the absurdity of the narrative.

Tuesday (Wiesner, 1991) features another absurd, impossible plot. An almost wordless picture book, *Tuesday* features smiling, fat frogs flying through the air on lily pads. The satisfied frogs soar around town until they fall to the ground when the sun rises. On the final page of the book, readers get a glimpse of next Tuesday's feature flight: pigs.

Summary of Postmodern Picture Book Characteristics

Postmodern picture books are characterized by any number of metafictive characteristics, which draw attention to the fictional state of the book. These characteristics include nonlinearity, narrator and/or author intrusion, multiple narratives, intertextuality, genre blending/blurring, indeterminacy, visual manifold narratives, typographic experimentation, new and unusual design layout, and absurdity and impossibility. The employment of these devices purposefully works to bring the reader's attention to the "physicalness" of the text, causing the reader to question the relationship between fiction and reality. The metafictive elements in postmodern picture books work to push the boundaries of traditional picture books. At the same time, readers' conceptions about how picture books should be constructed and read are also challenged.

POSTMODERN PICTURE BOOKS AND CHILDREN

Although there are numerous publications that describe 'postmodern picture books' (Anstey, 2002; Chatton, 2004; Goldstone, 2002; Hellman, 2003; Paley, 1992) or picture books with 'metafictive characteristics' (Cashore, 2003; Seelinger-Trites 1994), there is little research available that explores how children engage with postmodern

picture books. A review of the available research uncovered three major studies. Pantaleo (2002) conducted a study in which nine postmodern books were read aloud to first grade students in a classroom setting. Data analyzed included transcripts and observational notes from audio-taped read-aloud sessions. Pantaleo (2002, 2004) described how students successfully interacted with the postmodern characteristics in the *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2002) and *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998). First grade students were able to comment on and make sense of many metafictive characteristics during discussions guided by the researcher, through writing activities, and through an extension activity.

A second study was conducted by Serafini (2005) in which eight to twelve year-olds in a multiage classroom listened to postmodern picture book read-alouds. The students then discussed and responded to the metafictive characteristics found in them as guided by their classroom teacher. Serafini analyzed students' literature response journals, classroom field notes, and transcriptions of audio-taped teacher-led classroom discussions. Serafini (2005) described how students dealt with three specific metafictive characteristics in the *Voices in the Park* (Browne, 1998): non-linear structure, symbolism in the illustrations, and the relationship between the illustrations and written text. Some students were intrigued by these alternative literary devices, while others found them challenging and "weird" in a negative way. Serafini postulated that students who were better able to tolerate ambiguity and/or uncertainty in a story were better equipped to make sense of metafictive elements in text than those who shut down when encountering them

A third study took an alternative route. Chatton (2004) designed a study in which fourth and fifth grade students read and reviewed postmodern picture books. Students familiarized themselves with the book review process by reading and discussing book reviews written by adults from *School Library Journal, Horn Book*, and *Booklist.* Chatton's study details students' reactions to Chris Raschka's *Arlene Sardine* (1998). Eleven of twelve students reported that they liked the book. Although the story details the death of Arlene, a sardine, the students thought the book was "peaceful and educational." When the researcher shared a published negative review of the book with students, they reacted with shock. Chatton surmised that allowing students to critique literature produced an environment in which children realized that there were many ways to respond to and interpret stories. She further concluded that they also realized that they were entitled to express their thoughts about the books they read.

Pantaleo and Serafini provided valuable information about how students are able to make sense of the metafictive characteristics in postmodern picture books; however, a close look at how successful readers navigate postmodern picture books when reading independently is lacking from these two studies. While Chatton's study produced interesting information about how students responded to a few postmodern picture books, it did not include an analysis of student responses to the metafictive elements in postmodern picture books. What this means, in effect, is that there exists a gap in the research in which how children navigate and make sense of postmodern picture books, independent of someone who is teaching them the characteristics, is explored. How might children navigate these books without guidance from a teacher or another knowledgeable adult?

The section that follows will provide some background on story comprehension.

STORY COMPREHENSION

The present study explored the ways in which students navigated through and made sense of postmodern picture books. Although postmodern picture books are nontraditional in many ways, they are still stories. For that reason, it is helpful to have an understanding of research on story comprehension.

The heart of reading is meaning-making, or comprehension, as opposed to letter or word identification, the acquisition of vocabulary words or any list of skills associated with text. Rosenblatt's transactional theory posits that meaning is created from the transaction that takes place between the text and the reader (Rosenblatt, 1978). In other words, meaning does not reside in the text, waiting for the reader to unearth it; nor does it reside in the reader. Meaning is constructed during the transaction between the text and the reader in a specific situation at a specific time. Schema theory tells us that prior knowledge, or schema, plays an important role in this back and forth process of constructing meaning by helping readers to make sense of what they are reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). For example, if a reader possesses knowledge about World War II, she will be better equipped to make connections to and understand a narrative that takes place during the World War II era.

In the 70's, psychologists brought attention to comprehension in terms of the structure of texts. There is an underlying structure that all simple stories appear to have in common, called *story schema.* Studies on story comprehension indicate that many individuals have a sense of an idealized story, involving knowledge of structural features (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1978; Thorndyke, 1977). Additionally, studies

have indicated that individuals use story schema to facilitate understanding and recall (Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Webb, 2001; Fitzgerald & Spiegel, 1983; Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1978; Thorndyke, 1977). Thus, if a reader is familiar with the ways that authors commonly construct stories, then they are equipped with the necessary background knowledge about what to expect when they hear and read similar stories, which contributes to story comprehension. When children build schema for story genres, they are better able to predict story structure. For example, if a reader encounters a story that begins with *Once upon a time*, predicting that the story is fictional will aid comprehension.

Goldman & Rakestraw (2000) posited that instruction that focuses on story structure improves readers' awareness of how to identify various story structures and can be effective in improving memory and content learning. One way to focus instruction on story structure is to explicitly teach children the basic elements of a story, such as characters, setting, plot, and theme. Another is to focus on story grammars, such as Mandler and Johnson's (1977) story grammar, which consists of the following seven categories of narrative information: *major setting* introduces the protagonist, *minor setting* describes the time and place, *initiating events/beginning* changes the state of affairs, *reaction* includes responses, goals, desires, or thoughts, *attempt* symbolizes the protagonist's actions related to the goal, *outcome* indicates the direct consequences, and *ending* involves how the characters feel or think related to the outcome.

There are a variety of strategies to teach the basic elements of a story and specific story grammars to students. It is common for teachers to expose students to literature of various genres in order to bring attention to the characteristics of each. This can be

accomplished through teacher read-alouds, independent reading, buddy reading and shared reading. Another strategy commonly used to enhance story comprehension is the use of graphic organizers, or visual representations of text. For example, story webs and maps are used to visually depict elements, sequence events, compare how two or more things are alike and/or different, and explore cause and effect or describe the problem and solution. Reutzel (1985) found story mapping to be an effective strategy for improving comprehension of narrative text. Reutzel compared two groups of fifth grade students' recall of story details. The first group used story maps with a basal lesson and the second group participated in a basal lesson using the directed reading activity approach. Students who were instructed using story maps produced significantly more story details than the control group.

Another strategy for teaching story elements and story grammar is through dramatic activities. Beyersdorfer & Schauer (1994) found that dramatic activities fostered student involvement with texts and aided comprehension development. Sipe (2002) urged primary teachers to encourage and value students' expressive engagement with stories. He further explained that children can demonstrate comprehension of a story by becoming actively involved in the story with their words and/or physical actions. For example, readers might act out a portion of a story, talk back to story characters, insert themselves in a story, critique the story or take control of the story. Lastly, Raphael and McMahon (1994) emphasized the importance of literacy learning as a social process, encouraging student discussion of the story and generation of questions about stories.

In summary, evidence supports explicit instruction of narrative story structure in order to enhance story comprehension. This creates a dilemma for the present study. Given that postmodern picture books often deviate from traditional narrative structure and elements, the comprehension strategies previously described are likely not going to be effective in assisting students' comprehension of story. The present study attempted to address this situation by exploring the ways in which successful readers navigated postmodern picture books.

The final section of this literature review will provide background on think-aloud as a method of inquiry.

THINK ALOUD

Think aloud is an exploratory method which can be used as a tool for cognitive inquiry (Kukan & Beck, 1997). Think aloud methodologies call for *concurrent verbal reports* in which participants directly report their thinking, or express their thoughts (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). The resulting transcripts are commonly called *protocols*. Think aloud methodology can also be referred to as *protocol analysis*. Researchers employing think aloud methodologies analyze the protocols in order to investigate participants' thoughts. A brief history of think aloud methodology use follows.

Newell and Simon (1972) used think aloud protocols to explore how people solved problems. They identified the strategies participants used when doing activities such as playing chess and solving math problems. In the late 1970's, Olshavsky (1977) used think aloud protocols to explore the processing involved in reading. Olshavsky asked participants to stop at predetermined places while reading short stories to verbalize their thoughts. This study is noteworthy as it brought the representation of reading as

problem solving and the potential of verbal protocols in identifying the strategies that readers use while reading to the attention of reading researchers.

Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) described the potential of think aloud as a method of inquiry to reveal the flexible and goal-directed processing of good readers. Many researchers have employed the use of think aloud methodologies in order to identify the strategies that skilled readers use, that struggling readers might benefit from learning (for example, Collins, Brown, & Larkin, 1980; Brown & Day, 1983). These researchers focused on analyzing individual verbal reports of readers who were engaged in processing text.

In reviewing studies that have employed think aloud methodology as a method of inquiry for the processing of reading, specific procedures varied greatly. Some researchers modeled how they wanted participants to think aloud while others asked participants to share their thoughts about specific things (such as predictions or elaborations) and still others gave virtually no instructions as far as what was to be reported (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Also varied were procedures for *when* participants were to report their thinking. Ericsson and Simon (1984) stated that verbal reports were most valid when they occurred concurrently. However, many researchers asked participants to report their thinking at certain times, for example, after each sentence, after each paragraph, after each page, every two minutes, at a signal, etc. (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

There are some challenges of think aloud methodology. The first dilemma arises when researchers model the think aloud process. The concern is that by modeling, the researcher biases the participant's responses toward their own. The second challenge lies

in the data of the verbal report consisting of spoken language. Pressley & Afflerbach (p. 2, 1995) stated that “the richness and variability of language are the greatest assets and liabilities of the verbal reporting methodology.” Spoken language is related to a person’s thoughts, but how closely? Also, when a researcher analyzes verbal reports, there is a built-in language variation in which that person’s own personality, vocabulary, opinions, etc. influence the data.

The present study utilized think aloud methodology as a method of inquiry to identify and describe the processes that children used while reading aloud postmodern picture books. Analysis of the protocols from individual think aloud sessions produced insight about how children navigated postmodern picture books. Specific think aloud methodology procedures utilized in the present study are outlined in detail in Chapter 3.

SUMMARY

This literature review was designed to familiarize the reader with the characteristics of postmodern picture books, the research available on postmodern picture books and children, students’ comprehension of story schema, and think aloud methodology; providing a foundation to understand the present study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the present study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain understanding about the comprehension strategies successful readers employ as they construct meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books. Chapter 1 introduced the present study by presenting the problem, purpose, research questions, significance, limitations, delimitations and theoretical framework. Chapter 2 presented the literature review which detailed the background knowledge necessary to situate the present study.

In this chapter I provide a rationale for the methodological choices of the present study. This chapter also includes a detailed description of the methods utilized throughout the study, including a description of the participants, data collection methods, data collection timeline, and data analysis stages.

RATIONALE FOR METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

I chose to use a qualitative research design after careful consideration of how best to address my research question. Qualitative research allows for things to be studied in their natural settings so that the researcher can "make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them," (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). I intended to gain understanding of a phenomenon: comprehension strategies that successful readers drew upon as they constructed meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books (van Manen, 1997). I also hoped that a description of the results of this study would provide insight about how readers navigate through postmodern picture books for others to consider in their own specific contexts. Therefore, qualitative research allowed for an interpretive, descriptive approach to my research question (Lincoln, 1997, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I determined that employing a naturalistic, instrumental case study approach was the best choice for describing the experience of eight fourth grade students as they navigated through and make sense of five postmodern picture books. Creswell (1998) describes the focus of case study methodology as developing an in-depth analysis of a case, with *case* meaning a system bound by place and time (for example: a program, event, activity or individual.) Case study methodology allowed me to focus on exploring how a particular group of students navigated postmodern picture books over a specified period of time. This case was bound by time and place as it spanned a six week period and included eight fourth grade students. Case study methodology allowed me to work to "optimize understanding of the case" rather to make generalizations (Stake, 2000, p. 436).

I describe the present study as *naturalistic*, in that I attempted to gain "deep understanding and explication of social phenomena" as I observed students "in their own contexts," (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 16). I arranged to meet with students after school in the library of their elementary school, a place frequented by all participants and their classmates on an almost weekly basis since they began attending the school. I considered this case to be particularly naturalistic in the sense that I chose to meet with participants in an informal after-school setting in order to observe them in a more relaxed environment. This situation was more conducive to discussion, in comparison to their classroom during regular school hours. I intentionally worked to establish an informal environment in which the students felt comfortable discussing the books with each other. I asked participants to call me *Elizabeth* in order to deliberately alter the traditional teacher/student construct so that the students saw me as an equal,

rather than a teacher. I explained to students that I was learning from them throughout the project. During individual think aloud sessions and book club sessions I repeatedly redirected student discussion points and questions to the participants, instead of controlling the discussion and answering questions.

Lastly, the present study is described as an *instrumental* case study. Stake (2000) explained that instrumental case studies examine the case in order to provide insight into a particular issue, while it is the case itself that is of interest in an intrinsic case study. The present study qualifies as an instrumental case study in that its purpose was to explore the issue of postmodern picture book comprehension strategies.

In summary, a naturalistic, instrumental case study approach to the research question was intended to yield information that provided insight about the complexity of how children navigate postmodern picture books.

METHODS

Participant Selection

I chose to select participants from a large suburban elementary school in which I had served as an on-site intern supervisor at the site for three years. Because of the established trustful relationships with the principal and many teachers, I was able to obtain permission from the principal to approach teachers for participant selection. I utilized purposive sampling, which provided the opportunity for intensive identification of students who displayed both creativity and a proclivity for reading complex books. I selected participants from upper intermediate elementary classrooms because I anticipated that they were not only better able to comprehend the complex books chosen

for the study but also better able to verbalize their thinking as a result of their more developed vocabulary.

I chose to limit the case to eight participants for three primary reasons. First, I wanted to maintain a smaller group of participants so that there would be a better chance that all voices would be heard in the group sessions. Second, a small group of eight students limited the cost of supplies, including picture books, snacks, and video supplies. Lastly, I considered eight participants to be a desirable balance between having enough participants and therefore enough data, and having too many as far as the amount of data collected to be transcribed and analyzed.

I was granted university IRB approval and approval from the school system, and after receiving permission from the school principal, I approached a fourth grade teacher and offered her an information letter (see appendix A) explaining the study and the participant identification process, in particular. She then identified eight students who, in her opinion, showed a preference for complex, ambiguous books and critical thinking. The teacher passed on a parent consent form (see appendix B) and a student assent form (see appendix C) to each student to be signed and returned. Initially, I planned to continue to visit fourth and fifth grade teachers until I received consent and assent from eight participants. However, this was unnecessary as all eight participants and their guardians from the first classroom I approached provided consent and assent. Hence all participants originated from the same fourth grade classroom.

Participants

As described in the previous section, participants were eight fourth grade students at a large suburban elementary school in Tennessee. The group consisted of five females

and three males, and was comprised of seven Caucasians and one African-American. Participants chose their own pseudonyms to be used for the duration of the study: Cynthia, Lizzie, Samantha, Italia, Maria, Dalton, Tyler, and Cooper. I considered myself an active participant as well. I asked participants to call me *Elizabeth.*

Data Collection Methods

I utilized multiple methods in this study because research related to how readers respond to postmodern picture books is scarce and it is unknown how best to go about designing a study that might provide adequate understanding of how children navigate postmodern picture books. I chose to explore the research question in two ways, interactive small groups and meetings with individual participants. I met with individual participants and asked them to share their thinking as they read aloud postmodern picture books in an attempt to make students' thoughts visible as they independently navigated the books for the first time. I chose to incorporate group sessions because, influenced by the social constructivist perspective, I believe that multiple realities are constructed through social interaction and that knowledge is a co-construction of understandings (Hatch, 2002, Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Therefore the interactive groups provided a space for student-driven discussion of the postmodern picture books in an informal after-school setting so they might co-construct understandings of the postmodern picture books they read. It was my hope that the results from this study could inform researchers about how best to design studies of this nature in the future. Meeting with individual students in addition to small groups also allowed for a richer description of the phenomenon.

The interactive small group sessions, which are described in more detail in the next section, took place once per week for six weeks. All eight participants met with me

for each of these sessions (with a few exceptions due to absences). In addition, I met with two students per week, resulting in ten sessions with individual students. Since there were eight participants and ten individual sessions, I met with each student one time and two students (Cooper and Lizzie) on two occasions. The two students who met with me two times were chosen because they were able to stay after school on the dates specified. All sessions were videotaped. A video camera was set up on a tripod so that all participants, including me were visible on the tape. All sessions were transcribed. I also took field notes during and/or after each session in a notebook. In order to encourage attendance and satisfy hungry after-school appetites, I provided healthy snacks for the students. At the conclusion of the study, I allowed each student to choose a postmodern picture book to keep.

Group Meetings: Book Club

Group meetings took place once per week after school hours in a room in the school library, although one group meeting took place in the school cafeteria due to a scheduling conflict. The school library is large in size and stocked with over 21,000 books and sixteen student computers. From my conversations with the children, I learned that they consider the library a fun place to go, possibly due to the fact that the male librarian is a friendly, energetic and vivacious teacher. During small group sessions, all eight students and I sat on the carpet in a circle. The length of each session was approximately one hour, from 2:45 p.m. until 3:45 p.m., when the students were picked up by a parent or guardian. The first ten minutes of each session were spent getting settled and eating a snack. Group meetings were loosely based on Raphael and McMahon's (1994) Book Club framework. Hence, from this point forward I will refer to

group meetings as *Book Club* sessions. I conducted meetings based on social constructivist theory, which emphasizes learning as a social process and the importance of personal response (Raphael & McMahon, 1994).

The purpose of the initial group meeting was to create an informal community environment, generate enthusiasm for the project, and familiarize students with the think aloud process. I worked to establish an informal environment in which the students felt comfortable discussing the books with each other. I asked participants to call me by my first name, *Elizabeth.* I explained the purpose of the project and the students' importance in the project. Students understood that I would be learning from them how children make sense of and interact with the characteristics in a certain group of picture books. In order to get to know the students, I asked each of them what they liked to do in their spare time and what kinds of books they liked to read. I then introduced the concept of the think aloud process, which is described in detail in the following section.

Think Aloud Method

The think aloud process was an integral component of the methodological design of this study, utilized to make the seemingly invisible process of students independently reading postmodern picture books visible for the observer. The think aloud methodology is described in Chapter 2.

In order to avoid biasing students towards copying my thoughts about postmodern picture book characteristics, I chose not to use a postmodern picture book to model the think aloud process. I chose instead to model the think aloud process by explaining my thinking while solving a three-dimensional puzzle. The likelihood of students copying my thoughts in regard to postmodern picture books would be eliminated if I chose to

share my thoughts while I performed a task other than thinking aloud about a postmodern picture book. Also, by modeling the think aloud process using a three-dimensional puzzle I felt that I would be able to place emphasis on reporting the thinking process, rather than emphasizing specific thoughts.

I included a second step in modeling the think aloud process in order to demonstrate how one can think aloud while reading aloud a picture book. I chose a traditional picture book, one with a linear structure including a beginning, middle and end, instead of a postmodern picture book, again in order to reduce chances of biasing students towards identifying postmodern picture book characteristics. A detailed description of the way in which I introduced both components (three-dimensional puzzle and traditional picture book) of the think aloud process follows.

The students and I sat in a circle on the carpet and they observed my actions and listened to my thoughts as I attempted to replicate a picture shaped like a boot that appeared on a playing card. In the example below, I explained how I began putting plastic tangram manipulative pieces together to replicate the boot shape:

> I'm thinking that right here (points at card again) is going to be the big pieces, because all of these parts are kind of smaller. So, I'm going to try to use the big pieces for the angle part of the boot. I don't know if that's right or not, but I'm gonna...I'm gonna try this. (pause) Umm...OK. That seems to fit together.

In order to model the think aloud process by reading aloud and sharing my thoughts about a book, I read aloud *My Great Aunt Arizona* (Houston, 1992), which features a traditionally organized plot. As I read the text aloud, I stopped at various

points to explain my thinking. I shared predictions, connections, wonderings, and comments about the illustrations. For example, after I read the text, "She taught in the one-room school where she and Jim had sat. She made new chalkboards out of lumber from Papa's sawmill," I explained my thinking as follows:

> Right now, I don't know. Looking at this picture, I'm thinking she is an awesome teacher, because look at her students...how they seem to be really excited about what she's saying and paying attention her, and she looks really animated.

After I finished reading the story, I explained to students that as they read books with me in subsequent sessions, I would be interested in learning how *they* think about the books as they read them and would be asking them to explain their thinking to me. I reiterated that I would be learning from them throughout this project. I also emphasized that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers in explaining one's thinking. I explained to students that it was okay to express their preference for each book read, and that it was acceptable to like or dislike a book. I made a concerted effort to explain to students that they would not be graded on any activities or discussions during the study.

For the final step in this book club session, I introduced the first postmodern picture book, *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner, 2001), to students by reading the title and author and leafing through the pages of the book. I explained that the students needed to read the book before the next group meeting in order to be ready to discuss their reactions to the text with the group. I further explained that they could read the book at home, at school, silently, out loud, to someone, to themselves, etc.; reinforcing that they could read the book any way they chose. I reminded the two students who were meeting with me for

individual think aloud sessions that they would read the book with me for the first time the following day and told them that they were welcome to read the book again on their own after we met. I waited until both individual think aloud sessions were complete to distribute copies of the postmodern picture book to all participants to take home.

Each subsequent book club session featured two components: discussion of a postmodern picture book the students previously read and an introduction by me of the book to be read for the next week. I tried to create as much flexibility as possible because I wanted students to guide the discussion and feel comfortable sharing their thinking. I began by asking students to tell me what they thought of the book, and I encouraged them to refer to specific pages when talking about specific passages in the book. I tried not to control the discussion, reminding students to talk to each other, instead of looking to me. However, it should be noted that I was an active participant asking questions if necessary to keep the discussion moving.

Subsequent Individual Think Aloud Meetings

In addition to meeting as a whole group, I met with two students per week in order to obtain a deeper level of understanding about how students navigate postmodern picture books independently. I met with each student, one-on-one, after school in a meeting room in the school library. The student and I sat together at a table. The length of each session ranged from 20 minutes to 40 minutes. During these sessions, the student read the book for the first time with me, instead of reading it independently. Each student was encouraged to report her/his thinking as she read the book aloud to me, just as I had modeled with the whole group.

I attempted to take a "hands-off" role during these sessions both in order to keep from hindering the students' thought flow and to keep the process uniform. However, I interjected periodically with questions to clarify students' comments and sometimes stopped to ask students what they were thinking if they paused and did not say anything. I was particularly cognizant of providing students with adequate "wait time." Specifically, I waited up to three to eight seconds when students paused before I asked them to share their thoughts.

Students were provided small sticky notes to identify pages in the book which they found particularly intriguing, frustrating, questionable, etc. I met with six of the eight students individually one time each during the six week time period and I met with two of the students on two separate occasions. Figure 1 represents the timeline and organization of the group and individual sessions.

Data Analysis

Data utilized in this study included transcripts of ten individual think aloud sessions, which lasted approximately 30 minutes each, transcripts of five book club group sessions, which typically lasted approximately 45-50 minutes each, and my field notes, which I recorded after each session.

I used the constant comparative method of analysis, as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). After receiving copies of all transcripts, I read through the data, constantly comparing incidents to each other, looking for patterns, consistencies, discrepancies, and anomalies, which led to identifying themes. It should be noted that coded verbalizations varied in length. For example, some coded verbalizations consisted

Week	Day		Agenda
Week 1 January 31	T	**Book Club 1**	**Intro think aloud & *The Three Pigs***
	W	*The Three Pigs* w/ Cynthia	
	R	*The Three Pigs* w/ Cooper	
Week 2 February 7	T		
	W	**Book Club 2**	**Discuss *The Three Pigs***
	R	*Who's Afraid* w/Italia & Lizzie	
Week 3 February 14	T	**Book Club 3**	**Discuss *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?***
	W	*Red Book* w/Dalton	
	R	*Red Book* w/Maria	
Week 4 February 21	T	**Book Club 4**	**Discuss *The Red Book***
	W	*Voices* w/Tyler	
	R	*Voices* w/Samantha	
Week 5 February 28	T	**Book Club 5**	**Discuss *Voices in the Park***
	W	*Black & White* w/Lizzie	
	R	*Black & White* w/Cooper	
Week 6 March 7	T	**Book Club 6**	**Discuss *Black & White***
	W		
	R	Wrap-up/Celebration	

Figure 1: Data Collection Timeline

of a word or two while others consisted of an entire conversation and were one or two pages in length. The following paragraphs describe more specifically the ways in which I analyzed the transcripts.

I first read through the entire data set, all of the transcripts, in order to get a sense of the data. My goal was to spend time with the transcripts in order to get a feel for the data. I then isolated the think-aloud session transcripts and corresponding field notes and read them carefully, noting key phrases and ideas in a separate notebook. From those notes, I identified initial themes, including: making inferences, paraphrasing or recounting the narrative, making predictions, making connections, summarizing, expressing own ideas about narrative, confirming ideas, emotional connections, evaluative statements, questions, and illustrations. I then read through the book club session transcripts and corresponding field notes and again took notes in a separate notebook. I created a list of themes for the book club session both by modifying the themes from the think aloud sessions and identifying new themes. At this point, I began to realize that the same themes were not going to be appropriate for both types of sessions (think aloud and book club sessions) because several themes emerged from the book club sessions that were not present in individual sessions. Hence, I used one list of themes for the think aloud sessions and a modified list for the book club sessions. I then created codes for each theme and tested the codes on one think aloud session and one book club session. As I applied the codes to the data, I modified both the themes and coding strategies. For example, some themes were eliminated and merged with more general themes while other themes broke away from themes that became too heterogeneous. I

then read through all sessions in order by book (rather than by type of session) and took more notes.

Next, I viewed all videotape footage, took notes, and continued to refine themes. I then went back to the transcripts and applied the codes corresponding to each theme in order to test the codes on the data. When I felt confident that the themes and corresponding codes would stand up, I continued to code the remaining data. However, even as I did this, I continued to refine the themes.

In order to ensure trustworthiness and rigor, I sought feedback on my coding for one individual think aloud session and one book club session from a peer debriefer: a professor in the Theory and Practice in Teacher Education Department at the University of Tennessee who specializes in literacy and qualitative research. I asked her to question my choice of codes and to check my inference levels. I also asked her to specifically look for instances in which I may have asked leading questions and to analyze my decisions regarding the difference between instances in which participants were participating in general problem solving and instances in which they were problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world. With regard to my inquiries about coding leading questions, she noted the same places in the transcripts that I had, and concurred that the participants' responses in these cases were not trustworthy evidence of their own thinking, and should not be coded. Responding to her questions about my codes helped me to refine them for the final time.

The following verbalizations were coded throughout the individual think aloud sessions: emotional responses, general problem solving, problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world, wonder questions, predicting, text/media

connections, personal connections, excitement when own ideas are correct, exploring, and other textual features. The following verbalizations were coded throughout the book club sessions: emotional responses, general problem solving, problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world, asking questions, illustrative/font features, other textual features, intertextual references, text/media connections, personal connections, excitement when own ideas are correct, and reading behaviors.

SUMMARY

This research project utilized a naturalistic, instrumental qualitative case study approach to explore how a small group of eight fourth grade students navigated five postmodern picture books. Two methods were used to gather data: independent think aloud sessions and small group book club sessions. Think aloud sessions produced individual protocols of each participant's thinking as s/he read the book aloud to me. Group sessions produced transcripts of all eight students and me discussing each of the five books. Data analysis included careful reading and rereading of all transcripts and field notes, which led to thoughtful generation of themes for the individual think aloud sessions and book club sessions.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain understanding about the comprehension strategies successful readers employ as they construct meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books. In Chapter 1, I introduced the study by presenting the problem, purpose, research questions, significance, limitations, delimitations and theoretical framework. In Chapter 2, I presented the literature review which detailed the background knowledge necessary to situate the present study. In Chapter 3, I provided a description of the methods utilized throughout the study, including a description of the participants, data collection methods, data collection timeline, and data analysis stages.

In this chapter, I have presented the results of this study by describing the themes that I identified from the data analysis stages described in Chapter 3. These themes are presented in Figure 1. This chapter can be conceptualized in two sections: Think Aloud Session Results and Book Club Session Results. In the first section, I have discussed the themes identified from the individual think aloud sessions: emotional responses and problem solving. I have specifically described the two types of problem solving participants used: general story problem solving and postmodern story problem solving. I have then presented the themes that emerged from the two problem solving categories: general to postmodern, general to general, and postmodern to postmodern. In the second section, I have presented the themes identified from the book club sessions: aesthetic responses, reflecting on reading behaviors and problem solving. I have described the five specific postmodern story problem solving themes that I identified in the book club sessions: asking questions, illustrative features, other textual features, text/media

connections, and intertextuality references. Lastly, I have discussed how students came to further their understanding of postmodern picture books in book club sessions.

THINK ALOUD SESSION RESULTS

Think Aloud Session Themes

In each of the individual think aloud sessions, I asked participants to verbalize their thinking as they read a postmodern picture book aloud. The think aloud process was described in Chapter 3. There were a total of ten individual think aloud sessions. Each of the five postmodern picture books was read aloud by two participants in one-on-one (the participant and me) sessions. Each participant attended at least one individual think aloud session, however, as there were eight participants, two of the participants (Lizzie and Cooper) attended two individual think aloud sessions.

Analysis of patterns in the think aloud sessions resulted in the identification of two themes, *emotional responses* and *problem solving*. The problem solving theme was broken down into two subcategories, *general story problem solving*, and *postmodern story problem solving*. Figure 2 graphically represents these think aloud session themes as well as the themes identified in the book club sessions. In the paragraphs that follow, I have described each of the think aloud session themes and provided excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate the themes.

Emotional Responses

In the individual think aloud sessions, participants exhibited a range of emotional responses when they encountered "strange" things in the postmodern picture book they were reading. Emotional responses were noted for each think aloud session at or towards the beginning of sessions and then throughout the duration of sessions. There were six

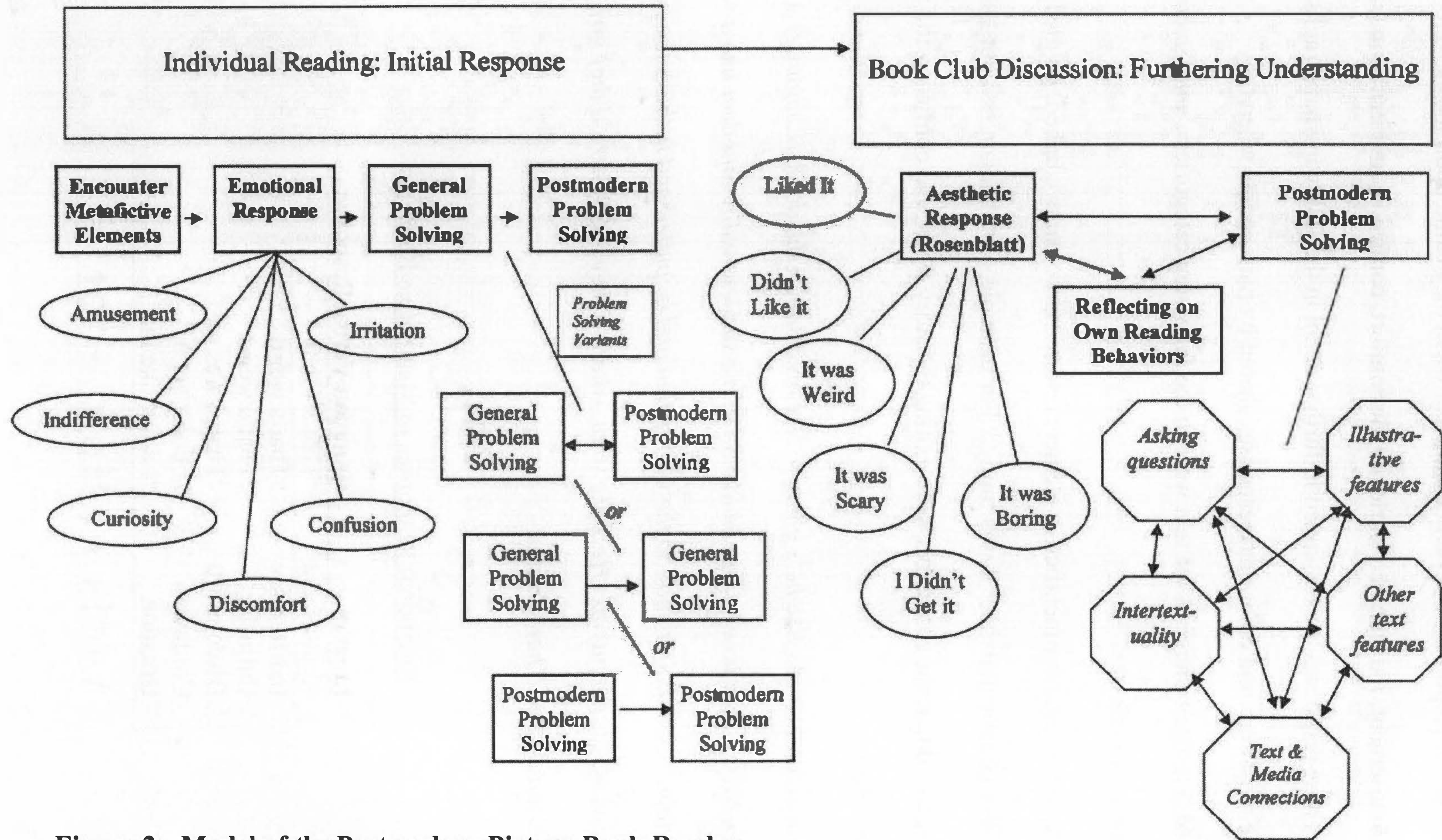

Figure 2: Model of the Postmodern Picture Book Reader

types of emotional responses that participants had when they came upon metafictive elements: amusement, indifference, curiosity, discomfort, confusion, and irritation (see Table 1). These responses are explained in further detail in the following paragraphs.

The most common emotional responses shared by participants when they encountered "strange things" in the text were in the following categories: *amusement, indifference, and curiosity.*

When encountering metafictive elements, some participants laughed, giggled, smiled, and/or commented that "it was funny." For example, Cynthia laughed out loud when she realized that the characters were exiting the story frame and confusing the wolf in *The Three Pigs*:

> *That actually looks like he's going to like break down the door. (Laughing) And then like its cool how he can be like all of the sudden reality and then like a cartoon. (Reading aloud) So the wolf huffed and he puffed and he blew the house in and he ate the pig up. He's like what, where'd they go? Where'd they go? He's like, not again! That's funny.*

Table 1

Emotional Responses to Metafictive Elements

Emotion	Common Verbal Response
Amusement	"That's funny."
Indifference	"That's weird."
Curiosity	"That's weird."
Discomfort	"That scares me."
Confusion	"I don't get it."
Irritation	"I don't like that."

In a second example, Tyler appeared to be amused when he saw a particularly strange illustration in *Voices in the Park*:

> *(Reading aloud) We both burst out laughing when we saw Albert taking a swim. Then we all played on the bandstand, and I felt really, really happy.*
>
> *(Thinking aloud) Huh (laughing) Look at that guy. He's got a banana on his umm…pitchfork.*

Cynthia and Tyler reacted to the story or story elements in a positive manner.

Verbalizations from the second and third categories, *indifference* and *curiosity*, showed that participants felt that parts of the story were odd. They responded to this oddness in different ways leading to two different category codes: they either reacted indifferently to the metafictive elements or seemed intrigued by them. Those who reacted indifferently seemed to note that something was odd, but they did not seem to put a lot of thought into it as they continued to read. Those that were intrigued by the "odd parts" seemed to ponder the meaning of the odd part. I observed them taking what looked like thoughtful pauses after they commented about the weirdness in the story. Often, they commented that something was "just weird" or "strange." Lizzie used the word "weird" to describe the non-linear plot device in *Black and White*: *That sort of is weird because it skips straight from the train line place straight over into this field talking about Holstein cows.* Lizzie paused after this statement and seemed intrigued by the nontraditional plot. In a second example, Italia shared a similar emotional response towards an unconventional page lay-out in *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*: *It is weird how it's flipped upside-down.* Italia noted that the page was "weird" and quickly moved on in her reading.

The emotional responses of *discomfort, confusion* and *irritation* were less common. Verbalizations that were coded in the fourth category showed that the students were uncomfortable with the "strange" things in the text and they described them as being "scary" or said that they weren't sure "what to think of it." For the fifth category, *confusion,* participants made comments about not understanding the story. They shared that they "didn't get it," or "didn't understand it." Lastly, some participants seemed irritated when they came upon the" strange" things in the text. For example, after reading *The Three Pigs*, Cooper explained that the story was frustrating for him because he tried to figure out what was going on and he wanted the story to be more straight-forward:

> *You want to figure out what they are doing. But at the end you finally figure it out but you like just wanna know what they're doing right when they're doing it.*

The transcripts revealed that participants exhibited a range of emotional responses when they encountered the metafictive elements in the books they read in individual think aloud sessions.

Problem Solving

Problem solving surfaced as a significant aspect of the ways in which students navigated through the postmodern picture books in this study. After noticing the "strange things" in the texts they were reading, participants typically shared thoughts that showed evidence of such problem solving in an attempt to figure out the story. I created two categories of problem solving in light of the research question: *general story problem solving* and *postmodern story problem solving.* The total number of instances tallied throughout the ten think aloud sessions was 68 instances of general story problem solving and 74 instances of postmodern story problem solving.

The first category of problem solving is categorized as *general story problem solving.* Transcript units in this category showed evidence that as the participant was reading, s/he noticed that something was different and took action to problem solve and figure out the story. For example, as Lizzie read *Black and White*, she shared her thoughts as she attempted to figure out the identity of the old woman on the train: *Well, in that other picture it looked like the lady was all white, so maybe she's a ghost. Or maybe the boy has just been dreaming and he thought he woke up from dreaming but he's still dreaming.* A second example of general story problem solving is illustrated when Samantha noticed the Santa gorilla character in *Voices in the Park* and attempted to figure out what was happening: *Looks like he's probably selling something. And, someone probably threw these [paintings] out of the house.* In a third example of general story problem solving, Cooper speculated about the meaning of the page in *Black and White* in which the train is stopped: *Maybe somebody went over there and made the rocks fall and he is yelling at them.*

The second category of problem solving, postmodern story problem solving, describes story problem solving more specifically, in terms of metafictive elements. Verbalizations that fit in this category illustrate that the reader is actively participating in the postmodern picture book story world as s/he works to figure out the story. The reader is actually making sense of one or more of the metafictive elements: intertextuality, symbolism in illustrations, non-linear aspects of the text, gaps or relationships between reality and fiction, multiple narratives, and/or indeterminacy.

In the following verbalization, Tyler's thinking exemplifies one aspect of postmodern story problem solving. He made sense of the complex symbolism in the illustrations in *Voices in the Park*:

> *Maybe she was angry and . . . she might have lit the tree on fire. Or maybe like how she feels. That's like what happens to the stuff around her and stuff. Like . . . when she was yelling the tree's leaves were like off . . . and now she's mad . . . the tree's on fire.*

This verbalization demonstrates that Tyler noticed that there were hidden, surrealistic clues in the illustrations that reflected the character's austere, angry mood.

In a second example of postmodern story problem solving, Dalton shared his thinking while reading *The Red Book. The Red Book is* a wordless picture book that features a child who discovers a book in the snow and discovers its power to transport her to another place. Although the book's illustrations look simple upon first glance, the plot is complex and open to interpretation. Dalton's verbalization demonstrates that he made sense of the ambiguity and gaps in the story, speculating the meaning of *The Red Book*:

> *Right here ... I think that, I think that I figured it out. I think that the boy is like dropping the book somewhere on accident and it's gone like to another time 'cause there's another boy that's finding it in the sand.*

In a third example, it is evident that Cynthia actively participated in the postmodern story world as she read aloud *The Three Pigs,* a postmodern version of the traditional, familiar tale. In this book, the three pigs discover that they can actually exit the story in order to escape from the wolf. They then travel to other stories via a story page that is folded into an airplane, picking up a few characters along the way. The following

transcript unit shows evidence that Cynthia noted the relationship between reality and fiction as the characters moved from story to story when she described how the cat's appearance changed in the illustrations:

> *And like that just really knocks me out because it's got like stripes and now it's just like plain orange [the cat]. That's weird. So I think that all of these are gonna like fall on them and they're gonna be like hey who turned off the lights?*

Clearly, Cynthia was an active participant in the postmodern picture book story world and made sense of metafictive elements. Her verbalizations, and others in this category, are similar to those described by Sipe (2002) in his study of first and second grade students' responses to storybook read alouds. Sipe found that students sometimes became expressive and performative in response to read alouds, becoming active participants in the story by acting out, inserting themselves in the story, talking back to the story or characters, or taking over the story. When Cynthia said, "they're gonna be like, *hey, who turned off the lights?*" she spoke for the characters, actively participating in the story.

Themes Within the Problem Solving Patterns

I identified several noteworthy themes when analyzing the story problem solving strategies the participants utilized in the individual think aloud sessions. These themes represented the ways in which they steered between general problem solving (General) and postmodern problem solving (Postmodern) as communicated in their verbalizations when reading aloud. These themes are: General to Postmodern, General to General, and Postmodern to Postmodern. Figure 3 graphically represents the relationship of these themes.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">1.) General →Postmodern</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Begin with general story problem solving;
end with postmodern story problem solving</td></tr>
<tr><td>1a.) Back & Forth</td><td>1b.) Direct</td></tr>
<tr><td>Switched back & forth between general story problem solving & postmodern story problem solving</td><td>Begin with general story problem solving and switched to postmodern story problem solving once.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">2.) General →General</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Begin and end with
general story problem solving</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">3.) Postmodern →Postmodern</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Begin and end with postmodern story problem solving;
mostly postmodern story problem solving</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 3: Think Aloud Sessions: Themes within Problem Solving Categories

General to Postmodern: In looking at the types of problem solving that were noted at the beginning of each session, eight out of ten sessions began problem solving within the "general" category. In looking at the problem solving that was noted at the *end* of each session, seven out of ten sessions ended with a "postmodern" coded problem solving verbalization. In other words, participants generally began problem solving within the general story problem solving category, then moved on to more complex postmodern story problem solving.

For example, when Maria read aloud *The Red Book*, her think aloud pattern revealed one instance of general story problem solving (G), an instance of postmodern story problem solving (P), another instance of general story problem solving (G), and then five instances of postmodern story problem solving (P). Maria initially shared more thoughts about *The Red Book* that indicated general problem solving, speculating about the main

character and the book's plot. Her thinking progressed to indicate that she was making sense of the idea of the red book. She smiled when she figured out that the red book in the little girl's hands was a portal to the world in which the boy on the beach lived. The following illustrates how Maria's problem solving pattern moved from general to postmodern: G-P-G-P-P-P-P-P. Dalton's verbalizations during his read aloud of *The Red Book* illustrate another example of problem solving moving from general to postmodern: P-G-G-G-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P-P.

Within each session, however, it was common for the participants' problem solving to move back and forth from general problem solving to postmodern problem solving throughout the duration of think aloud sessions (Back & Forth, 1a). For example, as Cooper read aloud *The Three Pigs*, his pattern of problem solving was as follows: G-P-P-G-G-P-G-P-P. Cooper began his read aloud session sharing thoughts about how the illustrations made it look like the pigs crashed into a totally different story, but his tone of voice indicated that he wasn't quite sure what to think about that idea. As he continued reading, his problem solving verbalizations showed that he understood that the three pigs were in fact exiting the story and visiting other stories (intertextuality). However, after that he continued to move back and forth between general and postmodern problem solving throughout the read aloud. Lizzie's problem solving pattern for *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* is another example of moving back and forth between general and postmodern problem solving: G-G-P-P-P-P-P-G-G-P-P.

There was an exception to the back and forth subtheme. Although Italia's think-aloud session for *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* showed that she began problem solving within the general story problem solving category and finished within the postmodern

story problem solving category, there was no fluctuation among the two types of problem solving strategies: G-G-G-P-P. It is important not to analyze this too deeply as there were fewer overall instances of problem solving to code for Italia's session, but it is interesting to note her pattern.

General to General: The fact that some students did not move on from general story problem solving to postmodern story problem solving, or had only one or two instances of the more complex postmodern problem solving, is also noteworthy. When Samantha read aloud *Voices in the Park*, her problem solving strategies remained categorized as general story problem solving (thirteen instances); she did not move into the next category of problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world. In her think aloud session, Samantha became fixated on the illustrations, pointing out the strange things on each page. When Lizzie read aloud *Black and White*, she shared seventeen instances of general story problem solving and only one instance of postmodern story problem solving.

Postmodern to Postmodern: Two participants, Cynthia and Dalton, began and ended their think aloud sessions with postmodern problem solving verbalizations. These two students were noted to have the most instances of postmodern story problem solving and also had the most instances of making predictions about the plot and posing "wonder questions" (I wonder if *this* could happen ...) about the story. For example, while reading *The Three Pigs*, Cynthia shared this prediction: *So I think that all of these are gonna fall on them and they're gonna be like hey who turned off the lights?* After reading *The Three Pigs*, she posed a "wonder question" about the possibility of a modified three pigs story: *I wonder if there could be something like that where they're*

the wolf and they get blown out by the pig. That'd be cool. Like in reverse. Like the original three little pigs. Because Cynthia and Dalton shared the most postmodern problem solving verbalizations in comparison to the other participants in individual think aloud sessions, they spent more time thinking about and making sense of the complex metafictive elements in the stories they were reading. It seemed as if they became more immersed in the postmodern picture book story world.

Think Aloud Session Results Summary

It seems, then, there was a pattern to how students navigated through the books in individual think aloud sessions. This pattern involved noticing something different in the story (metafictive elements), sharing emotional responses to the metafictive elements, and then finally moving into problem solving mode. However, there was variance within the problem solving mode.

The following section will report how participants navigated postmodern picture books during the book club sessions.

BOOK CLUB SESSION RESULTS

Book Club Session Themes

There were a total of five book club sessions; one for each of the five postmodern picture books. Each week, I met with all eight students after school in the library for approximately one hour to discuss the postmodern picture book they had been assigned to read prior to the session. The first ten minutes of each session were spent getting settled and eating a snack. I began each discussion by asking students to tell me what they thought of the postmodern picture book that was assigned to that particular session. I encouraged them to refer to specific pages when talking about specific passages in the

book. I tried to allow students to control the discussion, reminding students to talk to each other, instead of looking to me. However, I was an active participant, asking questions if necessary to keep the discussion moving.

From these discussions, I identified themes. The following paragraphs describe the themes and provide excerpts from the transcripts to illustrate the themes.

Aesthetic Responses

Participants shared responses similar to the emotional responses described in the individual think aloud sessions in the previous section (see Figure 1). When reading the book for the first time in think aloud sessions with me, students had obvious emotional responses when they encountered metafictive devices: amusement, indifference, curiosity, discomfort, confusion and irritation. I watched students laugh, cringe, and share with me their confusion when they came upon "strange things" in the text. However, in book club sessions, it seemed as if students had moved past the initial emotional responses and instead shared with each other their feelings about and attitudes toward the story and portions of the story. Borrowing from Rosenblatt (1978), I call this focus on the reading experience an *aesthetic* response. The students had a tendency to frame their aesthetic responses as evaluative. I identified the following aesthetic responses: *I liked it, I didn't like it, I didn't get it, It was scary, It was boring,* and *It was weird.*

Students shared positive aesthetic verbalizations about the books. "I like it" was the most commonly shared aesthetic response with a total of 24 verbalizations shared throughout all of the book club sessions. During the *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* book club, Dalton shared that he liked the way the book had "flipped out" pages and how

it looked like "a hole in the page." Nick thought the book was funny because the main character, Herb, cut pictures out of the book, added telephones to the illustrations and drew mustaches on the characters. Participants repeatedly shared that *The Three Pigs* was "funny" and they "liked it." Tyler thought it was funny when the pig was blown out of the story and Cooper shared that "it was cool how they kept going into different stories." Noteworthy is the finding that "I like it" was an aesthetic verbalization shared during all book club sessions, except *Black and White.*

On the other hand, students shared negative aesthetic verbalizations. They sometimes came to book club voicing their dislike of the story. For example, Cynthia and Samantha both came to *The Red Book* book club session with furrowed brows. Cynthia said that she did not like the book because it was "just a picture book," and it looked like something "that a preschooler would read." Samantha said: *There was no words and I was expecting it to be something you could actually read. You can read that, but you'd have to understand the pictures first.* Sipe & McGuire (2006) might describe this evaluation of the story as "preferential or categorical." For these students, it seemed that *The Red Book* did not match their conception of what they typically enjoy reading, so they initially rejected it, describing why they did not like the book.

The only aesthetic response that was shared by participants in all five book club sessions was "confusing." During *The Three Pigs* book club discussion, students shared that they were confused by the way the letters were falling off the page. Cooper described his confusion: *Like when the words were everywhere and you couldn't tell what they were trying to say.* During *The Red Book* discussion, Cynthia admitted that she was confused by the author's picture on the back book jacket flap. The illustration

features the author drawing a picture of herself, drawing a picture of herself, drawing a picture of herself, etc. Cynthia explained her confusion with this illustration: *Yeah ... I ... whenever I started doing that I could not like get it straight. I'm like ... ok. I just drew that and then ... I don't get it. I cannot get it straight whatever I do.*

There were several occasions during the *Voices in the Park* and *Black and White* book club sessions in which students commented that something was "scary." For example, when students discovered eyes on the illustration of a lamppost in *Voices in the Park*, several exclaimed that it was "creepy," "scary" and "freaky." Lizzie repeatedly commented that the hidden images in the illustrations of *Black and White* were "scary" or "creepy."

As noted in the previous section, the emotional response shared the most in the individual think aloud sessions was "It was weird." In contrast to this finding, "It was weird" was the emotional response shared the least in book club sessions.

In summary, participants shared a range of unsolicited aesthetic responses throughout discussions about the postmodern picture books. They continually expressed their feelings about and attitudes toward the postmodern books they were discussing.

Reflecting on Their Own Reading Behaviors

In book club sessions, participants sometimes shared the ways in which they read the stories. They shared their own behaviors when reading the text, strategies they used when reading the text, or ideas for strategies they might be able to use. Occurrences of sharing reading behaviors and strategies were particularly common in the *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?, The Red Book* and *Black and White* book club discussions. For example, Cynthia shared with the group that she accidentally skipped the first page when

she was reading *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book*? on her own. Italia admitted that she skipped portions of the text on a page spread in the same book. During the *Voices in the Park* book club discussion, Lizzie shared how she used post-it notes when she read the book independently:

Lizzie: I wrote all the characters for each voice.

Elizabeth: Why did you ... why did you do this?

Lizzie: Well ... I couldn't really figure out what the story was about. So, I wrote down all the characters and found out that some... that they sort of blend together in some of the voices.

It was also common for participants to share ideas about strategies they might use when reading the book in the future. For example, during *The Red Book* discussion, students talked about the possibilities of reading the book backwards and upside-down. They also discussed the possibility of adding pages to the end of the story. Dalton explained: *And then you stick it onto a piece of notebook paper and you like glue it to the back, and then you could like add more pieces of paper to make the story go on.* They seemed to like the idea of continuing the story so that others could find adventures in the red book.

During the book club discussions, students shared the ways in which they read the postmodern picture book on their own and even explored possible alternative ways to read the books.

Problem Solving Strategies

In terms of problem solving strategies shared in group sessions, participants showed evidence of significantly less time spent *general story problem solving* and more time spent *postmodern story problem solving*. In all five book club sessions, there were a total

of 38 verbalizations which were coded as general story problem solving and a total of 100 instances which were coded as postmodern story problem solving. This was consistent with the finding from the think aloud sessions that most readers moved from general problem solving to postmodern problem solving. If students who read the books individually at home showed evidence of the same pattern, it would make sense that less of the book club time would be utilized for general story problem solving, and more available for postmodern story problem solving. For example, during *The Red Book* discussion, students spent some time at the beginning of the session problem solving within the general category as they discussed whether or not the main character was a girl or a boy:

Italia: I thought it was a boy! It has no eyelashes on it.

Lizzie: Definitely a boy right here (points to back of book).

Cynthia: Yeah, me, too.

Samantha: Yeah, but it looks like a girl from there (pointing to back of book).

As the session progressed, students began sharing more verbalizations that showed evidence of postmodern story problem solving. For example, in the following conversation, students were clearly problem solving within the postmodern story world as they contemplated the potential of the red book to involve them in a magical experience:

Cynthia: And, that's why I think, are we really the end person doing this? OR is someone reading us? (She looks around and laughs.) Like, ohhhhh...

Lizzie: Are we the readER?

Cynthia: Are we the final reader, or not?

Tyler: Where's the person at that's supposed to be watching us?

Cynthia: Oooooh ...

Lizzie: Could we be in the book right now?

Tyler: Hi person! (waving)

In four out of five book club sessions, there were more postmodern story problem solving verbalizations than general story problem solving verbalizations. The exception to this was the *Black and White* book club session. During the *Black and White* discussion, students shared equal numbers of general problem solving and postmodern problem solving verbalizations. This was an anomaly which may be attributed to the complexity of *Black and White's* plot, which features four simultaneous ambiguous narratives on each two page spread. Students may have struggled to make sense of this plot in comparison to the other four books.

Common Postmodern Story Problem Solving Strategies

Five strategies were commonly utilized by participants in the book club sessions. These were: asking questions, pointing out illustrative features, references to intertextuality, connections to other texts and media sources and looking to other text features (such as book flaps and dedication pages). I will attempt to describe each strategy in the following pages.

Asking Questions: It was common for participants to ask questions during book club sessions. There were more instances of questions during the last three book club sessions: *The Red Book*, *Voices in the Park*, and *Black and White*. The *Black and White* discussion had the most occurrences of question asking. Questions were sometimes directed at the group, sometimes directed at me, and other times stated as "I wonder . . . ." For example, Dalton asked the group a question about a character during the *Black and White*

discussion: *Hey, do you guys think that . . . in the back picture, do you think that that might be the boy that's in the story that's wearing stripes, maybe? Inside?* A discussion between Dalton and Cynthia followed on this topic.

<u>*Illustrative Features*</u>: Pointing out and discussing illustrative features of the books was very common during book club sessions. Illustrative features include any features of the illustrations or text on the pages of the book. There were significantly more verbalizations about illustrative features during discussions of *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book*, *Voices in the Park,* and *Black and White* in comparison to the book club sessions on *The Three Pigs* and *The Red Book.* The *Voices in the Park* discussion produced the most illustrative feature discussion verbalizations (55). Discussion repeatedly returned to what students called "hidden things in the pictures" throughout the book club session. For example, the following verbalization shows how early in the book club discussion participants focused on the illustrations:

> *Cynthia: I read the little…*
>
> *Dalton: I read the pictures three minutes ago.*
>
> *Cynthia: … little add-ins like everywhere. There's like an elephant, then a tree on fire, and then like Gorilla Poppins.*
>
> *Italia: There's an elephant right here.*
>
> *Samantha: Yeah. There's just every little detail.*

While discussing *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, Cynthia turned the discussion toward the text, which appears meandering and zigzagging through the pages of the book. The text is even flipped upside down on a few of the pages. She explained how this

illustrative feature confused her: *Yeah ... I didn't like it because ... I could hardly read it. Like ... on this page ... I don't know what to read first ... that, that first, or that.*

Looking to Other Textual Features: In book club sessions, it was also common for participants to talk about other textual features such as the book cover, dedication page, the back of the book, "About the Author," copyright page, book flaps, title page, book price, and age recommendations. During the discussion about *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, Lizzie pointed out details on the title page: *I think it's sort of strange how in the front right here it says, "This book belongs to Herb." And it has the bananas about bananas sticker there.*

Later in the same book club session, Dalton brought attention to the age recommendation on the front flap: *At the first . . . it says ages four to seven. I think that we're like too old . . . for that one.* A discussion about age recommendations followed his comment in which several participants argued that the age recommendation was incorrect because the book was, in their opinion, too difficult for younger children to comprehend.

During *The Red Book* discussion, Cynthia brought the group's attention to the back book flap, which features an illustration of the author drawing a picture of herself, drawing a picture of herself, etc.:

> *Cynthia: Look guys! If you look in the very back . . . and look at what .. . she painted.*
>
> *Samantha: Yeah.*
>
> *Cynthia: It's a painting, it's a painting, it's a painting.*
>
> *Samantha: whoa . . . it's a painting, it's painting.*

Cynthia: Yeah. I think that she really likes to do that.

Samantha: Uh she likes to copy things.

A discussion followed in which Lizzie connected this idea to her own experience of having a dream that she was having a dream.

Making Connections to Other Texts or Media: It was common for participants to make connections between the books they were discussing and other books they read and/or television shows. For example, some students immediately connected *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book* to the popular cartoon television series Charlie and Lola, recognizing Lauren Child's illustrations. Lizzie also brought a copy of the chapter book *Utterly Me, Clarice Bean* (2003), also by Lauren Child, to the book club session to share with the group.

As book club sessions progressed, it became more common for participants to connect the book they were discussing with previous books they read and discussed in book club sessions. For example, Italia and Maria connected *Voices in the Park* to *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* and *The Three Pigs*, respectively. They pointed out that all three of the books contained stories within the story. Another example took place during the *Black and White* book club session when Samantha described how the story reminded her of *Voices in the Park* because there were hidden things in the illustrations for the reader to find in both books.

References to Intertextuality: Intertextuality is a metafictive device in which familiar stories are intertwined or juxtaposed to create a narrative. During book club sessions, participants pointed out and discussed intertextuality in four out of five book club sessions (all books except *The Red Book*). Of course students did not use the actual term

"intertextuality," but they did discuss how different stories were present in the book. For example, in the following excerpt, Cooper pointed out how he liked the intertextuality present in *The Three Pigs*:

> *Well, I thought it was cool how they kept going into different stories, like they start with the pigs, then they go like the cat one . . . where the cow jumped over the moon. Then they go to the dragon one . . . and they just kept going in all the different ones.*

A second example of discussion about intertextuality took place during the *Black and White* book club session:

> *Samantha: Well, it's a lot of different stories . . .*
>
> *Italia: Different stories.*
>
> *Samantha: . . . that are totally unconnected, and then . . . but once you read it then . . .*
>
> *Italia: They're switched around.*
>
> *Samantha: . . . they get connected.*

In the excerpt above, Samantha and Italia are discussing how *Black and White* features more than one story in the narrative. In the following example, participants noticed the intertextuality present and took it a step further by attempting to make sense of the different stories featured in *Black and White:*

> *Maria: Oh! I think I forgot to state about that picture that the ripped up paper could be like the snow the boy . . .*
>
> *Cynthia: I got it.*
>
> *Maria: on the train.*

Cynthia: Is that a train stop?

Maria and Dalton: Yes.

Maria: Because a train is going through . . .

Tyler: Oh!

Cynthia: Oh! Maybe that's the train in this story. This story one . . . this one, and this one. That is awesome!

Discussion of Book Club Sessions: Furthering Understanding of the Story

It is evident that the fourth grade students in this study came to further their comprehension of each story through the group book club discussions that followed their individual readings. As I stated earlier, I did not directly teach the students any of the characteristics of postmodern picture books, so when the conversation turned to discussing the metafictive elements, it happened as a result of the students themselves. Students spent a great deal of time during book club sessions working to problem solve various aspects of each plot. They asked each other questions, pointed out illustrative details, looked to other textual features for clues about the plot, made connections to other books and the media, and even pointed to the intertextuality present in many of the books.

While this may make it sound like the students figured out each story's complex plot by themselves, without my help, that is certainly not the case for all five books. The final two books discussed in book club sessions proved to be the most complex and verbalizations indicated that students reached a limited understanding on their own. Although the majority of the time spent during book club sessions was student-led, I

interjected toward the end of each book club session and asked more specific questions in order guide them to understanding *Voices in the Park* and *Black and White.* For example, as I listened to students discuss *Voices in the Park*, it became apparent that the students were not aware that the book presented four different perspectives of the very same day in the park. As the book club session neared the end, Cynthia shared her thoughts about why there were four voices in the book, "every day it's like ... they hear each other like differently." I said, "Wait. You said every day. So, is it four different days?" Cynthia, Lizzie, and Italia all agreed that the book represented different days for each voice because of the different font styles. At this point I stepped in and pointed out a detail in two illustrations, leading students to the realization that the book was describing the same day from four different points of view. However, it is important to credit the students' thinking. It is evident that students reached a higher level understanding of the books by talking with their peers in the book club sessions.

Lizzie's experience with *Black and White* illustrates how a participant came to gain further understanding of a book through the book club discussion. In the individual think aloud session, Lizzie was clearly frustrated as she attempted to make sense of the four simultaneous narratives present in *Black and White.* Throughout her reading of the book, she shared that the book was "weird" and "scary" and she struggled to make sense of the story's plot. At the conclusion of the book, she shared with me that she "didn't get" the book. She turned to the book jacket flap and the "warning label" on the title page, seeming to search for clues that would shed light on the plot. During the next day's book club session, Lizzie shared with the group how uncomfortable I made her feel in the think aloud session: "And you kept staring at me like when I read it to you. I don't like when

people look at me! I felt like I did something wrong!" My interpretation of this is that she was uncomfortable with the book and therefore felt that my looking at her was a negative thing because Lizzie participated in a think aloud session prior to the *Black and White* session and did not feel as if I was "staring at her."

Clearly, Lizzie was not comfortable with her understanding of *Black and White*; however, in the book club session, data indicate that she gained understanding of the plot. For example, she was the first participant to discuss the story's plot. She asked her friends if they read the "warning label" on the title page of the book. When Samantha pointed out that the burglar in one quadrant was the same as the burglar from another quadrant, Lizzie exclaimed, "Oh! So that's who that is!" She then shared that she thought that the burglar was a woman. Cynthia and Samantha told her that the burglar was disguised as a woman. In the following transcript unit, Cynthia made a discovery about the plot that caused Lizzie to make her own discovery:

> *Cynthia: Oh! I just made a connection! Look! You know here they're wearing the stuff* [newspapers] ... *now they are.* (She points from one quadrant of the two page spread to another quadrant.)
>
> *Lizzie: Yeah. And then they're ... and then they're ripping it up.*
>
> *Cynthia: I got something! I got something!*
>
> *Lizzie: And then they're ripping ... and then they're ripping it up!*
>
> *Cynthia: Yeah.*

Clearly, Lizzie gained knowledge about the story from this interaction with Cynthia. This notion of learning through social interaction, or social constructivist learning theory

(Vygotsky, 1978), is illustrated here as Lizzie built on Cynthia's comment about the plot and drew her own conclusion from the text.

As stated in the previous section, some students came to book club expressing negative opinions of and feelings about the stories they read on their own. These students actively participated in the book club discussions and seemed to gain more understanding of the story and even more appreciation for the story the more they discussed it. It seemed that the student's story schema was challenged, and s/he had certain ideas about how stories should be constructed and navigated. When this background knowledge was challenged by the presence of metafictive devices, frustration ensued and some students reported that they "didn't like" the story. As these students discussed the stories, their statements demonstrated that they came to more understanding, but most maintained their original opinion and claimed that they did not like the book at the conclusion of the book club discussion, sometimes despite remarks and behaviors that indicated that they enjoyed it.

For example, at the beginning of the *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* book club session, Cynthia shared that she didn't like the story because it was difficult to read due to the different print conventions and wandering font. Later in the same session when participants were talking about the pages that featured upside-down font, Cynthia said that she thought the author was "smart" for inserting upside-down pages and admitted that she "got into it and it was funny." She continued to actively participate in the discussion about the book, gaining understanding about the plot. For example, she asked the group how Herb got out of the book: if he was on the floor, how could he fall on the floor? If the book is on the floor and he's in the book. A lengthy discussion

ensued in which participants worked to understand this page, discussing various possibilities. Although Cynthia appeared to enjoy the book and gain understanding about the story's plot, she shared that she "didn't like the book" at the conclusion of the book club session.

Methodological Implication

It is important to note the significance of the methodological choice to explore students' response to postmodern picture books in two ways: individual think aloud sessions and group book club discussions. By choosing to include both methods, I was able to provide a more rich and complete description of Lizzie as a reader. She gained understanding as she moved from the individual think aloud session to the book club discussion. Had I chosen to explore this phenomenon in one way or the other (think aloud session or book club discussion), I would not have been able to obtain a complete description of Lizzie's growth. This study is important in highlighting the need for gathering data in two formats: individual and group discussion.

Book Club Results Summary

It seems, then, that unlike the individual think aloud sessions, there was not a pattern to how students navigated through the books in book club. Verbalizations revealed an interactive, dynamic pattern in which most of the time was spent discussing aesthetic responses, their own reading behaviors, and postmodern story problem solving. Five specific problem solving strategies were identified as commonly utilized by participants: asking questions, pointing out illustrative features, references to intertextuality, connections to other texts and media sources and looking to other text features (such as book flaps and dedication pages).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The specific purpose of this project was to uncover the factors contributing to the success of these fourth-grade readers as they constructed meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books in order to gain understanding about the comprehension strategies that successful readers draw upon as they read these nontraditional books. Toward that end, I identified a number of patterns from transcripts of individual think aloud sessions and group book club sessions. While a general linear navigation pattern emerged in the think aloud sessions (encountering metafictive elements, emotional response, problem solving), book club discussions produced a more interactive, dynamic navigation pattern in which participants shared aesthetic responses, reflected on their own reading behaviors, and spent time problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world.

It is also significant to note that the fourth grade students in this study came to further their comprehension of each story through the group book club discussions that followed their individual readings. A final observation is the significance of the methodological choice to explore response to postmodern picture books in two ways (individually and collaboratively in book clubs), as a richer description was obtained of the participants as readers.

In Chapter 5, I will provide conclusions, recommendations for further research and implications for educators.

CHAPTER 5: FINAL THOUGHTS

The purpose of this dissertation was to gain understanding about the comprehension strategies successful readers employ as they construct meaning while navigating through postmodern picture books. This was explored using two methods. The first was individual think-aloud sessions. The second method was group book club sessions. Transcripts from both types of sessions and field notes were analyzed for common themes.

In Chapter 1, I introduced this study by presenting the problem, purpose, research questions, significance, limitations, delimitations and theoretical framework. In Chapter 2, I described the background knowledge necessary to situate the present study in a review of the literature. In Chapter 3, I provided a description of the methods utilized throughout the study, including a description of the participants, data collection methods, data collection timeline, and data analysis stages. In Chapter 4, I presented the results of this study by describing the themes and patterns that I identified from the data analysis stages described in Chapter 3. This chapter presents conclusions, recommendations for further research and implications for teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

Reading comprehension is a complex process and varies greatly depending on the reader, the text, and the situation (Rosenblatt, 1978). This seems especially fitting for postmodern picture books as they are characterized by ambiguity and indeterminacy. However, some conclusions can be drawn about how the fourth graders in this study navigated through and made sense of five postmodern picture books, as discussed in Chapter 4. It is my hope that educators can see ways of applying and adapting this new

knowledge of children's response to postmodern picture books to the reading instruction in their own classroom situations. Conclusions about how the participants in this study navigated through postmodern picture books follow. I described these in detail in Chapter 4.

- There is a recognizable pattern by which the fourth grade students in this study navigated postmodern picture books individually in think aloud sessions. Students moved in a linear pattern involving encountering metafictive elements, showing an emotional response, and problem solving. There was much variance in the problem solving pattern.
- When students discussed the postmodern picture books in group settings, a more interactive, dynamic navigation pattern was identified in which participants shared aesthetic responses, reflected on their own reading behaviors, and spent time problem solving within the postmodern picture book story world.
- Data from this study revealed that the fourth grade students in this study came to further their comprehension of each postmodern picture book through the group book club discussions that followed their individual readings.
- Results of this study highlight the importance of gathering data in two formats: individual and group discussion.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As I described in Chapters 1 and 2, there is a paucity of research that explores children's response to postmodern picture books. As this genre is expanding and interest in digital genres is gaining momentum, exploration of this topic warrants attention. The available research on children and postmodern picture books thus far has focused on

teaching students the literary devices present in postmodern picture books. The present study is the only one to date that explores how children independently navigate postmodern picture books, without direct instruction from an adult about metafictive elements. Therefore, there is a need for future studies that further explore how students might navigate these books.

Lingering Questions

My work with eight fourth grade students' responses to postmodern picture books provided insight, but it has also left me with lingering questions. I wonder what new information might be gained if this study was extended in order to look at how students navigated postmodern picture books throughout an entire school year. Would the students become more skilled at navigating the more complex postmodern picture books independently? Might students emotional and/or aesthetic responses to postmodern picture books change over time so that those who tended to have negative responses might begin to have more positive engagements with this genre?

I also wonder what new information could be discovered if the participant selection process was modified. As the present study's participants were chosen for their propensity to think critically about literature, it might be beneficial to gain insight about how struggling readers make sense of postmodern picture books. What about younger children? What about middle school or high school students? It may be beneficial to design a study to investigate how pre-and in-service teachers navigate through postmodern picture books. The results from such a study may shed light on how teachers respond to these books and how it may affect the incorporation of this genre into the curriculum.

There are also implications for further research regarding specific phenomena in this study. For example, why is it that students reacted to metafictive devices in varied ways? They shared a range of emotional and aesthetic responses when encountering and discussing the "strange things" in the postmodern picture books both in individual and group settings. Some students expressed delight and were amused by metafictive elements while others were puzzled and confused by the employment of alternative literary devices. These unsolicited emotional and aesthetic responses to postmodern picture books beg for further investigation.

There are several possibilities that could be explored. For example, a student who is accustomed to searching for and producing "right" answers may be uncomfortable with postmodern picture books because they are open for interpretation and there is no "right" answer. These books are often ambiguous and feature indeterminate plots that have many possibilities conducive to exploration and interpretation. If a student strives to find the correct answers to the typical comprehension questions s/he is accustomed to answering, such as *What is the author's purpose?* Or *What happens at the conclusion of the story?,* s/he will likely become frustrated. The student who is most comfortable getting the "right answer" might get irritated with the story, confused by the story, or verbalize that they don't like the story.

Another possible explanation for the varied responses to metafictive devices has to do with story schema. Students were chosen for the present study based on their preference for complex, ambiguous books and critical thinking, making it reasonable to assume that they were "good readers." It is likely that they had enough previous experience with literature to have an established sense of story. Their prior knowledge of

story might include the traditional components of a story, called story schema (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1978; Thorndyke, 1977). This prior knowledge plays an important role in meaning construction by helping readers to make sense of what they are reading (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), and may have led the students to expect traditional story elements in the books. This expectation seemed to result in dissonance when students came upon metafictive elements. Those participants who were uncomfortable with the metafictive elements may have been struggling to match the "strange things" in the text to the existing story schema in their minds. When they were unable to do so, it made some of them uncomfortable and they reacted by saying that the text was "weird," "odd," "confusing" or "scary." On the other hand, those who found humor in the metafictive elements seemed to feel more comfortable with the text and were successful in comprehending it.

To explore the possible answers to these questions, further research is necessary. It may be useful to add a metacognitive component to future studies. The researcher might ask participants to view a videotape of themselves in the individual think aloud sessions and/or book club sessions and verbalize what they were thinking when they made their verbalizations. In other words, what was the thinking behind their thinking? This method might provide some insight as to why students shared varied emotional and aesthetic responses to the postmodern picture books.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

The findings of this study indicate the possibilities of thoughtful integration of postmodern picture books into the curriculum. If the goal of reading teachers is to foster an environment where students transact with text, comprehend reading material, and

communicate their thinking about text, there is great potential in incorporating postmodern picture books into classroom instruction. The metafictive devices present in postmodern picture books require readers to engage with text in alternative ways in order to gain understanding: thinking critically, analyzing illustrations, re-reading, tolerating and entertaining ambiguity and indeterminacy, and talking with peers. As the environment that children grow up in continues to be characterized by the interactive and nonlinear nature of digital media, it is becoming increasingly important to work to prepare children to negotiate multiple digital literacies. When postmodern picture books are utilized in the reading curriculum, students can be encouraged to navigate and discuss multiple narratives with ambiguous meanings.

With the insight gained from this study, teachers should be mindful to support and encourage students who might become frustrated as a result of more negative emotional and/or aesthetic responses to postmodern picture books. They can work to facilitate a classroom environment where there are explicit and implicit rules for discussions about books in which children are made to feel safe in their comments, questions, and responses. Since transcripts from both individual and group sessions indicated that students often became actively engaged with the books as they problem solved, the classroom environment should be conceptualized as a place where this sort of active engagement is valued and encouraged. Further research about possible ways students might be supported toward more positive engagements with postmodern picture books might produce more understanding about this genre.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Teacher Information Sheet

TEACHER INFORMATION SHEET
Postmodern Picture Book Club Research Project

January 9, 2005

Dear Teacher,

As you probably know, I am pursuing a PhD in Literacy at The University of Tennessee. I am currently beginning my dissertation research, which centers on an emerging genre of picture books called postmodern picture books. I am interested in how children navigate these books in order to make sense of them.

For this study, I'll be meeting with a small group of intermediate students once per week for at least six weeks, beginning January 23rd. I'll also be meeting with two focus students individually per week. Students will read a picture book prior to group sessions. In group sessions, we'll spend time talking about the book for the week. In individual sessions, students will read through the book for the first time, explaining their thinking to me as they read. Both group and individual sessions will be video-taped and transcribed.

I need your help to identify possible participants for this study. As the classroom teacher, you have a wealth of knowledge about the individual reading habits of your students. The picture books that we'll be reading are fairly complex and will best be enjoyed by students who tend to gravitate towards more complex, ambiguous books that may require more critical thinking. If you have students who come to your mind as you read this, I would appreciate it if you could pass along a student assent form and parent consent form for their review. I cannot contact potential participants myself without informed consent from their parents.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about this process. You are also welcome to contact Brenda Lawson at the UT Office of Research [phone number] if you have any questions student rights as a project participant.

I very much appreciate your time and attention to this study. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Swaggerty
[Address]
[Phone Number]
[Email]

Appendix B: Parent Consent Form

PARENT CONSENT FORM
Postmodern Picture Book Club Research Project

January 9, 2005

Dear Parent,

I am a doctoral student at The University of Tennessee, currently beginning my dissertation research. I am working on a PhD in Literacy. The topic of my research involves the ways in which children read and make sense of a new group of picture books called "postmodern picture books." If you wish to familiarize yourself with postmodern picture books, you are welcome to check out the list of books that your child will read if you decide that s/he will participate in the study, which is located at the end of this letter.

Your child was identified by her/his classroom teacher as showing a preference for complex books, and I think s/he might also enjoy postmodern picture books. I am interested in learning about how your child reads and makes sense of postmodern picture books on an individual basis, and also how a small group of children (your child included) talk about the characteristics of these books in an informal after school setting. So, if you decide that you want your child to participate, your child will be staying after school once per week for at least a six week period for the group book club. S/he will also be asked to stay after school on a different day of the week only once or twice during the six week period in order to read a book on an individual basis with me.

Specifically, your child's participation in this project will include the following:

WEEKLY GROUP SESSIONS
For six weeks, the small group will meet once per week on Wednesdays or Thursdays after school in the school library for one hour. These sessions will be videotaped and transcribed. I will provide light snacks and drinks for children staying after school in the group sessions. I will respect any special dietary needs your child may have.

INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS
I plan to meet with your child at least, but not limited to, one time after school for one hour during the six week period. During this session, your child will read a postmodern picture book to me, pausing periodically to tell me what s/he is thinking. These sessions will be videotaped and transcribed, as well.

READING
Your child will read one postmodern picture book per week. Your child will borrow the books from me, free of charge, for use during the study. Sometimes, s/he will read the book on her/his own time, and others s/he will read the book with me in an individual after school session. I will encourage your child to be honest of her/his critique of the books, explaining that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I will emphasize that it is

okay if s/he does not like the book and s/he is not being "graded" on the activity and will not be penalized in any way if s/he doesn't finish reading a book or doesn't like the book.

This study is considered a human research project; however, the risk to your child for being involved is minimal. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. At any time, your child may discontinue her/his participation in the study or withdraw from the study without question or penalty by notifying me or her/his classroom teacher.

It is possible that this study, when complete, will be published or presented in a public forum (i.e., a professional conference). Although there is a possibility of recognition of your child on video, her/his real name will not be used and s/he will select a pseudonym. If, for some reason, your child's real name is audible or visible, I will digitally mask the name.

There is probably no direct benefit to your child; however, s/he will hopefully enjoy reading and talking about intriguing picture books.

Your child's teacher will be told which children are participating in the study in order to assist with after school dismissal procedures. However, specific information about your child's input in sessions will not be shared with teachers.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions at this time or at any point later in the study. I am happy to meet with you in person to discuss this project.

Elizabeth A. Swaggerty
The University of Tennessee
[Address]
[Phone Number] [Email]

You are also welcome to contact Brenda Lawson at the UT Office of Research ([Phone Number] if you have any questions about your child's rights as a project participant.

If you decide that you want your child to participate in this study, please go over the assent form with her/him and return both the assent and consent forms, signed, to your child's teacher by Tuesday, January 17th. Your child's teacher will then give them to me. I will contact you about scheduling, transportation, food allergies, etc.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to this important project!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth A. Swaggerty

I have read the above information and consent form, and I give permission for my child to participate in this project.

Student's Name: ____

Parent's Name: ____

Parent's Signature: __________________________________ Date: __________

I understand that video recordings will be made of my child during after school sessions. I understand that these recordings may be used in professional presentations to report on this research. I understand that my child's real name will not be revealed in presentations. These tapes may also be used in future research projects about postmodern picture books. Videotapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in Elizabeth's office at The University of Tennessee.

I hereby give my permission for these videos to be used by the researcher in the manner described.

Student's Name: ____

Parent's Name: ____

Parent's Signature: __________________________________ Date: __________

Lastly, please indicate whether or not you wish to meet with me, in person, to discuss the study.

☐ I request to meet with Elizabeth in person.

☐ I decline the opportunity to meet with Elizabeth in person.

Picture Book List

The following is a list of picture books that your child will read if you agree that s/he should participate in the study. You are welcome to check them out at the library or request them from me for your review.

The Red Book by Barbara Lehman (2004)

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book? By Lauren Child (2003)

The Three Pigs by David Wiesner (2001)

Voices in the Park by Anthony Browne (1998)

Black and White by David Macaulay (1990)

Appendix C: Student Assent Form

STUDENT ASSENT FORM
Postmodern Picture Book Club Research Project

January 9, 2005

Dear Student,

Hi, my name is Elizabeth Swaggerty. I am wondering if you want to help me learn about some different books called postmodern picture books. I think they are really cool, and I want to know what you think about them.

I want to meet after school in the library with you and a few other kids to talk about these books. It will be a kind of book club. The book club will meet once per week for at least six weeks. I also want to meet with you a few times by yourself to see what you think (all by yourself) about the book. Don't worry, you don't have to buy any books. You can borrow them from me.

I hope that you'll be really honest when you talk about the books with me and the group. There are no right or wrong answers and it is okay to say if you don't like a book. You won't be graded on anything we do together and you won't get in trouble if you don't finish reading a book or if you don't like a book.

Each time we meet (in a group or by yourself) I will videotape our conversations.

Oh, and I'll provide you with drinks and snacks in case if you get hungry after school.

If, after beginning, you want to stop being in the book club, you can tell me or your teacher.

I think it will be really fun and I think I'll learn a lot about how kids read postmodern picture books from you. Why don't you talk it over with your parents and if you both agree it's ok, sign your name below. Thanks! And I look forward to learning with you!

Print your name here: ______________________________

Sign your name here: ______________________________

Write the date here: ______________________________

One last thing. I will store the videotapes in a locked cabinet in my office while I'm working on the study. I might want to use them later to teach other teachers about postmodern picture books or to do more research on this topic, but I will never use your real name. If that's okay with you, please sign again below. Thanks so much!

It is okay for me to be videotaped for this study.

Print your name here: ______________________________

Sign your name here: ______________________________

Write the date here: ______________________________

VITA

Elizabeth Anderson Swaggerty was born in Louisville, Kentucky on May 22, 1975. She was raised in Dubuque, Iowa and attended high school in Kingsport, Tennessee. She graduated from Sullivan South High School in 1993. At the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human Learning and Behavior in 1997 and a Master of Science degree in Curriculum & Instruction in 1998. She taught third grade at Ridgedale Elementary School in Knoxville, Tennessee for six years before returning to the University of Tennessee to pursue a PhD in Elementary Education, specializing in Literacy in 2003. While at the University of Tennessee, Elizabeth coordinated the Children's Choices Book Award Project, supervised elementary education interns, and taught various undergraduate and graduate education courses. Presently, she is a reading faculty member of the Curriculum & Instruction Department of the College of Education at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. Elizabeth is actively involved in the International Reading Association, National Reading Conference, and the National Council of Teachers of English.