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Developing critical reading

how interactions between children, teachers and texts support the process of becoming a reader

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Developing Critical Reading:
How Interactions Between Children, Teachers and Texts Support the Process of Becoming a Reader.

Thesis

VIVIENNE MARY SMITH

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of the University of Coventry
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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical exploration of critical reading in the primary school. It interrogates the term 'critical reading', examines and conceptualises the thinking processes by which readers make texts mean and proposes a description of critical reading as it is evidenced in young children.

At the heart of this thesis is an ethnographic study of the reading practices of classes in three contrasting primary schools. It follows and records the reading experiences of one class of children from each school, beginning in the middle of Year Two and continuing until the children near the end of Year Three.

The resulting empirical data is reflected in and measured against theoretical understandings of learning and of reading derived from a number of sources. Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theories of the interdependency of thought and language are considered, critical pedagogy is explored and literary theory, especially the ideas of reader response theorists and postmodernists, is examined.

From this process of reflection and assimilation, three theoretical positions are achieved:

- *that the interactions that take place between children, between children and teachers and between children, teachers and texts are of vital importance in the development of children as critical readers.*
  The thesis stresses the central role of the teacher in controlling the possibilities of dialogue in the classroom. It argues that children who are exposed to the *heteroglossia* (Bakhtin 1981) of Mennipean dialogue and rich and varied textual experiences are better equipped to read critically than those who are not.

- *that the process of reading can be modelled to show the nature of these interactions.*
  The thesis proposes a series of theoretical models that attempt to map out the dynamic, interactive process by which readers make texts mean. The models chart the pushes and pulls of thinking that a reader must employ during the act of reading in order to shape meaning from an indeterminate text.

- *that a description of critical reading activity in young readers can be postulated.*
  The thesis proposes a sequence of indicators that seem to be characteristic of the behaviour of children who are developing the ability to read critically.

Finally, the thesis stresses the necessity of reading widely to children if they are to take on the heteroglossia that will enable them to read critically, and the need to empower them by encouraging and honouring their own interpretive voices.

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Introduction

Concerning Metamorphosis

> *"The imaginative transformation of human life is the means by which we can most truly grasp and comprehend it." (Heaney 1995: xv)*

This thesis is about reading. Its core is an ethnographic study of the reading practices of young children in school; its intention to discover something of the processes by which children learn to read critically.

I spent four and a half terms in classrooms collecting the data that forms the basis of this research. In each of three very different primary schools, I followed a class of children as they progressed through Year Two and into Year Three. I made friends with those children. I talked to them, read with them, worked with them and joked with them. I observed their lessons and I got to know their teachers. I did my best to discover what counted as reading for the teacher and the children in those classes and to find out how that understanding of reading was reinforced.

At the back of my mind was another question. I wanted to know not just how these children read, but whether they read critically. I wanted to know what critical reading was, and whether school was a place that nurtured it.

My attempt to find out led me into libraries as well as classrooms. I surveyed the literature of reading pedagogy, classroom interaction and literary theory in order to supplement my understanding. I made excursions into postmodernism and socio-linguistics; I dipped my toes, tentatively, into literary criticism and even, once or twice, theology.

This thesis is the apogee and summation of my work.

Metamorphosis

In the summer of 1999, at the time when I had gathered most of the data for this research, and was beginning to turn my mind to the matter of how I would organise that data into a thesis, I went to the theatre at Stratford to see a production of *Tales from Ovid.*

It was an exciting evening's theatre. I sat in the very top balcony, and looked down into the stage in the round, and the actors beneath me. They looked as remote as puppets and I felt as omniscient as Jupiter himself. I was entranced by their drama: by the sound of their words and their music, the spectacle of colour and movement; and by the concepts and ideas that were being explored. The play presented a slippery world, where gods slipped in and out of human form, where people could root into trees and condense into spiders, where morality itself was shifting and deceitful. What in the dreadful tale of Tereus and Philomena, I wondered, counted as right?

I wondered too, about the provenance of these tales. Whose were they? Ovid's? Hughes's? Reade and Supple's? The Greek sources from which Ovid worked? Here was transformation upon transformation: from Greek to Latin; from the Classical World to the late Twentieth century; from poetry to play script. Not only were these tales about metamorphosis, but they themselves had metamorphosed again and again, through the ages. They had been adapted and recast, until now, on that evening, they were made afresh in the minds of that Stratford audience.

My interpretation of the play was affected by the thesis forming in my head. The image of metamorphoses struck me as being apposite to the task I had before me. The mountains of notes, ideas and observations I had spent the last two years gathering needed to be transformed into a coherent work, to be organised, re-told, re-presented, as Hughes re-tells Ovid, and as Reade and Supple re-present Hughes. Like them, I was in the business of managing transformation as I continually interpreted the data I collected, first by noting it, then annotating those notes, by analysing them and finally reworking them into this thesis.

The image of metamorphoses seemed too to be central to the reading processes I had set out to investigate. What else is it that readers do, but effect metamorphosis?

Is it too fanciful to say that they quicken the cocooned words on the page into vivid, fleeting butterflies of imagination?

Butterflies are hard to catch; so too is reading. It is an ellusive, slippery process that changes according to text, according to reader and according to context. In this thesis I do not try to capture it and pin it down, lifeless, in a specimen case. I try instead to describe its flight, its idiosyncrasies and its variety. I try to show what reading *is like* in the classes where I worked, why I think it is like that, and, in the last chapter, what reading *might be like* where young children read critically.

Description of thesis:

The Cabbage White, as Graves[1] observes, "will never now, it is too late, / master the art of flying straight." The structure of this thesis does not attempt to follow the lurches, guesswork and tortuous crookedness of a butterfly's flight, but neither does it proceed with the simple linear progression that has characterised the genre of thesis writing. I present instead a structure that is recursive and reflexive. Descriptions of method and observation, reports of the research literature and analysis of the data, are integrated here. They occur, reoccur and are developed as the argument itself develops.

Chapter One presents an initial Literature Review. In it, I set the agenda of thinking in which the research is situated. I begin with understandings of literacy. I explore its socially constructed nature and so explode the myth of literacy as a neutral, social and economic 'force for good' that informs much government policy in education today.

I turn next to consider reading, the matter of this thesis and an integral element of literacy. I make the unexceptional claim that there is more to reading than decoding the marks on the page, and support this understanding with a discussion of the ideas of reader-response theorists and postmodernist literary critics. I introduce the Freirian concept of critical pedagogy, and through it, discuss understandings of critical literacy and critical reading. I ask whether this sort of critical thinking is tenable in the primary school. I do not attempt to survey all the literature that has informed this research in Chapter One.

[1] Flying Crooked. In Graves (1975): *Collected Poems*

Chapter Two deals with the methodology. Here, I discuss the decisions which led to the selection of ethnography as the overarching paradigm for this research, and describe the means by which the research was carried out. I pay particular attention to the ambiguities that surround ethnography, especially the shifting nature of the researcher as participant observer and interviewer and the impossibility of researcher objectivity. I suggest that the process of ethnographic research is as fluid, as personal and as reflexive as reading, and that it is therefore a particularly apt methodology to employ for research of this kind. I make extensive reference to the penultimate chapter of this thesis to support this claim.

The discussion of methodology leads directly into the presentation of the case studies that are the matter of Chapters Three, Four and Five. In each of these chapters the setting is described and the two classes that formed the cases of reading practice within each setting are then presented. In each chapter, I begin with the Year Two class. I describe the classroom, the teacher and the children, and provide a first analysis of the reading practices I observed there. A description of the Year Three class – that is, the same children after the summer holiday – comes next, and follows the pattern set up in the analysis of Year Two.

An "interchapter" bridges the particular classroom based observation and analysis of the Chapters Three to Five and theoretical perspectives of Chapter Six. It takes the analysis already presented a stage further, and introduces the concept of teacher control through talk. Thus it leads the reader on into the fuller discussion of this matter which comes next.

I present a second review of literature in Chapter Six. Here the literature concerning the part played in learning by talk is considered. I introduce the ideas of Vygotsky on the understanding of children's learning through language, and explore the importance of the Zone of Proximal Development. In this chapter I problematise constructivist understandings of Vygotsky's theory, and place it instead in a social and political context. I ask whether it is possible to scaffold thinking within the Zone of Proximal Development without that scaffolding being part of the process of enculturation. I consider a number of classroom projects in England and America that have attempted to readjust the balance of classroom talk in favour of children, and assess the effect of these projects in terms of magisterial, Socratic and Menippean dialogue. Finally, I introduce Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia.* I suggest that it is

only through the acceptance and celebration of a babel of voices that is the result of heteroglossia, that critical reading becomes possible in the classroom.

In Chapter Seven, I bring the reader back into the classroom. Here I describe the intervention stage of the research in light of the linguistic understandings of the previous chapter. I provide examples of the children talking about the books we read together, freed from the usual magisterial dialogue of the classroom. I analyse their responses and use them, with the analyses that have gone before, to propose a number of categories of description that set out the reading behaviours I observed. I compare the reading behaviours of the children with those of a group of adults who were taking a module on the process of reading towards a Masters degree in Education.

Chapter Eight, is the climax of the thesis, in that in it, I present the 'final' theoretical understandings of reading as a process that emerged from this study. This chapter covers much the same ground as the last, and uses similar examples. I suggest that the maps of reading I put forward are a distillation and rationalisation of what has gone before. I present reading as a dynamic and wide-ranging exploratory process in which the reader is involved both individually and socially. I outline the importance of interpretive communities in critical reading.

In Chapter Nine, I draw the thesis to a close by presenting a description of critical reading in young children and considering the implications of this work, both in the classroom, and for further research.

* * *

From this description, the cyclic, recursive structure of this thesis will be clear. I see this structure itself as a form of *progressive focusing,* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) that draws the argument of the thesis forward. It shows more clearly than would otherwise be possible, the genesis and development of the *languages of description* that Bernstein (1996) identifies as the matter of ethnographic research. These, explains Bernstein, are the translation devices, the ways of thinking that turn data into concept. They are the means by which transformation, metamorphosis occurs.

In the Afterword at the end of this thesis, I consider the nature of that process of transformation.

* * *

Finally, word about inclusive language:

It has become the practice in academic writing to ensure that language that is inclusive of both genders. Manuals on thesis writing (e.g. Phillips and Hugh 1993) generally encourage the writer to use the pronoun *they* instead of *he* or *she* in, for example in a construction such as "when *the child ..., they...*" I will not do this. Nor will I use *s/he*. I am not prepared to use constructions that seem to be to be grammatically untenable, or worse still, ugly. Instead I use the pronoun *she*. There are three reasons for this. First it acknowledges that I am aware that there is an issue here. Secondly, it follows established, though increasingly uncommon, practice in educational writing and social science. (See Cole, M. *et al* 1978, for example of this.) Thirdly, the use of *she* reflects the gender of the majority of the participants of this study, for though there were roughly equal numbers of boys and girls in this research, the adult participants were nearly all female. Perhaps if there had been more men teachers and more male members of the Masters group, (see Chapter Seven) I would have used *he*. Perhaps too, my findings would have been different.

There are two occasions when I deviate from the practice of using *she*. They are as follows:

- When I am writing about a particular reader or writer who is male.
- When I am following or analysing the argument of another writer who habitually uses *he*. Freire is an example of a writer like this. Taylor (1993) observes that women do not seem to figure in Freire's understanding of the Brazillian peasantry. It would be absurd, and inaccurate of me to include them where Freire does not by changing his pronoun.

Chapter One

Literacy and Reading: Ideology and Common Sense

"Once again text and ideology cannot escape from the way they are indelibly involved, the one in the other, each parasitical upon, and host to, the other." (Cunningham 1994: 360)

Introduction

This chapter places the research against the political climate that dominates popular notions of literacy in Britain in the 1990s. In it, I argue that there is more to literacy than a common sense approach of the sort propagated by the media and politicians will admit; that a fuller understanding of literacy and reading is best achieved with the help of those who argue that literacy is a socially constructed phenomenon, and so cannot and should not be treated as a neutral force; with reading and literary theorists, who explain that there is more to reading than decoding the marks on the page; and with those who make a case for critical literacy.

I argue, therefore, for an understanding of reading in schools that is broader than the reductionalist common sense approach allows. I explore understandings of the term 'critical reading' in educational literature and present a conjectural definition of the phrase in the terms of critical literacy. I argue that there is a need for critical reading in the primary school.

Reading is more than common sense

Common sense is, as Geertz (1983) has argued, a product of society, 'a cultural system.' It is historically constructed and is 'subjected to historically defined standards of judgement. It can be questioned, disputed, affirmed, developed, formalized, contemplated and even taught..." (1983:76)

In the paragraphs that follow, I show how current political thinking concerning the teaching of reading rests upon 'common sense' notions of literacy. I argue that neither common sense, nor literacy is as unproblematic as politicians would have us believe, and that acceptance of it as such is detrimental to the teaching of reading in schools.

This is an age of political pragmatism. Overt idealism, as a motivating force in the making of policy in this country is in decline. Both government and opposition jostle to control the middle ground: public opinion is courted, focus groups are cosseted, a Third Way is sought, a 'Common Sense Revolution'[1] solicited. Nowhere is this passion and regard for popular opinion more clear than in the area of education, and especially literacy.

When Tony Blair, the current Prime Minister, fought the 1997 election, he rallied voters with the triumphant promise that his government, if elected would have three priorities "education, education, education." With these words he sent a clear signal to the electorate. His message was not that there would be a sea change in political thinking in the matter of education, that the ideas and assumptions of the previous administration would be challenged and reworked, new solutions sought and new policies implemented. The message he sent was that the status quo would remain. Tony Blair was playing to the crowd, casting for votes. He knew that voters wanted "education" as they had come to understand it and it was this that he was pledging his putative government to provide.

Common sense, mediated to the population via politicians and the media, had long insisted that education in England and Wales was in crisis. Our children, compared to their contemporaries in other European and some oriental countries were failing. They were insufficiently numerate and hardly literate. Research (MacGilchrist 1997; Riley 1997) suggested that children who failed to learn to read in their first year at school were at a considerable disadvantage thereafter. MacGilchrist called for "A structured comprehensive reading programme in the reception year" and "Early intervention ... for those children who still find learning to read difficult at the end of the reception year." (MacGilchrist 1997) Common sense demanded that something should be done – for the sake of the children, the pride of the nation and the good of the economy.

[1] William Haig, Conservative Party Conference, Blackpool, October 1999

Something was in fact, already being done. A National Literacy Project (DfEE 1996) had been established by the outgoing government. It was being piloted in 520 schools in eighteen Local Education Authorities. This, based on a number of similar schemes in America and Australia[2], provided a structure for the teaching of reading and writing in primary schools and worked on the commonsense assumption that literacy could and should be taught by reducing it to its component parts. Texts were to be read as whole artefacts, but were also to be examined at sentence level and at word level. This meant the sentences were to be broken up into their constituent grammatical parts, and words into syllables, morphemes and phonemes. There was emphasis, especially in the Early Years on the direct teaching of phonics as a necessary skill in both reading and spelling. Common sense, which always favoured this sort of measurable and almost tangible method of teaching reading, was delighted.

Tony Blair's government was duly elected. One of its first measures was to turn the still experimental and unproven National Literacy Policy into the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998) and to impose it upon all state primary schools from the following September. The Strategy was not to be exactly compulsory, but schools that chose not to conform to it would need to be able to prove that they had in place a better alternative.

The Nation, or at least the media, which both reflects and shapes popular opinion, applauded. Here at last was a government that meant business. The strategy was in place, and soon, by 2002, we could expect 80% of all 11 year olds to be "reaching the standards expected for their age in English." (Blunkett May 17th 1997). That is they will be functionally literate.

But there were murmurs of dissent. In schools, in colleges, in universities, people who knew rather more about education and literacy than the press and the populus, began (or rather continued, for these voices had been heard but disregarded by policy makers for years) to raise objections. (See for example, Cox (ed) 1998, Dombey 1998b, Hilton 1998). The theoretical backgrounds that propelled these objections were distinct and various, but what all the critics had in common was the understanding that reading is

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[2] In the U.S. *Success for All* (Slavin 1997) In Australia, *First Steps:Reading Development Continuum (Education Department of Western Australia 1994)*

complicated: that there is more to it that is obviously apparent to the media, to politicians, to focus groups and to public opinion. Common sense is not enough.

In this chapter, I gather together and explore under three headings a number of the ideas and theories that belie the myth of common sense and complicate reading. I establish reading instead, as a set of complex, cognitive, personal and interpersonal practices. In the first section, 'Literacy: a socially constructed phenomenon' I depose the concept of literacy from the abstract and therefore neutral pedestal that the National Literacy Strategy assumes for it, and place it firmly in society – where it used by real people to real ends. In the second section, 'making reading mean', I discuss various ways in which readers, children and adults, go about making meaning from text, and concentrate especially on the ideas of literary theorists. I show how, in the thinking of reading response theorists and post modernists, the notion of authority in text is challenged, and the role of the reader as an active participant in the making of individual meaning is fore fronted. In the section, 'Critical Literacy: the Liberating Word', I look briefly at the ideas of Paulo Freire and his followers, and bring together the ideas of the two previous sections to present an understanding of reading that is both personally and socially responsive and responsible. I end the chapter by bringing these ideas into the context of the classroom. I ask, what does it mean for a child in school to read critically and do schools encourage them to do so?

Literacy: a socially constructed phenomenon

A common sense understanding of literacy suggests first, that literacy is merely the ability to read and write, and second, that a number of observable benefits are the natural consequences of being literate. Foremost amongst these benefits is the access it affords for the literate person into education and therefore to economic advancement. This is the understanding on which the National Literacy Strategy is based.

It is not without precedent. The United Nations, for example, define a literate person thus:

> "A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for the effective functioning in his group or community"(UNESCO 1971)

This is *functional literacy*, a term 'intended to capture a sense of basic competence in reading and writing of a kind held to be sufficient for fostering efficient and informed workers' (Christie and Misson 1998:2) Allied to it is the idea that literacy brings prosperity. Being literate increases the individual's propensity for employment and therefore his ability to earn. High levels of literacy in a nation result in a successful economy. According to UNESCO (1970, 1973 in Gee 1996) a threshold of 40% literacy in the adult population of a nation guarantees economic development. Literacy has become a commodity; it can be measured.

Underlying all this is the idea that literacy is a civilising force, that it has a 'developmental perspective' that supports 'inevitability.' (Scribner and Cole, 1978):

> "It assumes that various components of literacy – say, an alphabetic script or an essayist text – are likely to have the same psychological consequences in all cultures irrespective of the contexts of use or of the social institutions in which literacy is embedded." (1978: 452)

What raised the Ancient Greeks out of the tribal barbarism that characterised much of the world in their time, and into classical civilisation with philosophy and democracy, was their ability to read and write. In all societies therefore, literacy comes to be seen as a neutral competence and necessarily a force for the good. Becoming literate achieves two ends: it opens to people the possibility of becoming civilised, and it enables them to think logically. Gee (1996) traces this idea through the work of various writers, (e.g. Goody 1977; Ong 1982) and shows the assumption that with literacy, unasked for and free of charge, comes access to higher thinking skills that would otherwise not be available. This, argues Goody and Watt (1963), is because literacy, especially writing, freezes language in the process of its production, and thus makes it abstract and open to analysis in a way that is not possible where there is only speech. Empirical studies, such as the reasoning tests conducted in Soviet Central Asia in the 1930s by Vygotsky and Luria with illiterate peasants (see Gee 1996) appeared to support this.

Where this view of literacy prevails, literacy itself can be seen as a product. Individuals can 'have' it, and when they do, they are changed. They can think differently and they can do more. Literacy is a commodity. It can be shipped into a community where it is

lacking like food aid, and just as the United Nations is concerned that everybody is adequately fed, so it is concerned that everyone has adequate access to literacy. Literacy is for the general good. It becomes a human right – an entirely abstract notion.

Street (1984) uses the term 'autonomous' to describe this neutral and abstract view of literacy, and finds it limiting. He suggests that literacy is never a simple commodity, because it is 'ideological' – it reflects and reproduces the needs and values of those who construct and propagate it. There are a number of very good reasons to support his position.

First, there is the work of Clanchy (1993). In his study of the literary changes and practices of early medieval England, he makes it clear that the force that resulted in a proliferation of written records in England between 1066 and 1307 was not literacy itself, but the needs of society. People perceived a need to record legal agreements they were making, and so they adapted the literacy they had already to serve their purposes. Society reconstructed literacy, put it to new uses, and so enabled literacy, eventually, to change the way society was perceived itself.

A similar cognitive move is recorded by Olson (1994) in his account of the changes in Biblical textual authority brought about by the printing press. For the first time, he argues, readers were presented with:

> "....a fixed and objective 'text' with a putative literal meaning – a meaning that came to be seen as determinable by systematic, scholarly methods – against which more imaginative and deviant interpretations could be recognised and excluded. (1994:58)

So opened the gate to Reformation and eventually to Rationalism. But it was not literacy itself that caused this change. New ideas were made possible because literacy - that existed already - was being put to new uses. It was the realisation that literacy could be used differently that changed the way it was used and consequently, changed the way people thought.

Further challenges to the autonomous nature of literacy come from those who identify not one literacy, but several, each existing alongside the other and serving different

purposes. Scribner and Cole (1978) find this in their work with the Vai people in Liberia. There, where a western, school based style of literacy co-existed with both a traditional Vai form of writing and religiously based Arabic literacy, and where members of the community had access to some, but not necessarily all systems, Scribner and Cole discovered that it was not literacy *per se* that made the difference in the way people thought. Those literates who could function perfectly well with Vai and Arabic script failed to show the same improvements in logic that were apparent in those who had been to school. What Scribner and Cole concluded was that it was western schooling that taught them to think in the way the logic tasks required, and the literacy they learned at school was part of that thinking. Vai and Arabic literacy served other purposes. It was not being able to read and write that made the difference in the way people responded: it was what they *used that reading and writing for.*

Recognition that several literacies exist, each clearly ideological and particular to the society that supports them, is not confined to research of the historic and exotic. A number of studies (Heath 1983; Taylor 1983; Minns 1990) have explored how children come to be literate in Britain and America, and demonstrate that there is no single fixed literacy to unite them. Different communities use literacy in different ways and to different ends.

Minns (1990) illustrates this clearly with her case studies of five children starting school in Britain. The children, who had different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all attended the same school, and brought with them the attitudes and subjectivities towards literacy that they had learned at home. This affected their work in the classroom, and most tellingly, the way their parents interpreted the school's request that they read with their children at home. Minns shows that texts are afforded different statuses in the different homes; the amount of time and the amount of space given over to literacy varies, as do the activities associated with that reading.

Most influential is Heath's (1983) detailed account of the ways two communities in the southern United States use words. She shows that language and literacy practices can differ radically in communities that are both geographically and economically close. Roadville and Trackton each had distinctive 'ways with words' and neither community found their particular literacies reflected in the mainstream culture that was assumed and propagated by school. A consequence of this was that children from Roadville and

Trackton failed to do well at school, and so were denied the social and economic benefits that come with schooled literacy. Heath did not find a single powerful and autonomous literacy; she found examples of literacy practice constructed by society. Some of these practices carried more power than others.

These writers show two things. The first is that literacy is not fixed; it changes. It is a set, or rather, a number of sets, of shifting, malleable practices, that respond to and reflect the needs of particular times and particular societies. The second is that literacy is not so much about the ability of an individual person, but is a function of society. Literacy is, as Cook-Gumperz (1986) explains, a 'socially constructed phenomenon.' It is transmitted socially and involves a '...selection- reproduction cycle [that] is not automatic but arises as a function of a series of activities and decisions which involve evaluation and judgements...' (1983:3) Literacy always reflects the values of the society that constructs it.

Cook-Gumperz illustrates this point with a survey of the history of literacy and mass schooling from the mid nineteenth century. She shows that what counted as literacy changed as society changed, and that those who controlled the schools also controlled the nature and extent of the literacy made available to the people. A literacy evolved that ensured a compliant workforce. Hilton (1996) makes a similar point. She describes how the patriotic and heroic literature for boys in the early years of the twentieth century prepared them to be canon fodder in the trenches. Here, most clearly, can we see literacy as ideological (Street 1984).

Street's point is that literacy is always ideological. Even where it looks most benign and natural, as for example, in the white, middleclass, American families that Taylor (1983) describes, and in Cochran-Smith's (1984) gentle nursery classroom, ideology is at work. The values of the family, the school, the society are continually replicated and reinvented by the literacy that ensues.

So, the common sense idea of literacy that informs the National Literacy Strategy begins to falter. Literacy is more complicated than a set of basic skills to be individually acquired, and to claim that it is so is to take what is simply another ideological position. (Street 1984) The consequences of this particular understanding in relation to the

National Literacy Strategy will be explored further in the third section of this chapter, 'Critical Literacy: the Liberating Word.' First, I shall turn to look at reading.

Making Reading Mean

So far in this chapter, I have used the words 'literacy' and 'reading' almost as if they were synonymous. Because being able to read in the ways determined by a society is an important aspect of what literacy is, this fusion of language was appropriate. But literacy incorporates writing practices that are not part of the remit of this research; so now I narrow my focus and concentrate on reading itself.

Common sense would have it that reading is simply a matter of taking meaning from the text. All the reader has to do is to turn the marks on the page into the sounds they represent. The sounds will form words, the words language, and with language, automatically, will come understanding. This, baldly, is the position of those who take a strictly 'bottom-up' (this term, together with its antithesis 'top down,' was first coined in relation to reading by Stevens and Rumelhart 1975) view of reading and the teaching of reading, and it is a large part of the thinking that informs the early stages of the National Literacy Strategy.

There are serious problems with this. The first is that even advocates of the 'bottom-up' approach admit that there is more to reading than decoding (for example, Adams, 1990; Bielby, 1994), the second is that it ignores a body of evidence that shows that many children do not learn to read in this way (see, for example, Bussis, Chittenden *et al.* 1985; Barrs and Thomas, 1991), and the third, that it assumes a text that contains within it meanings that are stable and accessible to any reader and at any time. Much literary criticism of recent years has disputed this (Iser, 1980, Fish, 1980, Eco, 1990). To put it simply, making texts mean is far more complicated.

There is more to reading than decoding.

That there is more to reading than translating marks on the page into speech is admitted even by Adams (1990) in what Harrison (1998) calls her 'landmark review of research into beginning reading'. Although it is her intention to promote a phonics based, 'bottom-

up' understanding of the process of learning to read, she nonetheless recognises the importance of the many hours that a 'mainstream', middleclass parent will spend reading with a pre-school child. She estimates that by the age of six, her own son had spent more than 1000 hours being read to, and acknowledges that other children might well experience twice this attention. Adams does not denigrate the importance of this time. She recognises that: "The single most important activity for building the knowledge and skills eventually required for reading appears to be reading aloud to children." (1990: 46) She sees this as a time for enjoyment, where parents pass on their love of books to their children, a time for talk, where parents can encourage children to discuss what they read and a time for teaching: parents can: "...pose progressively more challenging questions during storybook reading, [so that] their children show strikingly better verbal expressions and vocabulary ..."(1990:46)

Two points especially worthy of notice arise from this. The first is the presentation of an active parent and a passive child. Parents here show, encourage, question, teach; the child, we can only presume, absorbs. There is no suggestion of the child as an active participant in the making of meaning, still less of that child as a leader in the enterprise, though researchers who observe young children reading show this is often the case. (For example, Martin and Leather 1994; Watson 1993; Bussis, Chittenden *et al* 1985). A consequence of this disregard of agency in children is that Adams can ignore their particular learning styles (Bussis, Chittenden *et al* 1985). All children can be treated as one. Secondly, though she considers what children can be taught *around* the reading task, (i.e. pleasure, vocabulary, discursive skills) Adams does not specifically identify what it is that texts teach children about reading itself (Meek 1988).

Harrison (1992) is more specific here. When he writes about the learning that must be secure before a child can learn to read, he stresses the importance of 'knowing how stories work'. He explains this as a grasp of story grammar, that is, an understanding of how stories fit together, and the sort of things that might happen in them. But knowledge of how stories work is more than this. It is also the ability to take up the invitation of *subjunctivity* (Bruner 1986), to enter into the play, the *what-if-ness,* of a story. Knowledge of how stories work can only be learned from hearing narrative itself. Gregory (1992) shows what happens when that subjunctivity is lacking, and Barrs (1992) and Fox (1993) illustrate it working well. Fox tells how her son took the language of the stories he knew and incorporated it into his own imaginative storytelling and Barrs

writes of how children are helped in their own reading when they can 'hear the tune on the page'. What hearing stories teaches children to do is to take on the words and transform them into something that is playful and meaningful. This is the kind of lesson, presumably, that Adams' son gained from his many hours of story reading. It is more than knowing that books can afford the reader pleasure: it is the key to unlocking that pleasure.

Children learn to read in different ways

The work of Bussis *et al.* (1985), and of Barrs and Thomas (1991) who follow their thinking and put their research into professional practice, is important because it shows clearly that there is no single path that leads all children towards becoming readers. Bussis *et al* consider all reading to be 'an adaptive interaction between the reader and the text.' (1985:114) Readers draw selectively on the text and on what they know to make meaning, and that meaning builds in response to both. Their comprehensive observations of children learning to read identify that individual children go about this in quite different ways. They have particular learning and reading styles. While some do indeed, begin with 'small shapes' (Barrs and Thomas 1991) and like to recognise every single word before they can move on to the next, others are hindered by this approach. These children work with the whole shape of the story. They take on the language and the ideas of a text and gradually move from broad retelling to an accurate reading. Their first aim is to recreate meaning, to capture the significance of the text.

Bussis *et al* present Carrie, an engaging 5 year old in the first grade of an American School. Carrie thrives on story and drama and is determined to learn to read. She takes every opportunity that presents itself to enable her to do this, and is especially good at accosting adults who come into her classroom and getting them to read with her. She reads books again and again, gradually matching the stories and the language she knows to the words on the page. She works hard at it. She puts everything she knows *about* story into the task, and extracts everything she wants *from* it. Her learning to read is the result of an effortful coming together of experience and personality in the pursuit of meaning. She does not come to text as a neutral agent. She, and children like her, put themselves into their reading and the reading they achieve reflects the children themselves as much as it does the text.

The example of a reader like Carrie 'writes large' what it is that all successful readers do when they come to a text, that is, they make from it a meaning that is their own. (Rosenblatt 1978) That meaning is particular. In as much as Carrie matches the story she knows to the words on the page, so too does she match the words on the page to the story in her head. All readers do this, though for experienced readers it happens too quickly and smoothly to tell. This process is not nearly so symmetrical as the grammar of the earlier sentence suggests. Carrie is showing us that reading is more complicated yet. It a is not just that there is more to it than decoding, or that readers learn to do it in multiplicity of ways. There is a more fundamental problem still. The problem is this: if like Carrie, we all make our own particular meaning from text, then meaning in text cannot be stable. Text is the slipperiest constant of them all.

The slippery text: reader response theory and postmodernism.

David Rumelhart, the psychologist who contributed much to our understanding of how readers turn the marks on the page into words, begins the article that introduces his Interactive Model of Reading with the following words:

> "Reading is the process of understanding written language. It begins with a flutter of patterns on the retina and ends (when successful) with a definite idea about the author's intended message." (in Dornic 1977:573)

However, for those thinkers whose interest is in the teaching and understanding of literature, identifying quite what any author's intended message might be, and considering whether or not that matters, is precisely where the difficulty of reading begins.

As Freund (1987) explains, a person wanting to understand any work of art has a number of choices before him. He can focus on the work of art itself, on the creator of that work, on the environment in which the work was produced or is situated, or on himself, the receiver, and on how he responds to the work. Text is a made thing, and the choices for interpretation are exactly the same for it as for any other artefact. A reader who wants to understand a text, to find meaning in it, can look to the text itself, to the

author, to the context, or to himself. The choices are like poles in a continuum. At different times in the history of literary criticism, one pole or other has been favoured over the rest.

For the middle years of the twentieth century, the ideas on textual interpretation of the New Critics held sway. In what appeared to be a new scientific age, they wanted to raise the status of literature by making the study of it seem as positivist and objective as science. They maintained, therefore, that the locus of meaning was in the text itself, and only in the text. The text stood alone. It was separate from the writer who produced it and from the reader who read it. It was entire and sufficient and had to be seen on its own terms. Readers who submitted themselves to the discipline of the text would uncover its meaning. Those readers who responded emotionally to its affect were missing the point. Wimsatt and Beardsley (1949, quoted in Tomkins 1980) wrote of the confusion that necessarily ensues between a poem and its results when affect is taken into account and of the inevitable decline into relativism that follows.

Wimsatt, Beardsley and the other New Critics set up the literary text as an objective thing. The effect of this was that text was placed upon a pedestal and the reader demoted; for if a text contains in the words on the page all that is necessary to interpret it, then the reader needs a special training, determined by text, if he is to learn to unlock that meaning. The reader is not sufficient without that training. Literary texts become special. They form a canon. They 'contain treasures of wisdom and truth that justify the processes of canonisation and exegesis' (Scholes 1985:12). Meaning within them becomes fixed. It is *there,* contained in the words on the page, to be excavated by readers. It cannot be negotiated.

This position is important to the argument of this chapter for two reasons. Firstly, it is the theoretical position identified by Traves (1994b) and by Harrison and Salinger (1998) that underlies the work of many English teachers and of much government legislation concerning the teaching of reading (DfE 1995: DfEE 1998. See Marshall 1998 for a discussion of this.) Its very pervasiveness, in these diluted forms, makes it feel like common sense. Secondly, it is important because it is the position against which the reader-response critics reacted.

Opponents of the New Critics challenged the emphasis on objectivity and sufficiency in texts. Eco (1990) demonstrates how even a simple note about a basket of figs is interpreted differently by readers in different circumstances, especially if the basket and the figs are no longer there to help them. Fish (1980) looked at text ambiguities in Milton's sonnets. When careful consideration of a literary text, he asks, supports more than one interpretation, how can we say there is one, right meaning? Interpretation must depend on something other than text alone.

Other critics simply never accepted Wimsatt and Beardsley's *Affective Fallacy* (1949). They continued to maintain that the affective response of the reader to a text mattered. From the 1930s Rosenblatt (1978) began exploring the different ways that readers made sense of text. She gave adult readers identical texts and encouraged them to make plain the processes by which they came to understand it. Just as Bussis *et al* (1985) discovered with their beginning readers, Rosenblatt found that readers approached text in a variety of ways that were particular to their own needs and experience. Readers picked out the ideas and images from the text that were personally significant and built meaning around them. They revised, adapted and refined their understanding as they re-read, and the results they obtained, the 'final readings,' were a compromise of individual expectation and textual authority. Rosenblatt wrote of the 'transaction' that takes place in reading between the reader and the text, and stressed the uniqueness of every reading event:

> "The reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of some particular reader." (Rosenblatt 1994)

The response theorists who followed Rosenblatt took these ideas further. They maintained that not only is the reader just as important as the text, but that the text can not mean anything at all if there is no-one there to read it. In the broadest possible terms these theorists claim that meaning resides not in the text that is read, but in space where the mind of the reader meets that text (Iser 1980). A text might suggest ideas and images, but it is the reader who makes those ideas and images mean.

Iser's idea (1980, 1989) is that the reader makes meaning from the unwritten 'indeterminacies' in literary texts. These are the gaps in the author's prose that give the

reader's imagination space to build. The reader's imagination animates the outline of the text and so shapes the way it is understood. There is a continual, active interweaving of selection, reflection and anticipation on the part of the reader and from this process a 'gestalt' is achieved. Iser writes:

> "This 'gestalt' must inevitably be colored by our own characteristic selection process. For it is not given by the text itself; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook. The 'gestalt' is not the true meaning of the text; at best it is a configuration of meaning" (1980: 58 - 59)

According to Iser, reading is rather like looking at the stars in the night sky. One person will see a plough, another a bear. In the same way, the 'stars' in a literary text are fixed; it is the lines that join them that are variable. There are no right answers. All meanings, so long as they are built upon the details of the text, are valid. In this way, the static text of the new critics is entirely dissolved by the response theorists. In its place is a malleable, shifting entity, that is fashioned by the mind of the reader.

The balance then has shifted. The source of meaning no longer resides in the text, but in the reader who collaborates with it. And if meaning belongs to the reader rather than to the text, then there is nothing to stop any text meaning any thing. Fish considers this problem. He writes:

> "The fear is of interpretive anarchy, but it would only be realised if interpretation (text making) were completely random." (1980, in Tompkins 1980: 182)

His answer is that interpretation is not random, but that writers write texts and readers rewrite them as they read, as members of *Interpretive Communities*. These communities are intellectual and cultural constructs, rather than physical realities and they consist of those who share interpretive strategies for making texts mean. Members look for the same properties in text and assign the same intentions. As they read therefore, it is these strategies that determine the shape the text takes and the meaning the readers perceive.

In this way, Fish accounts for the differences in interpretation that are apparent when readers encounter the various textual cruxes in Milton's sonnets. It is not that any one set of readers is right or wrong, but that membership of the interpretive communities to which those readers belong favours one reading above another:

> "The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the 'true text', but the truth will be that that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being." (1980:182)

There are problems with this. Scholes (1985) insists that Fish's Interpretive Communities are inflexible, too vast and too fixed to account for every kind of disagreement that readers might find. Certainly, it is difficult, in the context of Milton's sonnets to see readers who prefer one reading as belonging to an Interpretive Community distinct from those who prefer another: they must necessarily have much in common to make sense of Milton's literary and Biblical allusions alone. Disagreement over the proper stress to be afforded a single word in a particular sonnet, and the differences of interpretation that ensue from that disagreement, hardly seem to indicate a significant perceptual divide. Despite this, Fish's concept of Interpretive Communities is an interesting one, and I shall return to it. (Chapter Eight: 238)

But perhaps where literary theory deviates most from common sense, and where the concept of text is most slippery, is in the work of the postmodernists or deconstructionalists. They claim, (Derrida, 1977, most famously) that there is nothing outside text, and nothing *apart* from text. This is not a return to the New Critics (the modernists) position, rather it is a statement about language. The idea is that all language is arbitrary: there is nothing (usually) about the sound of a word to connect it to the thing or idea that it signifies. The word is simply a sign, and only other signs, more words can explain it: "...crudely, every word is defined by another word in an endless chain." (Scholes 1985) Texts are made of language. They are therefore indeterminable in any way, except by language itself. Where there are no referents there can be no independent meaning, only perception.

Scholes (1985), Eco (1990) and Cunningham (1994) all question this position. They say that there must be a final referent for language. "Things are *there*, ...Language exists *in order* for us to talk about such things," writes Scholes (1985: 97) Eco relates the story of

the basket of figs to show that the reader of the note, wherever and whenever he is, will eventually ask the question 'Where are those figs?' And Cunningham insists that reading is always an amalgam of 'word-stuff and world-stuff':

> "...this amalgamation of word and world is the condition not just of Virginia Wolf's writing but of all writing." (1994: 10)

Cunningham, however, finds much that is helpful in the punning word games and traces of meaning that the postmodernists pursue. He writes of the 'para-logic' of texts, the paradox, the parasitical, referential relationship of one text to another. As he explores postmodernist criticism, and follows the chains of reference that the postmodernists themselves set up, he reveals a great paradox: postmodernism, despite its insistence on self-reflexivity alone, is itself parasitic upon the language and structures of theology, where, indeed, modernism began. Reading the word cannot be independent of reading the Word. It is the Logos, the ground of all being, and also paradoxically, the Word made Flesh, the Word without a word, the baby of Lancelot Andrewes' Christmas day sermon of 1618 (in Story ed. 1967.) This is word-stuff and world-stuff and transcendent 'other'-stuff, all mixed up; it explains everything and it explains nothing. It is, claims Cunningham, the central paradox of reading.

But for the moment, let us stay with the world. Here is Cunningham introducing his (post) postmodernist reading of Jane Eyre:

> "You can't, to put it bluntly, discuss the emblematic force, the deep linguistic logics of parasites and hosts, with out also pondering some of the actual social, historical, biological relations of those real parasites and hosts who share each others' tables, salt, bodies, life. The para-logics of language, text, hermeneutics are inseparable from the para-logics of dependency and ownership, slavery and mastery, colonies and colonised, subordination and authority." (1994: 341)

Cunningham might well have added 'oppression and the oppressed' to his litany of parallelisms. Even without doing so, he leads us very neatly into the language of Paulo Freire and Critical Literacy, where the relationships of literacy and power and education are all explored.

Critical Literacy: The Liberating Word

I begin this section of the chapter with a quotation dear to the hearts, not so much of Paulo Freire and his followers, but of his contemporary and fellow Latin American thinkers, the Liberation theologians (Boff and Boff 1997). Here is *their* text:

> He hath put down the mighty from their seat
> And hath exalted the humble and meek (Luke 1: 52)

I throw in this verse to sit along side (*para-bullein*) the thinking of Freire, because it encapsulates the similarities of the two distinct revolutionary positions. Both Freire and the theologians want to exalt the humble and meek, Freire through the 'problem-posing education' (Freire 1972) of his literacy programmes, the theologians through the teaching of the Gospels. Both look to a better future for the poor and oppressed, and hope to improve it through *praxis*: that is, reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Freire 1972:28). There is in Freire a hopefulness, even, that almost transcends the worldly in the "pursuit of fuller humanity" (1972:24), a consequence of liberating education.

In Cunningham's terms, there is a parasitical relationship here – the theological and pedagogical ideas feed upon each other. What is different about them is the chains of referents they set up, and the meanings they make possible. The question, for Freire concerning that most revolutionary of texts quoted above, then, would hardly occur to the theologians. It is, of course, to whom does the *He* refer? After the postmodernist games we have been playing, there is only one theological, Johannine answer: *He* is the Word: the *Logos,* the Word in the world.

For Freire, of course, it is not the Word, that liberates, but the word. *Naming* is the first stage of his literacy programme. Words rename the political world in which the peasant lives. The peasant learns to read and to write them. Through a process of *conscientization* (Freire 1972), he (Freire's peasant is always male) is taught to be aware of himself as a social and political being, and of the written word as a product of a political society. The literacy he learns is not autonomous (Street 1984). Freire entirely rejects the idea of 'banking education' (1972) where instrumental and decontextalised literacy skills are deposited into the heads of learners. Instead, literacy is situated in the

political and social world in which the learner lives. There is dialogue, reflection and then action. Freire's literacy teaching is designed to be transformatory and emancipatory. In it lies the possibility of liberation.

For Freire, the interrelationship between power and literacy is absolute. The process of *conscientization* through reflection unlocks the power and oppression that traditionally transmitted literacy wields over the reader, and empowers him to envision an alternative understanding of society. This is the purpose of 'reading the word and the world.' (Freire and Macedo, 1987):

> "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word continually implies reading the world...In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious practical work." (Freire and Macedo 1987: 35)

Freire, then, bridges the two dominant themes of this chapter so far. He brings together both social understandings of what literacy is (Street 1984; Cook-Gumperz 1986) and theoretical ideas of what readers must do. He reinforces Cunningham's (1994) understanding that reading involves the amalgamation and deconstruction of 'word stuff' and 'world stuff', and he echoes the response theorists' claims, (Iser, 1980; Rosenblatt 1978) that reading is an active process of transaction between the text and the reader. Readers *rewrite* the text as they join the dots. They *transform* it. For both Freire and the response theorists, authority, the power to make mean, rests with the reader, not with the text.

Those who follow Freire in advocating critical literacy (Giroux 1988; Gee, 1996, 1997; Lankshear 1997; Luke and Walton, 1994; Wallace 1992; Hall 1998) apply his ideas to social and educational contexts that are far removed from Freire's original peasant literacy programmes. They take on his two main ideas: that *banking education* is corrupt, and that *conscientization* is the key to change. They work on the understanding that text is socially constructed, and that readers are empowered when they are encouraged to reflect upon the *made-ness* of text and its purposes, rather than be subject to its supposed innate and neutral authority.

It is this awareness of and reflection upon the circumstances in which texts are produced that makes possible Gee's reading of the (typical) warning on an aspirin bottle (1996: 43–44). Here, what looks at first like an informative and even kindly text, is exposed as the cynical disclaimer of a pharmaceutical company's lawyer. Neither the text itself nor Gee's reading of it is neutral. Both are ideological constructs. The one (if we accept Gee's reading) presupposes a litigious society of individuals who take aspirin, and who are likely to sue if they are harmed by it, the other a manipulative corporate machine, whose aim is to make money. These are understandings of the society in which Gee lives as much as they are of text.

Critical literacy is therefore a means of cultural as well as textual analysis. Central to its process is the 'denaturalisation of what is taken for granted' (Hall 1998). Those who are critically literate take neither text nor society at face value. Wallace (1992) demonstrates this in her work with adult learners of English as a second language. Irritated by the bland, functional quality of so many texts for L2 learners, she challenged the assumptions they made about the assimilation of literacy, the passivity and deference of readers and the future social and occupational roles of her students.

Her teaching involved students in a reflective process that developed awareness of what reading is and a consideration of who reads what and why. This is a meta-cognitive process. It is akin to *conscientization*: it makes strange what has previously been taken for granted. It empowered her readers because it enabled them to see how mainstream literacy practices positioned them in this society, and gave them the confidence to challenge it.

Gee and Wallace both show how critical enquiry into their *made-ness* exposes the ideological and political provenance of even the most innocent of texts. If, with this in mind we return to the seemingly commonsensical and neutral nature of National Literacy Strategy, we can see it clearly as a political construct, imposed from above for political purposes. It assumes an autonomous understanding of literacy that it does not itself bear out. It supposes a model of education that is utilitarian, about the transmission of skills which is:

> "a functional perspective tied to narrowly conceived economic interests [and] a logic designed to initiate the poor, the underprivileged, and minorities into the ideology of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition." (Giroux 1988:61)

and it dehumanises children by assuming that their learning needs are identical. This in Freirian terms is banking education: the education of the oppressed.

Any challenge to the assumptions upon which the National Literacy Strategy is based necessarily involves the challenger in the process of critical literacy. The question that I ask here, is this: How far along the road towards critical literacy are we to allow the children upon whom the Strategy is imposed to travel? Should they be the passive recipients of banking education? Can they, instead, through *conscientization,* through critical reflection of the texts they read and the culture which forms and receives those texts, experience the liberating power of the word?

What then is Critical Reading?

The broad question that concerns this research then, is this: can we achieve critical literacy in schools? What does it mean for children to be critically literate? Can they read critically? Can we, do we help them learn to 'read the word and the world'? Before it is possible to begin to answer any of these questions, it is first necessary to look at the term 'critical reading' in more detail, and especially in the context of school.

There is little opposition anywhere, to the idea that children need to learn to read critically. Calls for 'critical' reading come from writers as diverse as Hoggart (1997, 1998), Traves (1994) Ofsted (Hertrich 1987) and the National Literacy Strategy itself, and the term is used fairly commonly by a number of others, (for example, Olson 1994; Wray and Lewis 1997; Meek 1997). The difficulty is that they mean rather different things by it.

For Hoggart former chairman of the Book Trust, critical reading is synonymous with what he calls 'creative reading'.

> "That means recognising that some books are better than others, as are some minds and imaginations..." (1997)

His is an elitist vision. In it all readers reject the dross and read instead the best literature. They are therefore open to the civilising and moral lessons that *stand available* for the taking (Hoggart 1998). Those who take on those lessons will find their lives and their thinking enhanced. Creativity here is not so much a function of the reader as the response theorists maintain (Iser 1980, Eco 1990), but of the text. The best texts create the conditions in which the reader can be enriched.

Hertrich (OfSTED 1997) seems to mean something similar when he reports that in some schools pupils in Key Stage 2 'read uncritically a narrow range of texts'. He tells us too, that in 'good' schools children:

> "can empathise with characters and show critical appreciation of stories, poems and plays"

But he differs from Hoggart in that he takes the idea no further. He offers no indication as to why critical appreciation is so important; it is simply a skill. The National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998:3) follows him. When it insists, that a literate eleven year old should through, reading be able 'to develop ...critical awareness' it does not say why. 'Critical awareness' it seems, is no more than an accomplishment; the gilding in the literate person's crown.

The fixed text

Between them Hoggart and the National Literacy Strategy represent the two major theoretical positions that have typified the teaching of English in recent decades. On the one hand, are those teachers with a functional approach to reading. They are concerned to equip their pupils with skills so that they might best survive in a literate world. On the other, are those teachers who want children to be able to read so that they might enjoy literature and reap its benefits. These positions were first clearly identified by Bullock (1975), and recent work (Cairney 1995; Marshall 1998; Goodwyn and Findlay 1999) suggests they are still current. In both cases the idea of critical reading is pertinent.

For those for whom literature is important, critical reading is to do with literary criticism. Generally, these teachers represent an approach to literature that is similar to Hoggart's: literature is a civilising force. It is a means to personal growth. (Goodwyn and Findlay 1999) In order to benefit from literature, pupils must learn the codes and practices and develop the sensibilities, to enable them to 'do' criticism, to approach the all-sufficient text. This is a position similar to that of the New Critics discussed above. It reflects a 'traditional emphases on literary appreciation and classical genres.' (Luke and Walton 1994) and assumes that a reader needs to learn to discern 'literary quality' in texts and to define that quality in the accepted terms of literary criticism. When Chambers (1985) justifies the responses of the children in his *booktalk* project in terms of Auden's list (1963) of what a critic should do, he is acknowledging the power these values continue to wield.

In the skills model, critical reading has a less literary flavour. The emphasis instead is on reading and evaluating non-fiction texts. An example of this can be seen in Mallet:

> "Discussion and demonstration of how to use retrieval devices can helpfully be built into everyday work. The ability to evaluate this aspect of an information book is part of becoming a critical reader." (1992:125)

Critical reading here seems to be a shorthand term for a number of 'higher order reading skills'. Sheeran and Barnes (1991) produce a list of these skills, and include within it such competences as the ability to 'distinguish fact from opinion', 'detect bias', 'recognise logical inconsistencies' and 'determine the strength of an argument.

Both these cases make two assumptions about critical reading. The first is that they take critical reading to be an advanced reading skill. It can only be taught when lower order skills, such as decoding and recall are firmly established. Attitudes to learning to read in the lower reaches of the primary school (Marshall 1998) reflect this and are supported by the National Literacy Strategy. Here an ever-increasing armoury of transferable skills is presented to the reader, beginning with phonemes and ending with development of critical awareness. All are designed to help the reader in her struggle to scale the fortress text.

The second assumption is that meaning in the text is fixed. The words on the page are the ultimate authority. The power to mean lies entirely within them. The reader comes before the text as a supplicant, in order to receive meaning. The more skilled the reader is, the more able to leave behind prejudice and predisposition, the more likely she is to discover the meaning that is there. The text remains fixed and static. The reader must change, become skilled in order to read it.

As I have already suggested in this chapter, it is possible to understand text differently.

The pliant text

Those writers who accept a postmodern understanding of text, necessarily stress the creative engagement of readers in the making of meaning from text. They see text as a 'made thing' that needs to be deconstructed and reassembled by the reader. For them the term 'critical reading' has a wider application. It still enables the reader to detect bias:

> "Critical reading soon detects the writer's underlying assumptions about the nature of science, about the humanity or exclusiveness of mathematics or what counts as neutral in any context." (Meek 1996:38)

But it encourages him to do so in the context of the text's production:

> "The fact is that all texts are located in a particular set of social practices and understandings. They involve choices. Critical reading involves an explicit examination of these choices and hence the particular social understandings and values underlying texts." (Wray and Lewis 1997:104)

Literature is important too, not because it is of intrinsic value or because it aids personal growth, but because it can privilege the process of reading, make clearer to readers what they *do* as they read and how reading affects them:

> "To learn to read better than ever before, as they surely must, children need space and time to *think* about what they are reading and also about reading

> itself. This means that texts of worth, literature especially, must be moved to the centre, to become the core of the reading curriculum." (Meek 1998)

Children then, learn to be in control of their reading. They *take in* what they read, but decide for themselves, and on good evidence, how much of what they *take in* they *take on*. All this firmly places reading in the domain of critical literacy. It admits the active role of the reader in interpreting texts and assessing their effects. It positions the reader simultaneously as a participant and an onlooker:

> "Readers are required to divide themselves into two parts: one which reads within the world of the text and one which calls it into question." (Traves 1994:94)

Gee, writing in Lankshear (1997) calls the ability to affect this shift in perspective the 'juxtaposition of Discourses' and explains that it is by watching the way competing Discourses frame and reframe various elements that the reader perceives the power relationships with them. New possibilities of meaning are revealed. There is 'a new consciousness of what a text *could have meant* or *could mean* to a[nother] putative reader'. (Olson 1994:136)

Those who advocate critical literacy in schools (Kress, 1995, 1997; Christie and Misson, 1997; Luke and Walton 1994) argue that if we teach children a single 'fixed' literacy, as the 'skills model ' particularly attempts to do, then many children will never have the experience or flexibility to juxtapose Discourses in this way. Furthermore in a world where literacy is changing rapidly, where electronic mail and the internet are turning on their heads the traditional practices of literate communication, children need flexibility in reading especially. They need to be able to change, to adapt, to take on the challenges of whatever new literacies develop, and to conquer it. (Kress 1995) They need to be multiliterate. (New London Group 1996)

The challenge for teachers is how and when to include critical literacy in the curriculum.

Critical Reading in the Classroom

Where critical reading is seen as an 'add-on competence', a skill to be acquired when the basic structures of functional literacy are firmly in place, then the obvious place to look for it is in the secondary school. However, if literacy is seen as social practice (Cook-Gumperz 1986), rather than individual skill, then it is reasonable to expect to find critical reading behaviour among much younger children. Heath, (1983) clearly shows how naturally young children pick up the 'ways with words' that are current in their communities. If small children live and learn in environments where critical reading practices flourish, then they should exhibit those practices themselves. Hall supports this:

> 'To assume that critical literacy is too complex for the youngest learners is misguided' (1998:190)

Indeed there is plenty of evidence to suggest that many young children, especially those from bookish families, do interact with books in an active and questioning way that looks like critical reading. (See, for example, Watson 1993; Martin and Leather 1994; Fox 1993). The question is whether these practices 'count 'as critical reading and whether they continue into the primary school. There is some evidence that they can. Towlson (1995) writes of the bright six-year olds in her class creating meaning from Anthony Browne's book *Changes,* and Hall (1998) describes an Australian infant teacher encouraging her class to problematise texts.

It seems likely though, that these examples are comparatively rare. Watson notices how the perceptive young reader, Ann, lost the sharp edge of enquiry into the books she read with him when she began to be able to manage the words for herself, and Thacker (1996), admittedly on the evidence of a very small sample, writes:

> "In general, these studies showed that the younger children were more likely to engage in fiction in an authorial and creative way than children who had spent time in school" (1996 :3)

Where schools create an environment where literacy and texts are fixed and monumental, as both appear in the National Literacy Strategy this is hardly surprising. The question is: how common is it?

This Research

In this research I reject a common sense understanding of reading and literacy. I rest this rejection on three basic principles. The first is that literacy is socially constructed, the second is that readers make texts mean, and the third, which follows from the first two is that critical literacy matters, and that the ability to read critically is a vital part of critical literacy.

From the literature discussed above, I conjecture a description of what critical reading ought to look like. People who read critically:

- are flexible in their approach to text
- recognise text as an artefact, a made thing, and know that they can exercise control in the matter of making it mean
- enter into the (often serious) play of reading. They enter into the *what-if*-ness of the story (Bruner's subjunctivity), but also ask, *what-if-not?*
- measure the word of the text against the world of their experience and therefore
- do not *take on* everything they *take in.*
- juxtapose discourses

The question that this research sets out to answer is this: Are children in primary schools able to do any of this? Do they read critically? And if not, are their schools helping them to do so?

The next chapter describes how I attempted to find out.

Chapter Two

Ethnography: Reading and Writing

"Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, suspicious emendations, tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventional graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour." (Geertz 1975: 10)

Introduction

In Chapter One, I argued that reading is complicated: like all elements of literacy, it is socially constructed and is in the process of being constructed still. I argued that the concept of text was tricky, that the meaning of a text has as much to do with the reader who reads it as it does with the words on the page, and that is not enough to understand text as a stable depository of meaning. I posited therefore, that reading is a fluid and changeable phenomenon and that critical reading in schools must embrace this complexity. Reading is not a fixed set of skills and it is shortsighted to regard it as such.

In this chapter I shall argue that any methodology employed to examine reading and readers, especially where those readers are engaged in the process of learning to be readers, must be equally fluid. A methodological framework is needed that has within it the flexibility to reflect the kaleidoscopic complexity of what reading is and of what readers do. It must not attempt to 'fix' the unfixable. I shall argue that ethnography provides a suitable framework and that the parallels between the reader making sense of text and the ethnographer making sense of data are pertinent to the understanding of both.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the decisions involved in choosing a research approach, and show why ethnography was selected. I move on to discuss the methods employed in this research and conclude with a brief discussion of the role of the ethnographer as reader and writer. The major function of this chapter, however, is to explain how I went about finding out how children read and what teachers do to help them.

Identifying the Research Approach

Research projects begin with a question. There is always something at the root of a piece of research that the researcher wants to know or wants to find out. I shall argue in this chapter that these questions are never neutral, that they are situated in particular cultural times and spaces and in the lives of the researchers who form them. For now, I shall simply tell the story of the history of the question that began this research.

As a teacher working towards an Advanced Diploma in English Language and Literature in Education, I became interested in critical literacy and the ideas that support it. I read Heath (1983), who showed me that ways with words were particular to societies, Bruner (1986) who explained how readers needed to learn to entertain the *possibility* of fictional worlds and Hilton (1996) who helped me connect these ideas to popular culture and the immediacy of my classroom. I became interested in the way the children in my reception class made meaning from the texts we read and watched together and noticed that their responses were often far more perceptive and acute than is generally expected from children of four and five. They seemed to be involved in a form of critical literacy.

I began this research with those children in mind. I wanted to know three things: did what they did in our classroom count as critical reading? Can children so young read critically? How does one recognise critical reading? These questions distilled further. They became: Do children read critically? What is critical reading? These were the *big questions* that were to propel this research. Having identified them, I needed to find a methodology that would enable me to find out.

The formation of the initial question is a suitable place to begin a discussion of methodology because very often it is the way that the questions are formed that directs the methodology selected. (Yin 1994:5-8) My questions, by their nature, directed me towards qualitative rather than quantitative research: it would be impossible to test and to count critical reading before I had found out what it was. It seemed too that the questions were symbiotically interrelated. I would begin to know what critical reading is when I had seen children read critically. I would know they were reading critically, because my understanding of critical reading would be developing. When boundaries begin to blur in this way it becomes clear that positivist

research is impossible. The sort of scientific paradigm that has traditionally been the recourse of educational researchers (Nisbet, 1980) would not be appropriate here.

There has been a move in recent years away from positivist research in education and especially from methodologies borrowed directly from the social sciences. Lomax (1994) and McNiff (1992) both persuasively make the case for an increase in the status of innovative qualitative research in education. Both see the fluidity it allows as a bonus in the ever-changing post-modern world of education, where flexibility and reflexivity of thought are more important than the establishment of static 'truths'. Lomax writes of the importance of 'working constructively with contradiction' (1994:5) and McNiff understands research as an 'evolutionary process in a dynamically creative lifestyle.' She writes:

> "There are no final answers ... – only provisional ones that are modified into new more interesting questions" (1992:5)

When the matter of research is a phenomenon as slippery as reading, and the obviously fluid development of children learning to be readers in particular contexts, then these observations seem particularly pertinent.

Chapter One has already dealt with some of the complexities of reading as a phenomenon. Because it is socially constructed, it is inappropriate to attempt to set it down as a set of universal skills, and even if this were achieved, those skills would be outmoded as soon as the task were done: socially constructed phenomena are constantly in a state of re-inventing themselves. Reading is not stable. Neither is text. Chapter One also showed how the understanding of text as a stable depository of meaning has been called into question by response theorists (Fish 1980, Iser 1980 and Rosenblatt 1978) and by post-modernists (Derrida, 1976; Cunningham 1994). It shows how these thinkers relocated the source of meaning from text into the minds of subjective readers or into the chains of reference that the words set up in the minds of those readers. Given this indeterminacy, this kaleidoscopic complexity, a methodology is required that has the potential to reflect that complex, fluid nature of reading and readers. A methodology that attempted to fix the unfixable would distort the representation of the matter studied.

The question, then, is which of a number of qualitative research paradigms would best suit this research? Again the initial research question provides a pointer. My

question: '*do children* read critically?' supposed an interest in doing and in children. It suggested that I did not want so much to study the phenomenon of critical reading as the people who do it. I wanted to know about children. Ethnomethodology (Benson and Hughes 1983) and phenomenography (Marton 1981) would not be appropriate. They would help me locate concepts and phenomena, but would have little to tell about the process of *doing* I wanted to explore. I needed a methodology that would involve me in the continuing process of being that a child who was learning to read experiences. Two approachs seemed to provide this continuity: Action Research and Ethnography. Again, the initial question decided the issue.

Action Research assumes a number of constants, (McNiff 1992:3-10) some of which seemed inappropriate. Most difficult for me was the notion of improvement. Action Researchers identify a problem, or a possibility for development and work to solve it. It is clear, therefore, that my question was more general than Action Research demands. It was 'Do children read critically?' not 'How can I help children learn to read more critically?' This latter question assumes a hypothesis that I did not share, that is, that it would be desirable for children to read more critically that they do now. I did not know whether they read critically or not. I wanted to find out. My question invited ethnography.

What is Ethnography?

Ethnography has its roots in social anthropology and in the Chicago School of sociology (Silverman 1993:33-34, Hammersley 1991:3ff). It is concerned therefore with the investigation of 'real-life' societies in order to understand how those societies work and what those societies do. Like anthropology, it routinely involves the researcher in immersion in the culture that is being studied for a period of time, so that the researcher might get to understand and interpret that culture both as a member of it, an 'insider', and as a stranger. It is descriptive and it is interpretive. The ethnographer's job is both to make *anthropologically strange* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) what seems obvious and familiar within that culture and to make familiar and accessible what appears strange. Ethnography attempts to render an account of "a people's culture [that] exposes their normalness with out reducing their particularity ...It renders them accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity." (Geertz: 1975:14)

Ethnography is based in the ordinariness of everyday life. This is the first of the five factors Hammersley (1991:2) identifies as being typical of ethnographic research. It takes place in the naturalistic setting of the culture that is being investigated, and the researcher comes to that setting as an outsider, and one who must learn how to *be* in that culture from within. The researcher therefore puts herself at first, in a position of powerlessness. She is a learner in that society, and can make no attempt to impose upon it her own ways of thinking or being, for these ways will be alien to the culture and will disrupt its naturalness. Thus the artificial stimulations of experiment and formal interview are avoided and participant observation (Woods 1986:33-36) and 'relatively informal conversation' (Hammersley 1991:2) preferred. This is Hammersley's second point. The idea is that where the researcher has no real power to manipulate any of the parameters (Geertz 1975: 22) she retains the possibility at least, of producing an account of that culture which reflects its complexity and does not simplify it to fit a pre-existing theoretical framework.

Thirdly, Hammersley identifies that in ethnography:

> "The approach to data collection is 'unstructured' in that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set at the beginning, nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say or do entirely pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic: simply that initial data are collected in a raw form, and on as wide a front as is feasible." (1991:2)

It is here that ethnography differs most markedly from case study research as described by Yin (1994). He is at pains to stress the importance of design in case study research (1994:18ff) and the role of theory in that design. He stresses that the design should indicate "what data are to be collected – as indicated by (a) the study's questions, (b) its propositions and (c) its units of analysis." (1994:26). Interrogating the design in this way, suggests Yin, will focus the researcher on theoretical matter to be researched and help identify relevant field contacts before the data collection begins and so avoid wasted time and false leads.

In ethnography the researcher avoids theoretical propositions at the outset of the research. She comes to the study as far as possible with an open mind and with no hypothesis to test. This is why data collection must be wide and inclusive. The idea is that theoretical propositions will emerge naturally and gradually as data is collected and analysed, through *grounded theory* (Glaser/Strauss 1967) and *progressive*

focusing (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983)[1]. In this way, a certain flexibility is afforded to the researcher that is not apparent in case study research. The ethnographer follows where the data leads, and pursues the turns and complexities of the society in focus and the phenomena constructed by that society. Thus, theory, when it emerges, is discovered through data rather than through researcher design or expectation.

Nevertheless, the study of a small number of 'cases' (rather than case study research) is a distinctive feature of ethnography, and this is Hammersley's fourth point.[2] The research reported here, which is an ethnography of school reading practices, is focused in three settings, that is, in three schools. Classes within those schools are the cases of the study.

Hammersley's fifth and final point concerns the analysis and writing of ethnography. He writes: "Analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations." (1991:2) Completed ethnographies very often, therefore, take on the form of narrative. Their relationship to story, and the ethnographer's role as reader and writer of story is an important part of this chapter.

The Ethnographer as Researcher

An assumption of much positivist research is that the researcher is a neutral observer. The idea is that the researcher looks in objectively at a phenomenon or situation from the outside. He (positivist research assumes a 'he') observes what *is*. He cannot, and should not affect that situation: to do so would seriously bias his findings.

For reasons that are perhaps pragmatic, ethnography has challenged these assumptions. Because of its roots in anthropology and the Chicago School, ethnography has always favoured participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), and it is clear that any researcher who actively participates in a society will, by that very action, change it. That the researcher is *there* will make a difference; for the researcher is an extra person and therefore a new factor at play in the interactions of

[1] These methods of analysis are discussed more fully on pp 55 ff of this chapter
[2] For a discussion of the purpose of cases in ethnography see pp 44 ff

that society. This effect is quite apart from what happens to a community that knows it is being researched. This knowledge makes members behave differently: they inevitably try to do and say what they want the researcher to believe.

Ethnographers have typically dealt with the matter of researcher influence and bias in two ways. The first has been to attempt to minimise its effects. The long term nature of most ethnographic studies is partly a consequence of this: the ethnographer hopes that the research population will become so used to her presence that they will forget to 'act up'. In extreme cases, attempts to minimise researcher influence have involved the researcher going 'undercover' (Cohen and Manion 1980:101), pretending to the community studied that he is merely a new member of that community, and admitting nothing of the research. The ethical implications of this approach are somewhat dubious. More often, ethnography attempts to minimise the effect of researcher bias by building checks into the research design. Hammersley and Atkinson's (1983) notion of making things *anthropologically strange* and Geertz's (1973) *thick description* are part of this process. Both encourage the researcher to step back from her assumptions about what is obvious and what can be taken for granted and to see a wider picture. Notions of *authenticity* and *validity*[3] provide further checks. Methods such as these do nothing to change the way a community reacts to the researcher's presence, but they do affect the way the ethnography is reported. They involve, in theory, the researcher in presenting a fairer account of the community than might otherwise have been the case.

The second way that ethnographers have attempted to deal with researcher influence is to embrace it. Most commonly, this involves the researcher in a continuous process of *reflexivity* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983), of acknowledging, exploring and problematising the inevitability of researcher influence, and working with rather than against, that inevitability.

> "Rather than engaging in futile attempts to eliminate the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them." (1983:17)

Robinson (1994) provides an extreme example of this in her study of elementary school classes in Mississippi. She maintains that her influence in those classrooms was empowering: the teachers' enthusiasm for the research empowered them. They

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[3] p below

innovated more and taught better: the children were empowered. The researcher caught their enthusiasm: she was empowered. Robinson reports this with an evangelical fervour that reveals as much about her own personality as it does the matter of her study. Two questions engage the reader. The first is: What is Robinson's study about: herself, ethnography or classroom interaction? The second: If her effect in the classrooms was so great, then can we learn anything from her work about those classrooms when she was not present? If the answer to this second question is 'no' then there are implications for ethnography. Does it attempt to describe and explain communities, or researchers?

Ethnography, it seems, attempts to 'have it both ways'. It wants at one and the same time to present a verisimilitude of objectivity and to celebrate the reflexivity and individuality of the researcher. My argument here is that this position is untenable. Ethnography, as it is usually presented, must do one or the other. Either it describes societies as fairly as possible, or it concerns itself with the researcher. The difficulty is that neither option is satisfactory. Researcher influence is inevitable, whatever checks are put in its way; celebrations of the individual researcher ultimately achieve little of use to anyone other than that researcher. Does this mean that ethnography is pointless?

I suggest not. I suggest that a solution lies in post-modernism: that what is needed is a radical shift away from understanding ethnography as a way of describing what *is,* towards an understanding of it *as a way of seeing* what is. Such a shift in perspective refocuses the role of the researcher. She is at once freed from the impossibility of achieving near objectivity and restrained from making grandiose claims about the nature of the matter under study or her understanding of it. She can claim only that the work is interpretation; it is not *truth*. Thus, subjectivity is acknowledged, but is no longer a drawback or a means to its own end. It is incumbent upon the researcher to account for her *way of seeing,* to show how and why it was achieved and, at the same time, to admit that her way of seeing is one way among many.

The Ethnographer as a Reader

"Doing ethnography is like trying to read," writes Geertz (1975:10).

As I went about my fieldwork and read the literature concerning reading, the parallels between what I did as a reader, what I came to believe about reading, and what I understood to be the task of the ethnographer, became increasingly clear. Readers and ethnographers alike are engaged in a process of making meaning, of turning the bewildering complexity of text or data into something that can be understood and interpreted.

I found parallels between the language of reading theory and the language of ethnography. As I read that the ethnographer's task was to render the familiar *anthropologically strange* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) and make the strange accessible, (Geertz 1975) I remembered Bruner:

> "Literature subjunctivises, makes strange, renders the obvious less so, the unknowable less so as well, matters of value more open to reason and intuition." (1986:159)

As I became convinced that reading was more than the accumulation of a set of identifiable sub-skills, I read Geertz:

> "From one point of view, that of the text book, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is .... " (1975:6)

Just as the reader response theorists (Iser 1980, Fish 1980 and Eco 1990 (Chapter One: 20ff) argue that meaning resides in the reader, not in the text, and that it is therefore the reader, and how the reader *thinks* about text, that matters, so Geertz turns his attention to the ethnographer. A particular 'kind of intellectual effort' defines ethnography for him: not the techniques or the society in focus, but the way the researcher *thinks* about them. The ethnographer is responsible for making data mean, in much the same way that the reader is responsible for making text mean. It is she who, to use Iser's language, must make the effort to construct a 'gestalt' from

the indeterminacies of data, and without that effort the data, like a text, can mean nothing. Reading and ethnography, quite simply, are alike.

In the latter chapters of this thesis, I go to considerable lengths to describe the processes by which readers make meaning from text. Based on the observations of the children who took part in this study, I attempt to map out the pushes and pulls of thinking that quicken the words on the page, and allow them to dwell in the imaginations of the readers. A central tenet of the theory I develop, is that the meaning each reader makes from a text is particular to that reader. The meaning a reader makes must be rooted in who that reader is, in what that reader has experienced and in the other texts that reader has encountered.

If the process of doing ethnography is analogous with reading, as I have suggested, then it must be the case that the ethnographer's interpretation of the societies she studies will be rooted in who she is as much as in what she sees, what she has experienced before and the texts she has read. An ethnography, when complete and written up, will be as particular to the ethnographer as an interpreted text is to the reader. Another ethnographer, given the same opportunities and similar data, might construct an entirely different account. "Ethnography," as Woods says, " is a highly personal affair" (1986: 149)

In the discussion of the methodology that follows, I take the metaphor of researcher as reader as a central consideration, and couch my examination of the methods used and the concepts borrowed in that language. I pay particular attention to my role in the process as reader, as interpreter and as writer, as well as designer of this research. This research is as it is because of who I am: it cannot be an objective account of the reading I observed in classrooms. It can only be an account of my reading of it.

The Collection and Organisation of Data

So far, this chapter has been concerned with the set of ideas that encompass ethnography. It has discussed what ethnography tries to achieve and the way that ethnographers think about what they do. Now I take a more practical turn, and describe the methods I used in order to carry out this research.

Research Design

This research was designed as an ethnographic study of reading practices in the case of six classes. Data was to be collected via participant observation, interview of children and teachers and a review of school documentation. This would ensure triangulation (Cohen and Manion 1980:208) and so provide some measure of validity. Data was to be analysed mostly through the process of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and ethical considerations were built into the design. Each method is discussed in turn below.

The Cases

This research is organised into the study of six cases.

As I have indicated above, the study of a small number of cases is a typical feature of ethnographic research. Stress here, insofar as recognising elements distinctive to ethnography is concerned, must be centred on words *small number* rather than on *cases*, for all research, as Hammersley (1992:197n) points out, involves the selected study of cases. The consequence of this is that use of *case study* as a means of organising and focusing the collection and reporting of data is extraordinarily difficult to define.

Yin (1994) tries. He attempts to define case study research as a paradigm for investigation that is distinct from survey and experiment, but his insistence on the place of hypothesis in case study design is problematic in ethnographic thinking. Further, his dismissal of ethnography as a 'a specific method of data collection' (1994:10) is altogether at odds with Geertz's (1974:6) more sophisticated proposition that ethnography is a particular kind of thinking.

Ethnographers (Woods 1986; Hammersley 1991; 1992; Robinson 1994) tend to ignore the matter of what actually constitutes a case study: they take for granted that what counts as a case depends on what is being studied. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:42ff) muddy the waters still further with their discussion of the relationship between cases and settings. In this research, I take setting to be the location in which the research took place, that is, the three schools. The cases are the reading communities I observed: the classes.

The selection of cases is a matter of more interest to ethnographers. Hammersley (1992) discusses the relative advantages of research designs that study one case with those that study several. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) write of the importance of selecting the *right* cases for the study. Should they be randomly selected, or *theoretically sampled*? (Glaser and Strauss 1967) Randomly selected cases might achieve meagre relevant data and make the generation of theory impossible. Theoretically sampled cases need to be similar enough to highlight basic properties, yet dissimilar enough to provide contrast and illustration.

Robinson (1994) explains how she selected the teachers for her research who were already involved with the University of Mississippi and were especially receptive to innovation. She writes of "an intuitive sense" that suggested a need to have good teachers for her study." (1994:39)

My intuition was different. I suspected I needed a variety of teachers, some good and some not so good, so that I could witness a range of reading experiences in classrooms and see what effect they had on the children. The likelihood, however was that I would only get into classes where the teacher was confidant and well thought of by the Head: less confident teachers do not much wish to be observed, and Headteachers are right to protect them.

The Headteachers of a number of schools were approached and invited to provide a setting for this research. I visited those who were most interested, explained the research and presented myself as an experienced primary school teacher, who would observe, certainly, but who would also be useful in the classroom. I would provide an extra pair of reliable hands. Some of the Headteachers felt that the demands of a year-long ethnographic study would be too great: teachers were under stress enough without the intrusion of a researcher. Others were already heavily involved with initial teacher education and felt they entertained students enough already. More still were simply too busy.

In the end, three schools[4] agreed to take part: Pardoners Way, because it had recently failed OfSTED and welcomed any help with reading; Friars Hall, because the Head thought reading was important; and Parsons Field, because the school was interested in participating in research. Selection of the cases therefore, was more

random than theoretical: I went to the three settings that allowed me access. I was fortunate that these settings provided me with contrasting samples of population, and fortunate too, in that what counted as successful and confident teaching differed markedly in each. I found my range of reading experiences. Without these differences, generation of theory from the cases would have been more difficult.

I negotiated with each Headteacher that I would begin work with a Year Two class and follow those same children through into Year Three. This would achieve two things: I would observe children who were just beginning to read independently, and who were likely to be expected to take on increasing responsibility for reading themselves; and I would observe the differences in expectation of children at the end of Key Stage One and the beginning of Key Stage Two. I met the Year Two teachers, and the participant observation began.

Participant observation

Woods (1986) recognises participant observation as the predominant method of data collection in ethnographic research. He explains that its purpose is to enable the researcher to penetrate the experiences of others within the group or institution studied.

> "How better to do this than by assuming a real role within the group or institution, and contributing towards its interests or functions, and *personally* experiencing these things in conjunction with others." (1986:33)

Participant observation was an obvious choice for this study: non-participation is not an option in a class of small children. Even King, (1978) who attempted to remain aloof and objective in his study of infant classrooms, succumbed eventually and sat with a child on his lap. Children expect adults in classrooms to talk to them.

Furthermore, the sort of information I wished to obtain demanded that I participate. I wanted not only objective descriptions of what I could see happening, but also the subjective interpretation of those events from the members who experienced them. If I could assume a real role within the groups, become part of the communities, then members would confide in me.

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[4] These schools and the six classes that made up the cases of reading interaction

However, the concept of participant observation is not unproblematic. One difficulty concerns the extent to which the researcher balances observation against participation. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 93ff), following Junker (1960) and Gold (1958) distinguish four possibilities. They identify the *complete participant*, the *participant-as-observer,* the *observer-as-participant* and the *complete observer* and present them as choices along a continuum of involvement and detachment. They delineate the advantages and disadvantages of the two extremes and suggest that while the complete participant is best able to empathise with the people of the research setting, his total immersion in that society is in the end limiting: he can no longer see outside it enough to pursue alternative lines of enquiry. Similarly, the complete observer is handicapped. He has no real contact with those he is observing.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that the researcher most often adopts whichever intermediate position best fits the research intention. My experience was that adherence to any one position was impossible. I moved in and out of all four positions as the situation demanded. When a teacher worked with the whole class, I was a complete observer. When I worked with a six year old who was struggling with number work, I gave all my attention to that child and became a complete participant. Much of the time I adopted a position somewhere in between.

Part of the reason for this flexibility was the ambiguity of my role as a participant in the classroom. Although I could participate in all the communities in that I became an accepted member of them, I could not take on either of the two established roles in those communities. I could not *be* a seven year old, and although I could sometimes participate as *a* teacher, but I could never be *the* teacher. Indeed, it would have been undesirable to attempt to be so: the teacher has too strong an influence on the shaping of a classroom community. I could not then, do as Woods suggests, and *personally* share *the experiences* of children or teacher. I had to carve out a role for myself in each classroom that would make participation possible.

I decided that it would be advantageous to exploit the ambiguity of my role. I needed to gain the trust of both the children and teachers in each setting, so they all would

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investigated in this research, are described fully in chapters 3-5

act as naturally as possible in my presence and feel free to talk to me. I maintained, therefore, a dual focus.

With the teachers, I introduced myself as a fellow teacher, with long experience of Year Two. I did all I could to be helpful. I tied shoelaces, gave spellings, read with children, and helped with maths and washed tables and brushes after painting. I made a point of chatting to teachers between sessions. I shared anecdotes with them. I told them of children I had taught and the problems I had not resolved. I provided positive feedback about successful lessons and the success of individual children wherever I could. I went to the staffroom with the teachers at break times and allied myself with their concerns as I soaked up the staffroom ethos. I made myself blank, a mirror for their reflections. I voiced an opinion only if I were directly asked for one. Thus I gained their confidence.

There were however disadvantages to this approach. King (1978) went into his Infant schools claiming he knew nothing about them. When he saw something that puzzled him, he could ask the teachers in all innocence to explain. Because I had assumed a shared understanding of the rules of classroom practice with the teachers, such questions from me would have become challenges. I could not ask them without seeming to make a judgement. I had to find less direct methods to interrogate practice. Sometimes I found I could refer to an incident that interested me after a week or so had passed: but by then teachers had often forgotten the circumstances. Most often I relied on wider observation of the particular incident, similar incidents in the same classroom and my knowledge of how teachers and classrooms work to make sense of incidents like this.

With the children, I worked and talked and made friends. I admired their yoyos and beanie babies and listened to their tales of ballet exams and parties. I made them understand that I wanted to hear what they had to say, that I was interested in them as well as in their reading. I chivvied along those who were reluctant to work and let them know I was helping them avoid teacher confrontations. I was on their side.

Only occasionally was there a conflict of role. If a child tried to enlist my support in a campaign against authority, I became conciliatory. If a child became silly and began to behave in a way that seemed to me to unacceptable in a classroom, I became a teacher and put a stop to it. Relationships were always slightly impaired by this, but they usually recovered.

I kept detailed field notes throughout the participant observation phase of this research. These I annotated, substantiated and supplemented as soon as possible after each session, and worked up a number of these into *thick descriptions*[5]. I also kept a reflective journal for much of the data collection stage of the research. In this I recorded the general impressions of the classrooms I was forming, my feelings about the children, the teachers and the teaching environment and my developing ideas and hypotheses.

Intervention

The intervention stage of this research was a part of and a development of the participant observation phase described above.

By the time the children in the study were about to begin Key Stage Two, I knew the children well. I had begun to develop a clear idea of the way their schools worked and of what was likely to happen to them in September. I had interviewed all the Key Stage One teachers, analysed those interviews and written up a preliminary account of what they suggested. I was beginning to understand what I thought I meant by critical reading, and beginning to feel that the schools were not doing much to encourage it.

I was aware too, that the National Literacy Strategy was about to be introduced in all three schools. I was concerned about its probable implications. I had read the Strategy, attended the training course for teacher educators and spoken to teachers about their understanding of it. I had seen little teaching so far that was conducive to critical reading, and it seemed likely that opportunities now would be more limited still. I decided that if I wanted to know if children could read critically, *I* would have to give them the opportunity to do so.

The rationale and design of the intervention stage of this research are described in Chapter Seven. Here I am concerned with its ethnographic and methodological implications.

A significant feature of intervention was the change it afforded in my status as participant observer. Whereas before, my role in the classroom had been ancillary, I

now became responsible. When I took a group of children out of the classroom to work with me I became more completely a teacher. I did not take on the magisterial role[6] that children expected of a teacher, but still I directed their activity, managed their behaviour and engaged entirely with those children in the process of making meaning from texts.

I found the sessions both difficult and intellectually challenging. My role was complex. I was teacher, I was catalyst and I was ethnographer. I had to provide children with texts and environments that made the exploration of meaning possible, but not lead them to make any particular meaning. I had to follow the rapid and mercurial lines of thought that the children set up for themselves and be quick to respond to them. I had to enter into their thinking sufficiently to understand it, and stand outside it enough to ask the questions that moved their thinking on. Furthermore, as ethnographer, I had to observe the process. What was I doing? What were the children doing? What was happening and how?

I found that my involvement in this was so great that it was very nearly impossible to keep up the running field notes that had so far formed the bulk of my observation. Though I wrote up the sessions as soon as was practicable (often in the playtime that followed), I found that key details were always lost: I could remember significant features of what children had said – sometimes whole phrases verbatim – but not what had prompted the children to say those things. I needed to employ tools that would take away some of the pressures of note making. I experimented with two: video and audio recording.

I made video recordings of my work with groups of children in all three schools and found that the strategy was successful in that it liberated me from note taking: I was freer to listen to and to interact with the children. However, there were considerable drawbacks. A major problem was the placing of the video camera. I clearly could not hold it. It had to be placed on a tripod in a position where it posed no danger to the children and was safe from damage itself. In Pardoners Way School, where I worked in the classroom, this was nearly impossible. In the other schools, where space was constricted, the difficulty was positioning the camera so that everyone in the group could be seen.

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[5] See appendix i for an example of this

Once the recordings had been made and viewed, it became clear that they presented a very different perception of the group work from the one preserved in my notes. Movement was accentuated: all the wriggles and squabbles that I dismissed as minor irritants were brought to the fore. Because the camera was fixed and could not zoom in on the participants, it was difficult to focus on particular children as they made discoveries and developed ideas. All close interactions with books were lost. When the children crowded in to look at a picture, the camera saw only the backs of their heads. Had I been studying classroom behaviour, or interaction for its own sake, this alternative view from the camera would have been useful. For my investigation into reading practices it was not. Its focus was too general. It showed what everybody did at the expense of what anybody thought. Its only virtue was that it fixed the language. I could go back and hear exactly what form the conversation had taken.

I had expected the introduction of the camera to disrupt the behaviour of the children. At Friars Hall and Parsons Field, this was hardly the case. The children quickly became engaged with the books we were exploring and forgot the camera was there. At Pardoners Way, the difficulty came from children in other teaching groups. They persistently thrust their hands and faces in front of the lens. I found this tiresome.

Audio taping was more successful. When I worked with groups of two or three children, the tapes captured the content, tone and pace of our conversations with such clarity that I did not miss the visual aspect: indeed, they brought back to mind what had happened more clearly than my supplemented notes. However, the tapes were difficult to interpret when the children became excited and began to talk all at once. When there were four children or more in a group, it was hard to sort out individual voices.

Time

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) stress the importance of considering time as an influential dimension of social life. If I wanted to construct as fair as possible an account of the reading in the classrooms, then I needed to organise my time in those classrooms to achieve two aims. I needed to spend sufficient time in the classrooms to become an accepted member of those communities, and I needed to spread that time to cover all the various times and contexts in which reading might take place.

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[6] See Chapter 7:190ff

The three schools did not come into the research concurrently, and so I spent unequal amounts of time in each during the first term. I spent three full days a week in Friars Hall at first. This gave me an excellent opportunity to get to know the children and to observe a wide range of curriculum activity. When Parsons Field joined, I spent a full day in each school and negotiated with the teachers over which week day would suit them best. This arrangement lasted for several weeks, and I was able to sample the reading activities of each classroom in a variety of curriculum contexts and a various times of day.

Pardoners Way joined the research at the very end of the summer term. I spent as much time in the classroom as I could, but my visits were restricted to mornings or afternoons. I was not invited to spend a whole day in the school. I tried, as far as possible, to visit at times when the normal curriculum was in action, but the children, the teacher and I were all aware of the impending summer holidays: the school was winding down.

In Key Stage Two it was harder to organise my visits so that I sampled the whole curriculum and the whole school day. Teachers worked to stricter timetables, and because my intention now was to work with a group of children, the teachers needed to account for me in their planning. They wanted to designate a fixed day each week for my visits. This seemed a reasonable request. The changing nature of the school curriculum meant too, that the integrated reading practices that had characterised Key Stage One were becoming rare. All three schools generally spent the entire morning on Maths and English and the afternoons on practical subjects. When I stayed to observe afternoon school, there was often very little reading to see.

I fell into the habit of visiting each school on the designated day for the morning session, when I knew there would always be something worth observing. This was a compromise. I salved my ethnographic conscience partly by convincing myself that this was progressive focusing: I knew now what I needed to see, and partly by persuading the teachers to allow me four consecutive whole days of observation at the end of the study. Those four days, in a normal working week, would allow me to pick up any typical classroom reading practices I had otherwise missed.

Interview

Interview was the second method of data collection I employed in this research. Like participant observation, it is a typical feature of ethnographic research (Hammersley 1991).

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), what distinguishes the ethnographic interview is its reflexivity. Ethnographers are aware, therefore that 'all interviews, like all other forms of social interaction, are structured by *both* the interviewer and the informant.' (1983:122-123) Both parties bring to the meeting complex cocktails of intention, motivation and perception, and what emerges from the interview is a negotiation of meaning and understanding between them. There is no question therefore, of an ethnographic interview yielding "'pure' data...free from potential bias." (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983:112). The ethnographer acknowledges the influence of all involved and accepts the interview as a construction.

In this research, I conducted interviews with both children and teachers. The interviews were focused (Cohen and Manion 1980:259) and at all times involved me in asking the interviewees to 'tell me' about what they thought, what they remembered or what they did. The concurrence between teaching strategy (Chapter Six: 172ff) and research method was no accident. In both cases the intention was the same: to shift the power and responsibility for constructing meaning towards the interviewee or pupil and away from the teacher or interviewer, to admit voices other than the magisterial. (Chapter Six:167)

Teacher interviews took place at a time towards the end of my participation in that teacher's classroom, when we knew each other well and had built up a measure of mutual trust. Each teacher was given an interview schedule (appendix v) some days in advance, so that he or she might reflect and consider possible answers, and asked to choose a time and a place for the interview. Most took place after school in the teacher's classroom.

The interviews were conducted informally, in the form of a conversation. (Gudmundsdottir 1996). I retained overall control, in that I began and ended each interview, but beyond that, I saw my role as prompter and listener. When a response from me seemed necessary or desirable, I sometimes supplied an anecdote from my own experience as a reader or teacher of young children in order to confirm their comments and encourage them to say more. I asked further questions when I needed a point to be elaborated and occasionally when I wanted to push a teacher's

thinking further. Interviews were all tape-recorded with the teachers' permission and transcriptions were made of all relevant exchanges for analysis. (appendix vi)

The children were interviewed individually when the data collection stage of the research began, and again in groups in the middle and towards the end. A number of issues arise in the interviewing of young children that are less apparent in adult interviewing: these issues are sharpened by the children's lack of experience and relative powerlessness. One is the matter of informed consent. It is unclear whether all children understand that an invitation to talk to an interviewer does not have the same status as a similar request from a teacher. Another is the difficulty some researchers experience in talking to children (King 1978) and a third, the supposed unreliability of their answers (Moston 1987). Doubts are also raised about whether the language skills and maturity of small children equip them for the demands of interviews.

Little can be done about the matter of informed consent. My approach was to be as open with the children as possible. I told the children as much as I could about what I was doing and why I was doing it. I made sure they understood that their words were being recorded, and I let them play back tapes and listen to themselves. I was as punctilious in thanking them for their co-operation as I was with adults.

Difficulties in communicating with young children seemed to me to be more a matter of discourse than language. Children are unfamiliar with the particular form of language interaction that is the interview. I attempted to overcome this difficulty by scaffolding their first encounters with the form. I devised and piloted a simple questionnaire (appendix vii) that encouraged them to explore and represent their reading attitudes and preferences. We completed the questionnaires together, then I used them as a basis for the interviews that followed. It was an easy step for the children to tell me what they were thinking when they chose a particular answer. Most of them became confident in talking to me.

We returned to the questionnaires at the end of the data collection phase of this research. The children were invited to complete them again and to compare their Year Three answers with those from the year before. Again, they served the purpose of focusing the children's attention and enabling them to discuss how their reading had changed over the year.

Interviews with the children always took place in school time and out of the classroom. Usually we could find a comfortable place to talk in a corner of a library or staffroom. At Parsons Field we often sprawled on the floor in the Head's office. This added an extra *frisson* to the procedure that the children enjoyed enormously.

I did not make complete transcriptions of the tapes of interviews with the children. I listened to them repeatedly, identified themes and phenomena, and noted verbatim those exchanges which seemed significant. A sample of a group interview with four children at Parsons Field School is included as appendix viii.

Documentation

I consulted recent OfSTED reports on all three schools, and focused my attention on two areas: the description of the schools and the assessment of the teaching of English in Key Stages One and Two. Except in the matter of statistics concerning school size and population, I did not use the reports as primary evidence. There were two reasons for this. First, two of the reports were current: they reflected the schools as they had been two or three years ago. Second, the supposed objectivity of OfSTED reports was a matter of concern to me. OfSTED Inspectors are named in reports, but no biographical detail of them is provided. The reader therefore is not able to assess the effect of personal influence on the final report. The report can only be seen as a construction: it is what the inspectors made of what they saw. It is not reliable evidence.

I used the reports, therefore, to supplement, rather than inform my observations. They provided another 'view', which I used it for purposes of validation.

It had been my intention in the design of the research to examine the documentation produced by each school concerning the teaching of reading. Only in one school was this evidence forthcoming. The other schools assured me that they were in the process of reviewing their policies in light of recent government initiatives. They would show me the documents when they were written. They never did. On the evidence of the one document I saw, I decided that the examination of documentation was unlikely to be particularly informative, so I abandoned the idea.

Analysis

Analysis of the data was gradual and on going, and was rooted in the concept of *grounded theory.* (Glaser and Strauss 1967) It took two forms: first the preparation of the raw data into *thick description* (Geertz 1973) and then the continuous, recursive turning over of data in the mind in order to organise it, categorise it and report it.

I include *thick description* as a method of analysis because it is foremost a way of interpreting observation data. Significant episodes of classroom reading interaction were worked up from my field notes into detailed passages of thick description (appendix i). This had the effect of placing observed events in the fullest possible context. What seemed familiar was made strange and what seemed significant could be seen in the light of everything else that was happening. Thick description, therefore, is a way of achieving balance: it checks researcher subjectivity by insisting that what the researcher is inclined to ignore is noticed. Themes and categories of description identified in data that have been prepared through thick description are more likely to be inclusive than those otherwise obtained.

Analysis through *grounded theory* is what happens once data has been established. It is a theory that has its genesis in the ethnographic ideal that the researcher comes to the research setting with no preconceived hypothesis. Through engaging with the data, the researcher discovers hypotheses that are grounded in it, rather than in existing theory. It is a continuing process: as more data comes in, it is checked against the developing hypothesis, and the hypothesis adjusted as necessary. A running theoretical discussion is maintained with the data, and theoretical categories are identified and become clear. *Progressive focusing* (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983) enables the researcher to hone in on these categories as the research develops, and to use them as a guide to further data collection and analysis.

At best, grounded theory achieves "...a feeling of 'ever-developing' to the theory, allows it to become rich, complex and dense, and makes its fit and relevance easy to comprehend." (Glaser and Strauss 1967:32) In short, the process is analogous to reading. Just as the reader, explores, constructs and checks her construction of meaning against the given text (Chapter Eight: 232 ff) so too does the researcher with data.

It is a process which Glaser and Strauss stress is both *implicit* and *explicit* (1967: 26). While much of my analysis was explicit, in that it involved the identification of categories, and the highlighting of instances of those categories in my notes,

descriptions and interview transcripts, more still was implicit. It took place in the spaces of my mind as I thought about my work: as I drove between the various research settings, as I relaxed in the bath, as I queued in the supermarket, and in a multitude of other unlikely places. Certainly that thinking was grounded in data, but equally, it was grounded in me.

Ethical considerations

This research was designed and carried out in accordance with the British Educational Research Association *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (1992).

Confidentiality and the Ownership of Data

Every effort was made to ensure the confidentiality of all participants in this research. The names of all schools, teachers and children reported here have therefore been changed. This courtesy I promised to each school at the outset of the research, and none of the adults involved ever questioned me further about matters of confidentiality.

The children did. When I worked with them out of the classroom, they sometimes expressed opinions or used words that they did not want their teachers to hear. I assured them on these occasions that what I heard and taped was confidential: it was between them and me. No other person would hear the tapes without their permission, and I would use what they told me only insofar as it helped me to understand their practice as readers.

Attempts were made to acknowledge shared ownership of data with the participants, and to make the process of research transparent. I gave each teacher a transcript of his or her interview with me, and invited feedback, comment and revision. None was forthcoming. When the data gathering stage of the research was complete, I invited all the teachers who had taken part, and the Headteachers of the schools to a meeting in which the initial findings were reported and explained. One teacher from each of two of the schools attended.

I did not give the children the opportunity to see transcripts of their interviews, but, whenever possible, I played back to them video and audio tapes. Without exception,

they were interested only in hearing their voices and seeing themselves on film: they did not reflect on their contributions. Some of them were interested in my field notes. I let them see what I had written, and, if they asked, read bits aloud to them. Mostly, they wanted to see their names and to comment on the size and neatness of my writing. My firm intention is to return to the schools and show the children this thesis when it is complete. They have a right, it seems, to see a tangible result of my time with them.

Authenticity and Validity

I include authenticity and validity in this section on ethics, because it is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to produce a research report that is fair, accurate, and accountable. Notions of authenticity and validity are ways of ensuring that this responsibility is upheld.

Ethnographers aim to produce accounts of the societies they study that are as near as possible authentic: that is, that they present a 'true' account of what has been observed and 'an authentic understanding' of the members of that society's experiences. (Silverman 1993) In this research, I sought to achieve authenticity first by means of thick description, and then by attempting to reflect my emerging analysis back upon the people it described. Showing the teachers the transcripts of their interviews was part of this process, as was the feedback meeting to which they were invited to attend. Those teachers who did attend the meeting agreed that my findings represented a recognisable account of the reading behaviour they saw in their classrooms. Again, in order to test authenticity, I gave the account of the Masters' group which appears in Chapter Seven to a member of that group to read and approve before it was included in the thesis.

Validity (Hammersley 1992:69ff) in research of this kind is partly assured through research design and the recursive process of analysis. These matters have been discussed above. Here I am concerned with the additional checks to validity that occurred after the data collection stage of the research and concerned my interpretation of that data. I attempted to validate my emerging findings in two ways. First, a sample teacher interview transcript and my account of that interview were given to a colleague to read. I asked him to consider both in terms of inclusivity and even-handedness. Did my account fairly represent the interview and what the teacher said? Secondly, I trialed the theoretical maps of reading that are presented in

Chapter Eight on two occasions. I showed them to the teachers on the Masters course. I asked them to consider the models in terms of their developing understanding of reading theory, their own experience as a reader, and their knowledge of children as readers. I asked them to find exceptions to the models. They found none. Later, I presented the models for peer evaluation at the Conference of the International Federation of Teachers of English in 1999.

Reading the Data and Writing the Thesis

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that there are clear and pertinent parallels to be drawn between the process of reading, that is, of making sense from text and the process of research, that is, of making sense from data. In this last section of the chapter, I expand and exemplify this idea by considering the importance of story in ethnography, and turning to my role as reader of that story as it emerged through data, and my role as writer of it.

The importance of story

Hardy (1977) famously, writes of narrative as *a primary act of mind.* Few research methodologies make this more apparent that ethnography. The researcher is involved in story at a number of levels. She observes the stories of communities she studies as they unfold – the wide story of how those communities function, and the smaller, multiple, individual stories of the members within it. She listens to those members as they tell their stories, informally to each other and to the researcher as participant observer, and more deliberately in interview. Finally, the researcher makes sense of all this; she pieces the story together and writes it as ethnography.

Gudmundsdottir (1996) stresses the importance of story in the research interview. She observes that narrative structures help people remember organise and rationalise their experiences, and that researchers use these same structures to understand what is being said. In effect they make stories from stories.

Scheurich (1997) builds on this idea. He emphasises the subjective nature of all storytelling. In a way that is reminiscent of Iser, he writes of the *indeterminacies* upon which stories are built, and stresses that they can therefore only ever be

representations of 'truth'. They are ambiguous. When the researcher hears and interprets the stories she is told, they become more ambiguous still: they are recast in her own subjectivity.
He argues for a postmodern approach to the interpretation of the research interview that acknowledges the indeterminate nature of story, and represents them in a way that *transgresses and exceeds a knowable order.* (1997:75) I suggest that what he says for interview must be applied to story throughout ethnography.

Reading the story in the data

My suggestion is that in ethnography the data, as it is collected, be seen as text, and the ethnographer be seen as the reader. Just as in a novel, the story in ethnography gradually unfolds as more and more data comes in. The ethnographer is involved in an active process of making that data mean from the beginning. As I explain in Chapter Eight, (235 ff), the reader (or ethnographer) takes the emerging text into her *interpretive framework* and begins to work on it. Pushes and pulls of thinking shape and reshape the text, and are determined by who the reader is, what the reader knows and what the reader has read. The *layers of resonance* explained in Chapter 8 are equally pertinent here. The ethnographer employs them all to make the text of her data mean.

Provisional texts (Chapter Eight: 228) begin to form. They are demolished and rebuilt as new data pours in and as the ethnographer tests them against the literature she has read, (i.e. the *intertextual layer*) her knowledge of the context, (the *extra-personal layer*) and her personal subjectivity (the *intimate layer*). Notions of authenticity and validity check the provisional text still further. These are outside influences. They take the provisional text from within the individual researcher's head and test it in the *interpretive community* (Chapter Eight: 238). They compel the researcher to ask: is my understanding of this story fair? Will others agree with it? As in reading, the aim is to achieve balance.

Eventually a constructed text is made. It is fixed as the written ethnography. It is ultimately, the researcher's story, made for others to interpret.

Making the story my own: writing the thesis

I am the reader-researcher here. This text is my meta-narrative: the result of the stories I have heard and watched unfold and the result of my interpretation of them. It is a reflection of me as reader, writer, teacher, person, quite as much as it is of the data gathered in this research. Notwithstanding checks and balances, everything here has been filtered through my subjectivity. This thesis is the way it is because subconsciously and consciously, I have made it this way. I present it therefore, not as truth, but as my best attempt at a fair way of seeing.

A word needs to be said about the structure of this thesis. I made a conscious decision to write it in a recursive rather than a linear way. There is no single literature review here. Instead ideas from a range of literary, educational and psychological sources are introduced as and when they become appropriate to the developing argument. Instances of children's and adults' reading behaviour are visited and revisited. They are analysed once, and then again in light of further understandings. The aim is to present reading in a way that reflects its complex, fluid and slippery nature. Neither reading, nor ethnography is a linear process.

Bernstein (1996: 135ff) writes of the importance and interrelationship of *internal* and *external languages of description* in ethnography. I trust that through the recursive method of reporting employed here, both languages are made transparent; that the gradual genesis of the internal language from literature and concept is shown clearly, and that the external language provides the necessary illustration and support to justify it.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have presented ethnography as the overarching methodological approach that governs this research, and stressed its particular suitability for research into reading practice. I have discussed the methods employed in the collection and analysis of data and considered the role of the ethnographer in the process of research. I have suggested that ethnography is by its nature subjective: that in good ethnographic research, the ethnographer can never do more than present a way of seeing. I suggest further that that way of seeing must be carefully tempered with inbuilt checks if the work is to retain validity; it must be recognisable and authentic, so that its claims may be assessed.

In the chapters that follow, I present the way I saw the communities that made up this research. I ask what sort of reading goes on in these classrooms and to what extent is it critical?

Chapter Three

Pardoners Way School

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the first of the schools, Pardoners Way.

I organise this chapter in the following way: first, I establish the setting, the situation of the school, and then describe the classes in turn. I present Year Two first. I describe the classroom, and give particular emphasis to the physical and intellectual literary environment it provides. Next the children are introduced. I present them as a community and as individual readers, and use both my observations and their own words to describe them. The teacher comes next. In this section, I concentrate on her perception of herself as a reader and of her role as a teacher of reading within this school. In the section that follows, I present an analysis of the classroom observation and draw threads between this and the teacher's understanding of her pedagogy.

I follow the children into Year Three and present the data collected from this class in exactly the same way. I make comparison with the Year Two class as appropriate.

The School

Pardoners Way is a primary school that accepts pupils between the ages of 5 – 11. There is a separate state nursery on site. The children who attend the school come almost exclusively from the surrounding estate. At the time of the recent OfSTED (1998) inspection, there were 339 of them on roll. Now, just over a year after the report was published, that number has significantly decreased. One family in the school has a mother tongue other than English. 30% of the school's population has been identified as having a special educational need, and a number of behavioural problems have been recognised. 32% of the children is entitled to free school meals. OfSTED reports that unauthorised absenteeism is a problem for the school. (para 98) The OfSTED inspection identified a number of serious weaknesses in the school and placed it under special measures.

The Location

To travel the short distance from the centre of town to the estate on the outskirts where Pardoners Way School is situated is to experience anti-climax. The elegant Georgian townhouses which flank the shops give way, first to generous Victorian villas, then to the solid detached and semi-detached houses that characterise domestic building in the thirties and early post war years. The visitor expects this pattern to continue – for the spaces between houses to increase, for suburbia to turn gently and genteelly into semi-rural comfort. Instead, there is Pardoners Way.

Pardoners Way is a post-war housing estate and it is perceived in the popular imagination of the town to be a problem. It is a large, mixed estate. A band of established, older private housing forms one boundary; newer, smaller private homes fill pockets to the north, but the greater part consists of council housing, row upon row of brick built, concrete rendered, uniform local authority homes from the fifties, sixties and early seventies. A strip of grass separates the houses from the road. Sometimes this is fenced into a small front garden; more often, it exists as a communal patch before each house. Either way, the effect is tidy, but feels uncommitted. Streets are long, narrow and lined with cars. They appear to lead nowhere. Occasionally, one opens up to a flat, grassy open space – there are few trees here and little play equipment – or on to the concrete car park of a public house. There are several of these: they too appear to have been built to an identical design. There is a utilitarian feel to the whole estate, as though imagination were a luxury too far.

At the core of this estate, a small church – rather newer than the housing, a short row of shops, recently refurbished, and a community centre stand brave and insistent, resolute against reputation and poverty.

The School Building

At the bottom of a long, long road, is Pardoners Way School. It is a brick built, flat roofed post war building, set on a large site which includes a field, two playgrounds, a separate nursery and a playgroup. All this is enclosed within wire fencing. The visitor,

who arrives in the car park is left with a choice: either to stay in the school grounds and wander past the dustbins and the kitchen, through the space beside the mobile classroom, across the back playground and so eventually to enter the school by the back door, or to leave the premises, go back onto the pavement, walk along the street outside the fence, enter through the unmarked pedestrian entrance, cross the front playground, pass the nursery, and finally achieve the front lawn and the main entrance. Both routes are unwelcoming and complicated.

The front door of the school is kept locked. The visitor rings the security buzzer and the door is released by one of the secretaries, who sit, busily working, in a slip of an office to the right of the entrance. One of them pops her head through the hatch let into the office wall to see what the visitor wants and to answer enquiries. Visitors are signed in, given an identity badge, and sent on their way with appropriate directions.

Again, there are choices to be made: left through the library and towards the staff room, or ahead, through the K.S.2 hall, towards the classrooms. The library offers the more attractive prospect. Here the corridor opens into a vestibule area. There is carpet on the floor and a bright display board that welcomes the visitor to Pardoners Way School. On this board too are examples of certificates of merit that the children can be awarded for progress and achievement both in lessons and in behaviour. There are photographs here of children being awarded these certificates by the head teacher. She, like the recipients, wears a school sweatshirt. On a low table nearby are more photographs, this time in an album, of children working and playing. They look engaged and disciplined. An easy chair encourages the waiting visitor to browse through these photographs.

The library is a pleasant area, carpeted and well lit. Three walls are clothed with shelves, to the height of about 5ft, and a row of free-standing bookcases separates the space from the corridor. Two small round tables are provided at which children can work and there are four colourful beanbags. The recent OfSTED report noted

> "The library is badly in need of books. No money has been spent on books in the last financial year."(para. 167)

There do seem to be few books. A wire carousel bookstand houses a collection of paperbacks for older readers, some in rather poor condition and a small number of picture books is displayed on the bookcases. Around the walls, well spaced, is the

non-fiction collection. It does not appear to be comprehensive or very new and seems to bear little relationship to the curriculum: I notice that the Religious Education section contains a series of cheap and popular retellings of Bible stories, but little else.

Out of the library, and the visitor finds herself in a maze of corridors that link classrooms, halls and stairways. These are typical corridors of traditional school buildings. They are narrow and functional: concrete and vinyl flooring make them noisy, artificial light makes them cold, and limited display boarding makes them hard to enliven. One board, above the eye level of small children, presents some examples of poetry written by a year two class. The work is good, but it is not attractively displayed. The poems are poorly mounted and there is no unifying heading to focus the attention of the passer-by. Other corridors serve the dual function of cloakrooms. They are lined with pegs and littered with P.E bags and fallen coats. These parts of the school feel transitory, as if they are the responsibility of no one.

The Staffroom.

Pardoners Way School supports a staff of 15 permanent teachers and 10 educational support workers and holds the loyalty of a small band of supply teachers, who appear to be guaranteed regular work. OfSTED reports that staff morale is very low (para 100) and certainly, the staff room is not a happy place. It is a small room. There is a kitchen area for making coffee and enough chairs, arranged round the edge of the room for most people to sit down. A long, low table fills the centre of the room. On it, typically, is a tin of biscuits, a pile of circulars from educational publishers and other papers and a pile of remaindered books for sale from an itinerant bookseller. Teachers help themselves liberally to the biscuits, and sometimes browse through the books. Rarely did I see them read the paperwork.

A large notice board fills one wall. Much of it is taken up by a vast commercial planning sheet on which the notable events of the term are marked – parents' consultation evenings and visits from the school photographer. Around it are Union notices, the county vacancy list and other semi-official papers of this sort. Here too, prominently displayed, is a list of the staff National Lottery syndicate, and, for a time, the double page spread from the local newspaper summarising the OfSTED findings.

Wry paper arrows direct the reader's eye towards this and it does not make comfortable reading.

Against the far wall is a row of lockers where teachers keep their personal belongings and some low shelves. Here is a collection of ancient lever-arch folders and the suggestion of a staff library: a book of science ideas, some photocopiable maths resources and an old history textbook.

I am taken to the staff room by the class teacher and instructed to make myself a drink. I am waved towards the cupboard where the cups are kept. There appear to be two sorts of cup: those that are clearly the personal property of someone, and those that are stained and chipped. I select the best of the latter category. I read the sign that says 'Visitors' coffee 10p', but finds nowhere to put the money. Nobody helps. I wonder if the 10p includes a biscuit.

The teachers, meanwhile, have settled into their customary friendship groups and begun to chat. No effort is made to include the visitor. The talk is of families and of classes. Anecdotes of family events are told with pride and humour. Comments about the children in the school are not. There are complaints about misbehaviour, lack of ability and poor attendance. When the Special Needs co-ordinator comes in he is bombarded with questions. Disillusion, it seems, masks desperation.

I am relieved to return to the classroom.

The Year Two Class

The Classroom

The year 2 class is one of two parallel classes. It occupies a bright and airy room at the far end of the school nearest the car park. Windows form the top half of one long wall, and a glass door opens onto a tarmac play area and the field beyond.

The other walls in this room are busy. The short back wall shows evidence of recent science work on the senses. There is a large painting of an eye and another of a mouth with protruding tongue. These are labelled 'sight' and 'taste' and smaller

words have been placed over the paintings to name the parts of each organ. More paintings of mouths and tongues come next, produced by individual children, and then a gallery of self-portraits. The long wall opposite the windows is less clearly themed. Much of it at eye level is taken up with a chart of the children's birthdays with the slogan 'We have made a birthday graph' and a collage of a colourful fish. The sign reads 'The Rainbow Fish', but there is no mention of the book or the story from which it comes. The space between this and the door is filled with a list. It is entitled 'Words to help with our writing' and includes the phrases *I played with...; I watched...; swimming pool and Malvern Hills.* Above all this, in layers along the wall are more lists: the months of the year, the seasons, the alphabet in lower and upper case and the Letterland alphabet, with captions.

A blackboard, the teacher's desk and a computer and listening centre fill most of the remaining wall, but there is still room for a number line above the board a display of shapes and a list of colour words. Space too is found for lists of ordinal numbers, relationship words and days of the week, and a star chart. Attached to the door is a large paper tree. This, explains a notice, is a behaviour tree. The class will be awarded leaves for behaving well. Twenty leaves will entitle them to a treat. There are 15 leaves on the tree so far. It seems unlikely that they will achieve twenty by the end of term.

This room is full of furniture. There is the teacher's desk, piled high with papers and children's work, a folding bookcase, displaying a selection of rather tatty picture books and two computer trolleys. There is an audio station, on which there is jumble of story tapes and a few books. Low cupboards and lockers for the children's trays line two of the walls. As well as games and puzzles, four plastic baskets sit on one of these, each filled generously with picture books. "Those are table books," a child told me. "We can look at them if we get ready quickly for P.E." I never saw them used. Exercise books are stacked here too and a series of covered shoeboxes in which the reading scheme, *123 and Away* is stored.

In the middle of the room are the tables where the children sit. There are two long tables, big enough to accommodate ten children and two smaller ones that seat four. A small table is tucked under the blackboard, where a naughty child is sometimes isolated. There is a carpeted area, by the bookcase. Here children sit to listen to stories.

The Children

I spent less time in this classroom than in any other during this research.[1] It was near the end of the summer term; the days were hot and the children fractious. Even at this late stage in the school year, there was little sense of communal identity or unity of purpose amongst the children of this class.

They presented a motley crew to the observer. Some were in school uniform: girls in red or green gingham dresses, boys in grey trousers and white shirts, others wore an assortment of everyday clothing, including football strips. While some of them were as neatly turned out as any child in the other schools, a significant proportion wore clothes that were outgrown, over-washed and fraying. The boys' shirts were illustrative of the effect of poverty; those boys whose parents bought them the aertex t-shirts popular in the other schools, remained tidy all week.

There was not time for me to talk at length to all the children, so the teacher selected for me a sample of ten children whom she judged to represent the range of ability in the class. These children, I took out of the classroom to a quiet place, and read with them and interviewed them according to the schedule. (appendix vii)

Of these ten children, three were enthusiastic readers, but all of them reported positive attitudes towards books and stories. Much of their pleasure seemed to be derived from the satisfaction of relationship consolidation through reading. The children enjoyed bedtime stories and 'reading with my mum on the cuddly sofa.' One boy told me:

> "My normal Dad likes recipes, so I find them for him in the newspaper. He says 'Wow! Super Boy!"

Few of these children had much to say about *what* they read at home and most of them appeared to come from homes that were not bookish. Expectations of what reading should be appeared to come mostly from school, where attitudes towards text displayed on walls, modelled in the classroom and expressed by the teacher were echoed by the majority. (See below)

One girl was an exception. She, co-incidentally, had brought with her from home that day a compilation of Roald Dahl stories. This she showed me eagerly. She was able to talk about these stories and Roald Dahl with confidence and conviction. She could leaf through the book to find favourite passages and quote significant phrases. "It makes me laugh when it says 'He sizzled up like a sausage.' That's from *The Enormous Crocodile*," she said. This level of control over and reflection of the reading process was not found again in this class.

More typical was another girl who also read well. She wanted to tell me about her experience of reading different sorts of text, but had been given no meta-language to do this. She had invented her own categories. She told me that at home she had three types of book: big ones that were hard and had little writing; middle-sized ones, like Aladdin and other Disney spin-offs and little books, such as alphabet books that were for babies and which she had grown out of. Books in the classroom could be categorised similarly. Big books were picture books. They were 'nice to read' and were 'like bedtime stories'. Small books were the reading scheme; they 'helped you learn to read.'

This separation between reading for its own sake and learning to read was apparent in the understanding of a number of the children and manifested itself in their preoccupation with progressing through colour bands: "I've gone past grey and green and all that, and now I'm on black" (Colin), with fluency: "At first I read like a robot. You have to practise every night till you get good" (Sinead) and with vocabulary: "You can't take any book, because you don't know the words in them" (Brian). Parental comments in reading record books echoed this perception. They were concerned entirely with fluency, expression and 'managing at a higher level'.

The result of this emphasis on skill and progression was that children, almost without exception, saw the reading of texts as a neutral activity. It was something one had to do, something that involved specific intellectual effort, but which did not engage the mind or imagination at any deeper level. When I interrupted Michelle half way through her reading of *Roger and the Cats* and said of a character, "I wonder what she is thinking?" Michelle looked at me, bemused for a second, then politely read on. Similarly, Colin was thrown from his stride when I asked him what he thought about

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[1] See Chapter Two: 52

Billy Blue Hat's midnight flight on a stone owl. Would he believe such a tale? It seemed that I was introducing a way of thinking about these stories that the children had not encountered before. Only John, who had recently arrived from another school, had access to more interactive ways of reading. He wondered why his book, entitled *Caterpillars and Butterflies* seemed to be only about caterpillars at first. "Perhaps the butterflies are in the garden," he said, and then, eagerly, "I know what's happening, because caterpillars turn into things!"

This functional attitude to reading was even more apparent in the less competent readers, who read the words on the page fairly accurately, but appeared not to understand their books at all and to be happy with this state of affairs. Katie took from her bag a Ginn 360 book, *The Park* and read to me the first page. It was a list of contents. "The Park 2 " she read. "The Picnic 9." I asked her what the numbers were for. "It's how many they score," she said, cheerfully.

Kylie too, seemed to miss the point. Roger Red Hat had taken his pet mouse to visit Billy. "Oh" said Billy when he saw the mouse. "Oh" said Mrs Blue Hat, standing on a chair, when she saw the mouse. "Oh" said both boys, when it was time for Roger to go home. Kylie read this to me mechanically. She gave no indication that she understood the different emotions conveyed by 'Oh'. When I asked her about this, she looked at me blankly. Together we read the book again and we wondered what the characters were thinking. It came as a revelation that Mrs. Blue Hat was frightened by the mouse, and suddenly the book made sense. I was left with the distinct impression that this was a rare experience for Kylie. She didn't expect reading to be meaningful.

What these children, reading in so functional a way, seem to lack is a meta-cognitive understanding of what reading can *do,* of what the reader can gain from a text. All that matters is process, and pleasure in reading is achieved through success in completing that process, by finishing the book and reaching the next stage in the scheme. Where the approval and expectations of the teacher reinforce this progress, then the satisfaction is increased manifold.

The Teacher

The teacher, Mrs. Knight, was a teacher of considerable experience, who had worked at Pardoners Way School for many years, first with junior classes, but more recently in K.S.1. She had two children of her own, both of them now teenagers, and much of her pedagogy was based on her experience of them learning to read.

Reading profile

Mrs. Knight presented herself as someone who had always enjoyed reading. She had no memories of a time before she could read, and no memory of being taught to read, but she could conjure happy scenes of herself at school racing through *Janet and John* and the *Gayway* scheme and loving it, and of herself at home, being read to by her father. She had memories of herself as an older child, now at boarding school, engrossed in Enid Blyton's school series and as an adolescent reading teenage magazines and Victoria Holt. She could trace a decline in the amount of reading for pleasure she did as she grew up, as the demands of college and then of work took up more of her time.

> " It is difficult to find time to read at all now, so it's mostly easy reads, Catherine Cookson and Danielle Steele. I read in the bath."

Two images emerge from this picture that Mrs. Knight paints of herself as a reader. The first is to do with emotion and emotional well-being. Like the children in her class, the security of being read to by a parent is important. Even though her memories are cloaked with nostalgia, it is significant that the only text mentioned by name in the course of our conversation, *The Railway Children,* was one her father had read to her. The closeness of the father-child relationship, and the value that the text held for him were as important in Mrs. Knight's memory as the book itself.
There is the security of success here too. The child who succeeds in the reading scheme basks in adult approval.

The Enid Blyton memories are filled with emotion. Mrs. Knight knew about boarding school, she went to one herself. In those books she found enough of the familiar to reassure, and enough possibility to excite. She was entirely involved in those books, subsumed in them. "I *was* one of those children," she said. She describes a commitment that is more than intellectually imaginative; it is emotional, as though she read Enid Blyton from the very font of her being.

The second image that emerges is to do with reading fiction as a luxury, as self-indulgence. Like the illicit bar of chocolate, reading time now is stolen and savoured in private. It takes place in the sensual and steamy indulgence of the bathroom, where time for oneself is guaranteed and interruptions are unlikely. And like the bar of chocolate, this is reading that has limited nutritional value, 'easy reads', as Mrs. Knight called it. These books quickly satisfy a craving for fiction, but require little effort to digest.

Teaching children to read

Mrs. Knight expressed satisfaction with the machinery in place in her school for the teaching of reading. She thought *1,2,3 and Away* an efficient scheme, and supplemented it, especially in the early stages, with flash cards. She kept in mind the experience of her son, who had failed to learn to read at another school where the apprenticeship approach was in vogue, and was determined that no other child in her care would suffer in the same way. To that end, by means of flash cards and word bingo, she ensured that her daughter could read before she went to school, and used similar methods with her own class. Roger Red Hat provided a suitable structure:

> "In fact that little group is way past *123 and Away,* but they've built up their skills."

Armed with this belief, and her own affection for *Gayway* she presented an understanding of reading that is based on a set of neutral competences that can be passed on to children.

> "By the time they come into year 2, they've done the basics. I'm trying to build on those basics. Michelle could read a simple sentence when she came up. She had good listening skills and all that you can build on. ... I'm teaching her the basics of, sort of, punctuation, the raising of the voice..."

This is the language of the building site. Through it reading is being constructed as an empty space with the potential for development. The ground is prepared, the foundations are dug, but the responsibility for ensuring that the building is put to good use is not the teacher's:

> "I want them to have that stepping stone, and what they do with it after they leave me and through the rest of the junior school is dependent on them themselves and their background"

Reading is neutral. It is a set of transferable skills. Mrs Knight sees it as her job to pass on those skills to the children.

Expectations of the children

Mrs. Knight did not expect much from these children. She concurred with the OfSTED findings (paras 64, 186) concerning the poor language experience and reading attainment of the children. She thought that many of them came into Year Two ill prepared for the work there:

> "I'm still teaching some of these the initial sounds. Things like initial sounds and word building skills should have been started."

She hoped they would learn to read and derive pleasure from reading as she did herself, but thought it unlikely. She cited the evidence of the classroom, where children were free to take home picture books as well as those from the scheme, but rarely did. I asked if she thought they would be readers as adults. Her reply,

> "Not for pleasure. Not as we saw it. That upsets me."

is an admission of helplessness. It signals the abnegation of responsibility and defeat.

The Teaching of Reading

Perhaps because it was so near the end of the school year, I saw very little teaching of reading in this classroom. I saw no examples of the teacher reading books with individual children or with groups, though I did once see her rehearse with Jim, a very weak reader, the words he kept to learn in a tin. I watched Mrs. Knight read a story to everyone. I saw her model the reading of notes, messages and worksheets to the children, and saw her teach the reading of a sentence from the scheme *1,2,3 and Away* to the whole class every morning. I watched the children engage in various

reading and writing activities, some of them planned by the teacher and others self-directed.

Reading in this classroom can usefully be described under four sub-headings: reading that is socially functional, reading that is instructional, reading that is pragmatic and reading for leisure. These categories are not discrete; it will be apparent in the discussion that follows that a number of the reading events described can be validly considered in more than one of them. Moreover, the categories themselves overlap. Reading that is pragmatic sometimes enables a social function to be served or allows factual information to be transmitted. The interrelationship of these categories does not invalidate them, it provides an authenticity; for the practice of reading in classrooms is complex and must presented as such.

Socially functional reading

Reading that served a social function was explicitly modelled in this classroom and was consciously set up as a paradigm for the children of what reading might be for. One clear reason for reading was that it helped the reader function in the classroom society. Mrs. Knight ordered the children by means of a series of lists. She read them to find out 'who' and 'who next'. First there was the register – boys' names listed and called first, then girls'. Then came milk money. "Let's see what my little list tells me," announced Mrs Knight. She produced a list of the children who bought school milk. She explained that she had already marked off the names of those children who had paid, and then read out the rest. Children who had money lined up at her desk, put it into a pot, and then watched while Mrs. Knight deliberately crossed off their names. "You need to see, so we all know you have paid," she said. There were lists too for book monitors, milk monitors, leaders and 'guards'. These lists were non-negotiable: the children were encouraged to read to see fair play rather than participate in it. But still, the usefulness of literacy in the maintenance of a smooth running and fair society was thus established.

The children took on this lesson. One afternoon, I watched a number of the girls in their free time decide to draw up illustrated lists. They were designing 'Vet's Clubs' and on their pieces of paper were two columns: those members of the class who they would accept as members, and those who would not be welcome. The names were

adorned with ticks and crosses. These children understood the power of the written word to manipulate society.

The 'behaviour tree' on the wall of this classroom was a further example of the way that words were used to order and control the community. Unlike the lists, which were primarily in Mrs. Knight's control, this tree was vested with the authority of the wider school: other teachers were responsible for noticing the behaviour of this class. Reading the leaves then, had a wider social relevance: it aligned the reader with the purposes of the whole school. Although I never saw a child look at it, the tree was clearly there to encourage good behaviour and create a sense of purpose amongst the children. It was the one display in the room that demanded a response from the children, and that response was social rather than imaginative.

The social usefulness of being able to read was illustrated again by Mrs. Knight when a note was sent round by the school office. She stopped the class and held it up to show them. She read the note aloud, her finger pointing to the words as she did so. It was about a special event at the end of term and what the children needed to do to participate. The implicit message that Mrs. Knight gave out was that it is worthwhile being able to read. Reading allowed one to know the secrets of those beyond the classroom. Readers know how to take part in society.

In this room then, the word served to initiate, mark and reinforce the social structures of the classroom and the wider school society. Readers had access to those structures, they could see them and understand them. They could participate more fully in the immediate and wider community. Being able to read was an advantage.

Instructional reading

Reading as a tool for instruction was commonplace in this classroom. Jim with his tin of ten basic words was a prime example of this. He read them in order to learn to read. Michelle's understanding that the scheme books were there to 'help you learn' rather than be read for their own sake is a further indication of it. John one day chose to play a card game. When the rime on one card was matched with the right onset on another, a picture was made of the noun formed. The player practised reading skills.

On several occasions I watched Mrs. Knight teach the reading of a sentence to the whole class. Each morning, the children would come into the classroom and find a

word on a slip of paper on their desks and a sentence from the reading scheme which contained the word written on the blackboard. One morning the word was 'Wednesday'. When the children had coloured it in, Mrs. Knight said:

> "Who can tell us what the word is? It's a long one, one used every week of the year. It doesn't sound like Wednesday at all. We can break it up into wed, nes, day. That will help us spell it."

Nathan read the sentence: *The old blue bus went to town every Wednesday.* "Well done you!" said Mrs Knight, and the lesson was over. This reading had no relevance except in the context of reading instruction.

Reading in this classroom was used as a means for instruction in other areas of the curriculum. The walls informed children of the names of the parts of the eye and the order of months in the year. These notices and labels had two instructional purposes: they conveyed facts to those children who could already read and supported the weaker readers who could match the words they knew in their heads with the shape of the word on the wall.

Mrs. Knight modelled the usefulness of reading as a means for finding out when she read lists and notes with the children. The lists told them whose turn it was, and the notes what needed to be done. The implicit message was that readers are better informed.

Reading then, was an instructional tool in this classroom. It was used for the teaching of reading itself, and for the transmission of factual information. It was portrayed as a skill. When that skill had been mastered, more information could be accessed.

Pragmatic reading

Reading in order to achieve something else occurred in this classroom. Again the walls bore witness to this. Lists of useful phrases, ordinal numbers and days of the week were there so children could use them. If they needed to know how to spell *swimming pool*, they looked on the wall.

There was pragmatic reading too of worksheets and textbooks. Zoe and Michelle were working from a maths workbook, drawing shapes into their exercise books. I overheard this:

> Z: Is that all you've got to do, draw shapes?
> M: That's what it says!

Michelle had read the instructions to find out how to proceed: she had a maths task to complete. The instructions did not help her with the mathematical concept, they merely told her what to do. Other children that morning had a worksheet to complete. It bore the legend: *Make 15.* The children needed to know what it said to complete the task, but reading didn't help them achieve it.

Reading like this is peripheral. It is not central to the purpose of the activity, but it makes that activity possible, or at least, efficient. It is a tool, a means towards a greater goal. It is immediate. As Michelle showed, the pragmatic reader sees a need, reads to fulfil it and then acts.

Reading for leisure

There were some instances in this classroom where reading was encouraged for its own sake and seen to be a pleasurable leisure experience. The books in baskets for 'if we get ready quickly for P.E.' suggested that this was the case. On one occasion, though, several of the children finished their work before the end of the session, and were allowed to choose. Some of them elected to read.

I watched a small group of girls sit on the carpet in front of the bookcase. They took a book, read a page or two out loud, flicked through the pictures and returned the book the shelf. Only the shortest and most familiar of the books, for example Pat Hutchins' *Titch* was read with any more than cursory attention.

On another occasion, I sat with Tina who had chosen listen to audio tapes. She played the Ahlbergs' *Funnybones* first. She followed the words in the text with her fingers and eagerly pointed to the skeletons as they were introduced. She grinned, gleefully at me when the singing started. When the tape had finished, she chose another, this time one of Shirley Hughes' Alfie stories. But we couldn't find the text

and concentrating on the sound alone of this rather wordier story was too much. Tina went off to do something else.

There were clear opportunities then, for reading for fun. Mrs. Knight sometimes encouraged it overtly. When a box of raffle prizes came round to the classroom, she purposely selected the only prize there that was a book and held it up for the children to see.

> "Gosh! There's a book, a lovely book! *Big Wonders of the World.*" She flicked appreciatively through he pages. "If you buy a ticket, you might win"

Books were covetable. They were a pleasure to look at and a pleasure to own. Despite this, there was no feeling in this classroom that reading for pleasure was important. It was pushed to the edges of the curriculum, fitted in between other work, and children left to get on with it. There was no *culture of persistence*, and children flitted from one text to another, one task to the next. Children reading were assumed to be purposefully employed and teacher intervention was deemed unnecessary. Furthermore, reading on these occasions had a status similar to that of colouring in, doing jig-saw puzzles and playing computer games. It was a leisure activity. If children chose to do it, that was all well and good, if they didn't, it hardly mattered.

At the end of the school day, Mrs. Knight was in the habit of reading a story to the children. There were instructional overtones to this activity. Mrs. Knight used it to reinforce technical vocabulary, words such as *chapter* and *author*, and to encourage the children to practise prediction. The main purpose of this session though, was relaxation.

> "I'm a traditional Infant teacher, " said Mrs. Knight, "The story is what you traditionally do at the end of the day. It gives the day a nice ending. I think that's important."

Reading for its own sake played a part in this classroom then, but it was a small part. Although it was sometimes explicitly encouraged, the implicit message was that it didn't matter very much. Learning to read was something that happened elsewhere and opportunities to include this reading into instruction were not taken up. Reading for the sake of reading was side-tracked. It was a nice enough thing to do, but it was no more another way to spend leisure time.

Conclusion

The reading experiences offered in this classroom were varied, but they had one thing strongly in common, that is that the word was always authoritative. Words on walls, on lists, in messages all conveyed the unquestionable truth. One did not argue with the list of book monitors: the names there were cast in stone. One did not question the labels of the parts of the eye or the spelling of Wednesday. The reader submitted to the superior wisdom of the text and accepted even the inanities of Roger Red Hat and his friends without demur.

Sometimes that authority came direct from the teacher, for example, in lists she made; sometimes it harked back to the wider authority of the school, and Mrs. Knight too was subject to its directives. Whatever the equation, the children were always the least powerful entity. They had no say: their opinions, experiences and ideas did not matter. When Mrs. Knight showed the class *Big Wonders of the World*, Colin volunteered, "Shall I bring in my world atlas tomorrow?" he was pointedly ignored. It was not for him to respond creatively. What the children knew or thought, or might tell each other didn't matter. The word encompassed it all.

One day Wayne was particularly wriggly when Mrs. Knight was talking. She said to him:

> I want you looking at me, not at Nathan, because unfortunately, you won't learn anything off Nathan."

She might have been talking about reading.

The Year Three Class

The Classroom

After the summer holidays, the class moves into a mobile classroom. It is a high, grey structure, set a little apart from the rest of the school, at the edge of the field, in the corner of the junior playground. A narrow flight of wooden steps lead to the door, which is half glazed and locked. The teacher, Mrs. Squire, keeps the key. She locks the door behind herself when the classroom is empty, and behind the children when the classroom is full. Visitors need to rap loudly on the glass or wave in at the windows to gain the teacher's attention and so be let in.

The door opens into a cloakroom area. One wall is lined with the children's coats and bags; their lunchboxes and snacks litter the floor beneath. To the left is a small grey table and two plastic chairs. The table is piled with old notes to parents and dilapidated jigsaw puzzle boxes. Beside it, on the floor, is the plastic container which the teacher uses to carry across teaching materials from the main school. The walls are blank. There is nothing else here.

A door, immediately to the right, leads into the classroom. It is a big rectangular room and it is full of tables. They seem large for such small children and are arranged in four blocks. The biggest table stretches across the back of the room and sits twelve children. Two others, big enough to sit eight, flank the sides of the room and are pushed so close to the walls that the children can hardly get to their places. The fourth table is in the middle of the room, in front of the blackboard, and directly under the teacher's eye. It seats six.

The corner of the room that is not taken up with tables is carpeted. It is here on the floor, that the children sit during the first part of the Literacy Hour. The teacher's wooden chair is here and the big book stand. Here too are the coloured plastic boxes in which books are stored and sorted for the children's use. There is one box of information books, and another, much emptier, for poetry. The others contain books that have been graded in order of difficulty and the majority of these are from the Oxford Reading Tree.

There is a computer in this corner of the room, just near enough the teacher's chair for her to reach across and use it. I rarely see it switched on. When it is, a phonics programme is revealed. Further away is a table on which more books are displayed. These are information and story books that have to do with the topic work that the children are currently undertaking. As the year passes I see books there on India, on Christmas and on rivers. I do not see the children consult them.

This is a light room: windows take up the entire length of the two longest walls. Display space is therefore limited and the two remaining walls are not imaginatively used. The blackboard fills most of one. Around it are lists of words on sugar paper: days of the week, names of shapes, useful openings for stories; a fire notice and a photocopy of the class timetable. An internal telephone positioned at adult height is prominent and provides a link for the teacher with the rest of the school. There is a drawing of a Roman soldier, about as big as a child, pinned to the door beside the board. It can only be seen when the door is shut. It was clearly drawn by children and has been cut out and mounted on black paper. It has a title *Roman Soldier,* but there are no further words. The children are proud of it.

For a while, visual impact is provided by a display on the back wall. Blue fabric is draped across the corner. The word *Winter* is cut out of blue paper and mounted on a silver starburst and the spiky face and hands of the Snow Queen spread chill across the room. Snowflakes hang from the ceiling and a small number of the children's poems and pictures extend the theme. Some of them, unfortunately, are mounted rather low and are made tatty by the chafing of chairs against the wall.

Beyond this there is a commercial poster promoting healthy eating, once used as an information text in the Literacy Hour, and some drawings of food labels. Two more commercial posters are dotted in the remaining space: one is a publisher's poster promoting a series of children's books, the other is a poster from the Book Trust. "Reading is Fun," it proclaims.

The Children

The children, of course are the same ones that were in the Year Two class, but they are now a little older. They look different. With the new school year, the Head teacher

has introduced a stricter uniform code. Now the children all wear bright red sweatshirts with the school badge, or bright red cardigans. They look smarter, and as their new teacher, Mrs. Squire waits for them to line up quietly outside the classroom, I feel that there is rather more a sense of purpose and calm.

The children are very pleased to be in Year Three. They enthuse to me about the improvements: there is more playtime, more things to do at playtime and snacks to buy. Drama lessons are exciting and "doing tests with plasticine" is fun. Only one child complains that the work is harder and only one moans about homework.

Several children tell me that the books are better. Harry, who reads action comics at home, and had found the illustrations to Roger Red Hat baffling, is thrilled to find pictures even in the Oxford Reading Tree that showed action and movement. Both Michelle and Colin are pleased to find a greater variety of texts. They name books they have enjoyed reading and vie with each other to retell the story. Colin talks enthusiastically about poems. The children explain to me that they are now allowed to choose the books they take home to read, but that they have to "stick to our colours."

Sinead is pleased to find that they are encouraged to read information books. Michelle agrees that this is a good thing. Without them, she says, "We'd be bored and we wouldn't find out information."

As the year progresses the number of children in this class decreases significantly. Some children move away, rather more transfer to other schools in the district. One is permanently excluded and another two swap classes within the school. Of my original sample of ten, only six children are left by the third term. This, together with some persistent absenteeism, means that for the end of the year, the typical daily class size is around eighteen.

The Teacher

Mrs. Squire has worked at Pardoners Way School for a number of years. Since her maternity leave, some three years ago, she has taught Year Three classes. She is

the Language co-ordinator for the school. She organises a school bookshop and professes to have an interest in children's books.

Reading profile

Mrs. Squire presents herself as a keen reader and a committed teacher of English. She has few memories of her own early reading, but thinks she learned to read very young. She remembers enjoying books with her mother before she started school, particularly *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* and a compilation of plays given to her by an elderly neighbour. She remembers reading at school, standing at the teacher's desk, reading aloud from scheme books and completing the complementary worksheets afterwards. Mrs. Squire is amused now by the compliance she exhibited in those days.

She told of the growing control she exercised over her reading: her insistence that her father borrowed *The Hobbit* from the library and read it to her in instalments at bedtime, and her choosing to spend her weekly pocket money on Ladybird books. These she collected and coveted. She spoke of her developing interest in non-fiction, fuelled by the Ladybird books, and, as she grew up, of her 'escapist' reading of *Sue Barton* titles in the summer holidays.

These days, Mrs. Squire still borrows books from the library and continues to read predominantly non-fiction. She reads gardening, cookery and travel books in term time, as well as the necessary professional literature. In the holidays, when she "can be mentally detached" she "makes a concerted effort" to read fiction. Often it is Maeve Binchey – "the as easy as eating peanuts scenario" – but sometimes it is Thomas Hardy.

The affect and indulgence that so characterised Mrs. Knight's reading is hardly discernable in this portrait of Mrs. Squire. Here we see a reader who feels she should be striving to achieve. It is not a children's book she remembers from her pre-school years, but Palgrave's *Treasury*. Parents are drilled into reading suitable texts in a suitable manner, Ladybird books are hoarded and Hardy is scaled like cliff face.

Mrs. Squire associates reading for enjoyment with guilt. Binchey is dismissed as easy, *Sue Barton* as the 'precursor to Mills and Boon'. "Not that I ever did," adds Mrs.

Squire hastily. She acknowledges her transgression in the matter of reading, keeps her sin before her and is tempted no further. Salvation does not lie in indulgence.

Covetousness, however, is acceptable. Mrs. Squire speaks of her delight in owning new books, and of her joy at taking home a pile of library books. "All mine to read, " she says, "Though whether I get round to read them is another thing!" There is pleasure in the ownership, even when it is temporary, but that pleasure stems not from what is *in* the books, but from what they signify. For Mrs. Squire, they seem inseparable from ideas of status and achievement.

Teaching children to read.

According to Mrs. Squire, her most important task as a teacher of reading is to communicate to the children that reading is more than a necessary skill: reading is enjoyable and reading is for life.

She felt that the way reading was generally taught in the school did not give children this impression. She found *1,2,3 and Away* boring and utilitarian, and felt that it produced mechanical readers who were unable to use inference. She talked with irony of the 'slavish approach' that other teachers seemed to have towards reading, and their insistence on vertical progression "until [the children] can read the works of Shakespeare."

Mrs Squire advocated the use of 'quality texts' in the classroom and attempted to expose children to 'good quality literature'. She told me how she encouraged the children to read widely by recommending familiar authors. She personally owned a good collection of Roald Dahl's books, and these she let the children borrow. She called this process modelling reading.

Mrs. Squire tried not to describe the progress of children as readers in her class in terms of skill acquisition. She talked instead of children behaving like readers; being increasingly motivated to read and to borrow books. She described their developing interest in non-fiction and their increasing ability to talk about texts. However, she had not rejected the language of skill altogether. She talked of children who 'hadn't got the basic skills' to cope with the Literacy Hour, and of Laura, who has "...sort of anomalies in her cognitive ability, and what she can do in terms of her skills." It seems then, that for Mrs. Squire, behaving like a reader can only happen when skills are secure.

Expectations of the children

Mrs. Squire was ambitious for the children in her class as readers, but not hopeful.

She felt unsupported by other teachers in the school. She found it hard to express her ideas to colleagues whom she felt were 'entrenched in the benchmarks.' She was encouraged to find that that the National Literacy Strategy was beginning to change this: books were being discussed in the staff room at last.

Mrs. Squire thought that many of the children lacked the necessary support at home to do well. She felt that the school was "fighting against a completely different value system:" Parents were introspective and lacked ambition for their children. They did not "aspire towards any other sort of culture system." Ownership of books seemed to be indicative of this: where they existed in the children's home, they were not "treasured as I might value my own."

Mrs Squire's great feeling about education is that it should be a force for improvement, a means of salvation. Reading is the key to this and so needs to be worked at. The purposefulness of her own memories provides illustration of this: we see her strive to become the sort of reader she aspires to be. She aims to inculcate this diligence in her pupils and to raise them out of the apathy she sees in their homes.

> "You've got to try and improve each generation, haven't you, really?"

The Teaching of Reading

The teaching of reading that I observed in the Year Three classroom was substantially different from that in Year Two. One reason for this was certainly the introduction of the Literacy Hour: it focused the teaching of reading in this classroom into a particular hour of each morning and marginalized its importance in the rest of the curriculum.

Most of the observations I made of this class therefore took place with the Literacy Hour. It was then that Mrs. Squire perceived that she was teaching reading and was most happy to accommodate me in the classroom. I made it my business to observe the class at other times too. On these occasions I looked for evidence of reading *outside* the Hour.

Except for the 15 minutes or so that the children spent at the beginning of each afternoon organising their homework and choosing the books they would take home that evening, I saw very little reading take place outside the Literacy Hour. Afternoons were filled with practical activities; there was no shared story time. It seemed that no one had time to read.

The National Literacy Strategy clearly affected the *accidence* of teaching of reading in this classroom: it controlled what was consciously taught, and when it was taught. It could not, however, affect the subjectivity towards reading that the teacher communicated to her class or all the uses to which reading was put.

In the analysis of reading in this classroom that follows, it is those uses, the *substance* of reading that is examined. The categories of reading used here are those introduced in the earlier part of this chapter, so that comparisons can easily be made and contrasts drawn.

Socially functional reading

The written word was not so obviously used to construct behaviour in this classroom as it had been in Year Two. The rules and the lists that organised day to day living were absent, and Mrs. Squire did not use notes and messages to model her part in society or the usefulness of reading in maintaining it.

There were two indirect ways, however, in which reading held a clear social function. First, the ability to read, as assessed first by Standard Assessment Tasks and then by teacher experience, determined where children sat in the classroom, the work they did and the books they were allowed to read. The children defined themselves according to these groupings:

> "We have to stick to our colours. The colour on our table is orange" (Michelle)

There is pride and clear boundary marking in these words: social distinctions are being made. It is not the written word itself that determines these distinctions, but the use to which the word is put.

Somewhat similarly, Mrs. Squire used reading to model and reinforce community and acceptable behaviour in her classroom. Her language in Literacy Hour sessions illustrates this:

> "What are all these poems we've been reading called? We can put them all together."
> "We are looking for ideas about what we can say..."

Edwards and Mercer (1987) note that the use of this 'royal plural' in teacher discourse is widespread. Here it defies the child to act as an individual, to step outside the group and think independently. The message strongly, is that *we in this community* read in this way and think in this way.

Indeed, compliance in reading is associated with virtue and dissension from the norm is not allowed. In one lesson 'we' were learning to identify key words in information texts. The children were considering a 'Healthy Eating' poster and those who correctly recognised key words were praised: "Good girl...Good boy" said Mrs. Squire. Then came a menu for Christmas dinner. The children were excited. They began to make comments:

> "I like Christmas dinner."
>
> "I had that for my tea last night!"
>
> "bananas"
>
> "...in pyjamas"

Mrs. Squire doggedly read on, ignoring the interruptions. When they continued, she shouted: "I expect better than this!" In doing so, she rejected the children's ways of reading as much as she rejected their behaviour.

In this classroom, responses to text other than those pre-determined by the teacher were not welcome. Children who persisted in responding aberrantly were ignored and then admonished. The practice of reading controlled the sort of reading that was allowed.

Instructional reading

Reading in order to teach reading in this class took place in the Literacy hour and in the 15 minutes after lunch when the children read and changed their books. Within the Literacy Hour it took two forms: there was reading aloud together in the whole class session, and guided reading.

There was considerable emphasis in this classroom on reading aloud. In the first part of the Literacy Hour, children were sometimes invited to join in with the teacher as she read paragraphs of prose and usually when she read poetry. Children were encouraged to read accurately and to mark punctuation.

Reading aloud featured strongly in guided reading. Here children took turns to read aloud and enjoyed doing so. They found it unnecessary to listen to each other, however, and did not consider themselves to be reading, unless it was their turn to read. Satisfaction, it seemed, came from the achievement of turning print into sound; and there was no expectation that the reading would be meaningful.

This emphasis on accuracy rather than content was apparent too in the reading time after lunch. Mostly the children were left to get on with reading and changing books as they wished, but sometimes a child would ask Mrs Squire if she could read individually to her. Mrs Squire was always ready to oblige. On these occasions I heard her listen to children, correct miscues, offer praise and point out adjectives. I did not hear her discuss the story or the child's interpretation of it.

Despite Mrs. Squire's insistence that reading was more than a skill, I saw little in her teaching of reading that went beyond skill acquisition. Text level work was rarely developed. Texts were simply read aloud as though meaning were transparent. Her personal interest in non-fiction was equally hard to perceive. Though the children read non-fiction, they read it not to discover facts, but to see how text is organised. This pragmatic use of text is considered next.

<u>Pragmatic reading</u>

Pragmatic reading was frequent in this classroom. Each day the teacher wrote a list of the day's activities on the blackboard, and the children read it in order to discover what would happen next. They read and copied down instructions for homework from the board, and they negotiated the print on worksheets in many areas of the curriculum.

Pragmatic reading was most clearly observable in the Literacy Hour, where poems were read in order to identify adjectives, stories to exemplify the use of speech marks in dialogue and posters to spot key words. One morning, the children were presented with a poem they had not seen before. It was *The Riding of the Kings* by Eleanor

Farjeon (see appendix ii). Mrs. Squire read the first verse to them and then stopped. "What sort of poem is it?" she asked, "Rhyming or non-rhyming? Who can spot a rhyming word?"

The children spotted several, and the reading continued. At the end of verse two, more rhymes were found, and still more at the end of verse three. The spelling of the rhymes was discussed at length and it was clearly this feature of the poem that concerned the teacher. Here was a spelling lesson disguised as poetry. If Mrs. Squire had intended the children to read this poem for any reason than other to help them spell, then she failed to communicate this intention.

Reading for leisure

Leisure was not a feature of this classroom. The pace was relentless and the hectoring voice of the teacher (Hilton 1998) was a persistent feature. Even in the time after lunch when the children were free to read, her voice frequently punctuated the calm: "I want to see those books out now ...You need to get a book with your own colour on it, your own colour ... Come on Trevor, you should be reading now."

Though there was no leisure, the children did find some pleasure in these sessions. Two boys giggled surreptitiously at a book containing nude figures and hid it when the teacher came by. Kylie glowed with pride when she was allowed to look at Mrs. Squire's own copy of *Angry Arthur*, and a number of children sat quietly and purposefully with books and appeared to enjoy reading them.

Mrs Squire clearly wanted to communicate to these children that reading was enjoyable and she tried to teach this directly. However, in a reading community where her own voice and interpretation was so strong it was sometimes difficult for the children to find the autonomy to form an opinion. The day the class read shape poems illustrates this.

The session began conventionally. Mrs. Squire introduced the poem, read it and asked the children safe, closed questions about its format. The children answered sensibly and their answers were accepted and confirmed. Then the teacher changed tack:

> "I like this poem. Does anyone else like this poem?"

For a moment there is silence. The children do not know how to answer. Then Sinead braves an attempt:

"It's a rhyming poem."

She is so unused to having to look within herself for an answer, that she finds an objective fact about the poem to offer instead. It is the sort of answer the teacher usually requires.

Mrs. Squire tries again. She reads another poem. This one is about lightning: short lines of verse are placed on the page to mimic a bolt of lightning.

"I think I like this one even better than the other poem. Does anybody else?"

Now the children are really confused. Is the teacher unsure? What does she want from them? They decide to hedge their bets:

"I like both"
"So do I."
" Me too."

Still Mrs. Squire is not satisfied. She tries to be more specific:

"I think I like it because it has been written really carefully. It doesn't actually say it's about lightning, but when you follow it with your finger – And I like the words too. They were chosen really carefully."

She slips immediately into teaching. She is not saying what she likes, but what she wants the children to learn. They are bemused and still desperate to please:

"I like all the words."

Then Tina breaks in:

"I like bright, sharp and zigzag"

She has managed to do exactly what Mrs. Squire has failed to do. She has responded to the matter of the poem, identified the words she finds vibrant and

resonant, and managed to tell everyone this, succinctly and with precision. Now it is Mrs. Squire who can't cope. She asks:

> "What made the poet choose any of those words?"

The question is unanswerable. Tina's moment is gone; response to the poem has fled and we are back in the predictable and earnest world of teaching points and providing the answer the teacher knew even before she asked the question.

Conclusion

The authoritative nature of the reading identified in Year Two persists into this classroom.

Whereas before, the word stood proud in lists and rules and ordered society, now its influence is insidious. It is not what the words say, but how well the reader can read them that matters.

Reading now has more power to control. It is divisive. Those children who chose to read in the ways determined by the teacher are accepted and valued in this society; those who dissent are not. Authority rests with the teacher. It is her way of reading that counts and the children are not encouraged to challenge her or the text. In this way they are deprived of power and autonomy as readers.

Still the text itself is unassailable. Meaning is perceived to be neutral: automatic and transparent. (Chapter One: 19) Therefore texts need not be questioned or discussed. Instead they can be used as exempla or paradigms to illustrate the competencies that are associated with literacy.

In this classroom authority determines that reading is fun. Sometimes it is, and occasionally that fun is illicit. More often, however, reading is earnest and focused. Mrs. Squire's determination to succeed pervades everything.

I saw little in either classroom at Pardoners Way School to suggest to me that the children were being prepared to read critically. Rather, children were taught to accept text and to comply with its authority; reading was utilitarian. I wondered if this was the

result of the particular circumstance in which Pardoners Way found itself: a 'failing school', in a difficult area, or whether its practice was widespread. I looked to the next school, Friars Hall, to find out.

Chapter Four

Friars Hall School

Introduction

This chapter follows exactly the structure introduced in the last. In it, I establish the situation of Friars Hall School and present first the Year Two class, and then the same children as they move to Year Three. I describe and analyse the reading experiences of children at both stages and consider the perceptions and purposes of the teachers.

The school

Friars Hall is a Church Of England Aided Primary school that accepts pupils between the ages of 5 and 11. There are currently 135 pupils on roll and the majority live in the village itself or in one of the two hamlets that comprise the catchment area. A sizeable number of pupils, however, travel in from the housing estates on the outskirts of the town. All the children are white, and although their family backgrounds are varied, their socio-economic circumstances are mostly favourable. (OfTSED 1996, para 25). Very few children are entitled to free school meals.

The school scores very well the DfEE performance tables of K.S.2 results. In 1998, 81% of pupils achieved level 4 or above in English and in Science. It is oversubscribed. A number of parents every year appeal to the governors and the County Council to have their children admitted to the school.

The location

Friars Hall is a popular village, about three miles to the north of the town. It stretches for some distance along the main road: first the church, red brick Victorian, distanced from the village by parkland, then the green, the school, the shop, and on until eventually, with a small cul-de-sac of prefabricated bungalows the village peters out into farmland.

It is a well-appointed village. As well as the church and the school, there is a shop, a post office, garage, a car show room, a community centre, two public houses and a tennis club.

Houses along the main road are substantial: Victorian and Georgian villas and farmhouses predominate. Between them are a few more ancient buildings and some terraced cottages. There are some modern houses, large and individually designed, but the development of smaller, estate housing is built off the main road and hidden from view.

This is a car-based community. Except for the times when parents walk young children to and fro school (and they are a minority) it is rare to see people walking in Friars Hall. The village shop reflects this. Outside a lay-by provides parking for five or so cars; it is rarely empty, and is used by people passing through as much as by villagers. The main public house has a vast car park – bigger than the school playground. It accommodates the many customers who come out from town as well as locals and the effect of this is that the village feels suburban. Despite the concerted efforts of some of the inhabitants, the village struggles to sustain a separate identity.

The school building

Friars Hall School sits, squat, by the main road, hedged high and fenced with peeling white railings. A collection of buildings can be seen from the road. The nearest and most striking is Victorian. It rises above the hedge, red brick and gothic, with large, single, mullioned window. A short bell tower echoes the ecclesiastical theme and the school sign confirms it: Friars Hall C of E Primary School. Barred, blind doors face the passer by, impassive, painted. There is a notice: "Welcome to Friars Hall School. Please use the side entrance." There is an arrow.

The visitor follows the arrow round the building into the playground. Here at last some signs of modernity and habitation. Colourful snakes writhe their way across the playground, inviting children to skip and to count. There has been recent building work. An extension to an Early Years classroom juts into the playground. Its broad, bay windows show the book boxes and small furniture within. A courtyard, some planting, and at last an entrance.

The entrance hall is bright and welcoming. The eye is drawn to a bright red notice board. 'Friars Hall School' it proclaims in huge paper letters. Photographs are mounted all around it, some posed, but most informal snaps of staff and children working and playing, outside and in. Nearby, the secretary sits in her room, the door open. Beyond her, is the Head's office. There is a waiting area. Two easy chairs are provided for the visitor and an occasional table. Ranged upon it is a selection of secondary school prospectuses: the local county secondary school is there; so too is the diocesan high school and glossier than both, prospectuses for a number of private schools.

A corridor leads away to the left, first past a small non-fiction library, then past a K.S.2 room and finally on to the infant classrooms. It is busy and narrow. Pegs line the walls and the coats, lunchboxes and backpacks of young children clutter the way. It opens soon onto an outside door and small carpeted area. Here are three foam chairs, infant-sized and brightly coloured, arranged beneath a window. There is a low table and a book display case, containing picture books. This is where those who buy school milk drink it after morning play, where house groups meet for assembly and where television programmes are watched. Occasionally, an adult will bring a child here to read.

A little further and the classrooms are reached. There are two for K.S.1. To the left is the modern room that could be seen from the playground. Here Reception and the younger Yr 1 children work. To the right is the Yr 1/2 room.

The staffroom

A staff room has been built in the converted loft space above the hall in the largest of the Victorian buildings. It is a big room – high at the centre and low at the sides. Light floods in from the top half of the vast ecclesiastical window in the gable end of the school.

It is a sparse room. There is little furniture and not much colour. A circle of six chairs cowers around a coffee table at one end, and this is where the staff relaxes at break and lunch time. There is a sink, a fridge and a small table where the equipment for making coffee is kept.

A bookcase stands in a corner. Part is divided into sections in order to provide personal space for teachers' belongings and post. The rest is given over to the sort of literature

that accumulates in staffrooms: county and DfEE circulars, publishers' catalogues and, more unusually, a pile of back numbers of the parish magazine. There is a shelf of published teaching resources. Some of these are textbooks; others are collections of lesson ideas.

At special times of the year the rest of the space in the staff room is strewn with costumes for school productions or the paraphernalia for maypole dancing. But for much of the time it is hardly used. Things are stored and undisturbed in boxes under the eaves.

At morning break the school secretary stands at the table and makes the drinks. She gives each teacher her own special mug. She welcomes visitors and offers them drinks and friendly conversation. The teachers sit around the table. They talk about their homes and families and about school. Most often they discuss the children in their classes. They especially talk about the children whose behaviour is difficult, and those who are not working as well as they should. They are proud of their achievements in the classroom and when a new child arrives from another school are quick to say how little it can do compared to the rest of the class. Often, when the head teacher is absent, they discuss her inadequacies. She 'doesn't understand' everything from the logistics of arranging maypole dancing on the village green to the educational challenge the Year Six class presents. This is not a happy staff.

The Year Two Class

The classroom

The classroom fills the greater part of a second Victorian building. The room is large and was once high. Now inelegant grey tiles lower the ceiling, and block off the top of the enormous window that fills the entire back wall. The room should be light, but the lower window panes, within the teacher's reach, have been covered with pictures of animals, cut from calendars and the upper panes are above the ceiling. Between them a little light filters in. The fluorescent tubes are needed, even in summer.

Narrow strips of brickwork divide the window into three. Attached to each is a long, red banner edged with yellow boarder paper. The first is a chart of number bonds to ten. A title asks, "Can you make 10?" The other banner displays the five times table. It asks nothing, but states its being: "The 5 Times Table."

Along another wall there is a row of low cupboards and above that a long blackboard. The tops of the cupboards are cluttered with classroom ephemera: pots of pencils, exercise books and abandoned sweatshirts. A central space has been cleared for things of topical interest. A book about trees is displayed there and another about jungles. An acorn grows in a pot and a solitary tadpole swims in a tank of snails and duckweed. A three-foot high papier-mache penguin roosts there. It looks down haughtily on all classroom proceedings.

There is writing on the board: lists of children's names with ticks or crosses beside them to indicate who has completed certain activities; lists of words in 'spelling families'; reminders of work to be done, of action to be taken. In the corner, where the board ends, there is a word bank. 26 cardboard pockets, each with a letter drawn on it, are arranged in alphabetical order. The pockets are empty.

On the opposite wall examples of children's work have been pinned, unmounted, slightly above the children's eye level. They appear to be cartoon strip representations of a story. There is no explanatory sign and some of the work looks unfinished. Beneath this, against the wall are two book boxes. They have recently been tidied. Two sections contain books from the Oxford Reading Tree series and another is full of Sunshine books. The rest seem to contain a variety of commercially published children's picture books. These have been sorted roughly according to size.

Thirty or so books are crammed into each partition. They represent a range of children's authors. The Ahlberg's are prominent: the *Happy Families* series is there and a copy of *A Dark and Stormy Night.* Anthony Browne's *Gorilla* is there, hidden between larger books, and Burningham's *Oi Get Off My Train.* There are books by Charles Keeping, Tony Ross, Babette Cole, Shirley Hughes, Ruth Brown and Lynley Dodds. There are two copies of Jill Murphy's *Peace At Last.* The Berenstain Bears jostle with Frog and Toad and there is a puzzle book called *The Land of the Lost Teddies.* The condition and age of these books varies. The best and newest of them are in plastic wallets and are on

loan from the schools' library service. Others are battered and show the effects of frequent handling.

A book case, to the right, houses a small collection of what the children refer to as 'chapter books'. A very well thumbed copy of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* is prominently displayed. A dozen or so new books in plastic wallets from the library service are spread along the top shelf. There are novels by Dick King-Smith and Jacqueline Wilson, and a collection of Bel Mooney's Kitty stories. Several of these books have slips of paper inside with a child's name on. These pieces of paper appear to function as bookmarks as well as claims of readership. A few hardback topic books about the rainforest and other natural habitats are on the lower shelves. They are not displayed, but rest flat.

This part of the classroom is the reading area. It is carpeted and six bright cushions flop across the floor. They look well used. The teacher's table sections this area off from the rest of the room. It is piled high with files and papers and classroom equipment. The teacher's own reference books are shelved upon it: an illustrated children's Bible, a collection of Bible stories and an anthology of folk tales. There are piles of group readers here too: six or eight copies of the same title for children to read together with an adult. None of the books on this table appears to be generally available to the children; the teacher controls their use.

A hard, wooden desk chair faces away from the table, towards the carpet where the children sit for registration and teaching sessions. This chair and the desk are the only pieces of adult sized furniture in the room.

Beyond this is a 'wet' area. There is a sink and equipment for painting. Two high, grey tables are pushed together to provide a surface for messy tasks. The wall beyond is filled mostly with another display about animals. A commercially produced poster invites the reader to distinguish between reptiles and amphibians and there are examples of children's work in maths and science. A computer sits against this wall and there is another table. On it are copies of recent letters to parents that the children have taken home.

The children's tables are hexagonal. They fill the area between the board and the book corner, and are arranged so everyone can see the board. A further table, away from the

rest and near the door, provides a place where a disruptive child can be isolated. Above it, book reviews written by some of the children have been pinned straight onto the wall. They are all of the same book and each includes a brief summary of the plot, the book's title, author, publisher, price and ISBN number. There is no focal point for this display and no sign to orient the reader. Above it is a chart for the recording of house points.

There is a bank of trays just inside the door, each with a child's name written on it. The children and teachers refer to these as lockers. They are nearly empty. They contain only what the child brings into school from home each day: a bookbag, a sweatshirt, a toy, a recorder. These children do not look after their own work. In a corner there is a rack of dressing up clothes and a dolls' house. These are the only signs in the room of play.

The Children

There are about thirty children in the classroom, eighteen of them in Year Two and the rest in Year One. They are all impeccably dressed in school uniform: the boys in grey shorts and aertex shirts; the girls in yellow gingham dresses. Some of the girls' frocks have white collars trimmed with yellow gingham and their socks have matching frills. All the children wear royal blue sweatshirts and these are printed with the school badge.

These children are comfortable with reading: it is something that people simply *do*. They see their parents and carers read for pleasure and for work related purposes, (Jeremy, David, Kathy) and they grow up in the expectation that they will do the same. "We are going to be beauticians," June told me, "So we'll read about that." They expect to be successful readers and they are.

For these children, reading is natural. It is part of the daily routine of bed-time and bath-time; it is there to be shared with friends who visit, and to provide solitary enjoyment in the privacy of the bedroom or garden den. There are story books and sticker books, football and pop star annuals, comics and newspapers. One girl told me how she skimmed the small advertisements in the local paper to find jobs and cars for her parents. The range of reading undertaken by these young, competent readers is impressive. (Clark 1976)

The children in this class understand their reading to have two purposes: it gives them pleasure and it helps them learn. They clearly see themselves as apprentice readers, engaged in learning the trade. They are therefore able to talk about their reading in terms of developing competence. They speak about how they used to read and what they will read soon. Leo looks forward to the science fiction his brother reads: "They are too hard for me now"; and David to the novels his parents enjoy: "My Dad's biggest book has got 999 pages!" They equate number of words and the size of print with difficulty: "It's got titchy writing. I can't even read it yet." (Robin) and they assume that as they grow older they will be able to read more. Practice is important, but it is the number of words they process rather than *what* they read that matters.

There is a feeling of relentless progress here. The children aim to leave behind picture books (which are 'easy' – "we know all the words") and move on to 'chapters'. Pictures are fewer, print is smaller, and the opportunities to read collaboratively diminish. Independent silent reading is the objective, and there is no need to revisit familiar texts. Only Annabel showed any sense of 'savouring' a book when we read together. For most of these children school reading is about displaying competence. They read aloud to prove they can and to be praised for it.

All but two children enjoy reading. The exceptions, one boy and one girl, are the least successful readers in the class. For both of them the difficulty seems to be that their expectations of reading do not match experience in the classroom.

Geraldine comes from a home that is less obviously bookish than the others and Mrs. Yeoman frequently complains that her parents do not support her by reading at home. In fact, books play an important part in Geraldine's life. She speaks enthusiastically of her own books – Thomas the Tank Engine and Teletubbies spin offs, comics and football books. She looks forward to reading her big brother's horror stories and for much of the term, carried round a copy of *Titanic,* the novel based on the recent film. She would settle with this book at silent reading times and was adamant that she 'read the words'. She clearly sees herself as a reader and expects to be able to read. The difficulty is that this media based understanding of what reading is for was not reflected in the classroom. Geraldine's titanic efforts with an adult book were not valued or encouraged.

She was judged instead on her stumbling renditions of the Oxford Reading Tree stories. Her expectations of reading did not count in this classroom.

Calvin's alienation is different. The reading he knows at home is very like classroom reading and he clearly had expected to learn to read as smoothly as did the rest of the class. Unfortunately, he continues to find words difficult to recognise, and his frustration is exacerbated by the disappointment of his parents and teachers. He is encouraged to read simple books with few words and he finds them boring. "I've got a book that's much too hard," he announced when we read it together. In fact, with support from the pictures and me Calvin managed the spoof information book well. This reminder that reading is not always linear helped release him from the uphill task of decoding word for word. The expectation in this classroom that learning to read is always a 'bottom up' process does not help Calvin.

The Teacher

Mrs. Yeoman has been teaching at Friars Hall School for about 5 years. This is her first appointment and she has always taught this age group. She has one daughter who is a pupil at the school in a K.S.2 class.

<u>Reading Profile</u>

Mrs Yeoman remembers enjoying listening to stories enormously at school, but being slow to learn to read. She sees two reasons for this. One is the tedium of the reading scheme presented to her at school, and the other is the willingness of her mother and sisters to read her the stories she could not read for herself. Mrs. Yeoman attributes her eventual learning to read to the intervention of her mother:

> "She must have thought that I'd never learn for myself if they kept on reading. So one day, the stories just stopped. And I did learn."

The first book Mrs Yeoman remembers reading for herself is Blyton's *The Ring O Bells Mystery;* a 'proper chunky book.' "I really wanted to read it and I struggled through to the end.' and then:

> "I loved it. I loved stories. I'd sit down and read and become totally involved in that world."

Mrs Yeoman reports that she read 'all the time' until she started teaching, and recognises a number of trends in her reading. She reads mostly fiction, but the books she chooses often reflect her emotional state or current interests. She reads familiar books when she is unwell, went through a 'feminist phase' after the break-up of her first marriage, and enjoys books that are topical. She claims that she reads 'an odd selection of things'. One 'unusual' book was Ben Okri's *The Famished Road.* She found this difficult at first, but persevered and enjoyed it in the end. Now Mrs. Yeoman rarely finds time to read adult books except in the holidays. She continues to read children's books with her daughter.

A number of themes emerge from Mrs. Yeoman's description of herself as a reader. One is her commitment to story and her need to be interested in what she is reading. This is evident in her impatience with the reading scheme she endured as a child, her ability to become 'totally involved in the world' of the book, and the intellectual and emotional engagement she presents in her reading as an adult. Mrs. Yeoman believes that reading should be fun; and for her that fun is to be found in complete involvement in story. She immerses herself in text:

> "I'd lose myself in a book. It's a definite escape."

Familiarity is important too to Mrs. Yeoman. Although she does read texts that are unfamiliar, for example the Okri, much of her reading is connected to what she knows or has experienced. This does not mean that her reading is merely an echo of what she knows already; rather it extends and stretches her understanding. Syal's *Anita and Me* certainly presents a Black Country childhood like her husband's; but it is an Asian childhood. There is similarity and difference: something to work at. Mrs. Yeoman expects books to affect the way she thinks. She remembers reading Moseley's *Hopeful Monsters* on a train:

> "You'd get off the train and you'd still be in the story and because he's got this bizarre way of looking at things, you'd be looking at Birmingham in this bizarre way yourself."

Finally, Mrs. Yeoman recognises the importance of individual effort. She talks of *struggling* and *persevering* when she speaks of her reading both as a child and as an adult, and she strongly implies that she makes this effort alone. She offers no sense of a supportive community of readers. But effort is worthwhile: the satisfaction gained from reading is greater when it has been worked for. Here is a sense of achievement: s*truggle* and *perseverance* both suggest that she sees herself overcoming the obstacle of difficulty as she reads – and the personal victory she gains over that difficulty is at least as great and as pleasing as the satisfaction of reading itself.

Teaching the children to read

Like many primary school teachers (Cairney 1995), Mrs. Yeoman's great concern is that the children in her class grow to love reading. To this end she affords it a high status in her classroom. A lot of time is given over to reading and the room is filled with bright books. She reads to the children regularly and encourages them all to read at home and at school.

Because of her own experience as a child with a reading scheme, there is no scheme in her class, but a large number of Oxford Reading Tree books are included with commercial texts in the book boxes. The children can choose to read these as they please. She prefers children to have completely free choice in their reading, but recognises that this is not always appropriate and that children sometimes need guidance:

> "I have to suggest something harder, or perhaps not so difficult for some children."

She offers guidance, then, not according to the likes and interest of individual children, but according to the perceived difficulty of the book and the competence of the reader as a decoder: the child needs to be able to manage the words. This appears to be at odds with her own experience with the *Ring O Bells Mystery* and leaves little room for children

who like Carrie, (Bussis et al 1985) rely on story to help them read the words. Even without a scheme she implies a hierarchical, 'bottom up' development in children's reading.

This discounting of the matter of text is pervasive. As long as words are being read, it seems, Mrs. Yeoman is happy:

> "I say to the children, if it's silent reading, I don't care *what* you are reading, as long as you *are* reading"

She accepts Smith's (1978) dictum that we learn to read by reading, but she does not pursue the idea far enough to wonder what it is that the texts the children in her class actually teach. (Meek 1988). She is still, despite her insistence on free choice and interesting texts, concerned with teaching skills:

> "Something I'm trying to focus on now is getting them not just to read non-fiction, but to use it. If they are successful they can use a book to find information.

Mrs. Yeoman acknowledges the role that parents play in teaching children to read. In accordance with school policy, she expects each child to take home a book every night and for parents to read that book with the child. She is happy with this system, especially in the early stages of reading, but finds that parents flounder once their children achieve fluency:

> "A parent is not going to sit down and devise a set of questions and test them to see if they have understood the book."

Mrs. Yeoman considers the teaching of comprehension skills to be one of her key tasks.

<u>Expectations of the children</u>

Mrs. Yeoman has no doubt that the majority of children in her class will become successful readers and believes that most of the parents have similar goals for their children as readers as she does herself.

Mrs. Yeoman recognises that there are other expectations too. Some parents see reading not as a source of pleasure, but as a route to academic success. Mrs. Yeoman believes this competitive approach to reading to be unhelpful and finds it makes some children anxious.

The Teaching of Reading

A lot of time is given over to reading in this classroom and Mrs. Yeoman is adamant that its encouragement is her highest priority. Despite this reading enjoys an ambiguous status. Millard (1994) observes:

> "The real problem is that the reading of fiction in this important stage of learning has been weighted with too many functions. On the one hand ... it is intended to serve as a five finger exercise in basic skill which will be used for more important purposes later ...On the other hand, reading practice is expected to develop a love of reading in preparation for the literary responses which will form a major part of their secondary school experience of English." (1994:45)

These tensions are clearly apparent. Reading is publicly heralded as a vital and enjoyable part of the curriculum, but its pursuance in the classroom is often vague and directionless. It is a necessary skill, and a privilege. This central paradox in the teaching of reading is not resolved in this classroom.

As before, in order to make the practice of reading in this classroom comparable with the others, the same categories for analysis are used.

Socially functional reading

In a society where reading is accepted as a natural part of life, and where school understandings of reading are similar to those of the home, the ways in which reading continually shapes and reinforces behaviour are difficult to see. Unlike the teachers in Pardoners Way, Mrs. Yeoman had no need to model the social usefulness of reading in her classroom. The children accept this already.

The social function that reading served here was two fold: it bestowed status on readers and book ownership and it made clear the boundaries of acceptable reading behaviour in this community.

Although there was no hierarchical ladder for the children to climb that made plain their reading attainment, few of the children were in any doubt as to where they stood as readers in relation to the rest of the class. Their judgements were based on three things – the grouping of children for group reading sessions, the fluency in reading unseen texts aloud in these sessions and knowledge concerning who was 'on chapter books.' Being 'on chapter books' was a social accolade in itself. It signified the approval of the teacher and acceptance into the set of children who were somebody in the class. And because seating arrangements were loosely determined by the teacher's assessment of reading ability, this social divide was continually reinforced.

The ability to read aloud well was particularly valued. One day, Mrs. Yeoman was unwell and her voice began to give out as she read the story to the class on which their morning's work was to be based. She asked the four most competent readers to finish the story for her. They stood in turn and read aloud. Her gratitude together with the awe and envy of the others raised those children's status for the rest of the morning. Being able to read like this was what everybody wanted.

Favour and status could be achieved too by owning books. One morning, Olivia brought in from home a book about trees to complement the working the classroom. Mrs. Yeoman celebrated the book. She showed it to everyone, looked at the photographs and demonstrated how the index worked. The book was placed prominently on the display table. No one showed the slightest inclination to read it. Ownership was enough. Olivia was made to feel special because the book was hers.

The ownership of fiction, especially chapter books conveyed similar status. Christine proudly carried round an anthology of Dick King-Smith short stories that she owned, and Cara, a whole pile of her favourite books. Neither girl expected to have time to read these books in school. They were for show, to prove their owners were the sort of people who read and valued books, and that they accepted the bookish values of society.

Mike's football annual had a different effect. He pored over it with his friends before school and sometimes in silent reading sessions, but he did not show it to Mrs. Yeoman. She tolerated it in the classroom but clearly disapproved of the chatty reading practices it encouraged:

> "If you are going to read that book, Mike, then sit down and read it quietly. If not, find something else."

Collaborative, factual reading of this kind simply had no place here. It deviated from the accepted construction of what reading was for. It did not practise recognised skills, it was not individual and it was not story, the precursor of literature. It was discouraged.

<u>Instructional reading</u>

Overt teacher led reading instruction is comparatively rare in this classroom: most of the children are beginning to read fluently, and as Millard suggests is common in primary schools, there is:

> "... an unquestioning acceptance ... that children would develop as readers, if given sufficient time and space to read books that interested them. "(1994:47)

To this end a great deal of time is given over to the children to practise reading and in this time responsibility for progress and motivation rests with the children themselves. There is little guidance from the teacher, who does not see it as her task to intervene, except to keep order.

The 'silent reading' slot after morning play is a prime example. The children come in full of excitement and are expected to settle with a book. Some do. More do not. They flick aimlessly through the pages of books they have chosen, rifle through the book boxes or continue conversations under the cover of reading. Even those children who do take the opportunity to read do so casually. They find a book, read it for the session, then put it away. They do not use the time to continue with the book they are reading at home, though these are often with them in school, or attempt to keep the new book safe for later. The impression they give is that reading in these times simply *does not matter:*

Jeremy: We just read to ourself, in our head.
V.S : Are you learning anything then?
Jeremy : No, not really.

This impression is exacerbated by Mrs Yeoman, whose practice is to insist that children who have not worked hard before play get on with their work during silent reading time. The status of reading is thus diminished and there is confusion amongst the children as to whether it is *silence* or *reading* that matters.

Teacher intervention in the teaching of reading comes in two forms in this class. The teacher 'hears children read,' and there is group reading, which she supervises. 'Group reading' is the prerogative of the better readers in the class. Mrs. Yeoman gathers six children at a time around a small table and together they read a short novel. The children take it in turns to read aloud, a page each around the group. Mrs. Yeoman helps them with words if they stumble, and explains vocabulary as she deems necessary. She keeps an ear tuned to the rest of the class, and seems sometimes more concerned to keep them quiet than listen to the readers. There is little discussion of the texts. The children who read a version of The Trojan Horse and Pandora's Box are encouraged to identify them as traditional tales from Greece and are asked if they enjoyed them, but the issues and emotions prompted by the stories are not explored. The children are asked to write book reviews to a specified formula.

Mrs. Yeoman 'hears' the weaker readers. They bring to her their current reading book, stand beside her chair in the middle of the classroom and read aloud to her. She listens quietly and as before, only intervenes when she judges that help is needed. She encourages children to 'break up' unfamiliar words. She offers praise and encourages each child to choose a new book. Other adults come into school to read with the children from time to time and their interactions follow a similar pattern. Always, the emphasis is on accuracy and fluency. There is no discussion of text and no direction in the selecting of the next book. Adults always profess to having enjoyed hearing children read.

This is skills based pedagogy. Reading ability is assumed to accrue though the accurate decoding of words and the garnering of vocabulary. Meaning is transparent and does not need exploration, but the presentation of that meaning in the form of a book review is yet another skill to be acquired – an 'add-on competence'. (See Chapter One: 32.) Here are

Millard's (1994) five-finger exercises, and it is interesting to note how 'enjoyment' is always tagged on to the end of them, a guilty nod in the direction of the wider purposes of literature. Mrs. Yeoman and the other adults in the school want to show that reading is enjoyable and fulfilling, but skills are their first priority.

The children know this, and clearly show it in the 'paired reading' sessions that take place everyday in this classroom with the children from Reception next door. The point of this time, according to the teachers, is for everyone to practise reading, but the year two children perceive it quite differently. They see themselves as teachers, helping the younger children to read:

> Valerie: You can help them read the words if they get stuck on it.
> Christine: You make them feel that they are getting better, to help them get better at reading.

They do not benefit themselves:

> V.S: Do you think you learn anything from paired reading?
> Jeremy: No. They are too easy books.
> David: I can read just about all of them.

The children here exactly echo the presumptions of the classroom. Reading is an accretion of skills. The reader progresses from 'easy' books to 'hard' books, and books are read not for what is intrinsically in them, but for their semantic difficulty. There is no need to read a book that easier than you can manage: its lessons, which are about decoding, are learnt already.

The teaching of reading through modelling by the teacher will be dealt with under the final heading of this section.

Pragmatic reading

A lot of the reading that takes place in this classroom is in essence pragmatic. The children are aware for much of the time that they are reading to learn to read, and because of this they see the reading they do now as preparation for reading in the

future. Learning to read silently is important, Christine explained, because when you get into a 'bigger class', you will have to do a lot more of it: practice now will pay off later.

There was pragmatism too in the way that Mrs. Yeoman used stories in the classroom. When she read the children a version of Jack and the Beanstalk[1], her primary aim was not to model the making of meaning from text or to communicate the fun of the story, although both happened to some extent, but to get the children to write. All the books I saw her read to the class, except in the last few minutes of the school day had this function. She read to the children to start them writing.

More obvious pragmatic reading happened at a more local level in the classroom when children read and copied spelling lists from the board and instructions from the top of worksheets. This was minimalist reading. Most of the children read as little of the instructions as they could get away with, preferring to ask a friend what to do, or guessing from the look of the exercise. This exasperated Mrs. Yeoman, and sometimes she was justified, but occasionally the problem was not that the children failed to read the words, but that they did not know how to make sense of them. One day, for example, a maths sheet had six squares drawn upon it and an instruction to colour in half of them. The children meticulously drew a line through each square and coloured six halves. They failed therefore to see that three was half of six, as the exercise intended, and were blamed for 'not reading the instructions properly.' I never saw a child helped to understand the differences in reading required for mathematical language such as this.

An effect of all this pragmatism was that a number of children saw reading tasks in the classroom always as a means to an end. Reading came before a task, and the work of the classroom was to get that task finished. Reading itself was sidelined, it became a subsidiary activity that could be avoided if someone else could be persuaded to do the reading for you or tell you the answers. The reading that did take place was therefore cursory and uninvolved. It was the beginning of the *nothing-to-do-with-me-ness* that was a major feature of these children's work in year three.

Reading for leisure

It is the stated belief of both teacher and children in this classroom that reading is a pleasurable activity. Books are to be coveted and stories enjoyed. Time to read is time for leisure and relaxation. Children who work well and quickly are rewarded with extra reading time, and children who were slow, denied it. The consequence of this is that reading comes to be seen as a treat rather than an important part of classroom business. 'Work', however petty, takes priority. I found Cara one day, close to tears. She had wanted to read, but Mrs. Yeoman insisted she finished colouring the cover of her project folder. Mrs. Yeoman herself regularly spent silent reading sessions marking, or doing what the children called 'important jobs.' The implication was that she was too busy to read: reading was for leisure.

Indeed the relaxed ethos of silent reading sessions did strongly suggest that reading was a low grade, leisure activity. Although some sustained reading undoubtedly did take place, most of the children, for most of the time were engaged in reading related activity, rather than reading itself. They browsed through books and book boxes, they selected, they sampled, they sorted. I watched a group of girls gather together the classroom collection of Ahlberg's *Happy Families* books one day. They sorted them, compared them and arranged them, but did not open them. They were happy and busy and that was enough.

Enjoyment was a feature of more formal reading events too. Mrs. Yeoman enjoyed reading to the class. She read aloud well and sessions were suffused with pleasure. However, there is a constant tension between the fun of the realised text, the necessity of work and the behaviour of the children. The occasion when Mrs. Yeoman read Jack and the Beanstalk to the class demonstrates this clearly. (appendix i) Mrs. Yeoman models that enjoyment is an appropriate response to the text, but signals that it is to be enjoyment on her terms. The children are to take on her teaching points concerning vocabulary and genre. Their interpretations of the story must not eclipse its significance in terms of work to be done. Thus the exuberance of the class in joining in is curbed and 'irrelevant' responses are silenced.

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[1] See appendix i

The Year Three Class

The classroom

The new classroom is smaller and part of the school's modern extension. A long glass window fills one wall, from waist height and beneath it a broad windowsill is lined with plastic ice-cream tubs filled with books. Some of these are multiple copies of the same book for guided reading in the literacy hour. Others are short novels, plays and poetry anthologies. They are banded together according to the teacher's perception of their difficulty and the tubs are colour coded.

Directly beneath the window is the carpeted area where the class meets for registration. A row of three brown corduroy easy chairs, of seventies design, is pushed together against the wall to form a sofa, and beside it in the corner is a bookcase. Rows of paperbacks fill the shelves. Some are old, with yellowing pages and include a number of well-known children's texts, such as the Paddington books and *The Hundred and One Dalmatians*, but Jacqueline Wilson and Michael Morpurgo are here too. A few large format picture books are stored in a large plastic box to one side.

The adjacent wall is flanked with units that house the children's trays. The trays themselves bulge with toys: beanie babies are a craze here. Piles of exercise books are stored upon the units. Above them is display space. A poster with a poem on it, used in a literacy hour session is temporarily pinned to the wall, over a number of weather pictures produced by the children. To the left, a sink is cluttered with the paraphernalia of classroom painting; newspapers spill from underneath and brushes and palettes, inadequately washed, are balanced on the draining board. Recent artwork is stacked in untidy piles on the tables nearby. It needs to be cleared before the children can work.

The far wall of the classroom is where art is displayed. Paintings based on the work of Monet adorn one wall together with a newspaper clip about a current Monet exhibition in London. There is more creative work on the adjacent pinboard. A sign reads 'The Vikings are Coming' and drawings and models of long ships are pinned to the wall.

By the door is another bookcase, and there are more books in trays on the shelves. These are mostly scheme books. The Oxford Reading Tree is well represented and there are copies of books from Ginn 360 and Upstarts.

A wide black board takes up most of the remaining wall. Like the rest of the room, it is cluttered. On it are headings for children's work, notes for the teacher, and reminders of work to be done. Lists of words on sugar paper surround it. There are 'word families,' words to use instead of 'said' and rhyming words. A tall bookcase stands beside the board. Its lower shelves are filled with texts books for the children's use: dictionaries, atlases and comprehension books are there. Maths scheme books are most numerous. Two computers and the teacher's desk take up the remaining space. Children's word-processed stories are pinned around at eye-level. The teacher's desk is piled high with papers and curriculum documents. Her personal books are shelved at the back. Prominent are several Bibles, a school hymnbook and a book of ideas for assembly.

The tables where the children work fill the centre of the room. There is hardly room to walk between when everybody is sitting. Most chairs are arranged to face the board, but one or two are placed so that children have to twist and strain to see. They are arranged in groups to sit six to eight.

There are always adults in this classroom. Two of the children suffer from cerebral palsy and have full time ancillary support.

The children

The eighteen children from year two join a dozen from the year above and four newcomers to the school to make a large and noisy Year Three/Four class. The older children have been in Mrs. Merchant's class for a year already. They are the least successful and confident of their year group and it is thought that another year with the same teacher will benefit them.

The children tell me about their new class with mixed enthusiasm. They have been organised into groups according to the outcome of a reading test, and these groups determine the books they are allowed to read. Children in the top 'free reading' group are thrilled with the outcome and Priscilla boasts that she has a reading age of eleven.

Others are less pleased, but philosophical. The 'colours' are simply part of changing class and growing up.

As the year progresses and the children mature, their attitudes towards reading develop. The homogenous and unspecified approval of reading that was apparent in year two has dispersed. Some find that activities such as Brownies and swimming allow them less time to read, and some hardly read at all:

> "I hate reading now," said Geraldine. "I watch telly. South Park's my best programme. 9 o'clock, Fridays."

Others are developing clear preferences for certain texts and authors. Non-fiction is becoming more popular, especially among certain of the boys. Lottie tells me how she rereads her favourite passages from *The Twits* "over and over again. It's so fascinating." Blyton is popular with a number of children. David is so impressed with her writing that when we discuss the prose of Browne's *Voices in the Park*, he says "Enid Blyton would have done it better." This is the first indication from any of the children that the author is responsible for the text.

There is a move too, in many of the children from a preference to reading to adults towards reading alone. For many of the most confident readers, this is because "It's better in my head," but others still crave the support of adult approval. A few children simply like reading aloud: they enjoy the opportunity to display their competence.

The attitude of relentless progress towards ever longer and denser books persists. Christine looks forward to the 'really thick books' she will read in year six. Comics are enjoyed at home, but they are not part of this progression and picture books are dismissed. When David and Jeremy, two of the most competent readers in the class are presented with *Voices in the Park,* they read the words, quickly and efficiently, from beginning to end. They do not even glance at the pictures. "That was *quite* good," they tell me politely, and are momentarily stunned when I ask them to read the words *and* the pictures.

The Teacher

Mrs. Merchant is a teaching head. The recent OfTSED inspection recognised 'significant weaknesses' in the school, particularly 'deficiencies in management and leadership' (OfTSED 1996 para 19) and 'unsatisfactory outcomes... in the middle year groups' (para 7). A generally unsupportive staff blames Mrs. Merchant for these lapses. She has been at the school for four years.

Reading profile

Mrs. Merchant is a graduate in English. She is committed to reading and to literature and at the time of our interview was working her way though Hemingway's *Collected Short Stories*. She was the only teacher who talked to me about her current reading.

Mrs. Merchant described a childhood full of books. She has no memory of learning to read, or of being read to, but knows she could read before she started school. There were always books around. She shared a bedroom with her older sister, who "was a book-oholic and still is" and she read her sister's books. At ten, she borrowed a copy of *Wuthering Heights* and was engrossed by it. The ghost in the window so frightened her that she slammed the book shut and fled terrified, beneath the bedclothes. Mrs. Merchant mentioned no children's books.

She grew up in a family where literate behaviour was important and education valued. Both her parents were 'self educated' and read widely. Her father wrote poetry and plays. The nonconformist church they attended provided a complimentary environment, where reading was emphasised as a route to self-improvement. "Salvation and lift, they used to call it," said Mrs Merchant.

As an adult Mrs. Merchant continued to read and to write stories for children herself. In the course of our conversation she talked about many of the books she had enjoyed. A constant criterion for her in the choosing of books was the quality of writing:

> "I like Dorothy L. Sayers, because she s a jolly good writer."
> (about Eco's *The Name of the Rose)* "It really is exceptionally beautiful writing"

She also valued 'depth' and complexity of plot. *The Name of the Rose* is "like peeling an onion all the time, and there is layer upon layer. It's amazing." Meaning, however, is perceived to be extant, in the text, in all its multi-layered complexity. (Chapter One: 28ff- *the fixed text*) It is not a construct of the reader:

> V.S: Different people take such different things from that book. Do you remember it mostly for the detective story or the philosophy?
>
> J.M: It's this idea of the different layers. To get to the detective bit, you have to go through the philosophy. That's what's fascinating for me, to have a book that has layers in.

Mrs. Merchant finds the government circulars that are a necessary part of a head teacher's reading diet dull and difficult to read:

> "I tend to do a lot of skimming and scanning, and I read the summaries. It's awful to admit, but it's true."

Ms Merchant comes across as a passionate reader. She is passionate about reading and passionate in the way she reads. Her preference for *Wuthering Heights* over government documentation is an example of this, and so is her willingness to persevere with the intensely felt, but bloodthirsty Hemingway. She is unusual among the teachers in this research in three ways. First, she is the only one for whom reading seemed to be a commitment rather than a leisure activity; second, she alone presented her childhood memories in a rationalised form; and third, she was the teacher whose understandings of reading showed least clearly in the classroom.

<u>Teaching the children to read</u>

Mrs. Merchant favours a *Personal Growth* (Goodwyn and Findlay 1999) understanding of the purpose of teaching reading.

> "Books teach you about yourself, ultimately, and that has got to be the ultimate goal of education in my opinion."

Reading confers self-improvement through self-awareness. Books are a 'tool for the imagination' and 'open up new worlds for the reader', and so the reader is enriched.

> "But you have got to be a confident reader before you get to that point. Having said that, I think we've got a lot of confident readers around who never get to that point. For me it is almost a spiritual thing. It's a key to a side of yourself, to a world, if you like, that's not just based on success and power."

Mrs. Merchant's first aim then is to ensure that the children in her class attain competence. In previous years, this was achieved by regularly hearing children read individually. Children were sorted into those who needed to be heard daily, those for whom once, twice or three times was enough, and with the help of other adults, a routine was maintained. It ensured that children whose parents no longer saw the need to listen to them were given practice, encouragement and helped to progress. Now, with the advent of the National Literacy Strategy and the Literacy Hour, there was no time for this, and Mrs. Merchant felt that the children's reading was suffering as a result. Guided reading was fun and a 'positive thing' but it was not enough.

Mrs. Merchant thought that her training in English informed her practice. It made her want to help children think about stories in more complicated ways, to consider character and motive, and not to take things at face value.

She found much of the Literacy Hour disappointing. She did not like working from extracts and found the necessity of using texts as a source for skills based word and sentence level work counterproductive. She felt children lost sight of enjoyment:

> "If you take away the fun out of reading, you are making a big mistake."

She thought the government were selling parents 'a duck' with the National Literacy Strategy because:

> "Basics, basically, are the basics and will always remain the basics. And if that is all you aspire for your child, well, it isn't particularly self enhancing is it?"

The Teaching of Reading

The practice of reading in Mrs. Merchant's Year Three/Four class is significantly different from that in Year Two. Now, because of the greater demands of the Key Stage Two curriculum, there is little time devoted exclusively to reading. Silent reading and paired reading are no more, and the only sustained opportunity to read fiction is in the guided reading part of the Literacy Hour, when children read 'multiple text' books. The demands on them to read in other areas of the curriculum are greater, and this, together with the mountain of comprehension, grammar and vocabulary exercises that the children are expected to complete during the Literacy Hour means that much of their reading is fragmentary and pragmatic. A result of this is that the status of school-time reading is considerably lower than before.

Socially functional reading

A key function of reading in year two had been that it gave the children social standing in their own eyes and won them the approval of the teacher. Now it is ownership of toys, not books that confer status. The children's individual trays are crammed full, first with yoyos and then as the year progresses, with beanie babies. The need to win adult approval has been overtaken by peer culture. The children no longer need to prove to each other that they are reading.

The public status of reading has diminished: it is no longer a uniting force. Books are occasionally brought into school, but now the children have their own concerns and take little notice of public acclaim. Mrs. Merchant listens valiantly when two girls read a poem 'from my mum's old poem book'. No one else bothers. More interest is shown in Lottie's book about volcanoes. She got it by saving the tokens from breakfast cereal packets and is eager to own the other titles in the series. Like beanie babies, it is collecting that matters. Many of the other children seem to share this perception. They ask questions about the brand of cereal and number of tokens required. No one asks about volcanoes.

Reading for the sake of reading has gone underground in this community. Children do still read, and some enjoy reading greatly, but they read at home. The reading they do there has an individual, private function. It is no longer part of the dynamics of the classroom.

The reading that does take place in school continues to shape the children's experience and expectation. Because so much of it is low grade and pragmatic (see Pragmatic Reading, below), a culture of *nothing-to-do-with-me-ness* has developed. Children do not see any need to concentrate or 'connect' with what they read. A surface reading will suffice to get the task done, and leave plenty of imaginative space for chatter. "You ignore all that," said Christine, of the passage of a comprehension exercise. "You just have to answer the questions." On no account should the necessity of reading interrupt a conversation or affect the reader.

A culture developed in this classroom where most reading was merely part of the day-to-day grind of school life. It had to be endured, but could be made bearable by ignoring it as far as possible.

Instructional Reading

The teaching of reading in this class takes place almost entirely within the confines of the Literacy Hour, in the teacher led whole class and guided reading sessions. Observation of Mrs. Merchant at these times, suggests she has four main concerns: to increase the children's vocabularies and therefore their understanding of text; to provide them with a technical metalanguage for the identification of text-types; to encourage good reading aloud; and, for the weakest readers in the class, to further their decoding skills.

Introducing and explaining vocabulary is a major component of Mrs. Merchant's teaching. She believes that children's misunderstandings are very often caused by difficulties with vocabulary:

> "They don't understand one word and they miss a huge chunk of what you are talking about."

In guided reading sessions and in whole class work, she continually drew children's attention to words she thought they might not know. For her, it seemed, meaning resided in the very words of the text. She viewed the acquisition of vocabulary as a cumulative skill, separate from the context in which words occurred:

"Now, we've had this word before, so you ought to know it."

The children copied her in this: "We *know* that word *already*!" said Lottie, with contempt.

The insistence on a metalanguage for text-type was probably a result of the National Literacy Strategy. Sessions frequently began with naming, and in this way, words such as anthology, collection and biography were introduced, and concepts such as fact, fiction, information text and traditional tale were reinforced.

In both these instances, Mrs. Merchant taught the children by means of *display questions* (Heath 1982):

> "Who can tell me the difference between fact and fiction?"
> "Can anyone tell me what 'flattery' means?"

These questions, which work on the understanding that the teacher already knows the answer, have two purposes: they allow children who know an answer to prove it and give those who do not a chance to learn. But even when an answer is correctly provided, children were rarely allowed the last word. Mrs. Merchant confirmed and refined what the children said. At the end of the conversation about flattery, Joanna observed "My Nanna does that to me." She is ignored: her experience not accepted. It is not part of the objective knowledge that Mrs. Merchant wished to transmit.

Mrs. Merchant read aloud to the children at the beginning of nearly every Literacy Hour session, and sometimes asked the children to read too. They were allocated paragraphs of prose to read unseen or invited to read a verse of a poem on its second reading. Especially in the case of reading poetry, performance was emphasised and only the more fluent readers asked to contribute. Less proficient readers practised reading aloud in guided reading sessions.

The teaching of reading in guided reading sessions depended on the make up of the group. Confident readers were expected to read silently, and then answer questions about the wording of the text. Mrs. Merchant was keen to demonstrate that successful reading was about more than speed ("It isn't a race, Jeremy.") and that long books were

not necessarily harder to read than short. ("I know it looks easy, but it isn't. The words are quite hard.") Understanding mattered, but understanding, as always in this class, appeared to be a function of the words in the text, not the reader.

Less confident readers took turns to read the text aloud with Mrs. Merchant[2]. She helped them sound out unfamiliar words and break up long ones such as understand. She asked questions to check that children were following the story, and asked them to recall significant events. All of her questions demanded display and she did not expect the children to supplement their answers with supposition or experience:

> "Don't guess, Joanna. Check the answer."

She sometimes used cues in the text to help children vocalise their reading, and discusses with them how "Hi there, furry features!" might sound, but she ignores the textual cues that might lead to speculation: "An ordinary dog on an ordinary day. Maybe. Maybe not."

Only once did I witness the teaching of reading outside the Literacy Hour. This was when Mrs. Merchant showed the children how to read the key on a map.

Pragmatic Reading

A very large amount of reading in this classroom is pragmatic. Children spend time in the Literacy Hour every day scanning dictionaries and thesauruses for words that begin with a certain letter, or have a particular spelling pattern or belong to a specified grammatical class. They complete worksheets. They read comprehension passages from textbooks, read questions and (when they are reminded) answer them in full sentences. They work from maths text books and atlases and sometimes find and copy passages from information books.

Guided reading sessions with the most able readers are pragmatic. The children are asked to find adjectival phrases in the text they have read or explain vocabulary. Sometimes children are encouraged to search for question marks or notice how direct speech is recorded. Even here, the text does not count for itself.

Invariably, in the children's work, it is product that is valued over process. Though sometimes the quality of a child's work is praised, ("Those are *wonderful* adjectives, Peter"), more often teacher comment focuses on presentation, the quantity of work produced and whether the work is correct. There is rarely room for ambiguity in the work the children do. Comprehension exercises rely on the sufficiency of opaque text, grammar, spelling and punctuation on a system that is perceived to be objective.

The result of this is that the children are distanced from any real responsibility for their work. They are gatherers and reporters of *fact* - that is the fact held by the text or governed by convention. They are not responsible for making texts mean or language work. Answers are *there,* and because it is getting them right that matters, children might just as well copy from a friend or ask a passing adult for help. They need not think for themselves. Here is the genesis of *nothing-to-do-with-me-ness.*

A clear example of this arose towards the end of the summer term, when Mrs. Merchant wanted to assess the children's reading comprehension. She gave each child a photocopied extract from a story and a set of questions, and set them reading. Becky sat beside me muttering: "I don't want to read this. I can't be bothered." Then to me: "Will you read it for me?" I would not.

Becky needn't have worried. Mrs. Merchant clearly shared with the children the perception getting it right was what mattered. Within minutes, she was talking the children through the text, making sure they could all read the words, explaining vocabulary and unpicking figures of speech. She then went through the questions. By the time she had finished, there was little left to assess, except how well the children had been listening to her and how fast they wrote.

Pragmatism, then, reigned in this classroom. Not only was reading mostly for pragmatic ends, but through pragmatism, it was possible to avoid doing even so much of it as was required. Reading, it seemed hardly mattered.

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[2] see appendix x

Reading for Leisure

Mrs. Merchant's busy schedule as a teaching head left her no time to read during the school day; her reading took place at night. The children in her class, despite their comparative inexperience, were expected to develop similar habits. There was no time in the school day to pursue individual reading, to explore texts with friends or to browse through the books in the classroom.

Indeed, the quantity of work expected of the children, and their reluctance to stop talking for long enough to do it meant that there was rarely free time of any sort in this classroom. On the few occasions when the children were able to determine their own activity, (for example, in the minutes before school and at wet playtimes) no one chose to read. Once, I sat at a table and read myself, to see what would happen. Two or three children came to join me. They asked questions about what I was reading, then got out their own books. It had not occurred to them to do this before.

However, reading as a pleasurable experience was strongly modelled to the children. It was the custom of the school that the last twenty minutes of each day was spent either in musical activity or in storytime. Classes split and children went to different teachers and listened to different texts. In one week, the children in year three had the opportunity to listen to serialised episodes of three separate novels: *The Iron Man, The Family from One End Street* and *Starlight Barking.* This rich experience of being read to, of hearing the tune of the language on the page (Barrs 1992) must have helped convince many of the children that reading was still worthwhile, despite the contrary messages of this classroom.

Conclusions

Despite the rhetoric of both teachers, which forefronts literary involvement, this pedagogy is essentially skills-based. Children are taught to decode text. When they are judged to be able to do this, they are encouraged to read individually. 'Add–on competences,' for example the ability to summarise plot and write book reviews are introduced. Skills direct teaching. They determine what needs to be taught. Texts and

the readers must bend to comply. There is no room for ambiguity in text, or individual response from readers.

The abiding vision is not so much as to create a community of readers, as to produce a class of individuals who read. Reading is a private pursuit. The teachers' own pleasure in reading is solitary, and they want the same for their charges. At a time therefore, when the curriculum demands ever more pragmatic uses of reading, and when peer pressure grows stronger than teacher approval, children are left to read independently. Their only model at school of what texts can do comes in the story session at the end of the school day. There texts are given a chance to be powerful. The children are interpreters, but as in their own reading, they are silent interpreters. They are not given explicit models of thinking that empower them to make meaning from texts. Some children learn to do this anyway. Others do not.

At Pardoners Way, the model of reading was entirely authoritarian. Here, a similar authority in teacherly curricular reading was coupled with what amounted to complete abnegation of authority in individual, private reading. The children's thinking was tightly controlled on the one hand, and left awash, drifting and directionless on the other. Was it possible, I wondered, to bring these strands of reading together? Could not a dialogue be set up between individual and school reading, between teacher and child interpretation of texts that enriched both? I looked to Parsons Field School to see if reading was more integrated there.

Chapter Five

Parsons Field First School

Introduction

In this chapter I present the third school that participated in this research. As with the two previous chapters I introduce the school first in the context of its surroundings, and then describe the physical environment. I introduce the children and teachers and describe and analyse the teaching of reading. As before, I portray the children's experiences in Key Stages 1 and 2 separately, even though in this case, the children did not change classes.

The School

Parsons Field School is a voluntary controlled, Church of England First School, which, admits children from Reception to Year Five. There are three classes in the school and 72 children on roll. OfSTED, which visited in 1997, remarks on the 'warm and caring family atmosphere' (1997 para 1) that is maintained in the school.

The majority of the children who attend the school live in the village. Many come from professional homes, though the majority have parents who work on the land. There is a small but significant core of Traveller children, most of whom live on a Travellers' site in the village. One boy, whose cousins attend the school, comes by taxi every day from another site some eight miles distant.

The school employs three full-time teachers, a secretary and two part time classroom assistants.

The Location

Parsons Field is a long village: it straddles a country road for more than two miles, the houses spaced and spacious at first and modern, then closer, almost intimate, as the middle is reached. Here buildings are of local stone; they are warm, ancient and

picturesque. The road bends sharply. A public house, the green, and the Church are revealed, and the village school.

The School building

If the visitor comes from the north, it is the school field that is seen first. It is a large field, edged with trees, and it runs for some way along the road. A low iron fence separates it from the pavement, and leaves open a view, past the adventure playground and the swings provided for the children, and on to the fields and countryside beyond. From there, sheep can be heard bleating, and occasionally, a party of ramblers emerges. The walkers clamber over the stile and trudge along the public footpath that crosses the school field, and pass eventually onto the road.

A huge and ancient horse chestnut tree stands in the field close to the school. It towers over the old original building and provides a focal point for parents bringing their children to school and collecting them afterwards. On it is pinned a bright poster advertising a School Association summer barbecue.

The visitor follows the railings along the pavement towards the school entrance. A notice proclaims the land to be the property of the County Council and warns off trespassers and forbids the exercising of dogs on the playing field. A gravel path leads to the door, and half way along it is another notice board. This one is white and wooden. It has pinned to it notices particular to the school. The school name is there, and a list of the governors, produced in a calligraphic script on a computer. A further hand-written note asks parents for donations of cardboard for use in classrooms.

From here the front of the school can be seen. It is clearly in two parts. There is the original, single room school building, late Victorian and of local stone. A small chimney rises from the gabled slate roof and the effect is homely. A low, flat roof building, of glass and yellow brick, extends from the right. It is to this new building that the path leads.

There is a porch. Glazed doors lead the visitor into a small entrance lobby. Photographs are displayed on all the walls. To the left mounted on black paper, Year Two and Year Three children can be seen participating in a practice Literacy Hour session. Beside them, on more black paper, are photographs of other children from

a city school, who came to demonstrate their steel band and Asian dancing. Still more photographs celebrate a school visit to the Outdoor Centre in the Malvern Hills and in a clip frame, hung at the eye level of a small child, is a montage of children and adults creating the wildlife area together.

On the shelf beneath the secretary's window is a small bell. The visitor rings it and the secretary appears, smiling. She welcomes the visitor, asks her to sign in and hands across a paper 'visitor' sticker. "The children will challenge you if they don't see it" she warns. Then the secretary releases the security lock and the visitor passes into the school.

There is a wide, carpeted corridor. To the left is a library area, to the right, cloakrooms, the head teacher's office and the staff room. Ahead is a large display board on which scenes from nursery rhymes have been painted by the children and mounted by staff. A broken down wall has been made from paper bricks and the question "Who has fallen off the wall?" pinned beside it. An abandoned bucket is accompanied by the sign "Who went up the hill?" A table beneath this board has upon it a tray with teacups and a teapot. Beside these is a set of instructions written by children about how to make tea. Further along is a spinning wheel and examples of wool, some untreated, fresh from the sheep and some commercially spun and wound.

Where the table and display board end is the door to a large classroom. This is the room where the oldest children work and the room which doubles as assembly hall, dining hall and P.E. space as the day requires. Opposite it, above the pegs are posters made by the children. They invite tourists to visit the village, the nearest town and England.

The library area is bright and inviting. There are book boxes stationed through the centre of it, their geometric shapes softened by green hardboard frogs that have been screwed to each end. In these boxes is a seemingly random selection of commercial picture books. Between them are small round tables where the children can work and sets of four chairs.

The room is edged with low book shelving and it is here that those books the children refer to as 'reading books' are housed. These books are colour coded and

are displayed with their spines facing out. Many of these books are from reading schemes, the majority being part of Ginn 360. Few have a title written on the spine and what shows most clearly from the shelves are the coloured sticky labels.

A window looks out onto the road. Beneath it shallow steps have been built to accommodate more books. Here a small reference library is displayed, front covers looking out at the reader. All the books are new and most belong to the Dorling Kindersley 'Picturepedia' series. They deal with natural history and science. Other non-fiction titles are scattered throughout the library, some resting on stands above the shelves where the scheme books are housed. Interactive books, such as Stephen Biesty's *Cross Section Castle* are there and so too are books on religious festivals, musical instruments and colour.

The Staffroom

The staff room is small and narrow. It is divided into two parts. Near the door is a work area. There is a large table, a photocopier and a guillotine, and shelves of professional books, curriculum documents and planning files. A low wall separates this from the social area. Here is the sink, the fridge, the kettle, a set of eight identical mugs, comfortable chairs and, usually, a biscuit tin. The teachers and support staff meet here at break and lunch times.

Conversation flows freely in this staff room. The teachers live busy lives and talk of their homes and their families and hobbies. They talk too of the children in the school. Frustrations with, and worries about individual children are shared by everyone, and triumphs are celebrated. There is an ethos of caring.

The atmosphere in this staff room is always welcoming. Refreshments are offered to visitors and generous attempts are made to include them in conversation.

The Year Two Class

The Classroom

At the end of the library a doorway leads to the old part of the school, the Year Two/ Three classroom. Immediately the visitor is aware of a change in light and temperature: for the fabric now is stone rather than brick, and the windows are small.

The entrance is narrow. As the visitor enters the classroom there is a display board to the left where two sugar paper books containing children's work are hung. *Our Class Poems* is one, and the other: *An Anthology of Writing for Different Purposes*. What purpose any of this writing had other than its eventual inclusion in this book is unclear. Both books are hung rather high.

To the right is a piano. It does not appear to be in frequent use. Books and papers are piled upon the top and a spider plant trails anaemically over the edge. The cover above the keys makes another place where books can be shelved. Iolette Thomas' *Janine and the Carnival* is here. So too is Jill Bennett's anthology of spooky poems and John Burningham's *Would You Rather...?* Mick Inkpen's *Penguin Small* once stood with these books. Now it has fallen and lies flat above them on top of the piano.

A broad counter runs along two sides of the room, beginning by the door, opposite the piano. On its first stretch is equipment for technology. Scissors and glue are here and so are construction toys and the models the children make with them. Card and fabric and larger material for modelling is underneath. Paint, brushes and palettes come next and cut into the counter in the corner of the room is a sink. Over it and on red backing paper, more of the children's poems are displayed. These have clearly been written out by the children in their best handwriting and have been carefully placed on the page and illustrated.

Maths equipment comes next: the trays underneath the counter are clearly labelled and contain rulers, or cubes or plain shapes. The surface above is clear, except for sweatshirts and cardigans temporarily abandoned by the children.

Two small, high windows divide the wall here. Between them, and flowing onto the windowsills, is a display of artwork inspired by Lowry. There are paintings and

models of buildings made from cereal boxes. Labels, written by the children announce that these are flats and houses. The display extends down towards the counter, where there is a collection of books on the topic 'homes.'

Beneath the last length of counter are the children's personal trays. These overflow with books and papers, sweatshirts and hymnbooks. They contrast sharply with the precise mathematical presentations on the wall in this part of the classroom. Shape has clearly been the business of much of the year's teaching. There is a display of tangrams and of work on area, and careful explanations, written by the teacher link the two logically. Letters of the alphabet have been plotted on squared paper; a notice asks the reader to solve various puzzles based on these.

The third wall consists almost entirely of a large mullioned window set into the stone wall. It looks out onto the large chestnut tree – magnificent, but blocking much of the light. There is a wide windowsill here, and on it is displayed more information books, this time about plants and nature.

The last wall is the focal point of the classroom. A long cupboard has been painted black to provide a blackboard, and between this and the heater is the teacher's chair. She sits surrounded by notices. There is a timetable; group lists and effort point lists are pinned nearby. The date is written both in words and numbers and there is a 100 square. A sign insists 'Look at Number' and asks 'What patterns can you see?' All this is within touching distance of the teacher's chair. A computer is nearby, and beside it a rota for its use and examples of children's work generated by it.

The teacher's table, piled high with exercise books, papers and pencils and coffee mugs juts into the room, and together with a bookcase set at right angles to it, sections off a carpeted area in which the children can read quietly or get together for class teaching sessions. A number of books are stored here. There are several anthologies and collections of poems: Rosen's *Book of Nonsense* is here and Ahlberg's *Please Mrs. Butler,* but copies of a county selection of children's work predominate. There are picture books and 'chapter books', collections of Bible stories and a set of Usborne picture dictionaries and atlases. There is a pile of Open Door readers.

More books are in the two book boxes, which define the far corners of this reading space. One is filled entirely with dictionaries of various types and thesauruses. The other contains a selection of well-used picture books. They range from Mr. Men books to Oakley's *Church Mouse* series.

The tables at which the children work fill the remaining floor space. They are arranged in blocks to sit four to six children.

The Children

There are twenty-six children in this class. Fifteen are in Year Three and are coming to the end of their second year in Mrs. Franklin's class. The other eleven, who are the main participants of this research, are in Year Two. All, except one, wear school uniform. This consists of a maroon sweatshirt worn over a blue t-shirt and grey shorts or gingham frock. On P.E. days, many children wear jogging bottoms to match their sweatshirts. It gives the classroom a relaxed air and makes changing quicker.

These are confident children. They are used to talking with adults and they expect their ideas to be taken seriously. More than in either of the other schools, these children take control of conversations. "What sort of books do *you* like reading?" asked Claire at the end of our first meeting. She assumed a measure of equality between us as readers: this was not a simple pedagogic relationship.

With the exception of Derek, the children are enthusiastic about reading and tell me eagerly about books they have enjoyed. Even those who do not yet read independently see themselves as readers. They recount the plot of books that have been read to them and of books they have seen on video as if they have read them themselves, and they speak confidently of authorship and character. They look forward to the books they will read soon. Both Josh and Gillian name books they have not yet read as favourites. "I know it will be really good." Gillian told me. They expect to derive pleasure from books.

The more confident readers discuss a wider range of reading material. Hester enthuses about the fairy stories, the comics and the information books she enjoys, and several of the children are beginning to develop distinct preferences for

particular authors and genres. Lucy Daniels, Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton are all mentioned. Oliver is sure that he enjoys fiction more than information books. Patrick describes how he has moved away from Dahl to Blyton: “Her books are much more adventurous.” Fry (1985) shows the value of Blyton’s books in supporting new readers. Patrick’s example makes a similar point. He read Dahl with the support of adults. They read to him and with him and scaffolded his making of meaning. He reads Blyton entirely independently.

These children show too that they have an emerging metalanguage for the discussion of texts. They display it keenly. Claire justifies New Way scheme books she enjoys reading by means of the “good characters” she finds in them, but she can’t explain what she means by ‘good.’ Hester peppers her speech with newly acquired terms from a recent trial Literacy Hour session. She talks of synopsis and blurb and ‘continents’ (contents) pages. Neither girl quite knows what to do with these terms. They begin to have the tools for literary discussion, but have not been shown how to use them.

There are signs too that some of the children are becoming able to reflect on the matter of their reading. “It’s quite a mixture, really!” said Hester, of the variety of texts she’d enjoyed recently and Patrick, in considering the differences between Dahl and Blyton, notices not just subject matter, but also style. He finds the rhyming words and names in the former silly. Blyton gets on with the story. Claire reflects on the process of learning to read itself:

> “It’s like you’ve got a word bank in your head. When you read a new book, you get more and more words in it.”

The children show both acceptance and resistance to the reading culture of the classroom. Josh assumes when he comes to talk to me that I want to hear him read. He takes his book out of his bag and without even a glance at the title page or cover begins to read. Other children profess to *hate* reading aloud. It is too slow for Patrick, too public for Hester and too fraught with corrections for Oliver. Gillian resents the inevitable interruptions and finds much reading in school irksome in this way: it is simply too noisy in the classroom.

Derek, the only Traveller child in the year group presents an entirely different attitude towards and understanding of reading. Reading is not a natural activity in his home and he does not experience the parental help and support with reading that the other children enjoy. His 'school reading book' is an early example of the *Open Door* series, a highly structured, phonically based scheme with minimal plot. At silent reading times, Derek looks at art books or matches illustrations in picture dictionaries with the other Traveller boys. He tells me he hates reading. Unlike most of the class, for whom reading is an obvious and pleasurable way to spend time, Derek scarcely knows what it is for.

The Teacher

Mrs. Franklin is the deputy head of the school and the Year Two/Three teacher. She has taught in this school, usually with this age group, for a number of years. Previously, she worked in London and, although she enjoyed teaching there, she 'always wanted to work in a country school like this.' As a child, she had attended a very similar school, not many miles away.

Reading profile

Mrs. Franklin enjoys reading and memories of books and being read to stretch back into her early childhood. She grew up in a large family and there were always story books and annuals for Christmas, and adults willing to read to the children. Her mother and Grandmother read stories at bedtime and at odd moments during the day too. They read whatever children's book was handy - lots of Enid Blyton and short stories, for example, *Teddy Robinson.* One of Mrs. Franklin's fondest memories is of her father reading to her *The Wind in the Willows.* She has always enjoyed listening to stories.

Mrs. Franklin has few memories of learning to read, but thinks she learned slowly. She read throughout her childhood, but with no especial enthusiasm, until she met adult authors, such as Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy, "the biggies as it were" in her teens. They awakened in her a real desire to read for the first time.

Mrs. Franklin usually has "a book on the go," but is often too tired to read more than a few pages a night in term time. In the holidays, "when there are no distractions,"

she will sit and read for an hour or two in the morning. She reads slowly "for the language," and carefully, "to absorb what the language is saying." Her choice of book is usually fiction, often detective stories, and mainly best sellers. She looks for familiar authors and follows the recommendations of friends, especially her mother, to direct her reading. When she wants a challenge, she turns to "the old classics:" Hardy, Austen and Dickens:

> "I almost know what I'm going to get, but I want that kind of depth."

Reading has always been a multi-sensory experience for Mrs. Franklin. She speaks frequently of her need to hear the sounds and rhythms of prose as she reads, but touch and appearance are important too. She tells of the delight she felt as a child in the feel of the glossy pages and bright colours of Awdry's *Railway Stories*, of the pleasure she now finds in well-produced gardening and cookery books.

She is a solitary reader. Her desire to read now, when there are no distractions, is echoed by a nostalgic memory from childhood: a small child, awake at dawn in her aunt's sleeping house, aware of her unique wakefulness and savouring the magic by reading.

Teaching the children to read

Mrs. Franklin acknowledges that her predilection towards reading affects the way she teaches. Because listening to stories was so important to her as a child, she privileges story reading in her classroom. She reads often and enthusiastically to the children:

> I try to get into character and make it interesting with inflection of the voice. I think it's really important, the way you are read to as a child – as important as the reading."

She is keen that the children in her class will become successful readers and she measures their success not by the quantity of books read, but by "whether they enjoy books, grow to love stories and develop a general love of books." Beyond this, she wants children to be able to read quickly and to be able to retrieve information from text.

The acquisition of skills plays an important part in Mrs. Franklin's understanding of the teaching of reading. She speaks of Derek, who was "still struggling with his sounds" when he joined the class, but who now has

> "a certain vocabulary that is secure. I know that he has read a certain amount of material that has enabled him to develop phonically and enable him to develop some understanding. If you ask him questions about the story he has the ability to talk about the main features. ... He has learnt his initial sounds and is now developing word building skills and other strategies for reading."

She is happy that the core scheme used in the school, Ginn 360, provides a structured progression that enables children to acquire and practise these skills and "doesn't leave gaps." This is important, because:

> "If you push them too fast there is a tendency then to have missing chunks of knowledge – which may cause problems for the child."

Here skills are entirely decontextualised. They have nothing to do with the reader, who must make them 'his' or 'hers,' and nothing to do with text. But skills must be learned, and in a predetermined order. It is like a cumulative folk tale. The hapless reader journeys on meeting challenges. She learns to comb the old crone's hair, to throw the stranded fish back into the pond and to bind the robin's broken wing. The tokens they give her in exchange look like nothing, but when she reaches the palace, they are exactly what she needs to fulfil the king's impossible request. Everything immediately falls into place and comes right. The magic door into reading is opened and the reader can live happily ever after, nose in a good book, for ever more.

The Teaching of Reading

Socially functional reading

A function of reading that is apparent in this classroom more than any of the others is its propensity to be social glue. Here the stories that are read to the children bind

the class together with cords of shared experience and understandings. There are two reasons why these sessions are different from those at Friars Hall, where stories are also serialised and read regularly. The first is to do with timing. These sessions are not pushed to the edges of the school day when everyone is tired; these are a central and integral part of the day's business. Second, and more important, is the involvement of the children. They are expected to do more than listen passively. Rather in the manner of Chambers (1985; 1993) they are routinely asked to say what they liked about what they have heard. This is not simply a matter of display. (Heath 1982) Their answers are listened to with interest and respected. To a limited extent, they become interpreters with the teacher of the text that is read. There is a sharing of power.

Mrs. Franklin reads aloud to the children most days; there is usually a class novel 'on the go.' She reads aloud well and the children wait eagerly for each instalment. Typically sessions begin with a resume of the plot, provided by the children, but initiated by Mrs. Franklin. She reads. At the end of the chapter, she stops, asks questions to check that everyone has followed the events, and then invites the children to tell her what they have enjoyed.

The strongest message that this transmits to the children is that reading is enjoyable. They know that stories are worthwhile, and that there is pleasure to be had in sharing texts and responding to them, and that their opinion matters. This understanding is made explicit in the children's talk about books and in their bookish behaviour in the classroom. Most of them like books. They use them to amuse themselves and to cement friendships. Small groups of children read books together, and play games with books in quiet reading time. They read socially as well as individually, and sometimes, as in the case of Louisa and Patrick (see *Reading for Leisure,* p138 below) use reading to explore the boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Another consequence of Mrs. Franklin's skilled and frequent reading to the children is the emphasis on reading aloud in this community. It is not simply that they are schooled not to "read over the full stops." Claire and Hester choose to read poems to each other when they go to each other's homes to play. Oliver speculates:

> "You might get a job where you have to read out messages. So you have to be good at it."

They see reading aloud as a useful social attribute. It is more than a function of classroom literacy.

As at Friars Hall, reading here confirms status. There is a strict system of reading progression, and the children understand the hierarchy of reading competence it makes explicit. Unprompted, they discuss with each other 'what level I'm on.' They regard Patrick, who has "gone past levels" and Gillian, "who's on level 10" with awe. After level 10, children chose 'reading books' from a range of children's novels stored in the Year Four/Five classroom. The distinction of 'being on' the same books as the oldest children in the school is keenly felt.

Instructional reading

Explicit teaching of reading in this class is structured around a system of *reading levels* based upon the Ginn 360 reading scheme. Books from this scheme and others judged to require a similar measure of reading competence are gathered together into *levels* and the child is expected to progress from one level to the next, thereby acquiring a requisite but unspecified number of reading skills and a sight vocabulary. Children do not need to read every text, and move on at the teacher's discretion when they are "managing well at that level." A core text, usually from the Ginn scheme is identified at each level, and all children are encouraged to read that, so that no "gaps" in the child's knowledge develop.

The *level* books and the books in the year Four/Five classroom count as *reading books,* and therefore have a quite different status from the other books in the school. *Reading books* are those that go to and from school in book bags to be read at home with parents and are monitored by Mrs. Franklin when she *hears readers.* Oliver sums up the distinction thus:

> "Library books you take home for a week *to look at*, but reading books you *read* to your mum and dad and you can take as long as you like." [my italics]

Reading books clearly matter more.

Mrs. Franklin *hears readers* when she can. There is no pretence about sharing books and enjoying them. This is a monitoring process: "to see how we are getting on." (Oliver) Typically a child will stand beside the teacher's chair and read aloud, while Mrs. Franklin listens. Only a page or two is read, and Mrs Franklin helps as required. Phonics input is most common for the weakest readers:

> "What does it begin with? *ou* makes an *ow* sound. *f ... ou found.* Good boy."

More experienced readers are encouraged to make use of a wider range of strategies, especially contextual cues.

Other than this, reading is taught in whole class lessons, when Mrs. Franklin models the reading of stories and of information texts to the class. Her purposes here are various, and make clear some of the many purposes that Millard (1994) recognises that reading is expected to serve. It settles the class after playtime, keeps children busy while they drink their milk, sets up the context for writing activities and provides a space for the passing on of specific readerly knowledge. An information book about pizza, for example, serves to introduce technical words such as index and glossary and for Mrs. Franklin to model how they might be used:

> "page 20: Romans. Romans? I wonder what they have to do with pizza? You have to go to page 20 to find out. Rimini. Rimini? [she flicks through the book] Oh yes. I thought it was a town and I was right. [she laughs.]"

It also provides a lesson on the lay out of information. The children are asked to use a similar format to present their own information about pizza.

Retelling is a key skill in the teaching of reading in this classroom. Whenever Mrs. Franklin reads to the children she encourages them to retell. They explain what has happened so far, tell the passages they enjoyed and explain what they have found out. The children take on this lesson. Retelling becomes their prominent mode of response to individual reading. When children in this class tell me about books they have enjoyed, they do so by telling me the story.

Pragmatic reading

Worksheets are less common in this classroom than in any of the others. Mrs. Franklin communicates and negotiates instructions to the children by talking to them and by example. Occasionally, children are required to complete an activity that involves pragmatic reading. Patrick and Gillian one day are expected to read 'maths stories.' These are short shopping narratives. They list the prices of products purchased. The children have to read them, translate the words into sums and work out how much has been spent.

By far the most common occurrence of pragmatic reading in this classroom takes place during paired reading sessions. Here the children sit with a partner, chosen by the teacher and for five minutes each read aloud from their *reading* books. These sessions are pragmatic by intent. They ensure that all children have the opportunity to practise reading aloud every day and they free Mrs. Franklin of the necessity to hear each of them individually.

They are also pragmatic by nature. The children understand that the purpose of these sessions is to hear each other read: to "help with wrong words" and "check they don't read over the full stops." There is certainly no requirement to attend to the content of what is read. Sally comes to me with the word 'chortled'. Neither she nor her partner can make it out. I tell her and she carries on reading. "Do you know what chortled means?" I ask. She is startled. "No." she says, and carries on reading. It is getting to the end of the page, the book and the level that matters, and being able to do so with fluency. Reading here is not about understanding.

Reading for leisure

These are children who know that books are fun. Even Derek who is unsure that that the written word has anything to offer him other than failure, enjoys looking at art books and the illustrations in picture dictionaries. There is time for this twice a day, when the children come into school and registers are taken. This is officially 'quiet reading time,' though it rarely is quiet, and the noise accepted depends on the teacher's level of tolerance.

A range of reading behaviour is common in these sessions. Some children do settle with books and magazines they have brought from home (never their *reading* books)

and read. Others choose from the book boxes: they browse through poems and picture books, sometimes alone, sometimes sharing their discoveries with friends. Groups of boys especially, play matching games with multiple copies of the picture dictionaries. Much activity is book related, though all children occasionally use the time for conversation under the guise of reading: they sit with a book, but never actually look at it. Reading in these times is usually *worth it*, as far as the children are concerned, but it isn't important.

Fun from reading pushes its way unofficially into other areas of schoolwork. Louisa spends some time during a writing lesson scouring a dictionary. She picks words which are euphemisms for male genitalia, but are defined quite differently in the dictionary and furtively shows them to Patrick. He giggles and looks for more. They are both perfectly aware that I am watching them: my presence enhances the daring. They are enjoying the frisson of subverting the literary values of the classroom and of being discovered in the act.

The Year Three Class

In September, the head teacher takes up a secondment as acting head of a larger, nearby school. Mrs. Franklin takes over her role as teaching head of Parsons Field, and moves into the hall to teach the oldest children. Her place, and classroom, is taken over by Mr. Reeve, who is employed for one term. It falls to him to introduce the Literacy Hour in this classroom and to integrate a new set of year two children into the existing class.

The classroom

Mr. Reeve makes very few changes to the classroom. The furniture is not moved, and little is done to decorate the room. There is a small display about canals, which consists mostly of commercial leaflets from waterways museums, and a few examples of the children's story writing are pinned to the walls.

There are fewer books in the room. Although the book boxes and bookcases are still full, there are no longer 'topic' books displayed along the counter or fiction on the piano. The few books on water transport that complement the canal display are piled nearby. They are easy to miss.

A set of cardboard shelves provides storage space for the worksheets that are an integral part of Literacy Hour sessions.

The children

After the summer holidays, the children return to the same classroom and begin Year Three. They are now the oldest in the class and are joined by the sixteen younger children who make the new Year Two. For this first term, the class is unsettled. There is a new mix of children, a new teacher, and the Literacy Hour to contend with. The year three children find that the easy relationship they had assumed with Mrs. Franklin has to be renegotiated.

As in Friars Hall school, (Chapter Four:112-113) a distinctive feature of this year is that the children develop clearer individual reading preferences and are less influenced by the reading values of the classroom. Thus, Patrick discovers Harry Potter and *The Hobbit*, Gillian works her way through Lucy Daniels, rejects Babysitters Club books as "stupid and boring" and struggles with O'Hara's *My Friend Flicka.* Lisa hardly reads at all: "I don't read much now, "she says.

The children divide into two clear categories. There are those who have discovered how to make reading work in their heads. They can 'become the teller and the told' (Meek 1988 from Scollon 1981). These children read enthusiastically and can talk at length about their own reading. The other children still need a mediator to help them get 'the tune off the page' (Barrs 1992). If a story has been read to them, or if they have seen a film version, they can talk about it eloquently and sometimes, sensitively. But if they are left to themselves with a text, they make little of it. Even though, in a technical sense, they can read the words, they cannot turn them into story. They rely on their expectations, the title and the evidence of illustrations to make some sort of sense from the book, and they *think they have read it.* Lisa and Sally's enthusiasm for the book *Pet Swapping Day* provides a clear example of this. Both girls swear they have read the book and enjoyed it, but as we talk, it becomes obvious that neither has. They do not recognise the names of the characters and know no more about the story than is apparent from the pictures. From these Lisa has fabricated an entire, alternative narrative and is convinced by it. She does not seem to know that there is more to reading than this.

Retelling continues to be a key feature of the children's response to reading.

The teacher

Mr Reeve has recently moved into the county with his wife, who has become head teacher of another primary school. He has been supply teaching in the area for some months. He is used to working with children rather older than these six and seven year olds and is particularly concerned about teaching the youngest and least able of the Year Two children. He is used to children who can do more.

His sudden appointment to Parsons Field meant that he came into this research by default rather than negotiation.

Reading profile

Mr. Reeve had little to say about reading in his childhood. He remembers being slow to learn to read at first, and then eventually "latching on" to the adventure stories of Enid Blyton:

> "I enjoyed a good story, an adventure, something that was approachable. There was a certain amount of characterisation."

He remembers reading Dumas's *The Black Tulip* in his top junior class:

> "That was one of the first 'good' books I ever read."

His was a home that valued education. There were reference books on the shelves, and his parents believed that "education was the way out of the grind of working class life." His father was so determined as to educate himself and become a local preacher.

These days, Mr. Reeve enjoys reading and reads most evenings before he goes to bed. He reads: "newspapers, biography, history, small amounts of philosophy – quite a wide range, really." His interests are as particular as they are varied: his 'subject area' is British social and economic history, of around 1750, and much of his reading concerns that. In the holidays, there is "escape reading," as well. He particularly enjoys crime novels set in New Orleans:

> "That's because of my interest in New Orleans, which is partly through music."

He finds it incomprehensible that there are some people who do not want to read.

In the little Mr Reeve says about his reading there is earnestness, a sense of striving. In the justification of Blyton's work (a *certain amount* of characterisation), and in the acknowledgement of Dumas's merit, we see an ambitious reader, who is concerned to read what is 'good'. Children's books are dismissed; history, philosophy and adult novels of the last century are fore-fronted. Reading, it seems, should not be too easy.

There is no sense that Mr. Reeve, like most of the other teachers here, surrenders himself to the story and gets 'lost in the book.' His is intellectual, not emotional involvement. He reads to find out, to further his knowledge. Even detective novels serve his purpose. They are depositories of knowledge about New Orleans.

Teaching the children to read.

Mr. Reeve claims that his own reading affects his teaching:

> "I am what I read to a large extent. So my whole personality has been influenced by what I've read."

Despite this, he sees no obvious continuation in the practice of his own reading preferences and his work in the classroom. The two seem to be quite separate in his mind. Indeed consistencies between the two are hard to observe.

Perhaps his desire to present reading as a life skill has its roots in his parents' understanding that education elevates. He encourages it for two reasons, and both 'improve' the prospects of the child: reading will help in the world of work when the children are adults and it is intrinsically enjoyable. He recognises that a pragmatic approach is necessary, because the education system is supposed to serve the needs of the economy, but he hopes rather more that reading will assist the children in self-development.

Imagination is the most important factor here. Mr. Reeve thinks that it is the purpose of school to encourage the imagination and that this is best achieved through reading stories. Therefore, despite his own preference for non-fiction, he is keen that all children should read stories in school time. He is concerned that boys who read only non-fiction will perhaps never read anything else unless school counters their preference.

In the teaching of reading, Mr. Reeve is concerned to encourage the children to "improve their reading so they can gain the benefits." With the younger children, this means helping them acquire technical skills. He achieves this by using a lot of material that involves reading in the classroom and reading this through with the weakest readers.

For the other children:

> "It is just a question of keeping them going and trying to encourage them."

As long as they continue to read, he assumes they are finding books interesting, and so is happy. He does not interfere unduly. If he feels that a child gets "locked into the law of diminishing returns" with a particular type of book, he will suggest an alternative, because it is part of the function of a teacher to encourage children to read widely, but he finds that children tend to discover books for themselves.

The Bullock Report (DES 1975) recognised this phenomenon:

> " The teaching of reading virtually ceases once the child can read aloud with reasonable accuracy at a reasonable speed." (1975: 92)

<u>Expectations of the children</u>

Mr. Reeve wants the children to be successful readers who enjoy reading. They need not, he feels, be technically good. What matters is that they can feed their imagination by it, "at their own level."

However, he is not optimistic about the reading futures of many of the children he teaches. He remembers his own delight with *The Black Tulip*, but doubts whether today's children would expend the necessary effort to read it:

> "[It] looked a bit old and battered and had small pages and small writing. [I doubt] whether they'd actually be bothered to plough through it. "

He does not think that modern children's books offer comparable riches.

The teaching of reading

I spent rather less time in Mr. Reeve's classroom than any of the other Year Three classes. There were two reasons for this. The first was the relatively short time he

spent in the school – he was only there for one term. The second was to do with his involvement in the research by default rather than choice. I felt my presence was endured rather than welcomed.

In order to compromise, then, I observed morning sessions – the Literacy Hour and the work that followed it, but did not stay for afternoon school. I saw therefore, very little of the quiet reading that went on after lunch, and did not see Mr. Reeve read to the children at home time, though I gather this was his practice.

Socially functional reading

This is an authoritarian classroom. A lot of teaching is transmitted through teacher talk to the whole class and questioning plays a key part. A brief set of exchanges from a geography lesson illustrates this:

> Teacher: If we look at a map of the world, we can see that the world is ...what shape?
> Patrick: a sphere
> Oliver: like an orange
> Children: Is it circular?
> Teacher: It's more elliptical than circular.
> Child: We're like aliens, because we live in space.
> Teacher: Let's not get into fantasy.

The teacher's authority is clear, in the display questions he asks, in the children's attempts to guess the answer he is looking for, and in his rejection of their very sensible and child orientated answers for the word *elliptical.* The child who tries to introduce an element of supposition into this conversation, where the teacher's authority is less sure, is silenced.

Reading has a place in this classroom as an adjunct and justification of that authority. The teacher's knowledge comes from books and books in all areas of the curriculum are supposed to be a source of infallible information. A comprehension exercise on *The Iron Man,* for example, asks the children to 'Find a sentence that tells us ... and write it down.' All the reader has to do is pinpoint the sentence and

extract the information. The text, as in some modernist understandings of reading (Chapter One: 18ff) is sufficient.

An extreme example of this occurred in another geography lesson. The children were filling in the place names of regional centres on maps of Britain. There was a dot for Birmingham, but it was too far south and east – about where Oxford should be. I queried this with some of the children and together we looked at the page in the atlas from which their map had been taken. It was wrong here too. Despite all the other evidence I found, the children were not prepared to believe their atlas was wrong. It simply could not be.

I showed the discrepancy to Mr. Reeve. He reluctantly acknowledged it, but insisted the mistake was his. There must have been a slip in the reproduction process. He too would not entertain the possibility that the atlas had been badly made. The implication clearly is that while readers are fallible, books are never wrong.

This attitude to books permeated much of the work in this classroom. The reliance on maths scheme books, comprehension passages and textbooks all illustrate this.

Instructional reading

I see very little that might be considered to be reading instruction in this classroom. Though the children can be presumed to continue to read their way through the *levels*, I see no evidence of it, and various of the older children tell me that no-one hears them read any more.

I do not see guided reading in the Literacy Hour, but sometimes at the end of the hour, there is shared reading. In the absence of a big book, the text is written out on the blackboard, and the children read it together in chorus. Mr. Reeve checks that everyone is joining in and insists that children who opt out attempt to read the passage alone afterwards. Compliance seems to matter more than reading itself. Individual words are then selected from the text and their spelling, construction and precise meaning is noticed.

Pragmatic reading

Pragmatic reading proliferates in this classroom. There are worksheets to read and complete, maths scheme books to negotiate and atlases with texts and maps to consult. In all of these activities, the children read to achieve a task that is separate from the reading itself.

Reading within the Literacy Hour is also pragmatic. Texts are presented to the children so that work can be done from them. Ahlberg's *Mrs. Plug the Plumber,* becomes a paradigm for writing very similar stories, and *Cops and Robbers* serves to teach the children about rhyme schemes and rhythm. Terms such as *saga* and *epic* are introduced. A body of knowledge is built up from texts and around texts, and this seems to matter more than the texts themselves.

An effect of this is that the children, who are used to being rather more involved in reading than this, are marginalized and their lack of ownership is carried over into the small group tasks they are engaged in for the rest of the Literacy Hour. They need to be constantly reminded to "get on " and "stop dawdling," and the children who produce work in quantity are lavishly praised.

Rather as in Friars Hall School an ethos of *nothing-to-do-with-me-ness* begins to develop, where the quantity and speed of work mattered more than the quality. A consequence of this was the sidelining of text, a reluctance to read any more than seemed immediately necessary. Patrick, one day, determined as ever, to prove he was the "cleverest person in the class," dashes through his maths work without bothering to read the explanations in the textbook. He fails therefore to see the point of the work and gets it wrong. His reluctance to read the text is not a challenge to its authority: Patrick assumes that he knows what the task is already. He does not expect to be surprised or challenged; he simply wants to get the work done. *Doing* the work is what matters, *understanding* the task or the text is subsidiary.

Reading for leisure

Some of the children still reach for books when they come in to the classroom in the morning, and a number of them chose to read when they are drinking milk after play. Apart from this, there is a notional quiet reading time every afternoon from 1pm to 1:30 "though it's never that long really," says Mr. Reeve.

The reading I observe is casual and uncommitted. The children flick through books restlessly and change them often. They are easily distracted and chat at least as much as they read. Although a number of these children do read seriously for pleasure, they do this at home rather than school.

Mr. Reeve reads to the children at home time. The children enjoy listening. They perceive the purpose of this session to be leisure: it makes a pleasant and relaxing end to the day and has nothing to do with the real business of the classroom. Patrick comments:

> "We read it and then we go home. That's better because if you have it [a story] in the middle of the day, all the children forget about their work."

After Christmas

After Christmas, Mrs. Franklin returns to the classroom. She re-establishes her routine and the class soon settles. The pattern of her teaching is much as it was before, but now the Literacy Hour provides a firmer structure. Paired reading has disappeared, except for the weakest readers, who are now supported by the strongest for ten minutes at the beginning of each day.

<u>Instructional reading</u>

Paired reading sessions are interesting in this class because they show what the children themselves think reading instruction is for, and highlight the unresolved dichotomy here between learning to read and reading. I watch Gillian with Joe, who is working his way through the *Open Door* books. She is very strict with him and demands that he reads the text word by word as she points. She provides phonic cues when he falters, but refuses to engage with him or the text any further. His attempts to initiate conversation about the books are ignored: Gillian industriously records the page he has reached in his record book. Phonics matter, words matter, pages read matter. Response certainly does not. This is a message entirely different from the whole class teaching in the Literacy Hour

Mrs Franklin uses the whole class session of the Literacy Hour to model reading to the class and to introduce them to the skills and metalanguage deemed by the strategy to be appropriate for their years. What is significant about this teaching, however, is the extent to which she draws the children into the lessons. One story session included the following exchanges in the course of the reading:

> Teacher : Who do you think Snowy is?
> Nina: A cat?
> Teacher: I think you are probably right. Let's read on and see.
>
> Teacher: (reading) "I knew who it was as soon as I heard the voice."
> Who do you think it is?
> Chris: The man who saved him from the roof!
> Teacher: It couldn't really be anyone else could it?

The children are invited then to participate in the process of making meaning. They are encouraged to suppose and to rely on their understanding of how stories work to predict what will happen.

Another feature of this teaching is that Mrs. Franklin draws on the children's experience. "You know all about this, don't you?" she says to one child, "Because you've got a teenage sister." And, on another occasion, when the story is about twins, she says to the twin boys in the class: "Is it like that on your birthday?"

The effect of this is twofold. First, the children are given a specific model of how readers read and the thinking they bring to that reading. Knowledge of how stories work and how the world works are two of the basic understandings that Harrison (1992) identifies as being necessary in learning to read, but they are rarely made explicit in the classrooms in this research. Second, it makes it known to the children that their ideas and experiences *count*. There is value in what they say. An understanding of this must make them more confident in the way they make meaning for themselves when they read alone. It is the beginning of empowerment.

But the children are not empowered entirely. Open questions like those above, are very often followed by the sort of closed, teacherly, display questions that are the meat of the Literacy Hour:

"What do we have to look for as we read?"
"What are characters?"
"What do we mean by setting?"

The *we* here presumes an interpretive tradition to which many of these children do not naturally subscribe. It does not reflect the experience of the people in the classroom. Power here is invested in the tradition and mediated through the teacher.

A result of this is that the children do not always know what sort of answer is required. Are they empowered to think for themselves, or should they be guessing what is in the teacher's head? During one lesson, on the layout of information text, Mrs. Franklin asked the children whether they thought the pictures helped their understanding. There was silence. The children looked warily about them, trying to ascertain from one another how to respond.

> "I'm asking what you think," said Mrs. Franklin eventually. "There isn't a right or wrong answer!"

Conclusions

There are two distinct strands of thought directing the teaching of reading at Parsons Field School. The first, as in the other two schools is skills based. There is the idea that children learn to read by accruing skills. They learn to decode and they learn a sight vocabulary. From these, with practice, more skills, particularly fluency and interpretation, proceed. Words, skills and concepts must be learned in order, and no gaps must be left. This is a purely mechanical process. There is no room for personal involvement or negotiation. Beginning reading instruction in this school and much of Mr. Reeve's teaching fits into this model.

The second strand of thought emerges from Mrs. Franklin's own preferences as a reader. Hers is an emotional engagement with story and language and the sound it makes. She powerfully models to the children in her class what she finds reading good for and encourages them to find the same. Narrative is important, so they learn to retell. Personal involvement matters, so she creates opportunities for the children

to become involved too. They are encouraged to respond and identify pleasing features.

For some children an effect of this is that they begin to be empowered as readers. They trust their responses to text and begin to acknowledge the difference they make as people to what they read and how they read it. Patrick knows that adventure stories are for him. Gillian can dismiss a book as "stupid and boring" when it does not meet her needs.

Of all the three schools, Parsons Field seemed to offer the richest ground for the development of children as critical readers. Here the children are encouraged to interact with text, to make personal and imaginative relationships with the stories they read. Still, though, concepts of meaning in text as a fixed and definable entity are propagated. Children are encouraged to bring to reading all they can, but feel most of the time, that they are expected to find a 'right' answer. Their empowerment is limited.

In the Interchapter that follows, I draw together the threads of thinking concerning empowerment, control and concept of text that have arisen in all three of these case study chapters. I look particularly at the way teachers control the possibilities of making meaning in their classrooms and consider the effect of this. I ask, can children who are so subject to particular ways of thinking learn to read critically?

Inter-chapter

Responsibility and control: a discussion of the case studies

Introduction

In the preceding three chapters, I presented the schools that provide the data for this research as individual case studies. Description of them focused on what was particular: the classrooms, the teachers, the children and the practices of reading therein. I hoped therefore to enable the reader to understand the nature of these classroom societies and to see the place of reading within them, each in its particular physical and intellectual context.

The purpose of this inter-chapter is to draw out and discuss some of the themes and similarities that arise from these case studies and to consider the extent to which they are likely to influence the development of critical reading amongst the children in the classes.

Discussion here will focus on the role of the teachers, rather than the children. It will consider first the teachers' *concept of text*, and then two inter-related issues: the extent to which the teachers feel *responsible* for the teaching of reading in their classrooms, and the manner in which they *control* the making of meaning within that reading.

The teachers

A constant that is apparent in all the case studies is the overwhelming influence of teachers in controlling both the physical and intellectual environments of the classrooms. As far as the physical environment is concerned, the teachers in all classrooms controlled the way space was organised: they arranged the furniture, ordered the equipment and determined where children could sit. They produced, selected and arranged the materials that went on the classroom walls, and so controlled the implicit messages these walls transmitted to the children. Even Mr.

Reeve, whose classroom remained mostly bare, had within him the power to change this state of affairs if he so wished. The children did not.

In all these matters, the children in the classrooms had no say. They had to ask permission to sit with friends or to move furniture and equipment. They could not decide to produce or change a wall display. Even the child-written notices in Mrs. Franklin's room were there at her behest. The children were entirely subject to the teachers' authority in so far as the physical environment was concerned.

The intellectual context was controlled by the teachers too. The case studies show how the intentions and especially the practice of all the teachers influenced the way that reading was perceived and approached by the children, at least within the classroom itself. This finding is not surprising and two reasons for it are worthy of mention here. The first is to do with the asymmetric nature of the pedagogic relationship. The children, after all, come to school to learn. They are required to be there by law, and it is the teacher's responsibility to teach them. They are necessarily subject to the teacher's control. Edwards and Mercer (1987) call this asymmetry 'inherent' in any learning relationship, and note that it is especially marked in schools, where:

> "...schooling is compulsory, separated from life at home, more formal and with a more arbitrary syllabus." (1987:158)

Secondly, it must be acknowledged that the design of this research made it probable that the influence of teachers in the formation of reading environments would be fore-fronted. The teacher interviews that focused on reading histories and intentions in the classroom provided a framework for analysis against which the classroom observations could be measured. It was always the purpose of this research to look at what teachers did.

It is therefore reasonable to pursue the role of the teachers rather than the response of the children in the paragraphs that follow. In doing so I shall argue that this is not only expedient, but necessary – for in most of the classes and for most of the time, the children's responses that fell without the teachers' preconceived framework were sidelined, and this was a result of the way the teachers exercised their power.

The Teachers' Concept of Text

All the teachers saw themselves as receivers of, rather than constructors of meaning. They assumed that meaning resided in the text itself, and that the reader's job was to uncover it. Mrs. Knight demonstrated this most clearly in her constant referring to notes and lists to authorise and justify her actions. Mr. Reeve showed it in his comprehension questions on *The Iron Man*, and Mrs Merchant revealed it in her understanding of multi-layered texts:

> "It's this idea of the different layers. To get to the detective bit, you have to go through the philosophy."

None of the teachers expressed any understanding that the reader might have a role to play in constructing meaning from text (Iser 1980, Rosenblatt, 1978, Fish 1980). They therefore failed to acknowledge their own efforts in making texts mean, and undervalued the less practiced attempts of the children. For them, meaning in text was unproblematic so long as the reader had the skills to uncover it. As teachers, and as more experienced readers, it was their responsibility to make clear the meanings texts contained for the children in their classes.

If teachers considered their interpretation at all, they saw it as something natural and neutral, a reflection of what was actually in the text, rather than a reading of it. Quite simply, the teachers *knew* what the text was about. They could concentrate on passing on their predetermined reading to the children in their classes, or in helping the children to perceive that meaning. This understanding affected two things: the explicit way that the teachers discussed texts with the children, and the implicit messages they transmitted about reading.

Responsibility

A major feature in all of the teachers' conversation was the responsibility they felt as teachers of reading. They all acknowledged that reading was important and saw it as a factor in the improvement of people's lives. For all of them, this 'improvement' had a personal, imaginative quality. They saw reading as something that was intrinsically enriching (Mrs Merchant), intellectually rewarding (Mrs Yeoman, Mr. Reeve), and satisfyingly relaxing (Mrs. Franklin, Mrs. Knight). Three of them had a further

understanding of reading as something that went beyond the individual: they saw social and political implications arising from being able to read. Mrs. Merchant, therefore spoke of the 'salvation and lift' attitude that had permeated her childhood, Mr. Reeve of the way his parents saw education as "the way out of the grind of working class life." and Mrs Squire believed that the teacher's task was "to try and improve each generation." Reading here did more than affect the inner lives and imaginations of readers: it made them socially mobile.

According to the teachers the motivation for becoming a reader was twofold. It enriched the imaginative life of the reader, and it helped that reader, 'get on in society'. These were the possible, but not inevitable consequences of reading. Most of the teachers recognised that many readers fall short of these ideals. Mrs. Knight's pessimism about the future of the readers in her class, Mrs Squire's dismissal of the parents as 'introspective' and Mrs. Merchant's acknowledgement that many confident readers 'never get to that point' where 'new worlds can open up' are all expressions of this understanding.

All of the teachers understood that it was their responsibility to teach the children to read and to encourage their reading. They expressed the first of these aims – all of them – in what was in fact a skills based approach to reading. Some of them (e.g. Mrs. Knight, Mrs Franklin) used the language of construction to emphasise this. They talked of foundations and steps and levels. Others, although their language was more literary, (Mrs. Merchant, Mrs. Yeoman) stressed in their teaching phonics skills and vocabulary knowledge to such an extent that it seemed that they thought interpretation of text grew inevitably and entirely from these features. The implication from all these teachers was that once basic competence in decoding was achieved, the children would have within them the possibility of becoming readers. The teachers' job, they thought, was to encourage the children to enjoy texts, and to hope that they would.

The teachers saw their responsibility, then, in preparing the groundwork from which committed and regular reading might develop. From this point on they felt their responsibility waned. Mrs. Knight gives the clearest indication of this:

> "...what they do with it after me and through the rest of the junior school is dependent on themselves and their background."

But Mr. Reeve abnegates responsibility nearly as thoroughly in his insistence that most children will find the books they need to progress in reading for themselves. What is happening here is that the teachers are handing over the responsibility of learning to be a reader to the children themselves, despite the children's youth and their relative inexperience. The teachers do this not callously, but as a consequence of their untheorised ideology.

For what is common in all these classrooms is that reading is seen primarily as an individual accomplishment. The best reading is something that readers do alone, in silence and in the privacy of their heads. Reading a text assumes a simple relationship of transmission between the author of the book and the reader and there is no need for further social interaction. How can a teacher, who is outside this intimate relationship of author and reader, do more? All she can do is smile and encourage. Even the interventions of Mrs. Franklin, as she reads to her class do little more than encourage this cosy bonding. She asks the children to tell what they enjoy, not to question or discuss. This in Bakhtinian terms is a *monologic* relationship. (Bakhtin 1981) Mrs. Franklin feels she can help the children form relationships with authors, but she does not try to influence them.

This very individual and internalised approach to reading appears in all of the teachers' reading profiles and permeates practice in the classrooms. Teachers expect children to read individually, but do not follow up this reading. They read aloud class novels, and assume the children make meaning from them. They listen to children reading, and presume that meaning is made. In all these instances, children are solely and individually responsible for making texts mean. They are given no help and offered no models. Teachers intervene with interpretation only when they want to achieve something particular, as they do in the Literacy Hour, and then their interpretation is privileged. (See below, p 160ff for a discussion of this.)

At the beginning of this section, I reported that the teachers identified two reasons for becoming readers: self-enrichment and social advancement. It is clear that within this framework of individual and unmediated agency that is assumed for child readers, teachers are able to absolve themselves from the necessity of achieving either. In the end, it is up to the child herself to do what she will with the reading skills that are taught. Models are provided to show children that teachers find reading worthwhile,

and some children are helped form relationships with writers, but there is no social perspective here. Where reading is only individual it is unlikely to challenge society, the status quo. Mrs. Merchant's and Mr. Reeve's parents achieved social mobility for their children through applying their reading to their social and religious lives. The reading pursued in these classrooms, denies such a social dynamic. Can it, therefore, be empowering?

Control

The way the teachers control the making of meaning in the classrooms is obviously closely allied to their understanding of responsibility: where they do not feel responsible, they exercise very little control. Therefore free reading sessions were almost always devoid of teacher intervention, except for requests to keep the noise down, class and group story reading sessions were not followed by discussion and the hearing of children read was exactly that: teachers listened for accuracy and fluency - they did not concern themselves with meaning.

There were occasions, however, when the teachers took firm control of the way meaning was made from reading in their classrooms. They did this in lessons when the reading of a particular text was the matter of the session, and on these occasions they employed a number of techniques which ensured that the responsibility for making texts mean rested with them rather than the children. They achieved this by two means: controlling the activity of the lessons, and by controlling the talk.

Controlling the activity

Most obvious was the way the teachers directed the activity of these sessions. In their planning, they had determined what they wanted the children to understand and they worked to fulfil that plan. Jack and the Beanstalk, (appendix i) then, in Mrs. Yeoman's class, was interpreted through the lens of traditional storytelling. Guided reading in Mrs. Merchant's class inevitably revolved around the vocabulary she thought held the key to interpretation of the story. Recall and retelling were features in nearly all the classes. Ostensibly teachers used them to check that the children were listening and following the story, but there were two other effects. They privileged retelling and recall as a way of handling text, and ensured that the children's interpretation of that text followed the teacher's approved model.

Follow up work reinforced the teachers' intentions and therefore interpretations. Book reviews were written to the teacher's predetermined pattern; comprehension questions were answered; stories that followed the structure or the plot of an original were written. Few activities demanded an open, imaginative response from the children.

Controlling the talk

All the teachers were adept at controlling the talk that framed the making of meaning in class reading sessions and in the Literacy Hour. They did this primarily by means of display questions (Heath 1982). They asked children to read words, define vocabulary, explain details of plot, and find adjectives. In every case, they asked questions to which they knew the answers already. They asked not because they wanted to know the answers, but because they wanted to know if the children did. The children accepted this as a general ground rule of teacherly discourse (Edwards and Mercer, 1987), and were confused on the rare occasions when teachers asked genuine questions of them. (Mrs. Squire, Mrs. Franklin). They expected to be led into thinking along the same lines as their teachers, not to be asked to decide for themselves.

The typical pattern of display questioning is that the teacher *initiates* a question, a pupil *responds*, and then the teacher gives *feedback* to the pupil. (IRF: Edwards and Mercer 1987). The control of the teacher is obvious in the first turn of this process: she has already decided what is important enough to ask: it is her agenda for meaning that is being served. However, the way teachers use feedback is equally manipulative. Acceptable answers are received in one of three ways: they are celebrated ("Well done you!" – Mrs Knight p76), repeated (see Jack and the Beanstalk, appendix i), or paraphrased (Mrs Merchant p119). The effect of this is that the answer, and the child who gave it, is drawn back into the teacher's purpose. The teacher's meaning has been achieved and they can go on together. Unacceptable answers are ignored, and the question repeated. The child is not acknowledged as a contributor and is marginalized from the group's supposed unity. This marginalisation can be seen in Mr.Reeve's ellipse sequence (Chapter Five: 145), in Mrs. Merchant's treatment of Joanna (Chapter Four: 120) and in the Christmas dinner excitement in Mrs. Squire's class (Chapter three: 87). In all of these instances, I see children responding and attempting to create meaning for themselves, but because their

meaning deviates from the teacher's predetermined purpose, they are silenced. Rarely in my observations did I hear a child instigate a question.

I see then the teachers maintaining a tight grip on the making of meaning in their classrooms by controlling the talk. Teacher questions predispose children to look at texts in certain ways, and those children who try to break out of the teacher's framework are silenced. No channel in these classrooms exist for children to practise constructing meaning in their own ways and to their individual patterns. It is as if the teachers fear that children's voices will compromise the supposed stability of the text. When text and the teacher retain overall authority in the making of meaning, it is hard to imagine how the children can learn to read critically.

Conclusions

In this inter-chapter I have argued that the assumptions the teachers carry with them concerning the teaching of reading, and the practices they pursue as a result of those assumptions militate against the likelihood of critical reading flourishing in their classrooms. There are two reasons for this. The first is that teachers regard the making of meaning from texts as unproblematic. They assume that meaning in text is stable and accessible through competence and experience alone. They focus on individual reading and see no need for a social exploration of meaning. The second is that when they do read texts publicly with children, they control the thinking so tightly that the children have little opportunity and even less encouragement to experiment with ways of making meaning that are not their teacher's.

The question that needs asking now is this: can the teaching of reading be approached differently? What would happen if the patterns of classroom talk were changed? Would this help children to construct meaning for themselves rather than re-construct their teachers'?

In the next chapter I consider a number of investigations into the role of talk in the classroom, and ask how a change in the dynamics of dialogue might affect the way children and teachers approach text.

Chapter Six

The importance of talk: Dialogues and Dialogic

Introduction

In the inter-chapter that immediately precedes this, I drew on the work of Edwards and Mercer (1987) to analyse some of the talk observed in the case studies. I showed how teacher talk can so control the thinking environment of a classroom that it limits the creative involvement of the children in the making of meaning.

In this chapter, I pursue understandings of language and control further. By means of an examination of Vygotsky's theories of language development and verbal thought, I consider the inter-relationship of learning and language and explore the role that language plays in scaffolding internalised ways of thinking within the Zone of Proximal Development. I argue that despite the constructivist theories of Wells and Bruner, the Zone of Proximal Development as Vygotsky presents it, is a model for enculturation rather than creative thinking. I suggest that some other factor must be found and added to the model if learning through talk is to be empowering.

I next explore a number of investigations into classroom talk that have attempted to shift the balance of power away from the teacher and towards the children. I consider the extent to which they have been successful in overcoming the overwhelming magisterial voice of classroom dialogue. Finally, I introduce the ideas of Bakhtin, and show how his understanding of the dialogic nature of language can enrich and extend Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and introduce into it a way of overcoming its closed nature.

Learning and Language: the Importance of Vygotsky

Since his work was first made available in the West, the influence of Vygotsky's thinking on language and the learning it makes possible, has been unparalleled. This, explains Bruner, one of his earliest and most enthusiastic proponents, is because:

> "..though his principal theme is the relation of thought and language, it is more deeply a presentation of a highly original and thoughtful theory of intellectual development. Vygotsky's concept of development is at the same time a theory of education." (1962: v).

According to Burgess, writing thirty years later:

> "For nearly thirty years, the Vygotskian emphasis on the development of word meaning, inner speech, language's contribution to mind have provided English classrooms with continuity and rationale." (1993)

As well as establishing the importance of Vygotsky, these quotations identify two of the three interrelated and interdependent strands of thought that exemplify his work. The first is the importance of the symbol, the word, of language, as Burgess suggests. The second is Bruner's understanding that he presents a framework for a child's development and education. The third is the role that society plays in mediating and directing both of the above. It is this interweaving of these ideas concerning thought and language into a theory of education that is dependent on society that is important here.

Thought and language

Vygotsky's reading of various authorities in psychology and his experimental observation of young children led him to understand that while intellect and language have different 'roots' in the human mind, and so begin to develop independent of one another, they come together, interact and result in *verbal thought*, 'whereupon thought becomes verbal and speech rational' (1962: 45).

This is a slow process. The child's use of language is at first emotional: sounds and then words are used first to communicate needs and desires.

> "Language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his society." (1978: 89)

It is through interaction with other humans that the child learns that words can name, that they are symbols. Then begins a time of generalisation and classification, as the child gradually learns to match her developing understanding of word meanings to those of society at large. At the point of generalisation, the word necessarily becomes a thought, and the separate strands of verbal and intellectual development meet. Language has become intellectual. Burgess stresses the importance of this:

> "If word meaning belongs in the public, sociocultural sphere of language but also requires an act of thought, a generalisation, then words are at the interface of the cultural and the individual." (1993:26)

The child continues to work at this interface, and according to Vygotsky, learns next the external grammatical structure of the language she hears about her and then the syntax of logical thought to match it. Language here is entirely social. Through conversation, the child learns that words can structure ideas and clarify thinking and real challenges are overcome because someone has helped the child to talk through those challenges. Eventually, this explanatory spoken language develops where there is no obvious social need. The child uses language egocentrically to talk through problems herself, following the model with which she has been provided. The final stage of the process comes next. The operation turns inward and language becomes soundless: *inner speech* and so " ...come[s] to organise the child's thoughts, that is become an internal mental function." (1978: 89) Language has become the basic structure for thinking.

Vygotsky stresses that this last stage in the process is not innate:

> "Verbal thought is not an innate, natural form of behaviour, but is determined by an historical-cultural process and has specific properties and laws that cannot be found in the natural forms of thought and speech." (1962:51)

In this way, Vygotsky shows that learning to think logically is inherently a sociocultural experience. It depends on an outside factor, that is, the language of the society in which the child grows. It is a direct consequence of the socialised speech that the young child hears and is encouraged to practise. Language is a tool for thought, according to Vygotsky, but its use as a tool is a culturally mediated process.

The importance of inner speech and the mediating practices which encourage it is an important theme in this chapter.

A theory of education

Perhaps the clearest expression of the way in which learning is culturally mediated is presented in Vygotsky's concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (in Cole *et al* 1978). It is this theory of how learning moves on and accumulates that so impressed Bruner (1962, 1986), and enabled him to see Vygotsky's work as a system for education as much as a theory of development.

This, however does not seen to have been Vygotsky's main concern. His intention in developing the idea appears to have been more pragmatic and culturally specific. He was primarily involved in providing a Marxist psychology that fitted the needs of the newly post-revolutionary Russia. He wanted therefore, to explain the development of higher mental processes and to describe the method by which a child moves from pre-scientific to scientific modes of thinking, because scientific progress and the modernisation were the vital concerns of his time.

The *Zone of Proximal Development* is the means by which Vygotsky proposes that the child bridges the gap between her actual independent attainment and her potential development through "problem solving under *adult guidance* or *in collaboration* with more capable peers." (1978:86) This is demonstrated in the example of developing inner speech above, but it is a process that applies to all learning. What is important about this *guidance* and *collaboration* is that it assumes dialogue, a socialised and responsive version of the egocentric speech mentioned above. It is the nature of this dialogue that is essential to my argument here, because it is this that is internalised by the learner, that becomes inner speech, and directs the paths of thinking. It is dialogue formed by society, and it initiates the learner into that society:

> "...human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them." (1978:88)

In this way, language, thought and socialisation continue to interweave. The child learns through language and through society. Language is a tool for thought and

society determines the way that tool is used. The *Zone of Proximal Development* is the rolling apprenticeship through which mastery of the tool is achieved.

The concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development,* though relatively easy to explain, is not without difficulty. Quite apart from the pedagogical impossibility of matching classroom teaching to the potential development of a diverse class of children (see Maybin, Mercer and Steirer, 1992, and Edwards and Mercer 1987, especially their discussion of *ritual* and *principled learning*), it poses a philosophical dilemma about the purpose of education and the role of society in that purpose. The dilemma is this: is it that education exists to enable the individual to reach her intellectual and creative potential, and that a benign society, by means of careful scaffolding (Bruner 1986) through the Zone of Proximal Development, supports this? Or is it that the needs of society come first, before the individual? Does the Zone of Proximal Development explain rather how learners come to be encultured into the finite possibilities of thought which are available in the society in which they live?

The role of society

Burgess (1993) identifies two trends in current readings of Vygotsky in the context of English teaching. Commentaries either follow Bruner (1962, 1986) in emphasising the developmental side of Vygotsky's work, and focus on the individual learner, or they stress the historical context and political determinacy of his ideas.

Bruner's approach is the one that has mostly been followed above, so I will lay that aside for a while and consider the more politically acute understandings of the other camp. The interpreters here favour a reading of Vygotsky which stresses the political nature of culture, and they are interested in the way that this political nature is often disguised. (Burgess 1993:6) They investigate the social mechanisms in which learning takes place, and see the learner as one manipulated by the power and controlling momentum of society. When they take on Vygotsky's Marxist perspective, they insist on 'the significance of the political and cultural level as a site for achieving change, against economistic or deterministic social analysis.' (Burgess 1993)

Burgess presents an historical reading that takes into account the revolutionary Marxist climate in which Vygotsky actually thought and wrote. His reading constructs an interpretation of Vygotsky that recognises conflict, the struggle between dominant

and subordinate interests, and the ideological nature of the symbols that give meaning to society itself. Burgess writes: 'They underline the need for a politics of culture and critique.' (1993)

These ideas are important here, because they set the scene for an understanding of thinking in the classroom that challenges cultural dominance and stresses the importance of analysing that culture. It is the strand of thinking that manifests itself in what Goodwyn and Findlay (1999) and Marshall (2000) call the cultural analysis model of English teaching. Hall (1998) presents an example of this in her account of an Australian Early Years class, where the children were encouraged to deconstruct their understandings of family through Anthony Browne's *Piggybook*, and to consider the various commercial interests that are involved in Mother's Day. However, this sort of cultural analysis is rare in British primary schools, (see Marshall and Brindley 1998) and was certainly not witnessed in the classrooms of this research. Indeed, it is a model of teaching that is still relatively uncommon in secondary English classrooms (Marshall 2000). We need therefore, to keep the cultural analysis model in mind, and return to Bruner.

Burgess makes it clear that it is exactly this political embeddedness in Vygotsky's work that Bruner's reading chooses to ignore. Instead Bruner presents his acquaintance with Vygotsky as an apolitical meeting of minds, a union of thinking that transcends time, nationality, culture and politics:

> "I read the translation-in-progress with meticulous care, and with growing astonishment. For Vygotsky was plainly a genius. Yet it was an elusive form of genius. In contrast to say, Piaget, there was nothing massive or glacial about the flow of his thought..." (Bruner 1986:72)

An historical perspective reminds us that Bruner first read this translation-in-progress in the early 1960s, when the Cold War was at its height. He is therefore concerned to stress the similarities between Vygotsky's thinking and his own, rather than the differences, so that his Western readers might be prepared to consider it. He emphasises then, the agency of the child as learner, rather than the political society in which the child learns to be. He brushes aside Vygotsky's concern with modernisation and enculturation, and writes instead of a cosier "consciousness for two" (1986:75). He generalises and re-interprets.

In this way Bruner de-contextualises Vygotsky. He removes his work from the historical context in which it occurred, and places it instead within his own Western, child-centred constructivist framework. Wells (1998) completes the process:

> "Fundamentally, his [Vygotsky's] is a co-constructivist account, in which both the learner and those who provide assistance are agents in the Zone of Proximal Development" (1998:5)

The point I am making here is not that Bruner and Wells misread Vygotsky, or that their interpretations are not valid, but that their readings are as dependent on their social and historical circumstances as are Vygotsky's writings themselves. The result of their Western constructivist backgrounds, I suggest, is that they fundamentally alter the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development.

Wells defines constructivism thus:

> "Constructivist accounts of development ... give due weight to the individual's active role in the process of making sense of his or her encounters with the material and social world. " (1998:5)

They place the child, the learner, in a benevolent and supportive social environment, local rather than abstract, where meanings can be constructed through experience and sense made. The introduction of the Zone of Proximal Development into this framework does not change the framework. The child continues to be central to the process, still actively constructing, but now supported by a more competent peer or adult. Here is Bruner's 'scaffolding' and 'consciousness for two' (1986). But this scaffolding, and the *inner voice* it assumes is fundamentally different. While Vygotsky's *inner voice* takes on and reproduces the experience of society, Bruner's reconstructs it. The result of this is that when mastery is achieved, the child is understood to have constructed that learning anew. This is not 'a simple case of cultural transmission' (Wells 1998:3). It is creative. It holds within it the possibility of the child changing the culture itself, of moving it on. In the constructivist reading, the child constructs not just the learning she takes on, but the culture in which she lives and learns.

The question that needs to be asked is how can this be? Scaffolding is necessarily the product of a pre-existing culture. The child learns to construct within the possibilities afforded by that culture. Furthermore, the model of learning proposed by the Zone of Proximal Development is inherently asymmetrical: the power to know and to lead is in the hands of the more experienced other, and as Edwards and Mercer remind us:

> "Education is inherently concerned with introducing children and adults into a pre-existing culture of thought and language. However active a part pupils are allowed to play in their learning, we cannot assume that they reinvent that culture through their own activity and experience." (Edwards and Mercer 1987:157)

Cheyne and Tarulli (1999) develop this point further. They insist that 'prototypical and "official" dialogical genre of the Zone of Proximal Development '(1999:11) assumes a *Magisterial dialogue.* They draw this image from the medieval scholastic tradition:

> "A Magisterial dialogue is characterised by a superiority of the first (Magisterial) voice over the second (novitiate) voice: the parent over the child, the teacher over the student, the tutor over the apprentice." (1999:11)

This system, they claim, requires a third, authoritative voice upon which the first voice can draw. This is the voice of the institution, the text, the curriculum, the culture. This voice is the authority that defines what it is that the novice needs to know. Through dialogue, the first voice initiates the second into the proper ways of knowing and thinking determined by the third. This is a closed process:

> "The first and third voices presume to know where the dialogue is heading. Deviations from the proper trajectory are noted and corrections initiated." (1999:12)

It is easy to see how this understanding of the Zone of Proximal Development fits in with the observations that Edwards and Mercer (1987) made in their investigations into classroom talk. Their discussion of the pendulum lesson (128-159) makes clear that even when children appear to be engaged in experiential learning

"...the freedom of pupils to produce their own ideas was largely illusory, the teacher maintained a strict control over what was said and done, what decisions were reached and what interpretations were put upon experience" (1987: 156)

The teacher scaffolded the children's learning towards a predetermined end, chosen by her, but determined by the curriculum. That her efforts were not altogether successful was not the fault of the magisterial dialogue as a system or of its trajectory of the children's development. Rather, they failed because she misjudged what they actually knew. She built her dialogue on sand.

The magisterial model fits much of the teaching in the classrooms of this research too. On the simplest level, it is clear that the concept of text held by all the teachers (see inter-chapter) closely echoes the magisterial 'third voice'. The teachers saw text as something that was closed and authoritative, that could be appealed to in order to provide indisputable meaning. Their aim was to scaffold the children's learning so they might find that meaning for themselves. They modelled a magisterial voice that looked for authority in text and that voice became the children's inner voice and the pattern of the their thinking.

The magisterial model worked in these classrooms in a rather more complex way too, in that it determined what the teachers thought they were expected to do. Mrs. Knight gave the clearest example of this when she said: "I'm a traditional infant teacher." (Chapter Three: 80) With these words she asserts an allegiance to and an acceptance of the status quo. She would work in her classroom in the traditional way, doing what society expected of her and challenging nothing. To a lesser extent all of the teachers did this. Even though each one of them complained to me in private about the demands and expectations of the National Literacy Strategy, none of them gave a hint of this to the children. They presented the Literacy Hour as something neutral, something necessary and something worthwhile. No complicating word of dissent entered their dialogue with the children about the Strategy, and no voice was given to the children to explore texts in a way that was outside the strategy's authority. The teachers were obeisant towards it, and therefore almost all the scaffolding talk in the lessons I observed in all the classrooms fitted the magisterial model. The children's developing inner voices were learning to accept authority. How could they then, be expected to read critically?

The questions that arise from this are obvious. They are these: Is magisterial dialogue within classroom learning inevitable? When the culture of society and the school as a site of formal learning is so structured, are more open-ended approaches possible? Does the inherent asymmetry of the concept of learning as represented in the Zone of Proximal Development mean that dialogue of a bounded sort is necessary, or can a model of talk in learning be envisioned that allows for a more active and creative role for the child?

Cheyne and Tarulli (1999) suggest this is possible. They propose two other models of dialogue within the Zone of Proximal Development, which accord more easily with the constructivist and emancipatory ideals of Wells and Bruner. The first is that instead of magisterial dialogue, *Socratic dialogue* is possible. Characteristically in this model, the second voice, that of the learner, is encouraged to question and to resist the scaffold and is "no longer so easily silenced by appeals of the first voice to the authority of the third." (1999:13) Here the second voice is empowered: as the learner becomes increasingly informed, so the tutor's voice becomes less clear, and the two work together until a meaning is produced that is the result of mutual enquiry. There is little concept of an outside authority. Instead, there is "an encounter of differences that carries the potential for *inter*-illumination among the voices." (1999:14)

According to Cheyne and Tarulli, *Menippean* dialogue is a development of the Socratic ideal. In this case, the learner's voice becomes so strong that it mocks as well as challenges authority:

> "Ultimately, the third voice may be mocked, authority turned on its head, flags burned and leaders burned in effigy (at least). Voices multiply and become inverted, high and low change places in a full-fledged carnival." (1999:15)

This is seditious and dangerous stuff, far removed from Vygotsky's higher mental processes and desire for modernisation. It supposes an agency and autonomy on the part of the learner so strong that it threatens society itself.

Cheyne and Tarulli make no suggestion as to how the models of dialogue they describe might be realised in classrooms or how this questioning second voice can

be encouraged in what is an inherently magisterial school system. However, there is an increasing body of literature that discusses attempts by teachers and researchers in the United States and in the United Kingdom to change the pattern of classroom dialogue, especially in the teaching of reading. The next section of this chapter describes some of these attempts and examines the dialogue and thinking that emerges. How far is it based on a Vygotskian understanding of thought and language, and what sort of dialogue does it employ?

Changing Classroom Dialogue

In England

In 1987, the School Curriculum Development Committee of Great Britain set up the National Oracy Project to enhance and develop the role of speech, its practice and assessment, in schools throughout the country. The project involved thirty-five local education authorities and teachers from selected schools in each, worked with their classes across the age range of compulsory schooling, and investigated the use of talk across the curriculum.

The project was Vygotskian in concept, in that it accepted a Bruneresque understanding of the role of language within the Zone of Proximal Development. Here is Kate Norman in her introduction to the book *Thinking Voices* (1992) that disseminated much of the project's work:

> "Often in these extracts, they [children] think aloud, clarifying their own ideas, assimilating or challenging the ideas of others. In this way, they not only internalise the meanings that emerge, converting knowledge into understanding – they also internalise the process of effective thinking. This concept of 'thinking voices' is a central message of this book: that talking together, with adults and peers, is the most important way in which children learn to think." (1992:ix)

The project took for granted that children – even at five – were competent and creative users of language, and that they were *active* learners, that is, they 'attempt to interrelate, to reinterpret, to understand new experiences and ideas' (Barnes

1992:125) The emphasis, therefore, rested on the importance of *listening* to children, in a way that had not always been common before. Only when the teacher listened to what the child was saying, could she be aware of what that child knew now and needed to know next. Acknowledging the real voices of children and their expertise was one of the hallmarks of the project.

The project relied heavily on the work of Edwards and Mercer (1987). It followed them, not only in the broad ideological framework of Vygotskian ideas, but also in the way it analysed classroom interaction and teacher talk. Wood (1992), for example, analysed the purpose and effect of questioning by teachers. He observed that the strong asymmetry of power in interactions between children and their teachers and suggested that this created "a *powerful barrier* to the achievement of interactions in which children display initiative, curiosity or negotiation." (1992:207 my italics) He saw a need to 'tip the balance' in favour of the children, but recognised that there would need to be a change in the teachers' use of language to achieve this, as well as a compromise of power. He put forward a number of conversational 'move types' that teachers might employ in order to avoid the usual teacherly 'wh-' and 'two choice' questions that effectively close down the possibilities of pupil's talk, and noticed that with out them, children could sustain far longer and more searching conversational exchanges. Wood stressed too the importance of giving children time to think when they are expected to answer demanding questions.

The matter of teacher control interested other members of the project. Gardiner (1992) looked at what happened when the traditional role of the teacher in control was turned on its head, and Cordon (1992) described some of the various other roles a teacher might take in classroom talk. These roles included responding as a working group member, as a neutral chairperson, as a source of information and as an equal. When teachers took on less dominant roles, children were observed to "have a genuine stake in what is going on: they 'own' the task." (Gardiner 1992:197) He continues:

> "The adults' role is to make a 'contingent response'; they are listening and watching, in order to interpolate in ways which confer value on the pupils meaning and to help them to expand into appropriate modes of thinking and responding." (Gardiner 1992:197)

Children then, were given a measure of control that had been rare in many classrooms. They were empowered to set the agenda of their learning (within certain teacherly constraints) rather than always be subject to the teacher's magisterial knowledge. What the children knew already and what they thought was valued. Dialogue was more Socratic.

The cross-curricular nature of the National Oracy Project meant that although talk was seen to be the fundamental dynamic of language and its place in English teaching acknowledged, it did not particularly explore the role of talk in the teaching of reading, or in the teaching of literature. Chambers, (1985, 1993) however was working towards filling this gap.

In *Booktalk* (1985) and in *Tell Me* (1993) Chambers sets out a loose system through which teachers might help the children in their classes explore reading through talk. Two theories underpin this *Tell Me* or *Booktalk* approach: one builds on similar understandings concerning the use of questioning to those of Wood; the other is based on reader response theory. (see chapter one) Following Iser, Chambers claims that: "The meanings of any text shift according to the readers' own lives and their needs at a particular time." (1993:17), and that reading is a constructive, recursive and interactive process:

> "As we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and breaking of illusions. In a process of trial and error we organize and reorganise the various data offered to us by the text. (Iser 1974, quoted in Chambers 1993:47)

The teacher's role then, is to scaffold the child's thinking through this process by means of dialogue. *Tell me* questions are open; they are genuine enquiries into the child's thinking and they are invitations to explore. They are not, as was so often apparent during my own classroom observations, merely gaps in a monologic discourse in which children were expected to display or to guess what was already in the teacher's mind. If these explorations are to be valid, Chambers stresses that talk must be allowed to be tentative. Children must feel safe to express developing ideas and to risk being disagreed with; they must know that their words are *honourably reportable.*

> "…readers must know that nothing they say will be misused or turned against them, that they will be listened to and respected – and not just by the teacher, but by everyone else in the group as well. " (1993: 47)

According to Chambers, dialogue in *booktalk* achieves four things: it enables the child to form, and therefore express new ideas; it enables the child to communicate those ideas others; it enables the child to enter into the process of making a joint, or shared meaning with others; and it affords the child the possibility of generating a new meaning that that child could not have achieved alone. Dialogue, then, enables, encourages, supports and extends the child's thinking.

There is much to be admired here. Chambers is right to foreground the individual child as an active and valid maker of meaning from text. He is right to acknowledge the role of the classroom community in extending, modifying and enriching those emerging meanings. He is right too in focusing upon the teacher as the enabler in this process, the one who allows the dialogue to take place and who supports it. But *booktalk* has limitations. If we recall the cultural analysis readings of Vygotsky, discussed above, we see that what *booktalk* achieves here is in fact still enculturation: it introduces children to a way of reading that is the culture of literary criticism. Chambers makes this explicit in his justification of the project in terms of Auden's (1963) list of the purposes of literary criticism:

> "You will agree, I think, that these children are behaving, or learning to behave, as critics of the kind Auden wanted." (1993:37)

There is a magisterial voice here still, though it is hard to discern through a smokescreen of Socratic dialogue.

<u>In America</u>

In America, investigations into the role of talk in the teaching of reading took a rather different course. Kuchan and Beck (1997) provide a detailed account of the development of what they call 'thinking aloud and reading comprehension' from the cognitive revolution of the 1950s. They show how 'thinking aloud' was first a method of enquiry: researchers persuaded subjects to vocalise the processes by which the found meaning in text. Theories of information processing and problem solving were

developed, and soon these were incorporated into methods of reading instruction. In the first instances, students were taught the strategies by which comprehension might be achieved in text. As ideas evolved, teachers were encouraged to model these strategies as they read aloud to their pupils and finally, the pupils themselves were encouraged to participate in the process of 'thinking aloud' as they read texts with partners.

The inclusion of pupils in this way resulted in a clear shift in thinking. Researchers and teachers became interested in the social interaction that was necessarily involved, and began to wonder how this discourse in social contexts could be used to teach reading comprehension. The focus of investigations into reading instruction, then, moved from the individual to the group.

Two examples of the results of this shift are worth discussing here. The first is a year long research project into the teaching of reading of information texts in social studies lessons by elementary school pupils, conducted by Beck, McKeown, Sandora and Kuchan (1996), and the second is an investigation by the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1994) into the interaction of High School students and their teachers in English lessons, as they construct meaning together from text.

Beck, McKeown, Sandora and Kuchan (1996) call their project *Questioning the Author*, and its basic premise is that inexperienced readers are less likely than others to notice inconsistencies in text context and find it hard to monitor their comprehension. They need therefore to be helped to become actively involved in constructing meaning as they read. *Questioning the Author* is an "instructional intervention" that encourages student to "grapple with and reflect on what an author is trying to say in order to build a representation from it." (1996: 387)

To that end, the teachers in the project were discouraged from using questions that demanded factual one-word answers in a typical Initiation Response Feedback (IRF) manner, and were persuaded instead, to ask more open questions, to make links between questions and responses and to move the children to discussion. Instead of asking "What do Hawaians eat?" they asked "What do you think the author is getting at here? Or "How did the author settle that for us? (1996:390)

The links here with earlier attempts to provide a framework for information processing and comprehension are clear. Because of this, questions are inevitably more confrontational than those preferred by Chambers. However, the change in classroom control and the dynamic of dialogue that resulted was significant. Beck, McKeown, Sandora and Kuchan hoped this change would empower the children to be active participants in reading:

> "The notion was that in changing the way students (and teachers) address a text, that is, by challenging the authority of the textbook, blame for comprehension difficulties could be shifted from students' inadequacy to author fallibility. In turn the students might be more likely to question text ideas and dig into their meaning." (1996: 387)

To some extent this was achieved. The children did become more involved in lessons and their motivation increased. They spoke more and listened to each other, and together built meaning from the texts they were reading. Their scores on reading comprehension tests improved too.

Despite this, it is clear that even though the children were given more voice in the classroom, they were still restricted by the magisterial voice of the text. The author can be questioned: he might have failed to communicate clearly, or omitted important facts, but the text itself, or rather the information it contains is unassailable. The questioning is bounded. The children are fixed into an enculturation mode of the Zone of Proximal Development, and they have no means to break out.

The Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group (1994) was not concerned with using talk as a method of instruction. Their interest was in literacy as a socially constructed phenomenon (Cook-Gumperz 1986, see Chapter One: 10ff), and in the inadequacy of presenting children with a single model of schooled literacy rather than a generic literacy process. They set up therefore a child-centred investigation into the way that high school students constructed literacy between themselves as they talked and worked in groups.

This investigation took place in English lessons and the students were involved in discussing character in text. They worked mostly in small groups, but sometimes

individually. They came together as a whole class to pool ideas and to discuss them and to negotiate class understandings.

The teachers in this project stressed the importance of *difference* in all this. They emphasised that there were different ways of learning and different ways of arriving at an answer. They encouraged students to negotiate in their groups and to explain their ways of thinking. At no time did they expect students to achieve a single, unified answer. The 'class answers' at which they eventually arrived were the result of negotiation, compromise and majority decision. They were not presumed to be authoritative and pupils were not expected necessarily to take them on.

There was dialogue in this class then, between students, between students and teachers and between students and texts, and according to the researchers; it is the interaction of these three threads of dialogue that formed the literate culture in which the students operated. The students' learning was scaffolded by the dialogue within the culture it constructed. But still a magisterial voice lurked. Halfway through the project the teachers realised the necessity of grading the students' course work. Here there could be no dialogue. The teachers had to accept the constraints of an outside voice, to comply with the demands of the wider society. Again Socratic dialogue begins to look illusory.

From Vygotsky to Bakhtin

Common to each of the above examples is the understanding that talk is an important and enabling tool in the classroom. Where children's thinking is valued, where children are allowed to use talk to initiate, to question and to explore rather than simply to supply answers and comply with established teacher understandings, then talk takes on a dynamic role. It becomes the means by which new ideas are broached and considered, and the process through which new ways of thinking about ideas are assimilated. Talk is both message and medium. Implicit in this is the Vygotskian idea that thinking, *inner speech*, develops through dialogue. Real dialogues in the classroom provide the scaffold that supports actual thinking now and a model for an internalised scaffold to support possible thinking in the future.

It is the nature of these scaffolds, future and internalised, that is the matter of the discussion here: for it can be seen that despite the Socratic intentions of all the

projects, a magisterial voice finally bound the dialogues that formed those scaffolds. In the end, however constructivist the pedagogic ideology of the teachers concerned, the hegemony of the wider society triumphed. The practices of literary criticism had to be learned, assignments had to be written that could be conventionally graded, the right meaning had to be taken from information texts.

For dialogue in the classroom to be truly Socratic, and certainly if there is to be even the slightest possibility of it becoming Menippean, (Cheyne and Tarulli 1999) then some other factor must be introduced to challenge the magisterial voice. In their discussion of the strengths and limitations of Vygotsky's understanding of the relationship between inter-mental and extra-mental processes, Wertsch and Bustamante Smolka (1993) introduce some of the ideas of Bakhtin. They show how his thinking complements and extends that of Vygotsky, and particularly, how it enriches the understanding of the social dimension of language that forms *inner speech.*

In the rest of this chapter, I will argue that that 'other factor' without which it is impossible to challenge the magisterial voice, might be found in the work of Bakhtin.

Bakhtin and the Dialogic

Bakhtin was not a psychologist, nor was he concerned with education. His interest in language grew from his work as a literary critic and semiotician. His concern was to explain how readers turned the language of the texts they read into something that was meaningful. Although he was a contemporary of Vygotsky, there is no evidence to suggest that either was aware of the other's work. (Wertsch and Bustamante Smolka 1993)

Three main ideas from Bakhtin concern me here. The first is the notion of utterance as dialogic; the second is the understanding of speech genres, the accompanying idea of heteroglossia, and the distinction Bakhtin makes between monologic, *authoritative discourse* and that which is *internally persuasive*; and the third, briefly, is the matter of carnival.

Like Vygotsky, Bakhtin understood all language to be inherently social. He rejected absolutely the claims of earlier linguists, who held language to be essentially expressive, as if it were an individual outpouring of creativity. Bakhtin insisted that no language event could stand alone. Language was nothing if there was no one to hear what was being said, and therefore the listener was as important in the act of speech as was the speaker. All language, he said, was made with an audience in mind, and that audience was not a passive receiver of language:

> "The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes on an active, responsive attitude towards it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on." (Bakhtin 1986:68)

Language, according to Bakhtin is innately responsive. It relies on the response of the listener or reader, but equally, it is responsive in the way that it is formed. All utterances are made in response to some pre-existing utterance. Each, spoken or written, has a history and a future. It is a link in a vast chain of communication. Everything that is said relies on, responds to or borrows from something that has been said or written before, and looks forward to what will come next. Language is vital and dynamic. It exists through interaction:

> "The word in language is always half someone else's. It becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it into his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, ... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts serving other people's intentions." (Bakhtin 1981:293-4)

Language, then, is dialogic: it is by its nature concerned with dialogue and interaction. It can only exist in a social context, and its dialogic nature can only be understood when that context is taken into account.

It is Bakhtin's understanding of *speech genres*, (1986) that is particularly useful to my purposes here, because it is this that extends Vygotsky's idea of how language is

learnt in social contexts. *Speech genres* are the social languages that people use in their everyday lives and which shape their ways of thinking and being, and are the basic structures for communication. There are speech genres "of greetings, farewells and congratulations, all kinds of wishes, information about health, and so forth." (1986:79) There are official and formal genres, of the sort that include military commands and academic discourse, and there are genres for every sort of talk in between. Speech genres differ in their flexibility. Some are plastic and creative, others formal and stable. They are the basis for all utterances. Bakhtin writes:

> "We speak only in definite speech genres, that is all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical *forms of construction of the whole.* Our repertoire of oral (and written) speech genres is rich." (1996:78)

It is from these rich and diverse speech genres that children learn what language is and how to use it. It is not one model therefore, that scaffolds their learning, but many. This is Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia; (1981:263) the idea that language in real life, and in the novel, is made up of many, responsive voices. It is a rich tapestry and the competent language user weaves in and out of the strands with ease.

Bakhtin (1981:295ff) provides an example of this process in action. He proposes an illiterate Russian peasant, functioning happily in four separate languages: the language of prayer, a language of song, a language for family interaction, and a language for dealing with officialdom. At first he uses them independently: each shapes his thinking in its own sphere. The change comes when the peasant realises that the languages can interanimate. He begins to see each through the eyes of another, and as a result, their inviolability comes to an end. He takes command of the languages: they cease to control him.

> "The better our command of genre, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our own individuality in them (when this is possible and necessary), the more flexibly and precisely we reflect the unrepeatable situation of communication – in a word, the more perfectly we implement our free speech plan." (1986:80)

The *inner voice*, of the peasant has become multiple and holds within it therefore, the possibility of challenging the single voice of enculturisation that haunts

Vygotsky's model of the Zone of Proximal Development. In the remainder of this chapter I shall argue that it is this heteroglossia that is the 'other factor' that makes the Socratic and Menippean dialogue suggested by Cheyne and Tarulli, (1999) possible, and that it is this that might challenge the pervasive magisterial voice of educational discourse.

The influence of Bakhtin in the classroom

A further development of Bakhtin's understanding of speech genres is the understanding that some genres are more powerful than others. The 'loudest' genres are those which have *authority of discourse.* (1981:342ff) These are the genres in which political, religious and moral certainty is transmitted. They are the ways of thinking that a particular society accepts as right. The texts of these genres are *externally persuasive*, that is their authority comes from the consensus of society rather than the dialogism of discourse. They are texts of transmission. The reader of these texts, or the listener, is supposed to take in and take on what the texts propose. Reading and listening here is at its least active. The texts are monologic. There is little room for response and none at all for argument. It is easy to see how the magisterial texts of the typical classroom are like this.

At the other end of the scale are genres that are *internally persuasive.* These have none of the authority of the above. They are persuasive because they set up resonances in the listener's mind that chime with existing understandings. They promote response, the retelling and realigning of ideas, and the borrowing and transforming of utterances from one genre to another.

Wertcsh and Bustamante Smolka (1993) show the application of this analysis in practice. They tell of a project in Brazil, where the teacher wanted to empower her already socially disadvantaged reception class. In much the same way as the teachers in the projects in England and America above, this teacher put aside her usual teacherly *authoritative discourse*, and attempted instead to teach by means of dialogue that was *internally persuasive*. Her part in the classroom dialogue (as can be seen in the transcripts provided by Wertcsh and Bustamante Smolka) is to reflect, to remind and refocus the words of the children. Even when they are wrong and muddled, she does not *tell* them what to think. She operates under the belief that the children will hear and respond to her transient remarks, and those of the other

children, and that the internal dialogue that is set up in their heads will persuade and reorganise their thinking. Wertsch and Bustamante Smolka put it like this:

> "Instead of taking others' utterances as untransformable packages of information to be received, they [the children] were encouraged to take them as thinking devices, as a kind of raw material for generating new meanings." (1993)

Here then is a clear example of the working of Vygotsky's *inner voice* in a classroom. It shows how, in the absence of a magisterial framework, a responsive, Socratic inner voice can begin to develop. What this example does not show is how speech genres interact in the classroom or what happens when internally persuasive genres such as those used by the teacher come into conflict with the authoritative voices of the rest of society.

Howarth (1999) takes the ideas a little further. She looks at small group interaction in a Year Three class in a British primary school and applies a Bakhtinian framework to her analysis. She presents two groups of children, both engaged in a piece of collaborative writing. One is a group of boys, the other girls; her role is to assist them and to act as scribe. She notes that throughout the task the girls remain set in the monologic, authoritative discourse that is typical of whole class teaching in this classroom. The girls do not assert themselves or their ideas, they are uncritical of each other's suggestions and they constantly defer to Howarth as teacher. Their work, in the end lacks vitality and originality. The boys, however, are able to break free of the monologic speech genre of whole class interaction. In their conversations, voices of the playground, the courtroom and the classroom jostle with one another as the boys negotiate the parameters of the task and their roles within it. By juxtaposing speech genres, individuality is asserted and ideas are challenged. Howarth writes:

> "The adaptation and reaccentuation of genres is empowering for the children; their apparent ease with a range of genres allows them to position themselves as largely self-sufficient interlocuters and the teacher-researcher as umpire/scribe" Howarth (1999:110)

What is important here is the way that the boys' familiarity with a multiplicity of genres allows them, in the context of a small group of peers, to by-pass the authority of classroom discourse. Here is Socratic dialogue, not just enabled, but beginning to work. One genre is thrown against another, and the resulting clash of ways of thinking enables the boys to be creative. They experience the "encounter of differences that carries the potential for *inter*-illumination among the voices." (Cheyne and Tarulli 1999:14) They have multiple scaffolds on which to build and the freedom to think in the various ways these scaffolds allow.

There is a way however, in which the thinking of these boys is still bounded by the magisterial voice of the classroom as a whole. There are two indications of this. The first is the acceptance that the boys clearly take of the task as a whole. They vie with each other, not with the task. The second, which is perhaps, the reason for the first, is that the boys show no consciousness at all of the overriding magisterial voice that controls their work. They do not challenge its authority; it is so pervasive that they don't realise it is there. They can perceive no other way of being.

For these boys to have behaved in a way that challenged the authoritative discourse of the classroom would suppose a Menippean rather than Socratic framework for their dialogue. Menippean dialogue has a critical, satirical edge. It confronts. It grows, like Socratic dialogue, from familiarity with diverse speech genres, but now the internally persuasive genres challenge the authoritative. They notice it. They set up chains of meaning that respond to its particularities. They parody, they satirise, they mock. Here is play and humour and carnival. The monologic voice is undermined and overturned.

Here is the possibility of empowerment. The thinker, who has access to internalised Menippean dialogue, knows the weaknesses of authoritative discourse well enough not to be enslaved by it.

Menippean Dialogue and Critical Reading

The interplay of speech genres in Menippean dialogue supposes a meta-cognitive dimension to language that is not present in either Socratic or magisterial dialogue. It is a mode of thought that is akin to the Freirian notion of *conscientization* (Chapter One: 24) It makes strange what has previously been taken for granted, and opens

up the possibility of action. Understandings of critical literacy, (Chapter One 24ff) and the cultural analysis model of English teaching (this chapter: 165) are based on this.

The introduction of a Bakhtinian framework to this set of ideas is particularly enriching in the context of the teaching of reading because Bakhtin's primary concern was literary criticism. The concepts of the monologic text and of heteroglot novel were first of all literary ideas. They described types of discourse in text and the possibilities of response those discourses left open to the reader. Critical reading, therefore, needs to take into account not only the internal voices of Menippean dialogue that come about through exposure to multiple speech genres in talk, but also to recognise those voices which are developed through written text. For many young children, it is the rich, subversive, multi-voiced picture books of writers such as Browne, Ahlberg and Burningham, which provide the most winning examples of internally persuasive dialogue they meet, and the clearest examples of carnival.

Carnival is important because it is at the heart of reading and of thinking about reading. It exposes the assumptions upon which text is based. The provisional description of what critical reading might include which is provided at the end of chapter one recognises this. It posits that people who read critically enter into the (often serious) play of reading. They are flexible in their approach to text, recognise text as an artefact and do not necessarily *take on* everything they *take in.* They achieve this by juxtaposing discourses, by allowing one discourse to clash with another and disrupt it, and by exploiting the possibilities for satire that ensue. Play and carnival are essential elements in this process and texts themselves have a vital role to play in making this process clear to children.

Conclusion

In a Bakhtinian understanding of Vygotsky's theory of thought and language, *inner speech* becomes not one voice, but many, and dialogue within the Zone of Proximal Development becomes necessarily a complex and multifaceted process. The authoritative voice of enculturation is buffeted by a heteroglossia of opposing voices.

If we want children to learn to be critical readers, we need to encourage this. We need to give children access to the range of voices that will make it possible. We

need to introduce them to a Babel of voices: voices from texts, voices from each other, voices from teachers, and voices from other adults. Furthermore, we need to help them to become skilled at throwing these voices, one against the other, *para-bullein*, in the language of the post-modernists, or, to use the words of Gee (1996) at juxtaposing Discourses. (Chapter One: 31) In this way, they might learn to internalise the sort of Menippean dialogue that exposes and challenges authoritative discourse that limits the possibilities of their reading.

The classroom observations described in Chapters Three, Four and Five yielded very little dialogue of this kind and provided small evidence of critical reading in the classrooms. In the next chapter, I describe my attempt to find more. Might I, by providing the children with rich, multi-voiced, carnivalesque texts, and by giving them the opportunity to speak, to think aloud and to explore those texts together, uncover rather more?

Chapter Seven

The Intervention: Talking about Reading

Introduction

In Chapter Six, I argued that the magisterial dialogue common to many classrooms, and widely observed in the teaching of reading in the observation stage of this research, is unlikely to encourage children to learn to read critically. I posited that the inherently asymmetric power-context of school necessarily means that Socratic dialogue, which ought to be an alternative to Magisterial, can only ever be illusory. I suggested therefore, that a form of Menippean dialogue is needed if critical reading is to be achieved in school. This, by introducing into the discourse an element of meta-cognition, will result in satire, subversiveness and carnival and will open up for the reader the possibility of critical reading.

In this next chapter I set out to achieve two things: first to describe the intervention stage of the research and second to consider the data it generated. In the description of the intervention, I show how Socratic and Menippean dialogues were introduced into the discourse of the children in the study, in the expectation that this would uncover any propensity for critical reading that existed among them already and would create the potential for more. I explain the role of talk in the intervention, then introduce myself, as researcher and teacher, and the participants. In this way, the pattern of description established in Chapters Three to Five is followed. I present two stages of the intervention in schools and describe a parallel strand of work with a group of adults undertaking a module on the reading process at masters' level.

In the second part of this chapter I consider the data from this intervention. One result of the change in discourse was that the children were now more nearly free from the constraints of magisterial dialogue. Given this freedom, how did they go about making meaning from text, and what did they do that echoed, or differed from adult behaviour?

At the end of this chapter, I propose a number of categories to describe the reading behaviour of participants in this study.

The Children

The teacher of each Year Three class chose a group of children to take part in the intervention stage of this research. At my request, these children were chosen from the middle range of readers in the class. They were not the most successful, that is those children who might be supposed to be likely to discover a questioning mode of reading for themselves, nor were they children the teacher considered to be struggling. I wanted ordinary, average children, the sort who would need teaching, and who might be ready to take on the ideas and possibilities I wanted to introduce.

The intake, expectations and organisation of the three schools meant that the groups were rather different in composition. At Friar's Hall and Parsons Field, the groups were stable. They included children who were just able to read independently and those who were becoming well practised. Two of the Friar's Hall children were in Year Four: teaching groups there had already been arranged, and this pair was used to working with the year three children who were my target group. Both groups contained 'naughty' boys and the sort of quiet girl who rarely finds a voice in whole class sessions.

At Pardoners Way, the group was not stable. Of the six children who were nominally in my group, two changed schools, one was permanently excluded, and another was a persistent absentee. Other children joined and left the group as the teacher wished. I was never sure from week to week which children I would be teaching, or how many of them would be present. Two or three was most usual. Of the two children I taught most regularly, Nathan could, in the words of the National Curriculum: "recognise familiar words in simple texts," and was beginning to be able to "use [his] knowledge of letters and sound symbol relationships in order to read words and establish their meaning when reading aloud." (DfEE 1995: Attainment Target 2: Reading, level 1) Kylie could do much less. Neither had thought much about reading beyond the decoding of words in *123 and Away.*

The Teacher

In the intervention part of the research, I took on the role of teacher in guided reading sessions with the children.

I, like Mrs. Merchant, am a graduate in English and a teacher of some experience. I have taught English Literature to 'A' level in Secondary schools, but most of my career has been spent in K.S.1. I have worked with Year Two more than any other age group, but my most recent primary school teaching experience has been in Reception.

Reading Profile

Unlike most of the teachers in this research, I remember a time before I could read and a time when I was learning to read. I remember recognising individual words in context before I went to school ("You're just remembering them", said my mother); and I remember learning to read with ease once I got there. Before long, I was living the sort of reading double life that was apparent in some of the children in this research. At school, I meted my way through the Ladybird reading scheme and at home, I read widely and enthusiastically, resourced and encouraged by weekly visits to the public library. Both my parents read, though not with any great purpose. My mother did, however, make sure she read the books we children borrowed as well as her own. We would talk about how far we had got with a book, and what we thought would happen next. Sometimes she read to me.

Secondary school widened my reading well beyond the horizons of my parents. Soon I was greedy to read and to own books in a way that neither of them understood. I developed habits of reading that have lasted to this day. Nowadays I read for relaxation and stimulation. I read fast for plot and for character. I read slowly to hear the cadence of the language, and I read poetry. I read to understand ideas and to see how ideas are handled. I reread. I read once to find out what happens, and again to see how it happened and what the writer did to make it happen. I read about books in newspapers and I listen to programmes about books on the radio. I borrow books from friends, read books at their recommendation, and talk with them about books.

Teaching children to read.

As a teacher of reading in K.S.1, my first concern was to teach children what reading could offer them. I wanted them to be readers - not simply people who could read. My teaching centred on texts. I read as much children's literature as I could, and

from this reading, I chose texts to teach which pleased me and which I thought would interest the children. I tried always to make sure that the texts I read to them and the books I encouraged them to read for themselves were worthwhile.

I discussed texts with the children in my classes, in much the way that Chambers (1993) advises. Even reception children were encouraged to consider texts in ways which went beyond recall and retelling. I asked open-ended questions and trained the children to listen to and respond to each other as much as they did to me. I encouraged them to speak aloud their thoughts as we read, and we brought to the stories and poems we shared together our lived experience, our expectation and all the intertextuality the children could muster.

Expectations of the children

The children in my reception class convinced me that even very young children could be sophisticated constructors of meaning from text if they were given the opportunity and encouragement to do so. I expected that the children in this research, with those three extra years' experience of life and text, ought to be able to read in a way that was at least as active and enquiring as the five year olds I had known. I had seen very little evidence of this in the first stage of the school research. This intervention was to see what they could do.

Finding out about Reading

Kuchan and Beck (1997 See Chapter Six: 173) note that the genesis of 'thinking aloud comprehension' is in cognitive research. My research here shares an interest with those early cognitive researchers, in that it is concerned to discover what it is that readers *do*. It shares too, the understanding that the best way to identify what it is that readers do is to talk to them, to encourage them to think out loud as they read and to monitor that process. This research differs from the earlier American work in that it does not seek to identify successful strategies for comprehension, but rather to map possible reading behaviours adopted by individuals as they read and to identify the potential of these behaviours for critical reading.

The intervention then, relies on talk. It takes for granted that reading, critical or otherwise, is a mysterious process and that it happens most often in the intimate

silence of the imagination. It assumes that the only means we have of understanding the process is by reflecting upon it, and by discussing that reflection with others. The intervention aimed to enable children to do this.

The first concern of the intervention then, was to establish the patterns of discourse in which the investigation of children's reading might take place. It was clear from the work of Edwards and Mercer, (1987) Norman et al (1992) and Beck, McKeown, Sandora and Kuchan (1998) that this move away from magisterial dialogue would necessitate an upturning of typical classroom power relationships. If I wanted the children to respond openly and honestly to the texts we read together, they would need to learn new ways of 'being' in the presence of a teacher. The children would need to have more power and I less. They must, as Chambers (1993) suggests, know that their ideas were 'honourably reportable' and that I would not demand or expect display answers from them.

The physical environment

It seemed that this revolution would best be facilitated by changing the physical as well as the intellectual environment in which our sessions took place. Therefore, wherever possible, I took my groups out of the classroom and conducted our reading sessions elsewhere. This was important: an actual as well as a symbolic space separated us from usual classroom practice. At Friars Hall, we worked in the reception area outside the secretary's office. Here we could use the comfortable chairs provided for visitors, and arrange them in a circle. We sat as equals and no table provided a barrier between us. The furniture and our surroundings signalled that our work was important and that the children were vital to it. What they had to say mattered.

At Parsons Field too we left the classroom. Here we sat, sometimes around the circular tables in the library, and sometimes in the comfort of the staff room. Again, we were informal. No hierarchy was implied by the arrangement of the furniture. The implicit message was that the children's ideas were as valid as mine.

At Pardoners Way, this informality and equality was harder to achieve. The teacher preferred us to stay with in the walls of the mobile classroom. We worked mostly, therefore, at the children's usual table. The children sat with pencils and exercise

books before them and it was difficult to convince them that we were not in the business of finding answers that could be recorded there later. The table was large; the rest of the class, and the teacher, noisy, and communication was difficult. Sometimes we worked in the narrow corridor that served as cloakroom for the mobile. It was a grey and uninspiring space and the children, suddenly freed from the dominance of the classroom, found it hard to concentrate there.

The authority of the researcher

In this first stage of the intervention, I needed to establish with the children the boundaries of my authority. I would clearly need to retain enough authority to ensure that the children did as I asked. If I could not persuade them to read and to talk, then the exercise would be pointless. I needed too to make sure that I reserved enough authority to deal with children who purposefully misbehaved or were disruptive. I had to maintain an ethos in our groups that was safe and explorative. I achieved this, when necessary, by asserting the sort of teacherly authority that quietens some and allows less dominant children to be heard.

Beyond this I limited my authority as much as possible. I assured the children that it was their interpretation of texts that was interesting, not mine. I was a more experienced reader than they, but I did not know all the answers. I would help, but I would not tell. Like Mary Poppins, I refused to give explanations.

Scholes (1985) identifies three stages in the reading process; first comes reading, then interpretation, then criticism. My role in this intervention was to help with reading. While I could not avoid interpreting texts as I read with the children, I did all I could to avoid privileging my own interpretation. I read texts aloud to the children and explained words they did not know if they seemed to provide an insurmountable barrier to understanding. I explained the word *phantom* in de la Mare's *The Listeners,* for example, but not *host* or *thronged,* and drew the children's attention to *turret* when they found it hard to locate the poem's setting. I did not tell the children what to *make* of these words.

As far as possible, I tried to echo the internal authority of the texts we read and to bring to those texts as little of my own that would influence the children as I could. Iser's (1980) image of the stars in the night sky is useful again here. I wanted to help

the children see those pinpoints of light, but I did not want to impose upon them my way of joining the dots or reading the spaces. I wanted the texts themselves to scaffold the children's understandings.

The texts

It was clear that the texts I used in this intervention stage would need to be carefully chosen. They would need to be texts that appealed immediately to the children, but which did not yield up all their secrets at once. They needed to be texts that made the children *want* to ask questions, which encouraged them to ponder, to reread, and earnestly seek the answers they sought. They needed to be rich and multi-voiced texts, which in Bakhtinian terms, (1980, 1986) were *heteroglot*: texts that demanded a high level of *addressivity,* and which built up resonances that were *internally persuasive.*

The different circumstances of the schools determined to some extent the texts I chose to read with the children. Pardoners Way School was in Special Measures: and under constant monitoring from the Local Education Authority and Her Majesty's Inspectorate. The class teacher was concerned therefore, that I closely followed the structure of her Literacy Hour planning, and focussed on speech marks or information texts with my group at the appointed time. This constrained my choice. The very limited reading ability of the children in this group and their lack of experience of texts other than *123 and Away*, restricted me further. I had to choose texts that were short, simple and accessible and which yielded to the relevant teaching point.

At Friar's Hall and at Parsons Field, I was given an entirely free rein. The far wider literary experience of the children meant that we could explore more demanding texts, and that the children would find the texts I used at Pardoners Way babyish. I decided to run these two groups in parallel, taking the same text to the children in both schools to see what differences arose. We read texts by Anthony Browne, poems by Kipling, de la Mare and Causley, and the opening chapters of a number of children's novels. (Appendix iii provides details of the texts and organisation of the intervention).

At about the mid point in Year Three, I decided to change my tactics in these two schools, and suggested to the children that they should each take turns in choosing the books they wanted to discuss.

Stage 1: Working with my Choice of Text

Typically, at Friars Hall and Parsons Field, the children left the classroom with me after the whole class part of the Literacy Hour. For the next half hour or so, we would sit comfortably in a circle and read and discuss the text I had brought with me. I encouraged the children to talk as we worked, to explore, to question and to wonder out loud, to share their ideas with us all.

The absence of magisterial dialogue freed the children in at least two ways. As Chambers (1993) predicted, it released them from the crippling necessity of getting answers right when they spoke and so gave them more confident voices. But this was a freedom born not merely of absence. The children were freed too because that absence created a positive space to be filled. Discourse could develop that consisted of dialogues that were more nearly Socratic than those generally experienced by the children in school, and that were Menippean in their childlike delight in subversion and carnival. Access to these usually suppressed dialogues liberated the children.

As the intervention proceeded I watched the children and listened to the changes in their language that took place. It became clear, as they gained confidence in this new discourse, that some of the developments I noted were consequences of the natures of dialogues themselves. There was for example, a definite increase in both the amount of interaction that went on between the children and in the way that they stated their individual positions within these exchanges: this is the Socratic position. I observed too, a significant increase in the children's use of *subjunctivity,* (Bruner 1986) a far greater freedom to make wide ranging responses to text, and more freedom to imagine. Quite simply, the children were playful. They were ready to exploit the absurd in a way I had not seen in the classroom. Here were Menippean influences.

The language of interaction and independence

One consequence of the intervention was that the usual pattern of teacher lead IRF (Interchapter: 158) interaction was broken down. In the recordings and transcripts of our sessions (appendix vi) my voice plays a far less dominant role in the discourse than did the voices of any of the teachers in the classroom observations. Without this constant and imposed adult authority, the children were thrown more onto their own resources and on to the resources of each other. Here is an example of a group of them discussing the page in *Piggybook* that shows Mr Piggott and his two sons standing outside his very nice house. The children have read the book through once and are now going back over the pictures:

Robin: He's smiling because his wife does all the work.
June: How come *she* does all the housework?
Karen: How come *my mum* does all the housework?
Robin: How come my *dad* does all the housework?

For now, I want to notice simply how the children interact with each other, how they build up their comments by listening to each other, echoing the ideas and the language that has gone before, and by imposing upon it their individual mark.

Here is a snapshot of Claire and Hester. They have been rereading *The Listeners.* Hester initiates the exchange:

Hester: I can imagine what the traveller looks like.
V.S: Can you?
Hester: He looks like an Australian swagman to me, but my own version of one.
Claire: No, I think, you know when your dads always shave?
Hester: A belled (?) hat
Claire: Well, they always have dots on their face
Hester: I don't imagine him like that...
Claire: and with a chimney sweep cap, and um, really scraggy clothes
Hester: I imagine him, you know those hats, right, black ones, they've got little bells round them.

What is especially interesting here is that even though the girls are talking against each other, the conversation is supportive of both: each girl is able to reject the other's idea in order to clarify her own. They take *in* what the other says, but choose not to take it *on*. The result of this is that their individual voices grow strong. "I don't imagine him like that." says Hester. There is an independence and assertiveness in her statement that I did not witness in any of the classroom observations. Howarth observes:

> "... it is precisely this sometimes antagonistic articulation of self in relation to others, this two way traffic of meanings which can generate (fruitful) dialogic exchange ..." (1999: 104)

The language of subjunctivity

Subunctivity is the word that Bruner (1986, 1990) coins to express the idea that the language in which story is cast invites reconstrual of what might have happened, that is. It employs "lexical and grammatical usages that highlight subjective states, attenuating circumstances, alternative possibilities" (1990:53) Bruner's claim is that the reader incorporates these into what has been read, and ends up with a story in memory that is even more subjunctivised than the text.

Karen puts this into action. She wrestles with the problem of who the mysterious people in Kipling's *The Way Through the Woods* might be and why they are travelling there when there *is* no road. She speculates about 'dead people'. Perhaps someone fell off a horse and died in the wood. Perhaps there used to be a town. Perhaps the path was muddy and the horse fell in the mud and was beating his hooves to get out.

The language she uses is pertinent: *perhaps* occurs again and again. She is exploring what *might be* in the poem, not what *is*. This recourse to subjunctivity occurs in all the examples that follow. In their wide-ranging searches for reference and resonance, and in their imaginative play with ideas, the children deal with *possibility*. They build putative, exploratory webs of suggestion that they hope will shed light on the texts. There was little room for *what-if-ness* in the Magisterial certainty of comprehension in their classrooms.

The freedom to make wide ranging responses

Another consequence of the intervention was that the children brought to their reading and talking about reading a far wider range of reference than usual in classroom contexts. They were not constrained by the Magisterial understandings of relevance and rightness and so were prepared to cast their minds widely, and sometimes wildly, in the hope of drawing in a useful idea: they read speculatively. I have already presented some examples of this. Hester's 'swagman' brings to bear an unexpected antipodean perspective on *The Listeners*. Her class had been learning to sing *Waltzing Matilda*. I can only speculate as to where Claire's chimney sweep comes from. I suspect television costume drama.

Children resorted to texts of all sorts in their attempts to make meaning from the stories and poems they read. There were references to books, to television programmes, to cartoons, and to horror films. They referred to their daily lives, their experiences of holidays and to the classroom. They borrowed the voices of parents and of teachers. June confidently informed me that you needed to put adjectives in a story to make it interesting. (appendix x) Peter, working very hard to understand how a *teacher* might become a criminal, a problem posed by Ann Cameron's *Julian, Secret Agent,* alarmed me:

Peter: Everyone's a criminal. – No. That's not right, something –

He seemed to be struggling to remember some sort of homily from school assembly. The children were prepared to bring everything they knew to our work. Here were signs off a *culture of persistence*, the direct opposite of the nothing-to-do-with-me-ness I so often witnessed in these children's classroom. (see especially, Chapter Four)

Karen, above, has already demonstrated that she brings voices from home to bear on the texts she reads. Here she is again, a little further on in the same conversation about *Piggybook*.

Cara: I'm still puzzled. Where did the mum go?

Karen: I think the mum went shopping, then she went away to give her head a rest, and she went to *her* mum.

Cara: Perhaps. Yes. She went to her mum, and her mum was a magician, and she said, "I'll do something about that ..."

Karen has surely borrowed the phrase 'to give her head a rest' from an adult, probably her mother. The little I know of her family circumstances suggests this is likely. Here she is caught in the act of what Bakhtin calls *ventriloquation,* showing that "the word in language is always half someone else's." (1981:293) Cara listens, and responds with an alternative voice. She supplies a folktale motif. Perhaps Mrs. Piggott's mother is a witch, a wise woman. Karen quotes from the discourse of family life, Cara from folktale. It is this heteroglossia, this juxtaposition of discourses that enables the children to make the story about the story that helps them make sense from *Piggybook.* Peter continues the dialogue:

Peter: And her mum told her to go back and have a look ...

Nobody needed to say "and they'd been turned into pigs."

The freedom of the imagination

The effect of this freedom to interact, to assert, to subjunctivise and to search widely for ideas and to juxtapose them was that the children's imaginations were freed. Flights of fancy were relatively common as the children created stories about stories which filled what they perceived to be the gaps in the texts we read.

We have seen a little of this in Cara's introduction of witchcraft to explain the transformations in *Piggybook.* Peter's response to it shows him catching the idea and running with it. He has seen the point of her game and he joins in. He lets his imagination play.

Karen provides another example. Her excited exploration off Kipling's *The Way Through the Woods* ended like this:

"I know! Perhaps there was an old town there once and it all got covered in mud and it came gushing out and there was mud everywhere and the people

> had to move and ...and the horses know about the road and they told their mums and their dads and their brothers and their sisters and they remember."

She was so excited she could hardly sit still as she said this, and there is a 'let's pretend' quality to it that places it firmly within the aegis of play. Karen's imagination is as engaged and as busy as if she were acting out a story in play. Here is evidence, if any is needed, of the importance of play, Winnicott's *Third Area*, in the matter of reading. (See Chapter 8:223 for a further exploration of this idea.)

The next example of the imagination let loose and play comes from Oliver and Patrick. They have been reading *The Way Through the Woods* and *The Listeners* and wondering about both. They begin to construct stories that draw on both poems and attempt to resolve the *indeterminacies* (Iser 1980) of both. Here are kings and queens and castles, Old Coach Roads and otter pools. Soon there are highwaymen and murder. An arrow kills the queen and her horse as they ride through the wood. Their spirits haunt it forever. The boys enjoy themselves. They vie with each other to outdo ideas. In their enthusiasm, they shout, giggle, interrupt, squeal and exalt in their own creativity to the extent that I found it impossible to transcribe the recording of this session.

Here is riot and carnival made plain. What was especially interesting about it was the way that they continued to draw details from the poems evermore accurately into their interpretations, and the way that they were aware of what they were doing. At the end Oliver said:

> "That was *really* fun. We're not usually allowed to be that mad, but it helps you *think*!"

This sort of metacognitive dissident reading is important. The 'How come' conversation quoted at the beginning of this section supplies another example of it. Robin's final contribution does more that simply add to the developing cumulative litany: it overturns it. He has analysed the form, copied it and adapted it by adding a disruptive element that calls into question the basic premise of the other members of the group and of *Piggybook*. This surely, is Menippean.

The intervention opened up for these children the possibility of Menippean Dialogue and therefore, by extension, a path towards critical reading.

At Pardoners Way

None of this play, this subjunctivity, was readily apparent in my sessions with children at Pardoners Way. Their experiences of reading were so bound in the Magisterial Discourse of reading scheme and classroom that it was all I could do to get them to talk about books. They wanted to be passive receivers of text. The most they thought they had to do was read the words – and they found that difficult.

The day I took in *Think of an Eel* is an example of this. *Think of an Eel* is a picture book that presents the life cycle of an eel to the reader in a way that is both informative and affective. The language of the text is poetic narrative prose, and it is accompanied by beautiful, painterly illustrations, of a type more often found in imaginative children's stories than non-fiction. The focus of each double-page spread is the main strand of the narrative: it tells the story of eels in words and pictures. Above this, at the top of the page rather like a cartoon strip, is another set of illustration. These complement the text. One set, for example, shows the moon, each phase in turn, and represents the time the eel spends at the particular stage of its development described on that page. Another presents a mountain scene as it changes through the seasons. Below all this is a third stand of text, words again, this time in cursive script. These words wave across the page with the sea and twist and wind and wriggle with the eels themselves. They tell the reader more about eels, sometimes quirky, esoteric facts, sometimes straightforward 'scientific' information.

It is a book the reader is invited to explore, to mull over and to wonder. Nathan would have none of this. His only interest was in decoding the words of the main narrative, and these were difficult. Nathan understood few of them and could read fewer still. My attempts to interest him in the pictures, the alternative script, the changing seasons were brushed aside. Thinking about such matters did not accord to his understanding of what reading *was*. He displayed no curiosity, no imagination and very little interest.

Our attempt to read Rosen's *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* was more successful. Caroline discovered for herself that the trees in Arthur Robin's illustrations, had faces, and was delighted. She discovered that books could play. Even Kylie, after a lot of work

on my part, began to be able to suggest that a field mouse who had just be bopped on the head, *might* be thinking 'ouch!' Kylie's gradual realisation that it was possible to contribute to the reading of this text in this way seemed at the time to be one of the achievements of this research. She was thrilled with the notion, and when I returned with the book some months later, she was keen to show me that she remembered it. I gathered no evidence, however, from our subsequent readings together to suggest that she transferred this understanding to any other text.
The children at Pardoners Way were doubly disadvantaged. The Magisterial Discourse of their classroom was stronger than anywhere. No alternative voices were allowed to question its dominance and empower the children. Worse still, they encountered little literature at school, and many of them met still less at home. Most did not, therefore, even have access to the heteroglossia of text. Given such circumstances it is difficult to imagine how they could do otherwise than approach text passively. How could these children possibly be expected to read critically?

Stage 2: Working with the Children's Choices

The intention of the second stage of the intervention was to give the children at Friars Hall and Parsons Field yet more power. I was becoming increasingly aware, that by imposing my choice of texts on the children, I continued to set the agenda. I was beginning to discover how they read the sort of texts that interested me, but I had little idea of what they did with texts of their own choosing. Did they transfer the wide-ranging and questioning ways of reading that we employed in our group sessions to their own reading?

I warned the children of this change well in advance. I asked them to start thinking about books which they really enjoyed and which they might like to introduce to the rest of us. I suggested that they let me borrow any such book for a few days before the session, so that I might be informed enough to help the conversation along if necessary, and gave them a prompt sheet of *Tell Me* type (Chambers 1993) to focus their thinking.

This stage of the intervention was not entirely successful. Although the children were enthusiastic, without my constant presence in their classrooms, they found it difficult to organise themselves sufficiently to bring their favourite books to school. This

meant that I was often faced with children who made exaggerated claims about loving books they had hardly opened, or who grabbed familiar books from the classroom shelf at the last minute without much thought. Despite this, two important issues were raised by this stage of the intervention: the first concerns what children think reading means, and the second, the importance of intermediaries for children who are learning to read.

What do some children think *reading* means?

Sometimes when children came with books they wanted to talk about, they had clearly read them thoroughly. Josh's presentation of *The Chocolate Money Mystery* was like this. He responded to my invitation to introduce it by retelling the story in detail. His account was enthusiastic and energetic, clear and coherent. I had no doubt that he had read and enjoyed the story.

I was far less certain that Peter had read his choice, *Goosebumps: Monster Blood 2*. He could not name or describe the characters and could not talk about the plot. He returned the prompt sheet to me filled in as if it had been a comprehension exercise, with single sentence answers that had more to do with what Peter thought I wanted to know than what was in the book. He wrote, for example, that the teacher, who bullied the hero throughout the story, was 'nice and good.'

Despite the evidence, Peter did not seem to be lying when he said he had read the book. He believed that he had. The book was an ambitious read for Peter: it demanded rather more by way of stamina and fluency than he could yet muster. He desperately wanted to read it, because his friends read Goosebumps. I put this episode down as an anomaly.

However, when a group of girls assured me that they had all read and enjoyed *Pet Swapping Day,* I witnessed a similar phenomenon. The girls, Lisa, Sally and Nina quite simply had not read the book. They had read the title and the blurb at the back, and looked at the pictures, but that was all. From these clues, Lisa especially, had developed an idea of what she thought the story would be and had built up an entire (and inaccurate) understanding of the text. For her this counted as reading.

This revelation raises important questions about the teaching of reading to children who are just becoming independent readers. Both Peter and the girls above were

expected to choose books to read at home and to read them independently. Rarely, in either school was their reading followed up, and when a teacher did listen to them read, she rarely knew the text well enough herself to ask searching questions. It is easy, then, to see how children can slip out of reading *anything*. If this practice is widespread, how can they possibly accrue enough voices from text to read critically?

<u>The importance of intermediaries for readers who have not yet gained confidence.</u>

Several of the best conversations in this stage of the research were about texts which had been read to the children at school. It seems that freed from the necessity of finding the tune on the page themselves, (Barrs 1992) the children were more able to reflect upon and interpret text. Hester, who had tried to read *Pet Swapping Day*, but found it 'boring and confusing' (that is, I think, that she could not find the tune) enthused about the plot of a recent class novel:

> "It was so exciting. I just wouldn't ever have *thought* of doing something like that. I really liked the idea of it."

Even the most able readers in the sample found it difficult to reflect in this way on texts they had read themselves. If, as I am suggesting, it is important that they do this, then they need to be read to more. They need to hear more stories and be encouraged to think about them.

The Masters Group

At the same time as this phase of the research was being conducted in schools, I began to work with a group of adults who had chosen to take a taught module on reading and reading processes as a part of a Masters degree in Education. The group consisted mainly of teachers, the majority of whom worked in primary schools, and most of those in K.S.1. One group member was a secondary English teacher, and another was a librarian. Members of the group came with various agendas: some were interested in the process of reading; others hoped to improve their classroom practice. A sizeable minority was there because the Early Years module they had hoped to take that term did not run.

The group met weekly for nine weeks. I conducted the thinking of the group by means of presentations and seminars. Two parallel intentions informed my teaching.

One was to encourage an examination of the various theories concerning the ways in which children learned to read and to become readers. The other was to provoke in each of the group members an exploration of the way that they, as experienced adult readers, read. My hope was that by reflecting on their own reading and by discussing that reading with others, group members would find insights into the reading process and instances of their own styles and preferences as readers that would shed light on their understanding of how children come to read.

It is this second strand of the Masters course that is of interest here. In order to help group members problematise their own reading, I asked them to read Seamus Deane's novel *Reading in the Dark* and set aside some time in each session for us to discuss the book and our reading of it. This discussion would have two consequences. It would, as I have explained above, help group members ground the theory of reading in their own experience. It would also provide me with data that showed experienced readers reading; data that I could hold alongside my work with the children.

Reading in the Dark is not an easy novel. It won the Guardian Fiction Prize and was shortlisted for, but did not win the 1996 Booker. It is, according to Julia O'Faolain's review (Times Literary Supplement, 27.9.1996) an *intelligent* book. Written as first person narrative, it tells the story of a boy from a large Catholic family growing up in Northern Ireland in the 1940s and 50s. His is a family with IRA connections and dark secrets. As the novel unfolds, the boy relentlessly pieces together his family history of fear, shame and betrayal, and watches helpless, as the fragile cords of necessary deceit that bind his family together dissolve.

The narrative is fragmentary. Especially at first, the reader is presented with tiny snapshots: scenes described through the eyes of a young child as he watches his mother on the stairs, hides under the table at a funeral, wonders at the disappearing act of a travelling circus, and hears tales of his legendary Uncle Eddie. There is no explicit master narrative. Like the small boy, the reader is left to make what she will from the fragments. Together, the boy and the reader attempt to read in the dark. They turn around those first scenes in their minds as if they were randomly selected pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The boy grows, and more pieces are found, until, at last, when the puzzle is nearly complete, the horror of the story is revealed in all its

inevitability. All the reader (if she has persevered so far) and the boy can do is carry on together, stunned, diminished, until they reach the last page.

The novel is lyrical, funny and deeply moving.

Difficulties presented by *Reading in the Dark*

Most members of the masters group were bewildered by *Reading in the Dark.* They were astonished, first of all, to hear me describe it as difficult. It did not look difficult. It was not particularly thick and a cursory glance showed there to be no difficult vocabulary or complicated sentence structures. I was reminded at once of so many of the children's understanding of reading progression. (see especially Chapter Four:110 and 111)

> "Once I put it down, it was easy not to pick it up again!"

said someone after the first week. It became increasingly clear that a significant number of the group members were encountering a type of reading in this book that they had not met before. They were simply not equipped for the reading challenge it presented. At least two members of the group, for example, did not understand that the fact that the story was told by a narrator who called himself 'I' did not mean that it was necessarily autobiography. They accepted it as truth and understood the picture on the front of the book to be a photograph of the narrator and his brother.

Other readers found the indeterminate nature of the narrative difficult. Meek (1988, 1999) writes of the importance of children learning how to cope with uncertainty at the beginning of books. How do they learn to persevere until the terrain is sure? In this novel, the terrain remains uncertain for most of the book, and these adult readers did not know how to deal with it. They needed to be told what to think about the boy and his family. They were irritated by the indecision.

In order to keep pace with the group, I too was reading the novel. It was my second reading. I read now with an eye to see how Seamus Deane managed the narrative and positioned the reader, and in order to monitor my reactions to it. In doing so, I had begun to track ideas and images through those first disorienting pages. I suggested to the group that they might like to do the same. It would help them find

coherence in apparent disorder, and would provide a structure for their thinking. The suggestion was met with horror: "You mean like doing 'A' level?" said somebody. There seemed to be an understanding among several members of the group that reading, other than for professional purposes, should be an *un*-intellectual process. A novel, it seemed, was supposed to tell the reader a story: they expected to be the passive receivers of that story.

Emotional involvement

A consequence of this *un*-intellectual approach to reading was that some members of the group allowed the novel to work on their emotions and produce reactions of a sort that a more measured reading of the text would not have supported.

May, for example, convinced that the novel was autobiography, launched into a tirade about the book one week. For her, she announced, the whole book, was about the folly of deceiving a child. It was a matter of principle with her: one should always tell the truth to children. If the mother in *Reading in the Dark* had come out with it in the beginning all sorts of trouble would have been avoided. May was angered and depressed by this. It was a sign of bad parenting and she railed against the injustice of it all. The book was a lesson in morality. She could see it in no other way.

Two things appear to be happening here. The first is May's avoidance of the complexity of the situation in the novel. When another reader in the group suggested a more sympathetic and contextualised understanding of the mother's dilemma, May was unable to take it on board. She read the story that she wanted to read rather than the one that was actually presented in the text.

The second thing happening here is the revelation of May's need to find universal *truths* in her reading. Appleyard (1990) recognises this trait as being typical of the stage he calls *reader as thinker:*

> "Readers who have this response often retell or synopsize the story and provide a running interpretational commentary as they do so, frequently discussing the characters as if they were real people. ... [they] talk about the 'meaning' of the story." (1990:111)

He continues:

> "The usual way of putting this is in terms of an image of depth; the deeper meaning is somehow waiting below the surface to be discovered. Frequently of course, the generalised significance of a story is described as its moral or lesson" (1990:111)

This is not quite the same as Mrs. Merchant's understanding (Chapter Four: 115) that some books have 'layers of meaning' that can be explored. Rather, it assumes one, hidden 'answer' contained within the text, as if a novel were something to be solved. According to Appleyard, a reader at this stage is 'only partway along the road to an adequate resolution of the problems posed by inquiring about the meaning of a text.' (1990:113) He suggests that this *reader as thinker* is typically an adolescent, and acknowledges that some reader never progress beyond this stage.

The importance of experience

The readers who made most of *Reading in the Dark* were those readers who brought the most to the novel. I found Naomi's understanding of the book particularly interesting.

Naomi is an English teacher at a local secondary school and it might therefore be expected that she would be better equipped to discuss this novel than many of the other group members. However, it was not this professional background that marked out her contributions as exceptional, but her personal life. For, like Seamus Deane, Naomi came from Northern Ireland. Unlike him, she came from the Protestant community. Furthermore, she had grown up in Omagh, a town that had recently suffered an horrific Republican bombing. She was unlikely, therefore to read the book in the same detached way that was possible for the rest of us.

Naomi liked the book at first. She found in the early chapters an *otherness*, a spiritual mysticism that she recognised as uniquely Irish and quite unlike anything she had encountered in England. She felt in tune with the psychological landscape of the novel:

> "I really liked it at first... the shadow on the landing and all that. It was so spiritual, and it's just like that in Northern Ireland, both communities. And I thought, 'Yep, this is familiar. I *know* about this.' "

As she read, though, her disillusion grew. She found the portrayal of the police, through the eyes of this young Catholic boy especially distasteful. Increasingly, Naomi found in the book a depiction of Northern Irish society that was both unfair and unacceptable.

Naomi's reaction to *Reading in the Dark*, grounded so clearly in her personal circumstances, made me very aware of the background I was bringing to the book myself. My own reading was rooted deeply in my knowledge of Irish Literature; the plays and poetry I read at school, and the modern Irish novels I have read recently. Of course I was aware of the political history of Northern Ireland and the reality of paramilitary violence, but my subjectivity, built for example, upon Yeats' early romantic nationalism, O'Casey's frustration and McCabe's recent insights in *The Dead School*, meant that I was behind the narrator. I brought to the novel a web of intertextuality that enriched it and contextualised it for me. Naomi had access to this literature too, but her immediate, real life experience was stronger. It made sympathy for the IRA difficult to accommodate, even in a work of fiction.

Experience, then, affected the way both Naomi and I read. It gave us frameworks upon which we could construct meaning from the novel. To use the Bakhtinian terms discussed in the last chapter, we listened to the heteroglossia of literature and experience, and built our (very different) readings on those voices which seemed most persuasive. Leah, who was clearly the most widely read member of the group, provided a further example of the way experience made the book accessible.

Leah listened quietly while people vented their frustrations with the book. She seemed surprised at the difficulties it had caused, at the problems people were having coping with the narrative structure. When she was asked why she thought she had not experienced these problems herself, she said:

> "Well, I suppose I've read books like this before. I did find the first one difficult, but I'm used to it now."

Leah was used to reading books that expected her to think and which experimented with the conventions of storytelling. Those books had taught her two things that few of the other readers in the groups knew. The first was that reading is sometimes a match, a contract between the reader and the text, where both are expected to

display intelligence. The second thing she learnt was how to do the sort of reading that was necessary in order to make sense of texts such as Deane's. Quite simply, other texts had shown her how to read this one[1].

A Description of Reading Activity

What both the intervention stage and the discussion of *Reading in the Dark* provided, was evidence of people, children and adults alike, reading at the leading edge of their reading competence. Because the participants were stretched by the texts, the difficulties they experienced in making them mean, and the means by which they attempted to do this were highlighted. This is the basis on which Goodman (1973) developed miscue analysis. When texts are easy to read, readers simply read them and what they do as they read is not made explicit. It is what readers say and do as they struggle to make meaning that throws light on the reading process.

In the course of the intervention stage, and in the masters' group discussions, I watched and listened as readers struggled to make meaning form challenging texts. I collected evidence of the strategies they used and the reading behaviour they exhibited. From this it was possible to devise categories to describe the sorts of activity that readers typically resort to in their attempts to make meaning.

Rather similar ideas have been pursued by Rosenblatt (1978, 1994) and Many (1994) in their work on reader stance. They suggest that readers approach text in either *affective* or *efferent* mode. In the first readers give range to their emotions as they read. They test the text against what they feel and allow themselves to be affected by it. In the second, they read to find what is there: to discover information or answer comprehension questions. Rosenblatt and Many suggest that these two stances are the extreme ends of a continuum, and that readers move in and out of they continuum more or less effectively, depending on temperament, training and purpose.

Of the categories described below, two of them, confirmation and excavation clearly have features in common with Rosenblatt's stances. Confirmative readers are more likely to be ruled by their emotional reaction to a text, and excavators concerned with

[1] For a discussion of this phenomenon with children see Meek 1988

finding facts. But here the similarities end. I do not see confirmative readers and excavators as being at opposite ends of a continuum. Rather they are *staging posts* in a complex pattern of meaning making. Some readers, sometimes, choose to rest at those posts for a while.

The categories presented below are not discrete. It is to be expected that they will overlap and that each category will merge into the next. Reading is not static; to suggest that readers at any time are ever only involved in one sort of behaviour would be clearly wrong. Here then are broad trends. Together, they provide a pattern of reading behaviour that embraces the least sophisticated level of interaction with text and the most. I do not suggest, as does Appleyard (1990) that progression through these stages is related to the age and maturity of the reader. It seems instead to be to do with experience and expectation: it relates to what the reader thinks reading is *for*, and the internalised models of reading (Bakhtin's heteroglossia) available to that reader. Like Appleyard, I suggest that sophisticated readers have access to all five stages of reading activity, and use them as and when they think appropriate.

Doing reading

Doing reading is a phenomenon that is especially associated with school. It was most common in the classroom observation stage of this research, where children read because they had been told to. They *did* reading at the teacher's behest. They read the words on the page and thought not one jot about them. This is Becky's "I don't want to read this. I can't be bothered" (Chapter Four: 118) It is *nothing-to-do-with-me-ness.*

In the intervention stage, *doing reading* occurred most commonly at Pardoners Way, and Nathan was its strongest advocate. He was so pleased that he could at last decode the words on the page, that he saw no reason to do anything else when he read. Typically, he would pull the text towards him, set it straight in front of his eyes and focus his attention on the words. These he read slowly and falteringly, processing them in order and relying on initial consonants for unfamiliar words. He miscued frequently and self-corrected rarely. He did not always make sense of the texts he read, but he did not mind this. Decoding the words, for him, was what mattered and what counted as reading, and he could *do* it.

Those readers like Nathan, who *do* reading, do not become involved with the text as they read. There is no contact between text and reader and the possibilities of meaning making are therefore very limited. When people *do* reading they cannot talk about what they have read.

However, *doing* reading is not always a school-based strategy, nor is it necessarily confined to beginners. Sometimes, it is a positive and pragmatic way of coping with difficult texts. Gillian, one of the most competent readers in the study, attempted to read *My Friend Flicka*. The book was beyond her, but she persevered for several days. "I still don't know what it's going on about." She told me, when she finally decided to give up. By then, she had been *doing* reading for about a third of the book. She had doggedly continued with the text, knowing that doing so can sometimes lead to a breakthrough, and hoping that the book would eventually start to make sense. This time, it didn't and Gillian had the experience to know to stop reading. She knew what Nathan did not: that reading should be more than this.

Confirmation

Reading in order to confirm what the reader already knows, or thinks she knows, was relatively common. It was usual in some classrooms for teachers to go through comprehension exercises with children before they wrote the answers themselves (see Chapter Four: 121). Children read passages, therefore to confirm that they remembered what the teacher had said.

In independent reading, reading for confirmation was seen most clearly in Josh, as he read *The Weetabix Illustrated British History*. On the double-spread page which presented Tudor England, he first mis-read Henry VII, of whom he had not heard, for Henry VIII. Then his eyes were drawn to the foot of the page, where drawings of the wives of the latter were shown in order:

> "Oh yeah! " said Josh. "He had all their heads chopped off."

Josh paid no attention to the words which accompanied the drawings, although these explained briefly and clearly what had actually happened to the various women. For Josh, the pictures were enough: they confirmed his existing knowledge and he wanted no more.

Lisa's reading of *Pet Swapping Day* is another example of reading for confirmation. She uses the clues in the pictures to confirm what she made up for herself. If, as she insisted, she had read the book, then she did not notice that told a different story. She read what she wanted the text to say.

May's contribution to the discussion of *Reading in the Dark* shows that adults sometimes read in the same way. She found in Deane's novel confirmation of her belief that it is wrong to lie to children. Like all the children whose reading has been described in this section, she saw no reason to check that the text as a whole actually supported this supposition. Just as Josh ignored the words in the history book and relied on the pictures that supported his existing understanding, so she selected the strands of story that fitted her interpretation.

<u>Excavation</u>

Readers who excavate texts are those who are concerned to dig out the meaning that they perceive to be contained therein. They want to *know*. Unlike the confirmationists above, they do not read to reassure themselves, but to learn more and they expect texts, therefore to be a source of definite information. They are prepared to be diligent and methodical in their search for that information.

In the fictional and poetic texts that formed the bulk of the material that was read during this research, this tendency to excavate manifested itself mostly in terms of reading for plot. Some readers were driven by a need to know what happened. Mary, one of the teachers in the masters' group provided a good example of this. Although she was irritated and confused by Deane's style of narration, she persevered with the book:

> "I've just got to know what happened to Uncle Eddie," she explained "We do *get* to find out, don't we?"

Amongst the children reading for excavation was apparent when they retold the stories they had read. Josh's rendition of *The Chocolate Money Mystery*, which he enjoyed, was interesting because although he recounted the plot in impressive detail, there was not the slightest hint of interpretation in his retelling. He had taken

what the book offered and added nothing of his own to it. Patrick behaved similarly when he told us gleefully about the battle at the end of the Hobbit. It was all action. I wondered what he had made of what seems to me to be Tolkein's concern with greed and honesty in this scene:

> V.S: What did you think about Thorinn and the Arkenstone? And what about Bilbo? Do you think he acted properly?
>
> Patrick: Oh I don't know. I thought it was stupid.

Patrick dismissed my question. He wasn't interested. He wanted to know *what* had happened, and not *why*. He therefore dug the action out from the pages, but like Josh, contributed little interpretation.

Like Mary, readers who prefer to excavate texts can become frustrated with texts that refuse to yield to their excavations. Peter worked hard as his group and I struggled to make sense of Kipling's *The Way Through the Woods*. He scoured the text and brought to it all he knew of woods and otters and weathering, but he could find nothing definitive to explain 'the beat of a horse's feet and the swish of a skirt in the dew.' He pleaded with me:

> "Tell me what really happened. Please. Oh go on! Tell me the *answer*."

<u>Exploring</u>

Readers who explore as they read begin with activity that looks very much like excavating. They too begin by searching through the particulars of the text and by collecting detail. They differ from the excavators in that their search is less focused. Whereas excavators look for details of plot or information that they know to be there already, explorers look to see what they can see. Serendipity is at hand. These readers are less bound by expectation.

Picture books, especially those by Anthony Browne, provide excellent terrain for beginner explorers. They invite the reader to interrogate the illustrations, to scrutinise the detail, to discover all they can.

Presented below are some girls looking at *Voices in the Park* for the first time. They have read through to the end already, their attention focused on the words of the text. Now they are looking again. They have just begun to notice that the illustrations are behaving oddly.

> Claire: That's strange! The tree's on fire and... Can we ... (she begins to turn pages rapidly.
> Claire: Oh! There's an apple and a peach and a pear!
> Sally: And a lemon
> Nina: Look! A strawberry there.
> Gillian: A strawberry?
> Claire: Nothing on this page. Hang on! The queen's walking past! Look! Look! The queen!
> Sally: I saw a robber.
> Nina: There's a flying person, flying through the air.
> Claire: Oh my God! Look. There's a man walking a crocodile!

There is no system in their exploring. They come to the text open minded; they are prepared to find whatever is there.

The next stage in exploring, is to attempt to make sense of what has been found. This, in Anthony Browne's texts is extremely difficult. Kipling's poem *The Way Through the Woods* offers the reader more support. I have already shown Karen working with this poem. (see above: *The language of subjunctivity* p197; *The freedom of imagination* p198) In these extracts we see her move away from exploring the text and begin instead to explore the ideas she herself brings to it. She knows that the text alone will not yield all she needs to know to understand the poem. She must turn to herself and to the stock of possible scenarios that she carries in her head.

Questioning

Readers who question as they read behave similarly to those who explore, but their reading is qualitatively different. They look not just at what is in the text and their responses to it, but at the factors that influence both. They step *outside* and look at the text their reading from without. They bring a metacognitive awareness to

reading. They think about what they are doing as they read and what the author is doing in the text. They are aware that choices have been and are being made and that these *make a difference*.

Two (the only two!) examples from the children make this explicit. The first concerns Patrick. I read to his class *Martha Speaks*, a picture book about a dog who eats alphabet soup:

> "The letters in the soup went up to Martha's brain instead of down to her stomach. That evening, Martha spoke." (Meddaugh 1994:2-3)

Patrick said:

> "So, if *we* ate that soup stuff, and it went to our brains, would we *forget* how to talk?"

He shows that he can question the ideas of the text within the bounds of possibility created by the text itself. He is aware of how the text is working, and how the author wants him to think about it. In effect, he is asking the author, 'did you think of this?'

The second example comes from David as he read Browne's *Voices in the Park*. He was unimpressed with Browne's prose at the point where he gives Smudge the words: "I felt really, really happy." (1998:26)

> David: *Really*'s not a very good word, is it? He could have found something more interesting.
> V.S : Um. You know, some people say that Anthony Browne isn't all that good a writer. His pictures and ideas are fantastic, but the words…
> David: Yeah. Enid Blyton would have done it better.

David knows that another writer would handle the text differently. He looks at the *madeness* of the text and questions the decisions made by Browne. He knows that the writer makes a difference to the way the reader reads.

Leah, the member of the Masters' group who made most of *Reading in the Dark* said:

> "The bit that really touched me was the scene where the father of the soldier who was killed on the doorstep meets the narrator's father. I thought, that's the only time in the whole book when there is real communication. Most of the time, there is avoidance of communication."

Her ability to look at the book as a whole, and draw from it broad themes in this way, shows this same metacognitive *outsideness*. She has asked what am I thinking as I read this and how has the author made me think it?

Conclusion

The intervention gave children the opportunity to explore texts and talk about them in a way that was not restricted by the teacher led Magisterial dialogue that was usual in their classrooms. It achieved two things: it showed *what* the children could do when they were free to make meaning from texts in the way that they chose and it showed *how* they went about doing this. The intervention highlighted the way that the children were subjunctive in their reading of texts, the wide-ranging responses they made and the importance of imagination and play in this process.

The work with the group of teachers studying for their masters degrees provided a backdrop of experienced readers reading against which the children's practices could be measured. A number of similarities were identified that suggested that children reading were engaged in much the same sorts of activity as their adult counterparts.

A series of questions arise. If children and adults do much the same things as they read, then how do we account for progress in reading? What is it that experienced readers do better? Is it possible to create a set of images that sheds light on the process? In the next chapter I set out to try. I ask finally, where does critical reading fit in to all this?

Chapter Eight

Maps and Map Making: Describing the Process of Reading.

> *"As our readers read, as they begin to construct a virtual text of their own, it is as if they are embarking on a journey without maps – and yet, they possess a stock of maps that might give hints, and besides, they know a lot about journeys and mapmaking." (Bruner, 1986:36)*

Introduction

In Chapter Seven, I began the process of analysing the reading of the children and teachers who took part in this research. I put forward categories of typical reading behaviours that both children and adults employed in order to make meaning from text. I suggested that critical reading practices were rare, but could be identified in both groups.

In this chapter, I attempt a further distillation of the analysis above and so make the move from ethnographic description towards the formation of theory. In doing this, I take the example of existing theoretical models produced by Williams (1998); Jones (1990) Rosenblatt (1994) and Ruddell and Unrau (1994), and follow them in attempting to map out the intellectual and social landscapes through which readers must navigate in order to make texts mean. The maps I propose attempt to represent the dynamics of the individual readers' thoughts within these landscapes as they quicken the text into meaning.

I move then to a consideration of interpretive communities (Fish 1980). I discuss the role these play in the construction of meaning in classrooms and the part of the individual in the community of readers. In this way, an attempt is made to reflect both the fluidity of reading and the complexity of the reader's activity. The chapter does not pretend to present a definite explanation of how readers read. Instead, it offers a way of thinking about the process of reading that seems likely to be helpful.

Models and Maps

In this penultimate chapter of the thesis, I present a series of theoretical models that attempt to describe and explain the process by which readers make meaning from text. To proceed in this way raises a number of problems. The first of these is methodological: how appropriate is it for ethnographic research, which is by its very nature *particular* (see Chapter Two) to attempt to generalise? Can theories be formed on the evidence of so few readers? What is the status of theories that are formed from so small a sample? More difficulties arise from the nature of reading itself as it is presented in this thesis. Throughout, reading has been shown to be a *fluid* process. Post-modern theories of meaning construction underpin the thinking of this work (Chapter One:18ff) and the bulk of the analysis has stressed the powerful effect of classroom interaction on children's understanding of what reading is. If reading is in this way susceptible to change, so caught up with particular individual and societal practice, how then can it be reduced to a series of models, mechanical, predetermined and applicable to all?

Woods (1986) goes some way into resolving the methodological problems. He sees the production of descriptive models in ethnography as a necessary part of the process of theory construction, and this, he believes, is the primary purpose of research endeavour. For Woods, a good model "remains faithful to the proportions, and to the parts and their interconnections, and to the functions of that which it represents ...they [models] purport to represent on a smaller scale the essential components of a very complicated process." (1986:136) Because of this very complexity, Woods stresses that a complete, strong, original model is unlikely to emerge from one study.

> "Thus data collection leads to a particular theory being formulated, perhaps tentatively: further research casts new light on it perhaps inspiring a more strongly constructed model or typology, which in turn prompts further research ...[and leads to] modification of the theory." (1986:152)

Woods emphasises the tendency of ethnographic research papers to be entitled "Towards a model of..." The nature of theory building within ethnography then is cumulative and co-operative: it does not stand on one piece of research alone. The purpose of the model is to provide a provisional theory that can be tested elsewhere.

According to Woods, generalizability, if it is to be achieved, is not a feature of the original study, but a product of the comparable work of others.

The models proposed here attempt to comply with Woods's criteria: they set out to represent simply the possible proportions and parts of the reading process and to show particularly their interconnectedness. The models present an attempt to build provisional theory from the limited data of the ethnography and they are put forward in the hope that that theory will be tested elsewhere.

In so far as proposing models as a way to understand *reading* rather than general educational theory are concerned, the difficulties seem to be semantic as much as they are ideological. The word *model* itself is a problem. It suggests something that is both mechanistic and reductionalist – ideas that sit uneasily with the spirit of this research. Models, it seems, are fixed and work along predetermined lines. They are neither responsive, nor reflexive, nor fluid. They put one in mind of Carlyle's criticism of industrialisation. Models, like men:

> "...are grown mechanical in head and heart as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour and in natural force of any kind" (1829)

Models, somehow, do not seem to represent individual endeavour in the head or the heart. They assume conformity. Rosenblatt in putting forward her own theory of reading and writing transaction stresses their limitations:

> "...we may generalise about similarities among such events, but we cannot evade the realisation that there are actually only innumerable separate transactions between readers and texts." (1994:1057)

The word *model* jars with post-modernist understandings of reading.

Tierney recognised this in his discussion of the various models of reading that are presented in the International Reading Association's 1994 publication, *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (1994). He writes:

> "With the shift to constructivism and postmodernism, the search for a single model of reading has been supplanted by recognition of the worth of multiple models of different reading and writing experiences." (1994:1163)

He considers not whether the models presented in the volume are *right* in a positivist, testable sense, but whether they are *effective*.

> "In this regard, I see the model builders as more akin to topographers with map-making as their goal than to engineers with a well-defined goal of building roads. Rather than detail how one might get from A to B, models should suggest possibilities – that is, models should help us understand what we might need to take into account and what we might encounter." (1994:1169)

This change of metaphor from modelling to mapping seems to me to be fruitful. It dismisses imagery of mechanism and introduces instead landscape: terrain that can be inhabited by sentient people, and so shaped and explored. As Tierney notes, this thinking suggests *possibility* rather than inevitability. There are echoes of Bruner (1986) here that sit comfortably with the wider understandings of reading put forward in this research.

In this chapter, I take on the metaphor of map-making. In the process of charting the territory of reading activity anew, I consider existing attempts to represent the same ground. The maps I eventually produce are products equally of the data from schools and the maps that have gone before. They do not revolutionise reading theory: they add detail and texture to the maps we have already and new aspects of understanding.

Surveying familiar terrain

Attempts to describe what it is that readers need to know and to be able to do if they are to make sense of text are not particularly unusual. Many of the more influential efforts have attempted to systematise the way in which readers translate print into words (Rumelhart 1977, Stanovich 1980; Bielby 1994). These are not the concern of this work. This thesis looks towards attempts to theorise how readers make sense of the 'bigger shapes', that is, how they make texts, rather than print, mean. Attempts to

map this wider process are rarer, though they can be found scattered throughout the pedagogical, literary and sometimes linguistic literature. This chapter considers theoretical descriptions of reading provided by Harrison, (1992) Emmot, (1997) Williams, (1998) Jones, (1990) Rosenblatt, (1994) Ruddell and Unrau (1994) and Fish (1980).

Descriptions of the reading process tend to focus on one of three elements the reader as an individual, the reader in society or, least commonly, the text in society. This chapter will consider them in turn.

The reader as an individual.

Harrison (1992) and Emmot (1997) make an interesting pair with which to begin a discussion of how individuals read because their intentions in writing about reading are very different. Harrison is concerned with explaining to teachers what it is that very young children need to know before they can begin to read and Emmot considers in detail how competent adult readers comprehend narrative. That there are similarities in their findings suggests that their ideas might be applicable to all readers.

Harrison (1992) posits that there are four basic types of knowledge that beginning readers must have if they are to make sense when they read. The first, he calls knowledge of *how the world works.* This is the sort of general knowledge and culturally specific information that enables the reader to generate hypotheses about what is happening in a text and what might happen next. Without this the reader can make no sense of everyday events in stories and is therefore confused. The second is *how language works.* The child needs to know enough about the linguistic structures of the language in which the story is written, for it to recognise them and make sense of what is being told. Third comes knowledge of *how stories work.* This is an understanding of story and of story convention. It enables the child to predict the type of story that is to be read and therefore what might be possible in the world that it presents. Harrison's fourth point, that young readers need to understand print conventions, is not relevant here.

Emmott (1997) is concerned with a linguistic analysis of the way experienced readers comprehend narrative. In her overview of *Key Topics in Text-Processing Research*, she produces a list very similar to Harrison's. Like him, she stresses the importance of general knowledge. This she calls the 'basic type of knowledge... which is usually

taken for granted because it is learnt through experience rather than school, instruction.' (1997:23) It encompasses knowledge of entities in the world, typical scenarios and typical event sequences. While Harrison's general knowledge is important because it positions the reader in the cultural world of the story, Emmot explains how the reader exploits this knowledge so that inferences can be made. Thus, a scene set in a kitchen need not mention a cooker. The reader will presume that one will be there. Emmot suggests that general knowledge 'fills in' the missing parts of the text, shows links between objects and enables the reader to deduce connections such as cause and effect.

Comparable to Harrison's 'how stories work' is what Emmot calls understanding of text schemata. She suggests that what is helpful to readers is not so much a linguistic analysis of 'story grammars', but more an understanding of the conventions of story telling. The reader is thus able to anticipate complications and resolutions within the plot, and so suspense is heightened. When details that seem trivial 'in real life' are given significance in text, the experienced reader knows to take note. Further, according to Emmot, knowledge of text schemata helps the reader to recognise the linguistic cues that signal flashbacks, to distinguish major and minor characters and to separate background information from the narration of events. Emmot implies that it is this knowledge that helps the reader navigate the text and so make sense of it.

Her third category of understanding is text-specific knowledge. Just as Harrison's knowledge of how language works draws the reader into understanding the very words of the text, so Emmot's 'text-specific' understanding is about detail. The reader needs to know that it is necessary to make sense of the text itself, to follow the plot and to trace the activities and relationships of the characters. Text-specific knowledge is about memory. It is about remembering large chunks of plot, so that the story makes sense as it unfolds, about remembering who is who and about who has said and done what to whom. It involves recognising and remembering whose point of view the action is seen from and taking this into account in the consideration of events. Text-specific knowledge is also about holding in one's mind the tiny linguistic details that enable the reader to sort out who pronouns refer to and the larger units of language that make it possible to recognise the writer's style and the tone of the piece.

Both Harrison and Emmot suggest that the reader's job is to manipulate information from the sources they name and to bring it to bear on the text. When the reader has learned to synchronise all the various sources of knowledge, reading can take place and meaning is made.
Rosenblatt (1994) is broadly in agreement with them. She sees reading as a *transaction* that takes place between what the reader knows already and what the words of the text tell. She stresses that readers 'have only their linguistic experiential reservoirs' as the basis of interpretation:

> "Any interpretations or new meanings are restructurings or extensions of the stock of experiences of language, spoken or written, brought to the task." (1994:1062)

Her work is important because it particularises that experience. This is not simply the bank of broad cultural understanding of daily life and story that Harrison assumes is the necessary background for his young reader. Instead it is a *cultural, social and personal history* (1063). Because this is particular to each reader, it results in particular, individual responses or *evocations* (1070). According to Rosenblatt, all readers read differently: they make individual meaning.

Rosenblatt's discussion of reader stance further develops this understanding of the reader as an individual. She argues that neither contemporary reading theory nor literary theory pays adequate attention to the role of the reader in deciding *how* a particular text is read. She states that the tendency has been to assume that the distinction in operation between reading a scientific report and a poem has depended on the text itself. Rosenblatt insists that the reader's stance is at least as important. She notes that it is quite possible to read a novel as if it were social commentary or a newspaper as if it were a poem. The reader must choose, consciously or unconsciously an appropriate stance, and this will bring certain aspects of the text to the fore and push others to the fringes of consciousness. Rosenblatt suggests that this choices fall somewhere along what she calls the *Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum* (1994:1066). She explains the *efferent stance* as reading that is centred upon the extraction of meaning from text. It is typified by the reading of a newspaper, a textbook or a legal brief. The *aesthetic* covers the other half of the continuum:

> "The aesthetic reader pays attention to, savors, the qualities of the feelings, ideas, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth, and

participates in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions of the images, ideas and scenes as they unfold." (1067)

Rosenblatt makes it clear that the reader is free to adopt either predominant stance towards any text[1].The picture, then, is of a reader who is in control the reading process. While Harrison and Emmot's readers are carried along by the machinery of cultural expectation, Rosenblatt's makes choices.

Rosenblatt's *aesthetic stance* opens up another important area of reading activity that is ignored by both Harrison and Emmot. They present reading as a purely intellectual process. The aesthetic stance suggests that it is not: other factors come in to play. It acknowledges that in reading, and especially in the reading of fiction, there is emotive and imaginative involvement.

Pennac reminds us of this: "Whenever one reads a book, ... it is the *pleasure of reading* that presides." (1994:35) Readers read and want to read because it is an affective process: it is about desire. People who read know that there is something emotionally satisfying to be gained by it. It seems reasonable to suggest therefore, that there is a vital piece of knowledge that Harrison's beginning readers need above all else, and that is the understanding that reading can be 'worth it', that there is pleasure to be found in story and in text. The first call of reading is often emotive.

The role of the imagination too, is important, and is quite ignored by both Harrison and Emmot. Readers need to know how to make the imaginative leap that makes any reading possible. They need to know how to put aside the physical realities of their situation and enter the 'thought world' of the text. For text is language, itself an imaginative process which, according to Christie and Misson (1998:5) "...gives the ability to make absent things present for contemplation and discussion, the ability to manipulate ideas in subtle ways." This 'leap of the imagination', is of course, what Bruner (1986:31ff) calls *subjunctivity*. To subjunctivise is 'to render the world less fixed, less banal, more susceptible to recreation.' (1986:159) Bruner continues:

> "Literature subjunctivies, makes strange, renders the obvious less so, the unknowable less so as well, matters of value more open to reason and intuition." (1986:159)

A map, or a model of the reading process needs somehow to allow for the possibility of this imaginative response.

Britton (1977) recognises an assimilative mode of thinking, which competent readers adopt as they read fantasy. This has much in common with subjunctivity. Assimilative reading sets aside cognitive modes of thought, which encompass adaptive and reflective thinking, and allows the reader to enter into the make-believe of the story.

This, according to Britton, is where the imagination reigns. Assimilative thinking is the realm of play, of fantasy and daydream. It '...is a voluntary activity: it occupies because in itself it *preoccupies,* and not for any reason outside itself...' (Britton 1977:44). It frees the participant from the demands of the world's affairs and makes him more able to be fully himself. The difference in kind between a child's imaginative involvement in his own daydream and that which he uses to share in the fantasies of others presented to him in *Alice in Wonderland,* or *Treasure Island,* says Britton, is so small that to read such texts must be an assimilative act.

This representation of reading as play is significant. For it is in play that the child improvises freely upon the demands of the actual world, and so is better able to meet the demands of real life. Play is like ante room, between the demands of inner necessity and shared and verifiable reality.

Britton draws upon the ideas of Winnicott (1971) and introduces his notion of the *third area* of consciousness, that indeterminate imaginative space between the concrete reality of 'me' and the uncertainty of 'not-me', where children play. Winnicott writes of the 'transitional' objects, the symbolic toys and tokens that the very smallest children use to make it possible for them to bridge the gap safely between themselves and the unfamiliar world in which they live. He explains how, as that bridge grows and strengthens, it becomes that cognitive space where imagination is given rein and play happens.

My contention is that any attempt to map out the reading process needs to take into account not only the intellectual activity of the individual described by Harrison and Emmot, but also the aesthetic and imaginative involvement that Rosenblatt and

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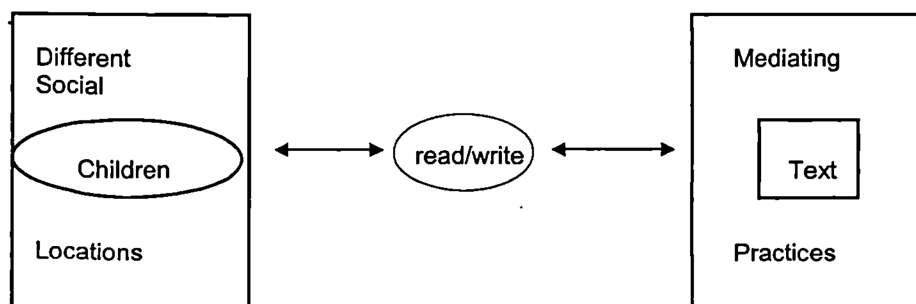
[1] Chapters Three: 86ff and Five: 145-6 both provide examples of teachers choosing a predominantly efferent stance in the teaching of literature.)

Britton recognise. I shall argue that Winnicott's *third area* provides a useful metaphor with which to describe that hypothetical area of mind wherein this processing takes place and reader make texts mean.

The reader in society

Other attempts to describe the reading process focus on the community in which reading takes place and the effect that societal practices have on that reading.

Williams (1998) puts forward a simple example of this. His model represents two separate entities: the children, who are the readers, and the text that they read at school. The model places children in the context of the different social locations in which they live and learn *out of* school, and the text within the mediating practices that they are taught to use *in* school in order to make texts mean. According to Williams, reading and writing occur when these two entities interact.



(Figure 2.4: An elaborated model of reading as interactive process in social contexts. Williams 1998:43)

The model represents reading as culturally moderated practice. It takes into account not only the different social locations and therefore the expectations with which small children come to school, but also the various ways by which they might be taught to handle text. Williams recognises that both contexts are influential, and that neither is static. Other readers, from other locations, and who have been taught different practices, will make different meaning from a text.

Williams presents this model as a starting point into which more details must be sketched. He particularly stresses the need for a more detailed understanding of how

children come to take on the mediating practices of the classroom. There are other details that need further elaboration. How is it, for example, that the reading transaction takes place completely outside the social location of the children's lives and the mediating classroom practices? Is it not dependent on both? Do not the mediating practices of the classroom depend to some extent at least, on the interaction of the children themselves? The model seems to assume that classroom practices are separate from the children and fixed. Does the teacher fix them? What is the role of the teacher in this model?

Ruddell and Unrau (1994) present a more detailed model of classroom reading that attempts to deal with some of the matters above. The heart of their model is a representation of the interaction of the individual reader, the teacher and the classroom community in a process of meaning negotiation. These three parties are bound together by the text, the task, socio-cultural meanings and understandings of the source wherein authority resides:

> "During negotiation for meanings related to texts, readers bring their own understandings to the interaction, teachers bring their understanding of the story as well as their understanding of the reading process, and members of the class interact with the text to shape – and reshape – meanings." (1994:1031-1032)

Ruddell and Unrau extend their model outwards from this core and detail the conditions that affect both the individual reader and the teacher in this equation. They present symmetrical representations of the factors which influence the reading of both. They stress the importance of the affective and cognitive conditions that all readers bring with them to text and indicate how these are brought to bear on the process of knowledge construction. They suggest that it is through the synthesis of these factors that readers make initial representations of text, and that these are controlled, monitored and tested first by the individual reader and then by the community.

The classroom community for Ruddell and Unrau has much in common with the interpretive communities described by Fish (1980). For both, community negotiation of meaning is imperative: for it is through dialogue that the community defines and validates the range of possible interpretations. Ruddell and Unrau follow Rosenblatt (1994) in stressing the role of the text here as a further constraint upon interpretation,

so that the text and the community together form a *hermeneutic circle* (1994:1033). When a text is discussed, meanings are negotiated and negotiable. Those meanings which are shaped by the community become part of its intersubjective understanding of text. Meanings are no longer individual: they are shared.

The observation and intervention stages of this research (Chapters Three to Five and Seven) make it very clear that classroom practice affects the way that children read. An attempt to map the process by which readers come to make meaning from text needs to take into account these shared societal influences.

The text in society

Jones's (1990) attempt to map out the process of reading is significant in that it includes the writer's generation of the written text at the same time as it deals with the reader's developing perception of that text. His model therefore represents the history of the choices made during a text's composition, and this has the effect of placing that text in the social context of its production as well as its eventual reception. Jones shows that texts are made by writers in a process that nearly mirrors the reading process. Texts are modelled and drafted within a social *culture of production* (1990:159) and it is this that determines and limits the possibility of their scope and their form.

An important part of this culture of production is what Jones calls *the intertext* (1990:165), that network of textual interrelatedness that readers weave from culture and memory. It is from this that writers, consciously or unconsciously, draw the models from which they shape their texts. It is this intertext that readers too draw upon to support their tentative attempts at meaning making. For both the reader and the writer, the intertext is subjective, but all pervasive. It is both part of the individual and part of society. Without it texts cannot be made and cannot be understood. Negotiating the intertext is a vital part of the reading process.

Jones's model makes it clear that a description of reading needs to take into account not only the individual reader and the interpretive community, but also the text as a product of cultural expectation. All texts carry with them traces of the intertextual influences that formed them, and, as they are made to mean, those that the reader brings. No text exists in isolation

Replotting the Landscape.

In this next section, I introduce the theoretical models that emerged from this study. In it I attempt to map out a theory of reading that is based in part upon the literature of reading theory that is discussed above and in part on my observation of and intervention with the children who took part in this research.

The argument I present is in two parts. First I set out the interpretive framework which describes the intellectual and aesthetic environments of mind in which reading appears to take place. In the second part, I superimpose upon these frameworks representations of the thought processes that depict the ways readers work to make meaning from text. In this way, the maps proposed here do more than chart the landscape: they suggest how that landscape might be explored. In doing this they attempt to represent the quickening process by which readers make texts mean.

The theory of reading that is developed here rests upon three assumptions that need to be clearly established before the frameworks can be introduced.

- That the reader, child or adult, is an active maker of meaning. (Wells 1998, Bruner 1986)
- That meaning in text is not fixed, but is a construct of the reader, (Iser, 1980, Fish 1980) who is guided in the making of meaning by the text, and by cultural expectations and practices. In the case of children at school, the reading community of the classroom is particularly influential. (Chapter Six)
- That the construction of meaning that is reading takes place in that fluid imaginative space that Winnicott (1977) called the *third area*.

It is within this *third area* that the frameworks are to be imagined. The maps propose that when a reader reads, the text, which is 'other' or 'not me' is taken into that area, that framework, which is an extension of 'me', so that it might be 'played with' and understood. Each reader's third area, and therefore interpretive framework, is different: it is constrained by that individual's experience and understanding. Because of this, the same text will be interpreted differently by each reader. The text cannot be seen as a stable, reliable, transparent entity, though the words presented to the reader on the page will be not change.

Furthermore, the text, as it exists within the reader's interpretive framework, is in a state of flux, because the reader is actively involved in making it mean. The text in process is not the same as the text on the page, nor is it the same as the text that will eventually rest in the reader's memory. For that reason, I will identify the text in a number of ways. First, I will refer to the *given text*: those words and images that are physically or aurally presented to the reader by the writer or storyteller. Next is the *possible* text. This is the text at its most amorphous, when it exists only as a set of unformed possibilities in the reader's mind. It is when the text is at this *possible* stage, that the reader takes it into the interpretive framework and begins to shape it into meaning. As this process takes place, the *provisional* text begins to form. This is the text as it is explored and tested by the reader. It remains provisional for as long as the reader is prepared to work on it and think about it. When, and if, the reader is finally satisfied that adequate meaning has been made from the text, the text is *constructed* and reading is complete.

The Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that is the basis of the theoretical map of the reading process proposed here, is built up of a series of constructs called layers of resonance. In this section, I will show how the layers of resonance are built up to make the framework, each contained within the last and dependent upon it, so that the eventual model is rather like a Russian doll.

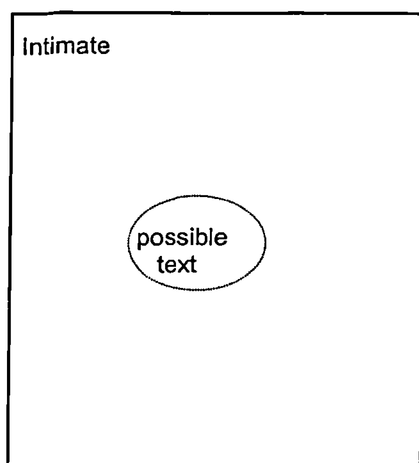
As I have suggested above, the framework might be imagined to correspond to Winnicott's *third area.* My contention is that it is here that all reading takes place, here that the reader and text come together in the imaginative playground that grows from the reader's being and extends out from it to take on and explore the unknown 'otherness' of text. In this playground, therefore, it is possible to reconstruct and interpret the 'not-me' ideas of the author.

The initial parameter of the interpretive framework then, must reflect the intimacy of the developing third area, that place where, by use of transitional objects the baby first learns to bridge the gap of dependency that exists between itself and the world. This first layer of resonance has much in common with Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance. It is intimate and emotive, and to do with need.

Reading that takes place within this layer reflects and draws upon the reader's very being, and is common, especially among less experienced readers. Kylie, from Pardoners Way provided a clear example of it. When we read *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* together, she responded by saying: "I've got a rabbit!" That her real rabbit at home had little in common with the dungareed, mallet-swinging thug of the story, did not matter to Kylie. What mattered was that for her, rabbits are special; she owns one and that ownership and her care for the rabbit are part of the person she perceives herself to be. There is personal and emotional attachment here to home and family.

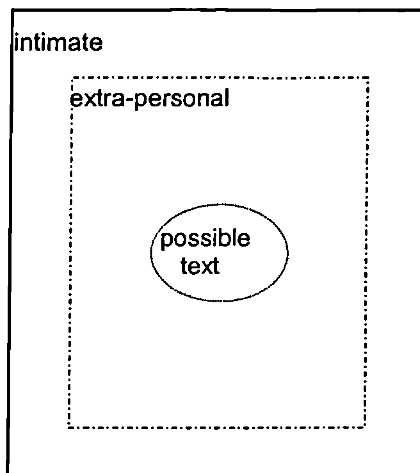
Experienced readers use this layer of resonance too. When Naomi, from the Masters' group responded to *Reading in the Dark* with "Yep, I *know* about this!" she was doing more than expressing an intellectual understanding of what matters to the communities in Northern Ireland. She was aligning herself with those communities. A gloss of her remark might read: "I know about this. It is where I come from, where I am coming from. I recognise it and understand it in the part of my mind that is most fully and consistently me. It is about home."

That both the least and most experienced readers have recourse to this emotive, personal layer of resonance, suggests that its use is widespread in reading. I want therefore to maintain that it is fundamental to the process of reading itself. Here it can be seen diagrammatically, with the possible text taken into the framework, ready to be imagined and interpreted. In this early stage of the map, this intimate layer of resonance is all that is available to the reader. Meanings that are made within it are personal. They are close to the emotional 'me-ness' of the reader.



Reader's interpretative framework

However, it is evident that readers do more than draw upon personal significance when they read. Clearly, Harrison is right when tells us that 'knowledge of how the world works' is essential for beginner readers. Babies pick up everyday cultural messages from the very beginning of their lives. It is called experience and of course it will be used in making text mean. So a layer of resonance needs to be built into the model to explain its part in the reading process. Here it is called the 'extra-personal.' I want to suggest that it grows naturally from the intimate. It is an extension, a rationalisation of the first.



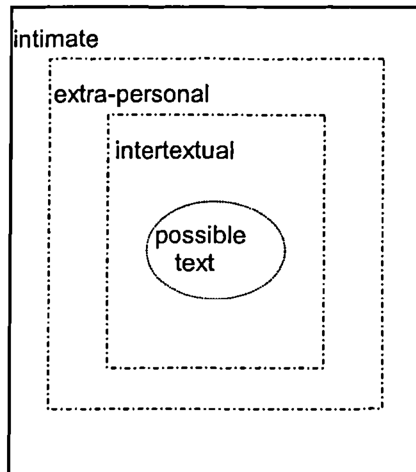
Reader's interpretative framework

So, if Kylie had said: "I've got a rabbit and I know they don't wear blue dungarees and ride motorbikes," her response would have been 'extra-personal' rather than personal. She would have drawn on her experience of what the world is like, rather than her knowledge of self.

Examples of readers drawing what they know of life to make sense of their reading are common. The girls at Parsons Field were all keen to tell about a raid on their village post office, when we read the wanted posters in *Julian, Secret Agent*. Karen, speculating enthusiastically about Kipling's *The Way Through The Woods*, (see Chapter Seven: 197) was crushingly informed by Cara her that 'horses don't live that long'. Cara is clearly using her 'extra-personal' knowledge of how things are to thwart Karen's more fanciful responses.

How then does Karen's reading of the poem fit into this framework? She is using what Jones calls the intertext, and so is implicitly acknowledging the place of this text

as a cultural artefact among others. Her imagination is fired by the ghost stories she has encountered in the past and it is these texts that she uses in her attempt to make sense of the poem. A layer of intertextuality needs to be included:



Reader's interpretative framework

The possible text is positioned within the framework because it is interpreted in the context that framework provides. It is there too because, of course the reader must draw upon the text itself if any meaning is to be made. Josh's retelling of *The Chocolate Money Mystery* is an example of the close attention that some readers give to the text. (Chapter Seven: 200)

The model of reading presents these layers of resonance and possible text within the interpretive framework, one within the other. But they are not quite like the Russian doll mentioned earlier, because they are not self-contained and cannot exist separately. The 'extra-personal' layer is embedded in and an extension of the intimate: it is what I know *because* of who I am. The intertextual likewise depends upon the others: it is the texts I have met because of where I am and who I am.

Boundaries between the layers are indistinct and they are represented here with broken lines to indicate this. Ideas first encountered in text, for example, merge into 'extra-personal' knowledge when they have been deeply learned and are taken for granted. The possible text too undergoes this sort of assimilative change. While it is being read, it becomes provisional, and exists within its own focused space in the framework. Once that reading is complete and it becomes provisional or constructed, then it is subsumed in its new form into the intertextual layer, where it can be drawn upon like everything else.

So, the framework thickens and deepens through out the reader's life as the reader continues to read. It begins with the hesitant awareness of the infant who hears her first stories and fits them into her growing understanding of herself and the world she is in. It ends, at best, as that complex and subtle network of ideas, memories and possibilities that the sensitive and mature adult has accrued at the end of a lifetime of reading.

Thinking in the frameworks: travelling towards meaning

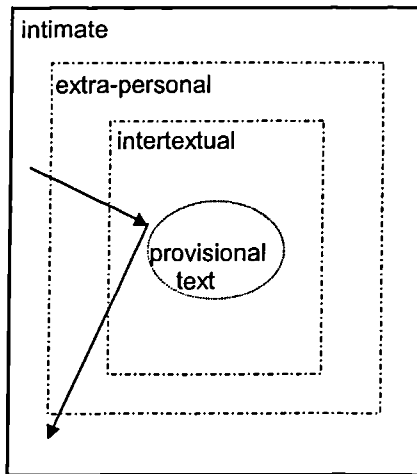
What then, happens when readers read? How do they use these frameworks, and what is it that experienced readers do that is different from the less experienced? In this next section of this chapter, I propose the four models of possible reading behaviour that have emerged from this research.

Each of the models takes as its basis the interpretive framework described above. Upon this are superimposed arrows that represent the pushes and pulls of the reader's thinking. The arrows penetrate and explore the possible text and the layers of resonance and make a pattern within the framework. This pattern is the shape that the possible text takes on as it gradually becomes provisional and constructed. It will be seen that in each of the models this eventual shape of the text is quite different. Different reading behaviours lead to different understandings.

1. Tangential Reading

Young, and very inexperienced readers seem often to respond tangentially to text. They seize upon a single feature of illustration or character or setting and respond immediately to that, to the exclusion of more pertinent responses. Kylie's response to *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* is like this, for the protagonist of the story bears no resemblance to her pet rabbit at all. It is as if her train of thought has glanced off the possible text rather than penetrating it. There appears to be no substantive contact with the story in her response. It can be represented in diagrammatic form in this way:

Tangential reading



Reader's interpretative framework

The arrows represent Kylie's lines of thought. They begin with the personal, approach the text, and then veer away back into the personal and stay there. It is as if, like the unbookish, children Gregory observed (1992) she has not yet learned how to channel this particular response back into the text. She doesn't know what to do with story.

Other children with rather more experience of books and reading are sometimes observed to behave tangentially. When Lisa wanted to discuss a book called *Pet Swapping Day.* (Chapter Seven: 200) she flicked through the book and found an illustration of children at a swimming pool. From just this picture, she began to build a meta-narrative about the book, which she called reading. It was tangential, because her story did not impinge upon the given text in any other way.

What is distinctive about tangential reading, is that the ideas generated by the text are identified, but not acted upon. The reader does not explore them any further. Although both examples described so far 'end' in the reader's personal layer of resonance, it seems that they can end anywhere within the framework.

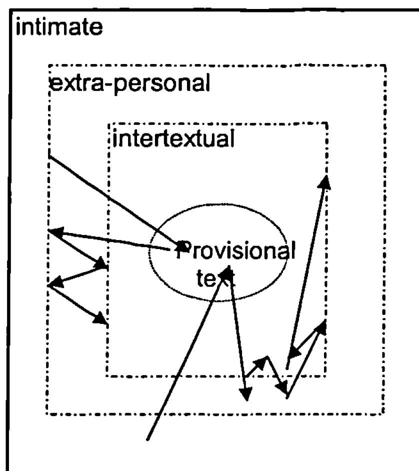
Josh, a reader of some experience, looked through *The Weetabix Illustrated British History.* His attention was first drawn towards the double page spread representing the Stone Age. A number of fur-clad men were shown attacking a woolly mammoth with sticks and spears. "That's so cruel!" he announced. "They should use a gun and

kill it outright." - a response rooted in the intimate, his sympathy for the mammoth, but supported by his 'extra-personal' knowledge of methods of killing and the cruelty they involve.

2. Ricochet Reading

A development of the tangential response is ricochet reading. Here, the reader has learned that it is necessary to *do* something with the train of thought once it has begun to find significance in the interpretive framework, if the reading is to continue. Chains of associated ideas are set up in the various layers of response and the reader finds them interesting and fulfilling. What they do not necessarily do at this stage, is impinge much on the text. Karen and her ghost story in the woods serves as an example. She seemed to see no need to reconcile her ideas with Kipling's poem.

Ricochet Reading



Reader's interpretative framework

Karen's ideas bounce around furiously in her 'extra-personal' and intertextual layers of resonance as she summons up all she can remember about possible ghost stories, about folklore and about towns engulfed in mud. She visits the text occasionally, and borrows from it broad features: dark paths, long ago, mystery, but there is no sense of her trying to test her version of events against the constants of the poem.

Ricochet reading was most frequently observed when children were keenly engaged in texts, and where authors had purposefully left gaps to be filled by the reader. The absorption of the children in *Piggybook* (see Chapter Seven: 193; 196ff) provides a

good example of this. Their ideas ricochet wildly throughout their extra-personal and intertextual layers of resonance as they try to decide where Mrs. Piggott had gone.

The failure of some of the members of the Masters' group to recognise *Reading in the Dark* as fiction, and to impose upon it understandings of moral intentions that are not supported by the given text, is another example of ricochet reading. The momentum of her ricocheting ideas concerning the importance of telling children the truth seemed actively to prevent May from seeing what the text actually said.

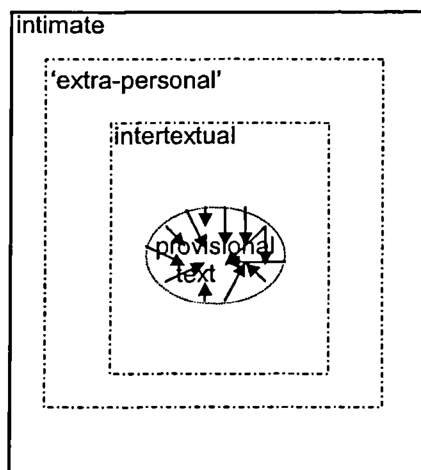
The consequence of both tangential and ricochet reading is that the provisional text is shattered. The pushes and pulls of the reader's thoughts break it apart and fail to reconstruct it by relating one idea to another. Elements significant to the reader are absorbed into the interpretive framework, but because these are imperfectly related to the text as a whole, there is a feeling of fragmentation and 'unbalance' in the final constructed text. Readers who rely on these reading behaviours seem to value their responses rather more highly than they do text. Quite the opposite can be observed in the next model, implosive reading.

3. Implosive reading

Implosive reading concentrates on text and takes little account of anything else. Nathan, supplies the clearest examples of reading in this way in his attempts to *do* reading His reaction to *Little Rabbit Foo Foo* was not to laugh, to pour over the pictures to sympathise with the hapless creatures or to gloat over the goonie. He pulled the text towards him, set it straight in front of him and focused his attention on the words. These he read slowly and falteringly, processing the words in order and relying on initial consonants for unfamiliar words. He miscued frequently and self-corrected rarely. He reminded me of the 'creature' pacman in early computer games. He gobbled the text word by word as pacman gobbled enemy symbols, never changing, never affected by anything.

Nathan experience with *Think of an Eel* (Chapter Seven: 198) is another example of implosive reading. He had little intertextual knowledge to prepare him for this book, and not much general knowledge either. The only layer of resonance available to him was the personal and he would not use it. For him, reading was about words, and it was not necessary to think about them. His reading can be represented like this:

Implosive reading



Reader's interpretative framework

The arrows of thinking all push into the text, which is unsupported and unsustained by any other response in the framework. The possible text cannot make a meaningful shape in the reader's imagination and so collapses in on itself.

Nathan's is an extreme case. Other children exhibited implosive reading behaviour at times, but never quite in the same, obvious way Peter's need to know what *really* happened in the Kipling poem provides an example. He seemed to imply that there was a definite answer in the text that would solve the mystery of the road and the ghostly people. If he could read the text more closely, as I presumably could, he would find it.

Patrick too is implosive in his reading of *The Hobbit.* (Chapter Seven: 211) Patrick, it seems, though clearly engaged with the words of the story and the action they contain, is not letting those words 'do their work'. He is not allowing his thoughts to wander outside the text, to explore the other instances of treachery, or fair play, or charity, or whatever it is that Bilbo displays in his dealings with the arkenstone. Patrick does not wonder about the story, or about his own position in relation to it.

4. Balanced Reading

What is it then that the experienced reader does that is different from all the examples given above? I want to suggest that there are three differences, that these are interconnected, and that in themselves they appear to be very slight indeed.

i. Balanced reading utilises the whole of the reader's interpretive framework.

Good readers make the most of all that is available to them in their attempts to make texts mean. They read the text, words and pictures, carefully and in detail and they constantly and persistently 'try out' what they discover in the text in their interpretive framework. They use all the layers of resonance.

In Chapter Seven, I explained how Naomi and I, both experienced readers came to *Reading in the Dark,* and how our subjectivity towards the text was very different. As we read, both of us used all we could find in our interpretive frameworks to supplement and explore the text. For me it was easy. My previous reading enriched and enlivened Deane's text; for Naomi it was difficult. She had to fight against the grain of the narrative, reform it, reject it and re-interpret it to make it mean. Implosive readers can have neither experience.

ii Balanced reading revisits the text

Good readers do not allow themselves to be diverted for too long when they find significance in their frameworks that is not helpful. When the masters group and I read the first page of Betsy Byers *The Eighteenth Emergency,* we found the word 'crackerjack' and spent a few moments remembering the children's television programme of that name. Then we went back to the text, to the sentence, and saw that it was a biscuit. We dismissed Leslie Crowther from our minds and read on. Tangential and ricochet readers have not learnt to do this.

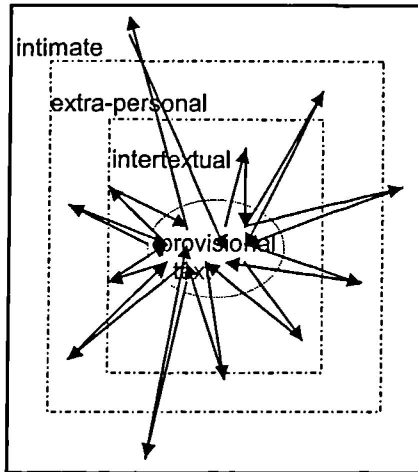
iii Balanced reading takes practice.

Good readers read a lot. They practise reading text closely, using the whole of the framework and turning responses back to the text. Two things happen. The process becomes easier because it is well used, and because more and more texts are absorbed into the intertextual layer of resonance. This is heteroglossia, (Bakhtin 1981) and it is an invaluable resource for the reader. Not only do these remembered, provisional and constructed texts provide a rich fund of resonance and significance for the readers use, but they provide a pattern for reading other, new texts.

The relative ease with which Leah read *Reading in the Dark* (Chapter Seven: 202) makes this point. Texts teach readers how to read.

So balanced reading looks something like this:

Balanced Reading



Reader's interpretative framework

The arrows of thought visit and revisit the text and all areas of the framework again and again. The pushes and pulls mould the provisional text into a shape that is not fragmented, but is meaningful and which is rooted in significance.

There is a balance here between text and reader. Each is important and neither relies on the other to make meaning.

Interpretive communities

So far the maps of reading have focused on the activity of the individual reader: they have taken little account of the involvement of that reader as a member of an interpretive community, or of the effect of that community of the reading of the individual. This research takes it as a central tenet that reading, like all literacy practice is socially constructed (Chapter One: 10ff) and that the influence of the classroom community plays a major part in the reading development of young readers. (Chapters Three to Seven). It is necessary therefore to relate the maps of individual thinking about texts proposed above to the dynamics of meaning making in the classroom community.

Ruddell and Unrau lead the way here. The notion of the *hermeneutic circle* (1994:1033) in their model of reading shows clearly the interrelationship of reader, text, and community in the meaning-construction process, and their example of classroom practice (1994:1035ff) demonstrates the support that this interaction provides for the student. Ruddell and Unrau stress the fluidity of the process:

> "Thus meanings are negotiated in classrooms among readers and between readers and teacher. Meanings are open, not closed or fixed, though they need to be grounded in text. Classrooms form interpretive communities that may share common understandings: however, those understandings are not fixed forever. Meanings are shaped and reshaped in the hermeneutic circle." (1994:1033)

Like the provisional text in the individual's interpretive framework, the provisional text in the community is in a state of flux as it is pulled and pushed into shape by the shared thinking of members of that community. It is as though for the duration of the classroom discussion, the text is held in a shared imaginative space, a collaboratively projected 'third area', where the serious play of exploration is anticipated and achieved. The children discussing *Piggybook* and *The Way Through The Woods* (Chapter Seven: 196ff) provide glimpses of this shared imaginative space as they work together, and of the purposefulness with which an interpretive community can choose to approach a text.

The term *interpretive community* needs some explanation here. It is a concept that is derived initially from Fish (1980). He developed it in order to demonstrate that interpretive anarchy was not the inevitable result of emerging theories of reader-response criticism. (Chapter One: 21) He proposed that wild acts of individual response to text were held in check by the interpretive communities to which the reader belonged. These provided both ways of seeing the world and strategies for understanding the text within that world: thus they limited the possibilities of interpretation. As Scholes (1985) points out, the difficulty with this is that Fish's understanding of the interpretive community remains undefined. He applies it both to vast cultural groups, who are predisposed to interpret texts in the ways of their culture, and to small groups of students engaged in the study of specific texts for specific purposes.

It is this last understanding of what the interpretive community is that is taken up here. With Ruddell and Unrau, I take the interpretive community to be a facet of the classroom, made up of adults and children reading texts together, and attempting to make those texts mean. The practices and expectations of that classroom are important, but they are not fixed, any more than is the interpretive community. At times it will comprise the whole class, such as in the Literacy Hour sessions described in Chapters Three to Five. At these times usual classroom interpretive practices will apply. At other times it will consist of two or three readers reading together, and the expectations of those individual children will form a community that is uniquely theirs. Quite simply, the interpretive community here means that community of readers, whatever its size, which is engaged in the purposeful act of interpreting a text.

Such a definition of the purposefulness of the interpretive community and the place of text in the joint imaginative space of a group of readers gives Fish's claims (1980:323ff) concerning the overwhelming influence of such communities currency. Fish tells of how he presented a group of students studying religious literature with a list of the names of linguists and semioticians, and told them that this list was a poem. He observed them as they sought significance in each name and forged them together to make poetic argument.[2] If there is any truth in Fish's account, then is clear that the expectation of the students in the context of this group affected the way they approached the text: they were a community that expected to find religious significance in a text, and they worked together to find it. It was the nature of their community to find meanings in that way.

Other communities will have different natures and different expectations of text. Chapter Six shows how the magisterial voice of a teacher can so dominate an interpretive community as to impose upon it only those ways of making meaning that the teacher herself holds. In this case, Ruddell and Unrau's hermeneutic circle is weakened because the three participants are out of balance. The projected 'third area' belongs so nearly to the teacher, that the children can only guess at its contents, and are forced to think along the predetermined lines of their teacher's imagination.

[2] Although Fish's point is generally applicable, his experiment itself is disingenuous. Fish's list included a number of names that carry with them clear Judeo-Christian resonances. (Jacobs-

At best, it seems that this projected 'third area', is not an extension of any one individual, but of the group identity. As such, it takes on the concerns and interests of the group as a whole. For the time that it is in existence, group members put their individual interpretive frameworks to the service of the common good: they search for resonances in themselves that will contribute to the group's purpose. When they offer an idea that is new, that stems from their particular knowledge or understanding, they do so in a way which is co-operative. The new idea adds to the stock of understandings already available to the group: it thickens and enriches the layers of resonance to which everyone has access, and from which the group can make text mean. Together, co-operatively, the community tempers the possible text into shape, into a shared provisional text, in the way that has been outlined above. (Chapter Eight: 232ff)

The relationship between reader and community is symbiotic. A provisional text cannot be made in an interpretive community without the co-operation and contribution of individual readers, and it is only through that co-operation and contribution that the individual's understanding of the possibilities of that text is shaped and extended. The interpretive community both makes meaning and enables more meanings to be made: for the conversation that shapes shared understanding of texts is absorbed into each receptive individual's layers of resonance as surely as it is absorbed into the group's. This is another example of heteroglossia. Individual readers take away with them what the group has made, even when the group, and its fragile shared third area, has dispersed.

The question that concerns this research is what happens next? Does the hermeneutic circle continue forever, as Ruddell and Unrau imply, or does it shatter when the class goes home, or moves on to the next lesson? While it is possible to imagine an individual's third area as a lasting extension of that person's imagination and thinking, it is hard to see a group of people's third area as anything other than an illusion, held together by the sorcery of common intent. How can it exist if the magicians do not sustain the charm? My suggestion is that provisional understandings of text shaped by interpretive communities can survive only in the memories of those individual members who make up the group. My further suggestion is that what happens to those memories and those provisional texts is the matter of critical reading.

Rosenbaum, and Thorne, for example.) His claim that any list of names would yield similar

Towards critical reading

The understanding of reading I have proposed so far, presents it as a process that can take place either in the individual imagination of the lone reader, or in the projected joint imagination of an interpretive community. I have suggested that the process of making meaning in both instances is similar, that in both the text is shaped by the reader's (or readers') active search for resonance within a framework of interpretation. I have suggested too, that the interpretive community enriches the individual reader's possibilities for making meaning by introducing ideas that would otherwise be unavailable to that reader. What I have not considered in detail is the extent to which the individual reader becomes integrated into the interpretive community and what the effects of that integration might be.

It is clear that members of interpretive communities exist as individuals both before the interpretive community is formed and after it has dispersed. It is clear too, that the interpretive community can only operate as a forum for interpretation if the members of the community wish to collaborate to that purpose. The question is what happens to those individual members while the interpretive community is in session? Are they subsumed into the joint purpose of the group or do they remain autonomous?

The data provides two possible answers, both of which have appeared in Chapter Seven. Here first, are Cara, Karen and Peter:

> Cara: I'm still puzzled. Where did the mum go?
>
> Karen: I think the mum went shopping, then she went away to give her head a rest, and she went to *her* mum.
>
> Cara: Perhaps. Yes. She went to her mum, and her mum was a magician, and she said, "I'll do something about that ..."
>
> Peter: And her mum told her to go back and have a look ...

This co-operative language suggests that the purpose of the group is foremost. The children are working towards a joint construction of meaning and their individual concerns are suspended. It is different with Claire and Hester:

---

results seems unlikely to be true.

Hester: He looks like an Australian swagman to me, but my own version of one.

Claire: No, I think, you know when your dads always shave?

Hester: A belled (?) hat

Claire: Well, they always have dots on their face

Hester: I don't imagine him like that...

Claire: and with a chimney sweep cap, and um, really scraggy clothes

Hester: I imagine him, you know those hats, right, black ones, they've got little bells round them.

The girls are clearly working individually. They maintain and pursue their own interests within their interpretive community and are supported by it. My suggestion is that both behaviours are possible within an interpretive community and that each is profitable. Readers need both to be able to contribute to the group and to retain a sense of individuality. This last is vital if critical reading is to be attained, and Magisterial dialogue challenged. Critical readers must be able to do more than simply take on the understandings of the crowd.

Fish (1980) advocates the interpretive community as a check to interpretive anarchy. I accept that it provides such a check, but propose that it is not an end in itself. It too needs to be moderated by the individual reader, the member of that community, who needs constantly to ask: *is there more to this than seems obvious to the group? Is there another way to look at it? Are we getting this right?* Were those students of Fish who made a poem from the list of names, entirely satisfied with their construction? Did they, I wonder, ask these questions? Did the more questioning of them go home, consider the poem again, and wonder whether it was perhaps anything more than a list of names? Critical readers know that interpretive communities should not always have the final word.

I suggest that it is the ability of the individual reader to step out of the interpretive community and see text from a different angle that is the mark of the critical reader. I suggest too, that it is impossible to do this without first being a full member of that community: it is necessary to understand what the group thought, and why the group thought it. The heteroglossia of the interpretive community is vital for the critical reader, for it is only through listening to a multiplicity of voices that she can eventually learn to trust her own.

The reader who reads critically can move in and out of the interpretive community. She is able to join in group and class discussions, take on at least temporarily, the ideas of others as the discussion demands, and help to build 'shared meanings' of the text in question. At the same time, she is able to retain an awareness of her individual responses and ideas and synthesise, modify and justify these in light of the ideas of others. She is hard to satisfy. The provisional text of the interpretive community remains simply that. The critical reader does not take it on as a finished construct, but takes it, unfinished into her interpretive framework, to be considered again. Her final understanding of the text will be one that was built upon, but is not necessarily identical to, the one achieved by the group.

The critical reader, I suggest, questions received understandings. She is not satisfied to take on trust, untested, her initial independent opinion, or the opinion of the crowd. The reading process for her is lengthy and complicated. Voices, discourses, interpretive frameworks and provisional texts are juxtaposed, one against the other, until she has achieved a meaning that seems most nearly satisfactory.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mapped out a theory of the reading process which draws upon both the existing literature of reading theory and my observations of the readers who took part in this research.

The theory outlines the activity of the reader as a text is brought into meaning and so stresses the importance of the dynamism and wide-rangedness of this activity. It proposes that the reader is engaged in an exploratory process, wherein not just the text, but other texts, the reader's experience and the reader's very self are drawn into the process of making texts mean. It proposes that the experienced reader achieves a balance with these elements that results in a balanced and considered experience of text.

The theory moves on to outline the place of the interpretive community in this activity. It posits that groups make texts mean in much the way that individuals do and

suggests that the group plays an important part in teaching children how meanings can be made and in enriching their resources for making meaning themselves.

Finally, the place of the critical reader in this theory is described. The critical reader is presented as a reader who is not satisfied with glib understandings of meaning, but moves in and out of interpretive communities, juxtaposing possibilities and discourses until satisfactory meaning is achieved.

In the final chapter of this thesis that follows, the theoretical understandings of critical reading given above are used to construct a description of what developing critical reading might look like in the primary school. In the final chapter I ask: what is it that children who are learning to read critically do?

Chapter Nine

Conclusions: Developing Critical Reading

Introduction

In Chapter Eight I proposed a theory of reading that positioned the reader as a creative maker of meaning. I demonstrated how readers can be imagined to be engaged in a process of exploring text in the context of their individual interpretive frameworks, and showed how these consist of layers of resonance put down throughout a reader's life through that reader's being, experiencing and reading. I suggested that readers with rich layers of resonance were better able to make meaning than others: they had more resources, more possibilities to draw upon. They were better able to come to a *balanced* reading of text.

Further, I explored the role of the interpretive community in the process of reading, and drew out the importance of this community both as a means of thickening the individual reader's layers of resonance and as a means of checking and balancing individual interpretation. Finally, I suggested that the critical reader is one who is able to move in and out of interpretative communities, reflect on the meanings produced by the community, and come to an eventual understanding of text that relies on, but is not necessarily identical to the meanings produced by the community.

In this final chapter, I draw the theory back to the consideration of the children who are the primary concern of this research. What does critical reading have to do with them? Based on the theory of the foregoing chapters and examples of children's reading activity in the intervention stage of this research, I propose a description of the reading behaviour that seems to characterise the development of critical reading in children of this age group.

I conclude this chapter and this thesis with a consideration of the implication of this research, both for practice in the classroom, and for further research.

Critical reading

The working definition of critical reading provided in Chapter One suggested that people who read critically:

- are flexible in their approach to text
- recognise text as an artefact, a made thing, and know that they can exercise control in the matter of making it mean
- enter into the (often serious) play of reading. They enter into the *what-if*-ness of the story (Bruner's subjunctivity), but also ask, *what-if-not?*
- measure the word of the text against the world of their experience and therefore
- do not *take on* everything they *take in*
- juxtapose discourses

In the chapters that followed, I presented examples of children and adults reading and measured their activity loosely against these rough guidelines. At the same time, through a review of the literature concerning literacy, the teaching of reading, literary theory and classroom interaction, I developed a cumulative theory of what critical reading might be, that expanded and fleshed out the points given above. The fullest account of critical reading occurs at the end of Chapter Eight, where the critical reader is presented as one who is so in control of her own reading as to be able to opt in and out of the various interpretive communities to which she belongs, juggle with and juxtapose the various discourses available to her, and eventually, by these means come to an understanding of her construction of text, which, though still provisional, satisfies for now. The implication is that children reading in this way were not discovered in the three schools which participated in this research.

Therefore, in this final chapter, attention is returned to those children in the understanding that though they are not yet reading critically, some are *developing* the ability to do so. In this chapter I ask: what reading behaviour do children who are *on the way* towards learning to read critically exhibit?

The descriptions that follow build on the provisional list put forward in Chapter One. They take into account the theoretical understandings developed in the chapters that follow and they rely heavily on observation of the children. They present a rationalisation, a synthesis, of what children need to be able to do if they are to read critically and of what they do already.

The descriptions are in three sections. Two of them, *attitudes towards text* and *social interaction* present the beginnings of continuums. They show accumulations of understanding and attitude that gradually move the reader towards a state where critical reading is inevitable. The third section, *metacognitive awareness* is different. Here there is less sense of obvious progress and direction. Rather the awareness seems to grow, to spread out, broaden from a central point, to provide a wide and supportive backdrop against which the other attributes can develop in tandem.

The descriptions are set out as follows. After each section heading, italicised statements are provided which describe the activity of the children in each category. These statements are abstractions: they describe the activity in the terms of the theory. After each statement, a number of bullet points are provided. Here the language moves from theory to practice. The bullet points describe the typical behaviour of a reader who is fulfilling the theoretical statement. Rather like the *level descriptions* in the National Curriculum (DfEE 1999), they provide a sort of 'check list', or 'best match' against which children's reading activity can be measured.

Finally, and more practically still, examples of children reading and talking about their reading from the intervention stage of this research are given, which best match the points in focus. These have three purposes. They illustrate each point. They ground the descriptions in the data and thus provide authenticity and they animate the dry bones of descriptive categories

A Description of Developing Critical Reading

Children who are developing the ability to read critically will display some or all of the reading behaviours indicated in the three sections below.

1. Attitudes towards text

(a) Children come to text aware that it is an ideological artefact, and that it can therefore be interrogated:

- They talk about the author and illustrator of a text, and of the decisions made by both. Their comments and judgements go beyond I like... and I have...
- They interrogate texts. They question both the author's decisions and their own responses as they read. They check their ideas against the evidence of the text.

Examples

Talk about the author and illustrator of a text and the discussion of simple preferences is common practice in the early part of Key Stage One. It seems to be less common at the end of Year Two and in Year Three. Examples of it from the data gathered in this research include Gillian's statement of self-description "I like reading Lucy Daniels books." (Chapter Five: 141) and Sinead's enthusiasm for Roald Dahl. (Chapter Three: 69)

Hester's reaction to *Voices in the Park* is a little more sophisticated. She glanced at the cover and said:" Oh, Anthony Browne. I know him! He did, um *Piggybook.* His books are really weird!" Sally, after reading the book said: "I like the way he has done it so it goes a girl, then a boy. Two of each." Both girls are beginning to interrogate the text and question the author's decisions. They show that they know the text is a made thing and is therefore ideological. David takes this understanding a step further with his judgement:

> "Enid Blyton would have done it better." (Chapter Four:113)

(b) Children engage with text:

- They are prepared to spend time and energy on constructing meaning from texts. They know that the effort they put in to reading is directly proportional to the satisfaction obtained.

- They take in much of what they read and store it in their memories. They test the ideas that they construct from text against common sense, their lived experience and other texts.

Examples

Josh's commitment to and enthusiasm for *The Chocolate Money Mystery* (Chapter Seven: 200) is an example of the sort of engagement that children are sometimes prepared to give to text. The exchange between Karen and Cara concerning the horses in *The Way Through the Woods* is another. All three children seem to know that the more effort they put into making meaning from the text, the more they will get out of it.

Karen and Cara illustrate the second point here too. Karen summons all she can from memory to make sense of the hoof beats. Cara provides common sense: "Horses don't live that long." (Chapter Eight: 230)

(c) *Children exhibit a playful (but not necessarily light-hearted) attitude towards text. They come to text full of curiosity and open to possibility:*

- They search widely and deeply within their textual and personal knowledge for resonances and echoes that might contribute meaning to texts. They are not easily satisfied.

- They take risks in the wide-rangedness of the responses they are prepared to make. They hazard connections with the unexpected.

- The 'matches' they find are not always directly helpful.

Examples

The cumulative conversation about who does all the housework (How come...?) provided in Chapter Seven (p 193) is a good example of this. Here Robin introduces a Bakhtinian sense of carnival into the search for meaning which demonstrates his willingness to play with ideas and to stretch them to their limit.

Oliver and Patrick show this too. While discussing *The Listeners,* they speculated about who the phantom listeners might be. Patrick picked up the word 'phantom.' For him it set off a train of thought about vampires, and tall, scary figures, masked and

cloaked in black. Their genesis appeared to be from Tolkein, via *Harry Potter* and demonstrates his wide reading. The word had no such resonance for Oliver:

> Oliver: "On I don't know who they are. Perhaps they come from, from *Planet Hog!*
> V.S: Planet Hog? What's that?
> Oliver: I don't know. I just made it up.

We all laugh and the idea was dropped. So were the vampires. Neither Oliver's wild guess nor Patrick's literary one seemed worth pursuing. The children knew when to drop them.

(d) Children exercise control over their reading:

- They make informed choices about what they read and how they read it.

- They are sufficiently knowledgeable about the mechanics of textual makeup to recognise irony, persuasiveness and propaganda.

- They do not take on everything they take in.

<u>Examples</u>

Gillian showed that she was beginning to take control over her reading and make informed choices when she announced that Babysitters Club books were "stupid and boring" (Chapter Five: 141):

> "I never finished the one I had out for ages, and I'm not going to get another one. Ever."

Examples of the children in this research exercising sufficient control over reading as to recognise irony were not found. Like the children in *Julian Secret Agent*, none of those with whom I read the first chapter of the story picked up on the irony of the 'can a teacher be a criminal exchange.' (appendix x)

However, Patrick shows he is beginning to approach this control over reading with his question about *Martha Speaks:*

"So, if *we* ate that soup stuff, and it went to our brains, would we *forget* how to talk?" (Seven: 213)

The irony here comes from him. He can produce it because he has understood the constructedness of the story we had just read together, and can therefore play with it. He has taken in the story but not taken it on. He sees it as it is: a construction of the imagination.

The recognition of irony, persuasiveness and propaganda seems to be the rational next step from here.

2. Social Interaction

(a) Children show an interest in books and in reading as a social activity:

- They want to read books with each other and to talk about what is in them.

- They make choices and preferences in the books they read and tell each other about these. They recognise that other readers make different choices

- They bring life to text and understand that other readers have different experiences. They articulate these experiences to each other.

Examples

An example of the first points came from Parsons Field during the intervention stage of the research. Without much thought and because it was attractive and familiar, Hester selected *Hairy Maclary's Showbusiness* for the group to reread one day. The children were all keen to tell each other which of the dogs they liked best and to compare this book with the others in the series. Everyone had a favourite dog, a favourite scene or a favourite story and was keen to talk about it.

Examples of children bringing life to text were plentiful. They include Kylie's comment, "I've got a rabbit!" when we read *Little Rabbit Foo Foo,* and the reaction of the children to the post office scene in *Julian, Secret Agent* shortly after there had been a real-life raid in the post office in the next village. "You know about that, don't

you?" the children said to me. Their keenness to supply me with the news demonstrates their understanding that different readers have different experiences and that these can be usefully shared.

(b) Children are aware that texts carry with them multiple possibilities of interpretation:

- They begin to know that other people have different ideas about a particular text, and those ideas might be valid. They use tentative language in their discussion of text – they talk about what 'might be' and suggest what 'perhaps' is meant.

- They are able to join in group and class discussions, take on at least temporarily, the ideas of others as the discussion demands, and help to build 'shared meanings' of the text in question. At the same time, they retain an awareness of their individual responses and ideas and synthesise, modify and justify these in light of the ideas of others. They eventually come to an understanding of the text that is built upon, but is not necessarily identical to, the shared group meaning.

Examples

Examples of the first point here, that is, the conversation between Claire and Hester about the appearance of the traveller and the discussion concerning the whereabouts of Mrs. Piggott have been thoroughly discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight (Seven:196; Eight: 234). Both clearly show the children working with multiple possibilities of interpretation.

The second point here is conjecture. There are no examples from the data of children displaying this stage of social interaction in critical reading. It appears to be the next rational step.

3. Meta-cognitive Awareness

(a) Children are able to articulate something about the reading process:

- They begin to be able to talk about reading. They can say what they like about reading itself and about books they have read. They begin to be able to say something about what goes on in their heads as they read.

- They are able to begin to reflect on their reading. They can talk about their reading pasts and their reading futures. They begin to know the 'sort of reader' they are and the sort they want to be.

- They become aware of their limitations and preferences as readers, and in that context, begin to entertain the possibility of experimenting with unfamiliar genres or writers.

Examples

Examples of children beginning to articulate their developing theories about reading include Claire (Chapter Five: 131) who imagined a word-bank accumulating in her head as she read, and the perception among many children, that progress in reading entailed being able to read increasingly longer books with increasingly harder vocabulary. (Chapter Four: 113) Claire, in the same conversation, displayed a development of this awareness when we discussed whose voice it was we heard when we read 'in our heads.'

> "Well, I don't know *exactly,* whose voice it is" she said. "But I know it isn't mine."

This last is of course, also an example of a child reflecting on her reading *now.* Patrick (Chapter Five: 131ff) shows an awareness of his reading past and therefore his development as a reader when he said:

> "I used to like Roald Dahl, but now I'm getting into Enid Blyton. Her books are much more adventurous."

Other children speak about their reading futures. Leo (Chapter Four: 99) looks forward to the science fiction his brother reads and Gillian projects for herself a future of reading animal stories. Her attempt to read *My Friend Flicka* (Chapter Seven: 209) is an example of this projection, and her realisation that she is not yet ready for

the book is an indication that she is becoming aware of the reality of her reading now. She knows there are limitations to what she can do at the moment, but that her reading will continue to strengthen. It is confidence born of this knowledge that will eventually enable her to experiment with unfamiliar genres and writers.

(b) Children see the value of re-reading:

- They reread and are increasingly aware that rereadings afford different results from initial readings. They begin to reread to discover more about a text rather than simply to experience familiar pleasures. They reread with an open, enquiring mind.

Examples

Hester and Claire displayed a developing awareness of the process of rereading when we looked again at the Kipling poem after a gap of some months. I asked then whether they enjoyed the poem more at the first or second reading:

> Claire: } first
> Hester:} second
> Claire: Oh, I don't know! It's the same.
> V.S. What's different?
> Claire: I don't think there is anything different
> Hester: Well you pay more attention to it because you are older
> Claire: yeah.
> Hester: and you get a few more ideas
> Claire: But I don't think it's so – it loses its spookiness

Lottie shows a similar awareness. She told me how she frequently rereads her favourite passages from *The Twits* before she goes to sleep at night:

> "Its so fascinating. I read one bit and it's so good, then I can't wait to get on to the next bit, because it is fascinating."

Her fascination seems to be in two parts. She is fascinated by the story, that it remains fresh and interesting after so many rereadings, and she is fascinated by

herself, that she continues to find it so. There is awareness here of the rich possibilities of text and of herself as a reader.

Implications for practice

If, as this research suggests, the ability to read critically is important, then it is incumbent upon schools to do something about it. If, as this research also suggests, children as young as seven are showing signs of developing the ability to read critically, then it is reasonable to expect that the teachers of those children are providing them with the encouragement and opportunities to further that development.

Unfortunately, the ethnographic stage of this research suggests that this is not much happening. The teachers observed here generally understood meaning in text to be fixed and inflexible. (Chapters Three to Five). They encouraged children, therefore to extract meaning from it, rather than to construct it from their understanding of other texts, of life and of themselves. In effect, they expected children to guess at the meaning they had made themselves. Their use of predominantly magisterial dialogue (Chapter Six) for teaching restricted the children, both in the way they approached text in the classroom and in the way they thought about text out of it. The result of this authoritative mode of teaching and thinking was that children accepted rather than questioned when they read. They were denied the possibility of what Freire (1972) calls conscienziation (Chapter One: 24): they did not reflect on themselves, on the texts or on the process of reading. At worst, they succumbed to a state of *nothing-to-do-with-me-ness.* (Chapter Four: 109) Critical reading requires engagement and liberation from magisterial modes of thought.

If children are to be helped to read critically in school, then I suggest the following three changes in practice need to be considered:

- Children need to hear texts read aloud. Texts themselves are valuable source of heteroglossia. Young readers who are not yet experienced enough to 'hear the tunes on the page' (Barrs 1992) themselves, need to be read to frequently so that those tunes might become part of their thinking. Children whose interpretive frameworks are rich with resonance (Chapter Eight) are better able to make texts mean and to assess the meanings made by others.

- There needs to be more dialogue, more interaction between children, texts and teachers. Children need to talk to their teachers and to each other about texts, and to use familiar texts to shed light on those that are new. There needs to be less emphasis on achieving *right* answers about text, and more on finding *possible* answers. Exposure to the resulting babel of voices and possibilities is the only means by which children will hear them, *ventriloquate* them (Bakhtin 1981) and become practiced at throwing them one against the other, at juxtaposing Discourses (Gee 1996).

- Children's understandings and opinions about text need to be listened to and taken seriously. Chambers (1993) stresses the importance of children knowing that their words are *honourably reportable*. Only when children are sure of this will they speak honestly, and only when they do is it possible for supportive and creative interpretive communities to develop in classrooms. It is through these communities that children gain the confidence to trust their own thinking.

It seems very likely that children who are encouraged to read and talk about reading in the circumstances detailed above have a good chance of developing the ability to read critically.

Implications for further research

The implications for further research arising from this thesis fall in to two categories. The first set of implications is methodological. It sees this research exactly as it is: a small-scale ethnographic study that requires substantiation and testing of theory through comparable studies. The second set of implications is ideological. It assumes that substantiation already and asks: if this is right, what needs to happen next?

<u>Methodological implications</u>

Small-scale ethnographic studies such as this can suggest theory, but they cannot substantiate it. (Woods 1986:147) The case studies are too particular, too reliant on time, locality and researcher partiality to yield generalisable results. Therefore, for the findings of this study to be substantiated further research is necessary.

I suggest, then, that comparable studies of the reading of other children in this age group and their teachers be undertaken, and the following questions asked, are the children and teachers studied here representative? What happens in classrooms where the teaching of reading is more open and less magisterial?

I suggest too that the models proposed in Chapter Eight be tested against a wider range of readers of all ages; and further that the descriptions of developing critical reading (this chapter) are scrutinised and refined against the observed behaviour of more children. What else do young people who are learning to read critically do?

Ideological implications

If the theoretical models developed here and the descriptions of developing critical reading are judged to be more or less valid, and the implications for practice taken on, then research into the effect of these practices will be necessary. Longitudinal research in a variety of school contexts might assess the effect of these practices in terms of children's general reading development, the development of critical reading, and the achievement of children as measured by the national assessment criteria at the end of Key Stages One and Two

Further research needs to address two questions. The first is straightforward. It is this: do the practices suggested above help to achieve critical reading? The second is reflexive. It demands that we look beyond the practical concerns of the classroom, and ask: what would be the implications for society of a generation of children, all of whom had been encouraged at school to read critically? I suggest those implications would be vast and far reaching. They would certainly cause the undermining of many of the common sense assumptions, beloved by politicians, with which I began this thesis. We need to ask: is this what society wants?

Afterword

From Metamorphosis to Alchemy

I began the introduction to this thesis with fanciful ideas of metamorphosis. I suggested that both reading and research were slippery processes. Readers needed to quicken the words on the page into 'butterflies of the imagination'. Researchers (such as I) needed to work at transforming mountains of confusing raw data into a coherent whole, to retell it, reform it, to bring it into being as a thesis.

The image provided me with initial and final descriptions of the process: I could imagine the text before it is read, the data before the thesis is written, and the glorious (or so it seemed then) products of both. The image said nothing about the long and messy *process* of transformation that necessarily takes place inside the shell of the cocoon. I wanted an image now that expressed the untidiness and insecurity of the process of change itself: its repetitiveness and that glimmer of hope, which, against all the odds, kept me going.

My first image was culinary: the process of analysis and writing seemed to me to be like the peeling of layers of skin from an onion. Here was an image that captured something of the recursive nature of the work: as one set of ideas or layer of analysis was dealt with so another was discovered underneath, and this, in turn, had to be dealt with. It was a homely and attractive image, but it did not work. The difficulty is with the nature of onions: if one continues to peel away the outer skin, one is eventually left with nothing more than a pile of peelings. Like the implosive reader (Chapter 8:235) one discovers that there is nothing left at the centre. The onion is all skin. I was reluctant to admit that this research was so vacuous.

Eventually, I came to think of those layers of analysis in terms of alchemy. They were distillations and I was the alchemist. As I revisited and reconsidered my observations and the words of the teachers and children, I reinterpreted them, described them anew, developed languages of description (Bernstein 1996) that refined them. Through a process of multiple distillations, I transformed again and again the base metal of raw data. My aim was to achieve that elusive nugget of pure gold that is the aim of this research: the essence of what it means for children as young as seven to read critically.

Chaucer's Canon's Yeoman reminds us that for all the alchemist's labour, the elixir is never achieved:

> "For al oure craft, when we han al ydo,
> And al oure sleighte, he wol nat come us to." (VIII *G* 865-867)

For all my craft here, I do not pretend for a moment that the final distillation, the quintessence, is achieved. My suggestion is that I have come as far in understanding and describing the nature of critical reading in young children as this small research project will allow. Now the ideas need to be tested and refined in a bigger crucible. I put them forward for further research.

* * *

I included at the top of the Introduction to this thesis a quotation from Seamus Heaney. Here it is again:

> "The imaginative transformation of human life is the means by which we can most truly grasp and comprehend it." (1995: xv)

It is, I suppose, a purpose of literature, to transform human life so that it might be understood. Hughes, through Ovid and with the help of Reade and Semple, achieves this. I make no such claims for this thesis. I do claim though, that the progressive transformations of observation into languages of description have enabled me more nearly to grasp the matter of reading in the primary classroom. I hope it achieves something of the same for the reader.

Appendices

Appendix i

Friars Hall School

Thick Description

a) Setting the scene

Friars Hall School. It sits, squat, by the main road, about three miles out of the city, hedged high and fenced with peeling white railings. A collection of buildings can be seen from the road. The nearest and most striking is Victorian. It rises above the hedge, red brick and gothic, with large, single, mullioned window. A short bell tower echoes the ecclesiastical theme and the school sign confirms it: Friars Hall C of E Primary School. Barred, blind doors face the passer by, impassive, painted. There is a notice: "Welcome to Friars Hall School. Please use the side entrance." There is an arrow.

The visitor follows the arrow round the building into the playground. Here at last some signs of modernity and habitation. Colourful snakes writhe their way across the playground, inviting children to skip and to count. There has been recent building work. An extension to an Early Years classroom juts into the playground. Its broad, bay windows show the book boxes and small furniture within. A courtyard, some planting, and at last an entrance.

The entrance hall is bright and welcoming. The eye is drawn to a bright red notice board. 'Friars Hall School' it proclaims in huge paper letters. Photographs are mounted all around it, some posed, but most informal snaps of staff and children working and playing, outside and in. Nearby, the secretary sits in her room, the door open. Beyond her, guarded by her, is the Head's office. There is a waiting area. Two easy chairs are provided for the visitor and an occasional table. Ranged upon it is a selection of secondary school prospectuses: the local county secondary school is there; so too is the diocesan high school and glossier than both, prospectuses for a number of selective private schools.

A corridor leads away to the left, first past a small non-fiction library, then past a K.S.2 room and finally on to the infant classrooms. It is busy and narrow. Pegs line the walls and the coats, lunchboxes and backpacks of young children clutter the way. It opens soon onto an outside door and small carpeted area. Here are three foam chairs, infant-sized and brightly coloured, arranged beneath a window. There is a low table and a book display case, containing picture books. There are no children here; it is the wrong time of day. This is where those who buy school milk drink it after morning play, where house groups meet for assembly and where television programmes are watched. Occasionally, an adult will bring a child here to read.

A little further and the classrooms are reached. There are two for K.S.1. To the left is the modern room that could be seen from the playground. Here Reception and the younger Yr 1 children work. To the right is the Yr 1/2 room.

The classroom

The classroom fills the greater part of a second Victorian building. The room is large and was once high. Now inelegant grey tiles lower the ceiling, and block off the top of the enormous window that fills the entire back wall. The room should be light, but the

lower window panes, within the teacher's reach, have been covered with pictures of animals, cut from calendars and the upper panes are above the ceiling. Between them a little light filters in. The fluorescent tubes are needed, even in summer.

Narrow strips of brickwork divide the window into three. Attached to each is a long, red banner edged with yellow boarder paper. The first is a chart of number bonds to ten. Large yellow paper numbers have been carefully cut from templates and arranged to show all the ways that 10 can be made by adding two numbers and how they can be set out in sequence. Above the numbers a title asks the reader "Can you make 10?" The other banner is of similar design and displays the five times table. It asks nothing, but states its being: "The 5 Times Table".

Along another wall there is a row of low cupboards and above that a long blackboard. The tops of the cupboards are cluttered with classroom ephemera: pots of pencils, exercise books and abandoned sweatshirts. A central space has been cleared for things of topical interest. A book that Emily brought in about trees is displayed there and another about jungles. An acorn grows in a pot and a solitary tadpole swims in a tank of snails and duckweed. A three-foot high papier mache penguin roosts there. It looks down haughtily on all classroom proceedings.

There is writing on the board: lists of children's names with ticks or crosses beside them to indicate who has completed certain activities; lists of words in 'spelling families' for children to copy and learn; reminders of work to be done, of action to be taken. In the corner, where the board ends, there is a word bank. 26 cardboard pockets, each with a letter drawn on it, are arranged in alphabetical order. Inside each was once a card with a list of common words beginning with that letter. Now the cards are missing.

On the opposite wall examples of children's work have been pinned, unmounted, slightly above the children's eye level. They appear to be cartoon strip representations of a story. There is no explanatory sign and some of the work looks unfinished. Beneath this, against the wall are two book boxes. They have recently been tidied. Two sections contain books from the Oxford Reading Tree series and another is full of Sunshine books. The rest seem to contain a variety of independently published children's picture books. These have been sorted roughly according to size.

These sections of the book boxes are full, there being perhaps thirty books in each partition. A range of children's authors are represented. The Ahlberg's are prominent: many of the Happy Families series can be found and a copy of *A Dark and Stormy Night.* Anthony Browne's *Gorilla* is there, hidden between larger books, and Burningham's *Oi Get Off My Train.* There are books by Charles Keeping, Tony Ross and Babette Cole. There are two copies of Jill Murphy's *Peace At Last.* Shirley Hughes' *Dogger* is there and *Alfie Lends A Hand.* There are three books by Ruth Brown . There are rhyming books by Colin and Jaqui Hawkins and by Lynley Dodds. The Berenstain Bears are there and so too are Frog and Toad. There is a puzzle book called *The Land of the Lost Teddies*, in which children are challenged to help solve a mystery.

The condition and age of these books varies. The best and newest of them are in plastic wallets and are on loan from the schools' library service. Others are battered and show the effects of frequent handling.

A book case, to the right, houses a small collection of what the children refer to as 'chapter books'. A very well thumbed copy of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* is prominently displayed. A dozen or so new books in plastic wallets from the library service are spread along the top shelf. Two of them are novels by Dick King-Smith and another is a collection of Bel Mooney's Kitty stories. *The Suitcase Kid* and *Mark Spark* by Jacqueline Wilson are there and so too is Angie Sage's *Ellie and the Wolves*. Several of these books have slips of paper inside with a child's name on. These pieces of paper appear to function as bookmarks as well as claims of readership.

To the right of these in the corner of the bookcase is a pile of a dozen more paperbacks, these older and tattier than the others and belonging to the classroom. Here again are titles by Dahl and King-Smith. There is another Kitty book and a collection of rhymes. Richard Church's *The White Doe* suggests a different readership. It has inside it the stamp of a charity shop from where it was purchased second-hand. The other shelves of the bookcase house hardback topic books about the rainforest and other natural habitats. They are not displayed, but rest flat on the shelves. The remaining item in the bookcase is a classroom-made book. It is a collection of letters written by children in role as various characters and linked by Postman Pat whose picture stares out from the front cover. The book is called *Postman Pat Visits Storyland.*

This part of the classroom is the reading area. It is carpeted and six bright cushions flop across the floor. They look well used. The teacher's table sections this area off from the rest of the room. It is piled high with files and papers and classroom equipment. The teacher's own reference books are shelved upon it: an illustrated children's Bible, a collection of Bible stories and an anthology of folk tales. There are piles of group readers here too: six or eight copies of the same title for children to read together with an adult. None of the books on this table appears to be generally available to the children; the teacher controls their use.

A hard, wooden desk chair faces away from the table, towards the carpet where the children sit for registration and teaching sessions. This chair and the desk are the only pieces of adult sized furniture in the room.

Beyond this is a 'wet' area. There is a sink and equipment for painting is stored here. Two high, grey tables make a square and on them is a variety of containers ready for some work on capacity. The wall beyond is filled mostly with another display about animals. A commercially produced poster invites the reader to distinguish between reptiles and amphibians and there are more examples of children's work, this time about maths and science. This work too is unmounted and seems to have nothing in common with the rest of the display. A computer sits against this wall and a there is a table. On it are copies of recent letters to parents that the children have taken home. Arrangements for the maypole dancing are here to be read; so too is advice about the eradication of headlice.

The children's tables are hexagonal. They fill the area between the board and the book corner, and are arranged so everyone can see the board. A further table, away from the rest and near the door, provides a place where a disruptive child can be isolated. Above it, book reviews written by some of the children have been pinned straight onto the backing paper that covers the wall. They are all of the same book and each includes a brief summary of the plot, the book's title, author, publisher, price and ISBN number. There is no focal point for this display and no sign to orient the reader. Above it is a chart for the recording of house points.

There is a bank of trays just inside the door, each with a child's name written on it. The children and teachers refer to these as lockers. They are nearly empty. They contain only what the child brings into school from home each day: a bookbag, a sweatshirt, a toy, a recorder. These children do not look after their own work. In a corner there is a rack of dressing up clothes and a dolls' house. These are the only signs in the room of play.

There are about thirty children in the classroom, eighteen of them in year two and the rest in year one. They are all impeccably dressed in school uniform; the boys in grey shorts and aertex shirts; the girls in yellow gingham dresses. They are well and carefully dressed. Some of the girls' frocks have white collars trimmed with yellow gingham and their socks have matching frills. All the children wear royal blue sweatshirts and these are printed with the school badge.

b) Jack and the Beanstalk

This morning the children are sitting on the carpet. Their teacher sits amongst them, high on her sturdy wooden chair. She is in her thirties and has fair, bobbed hair. She is formally dressed in a pale frock and cream coloured cardigan. Her smile, when it comes, is a little wry and she eyes the children with affectionate resignation. She is preparing to read them a story and there is a businesslike quality to the way she organises the class. She explains what she is going to do and invites the children to sit where they can see easily. Some of those who had been sitting with their backs against the teacher's table, facing the body of the class, move.

I sit apart at one of the children's tables, from where I have a good view of everyone. I am close enough to hear everything that is public, but I cannot hear whispers. I can see clearly when they happen. I have a notebook in front of me, and a pen in my hand. The children know I am there and know that I am watching. Every now and again one of them looks up at me and grins. I grin back. We signal friendliness to each other and anticipation.

The children compose themselves, some on the cushions, some leaning against the book boxes or tables. Some squeeze themselves into tiny gaps between the wall and the tables; others almost seem to disappear under the furniture. One or two shuffle forward; they want to be able to see as well as hear the story.

The teacher begins the lesson. She sits slightly forward in her chair and tells the children that she is going to read them an old fashioned version of Jack and the Beanstalk. She reminds them that the week before they had listened to another version of the story, from the radio, in their drama lesson and she asks them to listen for similarities and differences. She tells them that Jack and the Beanstalk is a traditional story. She stresses the word traditional and talks about the oldness of the story. It is one that has been told for years, she says. Even the children's grandparents heard it when they were small. The children listen quietly. They sit mostly still for this introduction, but there eyes are everywhere except on the teacher and their hands stray aimlessly to fiddle with shoes and socks and their friends' hair.

The teacher holds up the book she is going to read from for the children to look at and they do.[1] It is an old book, she says, one that she herself had as a child. She brings the book back to her lap and looks at it. She examines silently the front and back covers, opens the book, considers and says to the children: "You can see it is

[1] The book is *Jack and the Beanstalk*, retold and illustrated by William Stubbs, Kestrel Books 1965

old from the illustrations." She holds it up again and they can. Here are the line drawings that were common in children's books until the early seventies. Pictures are washed in yellow and grey. They seem lifeless and stylised.

She begins to read and a pattern is established: a page is read and then the book turned round so the children can see the pictures. They are clearly used to this and look up when there is a gap in the reading. Some children murmur approvingly. Others mutter, "I didn't see" and wriggle to get a better view. The teacher moves the book through a wider arc so more of the children can see easily.

The story moves on. When Jack is offered the beans, the teacher holds out her hand as if to show them. The children look. Her hand is empty, but they accept the mime. The class is quiet and attentive. Most eyes are fixed on the teacher. The wrigglers have settled and thumbs are creeping into mouths. A lulling calm is established. Stephanie, often an outsider in language activities, shuffles forward to a more central place. She appears to be moving into the story and into the community of listeners.

The teacher continues to read. Jack is sent to bed without any supper. "I bet he's hungry!" says Daisy. Her friends grin in recognition of her truth and daring, but the story moves on. This is clearly unofficial comment and is not recognised. Daisy doesn't speak again.

Jack wakes up and looks out of the window. "What do you think he saw?" says the teacher. She looks up at the children. I am not sure if she is reading the text or asking a direct question, but it hardly matters. "A beanstalk!" the children chorus. "So the little old woman was right after all!" responds the teacher. Again, I am not sure if this is text or comment.[2]

This interaction with text and teacher has unsettled some of the children. They wriggle. They shuffle closer to friends and begin to fiddle with each other's hair and the books in the boxes. The teacher bends down and whispers something settling to Becky. She reaches out and touches Jeremy on the head. He looks up at her, makes eye-contact and abandons the satisfying game he had been playing with the velcro fastening on his shoe. The story resumes.

Soon the children are drawn back into the story and thumbs are put back into mouths. Geraldine, quite silent, begins to draw in the air. Joanna, as the giant thumps his way into the castle, makes steps, one hand above the other in time with her teacher's reading of the footsteps. The teacher stops showing pictures and reads on.

"Fee Fi Fo Fum" she reads and the children take this as a cue to join in. Together they recite the rhyme and the mood becomes suddenly more animated. Those children who were beginning to slump, sit up straight. Everyone is alert. Then, in the story, the giant falls asleep and the teacher, judging the mood, makes exaggerated snoring noises. She causes her shoulders to rise and fall in rhythm with the noise. This is burlesque and the children giggle loudly. They continue as Jack escapes and 'dashes helter-skelter down the beanstalk.' There is a fresh out break of giggles at 'helter-skelter'. In this heightened mood the children are ready to find fun. The play and unfamiliarity of the expression pleases them. That means 'fast' says the teacher, responding instantly.

[2] In fact, both questions are text.

For a while the pantomime continues, the children active participants in the telling of the story. They thump along with the giant's footsteps and they chant his warning. A grin of intense satisfaction spreads over Geraldine's face as she repeats the rhyme for a second and third time. Heads and arms shake as children scurry down the beanstalk with Jack. But the quiet mood that characterised the beginning of the session is broken.

Now there are comments. Olivia whispers something to her friend as the golden egg is laid. Will signs and mouths a message to Robin. "I know what happens when he gets there" says someone else out loud, to no-one in particular. Jack hides from the giant in a copper and the teacher breaks off the narrative to explain what a copper is.

Now involvement in the story is deliberate. The children have sensed that some joining in is acceptable, but are not sure how much of it will be allowed. Robin and Will know too that I am watching them and this appears to make them braver. We make eye contact as they chorus the giant's chant and we smile at each other, signalling fun and complicity. There is a feeling of power amongst the children and when the singing harp is discovered, Robin is confident enough to sing with it. Several children join in but the mood is on the brink of silliness. Somebody makes pig noises. Nothing is said, but the teacher is suddenly alert. She tenses her body and her eyes sweep the class. There is a tiny thrill of disapproval and the singing stops.

She relaxes and carries on with the story. When the harp speaks, Will echoes 'master, master', but he echoes it alone. When the beanstalk is chopped down. Robin anticipates a chorus and begins to chant 'chop, chop...' But nobody picks up his cue and the teacher reads on. Will giggles. He catches my eye. Robin is embarrassed. He goes red, looks at the floor and then at me. I smile reassuringly at him and hope he accepts the sympathy I send.

The story ends and the children chorus "and they all lived happily ever after." Harmony is restored.

The teacher closes the book and sits back in her chair. "You didn't show us all the pictures" complains somebody.

She grins and explains that she wanted to get on with reading the story and that the pictures were not particularly interesting. She decides to show them anyway, holds the book up for them and quickly turns the pages so they can see. She begins to talk again about the art work and production. She explains how much cheaper it used to be to print in one colour rather than many. Modern production techniques have changed that she says, and books are brighter. She looks through the book to find the publication date. "There we are, she says "1965. A long time ago." The children listen, and say nothing.

"Apart from the old-fashioned pictures," she says, "what else did you notice that was different about this story?"

Hands are thrust into the air and the children take turns to name the details they can remember.

> -It was an old lady, not an old man.
> -It was easier to buy the cow from Jack.
> -It was an ogre, not a giant.
> -He had different things...

The teacher accepts all these answers, affirming them with smiles and nods and comments: Yes. Yes that's right. Some times she repeats what the child had said. The list is long and many children have contributed. The teacher is pleased with the class. She smiles benevolently at the children.

Christine puts up her hand. "I know what harp players do..." she says. But she is cut off. This contribution is not acceptable. "Can we talk about that later, Christine? asks the teacher, politely. "I want to get on with writing now". Tom says "I'm thinking about my video." Nobody hears him.

The teacher sets up a writing task loosely based on the story and begins to prepare the children for the work she wants them to do next.

Appendix ii

Classroom observation/video transcript

Pardoners Way School Year Three

The Literacy Hour.

Mrs. Squires sits on her chair in the far corner of the classroom. Just behind her, to her right, is the small table on which the term's topic books are kept, and beside that, the classroom computer. Today it is switched off. To her left is a wooden bookstand. A big book rests open upon it. It shows a double page spread – the poem *The Riding of the Kings* by Eleanor Farjeon.

The children sit before Mrs Squire, mostly on the carpet. A few, including Kylie and Nathan, sit on chairs that define the perimeters of the group. There seem to be fewer children than usual here today, and the atmosphere seems a little more relaxed.

I sit in my usual place by the door of the classroom, diagonally opposite Mrs. Squire. I can see her clearly, and the backs of the children sitting on chairs. I can see the outline of the big book, but the children's bodies obscure the detail. I have the video camera with me, but I do not turn it on until the lesson is well underway.

There is an ancillary helper in the classroom. She too sits outside the group on the carpet.

The lesson begins. Mrs. Squire tells the children that they will be working in groups today. The Red group will read a letter to Father Christmas with Mrs Cook (the ancillary helper), the Yellows will work with me as usual. She will work with the Greens.

She explains that the class is first going to read another Christmas poem. She points to the open page in the big book, invites the children to join in, and begins slowly, to read.

She reads one verse.

Mrs. S: What sort of poem is it? Rhyming or not rhyming?

Some of the children chorus 'rhyming.'

Mrs S: Good. Who can point out a rhyming word?

Somebody shouts out 'day and way'.

Mrs. Squire reads on. She stops at the end of verse two.

Mrs. S: Which are the rhyming words?

A number of children put up their hands.

Mrs S: Nathan?
N: *Old* rhymes with *gold*.

Mrs S: Good boy!

She casts her eyes round the whole of the group

Mrs S: Look at their spelling. What can you say about them?
Tina: They've got the same letters
Mrs. S: Not all of the same letters – but some of them.

She goes back over the first two verses of the poem, and points out the rhymes *day, way, all, fall, green, between*. The endings are always the same.

She reads v. 3. I turn on the video camera.

Mrs. S: and suddenly, it's changed. The rule we've just talked about for the rhyming words has suddenly changed. We know that 'sense' rhymes with 'experience' *(she points to the words on the page)*
'eyes' and 'wise' *(again points to the words)*
But how has the rule changed?

Hand begin to wave in the air., but Mrs S is distracted by a child on the floor. She clicks her fingers, swings round and points to the child on her right.

Mrs S: NOT a hairdressers

She turns back to the class.

Mrs. S: How has the rule changed? Sense, experience. *(points again)* They rhyme. Eyes, wise. They rhyme. How has the rule changed?
In this verse *(she gestures towards the poem)* we had this rule.
(with her fingers she mimes taking the rime from old and gold and placing them side by side)
It's the same letters making the same sound. Now what's happened?

Colin: The sound is the same but the letters are different.

Mrs. S: Good Boy! The way we are reading it, the letters are different. If you look closely at the spelling, 'sense' has an 's'. Experience that it rhymes with has a 'c' in the ending. 'Eyes' has an 'es' ending. 'Wise' has an 'se' ending. But when we read it, we get the same sound. Sense, experience, eyes, wise.
Next verse.

She reads aloud to the end of the poem in a sing-song voice that stresses the rhyme and the rhythm of the poem. A few of the children join in.

Mrs. S: Who wrote the poem? Who can see who wrote the poem?

She looks around. She coughs. Nathan's hand waves in the air. From where I am sitting, it is unclear whether he is stretching or offering an answer. He lowers his hand.

Mrs. S: Who wrote the poem?

She waits. Somebody mutters 'don't know'

She points to the words

Mrs S: Eleanor Farjeon. If we don't know who wrote a poem, what is written at the end? Who remembers? Yes? If we don't know who wrote the poem?

Hands go up. Mrs. S. nods and leans towards a child on the floor. There is an answer, but I do not hear it.

Mrs. S. *(nodding affirmation)* Anon. a.n.o.n. That means we don't know who wrote the poem. But we do today. Eleanor Farjeon wrote the poem.

There is a pause while the classroom assistant helps a child out of the room. Everybody turns to watch.

Mrs. S : Now, the word work we are going to think about is about putting words in a certain way, *(She reaches behind her for a book from the display table)* a certain order *(she flicks through the book to the end. She waits.)* and making a page of words. Carefully chosen words. Not little joining words like 'and ' and 'the', O.K? Carefully chosen words.
Now, I've got a page here in this book about Roman cities. (*She turns the book round and holds it up to the class)*
And the page has a heading called glossary.
(she clicks her fingers three times to gain the class's attention.)
And on that page are carefully chosen words. Carefully chosen words. Can you see how they are printed on the page? Put your hands up. Nathan?

Nathan speaks. His brief answer is unclear. Mrs. Squire nods.

Mrs. S: Some of the words are really dark. If you print it like that it makes the words stand out from the other words doesn't it? Some of the words are very dark. It makes them stand out. They are carefully chosen words.
Can anybody look down the column of carefully chosen words, the darkest words and tell me how they are organised, how they are ordered? Sinead?

Sinead: They are alphabetical.

Mrs. S: They are in alphabetical order.
My Greens this morning are going to make their own glossary – but not about Romans. It is going to be a glossary of Christmas words. Now as you can see, next to the carefully chosen printed words, there's also an explanation. So it's not just a page of words in alphabetical order, it's carefully chosen words and it's an explanation of what those words mean. Not where we find it in the book, but what it means.

Mrs Squire looks again at the book in her hand. She reads from it.

Mrs. S: It says 'taxes'. We hear about taxes, don't we? Taxes that the Romans called and made Mary and Joseph go and pay in Bethlehem. Taxes. That's the carefully chosen word here. That's the explanation beside it *(she reads aloud)* "money which people pay to the ruler of

their land." That's what Mary and Joseph had to do in the Christmas story.

So that's the sort of page I expect to see made by my Greens today.

Appendix iii

The intervention

The following charts show the weeks of the Intervention stage of this research and the texts the children and I read together.

1. Texts introduced by me at Friars Hall and Parsons Field:

Week 1	"The Way through the Woods" Kipling, R. in *I Like This Poem*, K. Webb (ed) (1979) Puffin
Week 2	"The Listeners" de la Mare, W. in *I Like This Poem,* K. Webb (ed) (1979) Puffin
Week 3	*It's Not Fair!* Mooney, B. (1991) London: Mammoth
Week 4	*Gorilla* Browne A (1983) London: Magnet
Week 5	*Piggybook*, London: Walker Browne, A (1986)
Week 6	*Bring in the Holly* London: Francis Lincoln Causley, C. (1992)
	Christmas break
Week 7	*Courtney* Burningham, J. (1996) London: Red Fox Paperback
Week 8	*Julian Secret Agent Cameron.* A (1989) London:Gollancz
Weeks 9-14	} } various texts provided by individual children. (see below) }
	Summer term
	Rereading: "The Way through the Woods" and "The Listeners"
	Voices in the Park, Browne, A (1998) London: Doubleday

2. Texts introduced by the children

	Disney Year Book 1997 Grolier Incoporated
	Merlin's Premier League 99, Official Sticker Book
Blyton, E. (1993)	*The Magic Clock and Other Stories* Award Publications
Dodds. L. (1991)	*Hairy Maclary's Showbusiness* Barnstaple: Spindlewood
Gates, S (1996)	*Pet Swapping Day* Young Hippo School, Scholastic Children's Books
Hargreaves, R. (1998)	*Mr. Messy* World International Paperback

Hunter, J. (1999)	*The Pet Detectives* Harper Collins
Laird, E (1995)	*Stinker Muggles and the Dazzle Bug* London: Collins
McCall Smith, A, (1997)	*The Chocolate Money Mystery* Young Hippo Adventure, Scholastic Children's Books
Nina and Claire (1999)	*Goosebumps*. Book made at home by children
Stine, R.L (1995)	*Goosebumps: Monster Blood 2* Scholastic Children's Books
Weetabix (1989)	*The Weetabix Illustrated British History Book.*

3. 'Prompt sheet' given to the children before the second stage of the intervention:

Some questions to think about before you introduce your book

Which bit of the book did you like best?

Was it exciting? Which bits excited you? Tell us about them.

Were there bits that made you laugh? Which were they?

Did the book scare you? When were you scared?

Did you like the people in the story? Who did you like best? What did you like about them? What didn't you like about them? Was there anyone really horrid in the book?

What else did you like about the book?

What else would you like to tell us about it?

4. At Pardoners Way:

Week 1	Shape poems	Poems supplied by class teacher.
Week 2		"Cats" E. Farjeon in *I Like This Poem*, K. Webb (ed) (1979) Puffin
Week 3	Story -openings	*Little Rabbit Foo Foo* Rosen, M. and Robins, A (1992) London: Walker Books
Week 4	Story – organisation of dialogue	*Little Rabbit Foo Foo*

Week 5	Christmas	*Little Angel* McCaughrean, G. (1995) London: Orchard
Week 6		*Bring in the Holly* London: Francis Lincoln Causley, C. (1992)
		Spring term
Week 8	Story- character	*I Don't Want To!* Mooney, B (1990) London: Mammoth
Week 9		*I Don't Want To!*
Week 10		*The Jolly Witch* King-Smith, D (1990) Hemel Hempstead: Simon and Schuster
Week 11	Non fiction	*Think of an Eel* Wallace, K (1995) London: Walker Books
Week 12	Instructions	Games downloaded from B.B.C *Really Wild Show* website
Week13		Special offer instructions from cat food box
Week 14	Poems from other cultures	"Children, Children" Traditional Caribbean in *Chanting Rhymes*, Foster (ed) (1996) Oxford University Press
Week 14		"Ar-ar-at" Grace Nichols in *A Caribbean Dozen*, Agard and Nichols (eds.) London: Walker (1994)
		Summer term
		Rereading *Little Rabbit Foo Foo*
		Voices in the Park, Browne, A (1998) London: Doubleday

Appendix iv

Transcript of audiotape intervention.

Parsons Field.

Re-reading Kipling

I tell the children that I am interested in finding out what they think of poems now that we read months ago. Claire is interested. "The one about the woods?" she asks "That was really spooky!"

Claire and Hester come with me to Head's office. I ask: so what do you remember about this poem? I turn on the tape recorder.

Claire: I remember! There was, there was skirts splashing across the thingy..
Hester: Yeah! That was weird, that was.
Claire: That was the weird one. The weirdest poem I saw
Hester: It goes across the grass
Claire: That's what I thought was weird about it.
V.S The swishing sound of the skirts in the dew?
(They make swishing noises)

V.S: Do you remember any thing else?
Claire: Well, there were horse chariots
Hester: Oh Yeah, there was things like that
Claire: Um. Well there was
Hester: We thought there was
Claire: probably, like dead people
Hester: With their skirts hanging on trees
(giggles)

VS: Is that what you thought?
Hester: No *(still laughing)* we didn't think that!
V.S: You didn't think that?
Hester: I did for a while
V.S You did for a while, but you changed your mind afterwards?
(Hester giggles)

Claire: I thought. When we first read it, I thought
Hester: "This is strange."
Claire: *(unclear)*...riding across the grass in their chariots, and I thought
Hester: ... there's ghosts wearing skirts, and the skirts fell off in the wind *(words lost in more giggling)* grass
Both girls giggle

V.S: Do you remember anything else about it? What was strange about it?

Claire: There was. I thought it was strange because, I thought there was horse...*(she giggles. Words unclear)*
Hester: No, the chariots died and the ghosts were still wearing skirts. They were flying along one day (giggle) and the wind *(words lost in more giggles)*
V.S Oh I think you are being silly now.
Hester: That's the only thing I can think of.
V.S: Shall we have a look at it, then?
Claire: *(eagerly)* Yes
Hester: Yes. I think it's strange.
Claire: I still had that in my drawer when I cleared it out
V.S.: Did you? Do you want me to read it or would one of you two like to?

Claire begins to read. Reads first line. Accentuates rhythm at end of second. Hester joins in. They struggle with coppice and anemone. Confidence grows at

You will hear the beat of horses' feet
And the swish of a skirt in the dew

Claire: Now the horses are wearing skirts

Hester reads on. They finish reading together.

Hester: That's a bit strange.
Claire: Yeah.
Hester: a bit
Claire: 'Cos if there's no road through the woods, how come there's
Hester: *(With the slow emphasis of one humouring an idiot)* 'Cos it's grown over now, Claire.
V.S: So there used to be a road, and now it's grown
Claire: That gave me the feeling that horses were wearing skirts.
V.S.: But you know it's silly, don't you?
Claire: I know
V.S: How do you know it's silly?
Hester: Have you got the answers to this?
Claire: I can just see it, right, 'cos all I think of is cartoons, and all I saw was horses wearing skirts, going clip-clop.
Hester: and then they are going "la lah lah...

V.S: Hester, What answers? Have I got the answers, you said. What do you mean?
Hester: Oh no! Not again!
V.S: Answers to what?
Hester: um... *(she fiddles with her shoe)*
Claire: Oh! Answers to the questions
Hester: Yeah.
Claire: I still don't get..
V.S: Tell me the questions.
Hester: The answer to the poem. It's a bit like a strange two verse riddle.
Claire: The swish of the skirts in the dew. It's a bit of a strange.
Hester: One shoe broke, now the other shoe broke. I'll have to sew this one together, but my mum can't sew,
V.S: Oh dear

Hester: so I'll have to wear this pair of silver shoes. But she might be able to. They are annoying, these shoes.
Claire: You can ask my mum

V.S: What are the questions, going back to the poem, that you'd like answered?
Hester: Um
Claire: They shut the road through the woods. I believe that.
Hester: I mean, The skirts across the grass
V.S: Whose skirts are they?
Hester: It might be a ghost or something,
Claire: We said that last time.
Hester: because the people who were driving the chariots
Claire: crashed
Hester: or died or something, then the ghosts
Claire: Yeah, but it doesn't say chariots, it says horses.
V.S: Yes. It doesn't say chariots, does it?
Hester: They are horses. Driving, or people might
Claire: I think, it's like

V.S: What's the story of the road?
Claire: er
V.S. There used to be a road...
Claire: yeah. And then it's been shut down and then
Hester: all trees have grown over it
Claire: Yeah, but the road's still probably showing a bit, that's why the, Oh no and the
V.S: Do people still go in this wood?
Hester: No
Claire: and they have memories of long ago
V.S: how do you know, hang on, that people don't go there any more?
Hester: it says in the poem. 'Cos
Claire: and , and . The wood was probably
Hester: Oh I remember that one *(she points towards another sheet of paper from my pile)*
Claire: *The Listeners*
Hester: *The Listeners*. I remember that scary one.
V.S: Let's just finish talking about this first, then we'll come on to that in a minute. O.K?

V.S: So. There was a road? They closed the road through the woods seventy years ago, and hardly anyone goes there now.
Hester: Yes. Because it's so spooky
V.S: So that the animals are tame. They aren't frightened of people. Ok? Is that right?
Claire: Are we going to listen to this afterwards?
V.S: If there is time. But if you do go into the woods
Claire: You get a bit scared
V.S: In the evening, you hear
Claire: Owls. Otters

Hester whistles

Claire: and birds

Hester: The doves. And the ringed trout pools
V.S: what else does it say in the poem?
Claire: and you might, if you were quite old and you went in the road seventy years ago, you might remember the brush of skirts on the grass and um, horses trotting along.
Hester: We're getting somewhere, Claire!

V.S reads second stanza of poem

V.S: What might you hear?
Claire: horses hooves
Hester: The trout ringed pools, the otter. The otters are dead now in this country.
V.S: I think they are coming back again. Claire was right. It does say you'll hear the beat of horses feet. You'll *hear* them,
Claire takes Hester's shoe and begins to make hoof beat noises with it.
Hester: Can I have my shoe back, please?
V.S: I don't think we really need to make trotting noises, Claire. We haven't got time.
Claire: I was only doing a clipclop sound.

V.S: You'll hear the horses

Claire makes horse noises with her tongue

Hester: Shut up Claire!
V.S: You'll hear, you'll hear the beat of horses feet and you'll hear the swish of skirts in the dew. You'll hear them. Will you see them?
Claire: No
Hester: You might do
Claire: cos, they never see men. That means women as well, in there
Hester stands up and looks out of the window.
Hester: Cor! Look at those big conkers on that tree!
V.S: They're not very big yet, are they?
Hester: Some of them are
Claire: *(giggles, affects grown up voice)* There's not time for speaking about that!
Hester: Yeah Claire.

V.S: Do you think this poem is better the first time, or when you read it again after a long time?
Claire: } first
Hester: } second
Claire: Oh, I don't know! It's the same.
V.S. What's different?
Claire: I don't think there is anything different
Hester: Well you pay more attention to it because you are older
Claire: yeah.
Hester: and you get a few more ideas

Claire: But I don't think it's so, it loses its spookiness. If it was a really lovely poem, right, you'd expect it's lovely, but if it's all spooky, you don't feel if it's so spooky..
Hester: yeah you do
Claire: I don't
V.S: You still think it's spooky?
Hester: Yeah
Claire: I don't. I don't that much. I still think it's spooky
Hester: There was a spookier one called *the Travellers*
V.S: Do you want to look at that one too?
Claire: Yeah, yeah, ye ye ye eyah!

Appendix v

Schedule for teacher interviews

1 You as a reader	Tell me about your memories of reading as a child. What is your reading like now?
2. Success in reading	Tell me about what you think counts as success in reading -in year 2/year 3 -eventually What do you look for to recognise that success? What sort of things do you do to achieve that success? -for day to day reading -for the future
3. You in the school	Tell me about the school reading policy and the resources. How does what you try to do fit in with these?
4. Parents and children	Tell me about the parents. Do you think they share your aims for their children as readers? How far do you think that what you do matches what they want? What do you think the children think?

Appendix vi

Friars Hall School

Interview with Teacher – Mrs Merchant

V.S. Do you have strong memories of yourself as a child?

J.M. I was always a reader. I could read before I went to school, but then I don't think in those days you went to school until you were 5, but, um, I know, I remember books being around. I shared a room with my big sister, who was 6 years older than me who was a book-aholic and still is, which meant I was reading things that were older than I should. I mean I read things like *Wuthering Heights* when I was 10, scared myself to death with that, under the bedclothes, when, I was 10, you know I can remember reading it to the bit, I read it through, you know, in bed, on my own, until I got to the point about, you know, the window, there's a bit in it, with er, the ghost outside, tapping on the window, the child ghost saying 'let me in' oh, and I remember, and then Heathcliffe: Cathy....... and he throws the ... down, and I can remember going bang with the book (mimes slamming it down) and flying under the bedclothes being absolutely terrified. I really terrified myself with it.

Um but. There were all sorts of other things I read that I probably shouldn't have done, round about ten and eleven because they were my sister's books

V.S. Have you read them since?

J.M. Oh yes. *Wuthering Heights* I must have read 10 times if I've read it once ...and so I was very lucky. And also when I was in my teens, between the ages of about 11 and 16, my brother and I don't agree on this, there were 6 years, or 5 or 6 years when we didn't have a television. We had to go to our auntie's house to watch things like the er ..er .. the one about the Port Merion thing, the Prisoner, things like that in our teens. He reckons it was when we were older, but I don't. I remember it from when I was in my young teens, but during that time, of course, we hated it (laughs), but we read a lot more than other teenagers because we didn't have a television.

V.S. So. When you were growing up with this big sister, did she read to you?

J.M. No. No. I've no memory of anyone ever reading anything to me. I used to read books, I used to make up the story. When I was 4 or 5 I used to read, but I'd actually make the story up, out loud, but I'd be making the story up as I went along from the pictures. I remember doing that.

V.S. It sounds a very rich sort of childhood

J.M. yeah, it was poor

V.S. I mean as far as experiences are concerned.

J.M. Oh yes. Working class. You get some people like this. My parents were working class people who met over opera records. My dad was a shoe maker and my

mum was in the NAAFI at the time. So they were working class people who were a bit like the Welsh. They were absolutely absorbed and terribly interested in culture and in education in general.

V.S. Do you remember them reading at home?

J.M. {Yes
{
V.S. { to themselves?

J.W. Yes

V.S. and that was books, newspapers?

J.M. Everything. All sorts of things my dad used to read. He wrote plays, he wrote poetry and plays. I've actually got them. When he was in the army he wrote a lot of poetry and er, it's very bad poetry, it's not, I mean..

V.S. That's not the point!

J.M. And he wrote pantomimes for the church and he wrote, he also wrote a couple of plays. We had an old typewriter he used to band away at. I mean he wasn't really an educated person at all. He was self educated, but um during the was in Italy, with no socks and only his battle dress that had apparently only a piece of wool, that's all he could find connecting the buttons, right, so he hadn't got his full kit, he went to the opera in Milan.

V.S. Good for him!

J.W. Er dressed, because he happened to find himself in Milan, so he went to the opera!

V.S. Excellent! That shows spirit, doesn't it?

J.M. Yes. And you know, it was that kind of so we were very poor though, very poor. We had no money, but I do recognise now that it was a very rich kind of cultural background.

J.M. And at school I always remember always, always being interested in reading. My first memory of school was the very first day., I remember it very clearly, I know exactly what I did. I must have been literary right from the word go, because the teacher put on these rubber overalls and a great big sheet of paper, it seemed like a field, on a thing and told me to paint a picture. I think it's terribly Freudian and terribly egotistical, because, I'd obviously been told about writing and writing my name and I was expecting to do that, I think and I got there and here I was with this huge field of paper and she was saying paint a picture, so I er I made, I got red paint and with huge letters I wrote 'Janet' right across it and then I got the blue paint, cause they were in kind of jars with ... in the top, and I got the blue paint and I did a kind of curly line all the way round. She must have thought 'we've got a right egoist here!' She said "That's very nice dear" and took it off put another piece on and said "now paint a picture!"

But I mean, I remember that and that was the first day, so I would say words were always important to me.

V.S. Do you remember what happened in learning to read at school? Despite the fact you could read, were you put on the Janet and John schemes?

J.W. It was *Janet and John.* I remember reading *Janet and John,* but I remember very quickly going through *Janet and John* on to other things; so was always a confident reader and I remember reading in carol services and er, plays. We were. My family were Primitive Methodists and it was that kind of environment where, you know, at Church and Sunday School there was a lot of reading, it was very, so we were reading hymns or whatever.

Salvation and lift as they used to call it.

V.S. Did they?

J.M. Have you never heard that? Very nonconformist. The idea of, if you look back through the century, what happened with a lot of nonconformists is that, because of their religion, they were very committed to education so they got salvation and lift.

Um, but it was, er very, word orientated, very literary, sort of.

V.S. What about now? Are you still as literary orientated, or isn't there the time?

J.M. When I've got time, I haven't done it for the past 4 years, I do write. So does my sister. Neither of us has ever been published, but I've written a series of children's books and a series for TV: that almost got on TV, that was about 10 years ago. I got a second reading, with Channel 4, which takes a lot of doing when you are an amateur. Um and I've written a couple of children's books just for my own pleasure. Not poetry, no, I've never written poetry, but it is my, I would say if I had the time, I used to do it before I became a head teacher

And I read all the time, and novels. I have to say I read more novels, and I find it harder to read government circulars. You know you've got to have a kind of brain, because we have in this job, there's just so much that you have to absorb in the way of reading that comes from the government. That whole stack there, that's more stuff about literacy that's a new lot, new on top of all the things we had last year, that lot arrived two weeks ago, all these booklets. And I do find it increasingly hard.

V.S. It's dull isn't it?

J.W. It is. It is very dry and very difficult and I have to say as a head teacher I'm supposed to do an enormous amount of reading and I tend to do a lot of skimming and scanning and I read the summaries and it's awful to admit now, but it's true, because it doesn't do very much for me. Yes reading books, it isn't just reading, books themselves are very important to me. I recognise that now because a year, I lived in a house a few years ago when we were in between moves and all my books were packed in a loft, because we had nowhere to put them, so I had to live for 12 months without the books on the shelves and I hadn't realised until that point how much that meant.

V.S. You feel as though part of you is missing, don't you?

J.W. That's right. I get very possessive about books. I don't like throwing them

away.

V.S. No. I don't! So what are you reading now?

J.M. Oh! It's awful actually, I don't like it I bought, I frequent the Oxfam bookshop in Malvern

V.S. It's good isn't it?

J.M. Yes. It's a very good price and I pick up all sorts of things in there. I picked up the ... first ... stories by Ernest Hemmingway. I remember reading them, I haven't read Hemmingway for years. I remember reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls* when I was about 18 and really enjoying it, so I thought, "Oh I haven't read this, something I haven't read! Goody" But actually, it wasn't they are gruesome. They are all about, the bullfighting ones are absolutely hideous, so I'm reading them in bed going, "euuugh!"

V.S. I read one years ago about an Indian woman ...

J.M. yes

V.S. {giving birth
{
J.M. { giving birth

V.S. and the husband cuts his throat.. The memory has stayed with me so clearly, and it must be 20 years since I read it!

J.M. Honestly, the other night, two nights ago, I was reading this thing and I thought, "Why am I reading this book? It's horrible." But I will get to the end. I've nearly finished it actually.

V.S. How do you go about choosing books? Do you go for writers or..

J.M. All sorts of things, really. I mean sometimes, I like your bog standard female, not Mills and Boon type romances, but interesting things like Susan Howatch and um particularly when I'm on holiday because of the lighter, and I like crime um I like Dorothy L. Sayers and er um because she's a jolly good writer. But I do like, I tend to like good writers as well if you know what I mean. It annoys me, but I can't stand Jean Plaidy because I just you know there are some that not they are in the same category, but to me they are not very good narratives. You know? I mean, it's a whole range really. I read *The Name of the Rose*. I'd seen the film ages ago. And I found that in the bookshop and it was wonderfully written: it's very good and *The English Patient.* I enjoyed those immensely, because they were both very well written.

V.S. What did you like about The *Name of the Rose*?

J.M. It's so intricate. It's one of those things that you get further and further into. You know it's the complication and of course, it's beautiful writing. It really is exceptionally beautiful writing. But it's the intricacies of the plot with that. It's almost like a labyrinth in that it, you kind of, it's like peeling the onion all the time, and there is layer upon layer. It's amazing. It's a great piece of writing.

V.S. It's interesting. Different people take such different things from that book. Do you remember it because of the detective bits or do you remember it for because of the philosophy ?

J.M. It's this idea of the different layers. To get to the detective bit, you have to go through the philosophy. That's what's fascinating for me, to have a book which anything that has layers in. It's a wonderful novel.

Do you realise that I did English Literature for my degree? I can talk about this for months!

Um. Yes. It's that kind of depth and complexity in a novel that is really appealing, that draws you further and further in. I love that. And yet to have seen the film first - usually when that happens, it's very often disappointing when you read the book, but with both of those, *The English Patient* as well - that's another book that I saw the film first and then read the book. It isn't like the film. I like the film as a film, but the book is different, but I also enjoyed the book, but it was different. It's interesting how the film picked out, almost one strand, there's far more ... around some of the other characters

V.S. I haven't read the book. I've seen the film.

J.M. Um They almost. I mean, I think *The Name of the Rose* as a film is an excellent film. The almost, as far as you can translate a book into film, it's very true to the book, whereas *The English Patient* isn't true. Not true because it is like one story out of a whole lot of stories. Um and it's another book that's complicated in that you have layers. In the book it's not kind of, 'the death of ....' thing. You only get that through, you know, you find that, you make up that story through lots of little bits. You put it together as you go. It isn't written in that way, you know. Whereas what they've done is, all the bits you realise at the end, they've put that all together. They took that and made it into a film if you see what I mean. It never actually exists in the book as a whole story like that. That's fascinating.

V.S. How do you think all that, that interest in text and the way texts were made - do you see strands of that in your teaching? Are you aware of using that?

J.M. I certainly think that – yes – with the children and their writing, I try to get them to see it in a more complex sort of way. And certainly reading - I want them to look at to not take things at face value, to actually think about the stories there is that. But I have to say, being a teaching head, is, you don't, it ruins your teaching!

(short telephone interruption)

....

It's bound to. It does inform what you do. You are thinking about stories in more complicated ways. I'm trying to get the children to think of character and motives and with their reading, literally, not take things at face value.

V.S. Do you think the Literacy Hour has changed the way you do that?

J.M. I think the Literacy Hour has helped tremendously with their writing skills.... ... .. and it certainly isn't helping with their reading. I think if you take the group reading out of the hour and every week give them a chance to have a group reading session, the children will love it and I think it's a very positive thing to do , but my own opinion is that they still need to have individual reading. ....

But the whole part about reading is that they've got this whole thing about skills and decoding right, but it's much more than that, it's more than the sum of the parts. It isn't just decoding and being able to read, for somebody like me, who is an English specialist, it's actually so much more. We've done our best. I think the children have done wonderfully with certain aspects of it, but from the reading point of view, no, I don't think it gives, as a teacher you have to carry on doing extra.

... ...

Because it's death my extract. I think you have to be very careful, with the poetry; you have to be very careful, taking poetry to bits. I mean I think it's very interesting that. I can't remember which poem now, but at the end of one session, because I didn't take it to bits, we just read it and it was this thing about the gold, gold and silver or whatever it was, and I thought, I am not going to do this poem in this big book in this - let's summarise it and look at the adjectives in it way - we going to do it as a poem. And at the end of that session, I said to them " Who likes this poem?" and nearly all the children went like that (gestures) they put their hands up. They liked it. They responded to it as a whole thing and they weren't being asked if they could find all the adjectives.

I tell about *The Listeners* and the children's memory of it after 6 months

It's the feeling behind it, and also the fun behind it. If you take away the fun out of reading, you are making a big mistake, and this is the problem with the Literacy Hour. I think the pressure on teachers is to do it in a rather dry way, you know. Looking at skills, grammar and word level, and all the rest of it and the truth is that if you do that and you haven't got some amount of enjoyment out of it, it's not going to improve the children's reading or writing, because the things are connected and they have to enjoy doing it. And that's the essence of the thing. I have tried. It's not that I rejected the whole thing. I mean I have tried for a whole 12 months, very hard to implement it as best I could.

I mean they loved *Matilda* that they did, because that is fun, and it's using words in a fun way, but even so, they still had to do bits of work from it because that's the way the Literacy Hour does it. But they shouldn't be doing that, they should be just enjoying it! And writing their own. - and it shouldn't be used as source. I think that's the mistake to take every text that you do and to see it as a source of something to teach from.
....

(Knock on door. Interview interrupted for a few minutes, while J.M. deals with enquiry)

V.S. Um. One of the things I notice, that you seem to do quite a lot, is often pick up

on vocabulary. Is that a conscious policy, or something that just happens?

J.M. I think I do that almost without thinking really. That's teaching. I do that even when we're not doing Literacy or English. I think it is - I mean if you don't do that it's very easy for the children not to understand. Because, they don't understand one word and they miss this huge chunk of what you are talking about, because they don't understand one word. So if they don't understand the word 'reflections' and the poem is about reflections, then, from the word go, they are going to have a real problem there. It's very important - it still doesn't always work because there are some children who say yes , yes and you've explained it and they still don't understand what you're saying. and they are the ones who - it's this business about having all the abilities in one classroom. It's so hard to make sure that everybody is on the ball and they all know what you are talking about. .... but you do your best and I think you have to be aware of the words that they might, they are not going to know - or they might have got wrong! That definitely happens - that children have heard a word and they think they know what it means, but they have actually made a mistake in their own minds about what it is. And you can get some very weird and wonderful interpretations because of that!

V.S. Do you, do you go back and look at some texts again?

J.M. We are going to have to, because we can't afford to buy new ones! (Laughs)

V.S. Would you ideally?

J.M. Yes, ideally. This is the trouble with ..... Well I reread things all the time, and you can't keep this constant and certainly it's not practical, we'll not be able to do this. I have to admit a little bit, we've gone back to some things we've done as shared texts - we've done that a couple of times, to do bits and pieces. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I love revisiting stories myself. I want to say to the children: "look, I know you've heard the story before, but we are going to hear it again." Even if you're reading the story, you know, they love that.

(I talk about my experiences of rereading with children in her class)

J.M. It's all too pressured, it's all too pushed through. You shouldn't really be doing that. Not all the time.

V.S. Is there anything else you think you want to say?

J.M. Just that, you know, I do have real concerns about the reading and the fact that there isn't, I mean if we had done it we were supposed to have done, with no individual reading, I would have instigated it again half way through the year. In fact, we didn't do that, but we still don't have enough time. I used to have a plan for my readers. Last year, I had a plan, so I had once a week readers, twice a week readers and three times a week readers and four children who were once a day and we stuck to that plan and with my adult helpers in the class we did it for the whole year and I was much happier with the reading in my class. Because of the Literacy Hour and the group reading, I, we've tried to hear everybody every couple of weeks. Very, very difficult! And the worse thing was, I wasn't able to hear - I mean how we had it working before, it wasn't always me. Those four children who needed support - somebody heard them read every day and even the once a week readers got

the once a week. What's actually happened this year with the way that we've been doing it, is that, what used to be the once weak readers, the able readers, I've only heard about every 4 weeks which is a real shame. I do worry about that. I think it's those middle primary years, what happens is that, parents a s well do this, they think " Oh these children can read!" and the better readers, once they get to that point, nobody practises with them any more, nobody listens to them any more and they don't actually get stretched and pulled further.

The only other thing I feel I want to say is, this links very closely to their self-esteem and confidence. Now, you cannot ignore those two things. It does make an enormous difference. Lara is a good example. She is a very able reader, but she is a child who has very little confidence .....and her writing, as a consequence, isn't a patch on her reading, and it's because she's afraid she's going to make mistakes. The trouble with initiatives like the Literacy Hour, there is no room for children who are like that.

V.S. So what do you hope for these children? What sort of readers

J.M. I hope I would hope they would be readers in the sense that they will enjoy reading for themselves, not because they've got to do it because they are told they've got to do it, so they can get to the point where a book opens up a new world for them. It's, it's the tool of your imagination. But you've got to be a confident reader before you get to that point. Having said that, I think we've got a lot of confident readers around who never get to that point, because that's side of reading, we don't teach. (? word unclear) For me it's almost a spiritual thing. It is a key to a side of yourself, to a world, if you like, that is not just based on success and power and all the things that work in the real world. I would want every children to be able to recognise that and find that themselves.

V.S. I wonder what you think: there are some people like the government, who think the reason we need to read is so we can get a better job - it seems a completely fallacious argument, but there we are, - and some people who think that er reading is a way to self improvement.

J.M. It is.

V.S. Other people would say that it's important as a way of analysing the culture we find ourselves in. Would you go for that - the self improvement one?

J.M. I would say more that that. More than self improvement. It's not just self-improvement; it's the way to self-awareness, which is slightly different. It's self-improvement and self-awareness and it's the self-awareness that is the most important. Books teach you about yourself, ultimately, and that has got to be the ultimate goal of all education – in my opinion.

V.S. Do you think parents hold that opinion?

J.W. No. Parents' perception is that they are being sold this duck at the moment. You know, they are being sold this thing by the government and everybody else that their children have got to succeed and to do this they need to have 'the three Rs'. It's back, it's this back to basics thing, but the basics, basically, are the basics and will always remain the basics, Right? And if that is all your, kind of, aspirations for your child, it isn't particularly self-enhancing, is it?

Appendices

Appendix i

Friars Hall School

Thick Description

a) Setting the scene

Friars Hall School. It sits, squat, by the main road, about three miles out of the city, hedged high and fenced with peeling white railings. A collection of buildings can be seen from the road. The nearest and most striking is Victorian. It rises above the hedge, red brick and gothic, with large, single, mullioned window. A short bell tower echoes the ecclesiastical theme and the school sign confirms it: Friars Hall C of E Primary School. Barred, blind doors face the passer by, impassive, painted. There is a notice: "Welcome to Friars Hall School. Please use the side entrance." There is an arrow.

The visitor follows the arrow round the building into the playground. Here at last some signs of modernity and habitation. Colourful snakes writhe their way across the playground, inviting children to skip and to count. There has been recent building work. An extension to an Early Years classroom juts into the playground. Its broad, bay windows show the book boxes and small furniture within. A courtyard, some planting, and at last an entrance.

The entrance hall is bright and welcoming. The eye is drawn to a bright red notice board. 'Friars Hall School' it proclaims in huge paper letters. Photographs are mounted all around it, some posed, but most informal snaps of staff and children working and playing, outside and in. Nearby, the secretary sits in her room, the door open. Beyond her, guarded by her, is the Head's office. There is a waiting area. Two easy chairs are provided for the visitor and an occasional table. Ranged upon it is a selection of secondary school prospectuses: the local county secondary school is there; so too is the diocesan high school and glossier than both, prospectuses for a number of selective private schools.

A corridor leads away to the left, first past a small non-fiction library, then past a K.S.2 room and finally on to the infant classrooms. It is busy and narrow. Pegs line the walls and the coats, lunchboxes and backpacks of young children clutter the way. It opens soon onto an outside door and small carpeted area. Here are three foam chairs, infant-sized and brightly coloured, arranged beneath a window. There is a low table and a book display case, containing picture books. There are no children here; it is the wrong time of day. This is where those who buy school milk drink it after morning play, where house groups meet for assembly and where television programmes are watched. Occasionally, an adult will bring a child here to read.

A little further and the classrooms are reached. There are two for K.S.1. To the left is the modern room that could be seen from the playground. Here Reception and the younger Yr 1 children work. To the right is the Yr 1/2 room.

The classroom

The classroom fills the greater part of a second Victorian building. The room is large and was once high. Now inelegant grey tiles lower the ceiling, and block off the top of the enormous window that fills the entire back wall. The room should be light, but the

lower window panes, within the teacher's reach, have been covered with pictures of animals, cut from calendars and the upper panes are above the ceiling. Between them a little light filters in. The fluorescent tubes are needed, even in summer.

Narrow strips of brickwork divide the window into three. Attached to each is a long, red banner edged with yellow boarder paper. The first is a chart of number bonds to ten. Large yellow paper numbers have been carefully cut from templates and arranged to show all the ways that 10 can be made by adding two numbers and how they can be set out in sequence. Above the numbers a title asks the reader "Can you make 10?" The other banner is of similar design and displays the five times table. It asks nothing, but states its being: "The 5 Times Table".

Along another wall there is a row of low cupboards and above that a long blackboard. The tops of the cupboards are cluttered with classroom ephemera: pots of pencils, exercise books and abandoned sweatshirts. A central space has been cleared for things of topical interest. A book that Emily brought in about trees is displayed there and another about jungles. An acorn grows in a pot and a solitary tadpole swims in a tank of snails and duckweed. A three-foot high papier mache penguin roosts there. It looks down haughtily on all classroom proceedings.

There is writing on the board: lists of children's names with ticks or crosses beside them to indicate who has completed certain activities; lists of words in 'spelling families' for children to copy and learn; reminders of work to be done, of action to be taken. In the corner, where the board ends, there is a word bank. 26 cardboard pockets, each with a letter drawn on it, are arranged in alphabetical order. Inside each was once a card with a list of common words beginning with that letter. Now the cards are missing.

On the opposite wall examples of children's work have been pinned, unmounted, slightly above the children's eye level. They appear to be cartoon strip representations of a story. There is no explanatory sign and some of the work looks unfinished. Beneath this, against the wall are two book boxes. They have recently been tidied. Two sections contain books from the Oxford Reading Tree series and another is full of Sunshine books. The rest seem to contain a variety of independently published children's picture books. These have been sorted roughly according to size.

These sections of the book boxes are full, there being perhaps thirty books in each partition. A range of children's authors are represented. The Ahlberg's are prominent: many of the Happy Families series can be found and a copy of *A Dark and Stormy Night.* Anthony Browne's *Gorilla* is there, hidden between larger books, and Burningham's *Oi Get Off My Train.* There are books by Charles Keeping, Tony Ross and Babette Cole. There are two copies of Jill Murphy's *Peace At Last.* Shirley Hughes' *Dogger* is there and *Alfie Lends A Hand.* There are three books by Ruth Brown . There are rhyming books by Colin and Jaqui Hawkins and by Lynley Dodds. The Berenstain Bears are there and so too are Frog and Toad. There is a puzzle book called *The Land of the Lost Teddies*, in which children are challenged to help solve a mystery.

The condition and age of these books varies. The best and newest of them are in plastic wallets and are on loan from the schools' library service. Others are battered and show the effects of frequent handling.

A book case, to the right, houses a small collection of what the children refer to as 'chapter books'. A very well thumbed copy of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* is prominently displayed. A dozen or so new books in plastic wallets from the library service are spread along the top shelf. Two of them are novels by Dick King-Smith and another is a collection of Bel Mooney's Kitty stories. *The Suitcase Kid* and *Mark Spark* by Jacqueline Wilson are there and so too is Angie Sage's *Ellie and the Wolves*. Several of these books have slips of paper inside with a child's name on. These pieces of paper appear to function as bookmarks as well as claims of readership.

To the right of these in the corner of the bookcase is a pile of a dozen more paperbacks, these older and tattier than the others and belonging to the classroom. Here again are titles by Dahl and King-Smith. There is another Kitty book and a collection of rhymes. Richard Church's *The White Doe* suggests a different readership. It has inside it the stamp of a charity shop from where it was purchased second-hand. The other shelves of the bookcase house hardback topic books about the rainforest and other natural habitats. They are not displayed, but rest flat on the shelves. The remaining item in the bookcase is a classroom-made book. It is a collection of letters written by children in role as various characters and linked by Postman Pat whose picture stares out from the front cover. The book is called *Postman Pat Visits Storyland.*

This part of the classroom is the reading area. It is carpeted and six bright cushions flop across the floor. They look well used. The teacher's table sections this area off from the rest of the room. It is piled high with files and papers and classroom equipment. The teacher's own reference books are shelved upon it: an illustrated children's Bible, a collection of Bible stories and an anthology of folk tales. There are piles of group readers here too: six or eight copies of the same title for children to read together with an adult. None of the books on this table appears to be generally available to the children; the teacher controls their use.

A hard, wooden desk chair faces away from the table, towards the carpet where the children sit for registration and teaching sessions. This chair and the desk are the only pieces of adult sized furniture in the room.

Beyond this is a 'wet' area. There is a sink and equipment for painting is stored here. Two high, grey tables make a square and on them is a variety of containers ready for some work on capacity. The wall beyond is filled mostly with another display about animals. A commercially produced poster invites the reader to distinguish between reptiles and amphibians and there are more examples of children's work, this time about maths and science. This work too is unmounted and seems to have nothing in common with the rest of the display. A computer sits against this wall and a there is a table. On it are copies of recent letters to parents that the children have taken home. Arrangements for the maypole dancing are here to be read; so too is advice about the eradication of headlice.

The children's tables are hexagonal. They fill the area between the board and the book corner, and are arranged so everyone can see the board. A further table, away from the rest and near the door, provides a place where a disruptive child can be isolated. Above it, book reviews written by some of the children have been pinned straight onto the backing paper that covers the wall. They are all of the same book and each includes a brief summary of the plot, the book's title, author, publisher, price and ISBN number. There is no focal point for this display and no sign to orient the reader. Above it is a chart for the recording of house points.

There is a bank of trays just inside the door, each with a child's name written on it. The children and teachers refer to these as lockers. They are nearly empty. They contain only what the child brings into school from home each day: a bookbag, a sweatshirt, a toy, a recorder. These children do not look after their own work. In a corner there is a rack of dressing up clothes and a dolls' house. These are the only signs in the room of play.

There are about thirty children in the classroom, eighteen of them in year two and the rest in year one. They are all impeccably dressed in school uniform; the boys in grey shorts and aertex shirts; the girls in yellow gingham dresses. They are well and carefully dressed. Some of the girls' frocks have white collars trimmed with yellow gingham and their socks have matching frills. All the children wear royal blue sweatshirts and these are printed with the school badge.

b) Jack and the Beanstalk

This morning the children are sitting on the carpet. Their teacher sits amongst them, high on her sturdy wooden chair. She is in her thirties and has fair, bobbed hair. She is formally dressed in a pale frock and cream coloured cardigan. Her smile, when it comes, is a little wry and she eyes the children with affectionate resignation. She is preparing to read them a story and there is a businesslike quality to the way she organises the class. She explains what she is going to do and invites the children to sit where they can see easily. Some of those who had been sitting with their backs against the teacher's table, facing the body of the class, move.

I sit apart at one of the children's tables, from where I have a good view of everyone. I am close enough to hear everything that is public, but I cannot hear whispers. I can see clearly when they happen. I have a notebook in front of me, and a pen in my hand. The children know I am there and know that I am watching. Every now and again one of them looks up at me and grins. I grin back. We signal friendliness to each other and anticipation.

The children compose themselves, some on the cushions, some leaning against the book boxes or tables. Some squeeze themselves into tiny gaps between the wall and the tables; others almost seem to disappear under the furniture. One or two shuffle forward; they want to be able to see as well as hear the story.

The teacher begins the lesson. She sits slightly forward in her chair and tells the children that she is going to read them an old fashioned version of Jack and the Beanstalk. She reminds them that the week before they had listened to another version of the story, from the radio, in their drama lesson and she asks them to listen for similarities and differences. She tells them that Jack and the Beanstalk is a traditional story. She stresses the word traditional and talks about the oldness of the story. It is one that has been told for years, she says. Even the children's grandparents heard it when they were small. The children listen quietly. They sit mostly still for this introduction, but there eyes are everywhere except on the teacher and their hands stray aimlessly to fiddle with shoes and socks and their friends' hair.

The teacher holds up the book she is going to read from for the children to look at and they do.[1] It is an old book, she says, one that she herself had as a child. She brings the book back to her lap and looks at it. She examines silently the front and back covers, opens the book, considers and says to the children: "You can see it is

[1] The book is *Jack and the Beanstalk*, retold and illustrated by William Stubbs, Kestrel Books 1965

old from the illustrations." She holds it up again and they can. Here are the line drawings that were common in children's books until the early seventies. Pictures are washed in yellow and grey. They seem lifeless and stylised.

She begins to read and a pattern is established: a page is read and then the book turned round so the children can see the pictures. They are clearly used to this and look up when there is a gap in the reading. Some children murmur approvingly. Others mutter, "I didn't see" and wriggle to get a better view. The teacher moves the book through a wider arc so more of the children can see easily.

The story moves on. When Jack is offered the beans, the teacher holds out her hand as if to show them. The children look. Her hand is empty, but they accept the mime. The class is quiet and attentive. Most eyes are fixed on the teacher. The wrigglers have settled and thumbs are creeping into mouths. A lulling calm is established. Stephanie, often an outsider in language activities, shuffles forward to a more central place. She appears to be moving into the story and into the community of listeners.

The teacher continues to read. Jack is sent to bed without any supper. "I bet he's hungry!" says Daisy. Her friends grin in recognition of her truth and daring, but the story moves on. This is clearly unofficial comment and is not recognised. Daisy doesn't speak again.

Jack wakes up and looks out of the window. "What do you think he saw?" says the teacher. She looks up at the children. I am not sure if she is reading the text or asking a direct question, but it hardly matters. "A beanstalk!" the children chorus. "So the little old woman was right after all!" responds the teacher. Again, I am not sure if this is text or comment.[2]

This interaction with text and teacher has unsettled some of the children. They wriggle. They shuffle closer to friends and begin to fiddle with each other's hair and the books in the boxes. The teacher bends down and whispers something settling to Becky. She reaches out and touches Jeremy on the head. He looks up at her, makes eye-contact and abandons the satisfying game he had been playing with the velcro fastening on his shoe. The story resumes.

Soon the children are drawn back into the story and thumbs are put back into mouths. Geraldine, quite silent, begins to draw in the air. Joanna, as the giant thumps his way into the castle, makes steps, one hand above the other in time with her teacher's reading of the footsteps. The teacher stops showing pictures and reads on.

"Fee Fi Fo Fum" she reads and the children take this as a cue to join in. Together they recite the rhyme and the mood becomes suddenly more animated. Those children who were beginning to slump, sit up straight. Everyone is alert. Then, in the story, the giant falls asleep and the teacher, judging the mood, makes exaggerated snoring noises. She causes her shoulders to rise and fall in rhythm with the noise. This is burlesque and the children giggle loudly. They continue as Jack escapes and 'dashes helter-skelter down the beanstalk.' There is a fresh out break of giggles at 'helter-skelter'. In this heightened mood the children are ready to find fun. The play and unfamiliarity of the expression pleases them. That means 'fast' says the teacher, responding instantly.

[2] In fact, both questions are text.

For a while the pantomime continues, the children active participants in the telling of the story. They thump along with the giant's footsteps and they chant his warning. A grin of intense satisfaction spreads over Geraldine's face as she repeats the rhyme for a second and third time. Heads and arms shake as children scurry down the beanstalk with Jack. But the quiet mood that characterised the beginning of the session is broken.

Now there are comments. Olivia whispers something to her friend as the golden egg is laid. Will signs and mouths a message to Robin. "I know what happens when he gets there" says someone else out loud, to no-one in particular. Jack hides from the giant in a copper and the teacher breaks off the narrative to explain what a copper is.

Now involvement in the story is deliberate. The children have sensed that some joining in is acceptable, but are not sure how much of it will be allowed. Robin and Will know too that I am watching them and this appears to make them braver. We make eye contact as they chorus the giant's chant and we smile at each other, signalling fun and complicity. There is a feeling of power amongst the children and when the singing harp is discovered, Robin is confident enough to sing with it. Several children join in but the mood is on the brink of silliness. Somebody makes pig noises. Nothing is said, but the teacher is suddenly alert. She tenses her body and her eyes sweep the class. There is a tiny thrill of disapproval and the singing stops.

She relaxes and carries on with the story. When the harp speaks, Will echoes 'master, master', but he echoes it alone. When the beanstalk is chopped down. Robin anticipates a chorus and begins to chant 'chop, chop...' But nobody picks up his cue and the teacher reads on. Will giggles. He catches my eye. Robin is embarrassed. He goes red, looks at the floor and then at me. I smile reassuringly at him and hope he accepts the sympathy I send.

The story ends and the children chorus "and they all lived happily ever after." Harmony is restored.

The teacher closes the book and sits back in her chair. "You didn't show us all the pictures" complains somebody.

She grins and explains that she wanted to get on with reading the story and that the pictures were not particularly interesting. She decides to show them anyway, holds the book up for them and quickly turns the pages so they can see. She begins to talk again about the art work and production. She explains how much cheaper it used to be to print in one colour rather than many. Modern production techniques have changed that she says, and books are brighter. She looks through the book to find the publication date. "There we are, she says "1965. A long time ago." The children listen, and say nothing.

"Apart from the old-fashioned pictures," she says, "what else did you notice that was different about this story?"

Hands are thrust into the air and the children take turns to name the details they can remember.

> -It was an old lady, not an old man.
> -It was easier to buy the cow from Jack.
> -It was an ogre, not a giant.
> -He had different things...

The teacher accepts all these answers, affirming them with smiles and nods and comments: Yes. Yes that's right. Some times she repeats what the child had said. The list is long and many children have contributed. The teacher is pleased with the class. She smiles benevolently at the children.

Christine puts up her hand. "I know what harp players do…" she says. But she is cut off. This contribution is not acceptable. "Can we talk about that later, Christine? asks the teacher, politely. "I want to get on with writing now". Tom says "I'm thinking about my video." Nobody hears him.

The teacher sets up a writing task loosely based on the story and begins to prepare the children for the work she wants them to do next.

Appendix ii

Classroom observation/video transcript

Pardoners Way School Year Three

The Literacy Hour.

Mrs. Squires sits on her chair in the far corner of the classroom. Just behind her, to her right, is the small table on which the term's topic books are kept, and beside that, the classroom computer. Today it is switched off. To her left is a wooden bookstand. A big book rests open upon it. It shows a double page spread – the poem *The Riding of the Kings* by Eleanor Farjeon.

The children sit before Mrs Squire, mostly on the carpet. A few, including Kylie and Nathan, sit on chairs that define the perimeters of the group. There seem to be fewer children than usual here today, and the atmosphere seems a little more relaxed.

I sit in my usual place by the door of the classroom, diagonally opposite Mrs. Squire. I can see her clearly, and the backs of the children sitting on chairs. I can see the outline of the big book, but the children's bodies obscure the detail. I have the video camera with me, but I do not turn it on until the lesson is well underway.

There is an ancillary helper in the classroom. She too sits outside the group on the carpet.

The lesson begins. Mrs. Squire tells the children that they will be working in groups today. The Red group will read a letter to Father Christmas with Mrs Cook (the ancillary helper), the Yellows will work with me as usual. She will work with the Greens.

She explains that the class is first going to read another Christmas poem. She points to the open page in the big book, invites the children to join in, and begins slowly, to read.

She reads one verse.

Mrs. S: What sort of poem is it? Rhyming or not rhyming?

Some of the children chorus 'rhyming.'

Mrs S: Good. Who can point out a rhyming word?

Somebody shouts out 'day and way'.

Mrs. Squire reads on. She stops at the end of verse two.

Mrs. S: Which are the rhyming words?

A number of children put up their hands.

Mrs S: Nathan?
N: *Old* rhymes with *gold.*

Mrs S: Good boy!

She casts her eyes round the whole of the group

Mrs S: Look at their spelling. What can you say about them?
Tina: They've got the same letters
Mrs. S: Not all of the same letters – but some of them.

She goes back over the first two verses of the poem, and points out the rhymes *day, way, all, fall, green, between.* The endings are always the same.

She reads v. 3. I turn on the video camera.

Mrs. S: and suddenly, it's changed. The rule we've just talked about for the rhyming words has suddenly changed. We know that 'sense' rhymes with 'experience' *(she points to the words on the page)*
'eyes' and 'wise' *(again points to the words)*
But how has the rule changed?

Hand begin to wave in the air., but Mrs S is distracted by a child on the floor. She clicks her fingers, swings round and points to the child on her right.

Mrs S: NOT a hairdressers

She turns back to the class.

Mrs. S: How has the rule changed? Sense, experience. *(points again)* They rhyme. Eyes, wise. They rhyme. How has the rule changed?
In this verse *(she gestures towards the poem)* we had this rule.
(with her fingers she mimes taking the rime from old and gold and placing them side by side)
It's the same letters making the same sound. Now what's happened?

Colin: The sound is the same but the letters are different.

Mrs. S: Good Boy! The way we are reading it, the letters are different. If you look closely at the spelling, 'sense' has an 's'. Experience that it rhymes with has a 'c' in the ending. 'Eyes' has an 'es' ending. 'Wise' has an 'se' ending. But when we read it, we get the same sound. Sense, experience, eyes, wise.
Next verse.

She reads aloud to the end of the poem in a sing-song voice that stresses the rhyme and the rhythm of the poem. A few of the children join in.

Mrs. S: Who wrote the poem? Who can see who wrote the poem?

She looks around. She coughs. Nathan's hand waves in the air. From where I am sitting, it is unclear whether he is stretching or offering an answer. He lowers his hand.

Mrs. S: Who wrote the poem?

She waits. Somebody mutters 'don't know'

She points to the words

Mrs S: Eleanor Farjeon. If we don't know who wrote a poem, what is written at the end? Who remembers? Yes? If we don't know who wrote the poem?

Hands go up. Mrs. S. nods and leans towards a child on the floor. There is an answer, but I do not hear it.

Mrs. S. *(nodding affirmation)* Anon. a.n.o.n. That means we don't know who wrote the poem. But we do today. Eleanor Farjeon wrote the poem.

There is a pause while the classroom assistant helps a child out of the room. Everybody turns to watch.

Mrs. S : Now, the word work we are going to think about is about putting words in a certain way, *(She reaches behind her for a book from the display table)* a certain order *(she flicks through the book to the end. She waits.)* and making a page of words. Carefully chosen words. Not little joining words like 'and ' and 'the', O.K? Carefully chosen words.
Now, I've got a page here in this book about Roman cities. (*She turns the book round and holds it up to the class)*
And the page has a heading called glossary.
(she clicks her fingers three times to gain the class's attention.)
And on that page are carefully chosen words. Carefully chosen words. Can you see how they are printed on the page? Put your hands up. Nathan?

Nathan speaks. His brief answer is unclear. Mrs. Squire nods.

Mrs. S: Some of the words are really dark. If you print it like that it makes the words stand out from the other words doesn't it? Some of the words are very dark. It makes them stand out. They are carefully chosen words.
Can anybody look down the column of carefully chosen words, the darkest words and tell me how they are organised, how they are ordered? Sinead?

Sinead: They are alphabetical.

Mrs. S: They are in alphabetical order.
My Greens this morning are going to make their own glossary – but not about Romans. It is going to be a glossary of Christmas words. Now as you can see, next to the carefully chosen printed words, there's also an explanation. So it's not just a page of words in alphabetical order, it's carefully chosen words and it's an explanation of what those words mean. Not where we find it in the book, but what it means.

Mrs Squire looks again at the book in her hand. She reads from it.

Mrs. S: It says 'taxes'. We hear about taxes, don't we? Taxes that the Romans called and made Mary and Joseph go and pay in Bethlehem. Taxes. That's the carefully chosen word here. That's the explanation beside it *(she reads aloud)* "money which people pay to the ruler of

> their land." That's what Mary and Joseph had to do in the Christmas story.

So that's the sort of page I expect to see made by my Greens today.

Appendix iii

The intervention

The following charts show the weeks of the Intervention stage of this research and the texts the children and I read together.

1. Texts introduced by me at Friars Hall and Parsons Field:

Week 1	"The Way through the Woods" Kipling, R. in *I Like This Poem,* K. Webb (ed) (1979) Puffin
Week 2	"The Listeners" de la Mare, W. in *I Like This Poem,* K. Webb (ed) (1979) Puffin
Week 3	*It's Not Fair!* Mooney, B. (1991) London: Mammoth
Week 4	*Gorilla* Browne A (1983) London: Magnet
Week 5	*Piggybook*, London: Walker Browne, A (1986)
Week 6	*Bring in the Holly* London: Francis Lincoln Causley, C. (1992)
	Christmas break
Week 7	*Courtney* Burningham, J. (1996) London: Red Fox Paperback
Week 8	*Julian Secret Agent Cameron.* A (1989) London:Gollancz
Weeks 9-14	} } various texts provided by individual children. (see below) }
	Summer term
	Rereading: "The Way through the Woods" and "The Listeners"
	Voices in the Park, Browne, A (1998) London: Doubleday

2. Texts introduced by the children

	Disney Year Book 1997 Grolier Incoporated
	Merlin's Premier League 99, Official Sticker Book
Blyton, E. (1993)	*The Magic Clock and Other Stories* Award Publications
Dodds. L. (1991)	*Hairy Maclary's Showbusiness* Barnstaple: Spindlewood
Gates, S (1996)	*Pet Swapping Day* Young Hippo School, Scholastic Children's Books
Hargreaves, R. (1998)	*Mr. Messy* World International Paperback

Hunter, J. (1999) *The Pet Detectives* Harper Collins
Laird, E (1995) *Stinker Muggles and the Dazzle Bug* London: Collins
McCall Smith, A, (1997) *The Chocolate Money Mystery* Young Hippo Adventure, Scholastic Children's Books
Nina and Claire (1999) *Goosebumps.* Book made at home by children
Stine, R.L (1995) *Goosebumps: Monster Blood 2* Scholastic Children's Books
Weetabix (1989) *The Weetabix Illustrated British History Book.*

3. 'Prompt sheet' given to the children before the second stage of the intervention:

Some questions to think about before you introduce your book

Which bit of the book did you like best?

Was it exciting? Which bits excited you? Tell us about them.

Were there bits that made you laugh? Which were they?

Did the book scare you? When were you scared?

Did you like the people in the story? Who did you like best? What did you like about them? What didn't you like about them? Was there anyone really horrid in the book?

What else did you like about the book?

What else would you like to tell us about it?

4. At Pardoners Way:

Week 1	Shape poems	Poems supplied by class teacher.
Week 2		"Cats" E. Farjeon in *I Like This Poem*, K. Webb (ed) (1979) Puffin
Week 3	Story -openings	*Little Rabbit Foo Foo* Rosen, M. and Robins, A (1992) London: Walker Books
Week 4	Story – organisation of dialogue	*Little Rabbit Foo Foo*

Week 5	Christmas	*Little Angel* McCaughrean, G. (1995) London: Orchard
Week 6		*Bring in the Holly* London: Francis Lincoln Causley, C. (1992)
		Spring term
Week 8	Story- character	*I Don't Want To!* Mooney, B (1990) London: Mammoth
Week 9		*I Don't Want To!*
Week 10		*The Jolly Witch* King-Smith, D (1990) Hemel Hempstead: Simon and Schuster
Week 11	Non fiction	*Think of an Eel* Wallace, K (1995) London: Walker Books
Week 12	Instructions	Games downloaded from B.B.C *Really Wild Show* website
Week13		Special offer instructions from cat food box
Week 14	Poems from other cultures	"Children, Children" Traditional Caribbean in *Chanting Rhymes*, Foster (ed) (1996) Oxford University Press
Week 14		"Ar-ar-at" Grace Nichols in *A Caribbean Dozen*, Agard and Nichols (eds.) London: Walker (1994)
		Summer term
		Rereading *Little Rabbit Foo Foo*
		Voices in the Park, Browne, A (1998) London: Doubleday

Appendix iv

Transcript of audiotape intervention.

Parsons Field.

Re-reading Kipling

I tell the children that I am interested in finding out what they think of poems now that we read months ago. Claire is interested. "The one about the woods?" she asks "That was really spooky!"

Claire and Hester come with me to Head's office. I ask: so what do you remember about this poem? I turn on the tape recorder.

Claire: I remember! There was, there was skirts splashing across the thingy..
Hester: Yeah! That was weird, that was.
Claire: That was the weird one. The weirdest poem I saw
Hester: It goes across the grass
Claire: That's what I thought was weird about it.
V.S The swishing sound of the skirts in the dew?
(They make swishing noises)

V.S: Do you remember any thing else?
Claire: Well, there were horse chariots
Hester: Oh Yeah, there was things like that
Claire: Um. Well there was
Hester: We thought there was
Claire: probably, like dead people
Hester: With their skirts hanging on trees
(giggles)

VS: Is that what you thought?
Hester: No *(still laughing)* we didn't think that!
V.S: You didn't think that?
Hester: I did for a while
V.S You did for a while, but you changed your mind afterwards?
(Hester giggles)

Claire: I thought. When we first read it, I thought
Hester: "This is strange."
Claire: *(unclear)...*riding across the grass in their chariots, and I thought
Hester: ... there's ghosts wearing skirts, and the skirts fell off in the wind *(words lost in more giggling)* grass
Both girls giggle

V.S: Do you remember anything else about it? What was strange about it?

Claire: There was. I thought it was strange because, I thought there was horse...*(she giggles. Words unclear)*
Hester: No, the chariots died and the ghosts were still wearing skirts. They were flying along one day (giggle) and the wind *(words lost in more giggles)*
V.S Oh I think you are being silly now.
Hester: That's the only thing I can think of.
V.S: Shall we have a look at it, then?
Claire: *(eagerly)* Yes
Hester: Yes. I think it's strange.
Claire: I still had that in my drawer when I cleared it out
V.S.: Did you? Do you want me to read it or would one of you two like to?

Claire begins to read. Reads first line. Accentuates rhythm at end of second. Hester joins in. They struggle with coppice and anemone. Confidence grows at

You will hear the beat of horses' feet
And the swish of a skirt in the dew

Claire: Now the horses are wearing skirts

Hester reads on. They finish reading together.

Hester: That's a bit strange.
Claire: Yeah.
Hester: a bit
Claire: 'Cos if there's no road through the woods, how come there's
Hester: *(With the slow emphasis of one humouring an idiot)* 'Cos it's grown over now, Claire.
V.S: So there used to be a road, and now it's grown
Claire: That gave me the feeling that horses were wearing skirts.
V.S.: But you know it's silly, don't you?
Claire: I know
V.S: How do you know it's silly?
Hester: Have you got the answers to this?
Claire: I can just see it, right, 'cos all I think of is cartoons, and all I saw was horses wearing skirts, going clip-clop.
Hester: and then they are going "la lah lah...

V.S: Hester, What answers? Have I got the answers, you said. What do you mean?
Hester: Oh no! Not again!
V.S: Answers to what?
Hester: um... *(she fiddles with her shoe)*
Claire: Oh! Answers to the questions
Hester: Yeah.
Claire: I still don't get..
V.S: Tell me the questions.
Hester: The answer to the poem. It's a bit like a strange two verse riddle.
Claire: The swish of the skirts in the dew. It's a bit of a strange.
Hester: One shoe broke, now the other shoe broke. I'll have to sew this one together, but my mum can't sew,
V.S: Oh dear

Hester:	so I'll have to wear this pair of silver shoes. But she might be able to. They are annoying, these shoes.
Claire:	You can ask my mum
V.S:	What are the questions, going back to the poem, that you'd like answered?
Hester:	Um
Claire:	They shut the road through the woods. I believe that.
Hester:	I mean, The skirts across the grass
V.S:	Whose skirts are they?
Hester:	It might be a ghost or something,
Claire:	We said that last time.
Hester:	because the people who were driving the chariots
Claire:	crashed
Hester:	or died or something, then the ghosts
Claire:	Yeah, but it doesn't say chariots, it says horses.
V.S:	Yes. It doesn't say chariots, does it?
Hester:	They are horses. Driving, or people might
Claire:	I think, it's like
V.S:	What's the story of the road?
Claire:	er
V.S.	There used to be a road...
Claire:	yeah. And then it's been shut down and then
Hester:	all trees have grown over it
Claire:	Yeah, but the road's still probably showing a bit, that's why the, Oh no and the
V.S:	Do people still go in this wood?
Hester:	No
Claire:	and they have memories of long ago
V.S:	how do you know, hang on, that people don't go there any more?
Hester:	it says in the poem. 'Cos
Claire:	and , and . The wood was probably
Hester:	Oh I remember that one *(she points towards another sheet of paper from my pile)*
Claire:	*The Listeners*
Hester:	*The Listeners*. I remember that scary one.
V.S:	Let's just finish talking about this first, then we'll come on to that in a minute. O.K?
V.S:	So. There was a road? They closed the road through the woods seventy years ago, and hardly anyone goes there now.
Hester:	Yes. Because it's so spooky
V.S:	So that the animals are tame. They aren't frightened of people. Ok? Is that right?
Claire:	Are we going to listen to this afterwards?
V.S:	If there is time. But if you do go into the woods
Claire:	You get a bit scared
V.S:	In the evening, you hear
Claire:	Owls. Otters
	Hester whistles
Claire:	and birds

Hester: The doves. And the ringed trout pools
V.S: what else does it say in the poem?
Claire: and you might, if you were quite old and you went in the road seventy years ago, you might remember the brush of skirts on the grass and um, horses trotting along.
Hester: We're getting somewhere, Claire!

V.S reads second stanza of poem

V.S: What might you hear?
Claire: horses hooves
Hester: The trout ringed pools, the otter. The otters are dead now in this country.
V.S: I think they are coming back again. Claire was right. It does say you'll hear the beat of horses feet. You'll *hear* them,
Claire takes Hester's shoe and begins to make hoof beat noises with it.
Hester: Can I have my shoe back, please?
V.S: I don't think we really need to make trotting noises, Claire. We haven't got time.
Claire: I was only doing a clipclop sound.

V.S: You'll hear the horses

Claire makes horse noises with her tongue

Hester: Shut up Claire!
V.S: You'll hear, you'll hear the beat of horses feet and you'll hear the swish of skirts in the dew. You'll hear them. Will you see them?
Claire: No
Hester: You might do
Claire: cos, they never see men. That means women as well, in there
Hester stands up and looks out of the window.
Hester: Cor! Look at those big conkers on that tree!
V.S: They're not very big yet, are they?
Hester: Some of them are
Claire: *(giggles, affects grown up voice)* There's not time for speaking about that!
Hester: Yeah Claire.

V.S: Do you think this poem is better the first time, or when you read it again after a long time?
Claire: } first
Hester: } second
Claire: Oh, I don't know! It's the same.
V.S. What's different?
Claire: I don't think there is anything different
Hester: Well you pay more attention to it because you are older
Claire: yeah.
Hester: and you get a few more ideas

Claire: But I don't think it's so, it loses its spookiness. If it was a really lovely poem, right, you'd expect it's lovely, but if it's all spooky, you don't feel if it's so spooky..
Hester: yeah you do
Claire: I don't
V.S: You still think it's spooky?
Hester: Yeah
Claire: I don't. I don't that much. I still think it's spooky
Hester: There was a spookier one called *the Travellers*
V.S: Do you want to look at that one too?
Claire: Yeah, yeah, ye ye ye eyah!

Appendix v

Schedule for teacher interviews

1 You as a reader	Tell me about your memories of reading as a child. What is your reading like now?
2. Success in reading	Tell me about what you think counts as success in reading -in year 2/year 3 -eventually What do you look for to recognise that success? What sort of things do you do to achieve that success? -for day to day reading -for the future
3. You in the school	Tell me about the school reading policy and the resources. How does what you try to do fit in with these?
4. Parents and children	Tell me about the parents. Do you think they share your aims for their children as readers? How far do you think that what you do matches what they want? What do you think the children think?

Appendix vi

Friars Hall School

Interview with Teacher – Mrs Merchant

V.S. Do you have strong memories of yourself as a child?

J.M. I was always a reader. I could read before I went to school, but then I don't think in those days you went to school until you were 5, but, um, I know, I remember books being around. I shared a room with my big sister, who was 6 years older than me who was a book-aholic and still is, which meant I was reading things that were older than I should. I mean I read things like *Wuthering Heights* when I was 10, scared myself to death with that, under the bedclothes, when, I was 10, you know I can remember reading it to the bit, I read it through, you know, in bed, on my own, until I got to the point about, you know, the window, there's a bit in it, with er, the ghost outside, tapping on the window, the child ghost saying 'let me in' oh, and I remember, and then Heathcliffe: Cathy....... and he throws the ... down, and I can remember going bang with the book (mimes slamming it down) and flying under the bedclothes being absolutely terrified. I really terrified myself with it.

Um but. There were all sorts of other things I read that I probably shouldn't have done, round about ten and eleven because they were my sister's books

V.S. Have you read them since?

J.M. Oh yes. *Wuthering Heights* I must have read 10 times if I've read it once ...and so I was very lucky. And also when I was in my teens, between the ages of about 11 and 16, my brother and I don't agree on this, there were 6 years, or 5 or 6 years when we didn't have a television. We had to go to our auntie's house to watch things like the er ..er .. the one about the Port Merion thing, the Prisoner, things like that in our teens. He reckons it was when we were older, but I don't. I remember it from when I was in my young teens, but during that time, of course, we hated it (laughs), but we read a lot more than other teenagers because we didn't have a television.

V.S. So. When you were growing up with this big sister, did she read to you?

J.M. No. No. I've no memory of anyone ever reading anything to me. I used to read books, I used to make up the story. When I was 4 or 5 I used to read, but I'd actually make the story up, out loud, but I'd be making the story up as I went along from the pictures. I remember doing that.

V.S. It sounds a very rich sort of childhood

J.M. yeah, it was poor

V.S. I mean as far as experiences are concerned.

J.M. Oh yes. Working class. You get some people like this. My parents were working class people who met over opera records. My dad was a shoe maker and my

mum was in the NAAFI at the time. So they were working class people who were a bit like the Welsh. They were absolutely absorbed and terribly interested in culture and in education in general.

V.S. Do you remember them reading at home?

J.M. {Yes
{
V.S. { to themselves?

J.W. Yes

V.S. and that was books, newspapers?

J.M. Everything. All sorts of things my dad used to read. He wrote plays, he wrote poetry and plays. I've actually got them. When he was in the army he wrote a lot of poetry and er, it's very bad poetry, it's not, I mean..

V.S. That's not the point!

J.M. And he wrote pantomimes for the church and he wrote, he also wrote a couple of plays. We had an old typewriter he used to band away at. I mean he wasn't really an educated person at all. He was self educated, but um during the was in Italy, with no socks and only his battle dress that had apparently only a piece of wool, that's all he could find connecting the buttons, right, so he hadn't got his full kit, he went to the opera in Milan.

V.S. Good for him!

J.W. Er dressed, because he happened to find himself in Milan, so he went to the opera!

V.S. Excellent! That shows spirit, doesn't it?

J.M. Yes. And you know, it was that kind of so we were very poor though, very poor. We had no money, but I do recognise now that it was a very rich kind of cultural background.

J.M. And at school I always remember always, always being interested in reading. My first memory of school was the very first day., I remember it very clearly, I know exactly what I did. I must have been literary right from the word go, because the teacher put on these rubber overalls and a great big sheet of paper, it seemed like a field, on a thing and told me to paint a picture. I think it's terribly Freudian and terribly egotistical, because, I'd obviously been told about writing and writing my name and I was expecting to do that, I think and I got there and here I was with this huge field of paper and she was saying paint a picture, so I er I made, I got red paint and with huge letters I wrote 'Janet' right across it and then I got the blue paint, cause they were in kind of jars with ... in the top, and I got the blue paint and I did a kind of curly line all the way round. She must have thought 'we've got a right egoist here!' She said "That's very nice dear" and took it off put another piece on and said "now paint a picture!"

But I mean, I remember that and that was the first day, so I would say words were always important to me.

V.S. Do you remember what happened in learning to read at school? Despite the fact you could read, were you put on the Janet and John schemes?

J.W. It was *Janet and John.* I remember reading *Janet and John,* but I remember very quickly going through *Janet and John* on to other things; so was always a confident reader and I remember reading in carol services and er, plays. We were. My family were Primitive Methodists and it was that kind of environment where, you know, at Church and Sunday School there was a lot of reading, it was very, so we were reading hymns or whatever.

Salvation and lift as they used to call it.

V.S. Did they?

J.M. Have you never heard that? Very nonconformist. The idea of, if you look back through the century, what happened with a lot of nonconformists is that, because of their religion, they were very committed to education so they got salvation and lift.

Um, but it was, er very, word orientated, very literary, sort of.

V.S. What about now? Are you still as literary orientated, or isn't there the time?

J.M. When I've got time, I haven't done it for the past 4 years, I do write. So does my sister. Neither of us has ever been published, but I've written a series of children's books and a series for TV: that almost got on TV, that was about 10 years ago. I got a second reading, with Channel 4, which takes a lot of doing when you are an amateur. Um and I've written a couple of children's books just for my own pleasure. Not poetry, no, I've never written poetry, but it is my, I would say if I had the time, I used to do it before I became a head teacher

And I read all the time, and novels. I have to say I read more novels, and I find it harder to read government circulars. You know you've got to have a kind of brain, because we have in this job, there's just so much that you have to absorb in the way of reading that comes from the government. That whole stack there, that's more stuff about literacy that's a new lot, new on top of all the things we had last year, that lot arrived two weeks ago, all these booklets. And I do find it increasingly hard.

V.S. It's dull isn't it?

J.W. It is. It is very dry and very difficult and I have to say as a head teacher I'm supposed to do an enormous amount of reading and I tend to do a lot of skimming and scanning and I read the summaries and it's awful to admit now, but it's true, because it doesn't do very much for me. Yes reading books, it isn't just reading, books themselves are very important to me. I recognise that now because a year, I lived in a house a few years ago when we were in between moves and all my books were packed in a loft, because we had nowhere to put them, so I had to live for 12 months without the books on the shelves and I hadn't realised until that point how much that meant.

V.S. You feel as though part of you is missing, don't you?

J.W. That's right. I get very possessive about books. I don't like throwing them

away.

V.S. No. I don't! So what are you reading now?

J.M. Oh! It's awful actually, I don't like it I bought, I frequent the Oxfam bookshop in Malvern

V.S. It's good isn't it?

J.M. Yes. It's a very good price and I pick up all sorts of things in there. I picked up the ... first ... stories by Ernest Hemmingway. I remember reading them, I haven't read Hemmingway for years. I remember reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls* when I was about 18 and really enjoying it, so I thought, "Oh I haven't read this, something I haven't read! Goody" But actually, it wasn't they are gruesome. They are all about, the bullfighting ones are absolutely hideous, so I'm reading them in bed going, "euuugh!"

V.S. I read one years ago about an Indian woman ...

J.M. yes

V.S. {giving birth
{
J.M. { giving birth

V.S. and the husband cuts his throat.. The memory has stayed with me so clearly, and it must be 20 years since I read it!

J.M. Honestly, the other night, two nights ago, I was reading this thing and I thought, "Why am I reading this book? It's horrible." But I will get to the end. I've nearly finished it actually.

V.S. How do you go about choosing books? Do you go for writers or..

J.M. All sorts of things, really. I mean sometimes, I like your bog standard female, not Mills and Boon type romances, but interesting things like Susan Howatch and um particularly when I'm on holiday because of the lighter, and I like crime um I like Dorothy L. Sayers and er um because she's a jolly good writer. But I do like, I tend to like good writers as well if you know what I mean. It annoys me, but I can't stand Jean Plaidy because I just you know there are some that not they are in the same category, but to me they are not very good narratives. You know? I mean, it's a whole range really. I read *The Name of the Rose*. I'd seen the film ages ago. And I found that in the bookshop and it was wonderfully written: it's very good and *The English Patient.* I enjoyed those immensely, because they were both very well written.

V.S. What did you like about The *Name of the Rose*?

J.M. It's so intricate. It's one of those things that you get further and further into. You know it's the complication and of course, it's beautiful writing. It really is exceptionally beautiful writing. But it's the intricacies of the plot with that. It's almost like a labyrinth in that it, you kind of, it's like peeling the onion all the time, and there is layer upon layer. It's amazing. It's a great piece of writing.

V.S. It's interesting. Different people take such different things from that book. Do you remember it because of the detective bits or do you remember it for because of the philosophy ?

J.M. It's this idea of the different layers. To get to the detective bit, you have to go through the philosophy. That's what's fascinating for me, to have a book which anything that has layers in. It's a wonderful novel.

Do you realise that I did English Literature for my degree? I can talk about this for months!

Um. Yes. It's that kind of depth and complexity in a novel that is really appealing, that draws you further and further in. I love that. And yet to have seen the film first - usually when that happens, it's very often disappointing when you read the book, but with both of those, *The English Patient* as well - that's another book that I saw the film first and then read the book. It isn't like the film. I like the film as a film, but the book is different, but I also enjoyed the book, but it was different. It's interesting how the film picked out, almost one strand, there's far more ... around some of the other characters

V.S. I haven't read the book. I've seen the film.

J.M. Um They almost. I mean, I think *The Name of the Rose* as a film is an excellent film. The almost, as far as you can translate a book into film, it's very true to the book, whereas *The English Patient* isn't true. Not true because it is like one story out of a whole lot of stories. Um and it's another book that's complicated in that you have layers. In the book it's not kind of, 'the death of ....' thing. You only get that through, you know, you find that, you make up that story through lots of little bits. You put it together as you go. It isn't written in that way, you know. Whereas what they've done is, all the bits you realise at the end, they've put that all together. They took that and made it into a film if you see what I mean. It never actually exists in the book as a whole story like that. That's fascinating.

V.S. How do you think all that, that interest in text and the way texts were made - do you see strands of that in your teaching? Are you aware of using that?

J.M. I certainly think that – yes – with the children and their writing, I try to get them to see it in a more complex sort of way. And certainly reading - I want them to look at to not take things at face value, to actually think about the stories there is that. But I have to say, being a teaching head, is, you don't, it ruins your teaching!

(short telephone interruption)

....

It's bound to. It does inform what you do. You are thinking about stories in more complicated ways. I'm trying to get the children to think of character and motives and with their reading, literally, not take things at face value.

V.S. Do you think the Literacy Hour has changed the way you do that?

J.M. I think the Literacy Hour has helped tremendously with their writing skills.... ... .. and it certainly isn't helping with their reading. I think if you take the group reading out of the hour and every week give them a chance to have a group reading session, the children will love it and I think it's a very positive thing to do , but my own opinion is that they still need to have individual reading. ....

But the whole part about reading is that they've got this whole thing about skills and decoding right, but it's much more than that, it's more than the sum of the parts. It isn't just decoding and being able to read, for somebody like me, who is an English specialist, it's actually so much more. We've done our best. I think the children have done wonderfully with certain aspects of it, but from the reading point of view, no, I don't think it gives, as a teacher you have to carry on doing extra.

... ...

Because it's death my extract. I think you have to be very careful, with the poetry; you have to be very careful, taking poetry to bits. I mean I think it's very interesting that. I can't remember which poem now, but at the end of one session, because I didn't take it to bits, we just read it and it was this thing about the gold, gold and silver or whatever it was, and I thought, I am not going to do this poem in this big book in this - let's summarise it and look at the adjectives in it way - we going to do it as a poem. And at the end of that session, I said to them " Who likes this poem?" and nearly all the children went like that (gestures) they put their hands up. They liked it. They responded to it as a whole thing and they weren't being asked if they could find all the adjectives.

I tell about *The Listeners* and the children's memory of it after 6 months

It's the feeling behind it, and also the fun behind it. If you take away the fun out of reading, you are making a big mistake, and this is the problem with the Literacy Hour. I think the pressure on teachers is to do it in a rather dry way, you know. Looking at skills, grammar and word level, and all the rest of it and the truth is that if you do that and you haven't got some amount of enjoyment out of it, it's not going to improve the children's reading or writing, because the things are connected and they have to enjoy doing it. And that's the essence of the thing. I have tried. It's not that I rejected the whole thing. I mean I have tried for a whole 12 months, very hard to implement it as best I could.

I mean they loved *Matilda* that they did, because that is fun, and it's using words in a fun way, but even so, they still had to do bits of work from it because that's the way the Literacy Hour does it. But they shouldn't be doing that, they should be just enjoying it! And writing their own. - and it shouldn't be used as source. I think that's the mistake to take every text that you do and to see it as a source of something to teach from.
....

(Knock on door. Interview interrupted for a few minutes, while J.M. deals with enquiry)

V.S. Um. One of the things I notice, that you seem to do quite a lot, is often pick up

on vocabulary. Is that a conscious policy, or something that just happens?

J.M. I think I do that almost without thinking really. That's teaching. I do that even when we're not doing Literacy or English. I think it is - I mean if you don't do that it's very easy for the children not to understand. Because, they don't understand one word and they miss this huge chunk of what you are talking about, because they don't understand one word. So if they don't understand the word 'reflections' and the poem is about reflections, then, from the word go, they are going to have a real problem there. It's very important - it still doesn't always work because there are some children who say yes , yes and you've explained it and they still don't understand what you're saying. and they are the ones who - it's this business about having all the abilities in one classroom. It's so hard to make sure that everybody is on the ball and they all know what you are talking about. .... but you do your best and I think you have to be aware of the words that they might, they are not going to know - or they might have got wrong! That definitely happens - that children have heard a word and they think they know what it means, but they have actually made a mistake in their own minds about what it is. And you can get some very weird and wonderful interpretations because of that!

V.S. Do you, do you go back and look at some texts again?

J.M. We are going to have to, because we can't afford to buy new ones! (Laughs)

V.S. Would you ideally?

J.M. Yes, ideally. This is the trouble with ..... Well I reread things all the time, and you can't keep this constant and certainly it's not practical, we'll not be able to do this. I have to admit a little bit, we've gone back to some things we've done as shared texts - we've done that a couple of times, to do bits and pieces. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. I love revisiting stories myself. I want to say to the children: "look, I know you've heard the story before, but we are going to hear it again." Even if you're reading the story, you know, they love that.

(I talk about my experiences of rereading with children in her class)

J.M. It's all too pressured, it's all too pushed through. You shouldn't really be doing that. Not all the time.

V.S. Is there anything else you think you want to say?

J.M. Just that, you know, I do have real concerns about the reading and the fact that there isn't, I mean if we had done it we were supposed to have done, with no individual reading, I would have instigated it again half way through the year. In fact, we didn't do that, but we still don't have enough time. I used to have a plan for my readers. Last year, I had a plan, so I had once a week readers, twice a week readers and three times a week readers and four children who were once a day and we stuck to that plan and with my adult helpers in the class we did it for the whole year and I was much happier with the reading in my class. Because of the Literacy Hour and the group reading, I, we've tried to hear everybody every couple of weeks. Very, very difficult! And the worse thing was, I wasn't able to hear - I mean how we had it working before, it wasn't always me. Those four children who needed support - somebody heard them read every day and even the once a week readers got

the once a week. What's actually happened this year with the way that we've been doing it, is that, what used to be the once weak readers, the able readers, I've only heard about every 4 weeks which is a real shame. I do worry about that. I think it's those middle primary years, what happens is that, parents a s well do this, they think " Oh these children can read!" and the better readers, once they get to that point, nobody practises with them any more, nobody listens to them any more and they don't actually get stretched and pulled further.

The only other thing I feel I want to say is, this links very closely to their self-esteem and confidence. Now, you cannot ignore those two things. It does make an enormous difference. Lara is a good example. She is a very able reader, but she is a child who has very little confidence .....and her writing, as a consequence, isn't a patch on her reading, and it's because she's afraid she's going to make mistakes. The trouble with initiatives like the Literacy Hour, there is no room for children who are like that.

V.S. So what do you hope for these children? What sort of readers

J.M. I hope I would hope they would be readers in the sense that they will enjoy reading for themselves, not because they've got to do it because they are told they've got to do it, so they can get to the point where a book opens up a new world for them. It's, it's the tool of your imagination. But you've got to be a confident reader before you get to that point. Having said that, I think we've got a lot of confident readers around who never get to that point, because that's side of reading, we don't teach. (? word unclear) For me it's almost a spiritual thing. It is a key to a side of yourself, to a world, if you like, that is not just based on success and power and all the things that work in the real world. I would want every children to be able to recognise that and find that themselves.

V.S. I wonder what you think: there are some people like the government, who think the reason we need to read is so we can get a better job - it seems a completely fallacious argument, but there we are, - and some people who think that er reading is a way to self improvement.

J.M. It is.

V.S. Other people would say that it's important as a way of analysing the culture we find ourselves in. Would you go for that - the self improvement one?

J.M. I would say more that that. More than self improvement. It's not just self-improvement; it's the way to self-awareness, which is slightly different. It's self-improvement and self-awareness and it's the self-awareness that is the most important. Books teach you about yourself, ultimately, and that has got to be the ultimate goal of all education – in my opinion.

V.S. Do you think parents hold that opinion?

J.W. No. Parents' perception is that they are being sold this duck at the moment. You know, they are being sold this thing by the government and everybody else that their children have got to succeed and to do this they need to have 'the three Rs'. It's back, it's this back to basics thing, but the basics, basically, are the basics and will always remain the basics, Right? And if that is all your, kind of, aspirations for your child, it isn't particularly self-enhancing, is it?

Appendix vii
Children's reading questionnaire

About Reading	Name
1 I like reading	
2 I like reading with my mum and dad	
I like reading with my teacher	
I like reading with my brother or sister	
I like reading with my friend	
I like reading to my toys	
I like reading to myself	
Reading to ------------------------------ is best.	

3	
I like reading at home	
I like reading at school	
At home , my favourite place to read is	
At school, my favourite place to read is	
My favourite place of all for reading is	
4	
The things I read at home are better than school books	
School books are better than the ones I have at home	
The best books come from the library	
My favourite books are	

Appendix viii

Parsons Field School

Group interview Year 2 Gillian, Brian, Oliver, Hester

V.S: I've noticed that in your classroom there's different sorts of reading that happens
All: yes
O: levels
V.S: There's paired reading,
B: levels
O: silent reading
V.S: levels don't really interest me so much. Silent reading? Ha ha Not very silent is it?
B half time reading?
V.S What's that?
B I don't know really
V.S There's paired reading?
O Yeah
V.S silent reading
There's when somebody reads you a story
H When the teacher is listening to you
V.S I haven't heard, seen Mrs Franklin doing that but she does. Does she?
B yeah
H yep
O she does that
V.S and there's when you read your own work to see what you've written
B yep
O Oh yeah

V.S Have any of you thought about those different sorts of reading?
How they are different?
O No. not really
V.S Have a think now. Are some better than others? Which do you prefer? Do you prefer silent reading or do you prefer paired reading?
G silent reading
All silent reading
V.S Lets listen to one person at a time. You said that very quickly Gillian
G silent reading
V.S Why do you like silent reading? ....what's good about it?
B I don't know she's my partner

V.S tell me about silent reading? why is it nice? Brian Your turn in a minute.............. You're not sure.
G. shrugs
O Well you said you liked silent reading Oliver. Tell me about that.
Umm...I like silent reading because, ..if um you use paired reading it's not so nice because I like reading to myself and um .. if I get a word wrong you have to try and try and I don't like doing that. So I just do the words like it sounds
G I like/normally get it correct

B I like er, reading all by myself

O Yes, I like reading

B It's because er, if er, I do paired reading, um they make me sound the words and I don't like that. When I do paired reading if I just, if I don't know the word I just skip it.

V.S Does that make a difference to what you are reading? Do you understand it when you skip words?

B Yeah!

V.S What about you Hester, what do you think?

H I like silent reading, because it's quiet

G sometimes!

V.S The reason I read that story to you this morning was because I couldn't stand the noise anymore, when Mrs Franklin had gone and you were supposed to be reading silently...so I thought I'd stop you all. What...? Are you going to say what you think?

....

O Do you like reading with the teacher or.. er................silent reading?

V.S Yes, what about reading with the teacher?.....Is reading with the teacher the same as paired reading?

O No I hate reading with the teacher.

H yes

O It's the worse thing ever!

V.S Why?

O um..Because .... it makes me feel sick

V.S Is that because you get nervous?

O No

V.S So why do you feel sick?

O because I don't like reading with the teacher

V.S Can you, I know it's hard, but can you explain what it is you don't like?

O I don't like um sounding words out, because my partner 's younger than me and she's not enough, at a high level, so I can do it cause she can't read the words that I nearly get correct.

V.S So are you saying, Oliver, that when you do paired reading

O yes

V.S you like it because you feel you can help? Is it Claire you read with?

O No, Sally.

V.S With Sally. So you feel you can help her. But when you're reading with Mrs Franklin, she has to help you. You'd rather be in charge.

O Yeah

V.S Is that what you are saying?

O Yes

V.S Does anybody else think that?

B yeah and me

G Yes.

(short silence)

V.S Tell us what you think Hester?

H Well, I don't really like reading to the teacher,

G No It's horrid

H Because, um, sometimes we I want to get on with my work and think oh!

B Yeah 'cause um

V.S They interrupt you?

B I don't like interruptions

O 'cause you have less time, and um other people that don't (*unclear everyone talking at once)*

O You can't get your work finished it's so boring
B Yeah cause you only just have to read then she says "You can go next"
O Yeah cause there's
V.S One at a time!
O Some people that don't read get more time. They spend about
B 3 hours
O 10 minutes
B 15
O …reading with the teacher and you just miss out and all you have do is sometimes a 20 minute activity and you read for about 10 minutes and you've only got 10 minutes to do it.

V.S Give Hester a chance because she wanted to say something
H Well once um I was reading and all the class was sat down on the carpet and listening and I was going, I was reading really loud..
V.S Was it embarrassing?
H Um yes
V.S What do you think?
G I like reading with the teacher because I can't work very well because most of the class are noisy and then you've got an excuse for not finishing your work.
V.S Reading for an excuse! That's interesting! Go on then Brian.
B Er, when it's nearly hometime, when we are still doing our work and Mrs Franklin says someome er go and read, Come and read to me and then er, we've finished reading, school's over!

V.S When you read to Mrs Franklin, do you read a whole book or a whole story or whatever, or just 2 or 3 pages?
B {Half, half
O {We just read a few pages ....or maybe a story if it's short
V.S What do you think about that?
B It's a bit boring
H I only read ...
O It's a bit boring because reading the whole book um is interesting
H I only read one page because I've got, there's no pictures on this there's just words, a full page

V.S So why do you think Mrs Franklin listens to you reading? What is she trying to do?
H Oh I think its because she's trying to ..
B She , I think she's being cruel *(giggles)*
H I think it's because she's trying to get us better at reading
V.S So ... what's a good reader?
How do you know if someone's a good reader?
O I know because um, *(he stops)*
V.S What are the signs of a good reader?
O Um, when someone's peered into a book and they are not looking up and looking around If they are looking around that means that they are not too good and they want to waste time so it's an excuse for not reading um as much as you can do
V.S If a good reader is a person who just reads to himself without looking up, wouldn't Mrs Franklin be able to tell that just by watching you?

B Yes.
O Yes she would.
V.S She wouldn't have to listen.
H Yeah, because she would see your eyes following the word

V.S But she listens to everybody read?
What else were you going to say Hester, because you had your hand up?
H Well I think people know that good readers are good readers because, the people that, um, the good readers, read fluently, the bad ones go " It was a blubluurr"
V.S There's a poem I nearly read to you this morning from *Please Mrs Butler* about someone who reads like that. It's called "The Slow Reader, " I think. It goes like that *(I say the words haltingly)*
(laughs)
B I got one of them. I got one of them really good poems.
O I'm a good reader, but I do peer around.
B I got one: *(He puts on halting, readerly voice)*

I go to school
I picked up my lunchbox

V.S So why do you think that people...

B And went home

V.S Thank you Brian, ...who aren't such good readers read like that?
B. Um, Because they
Aah! Because they don't know how to read really quickly. *(O sighs)*
B: Because if they just go : I want to go to lunch, if they do it like that

V.S What do you think Hester?
H. I think it's because they are not sure of all the words, frightened of getting them wrong.
O Yeah. I was going to say that.

V.S Do you think that being able to read out loud really well, is the same as being able to read in your head really well?
G, H, Um, no
O Reading out loud is harder. I think reading out loud is worse, because if you make a mistake, the whole class hears it,
H Starts laughing
O and if it it's a word that you find hard, they could, and they start bursting out with laughter.
B If you read out really loud and you don't know the word, you'll be really tight (?), cause you keep shouting out, your breath will run out.
H If you read loud and someone hears it, and if you, if you get a word wrong, it would be funny to the other class, and there'll be laughter.
V.S It's a bit embarrassing, isn't it?
All Yes

V.S What do you think is most important to do? Being able to read out loud, or being able to read in your head/
B I don't know
(Silence for a few seconds)
O Um being able to read out loud, because you might, um, get a job as, um,

maybe someone who reads out messages to other people, and you couldn't read them out loud if you couldn't do that, because you wouldn't be too sure.

V.S. Do you read out loud at home?
(laughter)
G, H,O No
B Yeah!
V.S. You don't?
B Yeah!
O I read in my bedroom in dead silence!
V.S Brian, Why?
B Er, 'cos I like doing that! *(giggles)* It makes my eyes water!
H Um, I, I only read out loud if I read to my mum, because I know that there's no-one else there, but if I'm reading in bed, I would read silently, because if you've got semi-detached someone might hear you!

V.S Um, when you read out loud to somebody, whether it is your paired reading partner, or your teacher, or whether it's your mum, one of the reasons you are doing it is so that person can tell the mistakes you are making. Is that right?
O Um
B Yeah
O I don't like doing that
B Gillian's on level 2
V.S But when you read in your head, do you worry about the mistakes you are making?
O Um Yes
H No
O Sometimes.
V.S Usually?
B Yeah, I do
O Um, you are thinking about, if I get the words wrong, I'll be in big trouble, so if you just concentrate, even if you are a bad reader, and you just ignore what you're thinking, you can read quite well.
V.S If you get the words wrong, you'll be in big trouble? From who?
B Not big trouble
O No-one!
B A little bit of trouble! Not a trouble at all. Um, the people who can't read well, someone might say:" sound the letters out" and
O I don't like doing that
H My Mum says: "Oh you can read that word" and that makes me really try and try and try
O Ye...ah! *(sighing resignedly)* Same as me! and I've never seen it and she thinks I have!
V.S But when you are reading, Gillian, you're not thinking about getting the words right, are you? What are you thinking about?
G nods at me mutely, then giggles.
I bet you're not. I bet you are thinking about the story, aren't you?
B No!
V.S. When you read in your head?
H Yeah. I'm thinking about the story. I wonder what's going to happen next?
G That's what I'm thinking when we've finished silent reading on the carpet. I want to read more to find out what happens.

V.S I'm very puzzled. I've watched this happen in your class a lot of times, and I think it's really strange. Brian, I'll send you back to the classroom if you can't behave.

You come in in the mornings and you sit on the carpet and Gillian and some other people get really involved in their story books, and I think "this is good! They really want to read" and then Mrs. Franklin says "Put your books away and get your shared reading books out." So, those books that you really want to read, go in your tray, and you get another book out, and, do you want to read the other book?

All No

V.S I was watching you two *(I nod towards G and B)* this morning, and it was really interesting. First of all, Brian sat there doing nothing for half an hour while he waited for you to come back, and then when you came back, Who read first?

B Me.

V.S. You read first?

B No Gillian!

V.S. No, I think you read first. You had the book right up against your nose, so Gillian couldn't see what you were doing, anyway. And she sat there with her book closed, looking bored and thinking: "Oh my goodness, why are we doing this?"

G. I can't even hear what he's saying! And he gets hundreds of words wrong, and I can't help him, because he won't let me.

(B squeals in indignation)

B NO!

V.S. And then, it was your turn to read, so Brian puts down his book, turns around and walks to the table next door to him, and starts fiddling. And you kept reading out loud to yourself. And I thought: "Who is listening to this?"

(We all laugh.)

B I've got very sensitive ears!

We laugh more

V.S What were you going to say, Hester?

H I don't like it when someone gets a book that you want to get. They beat you to it. Like this morning, I mean this afternoon, I wanted to get *Magic Poems*

O Oh yeah! And I got it!

V.S So would paired reading be better if you could carry on reading on the floor?

O Um yes. A lot better!

V.S. And would it be better if the person actually listened when you were reading it?

B Yes

H, O,G No

B No!

V.S Would it be possible to listen to anything else? I asked Brian about this this morning. He said the reason you listened was that you wanted to hear when people make mistakes

All Yes

V.S. And you wanted to check that they weren't going over full stops. That's what you said, isn't it?

(he nods)

What if the other person was listening to find out what you were reading about? And talked to you about what you had read? Would that be better?

O Yes. A lot better! 'Cos you do that, and it sounds a lot better, and when Mrs.

Franklin reads out, she doesn't talk about it. *(pauses)*
And when you read it to a group of children, it sounds better, because you talk about it to us. What the story's about and the other things.

V.S If I had a reading partner, or a class that had reading partners, what I'd try to get them to do, perhaps if they had the same book, and they read a bit and talked about what they had just read. That thinking you do in your head about what is going to happen next.

O Um, Mrs, um, Miss Smith? Um, Sally and Josh, because Josh didn't have anybody to partner, he went into our group
V.S Yes, I noticed
O And Sally and Josh had the same books and sally had already read that page and was looking really bored, because she had already heard it.
V.S. They didn't talk about the book, did they? They talked about what level they were on. They were saying "I'm on level seven" "I'm on level seven"
B I'm on level seven!
(I laugh)
G I'm on level nine!
B She's on level one!
V.S I would like people to be saying to each other; "What do you think about that?"
B Boring!
V.S Is there anyone you talk about that to?
O Sometimes I talk about it to my friends that I usually play with.
G I'm not. I don't at all

V.S Do you ever read a book, and, you've just read a book and you say: "Read this one? Hey, read this"?
B Yeah I do that!
O Yeah
V.S Which books, then Brian, and which friends?
B Er Nigel and Craig
V.S Tell me which books
B Er *Winnie the Witch*.
V.S So what happened? Did they read it?
B They put it back in the box!
V.S They didn't actually listen to you! That's a shame!
What about you Hester?
H When I um sometimes in class, I challenge my friends and be a spoilsport and say: "I'm on this level, I'm on that level." They say, "Oh, I'm not!"
V.S Do you think these levels are helpful?
B No
H No
O Yes! One of Mrs. Monk's (the reception class teacher) might look for a book and they might sound good for their age and then when they read it, they say "What's that word? What's that word?" *(he puts on sing-song baby voice)*
All *(echoing intonation)*What's that word? What's that word?

V.S Gillian, do you have anyone who you talk about books to?
G Well I've only got my reading partner and that's Brian?
V.S That was not a partnership!
G Brian says he hate's me
V.S Yes. Well, we're not talking about that now!

Appendix ix

Paper presented at conference: Children's Reading Across the Centuries, Ivanano, Russia, November 1999

Conversations with meaning: children learning to read critically

Introduction

This paper is about children learning to read and teachers helping them to do so. It takes as a central tenet that reading - literacy - is a socially constructed phenomenon (Cook-Gumperz 1986) and that the way we learn to read reflects the uses to which society around us puts words (Heath 1984).

In order to examine the way reading is taught then, it is necessary to explore the literary environment of the schools in which children learn. This paper attempts to do this in two ways. First, it presents the general context. It provides an overview of schooling in England and Wales, and gives a brief account of the political pressures that affect the teaching of reading in them at present. The paper then looks at individual reading events in particular classrooms. Here it is the minutiae of classroom practice that is examined. The paper asks: What are the implicit messages that these classroom societies give children about reading?

The paper concludes with a brief look at some wider understandings of what reading and literacy might be for, and asks whether the reading that is taught in schools adequately equips children for the challenges of the new century.

Schooling in England and Wales

In England and Wales, we put pressure on our children to learn to read from a very early age. Compulsory education begins at 5, and sometime before their 5th birthday, nearly all children enter the Reception class in their local Primary school, and their full time school career begins.

This is proper school: it is not kindergarten, or nursery. Although in the best Reception classes there is still plenty of play and a lot of practical activity, the children are taught from the beginning to read and write, and the expectation is that they will learn quickly. When a child who has been in school for a full year is not beginning to be able to read and write with some confidence, parents and many teachers begin to worry.

Recent research has compounded this worry. Riley (1996) and Mortimore (1995) suggest that early attainment in reading is a key factor in success in later years of education, and this has prompted MacGilchrist (1997) to call for "A structured

comprehensive reading programme in the reception year" and "Early intervention ... for those children who still find learning to read difficult at the end of the reception year. " In England nowadays we panic about children's reading before they are even 6!

The influence of politics

This pressure is made worse by politicians and fuelled by the media. We are always being told that our school leavers are less well educated than their contemporaries in Germany and Japan, and that our children are failing, and that levels of illiteracy in the U.K. are far too high. Politicians look at the economic success of Germany and Japan in recent decades and conclude that the two are simply connected – a highly literate work-force necessarily results in a booming economy. Children, they say, need to read better for the prosperity of the nation!

Tony Blair won the1997 election and became Prime Minister of Great Britain with the campaign slogan " My government will have three priorities: Education, education and education." Within weeks of coming to power he began to put this into effect, and he started with of literacy. A National Year of Reading was announced and The National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998) and was set into place for the beginning of the new school year. This provided a structured, skills based programme for the teaching of reading and writing for children from 5 years old to 11 and was made more or less compulsory in primary schools across the nation.

Thinkers from the educational community, especially those most concerned with the teaching of English, were not widely consulted about any of this and the initiatives were greeted with mixed feelings. While everyone was pleased that reading was being promoted, many were concerned about the utilitarian messages that accompanied the policies. Literacy, a relatively new term in the educational vocabulary, was being promulgated as a set of basic sub-skills, fixed, and neutral, that could be easily learned and would see children through life.

Almost at once, Cox (1998) published a collection of polemic essays entitled *Literacy is Not Enough: Essays on the Importance of Reading*. In these essays, the literary and educational establishments joined together in deploring the government's approach. It is in this tradition, in a belief that reading is more than a set of skills, and that children need to be taught to do more than simply read, that this research stands.

What is reading like in Primary Schools?

For the last two-and-a-bit years, I have been researching into the teaching of reading in Primary Schools. I have conducted an ethnographic study of three classes of children, one in each of three very different schools. When the study began, the children were all 7, or approaching their 7th birthday. Most of them could read independently, and some of them read with considerable fluency and enjoyment.

Over four terms, I spent many hours in school with these children. I became their friend, helped them with their lessons, joined in their chatter and assisted their teachers. All the time, I was asking myself, *what is reading like in this community? What are the explicit lessons the teacher gives to the children as she helps them develop as readers? What*

are the implicit lessons? What do the practices of this community suggest to the children that reading is for?

Clearly there is not room here to report on all the findings. What I want to share with you here are a few of 'snap shots' or rather 'audio shots' of conversations from reading lessons. In the first three of them, it is one of the teachers who is working with the children in her class. In the forth example, the teacher is me.

Example 1

The teacher sits with the whole class before her on the carpet. She is going to read with them a folk tale about a king with three tenants. The story is in a large format, big enough for everyone to see the print, and is displayed on a special stand. She begins by showing the class the text:

> "Can you see how this story has been organised into paragraphs? You need to remember them when you write your own stories."

She reads the first paragraph, then stops:

> "Who can tell me what a tenant is?"

Nobody can, so she launches into a long explanation. It involves wealthy landowners, farming and obligation. The children begin to play with each other's hair. She continues to read and continues to ask questions:

> "Who can tell me what the three tenants do?"
> "Do you know what rent is?"
> "Does anyone know what flattery is?"

She asks a child to take over the reading. At the end of a paragraph, she stops the child.

> "Well done. Lovely expression." she says.

Example 2

Another teacher, in another school. Again the class sits on the carpet and the teacher prepares to read with them. It is nearly Christmas, and the text is a poem about the Magi. The poem is displayed on a large poster. The teacher begins.

> Teacher: Now we are going to read another Christmas poem. See if you can join in the words with me."

She reads the first verse.

> Teacher: Now, Who can tell me what sort of poem this is? Rhyming or not rhyming?
> Child: Rhyming.

Teacher: Good. Who can point out a rhyming word?

She reads verse two.

Teacher: Which are the rhyming words, Nathan?
Nathan: Old rhymes with gold.
Teacher: Look at their spelling. What can you say about them?
Tina: They've got the same letters!
Teacher: Not all the same letters, but some of them.

Example 3

The teacher sits around a table with a group of about 8 children. They have been reading a short novel together *Superpooch and the missing sausages*, and are about to continue:

The teacher begins by asking the children to find the page they had reached. Then she asks:

"Who can explain how Superpooch solved the crime?"

Joanna's hand shoots into the air and waves about enthusiastically.

"Oooh, Oooh" she moans. She is bursting to answer.

"Don't guess, Joanna. Check the answer." says the teacher, and asks someone else. She is given a sketchy retelling of the denouement and accepts it.

"And what words does he say?"

"Bones and Biscuits" the children supply.

"It turns him into Superpooch!" adds Joanna.

She is ignored.

Analysis of the examples

So what is going on here?

What we see in examples 1 – 3 are teachers taking complete control of the making of meaning in the classroom. In example 1, for instance, we see a teacher with very clear purposes about the reading of this text. She uses it first to remind the children about paragraphing, second to improve their vocabulary, thirdly to check on their comprehension, and last of all to practise reading aloud. The text serves as a vehicle for

reading skills that she has decided are important, and it is authoritative. It can do paragraphs, it knows the words and it contains whatever it was that the tenants did. The children, those of them who have not already decided that this has nothing to do with them, come to it submissive, ready to receive. All they are expected to give in return is give the right answers, to echo what the text (and the teacher) knows already.

Example two is similar. The teacher and the children are concerned only with the external detail of the poem's form. They do not consider its matter at all. The teacher presumably assumes that its interpretation is so obvious that it need not be discussed. Her understanding of it will match that of the children, because meaning in the poem is fixed and transparent. All the reader has to do is be able to convert the squiggles on the page into words. And that of course, is exactly what she invites them to do.

Example 3 is most interesting because of the side-lining of Joanna. Here is a girl who has something to say about the text. She has her own ideas and is desperate to contribute. Twice she is snubbed. The first time she is brought smartly back to the text and reminded that it is sufficient. Her imagination is not wanted here. The second time she is ignored completely.

What is significant about all three of these examples is the role that the children play in them. With the exception of Joanna, who is snubbed, they say very little. They answer when they are asked a question, but they initiate nothing. There is no conversation here. The implicit message is that they have nothing to contribute. The making of meaning is in the hands of someone else. The children are powerless, and layers of authority weigh upon them. The text is right, and can't be questioned. The teacher knows the answers, and can't be questioned; and the National Literacy Strategy stands above all, determining what it is necessary to learn. The message is clear. Reading is fixed. This is how you do it.

Example 4

Claire and Hester and I are revisiting some poems we first read together some months previously. Here are some snippets of their conversation.

H: I can imagine what the traveller looks like.
me: Can you?
H: He looks like an Australian swagman to me, but my own version of one.
K: No, I think, you know when your dads always shave
H: A belled (?) hat
K: Well, they always have dots on their face
H: I don't imagine him like that...
K: and with a chimney sweep cap, and um, really scraggy clothes
H: I imagine him, you know those hats, right, black ones, they've got little bells round them

...

me: I think these poems are quite alike,...

K: Except in a different way. This one doesn't seem to give you butterflies, but this one makes you feel all spooky inside. It makes you think, 'get away...get away... get *away*!' It makes you feel all weird.
H: I feel like I'm losing my strength.
K: Yeah, I know what you mean...
H: I feel like my energy's just, sinking.

...

K: but the atmosphere, how they describe the stuff, like the phantom listeners and (she reads) 'No head from
H: No head?
K: the leaf fringed sill'
H: leaf? Oh I know what leaf fringed sill – it's a windowsill with all leafy creepers growing around it.
K: And there's something, - 'that goes down to the empty hall'
H: That is just scary!

The most obvious difference here is that the children have voices. They speak. They speak sometimes to me, mostly to each other, but always about the poem and their responses to it.

Look at the first snippet. Here we see two imaginations engaged in the same task, trying to picture a figure who is not described in the poem. They can only rely on hints and absences and they both do this well. They pick up strangeness about this traveller: Hester makes him actually foreign. Claire stresses his scruffiness, a reference I think to the suggestion in the poem that time has passed ("Tell them I came ... that I kept my word."). These girls are working at the creative edge of their competence. Hester's 'swagman' is clearly a reference to a song she has recently learned. She is pulling all she can into this image. And they support each other in this, for though the girls talk against each other here, they are still conversing. Each rejects the other's idea to clarify her own. They take *in* what the other says, but choose not to take it *on*.

In the second snippet we see them working more obviously together. It is not their visual imaginations we see them using now, but their affective response. Claire initiates. She voices the experience she feels as she hears this poem. Hester listens, reflects and supplies a metaphor to summarise it. Claire understands and agrees and so gives Hester the confidence to push her image further. She focuses it and refines it. "I feel as though my energy is sinking." Here the girls are taking *in* and taking *on* what each other is saying. Together, through conversation, they come to an understanding of the effect this poem has, that they would probably never achieve alone.

The third snippet is interesting in that it shows the girls doing exactly the close textual and vocabulary work that the teachers tried to achieve in examples 1 – 3. Here the girls initiate it themselves and supply the answers. Claire is trying to discover what it is in this poem that makes it creepy – a task more complex and more challenging than any initiated by the teachers. She uses the text to form and support her ideas. Hester follows. She is concerned with understanding. She looks at the vocabulary. When she dregs 'sill' from the recesses of her mind, she embellishes the image; there are creepers here as well as leaves.

What these girls have here that their contemporaries in the earlier examples were not given, is the opportunity to make texts mean for themselves and the confidence to do it. They can do this, because in my sessions with them, I was able to put aside the authoritarian, utilitarian expectations of the National Literacy Strategy, and let them explore texts as 'made things'. I had no answers in my head; I let them find answers for themselves. Conversation, language supported them, as Vygotsky knew it would, and took them further than they would ever have travelled alone.

Critical reading

Amongst those voices from the literary and educational who demanded a richer understanding of reading than that presented by the National Literacy Strategy were those who called for 'critical reading' – and you will see that this phrase occurs in the title of this paper. It is a phrase coined to be in parallel with 'critical literacy' and so builds on the emancipatory educational ideas of Paulo Freire. Advocates of 'critical reading' are persuaded that what matters is that readers are encouraged to 'read the word and the world' (Freire and Macedo1987). In this way texts are seen as the subjective products of society – made by people with agendas and read by people who may or may not share them. The reader who can deconstruct the text, and identify its underlying ideology is empowered because he can reject that ideology if he so wishes.

Kress (1995) and the New London Group (1996) build on these ideas and look forward to the future. They chart the way that literacy has changed over the past 20 or so years, and the speed with which it has happened. What we need now, they say, is not just people who are literate, but people who are 'multi-literate.' We need confident, flexible, critical readers, who can adapt to the further changes and challenges of the workplace. A single fixed literacy will not prepare them for this; it is not enough.

If Claire and Hester carry on reading in the creative, exploratory, thoughtful way we see above, and continue to get better at it, then it seems likely that they will go a long way towards meeting those expectations. They will not be cowed by text. They will see through it, and round it and turn it inside out and on its head where it is necessary to do so. They will be the sort of readers we need in the new century.

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Appendix x

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Everyone's a Criminal? Reflections on Critical Reading in the Primary Classroom

"Readers are required to divide themselves into two parts: one which reads within the world of the text and one which calls it into question." (Traves 1994:94)

There is out there in the general ether that constitutes our educational and political idealism, a feeling that though the ability to read is important, the ability to read critically is more important still. This feeling manifests itself via the pens and word processors of a variety of thinkers, some from the world of education, some from the literary establishment and others form the government itself.

Richard Hoggart, for example, former chairman of the Book Trust, speaks for many when he bewails what he considers to be the reading habits of much of society:

> "But the great majority, insofar as they read at all, go round and round, wooed on to that carousel of repetitive rubbish ceaselessly operated by the two-syllabled press and the stereotyped paperbacks." (Hoggart 1997)

He calls for "creative reading":

> "That means recognising that some books are better than others, as are some minds and imaginations..."

His is an elitist vision. In it all readers reject the dross and read instead the best literature. They are therefore open to the civilising and moral lessons that *stand available* for the taking (Hoggart 1998). Those who take on those lessons will find their lives and their thinking enhanced.

Those voices influenced by the writing of Paulo Freire call for critical reading too, but they mean something quite different. They are persuaded that what matters is that

readers are encouraged to 'read the word and the world' (Freire and Macedo1987). Texts are seen as the subjective products of society. The reader who can deconstruct the text, and identify its underlying ideology is empowered because he can reject that ideology if he so wishes.

There is an interesting bi-polarisation in these positions. For Hoggart, the text is all important. It is a powerful instrument that has the potential to change the malleable reader, for good or for bad. The reader must learn to detect quality, and allow himself to be seduced by it. For Freire, the reader needs to be more powerful than the text. He needs to be able to see where it is coming from and harness it, lest it controls him. Both routes lead to a better world.

In the rather less heady world of the English Primary School, ideas of this sort manifest themselves more gently. Wray and Lewis (1997) write pragmatically about children learning to read information texts:

> "The fact is that all texts are located in a particular set of social practices and understandings. They involve choices. Critical reading involves an explicit examination of these choices and hence the particular social understandings and values underlying texts." p104

And so does Meek (1997):

> "Critical reading soon detects the writer's underlying assumptions about the nature of science, about the humanity or exclusiveness of mathematics or what counts as neutral in any context."

But the enriching power of literature is necessary:

> "To learn to read better than ever before, as they surely must, children need space and time to *think* about what they are reading and also about reading itself. This means that texts of worth, literature especially, must be moved to the centre, to become the core of the reading curriculum." (Meek 1998)

Here is a rather different critical literacy. While it echoes Hoggart's concern for the centrality of literature, it shifts power away from texts towards the readers, who are

enjoined to 'think about what they are reading and about reading itself.' It values reflection, and through it, the reader and the text come to share power. The reader controls the process of reading and the text is allowed to work.

Even the official voices of education call for critical reading, though these voices are harder to place ideologically. Hertrich (OFSTED 1997) reports that in some schools pupils in Key Stage 2 'read uncritically a narrow range of texts'. Even the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998:3) insists, (as an afterthought?) that a literate eleven year old should through reading, be able 'to develop ...critical awareness'.

The difficulty with both these statements is that they offer no very clear idea of what 'critically' or 'critical awareness' means, or, more importantly, what it *looks like* in the primary classroom. And while Hoggart and Freire show what they think the adult who reads critically can do, they present their readers as 'finished products'. Those of us involved in the education of children as readers need to know about the process. What is it that a child who is learning to read critically *does* when she reads and how can we encourage this?

For the last year or so, I have been involved in an ethnographic study of reading practices in primary schools in the hope of shedding light on this question. My research has taken me into three very different primary schools and in each I have followed the fortunes of a group of pupils over three terms. The National Literacy Strategy was introduced in all of these schools during this time, and now, the children, who were all in year 2 when the research started, are nearing the end of year 3.

In the paragraphs that follow I want to present two episodes from the reading experience of children in one class from one of these schools. The first is a guided reading lesson conducted by the teacher as part of the literacy hour, and the second is a group reading session led by me. Two questions need to be kept in mind as these descriptions are read. The first is this: what do these children *do* as they read? The second is: who, if anyone is reading critically?

Guided reading with the teacher.

Eight children, the teacher and myself sit around a large table. Everyone except me has a copy of *Superpooch and the Missing Sausages.* I look over Geraldine's

shoulder and attempt to share hers. This is the group of readers judged to be least competent by the teacher. She has specifically invited me to observe this session.
The teacher begins by asking the children to find the page. She tells them which, but the searching takes ages. Eventually, everybody is ready. We survey the final pages of the last story the group read together. "Who can explain how Superpooch solved the crime?" asks the teacher.

Joanna's hand shoots into the air and waves about enthusiastically.
"Oooh, Oooh" she moans. She is bursting to answer.
"Don't guess, Joanna. Check the answer." says the teacher, and asks someone else. She is given a sketchy retelling of the denouement and accepts it. "And what words does he say?"
"Bones and Biscuits" supply the children.
"It turns him into Superpooch!" adds Joanna.

The teacher asks them to find the words in the text and for a moment there is a low mumbling noise while the children search the page. 'Bones and Biscuits' is printed in big letters. They all find it and point. When the teacher is satisfied, she says:
"Now who can find me the sentence that tells you about the big dog?" and again searching begins.

It is time for the children to read some new text. The teacher sets them off reading around the table. The children read a sentence or two each, sometimes a short paragraph. Every so often the teacher intervenes, sometimes with a question to check the children are following the story: Who owns the toyshop? Who is worried? Sometimes she asks them to look at a particular word. 'Understand' is broken down into 'under' and 'stand' and the reader praised for decoding it. No mention is made of the language of the text, which both teases

and supports the reader: "An ordinary dog on an ordinary day. Maybe. Maybe not."

Geraldine catches my eye and slowly pulls the plasters off her arm. I wince. The teacher praises all the children for working hard and several of them for reading well. She gives a short lecture on the need to go back in the text when you don't understand something, even when reading alone, and the session ends.

Group Reading with me.

Six children from the 'middle ability' reading group leave the classroom and come with me into the entrance hall. They bring chairs with them and arrange them in a circle. We have been working in this way for a term or more.

We look first, in some detail, at books the children have brought in from home. I introduce a book of mine. It is *Julian, Secret Agent* by Ann Cameron. I want to know what they will make of the playful language at the beginning of this book and what hints they will pick up from the first chapter about the content of the rest of it.

I open the book at the first page. Karen sees a picture: the sun in bed and clouds fighting:

"Weather. We're doing about that!"

I read the first sentence and am interrupted.

Peter: The sun can't stay in bed!

James: The clouds must be its pillow.

June: It must be really grey!

Liam leans across, reads the next sentence and laughs aloud. He reads it to the others and they share his delight. We speculate about how it could rain rubber boots and submarines and pirate ships.

The children in the story decide it is too wet to leave the post office.

Liam: They could go out in the rain. I do.

Cara: (looking at the picture) No. They haven't got any coats.

I read on and there are few comments until we get to the wanted posters.

One criminal has stolen $753.25 all in quarters.

Peter: It must be in Spain. They have pesetas there!

James is not so sure. When the second criminal steals dollars too, he is confident.

James: It's American. It says dollars.

The third miscreant is called Mildred.

Peter: Mildred. Mildred Hubble.

Karen: The Worst Witch!

Peter: Only she's not anymore. I watch it on the television.

This Mildred is a teacher, turned to crime. I read the words of Gloria-in-the-story. "How could a *teacher* become a criminal?" and wait for a reaction. There isn't one.

me: What do you think? Could a teacher be a criminal?

I wait for an answer. At last Peter has one

Peter: Everyone's a criminal.

There is a short silence. He appears to be weighing his words.

Peter: No. That's not right, ... something....

No-one can help him; so we move on. They have more to say about how far is too far, a matter which concerns the children in the story. The real children all want to tell where they are allowed to go alone and to imagine the consequences of transgression. Everyone agrees that their parents would be furious.

The chapter is coming to an end. I read the last words:

" 'Julian,' Gloria said. 'What trouble could we get into?'"

James: Oh no! They are going to get into trouble!

Me: Are they? What might happen?

Both James and Cara suggest that the children will go too far and find it difficult to get home. The others say nothing. If they have remembered the children's determination to catch criminals, and see a possible story here, they do not suggest it.

I am still interested in the way the passage has been put together. I wonder if they have followed the logical progression of the chapter and whether the playful beginning has persuaded them to look for humour in the rest of the book.

Me: Why do you think this story began with the bit about rain?

June: If it hadn't been raining, they wouldn't have stayed in the post office and they wouldn't have read the posters.

I am impressed, but not satisfied. The children are becoming restless, but I try again:

Me: What do you think about the *way* it began though? What was all that about rubber boots and submarines? Why didn't it just say "It was raining"?

June: It would have been boring! You have to make the beginning of stories interesting so people want to read on. You need to put in adjectives to make it interesting!

As I reread my field notes, what comes screaming through the pages at me from these episodes and from many others like them, is the difference they show: for there is enormous difference here in the roles played by the children and in what is expected of them as readers.

Let's take the session led by the teacher first. Here we see a reading lesson that is tightly controlled. The teacher sets the pace and the agenda and all interactions are initiated by her. The children are kept involved and interested.

The teacher achieves this mostly by use of questioning and her questions seem to fall into two categories. The first and most straight forward type, are comprehension questions. These are textually specific and are situated entirely within the world of the story. *Who owns? Who is? Why is?* They test whether the children are following the text and whether they are making appropriate sense from it. They are questions with black and white answers and there is no room for negotiation.

The second type of question is more socially orientated. Although these questions do refer the children to the text, their primary aim seems to be to direct activity. They operate with in the classroom rather than within the text itself. So, the teacher asks: *Who can find? Who can explain? Can you see...?* These are instructions as much as they are questions and they have no real answer apart from *I can.* They tell the children what to do. The teacher uses them not so much to discover which children can find a particular phrase, or who can explain it, but to ensure that everybody is with her, 'on task' and following her understanding of what matters in this story.

Neither of these types of question allows the children any control over the reading process. Both direct the children to the text and expect them to find there *right* answers, that is the answer predetermined by the teacher. There is no room for wonder or speculation or ambiguity. Joanna's enthusiasm is curbed. Don't Guess. Check the text. Find what is there. Find what I have found already. This is what reading is.

When the teacher moves the children on to read the text, we see her concerns are the same. Still it is the surface detail of the text that matters and the children's attention to it. They are praised for fluency and accuracy in decoding the text. They stop and start as the teacher determines and look at the words she selects. There is no discussion of the language of the text or of its content at a level beyond basic comprehension.

Taken on its own terms this is a successful session. The children behave like readers and enjoy the text. They are actively involved in the process of reading. They search the text, follow the text and answer questions about it. But their reading is closed, for they are not encouraged to explore. The only reading permitted is the teacher's reading. The children are not allowed the possibility of making meaning for themselves.

It has to be made clear before we begin to look at my reading interactions with the children that my task is easier. I stand towards them in a different, less formal relationship than any teacher could maintain, and I have the luxury and privilege of being a visitor to their classroom. I am not responsible for the day to day discipline of the class and I do not need to justify to anyone these children's development as readers. All this will have influenced the way the class teacher worked in the episode above just as much as did her beliefs about reading. I am free in a way she is not.

Most clearly, the dynamics of control in my group reading session are different. Although I retain overall control in that I provide the text, do most of the reading and can end the session as I wish, the power to respond, to speak and to think, rests mostly with the children. They know they may interrupt when they have something to say and that when they do, they will be heard.

In the few comments and interactions recorded above, there is much to be gleaned about how these children go about making meaning from story. Here there is only room for some of it. I will concentrate on the wide-ranging nature of the children's responses and the role that questions play in encouraging them.

First the nature of their responses: the range of reference these children draw on to make sense of the story is vast. Here is everything from Karen's casual reminder of the class topic, to morality. Peter and James show they can enter into the logical

play of the opening metaphor and June shows she understands it. Real, 'lived' experience occurs in the comments about rain and in the discussion about 'too far.' Cara shows she knows how to read pictures, and knowledge of other stories provides the intertextual link with Mildred Hubble and ideas for the possible continuation of the story.

Two exchanges are worth examining in more detail. The first is the peseta/dollar conversation, and it is James' part in it that I want to consider. What is going on in his mind between the first mention of the word dollar and Peter's comment, and its second occurrence a page or so later? He was surely following the story, or he would not have noticed the word the second time, but simultaneously, I suggest, he was thinking, searching his mind for the word dollar. Something to do with money, something foreign, but not Spain. He can't place it. He waits, he thinks, then the word occurs again and he remembers. America! And excitedly, he tells us.

Then Peter's criminal tendencies. What is he thinking of when he tells us that everyone is a criminal? He says it then rejects it. He appears to be searching for an aphorism, some little phrase he has heard that sets the world in order, that sheds light on the human condition. It impressed him, and he knows it is relevant, but it won't come. He tries and we all wait while he thinks, but we can't help; he gives up.

What all the children are doing, and these two in particular, is something more active, more involved, more committed than anything anyone was encouraged to do in the *Superpooch* session. I want to look briefly at the role questioning plays in achieving this difference.

Just as in the former episode all the questions here come from the adult, this time from me, in role as teacher. As before, they act in a way that asserts control, and shifts a previous agenda to the new one that the questioner wants to address. Both of us predominantly ask questions that appear to be about text.

But the nature of my questions is fundamentally different again. I ask not *what is?* but *What do you think?* These questions draw on the text, but the answers are to be found in the children themselves. The power of knowing the answer, and by implication, of making meaning, rests with them.

This power is implicit in the way these children respond to the text, for not once does one of them asks a question. Their comments suggest that questions have been asked: *Where is this story happening? Where else have I heard that?* but they are asked in the children's heads. With this text, they have the confidence and the power to answer for themselves. They do not need to ask each other, or to defer to my authority as a more experienced reader. They take on the responsibility of making meaning themselves.

Sometimes I throw in a question to challenge their thinking. Then that responsibility changes, for the children are no longer alone. They have to take on the agenda that is in my mind. I invite them into dialogue, to share their thoughts on that subject and we make meaning together. It is dangerous and difficult. It is one thing for James to make a personal discovery about dollars, another to share the uncertainty of an unfamiliar idea and make interpersonal meaning. Only Peter is prepared to wonder aloud if teachers can be criminals. Only June even attempts to consider why the book begins as it does.

Her final remark, about adjectives, is wonderful and worthy of more notice. Why, I wonder, does she make it? Is she telling me that she has thought hard enough already, and that I should behave like a teacher? Is it the answer that she thinks teachers want, that I want? Does she believe it? I think she does. I think she believes it in the way that children do believe, unquestioningly, many of the 'facts' that teachers tell them. The worry is that those 'facts', those closed ideas about what reading is, and what is important in a text, can limit the children, can stop them discovering significance and taking on responsibility for themselves.

Who then, in either of these episodes is reading critically? That depends, of course, on what you think critical reading is. Where the writers mentioned at the beginning of this article, despite all their differences, agree, is that there is something evaluative and metacognitive about critical reading. The reader who reads critically is aware of the process of that reading and evaluates not just the text, but how he is reading it and the effect it is having on him. Do any of the children do this?

I suggest the answer is no. At the moment none of them is reading in this way. However, it seems that those children who are able to articulate their thoughts as they read, who know, because their comments are valued, that reading is a wide-

ranging and exploratory practice, and that meaning is personal and interpersonal, are more firmly on the way towards critical reading than the rest.

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